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FOREWORD

Heaven is the future home of the redeemed. It is mentioned 84 times in Matthew's Gospel and more than 500 times throughout the Bible. Our Lord was careful to underline its importance throughout His earthy ministry. He warned that only a comparative few would enter in.

Yet, in spite of the wealth of information given about this wonderful place, even many churchgoers treat the subject with almost total indifference! This is a sad commentary on the current low spiritual state of the Christian church.

The Bible makes crystal clear the fact that all who miss out on heaven, miss out forever. There is no second chance. If we live life wrongly, we can never come back and live it over again.

In the light of these solemn facts, we would all do well to study carefully the directions contained in

God's map, the Bible. All who do not take the time to study these directions carefully are certain to lose their way.

In recent decades, Satan appears to have removed some of the signposts. This book is an attempt to draw attention to these signposts once again and to underline the necessity of following them. It is also my sincere hope that the book will give some encouragement to fellow travellers on their way to the Celestial City.

INTRODUCTION

I have travelled much around this old world preaching the Gospel. Whenever I considered going to some country for the first time, I would obtain all available information on that country. I wanted to learn all I could about it before I actually arrived there.

The real Christian of course, doesn't really belong here - he is a misfit - everything goes against the grain. His real home is heaven for in this world he is just a traveller passing through.

One of his chief concerns is to keep his garments clean, lest they be soiled with the filth that exists all around him (James 1.26).

However, another thing that is of more than passing interest to him is Heaven. As we've said, that is his real home. He wants all the information he can get on that beautiful place and the source of this information is, of course, the Bible.

Whilst preparing to write these chapters on Heaven, I decided to read again many of the passages that speak about it. I must confess that I was completely overcome with emotion. The thought that "eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has it entered into the mind of man the things God has prepared for them that love Him" (1 Cor 2.9) just overwhelmed me.

My prayer for this book is twofold:

First, that it will provide important information to my fellow-travellers on their way to the Celestial City.

Secondly, that you the reader, will gain as much spiritual profit from reading it as I have in writing it.

Chapter ONE

Some General Information About Heaven

It is not my purpose in this chapter to discuss the destiny of the unsaved, but rather to confine myself to the pleasant task of supplying some helpful information on the subject of 'Heaven' - the home of the 'redeemed'.

When it comes to studying the subject of heaven, I have a problem, and it is this: Who amongst us can describe heaven? We cannot personally explore it this side of death, so how can we explain it? How, with our finite minds, can we comprehend its glories, its wonders, its beauties and the radiance of the heavenly Jerusalem? It would be utter folly to pretend to know more about heaven than what is actually revealed in Scripture. On the other hand, we should be diligent in our attempt to understand what IS revealed.

The Government Of Heaven

The Bible makes plain the fact that in heaven the King of kings rules supreme. The constitution of heaven will be faultless, its laws will be just and its administration perfect; just the opposite to all we know of earthly politics.

The writer to the Hebrews says in chapter 12.22-24 *"But we have come unto Mt Zion and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are in heaven and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling."* These verses on their own contain a wealth of information and there are many such passages scattered throughout the New Testament. We should be tireless in our effort to seek them out and to discover their meaning.

Now before we look more closely at what is in store for the believer in heaven, let us consider some general information about it.

Heaven Is A Place

Our Lord says in John 14.2 *"I go to prepare a place for you."* I am well aware of the fact that there is a lot of theorizing as to what heaven really is. Some believe it to be a **state**, while others are adamant that it is a **sphere** or something else. I think we need to note exactly what our Lord says and accept it as such. Our Lord says "I go to prepare a **place** for you." He said what He meant and meant what He said. P-L-A-C-E does not spell state or sphere; it spells place. The terms 'state' and 'sphere' may be encompassed in the broader use of the term, but I understand the basic meaning to be that of an actual **place**. It is described as 'a city' - the 'heavenly Jerusalem' - a great metropolis

which will be the centre of our Lord's rule.

Heaven as Home

In John 14.2 our Lord refers to it as 'the Father's house' and of course the Father's house is also the children's 'home'. Someone has well said that **home** is one of the 'tenderest' words in the English language. Millions of earth's inhabitants turn toward 'home' when they finish the toils of the day and so with the Christian. As eternal night approaches, his footsteps often become weary. He trudges through a world that is not only unsympathetic, but often hostile. However, he is cheered on by the prospect that Heaven waits to welcome him and finally he will be "*at home with the Lord.*" 2 Cor 5.8. So cheer up, Christian! Sure, you carry some pretty heavy burdens just now, but it won't be long and you will be able to lay them all down.

What Will Heaven Be Like?

It will be vastly different from all other places where we have been. We are told in Rev 22.5 that "*there will be no night there*" - just one unending, eternal day. We are also told in the same verse that there will be no sun or moon, for God Himself will be the light of this beautiful city. The citizens of heaven will never experience fatigue - they will never grow old - neither will they experience sorrow or pain and of course they will never die (Rev 21.4). Our bodies in heaven will be similar to our Lord's resurrection body (Phil 3.21). Our Lord's resurrection body could be handled (Lk 24.39).

Our present bodies are, of course, mortal and will have to undergo a vast change before they would be fit for heaven (1 Cor 15.50-54). So at the resurrection, we are to be given celestial bodies suitable for heaven's environment. With our present finite mind, it is impossible to really comprehend all this. The wonder, the beauty, the glory of it all, is simply beyond the greatest stretch of our imagination, but these things are none the less factual. They are all clearly stated in Scripture by a God who cannot lie.

Recognition Of Loved Ones

It is generally acknowledged by students of the Bible that while we are in our mortal state we see as it were through a 'dark glass'. The picture now, is at best hazy, but there is coming a day when that veil will be lifted and faith will give way to sight. Then we shall "*know as we are known.*" (1 Cor 13.12)

If we know one another now, we are certainly not going to be more ignorant in heaven. This is simply common sense. Luke 13.28 along with other verses, indicates quite definitely that we shall know the Christian loved ones who have gone on before us. God has planted deeply within the human heart a longing to be with loved ones and this longing will not be disappointed. We shall "*go to them*" (2 Sam 12.23).

Reunion with loved ones in the eternal world cannot be separated from the permanence of personality. The Bible makes very clear the fact that personality is an eternal possession which will never be annihilated.

Knowledge In Heaven

Heaven is a place of ever-increasing knowledge. Life there will be one of growth. We will never reach a point beyond which no advance is possible. One of the delights of a loving heavenly Father will be "*that in the ages to come, He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus*" (Eph 2.7).

This seems to indicate that the saints will have continually unfolded to them new and greater

blessings and this process will continue throughout the endless ages of eternity.

The Third Heaven

There are three different 'heavens' mentioned in Scripture:

- 1. The Atmospheric heavens** that surround the earth. Planes fly through the atmospheric heavens and we are told in Scripture that birds live in the atmospheric heavens (Jer 4.25).
- 2. The Stellar Heavens** which of course are much farther away than the earth's atmosphere, but we can get a glimpse of them on a clear night. This heaven is referred to in Isa 13.10 where we read about "*the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof ...*"
- 3. The Heaven to which our Lord ascended.** It is referred to as "*the third heaven*" in 2 Cor 12.2. Paul on this occasion was caught up to the 'third heaven' and heard "*unspeakable words which it is not lawful for a man to utter.*" This is the 'heaven of heavens' and indeed the dwelling place of God and the myriads of angels and of the Church Triumphant. This 'third' heaven is beyond description.

The Inhabitants Of Heaven

We have already mentioned the fact that heaven is the seat of government for the King of kings. It is also the home of an innumerable number of angels. These beautiful beings are invisible to us throughout our earthly pilgrimage, but one day we too shall have a celestial body and then we shall be able to see them and talk to them. When that time comes, I am sure we will want to thank them for their watchfulness over us during our time on earth (Heb 1.14).

