

Exploring The Bible



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PREFACE

The author of this book was invited by the Glasgow (South) Christadelphian Ecclesia to speak at a conference of young people on the topic: “How you can get more out of your Bible.” The conference over, its sponsors pressed for publication. The author has taken the opportunity to include more detail here and there, and to add an extra chapter or two, but the general pattern of the original talks has been followed.

There is bound to be much that is unsatisfactory about so small a volume as this dealing with so vast and important a subject. So readers are asked to make allowances for the difficulties involved.

The circumstances which brought this book into being are responsible for several of its characteristics—the personal touch, which came easily enough when the talks were originally given in Glasgow, and which may perhaps help to lighten the heavier chapters; the omission of many aspects of Bible study which some would consider to be top priorities; the heavy loading with the author’s personal enthusiasms (this is not an apology for them!); and the omission of “perhaps”, “peradventure” and “it may be”. On this last point it is not amiss to mention that high confidence over conclusions reached in Bible study, is less often warranted than is commonly assumed. So opportunity is taken here to remind the reader that though the tone of these chapters may at times seem to be dogmatic, the writer is not unaware of his own fallibility. All experienced teachers know that to hedge around with provisos and uncertainties the instruction given is to cancel out much of its value and to dull its impression on the mind. Hence the approach here.

It would be churlish not to acknowledge how much the writing of this book has depended on the author’s invalid wife. Every chapter has received its share of her appreciation and/or ruthless, criticism. She also typed the manuscript. The advice given on page 8 is not flippant.

One thing more. A strong appeal is made here to readers not to be content to be always spoon-fed in Bible instruction. If these chapters do not send readers back to the Book to explore and study and think for themselves, they have failed, utterly in their aim.

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

“No!” I said into the telephone very decisively, “I can assure you there are no copies of Exploring the Bible to be had. The supply was exhausted long ago.”

But that insistent demand at the other end of the line was the last straw needed to break the camel’s back. Within a week or two this new edition was on the way.

It is hoped that this little book is still readable, in spite of the crop of anachronisms which has sprung up in the space of twenty years - such things as mention of G.C.E. (O-levels, now), and Charles Laughton records (now collectors’ pieces), and the Two Version Bible (now gone beyond recall), and the almost Victorian exhortation to pencil-sharpening (today, a 0.5mm. propelling pencil). Some of the versions discussed have almost disappeared, and instead we have the N.I.V. and the Jerusalem Bible, both admirable but not faultless. The old Appendix 3 recommended books now scarcely obtainable. I am not sure that the in part re-written version is much of an improvement.

It has been possible to correct a few misprints - unimportant oddments chiefly. And the added Index (thanks to my good friend E.B.) may possibly improve the book’s usefulness.

How it is regretted that C.M.P.A.’s fine gesture in first publishing Exploring at the ridiculous price of four shillings and sixpence (22 pence!) cannot” be emulated. Alas, it is not in my powers to swim against the roaring tide of inflation, that crazy phenomenon of our highly intelligent civilisation.

C.M.P.A. (404 Shaftmoor Lane, Birmingham 28) still publishes volume 2 ‘Enjoying the Bible’, and the Biblical material in it is, I hope, quite as stimulating as that which Exploring offers.

PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

In view of Bro. Harry's death in January 1992 before this reprint was undertaken, chapter 15 on Modern Versions has been brought up-to-date by using his recommendations from "Letters to George & Jenny" which he wrote in 1988. Otherwise, the book remains unchanged.

1. A BUSINESS-LIKE APPROACH

“If the Bible is God’s voice to every man that has ears to hear (which it demonstrably is), it is for every man by himself, and for himself, to seek to understand it, and to extend the benefit he may have received.” ROBERT ROBERTS.

It must be your first aim to get to know the Bible facts in really familiar fashion. A ready familiarity with the text itself is an absolute necessity.

As a means to this end, no better device than the Bible Companion has been produced. There are those who are not specially fond of this daily grinding away at five or six chapters from three completely different parts of the Bible. Variations have been invented, such as reading three portions from the first Old Testament assignment, then next day three portions from the New Testament. Some prefer to read Amos or John or Romans through at a sitting”, so as to maintain connection.