How Many Angels Are There?

In Rev 5.11-12 we read "*And I beheld and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice: Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and blessing.*"

This adds up to 100,000,000 -- plus millions more! What a choir! This too is beyond all human comprehension.

What About Purgatory?

While preparing to write this chapter on heaven, I, of necessity, read a lot of Scripture. In all that reading, I have not found one reference to purgatory - not even one! Nowhere does the Bible teach that there is such a place. There is not even a hint of it. This 'imaginary place' has been invented by men. The threat of going to purgatory is held like a gun to the heads of people as a way of extracting money from them. Paul says of the Christian that he is "*absent from the body and present with the Lord*" (2 Cor 5.8). There is just no way that we can fit purgatory in between our dying and our arriving in the Lord's presence. This teaching is a terrible perversion of truth - a hoax.

Chapter TWO

The Saints — What Is In Store For Them?

Having considered some general information on the subject of heaven, let us now look at something specific - namely, what is in store for the saints after they finish their earthly pilgrimage. It does us all good at times to lift our eyes above the grey landscape of this world and fix our gaze on the horizons of eternity and see just what awaits us there.

I am indebted to the late Philip Mauro for some of the sub-headings in this chapter.

1. Our NAMES are written in heaven. Our Lord said in Luke 10.20 *"Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven."* We earthlings get quite excited if we are informed that our names have been included in the Will of some wealthy person, but this fact is far out-weighed by the knowledge that our names are included in the 'roll up yonder'. We must not rest until we are satisfied that they are really written there and that this is just not mere assumption on our part.

2. The CITY for which we look is in Heaven. It was said of Abraham in Heb 11.10 that *"he looked for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God."* If God is building this wonderful city, then we can be sure that it will be far superior to any city that man could ever dream up. We are told in 1 Cor 2.9 that *"eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither has it entered into the mind of man what God has prepared for those who love Him."*

In other words, we have never seen sights on earth so breathtaking as we will see in heaven. We have never heard music and singing as beautiful as we shall hear in heaven, and the human mind is not capable of comprehending the rapture that Christians will experience in heaven. No wonder the writer to the Hebrews said in chapter 13.14 *"Here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come."*

3. Our CITIZENSHIP is in heaven. When Paul was writing to the Christians at Philippi, he said (Phil 3.20) *"Our citizenship is in heaven from whence also we wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ."* It has always been a source of real satisfaction to be a citizen of a great nation - but to be a citizen of heaven - well, that is really something! But if we Christians are citizens of heaven, then earth to us is really a foreign land. We are, in reality, pilgrims travelling through a strange land on our way to our heavenly home.

Often this world can be a very unfriendly place, and more and more Christians are looking forward to the day when they will at last reach that 'land that is fairer than day'. If in actual fact we are citizens of heaven and residing temporarily in what is sometimes a 'hostile' environment, what is our responsibility while we are here? Paul states it very clearly *"we are ambassadors for Christ."* In other words, we are to represent our Lord and His interests. What a privilege - and yet, what a responsibility!

4. Our TREASURE is in heaven. (Luke 12.33) It follows that if we are citizens of heaven passing through this world which is a foreign land, we should not let our roots go down too deep. Unfortunately, many Christians are wearing themselves out in a frantic effort to store up material possessions, completely ignoring our Lord's command to "*lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth...*" (Mat 6.19) If we make the mistake of hoarding earthly possessions, we will have to leave them all behind anyway. On the other hand, we can lay up treasures in heaven. If we invest in the Lord's work on earth, we are in real terms 'sending them on ahead.'

5. Our HOPE is in heaven. We are instructed in Titus 2.12-13 "to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world, looking for that BLESSED HOPE and the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ..."

Unfortunately, many Christians have substituted other 'hopes' for "*the blessed hope*". With some, their main hope is a nice up-market home. Others hope they can obtain the latest car with all the hi-tech gadgetry. Others again hope they can go on an overseas trip or accumulate wealth and possessions to enjoy as they grow older. With many, these hopes are so uppermost in their mind that they have virtually lost sight of "*the blessed hope*" (Tit 2.13)

Many times in the New Testament, faith, hope and love are linked together. Some Christians have the love of God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, but lack "*the blessed hope*". But really, faith and love are incomplete without hope.

The great hope of all real Christians is the **Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ** to take us out of this sin-cursed world. Peter refers to this in his first Epistle (chap 3.15) when he urges us all to "*sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord, being ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason concerning the hope that is in you.*" It is essential as Christians that we get our priorities right. Of all the hopes that we entertain in our hearts, let us make sure that the one which shines brightest is the Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our Going to be with Him.

6. We are to receive GLORIFIED BODIES. We read in 2 Cor 5.1-2 "*We know that if our earthly house (body) is dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with (human) hands, eternal in the heavens. Meanwhile, whilst living in our present house (body) we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly house (new body).*"

Also in Phil 3.20-21 we read that when our Lord Jesus Christ comes again, "*He shall change our vile body and clothe us with a glorious body like His.*" These verses, along with others in the New Testament, help us to understand that our present earthly bodies are only mortal. It is true that some last longer than others, but as we travel through life, they become injured and affected by disease and in the end become unfit to live in any longer.

This fact should not unduly bother real Christians. They rejoice in the fact that when our Lord comes again and the bodily resurrection takes place, they will then be clothed with a new body which is designed to last forever and will never be affected by sickness or disease again. It is surely a tremendous prospect for every Christian to look forward to the day when 'we will be clothed with our house which is from heaven.'

7. Our INHERITANCE is in heaven. According to 1 Peter 1.4 the Christian is to receive an inheritance, "*an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you.*" Peter makes 4 things clear about this inheritance. It will be **incorruptible**, it is **undefiled**, it will **never fade away** as all earthly things do sooner or later, and it is **reserved in heaven**.

It is a perfectly natural thing to look forward to receiving an inheritance. The greater the inheritance, the greater is the anticipation of receiving it. But there is no earthly inheritance, no matter how great, that can be compared with the inheritance that is reserved for real Christians. 'What' they receive and 'how much' will of course be governed by 'how' they have lived on earth. Some will no doubt receive little inheritance at all, whilst the inheritance received by others will

indeed be great. So cheer up Christian, you will eventually be rewarded for those years of toil and sacrifice. What a prospect!

8. Our REWARD is in heaven. The New Testament makes clear the fact that when Christians finish the race of life, they will receive their rewards. There are degrees of reward. Some of course will be saved, but receive little reward. If they didn't earn one, then they won't receive one. God, the great Judge of the universe is completely fair. Others will have earned some kind of reward. Again, others will receive 'great' reward. *"Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."* (Mat 5.12)

Rev 22.12 says *"Behold I come quickly and my reward is with me to give every man according as his work shall be."* Several facts are made clear in this verse:

1. Our Lord is bringing rewards with Him when He comes.
2. He intends to reward every one fairly.
3. The value of the rewards **there** is determined by our work **here**, according as his work shall be."

So rewards are determined on the basis of faithfulness. This fact is also taught by our Lord in Luke 14.14 *"for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just."*

Then Again Rewards May Be Lost

In 2 John 8 we read *"Look to yourselves that we love not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a **full** reward."* Also in Rev 3.11 we are told to *"hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown."* The instructions in these verses are that we should be diligent; otherwise we run the risk of forfeiting that which God would like to give us! So, *"let us not be weary in well doing, for we shall reap if we faint not."* (Gal 6.9)

In the light of these tremendous truths, it is sad indeed to observe that multiplied billions of people spend their time and money grasping for material things and pleasures that are only temporal. They seem perfectly oblivious of the fact that in so doing, they are sacrificing rewards that are not only "great" but "eternal". It seems that it is part of human nature for us to want what we can **see** and to want it **now**. This would have to be another one of those 'wiles of the devil' - to cheat Christians out of rewards that they would not only receive, but enjoy forever.

S u m m a r y

What can we learn from all that? Simply this: we are clearly instructed to *"set our affections on things above and not on things on the earth."* (Col 3.2)

Satan knows only too well that if he can succeed in getting us to set our affections on earthly possessions, he can then cause us no end of stress and worry. Our Lord said in Mat 6.21 *"Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."* Our business, our property, our possessions, should all be regarded as belonging to the Lord and we should simply regard ourselves as the caretakers. This does not mean that we are to give everything away, but simply that all that the Lord has entrusted us with should be used to glorify Him and extend His kingdom here on earth.

The Biblical Attitude

Some Christians regard their earthly possessions as theirs. They **own** them. It is this attitude of **ownership** that causes us a lot of worry and stress and hinders us no end. Every Christian who

comes to the place where he can, in all honesty, regard everything he has as belonging to the Lord, and himself as the caretaker, will be released from the bondage of owning 'things'. He will add a new dimension to his Christian experience and find a freedom and a liberty he has not known before. To not understand this will cause us no end of hassles and greatly hinder our service for the Lord.

A Word Of Warning

I feel that I should not conclude this chapter without offering a word of warning. It is highly likely that some who read it will just assume that they are going to heaven, but have not in reality met with the terms of entry. God's terms of entry are consistently spelt out in the New Testament. For instance, in Mat 5.8 our Lord states "*Blessed are the **pure in heart** for they shall see God.*"

Note carefully that our Lord did not say "blessed are those who are baptised" or "blessed are those who tithed their money." These things all have their place, but they are **not** conditions for entry into heaven.

The Condition Of Entry

The condition of entry stated here ever so clearly is **purity of heart**. Purity of heart is not an 'optional extra' for deluxe Christians. It is the condition of entry for everyone who would aspire to enter this "land that is fairer than day." There are no exceptions to this rule and no excuses will be accepted. Heaven is a holy place and only holy people will be allowed in. If we do not understand this, then we have misunderstood what the New Birth is all about.

My prayer is that we will all be like the Bereans who "*searched the Scriptures daily to see if these things be so.*" (Acts 17.11)

*"Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, **without spot and blameless.**" 2 Pet 3.14*

Chapter THREE

Heaven — Condition Of Entry

Whilst conducting crusades in a South-east Asian country some years ago, I received an invitation from a State Governor to be his guest for dinner. I had never before been honoured in this way and was more than a little apprehensive.

Friends informed me that this was a real 'suit and tie' event and that I should also pay careful attention as to how I would conduct myself on such an auspicious occasion. I made it my business to ask a lot of questions in order to make sure that I did not offend such a distinguished host.

When the day arrived, a chauffeur-driven official car called for me and drove me to the Vice-regal residence. At the gate an armed guard checked to see that I was really the person invited, and that my invitation was valid.

After engaging in some 'small talk' for a while with other guests, I noticed that the head servant appeared to announce that the Governor was now ready to receive us. We were all escorted to the magnificent dining room and shown our place at the official table.

Now I had been brought up in the bush in Australia and was used to one knife and one fork, and if there happened to be dessert, one spoon to complete the needed set of 'eating irons'! I had assumed unwittingly that this was all that was necessary. After all, you can use only one at a time, so why bother with more than one of everything - it only makes more washing up anyway!

To my amazement when I looked at the table, everyone had 8 knives, 8 forks and several spoons - all solid silver of course! Well, I thought "it often seems that I'm thrown in at the deep end, so I'll adopt a go-slow attitude and 'swim' by watching how others handle this situation." I soon discovered that there were 8 courses and certain shaped knives were used for different foods. I found the whole evening very enjoyable and a real learning experience.

Valuable Lessons

Later, while reflecting on that occasion, I could see several valuable lessons such as:

1. No one can 'gate-crash' a royal or vice-regal dinner. You 'must have an invitation.
2. All who wish to accept the invitation are obliged, out of courtesy, to inform the host of their intentions. To not do so, would be regarded as nothing short of an insult.
3. To accept such an invitation required that each person went suitably attired. To turn up in 'shorts

and thongs' would result in being turned away at the door, and rightly so.

4. The solemnity of the occasion demanded that everything be taken seriously, and careful attention given to detail in the necessary preparation.

5. To turn down such an invitation would most certainly result in never being invited again, at least not by the same host.

These are just some of the things that I had to give careful attention to at that time. Many years later, when reflecting on that occasion, I realised that the lessons I had learnt then are all taught very clearly in Scripture. The following passage is one of many places where our Lord brings to our attention some very clear instruction.

Matthew 22.1-14

"And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables and said: 2 The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, 3 and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come.

4 Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed and all things are ready: come unto the marriage!"

5 But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise ... 6 and the remnant took his servants and treated them spitefully and slew them. 7 But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies and destroyed those murderers and burned up their city.

8 Then saith he to his servants, 'The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. 9 Go ye therefore into the highways and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage!'

10 So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests. 11 And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: 12 and he saith unto him, 'Friend, how earnest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?' And he was speechless.

13 Then said the king to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness!'

There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, 14 for many are called, but few are chosen!"

This parable contains some extremely important lessons for all of us. In verse 2 reference is made to the kingdom of heaven - a kingdom is a realm or territory ruled over by a king. The kingdom referred to here is the Kingdom of Heaven and the King is of course God the Father Himself - a great king - in fact, the King of kings. We are informed in the same verse that God arranged a marriage for his Son - the Lord Jesus Christ. Scripture portrays the Lord Jesus Christ as the bridegroom and the Church as the bride, who is to prepare herself for the wedding.

In verse 3 we see that God sent forth His servants to call those that were invited to come, but they refused. The Gospel invitation first went out to the **Jews**, and the servants who invited them were the **prophets**. Scripture makes clear the fact that the Jews as a nation rejected the invitation. We read in John 1.11 *"that He came unto His own and His own received Him not."*

In verse 4 we observe the amazing patience of the king. He graciously sent another reminder and he reveals something of the trouble and expense to which he had gone in order to make sure that the wedding was a success. This was to be no ordinary wedding but a sumptuous feast such as could

only be provided by a king.

This parable conveys to our minds the fact that the great King of Heaven is right at this moment preparing for all who accept His gracious invitation to be present at the marriage supper of His Son. This marriage is not for a servant but for His Son and the whole occasion will be such as only the King of Glory could provide.

Reaction Of The Guests

In verse 5 we are told of the "*kingdom of God and His righteousness ...*" (Mat 6.33) Spiritual matters must always be given top priority.

Verse 6 informs us of the treatment that was meted out to the king's messengers. They were treated spitefully and killed. This applied equally to both prophets and apostles. These were the messengers whom God sent to the world, but both were ill-treated and many were killed. Out of the 12 Apostles, John was the only one who died a natural death - all the others were put to death in violent ways.

The King's Reaction

In verse 7 we are told of the king's reaction - "*He was angry*" - a perfectly natural reaction! What monarch wouldn't be angry when his servants were abused and killed? This verse reveals for us the righteous anger of a holy God, which is currently mounting up as sinners trifle with the gospel invitation.

The Jews made this grave mistake. For a long time, they rebelled against God. They made light of both prophets and apostles and abused and killed them. Finally, there came a time when "the cup of their iniquity was full" and God was now going to make them drink it - to the dregs!

The Axe Falls

We read in the same verse 7 "*The king sent for his armies and destroyed those murderers and burned up their city.*" This refers to the destruction of Jerusalem of A.D. 70. In that year, God rained down destruction on Jerusalem such as had never been witnessed before. Their beautiful temple was destroyed, their economy was in ruins. Their whole system of worship was totally obliterated. Josephus, the Jewish historian, tells us that over one million people lost their lives. Most of those who survived this holocaust were led off into other nations round about to become slaves.