But all such “improvements” notwithstanding, you are strongly advised for at least your first five years in the Truth (and probably for a good deal longer) to stick rigidly to the Bible Companion pattern of daily readings. It will give you an over-all acquaintance with the facts of Scripture which is invaluable in itself and without which progress of a yet better sort will not come easily.

And when you read, read always slowly and with attention to detail. It is surprising how little of what is read in any one chapter is retained clearly in the mind. In one of his books Burgon challenges his reader to go slowly through Genesis chapter 1 and then put the Bible aside and answer accurately twenty questions (Appendix 1 on page 138) about the facts that he has just read. The writer has still to find anyone who can score more than twelve correct answers!

Once in an informal Bible discussion class the speaker had a sudden lapse of memory and appealed to the twenty Christadelphians present to help him with the name of the old man who succoured David on the occasion of his flight from Jerusalem at the time of Absalom’s rebellion. And although those present had been reading the Bible steadily for periods varying between five and forty years, none was able to supply the missing name. So read with attention. Get familiar with the smallest details. With this object in view, use any means which present themselves for widening your knowledge.

It is far less of a Christadelphian custom than it ought to be that the Bible is discussed at the meal table. One forms the impression that there are today comparatively few Christadelphian homes where this is normal. Even at a Fraternal Gathering, where one might ordinarily assume that people are in a mind to discuss over their meal of fellowship the Truth which really binds them together, good Bible talk is a rare commodity. The trend in recent years has hardly been in the right direction.

Yet “iron sharpeneth iron” especially when sparks of Bible knowledge and elucidation are being struck. One recalls with pleasure and gratitude the American home where each place at table was set with half a dozen small cards each bearing a somewhat out-of-the-ordinary Bible question. As the meal proceeded, each person in turn read out a question and then looked around for the readiest answer. The arguments, discussions and investigations which those questions provoked were good for all concerned. Bread of Life was served with the meals at that table.

Another piece of advice which goes logically with what has just been emphasized is that you marry a wife (or husband) that you can talk to freely about the Bible and with reasonable expectation of an intelligent, helpful response. In the Truth married life should mean more than home-building, mutual enjoyment and family-rearing. The home where animated conversation about the Word of God is not a normal everyday thing is an emasculated affair.

In most Christadelphian ecclesias there are one or two outstandingly knowledgeable brethren. Some ecclesias, but not many, are blessed with more than one or two. Use to the full the frequent openings which come your way to pick the brains of such people, or the time will come when you will look back on these neglected opportunities and reproach yourself bitterly. Accept every invitation which conies your way to visit their homes—and always go with a Bible in your hand. And if conversation does not readily turn in the direction of helpful Bible topics, blame yourself.

The chances that fall to you to button-hole one of these walking encyclopaedias after a Bible Class or at the end of some other meeting should be taken full advantage of. That snatch of conversation before you go home may often be of more profit than the entire meeting which has preceded it.

But – another warning – you would be well advised not to argue with these venerable patriarchs in the process of brain-picking. What they offer may not invariably sound convincing, but you should always think it over carefully before jettisoning it altogether. By all means give yourself the luxury of a further question with a view to eliminating some objection which your mind has lighted on, but be careful not to take this process too far or the fount of wisdom may dry up; the sweet waters may become bitter.

2. MARKING YOUR BIBLE

“Writing maketh an exact man.” FRANCIS BACON.

EVERY time you learn some new thing—a piece of out-of-the-way information which throws light on an obscure passage of Scripture, a neat explanation of a long-standing difficulty, the name of a book which will supply useful knowledge on a particular subject, a simple association of two Bible passages which illuminate each other—whenever you encounter anything which might conceivably be of value one day, make a note of it somewhere.

Of course, you have a blotting-paper memory and can carry these details easily, so the note is not necessary. But please accept an emphatic assurance that one day your memory will not be as good as it is now, so it would be well to start the note-taking habit right away.

But you do not see your middle-aged brethren busy taking notes! Alas, no—and the more shame on them for not setting you a good example and doing what they know to be needful for themselves.

Another warning against dependence on that keen memory of yours. It may not be really as retentive as you think it is. Your self-assurance in this matter may actually be an indirect excuse for your own laziness—an evasion of the effort, small though it be, which is called for in the use of pencil and paper when you would rather merely listen or talk.