Notice it says the king destroyed those 'murderers'! Why were they called murderers? Because that is exactly what they were - killers! This was, without doubt, their greatest sin. They had murdered the prophets, the apostles, and even crucified the Son of God Himself. Finally, God said "Enough is enough!"

There comes a time when even God's patience will run out, and when it does, nothing - absolutely nothing - will stop His judgment from falling on those who have filled up the cup of their iniquity.

Concerning the Jews, we read in 1 Thess 2.16 "*wrath came upon them to the uttermost*", to the greatest measure. We observe here also that "*the king sent forth his armies*". The great armies of Rome were used by God as instruments to accomplish His purposes. God has worked in similar ways all through history. No generation in history has ever witnessed so great a desolation as was seen in Jerusalem - the utter desolate ruin of a once beautiful city.

The Door Closes

Verse 8 says *"they which were bidden were not worthy."* The door through which that generation of Jews could enter remained open for a long time, but at last it had finally closed. God Himself closed the door, just as He closed the door to the Ark and we all need to bear in mind the fact that when God closes a door, that's it!

With every individual, the door to eternal salvation remains open. With some, it remains open for a long time, but one day, it will close, perhaps silently. With some individuals the door of salvation closes long before they die. They have been influenced by the strivings of God's Spirit many times and said "No!" Then they say "No" once too often and the door of opportunity finally closes.

Once this happens to an individual, his eternal doom is sealed. (See Gen 6.3 and Heb 12.17) Even though some may live on for many years, they will never again hear the still, small voice of the Holy Spirit calling them to "come, for all things are now ready!"

Universal Invitation

Verse 9 The Jews, having rejected the invitation, found the door now opened to the Gentiles. *"Go into the highways and as many as you can find, bid to the marriage!"* The highways are public places. The Gospel now becomes open to all - it is universal. If some will not come, others will.

Verse 10 *"The servants went out and gathered together as many as they could find, both bad and good."* What a mixture! "Both bad and good" - all kinds of people are caught in the 'gospel net'. The "bad" such as the thief on the cross and Zacchaeus the tax-fraud agent; the "good" represented by such devout souls as Cornelius and Nicodemus.

Verse 11 Now when we get to this verse, we come to the **crunch** in the parable. *"When the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment."* Everybody knew that to receive this invitation was certainly a great honour. To be invited to dine with royalty, well, that was really something! So naturally each person would make sure they were suitably attired - or would they? No, one fellow seemed to think that it didn't really matter. He fronted up without a wedding garment. Oh, he had clothes on all right - but **not the proper clothes!**

You see, there was a certain standard of dress required of all those who aspired to be ushered into the presence of a monarch. This man did not meet the required standard. It appears he had refused the garment offered to each guest by the King.

What are some things that we should observe about this man?

1. He Was Found Out

Verse 11 The king spotted him immediately, he was conspicuous because he was different from all the others. He had neglected to prepare for the occasion. **HE DID NOT HAVE ON A WEDDING GARMENT, and this fact was immediately observed by the King.** Which brings home forcefully the fact that the King of Heaven will not be deceived when it comes to deciding who does and who does not enter heaven. All disguises will immediately be recognised for what they are - disguises. They may be very clever, or even deceive the other guests (as appeared to be the case on this occasion,) but there is simply no possibility that any form of disguise can pass the scrutiny of the King.

THAT coming Judgment day will be a time of separation - when the wheat will be separated from the tares. Both are growing together at this point in time, perhaps in the same church or even in the same family, but there is a day coming when the great Judge of all the earth will expose all those who have not on a wedding garment. They will be **FOUND OUT JUST AS THIS MAN WAS.** There is no way that any unprepared person will be able to 'slip through' by hiding in the crowd.

2. Identifying The Garment

Has there ever been more speculation than now as to what the wedding garment may represent? And on this point even many church-goers are deceived. Some take it to mean strict adherence to doctrine. Others confuse it with Christian service and feel that because they teach in Sunday School or serve on a Church board etc that they will be acceptable. Others still rest in the fact that they have been baptised and take communion, so all will be well with them when that great day comes. There will always be those who are depending on their profession of faith to get them in.

When we have a close look at the situation, these things are very good and each deserves a place in the spiritual life of those who profess to be Christians. But when the chips are down, none of these on their own, or even altogether, will get us into heaven, because **they are not the wedding garment!** I am inclined to agree with Matthew Henry who, in his commentary, says that the garment spoken of here is **the garment of PERSONAL HOLINESS.**

This is the only garment acceptable to the great King of Heaven. The Bible makes clear the fact that heaven is a holy place - and only holy people go there. The whole thrust of Bible teaching makes this fact clear. **That** is why God in 1 Peter 1.16 says "*Be ye holy for I am holy!*" And in Heb 12.14 the warning could not be clearer requiring "*holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.*" However, in spite of all the warnings, many will come to Him in that day saying "*Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them: 'I never knew you: depart from me ye that work iniquity.'*" (Mat 7.22-23)

It should be pointed out here that there can be no personal holiness apart from **a right relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ. HE** is our righteousness (1 Cor 1.30). If our 'decision for Christ' has not led us into a close personal walk with our Lord, then we have misunderstood what the new birth is really all about.

Let it be perceived that we are to put on the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 13.14) and if we do this thoughtfully and meaningfully, from then on we will "*walk in the spirit and not fulfil the lust of the flesh.*" (Gal 5.16) These things should be basic to Christian experience, but a spiritual 'smog' seems to have settled over the church and now many sincere people are gropingly trying to find their way.

I have already stated that the garment mentioned here is the garment of personal holiness. I feel that we all would do well to make sure that we are not substituting something else for this garment, because nothing else will be acceptable - no substitutes are allowed.

Notice What Happened!

After being found out, we are told (verse 12) the man was '**speechless**'. This picture is graphically vivid. It describes exactly the reaction of many church-goers and even many church members when their true state is exposed, as it surely will be - they will be dumb-struck, flabbergasted with absolutely nothing to say - not even one excuse to offer! Convicted and condemned by their own conscience - what a devastating thing to happen at that psychological moment!

They will be found out, their true state of heart exposed - how humiliating - and before others! Yet this is precisely what is going to happen to multitudes of people. The banquet will be within sight but they will not be permitted to partake of it - so near and yet so far!

Note Carefully The Outcome

Verse 13 portrays "the man bound hand and foot." This shows his loss of all freedom, being the first in a series of downward steps. All who will not walk as they should in this world will be bound in the next. It should also be clearly understood that this sentence is irreversible. Those who are

rejected on that great day will not be able to resist and neither will they have any further opportunity to make amends. For them the die will be cast. They will have made their bed and now must be forced to lie on it.

His Expulsion Is Ordered

"Take him away!" For he is now to be wrenched away from the other guests. What graphic language! Imagine people, fully expecting to be ushered into heaven, only to be turned away at the last moment! Seeing friends and family go in, but they themselves rejected! Of all the experiences we could have, surely none could be more devastating than this? All aspirations brushed aside! All hopes shattered! and to realise that it is **for EVER**. The King's decision is final. There is no higher court of appeal. All without the wedding garment of personal holiness will be separated from the King - from the very wedding feast, from Christian loved ones - **FOR EVER!** It need not have finished up that way, but it did.

The Next Step Downward

Verse 13 "**Cast him into outer darkness!**" These succinct words are meant to convey to us the darkness -- the utter hopelessness ~ the despair of lost souls in the eternal world. Matthew Henry in his commentary on this parable, says that the darkness spoken of here is "extreme darkness or darkness to the last degree - darkness which might be felt." The picture is one that will make all sensitive minds recoil in horror. However, we must bear in mind the fact that God is not given to exaggeration. This is how it is and God "tells it like it is!" If any think that the punishment is extreme and outweighs the crime, I would remind them of the serious nature of all sin.

Sin Is A Wilful Violation Of God's law:

Sin is rebellion against God's rule; Sin is a most serious offence against a holy God and therefore must be met with the sternest of punishments.

When considering the reality of hell and its torment, we must always keep in mind the fact that God is "perfect in His justice" choosing a punishment equal to the crime.

The whole thrust of the Bible conveys to our minds the fact that the continual flouting of God's laws is to be equated with rebellion against His rule and always will be met with the severest of punishment. Examples of this are the Flood in Noah's day ... The fire and brimstone that rained down on Sodom and Gomorrah ... and the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

The approaching Judgment Day that will finally bring history to a climax will be no exception. Paul reminds us in 2 Thess 1.7-9 that *"the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that **know not God** and that **obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power."***

This could not be any clearer even if it were written in letters of fire across the heavens. Such is the Word of the living God and this is how it is going to be. Whether we like it or not, whether we believe it or not, is not going to make one iota of difference.

The Final Result

"There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Here we gain a glimpse into the state of mind experienced by lost souls in that world of darkness ... see the weeping - not just on odd occasions - but constant weeping! Weeping is normally an expression of sorrow: here it expresses **great sorrow**. Lost souls will continually express sorrow over the fact that they could have been saved - could have been at the wedding feast - could have been experiencing the joys, the wonders, the very glories

of Heaven, but - because of their own foolishness and neglect - they disqualified themselves. So they weep - and weep for ever!

We note also that they will "gnash their teeth". This, I believe, is meant to convey to us the idea of the most severe pain, or extreme anguish of mind - or both. Their suffering, their remorse will be seemingly unbearable, made all the more so by the fact that it could have been avoided.

Our Lord's Warning

The parable concludes with a very striking statement by our Lord: "*Many are called, but few are chosen.*" Verse 14 cites the **many** - multitudes in fact - called to the wedding feast, but only a few - very few - are chosen. Those chosen, of course, are the few that have made sure they wear the wedding garment, the gown of personal holiness.

S u m m a r y

In summing up this chapter, I must underline the fact that the verses we have considered above came from the lips of our Lord Himself. In the light of this, we can be absolutely certain that the picture given is accurate to the last detail. These truths should fall as 'burning torches' upon the thoughts in our mind. If we really believe what our Lord taught, we should consider two options:

- 1. Not rest until we are absolutely certain** that we ourselves have on the right wedding garment.
- 2. Leave no stone unturned** in our efforts to persuade others, especially loved ones and friends, to prepare themselves for that great day when they will stand before the King.

Chapter FOUR

Our Actions Do Affect Other People

We have all heard the saying "actions speak louder than words" and I believe that there is a great deal of truth in it, far more than we realise. One old saint used to say "every step we take in this world, we tread on chords that will vibrate throughout the endless ages of eternity." When truth like this is brought home to our minds, we need to give it careful thought.

This truth is of such paramount importance, it should be allowed to regulate our lives and influence all our relationships with other people.

The fact is, whether we like it or not, we are all going to be held accountable for our actions. We have been clearly warned that "*God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.*" Eccles 12.14

How To Walk

In the light of this solemn fact, we should all heed Paul's admonition and 'walk circumspectly' which means cautiously. (Eph 5.15)

The Bible is literally full of stories of people whose walk was anything but circumspect, and their actions caused other people's lives to be shattered. There are so many Bible characters which I could use to illustrate this point that I have found it difficult to choose any particular one. However, on reflection, I have decided to use the life of King Saul.

It is not my purpose here to give a detailed history of this man, but simply to show that his actions had a devastating effect on the lives of people all around him. The main lesson we can learn from Saul's life is that we must discipline ourselves and learn to walk close to our Lord; otherwise, our actions too may have a shattering effect on other people.

Saul's Background

I will have time here to give only a thumb-nail sketch of his life. Saul was the first king of Israel. He was the son of Kish - of the tribe of Benjamin. Born about 1095 BC, he was especially noted for his stature, for he was 'head and shoulders' above his fellows. In appearance, he was every inch a king. Saul's father was a wealthy chief.

There came a time in Saul's life when he was anointed by Samuel as King of Israel. Israel, of course, still exists today, but no longer has a king.

Saul formed an army and fought in many battles. Israel as a nation, was at this time in history, under the domination of the Philistines. However, after some success in warfare, Saul gained a position well above any previous ruler of Israel.

Saul's Responsibility

Like all monarchs, he enjoyed many privileges, but hand in hand with privileges go responsibilities. Saul was responsible for the welfare of the nation. He was to guide and protect them as a people and at all times be an example to them.

We are all like Saul in this respect in that we too have certain responsibilities to other people, especially of course to our own children. However, there are many other people around us as well to whom we are responsible in various ways, especially in a spiritual sense.

Saul had a mission in life. That mission was to rule Israel wisely and well, and thus glorify the Lord God.

What Is Our Mission?

We too have a mission in life. That mission varies greatly from person to person. For one person, their particular calling in life may be to serve God on a mission field. For another person, their mission may be to teach a Bible or Sunday School class or to serve on a church board. Every Christian is to be a witness for His Lord and to set forth, both by precept and example, the great truths of the Gospel. It is the responsibility of each individual Christian to ask the Lord to reveal to them what their mission in life really is and how best they can serve Him. Unfortunately, many Christians go through life without ever really giving serious thought to this matter. They seem quite content to go year after year just sitting in a pew and being 'spoon-fed'. They are quite oblivious of the fact that a spiritual war is raging and all around them people are on their way to an eternal hell.

Saul Was A Fool

He was a fool by his own admission. In 1 Sam 26.21 we read his confession: *"Then said Saul, 'I have sinned: return, my son David: for I will no more do thee harm, because my soul was precious in thine eyes this day: behold I have played the fool and have erred exceedingly'."*

We should note carefully what Saul says: "I have sinned - I have played the fool - I have erred exceedingly." He didn't simply say that he had erred, but that he had erred **exceedingly**. How embarrassing! What a humbling confession for a king to have to make! To express this in purely Australian terms - he was a 'nong' - a galah - or a 'clot', or as the young people would now say, "he threw his brains away."

What Led To His Admission?

The answer to this question can be given in one word - **disobedience**. Disobedience seems to be the trip-wire that brings down many spiritual giants. We could begin with Adam and Eve in the Garden and trace this fact right through the Bible. We see with myriads of people that disobedience to God's revealed truth was the sin that caused their downfall.

Saul had been pursuing David as if he were an enemy. He knew the will of God in this matter, but chose not to do it. David showed some wonderful qualities in his character. These qualities attracted other people to him and this in turn made Saul jealous. One sin leads to another. Sin always has the effect of separating us from God. *"Your iniquities have separated between you and your God and*

your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear." (Isaiah 59.2)

So It Was With Saul

In 1 Sam 28.6 we are told that Saul 'enquired of the Lord' regarding a certain matter, but 'the Lord answered him not.'

How often, in our spiritual walk, do we find that 'the Lord has hidden His face from us' because of some sin and often it is a crucial time when we really need the consciousness of His presence to guide and reassure us.

Saul and his men were about to engage the Philistines in a great battle. They were at a place called Gilboa (1 Sam 28.4). We observe in the following verse that when Saul realised what a formidable army the Philistines had mustered, *"he was afraid and his heart greatly trembled."* (1 Sam 28.5) If God had been with him, there would have been no need for this fear. Someone has well said that "one man and God is a majority" - we see this with Noah. The reason for Saul's fear was the fact that God was no longer with him. Sin had robbed Saul of his courage. Samuel the prophet had died before this incident took place, so Saul was unable to consult God's servant and receive counsel from him.