One recalls a Bible Campaign when a drenching downpour ruled out the afternoon’s normal activities. The oldest campaigner present seized the opportunity and turned the next two hours to greater profit. The pages of his Bible turned back and forward, and one valuable exposition followed another in quick succession—a rare experience. At the end of it he looked round with grey eyes full of reproach: “See, I’ve shown you this afternoon some of the finest ideas I know, and not one of you has made a note about a single thing!”

Sure enough, some time later one of his hearers with a sponge-like memory had to ask him to repeat the explanation he had given of Paul’s puzzling words in 1 Cor. 15:39, R.V.: “There is one flesh of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and another of fishes”. This time the explanation went down on paper as soon as it was received, and since then has been useful many times over. As might be expected, the order significantly corresponds with Psalm 8:7, 8, R.V.

The present writer’s own progression in note-taking may not be without interest. It began on odd scraps of paper which invariably got lost. Then followed a series of shabby little notebooks tucked inside the cover of the Bible to the serious detriment of

its binding. One graduated next to an imposing array of student's exercise books, with each item written up in its proper place (this was the phase when there was as much pride in the system as there was zeal for ideas—the machine was becoming master of the man). The acquisition of a wide-margin Bible stopped all that. Since then Bible and commentary have lived inside the same Covers.

This matter of note-making in one's Bible is so important to any who are intent on the acquisition of wide Bible knowledge as to merit a special section to itself. If you expect to do this sort of thing over a period of twenty or thirty years it is going to be worth while to develop a good technique from the start. There are those with experience who would not concur with all the recommendations listed here, but each of them has proved to be of value to somebody. You will need to find by experiment which methods suit your own-style best:

- (a) Mark your Bible in pencil, not in ink. Of course ink is more legible, especially too if your pen has an extra-fine nib. But alas, ink is also indelible, and—if you are going to be a Bible student of any quality—the day will come (often!) when you will want to replace some of your notes with something better. Blessed is the man that is prepared to believe that his first thoughts were not infallible! Then, too, you will find that in many Bibles a pen has an unpleasant habit of writing on both sides of the paper at once. So pencil every time.
- (b) But what sort of pencil? You will find that anything softer than HB tends to smudge as the years go by. There is a loss of legibility and a provoking defacement of the page opposite. On the other hand a 4.H or 6H point is too hard; it makes an impression on the thin paper, in effect writes on both sides at the same time and is difficult to erase. You will probably find a good-quality H or HB best for your purpose.
- (c) Do not be content with any sort of point on your pencil. If you are to write small and clearly, it will need to be needle sharp. Bounce the point gently on the back of your hand. If it does not give a clear sensation of pricking, it is not sharp enough. A slim razor-blade sharpener is the ideal tool for producing such a point, costs only a few pence, and can be carried everywhere.
- (d) Always have a good eraser handy. Some are worse than useless, either leaving a nasty smudge behind (your fault possibly for letting it get dirty or greasy), or tearing the flimsy page, or rubbing up a rough surface or even a hole. You will soon find by experiment the best for your purpose.
- (e) A slim four or six inch ruler is a useful tool to tuck inside your Bible. Not only does it make a good book-mark when you are hunting up passages, but it provides the necessary straight-edge to help your underlining. Never—repeat never!—do your underscoring free hand. The steadiest set of nerves cannot guarantee always

to do such a job neatly and efficiently.

- (f) To pick out a specially useful passage listed in your central column references, it is sufficient to underline it and put a pencilled ring round the tiny letter or figure in the text which steers you to it. Any other single reference which you discover for yourself can be written in the margin or in an available space in the middle column or in the tiny space which is often left to you at the end of the verse.
- (g) Be very sparing of underlining. This has been so much overdone by some enthusiasts as to defeat its own object, which is presumably to enable something of special importance to catch the eye. The best way to find key passages quickly is to remember whereabouts they come on the page. If you are going to use the same Bible for twenty years at least (and this should be your aim) the development of this faculty can be invaluable.
- (h) The underlining or marking of different Bible themes at the side in different colours finds a good deal of favour in some quarters. The drawback here—and it is a big one—is the laboriousness of it all. One cannot be for ever carrying around the battery of coloured pencils or complete pharmacy of coloured bottles which this system calls for. Others avoid these snags by inventing a code of capital letters by which to pick out passages relevant to various themes.