Saul Is On His Own

He is in a predicament - but one of his own making. Unable to consult Samuel, and God not answering him, what was he to do? Verse 7 provides the answer to that question. *"Then said Saul unto his servants, 'Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her and enquire of her.' And his servants said to him, 'Behold, there is a woman that hath a familiar spirit at Endor'."*

Saul, who certainly knew better, actually turns to a woman with a familiar spirit, a witch of all people. This reveals the misguided actions of a desperate man.

Multiplied thousands of people are doing the same today - seeking help from clairvoyants, fortune-tellers, tarot card readers and many other servants of satan. They do not realise it, but they are being deceived, as was Saul.

This king had sufficient knowledge to know that the God of heaven would never countenance witchcraft. In fact, all Israel knew that any contact with the spirit world was strongly condemned by a holy God. It is not my purpose here to go into the details of Saul's encounter with this witch, but I feel that one point should not be missed:

Sin Hardens The Heart

An old saying runs like this: 'the same sun that melts butter hardens clay!' Truth also can have one of two effects on us:

If we yield to it, our hearts will be softened,

If we resist it, our hearts will be hardened.

We see from this that we are responsible for our own spiritual state. If our hearts are warm and our minds receptive, they have become this way because we have been willing to allow the Lord to have His way. We have cultivated a teachable spirit and for a true Christian, this is a matter of great importance.

Sin causes Distress

v. 15 Saul is in trouble - deep trouble. He was fearful of the Philistine army - Samuel was dead - and God wouldn't answer him any more. He describes his own state of mind, "I am sore distressed" - not just distressed but **greatly** distraught!

Many people bring sorrow and distress upon themselves through not walking in the ways and will of God. They are ignorant of a spiritual law which says:

*"Whatsoever a man soweth, **THAT** shall he also reap."* (Gal 6.7)

all who flout this law will surely head into trouble somewhere down the track.

A Boomerang

Sin not only causes great sorrow of heart, but it boomerangs back on us. That is why we are warned "*Be sure your sin will find you out*" (Num 32.23). No 'ifs' or 'buts' with this verse, just the plain warning: "***Be sure your sin WILL find you out!***"

God intends that this verse should explode in our minds so that we should never forget it. Saul had this fact brought home to his mind with devastating effects. The last chapter in 1 Samuel is also the last chapter in Saul's life.

Note The End Results

- 1 Saul's three sons are killed in battle, including Jonathan whom David loved, (v. 2)
- 2 Israel lost the battle, (v. 7)
- 3 Saul committed suicide, (v. 4)
- 4 His armour-bearer also took his own life, (v. 5)
- 5 All the men that were with Saul at this time were killed, (v. 6)
- 6 Because a large number of men were killed, it naturally follows that many women became widows.
- 7 Many children that day became fatherless.
- 8 An unknown number of people were driven out of their cities and their homes.
- 9 But worse still, God was dishonoured through it all.

It didn't have to end that way, but that is how it finished up. One man's sin caused incredible devastation.

What Can We Learn From This?

When we throw a stone into a pond, ripples go out in ever-widening circles. Saul threw the stone of disobedience into life's pond and the ripples hit thousands of people. Many had their lives devastated - for ever.

Here we have vividly portrayed for us one of the laws of the spiritual realm and what happens when we flout that law. Let us all learn from this chapter in Saul's life which had such a sad end.

We are all capable of engaging in actions which will benefit people enormously, and result in getting them to heaven. Conversely, if we do not walk as we should in this world, we can, by our actions,

devastate other people - perhaps eternally.

The Lord's Forgiveness

There are times when the Lord graciously gives us the opportunity to retrace our steps and undo some of the damage we have caused. There are other times, however, when the situation is irreversible, and there is just no way we can erase the harm that we have caused others. If we genuinely repent, we can of course, be forgiven, but that, in many cases, does not eliminate the damage.

King David was guilty of both murder and adultery. He repented and received forgiveness, but history reveals the fact that the damage which he caused was permanent. He was directly responsible for Uriah's death and there was absolutely nothing David could do to bring this man back to life.

Yes, our actions do affect other people! We have the potential to do an enormous amount of good to others. We can also cause them a great amount of harm.

So, we should always remember *"that God hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God."* (Micah 6.8)

CHAPTER FIVE

The Approaching Storm

When thinking people make a penetrating analysis of contemporary society, it becomes obvious that certain trends are now in motion. These trends have existed in most sections of society for some considerable period of time, but they now permeate society as a whole.

These facts are self-evident and become discernable to all with eyes to see. Thoughtful people in general, and Christians in particular, must ask themselves "where are these trends now leading us - where is western society going to finish up - what will be the state of the world in the future and how are our children as Christians, going to cope?"

Cause And Effect

Viewing the situation as one of 'cause and effect' the whole future picture appears to be one of 'doom and gloom'; that is, without some form of supernatural intervention such as the Second Coming of the Lord.

Many thoughtful Christians are these days carefully and objectively analysing the situation as it unfolds. Their purpose for doing so is to prepare themselves for difficult times ahead, which to them now seem inevitable. In other words, a storm looms large - a tempest having vast potential to lash the spiritual lives of thousands. If this is an accurate assessment of the situation, then we would be wise to think and pray about it and make some preparation.

If the return of our Lord is imminent, as many believe, what will western society be like in the not-too-far-distant future? In an attempt to answer this question I have taken some of the more obvious trends and traced them to their logical conclusions. In doing so, I find that the picture which emerges is identical to the picture painted in Scripture for the 'end times'. The way I interpret Scripture is that the prophecies regarding the last of the 'last days' are on course and soon to be fulfilled right before our very eyes!

Learning From History

Two concise prophecies concerning what we may expect were given by our Lord Himself:

"As in the days of Noah ... " Mat 24.37 *"As in the days of Lot ... "* Luke 17.28

A careful study of prevailing conditions during the times of Noah and Lot enables us to see that history has very nearly run full cycle. We are now rapidly moving toward a time when the conditions which existed in the days of both Noah and Lot will again prevail.

This, I believe, states the case in general terms, but in order to help us 'dig in' and prepare ourselves for the long haul, I will now endeavour to be more specific. Some of the things I will discuss here have already caught up with many of the Lord's people and I believe that it is only a matter of time and we will all have to contend with them.

Demoralisation

The term 'demoralise'¹ is a stronger term than discourage or dishearten. Demoralisation is in fact a breakdown in morale. This describes fairly accurately what is happening to multiplied thousands of people at this point in time. They are demoralised - they have lost the will to fight. If an army ever loses the will to fight, they are as good as beaten. The morale of the troops must never be underestimated as a strong contributing factor in winning a war.

Numerous counsellors are becoming increasingly concerned over the growing number of people whose morale is at an all-time low. This state has been brought about by any one of a large number of factors including severe drought, personal bankruptcy, prolonged illness, long term unemployment, loss of a home, family break-up, a breakdown in relationships, plus of course many other stressful circumstances.

Christians No Exception

Christians are not immune to these things and many find themselves caught in situations which are beyond their control. For instance, many sincere Christians are, at this present time, adversely affected by the current economic crisis. Whether or not the government can reverse the present downturn, still remains to be seen. Many national economies are already on the brink of total collapse. Some economists believe that if any more of the more 'stable' economies go over the edge, they in turn will drag others down with them.

This could well be one of the problems that will affect us all in some way and one with which we may have to learn to cope. We can be sure, however, that as time unfolds, satan will manufacture some diabolical set of circumstances, the aim of which will be to demoralise us - to break down our morale - and to get us to 'throw in the towel'.

One way of preparing ourselves for this eventuality is to saturate our minds with the Word of God - to memorise as many of the promises of God as possible. Doing this puts us in the position where the Lord can speak to us when times are really tough and give us the encouragement we need to pull us through.

Mental Confusion

Confusion can be brought about by a great variety of factors. It would probably not serve any real purpose to discuss them here. However, there is one form of confusion which affects many sincere Christians and that is the confusion caused by the many different and often conflicting interpretations of Scripture.

Much confusion clouds the charismatic issue. There is also much confusion regarding the doctrines which surround the Second Coming of our Lord. I often meet people whose confusion has become so great that it has undermined their faith. Because they were not able to 'sort things out' they eventually succumbed to the temptation to 'throw in the towel' and say "what's the use?" This is something that we must all watch. If we are grappling with some spiritual truth which we haven't yet

really understood, the wise attitude is to just 'shelve it' for the time being until the Lord gives us more light on it, but never allow it to shake our faith.

Our personal faith in the risen Lord and the veracity of His Word must be guarded at all costs because 'we walk by faith' and 'faith is the victory that overcomes the world.'

Divisions In Churches

Division has always existed within the framework of the Christian church. Paul once disagreed with Peter and told him so. On another occasion, Paul had a dispute with Barnabas over John Mark's reliability. Sometimes these disagreements can be a 'clash of personalities' but on other occasions, parties may be just looking at things from different angles. But there are, of course, times when divisions are of a more serious nature and Christians cannot solve the problem by simply 'agreeing to disagree'.

Modern Day Speaking In Tongues

Modern day speaking in tongues is one such problem. The Tongues movement has now infiltrated every denomination and is the cause of much division amongst the Lord's people. It seems inevitable that as time proceeds, satan will introduce other controversial issues which will cause further division. It is on these occasions when Christians are compelled to break fellowship with others, that they need to be especially careful.

If we take a pair of tongs and lift a live coal out of the fire and place it on the hearth on its own, away from the fire, it is only a matter of time before that lone coal becomes cold and black. Because it was isolated from the others, it lost its glow. This is precisely what can happen to Christians when divisions occur within the Christian church. Satan knows only too well the old saying, 'united we stand - divided we fall'. Satan is picking off Christians one by one and isolating them. Sadly, many become like some of the early followers of the Lord who 'went back and walked no more with Him.'

If we do find ourselves isolated by divisions, or because we hold strong convictions on matters of doctrine, we must of course be gracious about it lest we cause some weaker brother to stumble. But in addition to maintaining a gracious attitude, we must keep up a close, daily walk with the Lord. If we lack the discipline to do this, it will only be a matter of time until the glow departs and then our loss will be great indeed. We would all, I believe, be greatly helped by doing a careful study of the seven 'walks' in Ephesians:

1. Eph **2.2** We are not to walk according to the course of this world ... not to follow the ways of this world.
2. Eph 2.10 We are to walk in good works.
3. Eph 4.1 We are to walk worthy of our vocation or calling.
4. Eph 4.17 We are not to walk in vanity like the unsaved.
5. Eph **5.2** We are to walk in love
6. Eph **5.8** We are to walk as children of light.

7. Eph **5.15** We are to walk circumspectly, carefully.

To incorporate into our lives the admonition given by Paul in this letter to the Christians at Ephesus, could well save us from becoming another 'statistic'.

Spiritual Blindness

God in His infinite love beams the light of truth on our pathway in order to spotlight the track out of spiritual darkness. However, if that light is rejected, our spiritual eyes gradually lose their ability to see and understand truth - we go blind. Our Lord on one occasion said *"If therefore the light that is in you be darkness, how great is that darkness!"* (Mat 6.23) Large numbers of people have been exposed to gospel light through Sunday school, youth groups, the voice of conscience and so on. Many have rejected that light, even though it sometimes shone quite brightly into their lives. Sadly, it has happened to these people as Scripture has said *"Satan has blinded the minds of them that believe not."* (2 Cor 4.4) Many of these same people are now looking for answers in eastern mysticism, yoga, meditation, spiritism, seances and the New Age Movement which stems from Hindu animism etc.

If we stand under a lone street light on a dark night, we are able to see to some degree - it may even be possible to read a map. However, the further we venture from that street light, the more intense the darkness becomes, until finally we cannot see at all. That is how it is in the spiritual realm. Christ is the Light of the world as He said *"He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness."* (John 8.12)

A great spiritual smog is settling over this world. The darkness is becoming more intense. The only hope we have of being able to find our way is by a close walk with Him who is "the Light of life" and through constant study of His Word.

Idolatry In The Church

As history runs its course and we move further into these end times, many spiritually-minded people are becoming painfully aware of another problem with which Christians are confronted - that of idolatry within the church.

Ancient Israel faced a similar problem and in order to correct it, God placed a prohibition on them: *"Thou shalt have no other gods before Me!"* Idolatry in its modern form is of course more refined, but it is still idolatry. It is rendering to some object or person more devotion than we do to God Himself. With this definition in mind, we can readily see how easy it has become for some people to have money as their god. Of course, they are not aware of this fact, but it is so, none-the-less.

With other people, their home or a fully imported sports car or a high-powered boat has taken the place of God. Anything that takes the place of God in our lives in fact becomes an idol. Idolatry is a very subtle thing. Given time, satan can weave it into any culture without the people even becoming aware of what is being done or how they are being manipulated or exploited.

Action Needed

What do we do about this one? If we profess to be Christians, I believe we must make a full and honest appraisal of our whole lifestyle and actually tip out everything that is offensive to God. Our instructions are clear. Heb 12.1 says *"Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us."*

We are told to lay aside **every** weight and of course the sins that may act as trip-wires and eventually cause our downfall. This matter is one of the utmost importance. It requires drastic actions on our part because we cannot run well in this race if our lives are cluttered up with a lot of excess baggage. We should therefore be very decisive on what we tip out of our lives and what we allow to remain. Everything that even remotely resembles an idol should be closely scrutinised under the all-searching eye of a holy God and its future decided in the light of eternal values.

Increase In Materialism

Materialism is 'the love of possessions' or 'the pursuit of wealth' or 'the acquisition of things'. Materialism can get hold of us in varying degrees. In direct proportion to its hold on us, will be our regard for spiritual values. Materialism has, of course, always existed, but since the last World War, it has swept over the land like a great tidal wave and even rushed in through the doors and windows of the church. Many people who were once quietly living as contented Christians, appear to have been swept off their feet by the strong currents that now flow in society. These same people have eagerly joined the queue to obtain more 'things'. They seem to have forgotten "*to be content with such things as ye have.*" (Heb 13.5)

Both Christian and worldling now jostle together to obtain the best and the latest which modern technology can produce. The worldling looks on with wonderment and tries to figure out in what way the professing Christian is any different from him.

The sad fact is that there isn't much difference any more. How true it is that if the gospel has really taken root in our lives we have become **new creatures** - "*Old things pass away and all things become new.*" (2 Cor 5.17) This means new attitudes, new habits, new desires and new goals in life. I am convinced that this spirit of materialism has gained a bigger hold on us than we care to admit. The time is long overdue when we should assess our attitude to **things** and begin "*laying up treasure in heaven where neither moth nor rust corrupt and where thieves do not break through and steal, for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*" (Mat 6.20-1) If we are not willing to face the reality of the danger that materialism poses and do something to control it, it could well destroy our spiritual lives altogether.

The New Age Movement

Many discerning Christians have listened with more than usual interest to world leaders waxing eloquent about the New World Order. George Bush in particular has stated many times that he will not allow anything to stand in the way of the coming New World Order. Political and economic developments around the world point to the fact that this monolithic structure is well under way.

The fact we need to grasp is that every Christian eventually is going to be affected by this mushrooming worldwide movement. Actually, most are already affected by it - many without even knowing just how it is making inroads into their lives.

This New Age Movement is a last-ditch stand by satan to superimpose his religion on the peoples of this world. The whole scheme is extremely subtle and aimed at bringing the minds of every individual under satanic control.