Thus

D =The Devil

M=Mortality of Man

S=Sacrifice, and so on.

A scheme such as this is better because it is capable of greater extension and less tedious operation. But—it has to be said—both schemes are really signs of immaturity in Bible study. By all means try one of them. After a year or two you will want to leave it behind and also that copy of the Bible which you have so gaily decorated.

- (i) Economy of space is all-important in Bible annotation. Therefore teach yourself to write small. This is one of the big advantages of a really fine point on your pencil—your writing can be shrunk to half the normal limit of legibility and still be read with ease.

Another great economy of space and time can be made through the employment of your own system of abbreviations. Such space savers as Xt (Christ), S. of M. (Son of Man), Aton. (Atonement), Rtness (Righteousness), Kdom (Kingdom), Pr (promises). are immediately recognizable.

- (j) Notes which involve no more than three or four words can usually find room in the margin against the appropriate verse. For anything longer than that the strip of space at the top and bottom of the page is worth its weight in gold leaf. With care a quite surprising amount of useful information can be readily available there. If, then, you wish to add a longer note or a longer series of references against a given verse, put a capital A against it, and then at top or bottom of the page repeat this A and the note you wish to add. Against another verse B will appear similarly. This system employed over the years on a wide-margin Bible will turn it into a commentary also. Some like to use Greek letters instead of capitals. The only advantage is that of greater distinctiveness to the eye—and a certain intellectual snobbery!
- (k) When you strike an idea round which a widespread series of Bible passages clusters, you will find it advantageous to collect all of these together in the margin against one of them, and then put a cross-reference to that place against the others: e.g. it is useful to assemble against Num. 27:17 all the other passages where that luminous phrase “go in and out” occurs. But then how is one to make sure of finding that key passage? By including it in an Index to Notes at the beginning of your Bible. Many students’ Bibles are equipped with built-in indices of this kind. These are a great asset.
- (l) Most Bibles have a few blank pages at the beginning and end, and perhaps also between the Testaments. All such space is to be hoarded and used with the utmost care as open-boat survivors ration their food and water. These pages are, of course, to be used in emergency, when the lesser spaces are hopelessly inadequate to take something important.
- (m) When to make a note, and when not? The answer to this uncertainty is: When in doubt put it down. You never know what strange little bit of information is likely to prove valuable in the days to come. And, after all, you have already equipped yourself with an eraser, so it will easily rub out a year or two later.
- (n) A final warning in this section. Do not let your Bible marking become an end in itself. Bible marking is not Bible study—it is only an aid to study, a time-saver (ultimately) and a stimulus to later meditation. If you detect in yourself the slightest flicker of pride in a page well-plastered with annotations, then do not stop this practice, but do take precautions to see that others do not know about them. Let them remain your own private world.

3. FIRST THINGS FIRST

“The heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole, (which is to give all glory to God,) the full discovery it makes of the only way of man’s salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the word of God.”

Westminster Confession, 1647.

“ALL Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable.” 2Tim.3:16

This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance. If the Bible were not The Unique Book, there would be no point in this present attempt, or any such, to recommend the careful study of it and ways by which its Truth may be better known.

Yet another faithful saying—again with all acceptance, but how ruefully—is this: “The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.” The stark miserable truth of this in its application to knowledge of the Scriptures may be seen by certain simple tests.

The first consists of a number of representative questions taken at random from a recent G.C.E. examination paper in the subject of Bible Knowledge. As you read them through, ask yourself what would be the quality of your own written answers. If your memory of school examinations has not grown dim, you will recall how the writing of answers reveals the shabby inadequacy of reading and preparation not thoroughly done.

1. Explain what is meant by the “Servant Songs”. Give a description of one of them, and indicate what “servant” you consider it refers to.
2. Write notes on three of the following:
 - (a) The proclamation of Cyrus.
 - (b) Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel.
 - (c) Sanballat the Horonite.
 - (d) Priests and Levites.
 - (e) The image of jealousy.
3. Give three illustrations used by Ezekiel to enforce his teaching, and explain their meaning.
4. Show, with short quotations, what teaching is found in the Psalms on three of the following subjects:

- (a) Disbelief in God.
 - (b) Sorrow for sin.
 - (b) Patriotism.
 - (c) The fate of the wicked.
 - (d) The omniscience of God.
5. State the chief ways in which the Fourth Gospel differs from the three other Gospels in its presentation of the life of Christ. How do you account for the differences?
 6. Write notes on three of the following:
 - (a) The good shepherd.
 - (b) The visit of the Greeks to Christ.
 - (c) The new commandment.
 - (d) The Antichrist.
 - (e) The elect lady.
 7. Explain the parts played by Caiaphas and Pilate in the crucifixion of Christ, and give a brief estimate of the characters of both men.
 8. Say what were the points in Paul's teaching and conduct which aroused the antagonism of the Jews and led finally to his arrest.
 9. Illustrate from the Acts of the Apostles the attitude of the Roman Empire to the Apostolic Church.

Now, how do you feel about it? Is there a slight feeling of uneasiness or maybe shame? But, remember, questions such as these are to be answered in examination after only one or two years' preparation at the rate of three or four hours a week (and very often with little or no home background to help), whereas you as a faithful Christadelphian have been reading the Holy Scripture daily for years, you have listened to hundreds of Bible discourses and discussions, and maybe before that were soaking up Bible knowledge in Sunday School from a very early age. How do you compare with the children of this world who answer these questions in G.C.E. merely in order to have another subject listed on a document of academic achievement?

Another test of a different kind: "All Scripture is profitable" which is certainly more than can be said about many of life's occupations. Then how does the time you spend on novels magazines and newspapers compare with the time you give to the Bible and books about it? And how much of your time given to conversation is devoted to clothes, television, cars holidays, the peculiarities of other people, and similar unprofitable topics, by comparison with your time talking about the Bible and its worthwhile world? Or, put it another way, when you have some of your best friends in

for an evening, what son of topics do you naturally gravitate to? Or—differently again— is it not true that you become more animated in conversation about some matters than others? Which are the topics which really waken you up?

One suspects that there will be few readers of these words who, quietly honest with themselves in such tests as these, do not feel some qualm of conscience thereafter.

William Law (1686-1761) wrote in his *Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* that the root cause of spiritual mediocrity is lack of intention and deliberate purpose in the life of the believer:

“It was this general intention, that made the primitive Christians such eminent instances of piety, and made the goodly fellowship of the saints, and all the glorious army of martyrs and confessors. And if you will here stop, and ask yourselves, why you are not as pious as the primitive Christians were, your own heart will tell you, that it is neither through ignorance nor inability, but purely because you never thoroughly intended it.”

Let it be granted that where certain aspects of a devout and holy life are concerned, William Law is over-stating his case or over-simplifying the issue. But what he has written here fits perfectly the problem of one’s attitude to the Bible in daily life.

The rewards of Bible reading and study do not come in five minutes. If there is lack of serious and prolonged application to this Book then expectation of full knowledge and real profit is in vain.

And, conversely, any Christadelphian who over a lengthy period of time gives more time and effort to the mastering of some other subject, to the passing of some examination, to the acquiring of some specialized qualification than he gives to the Word of God, stands self-condemned in that very thing. The words may read harshly, but no amount of excuse-making can evade their stark truth. If the Bible really is the only book in the world to have come to us from God, then it demands and deserves more, and better, attention than any other—than all other—books. Is such a view unrealistic? How can it be? Paul wrote “All Scripture is profitable...” In another place, he described it as “the Word of God, which effectually works in those who believe”. Did he mean what he said, or are these words just rhetorical flourishes? If Paul was right, there is a transforming and guiding power about this Book which you must harness to your life. You just cannot afford not to!

Then by all means be business-like and thorough in the way you go about your Bible reading. It deserves something better than the easy-going haphazard attitude with which it is so often treated.

In 1962 a number of young Christadelphians and also a group of college students

(S.C.M.) were asked to indicate the usual where and when of their Bible reading, and the results came out like this:

Bible Reading	Christadelphians	SCM Students
1. Where?		
(a) In an armchair	30	7
(b) In bed	2	16
(c) In bus or train	0	0
(d) During meals	0	0
(e) At a table	6	0
2. When?		
(a) Before breakfast	1	4
(b) Between breakfast and tea	4	0
(c) Between tea and bed	40	7
(d) After going to bed	1	15
Other answers included:		
On the bed	3	1
Beside the fire	0	2
“On my knees at bedside”	0	1

In spite of the odd and perhaps rather depressing picture presented by these figures, the fact has to be faced that according to general human experience the mind is freshest and most efficient early in the morning and also that a book is studied sitting at a table—else why are classrooms and reference libraries equipped with desks and not with armchairs and settees?