The technique used to accomplish this form of mind control is to gradually woo people into 'an altered state of consciousness' - a passive state of mind - a mental state where your thinking is done for you by a 'higher power' or a 'spirit guide' or 'the inner self' **which is, in reality, a demon.** Mind boggling stuff isn't it? However, before you write it off as science fiction, let me share with you a fact which Christian counsellors everywhere are finding is not only happening now, but has actually been going on for some decades.

The methods used to bring people into this 'altered state of consciousness' or passive mental receptivity, vary considerably. The method that works with one person may not work with another. I will list just

a few that have come to our attention within the last few years, but first, allow me to describe one method in detail in order to make clear what I am driving at.

New Age Music

Many discerning Christians have come to realise the dangers of rock music. Rock music is dangerous because it is 'hi-energy'. The hype that it produces stretches the mind beyond its ability to cope. It is at this point that people's resistance is broken down and they become vulnerable to outside influences. The hype, volume and beat all combine to **blow the mind** of the listener. It brings people into a different 'mood' and girls in particular lose their ability to say "No!"

New Age, or Yuppie music on the other hand is a mystical type of music which is very soothing. It is this very ability to soothe that can induce an attitude of meditation and passivity. In other words, persistent listening to NAM music tends to have a hypnotic effect. It is this hypnotic state of mind that new agers call 'an altered state of consciousness'.

Well, what should be our attitude to this type of music? Does the Bible provide us with some guidelines in such a matter? Yes, as always, the Bible is more up to date than tomorrow's newspaper. In Ephesians 5.19 it encourages "*speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.*" Singing and music are an important part of Christian experience, but only singing and music that edify us and glorify the Lord.

I have used music here simply as an example to illustrate how the mind can be influenced. This influence is extremely subtle. It is also gradual but very definite. It alters people's thinking. In other words, it is a powerful form of brainwashing.

What To Look For

Now in order to alert my fellow Christians to other New Age methods which are just as dangerous, I will list some of the most common techniques being used at this point in time:

The use of yoga

Self hypnosis

Eastern mysticism, with its various types of meditation

Subliminal tapes

Mind dynamics seminars

Stress management courses

Human potential movement

The use of 'mantras' in Marshall Arts

Modern-day speaking in tongues

These are only a few of the methods currently being used to induce this 'altered state of consciousness' or to bring people into a 'passive' state of mind. I feel it necessary to point out here that in listing these things as I have, I am not making a blanket statement and condemning everything. Some courses to relieve mental stress and relax the body may be beneficial and can safely be undertaken by Christians without any danger to their spiritual lives.

Beware Of The Mixture

What I am saying is that satan has now mixed the **bad** and the **dangerous** in with the **good** and thus created a spiritual minefield. So reader, before you commit yourself to do a course or seminar of some kind, check it out thoroughly first. Ask some straight questions and demand some straight answers. Questions such as:

Who is conducting the course?

Is he/she a real Christian?

Exactly what is the purpose of the course?

What methods are used in order to achieve the goal in view?

In many of the courses and seminars being advertised today, there is a 'hidden agenda' and that is to demolish your spiritual life and most probably by the methods I've already outlined.

So think carefully about it, ask questions and read up on it, and most importantly pray about it and ask the Lord what He would have you do in the matter. If you are compelled by your employer to attend such a course, be sure to pray and ask the Lord to protect your mind from being affected in any adverse way.

S u m m a r y

Now to summarise the matters we have briefly looked at in this chapter. There is now very strong evidence to suggest that a great storm approaches. It is a storm of great magnitude. This tempest is being whipped up by satan and the forces under his control. The main thrust of this storm targets people in general, but the church in particular. The fury of this gale will take most people by surprise, exactly as the flood did in Noah's day.

We have now sufficient evidence to prove that the first shock waves have already hit our decadent shores. When we view the grey landscape of our times, what do we see?

An alarming increase in the number of broken marriages

A marked increase in the divorce rate

The rapid spread of false cults

A veritable explosion of occult activity

Political pressure being brought to bear on Christian schools

A frightening number of abortions

Departure from sound doctrine

Split churches everywhere

Pastors who have been side-tracked

Crowded mental institutions

A revival of both satanism and witchcraft

A rising tide of crime

Increased use of illicit drugs

A growing acceptance of homosexuality

The proliferation of prostitution

Sex, crime and violence rampant on TV screens nationwide

Crude language used blatantly on radio and television, giving young, impressionable minds the idea that this is the norm – this is how it is - what life is all about

Widespread abuse of alcohol, tobacco and prescribed drugs

And so the list goes on ...

No one can deny that these problems are already with us - the evidence is simply overwhelming. But as I have already stated, these are but the first shock waves. **The full fury of this storm is yet to break over us!**

What To Do

How do we handle all this? When we witness the devastation in the lives of people - their hopelessness - the despair, how do we prevent all this really getting to us when people's hearts will fail them for fear?

May I suggest to my fellow travellers on their way to the Celestial city, that we lift our gaze beyond the present storm and view with the eye of faith the peaceful harbour we call Heaven. On arrival there, we can drop anchor for the last time - all of life's storms will be past - there will be nothing but glory from then on throughout the endless ages of eternity.

Yes, when we cast our anchor there, we will be welcomed by our blessed Lord Himself, a host of shining angels, our Christian loved ones who have gone on ahead, and of course, a vast multitude of the saints. Many of these same saints passed through storms in their day. In fact, large numbers of them were literally overwhelmed by storms and perished physically, but they remained true to the Captain of their salvation and did not suffer spiritual shipwreck. Many of them had their lives cut short in the heat of the battle. They left the Church Militant on planet earth and immediately joined the Church Triumphant in Heaven.

So take courage my Christian friend! Lift your gaze beyond the present circumstance and remember all that is in store for those who remain true to their Lord.

When the little boat you call 'life' is overwhelmed by the waters of death and finally sinks, then it will be a case of '**absent from the body — present with the Lord.**' (2 Cor 5.8)

The bottom line here is ... **that we remain loyal to our Captain** — no matter what!

Bryce Hartin

Some short videos on speaking in tongues can be seen at
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qi6fIUpvZUI>

OTHER FREE BOOKS

by Bryce Hartin

The Christian, His Enemies And His Armour, was written by Bryce as an aid to the spiritual warfare in which all Christians are engaged. The writer feels that perhaps the greatest assistance he can offer is to give some Biblical instruction on **the Christian's enemies** - what they can and cannot do - and on **the Christian's armour** and how to use it.

Riding The Waves is a booklet in which the background of today's religious trends and the formation of the Pentecostal/Charismatic Movement is discussed.

Living In A Shattered Society is another booklet which tells of a Christian's need not to be conformed to world.

The Last Days, exposes the great deception of these last days. The church is in trouble - deep trouble and many within its ranks are confused and frightened.

Today's Tongues is a small booklet which gives a counsellor's eye-opening insight into today's tongues phenomena. It takes very little time to read yet gives a clear and convincing Biblical argument. Please take the time to study this material, with an open mind and in the light of Scripture.

To download the above books, go to <http://www.christianissues.biz/freebooks.html>

by Roy Hession

The Calvary Road, by Roy Hession, very simply outlines personal revival (sanctification) through being filled with the Holy Spirit. The 'how to' of Christian Surrender is revealed for all who would seek the Lord with all their heart. This is not another self help book but a most humbling revelation of the sin we fail (or refuse) to see and which keeps us from an intimate walk with Jesus.

We Would See Jesus, also by Roy Hession, is a wonderful follow-up to *The Calvary Road*. For this book and **Be Filled Now!** go to: <http://www.christianissues.biz/freebooks.html>

Various other books, articles and some MP3s are available from:
<http://www.christianissues.biz/downloads.html>