The Christadelphian, then, who has equipped himself the devout “intention”, referred to by William Law, will choose as a general rule to read his Bible sitting at a table or desk, paper and pencil handy.

The advantage of this is enormous. Not only is such a posture conducive to alertness, but the making of notes and the marking of details in the text are more readily done; and if occasion arises for consulting the concordance or reference book there is not the inertia to be overcome of climbing out of the bed or armchair.

Let any reader follow this pattern for, say, six months, and thereafter there will always be uneasiness and distaste for any of the more easy-going methods which are so much more popular simply because they are easy-going.

And as to when Bible-reading is best done, hear William Law again: “I take it for granted, that every Christian that health, is up early in the morning; for it is much more reasonable to suppose a person up early because he is a Christian, than because he is a labourer, or a tradesman, or a servant, or has business that wants him.”

“We naturally conceive some abhorrence of a man that is in bed when he should be at his labour or in his shop. We cannot tell how to think anything good of him, who is such a slave to drowsiness as to neglect his business for it.”

“Let this therefore teach us to conceive how odious we must appear in the sight of Heaven, if we are in bed, shut up in sleep and darkness, when we should be praising God; and are such slaves to drowsiness, as to neglect our devotions for it... On the other hand, sleep is the poorest, dullest refreshment of the body, that is so far from being intended as an enjoyment, that we are forced to receive it either in a state of insensibility, or in the folly of dreams.”

“Sleep is such a dull, stupid state of existence, that even amongst mere animals, we despise them most which are most drowsy.”

“He, therefore, that chooses to enlarge the slothful indulgence of sleep rather than be early at his devotions to God, chooses the dullest refreshment of the body, before the highest, noblest employment of the soul; he chooses that state which is a reproach to mere animals, rather than that exercise which is the glory of Angels.”

“Extreme opinions” you say? Perhaps they are, but you know yourself that this emphasis is in the right direction.

Anthony Trollope who personally organized the system of postal deliveries in every county of the British Isles—this in itself an adequate memorial to a life’s work—left an even more massive memorial in the shape of several shelves-full of novels all of which were written between the hours of 5 and 7 a.m.

A famous French scientist, who had the good sense to realize that the habit of rising late was likely to be the ruin of his career as a scholar, bribed his servant with the promise of money for every occasion when he was hauled out of bed before 6 in the morning. There were many desperate occasions and often volleys of curses, but the servant was resolved on having the money and he did his job resolutely, thus earning also the lasting gratitude of his master.

Readers of this chapter probably have neither money nor servant, and will most likely have to fall back on the aid of a cheap alarm-clock, placed in a remote corner of the bed-room so that the needful bleary-eyed sprint round the furniture will add to its efficiency.

There are doubtless those for whom the foregoing recommendations are invalidated by temperament, personal disability or home circumstances, but for every one in such case there are probably ten who would profit from the effort to adopt a regimen of this kind.

But whenever or wherever your regular Bible reading is done, let it be preceded by a prayer. It is hardly reasonable to expect to understand God's Book without first asking the Author's blessing on your attempt.

Beware, however, of multiplying words in your prayer. One recalls how the communal Scripture reading at a Bible campaign was introduced by a prayer which at first was no more than a quite simple sentence but which snowballed within a couple of weeks to ten minutes of eloquence with phrase piled on phrase. Instead:

"Lord, grant that the opening of Thy Word may give light and understanding to one who is simple."

Or again:

"Consider, Lord, how I love Thy precepts. Quicken me by them, according to Thy loving kindness."

Or:

"Father, this is Thy Book. How can I understand, except Thou guide me!"

4. A CHAPTER OF ODDMENTS

“Let a man attempt to repeat a parable, or relate one of our Lord’s miracles, in the words of Scripture,—and he will sufficiently perceive the importance of the practice here recommended. He will be amazed to find how small a portion of what he never got by heart, he is able to produce from memory; and how very inaccurately he renders what he thinks he can recall.” JOHN WILLIAM BURGON.

EVERY young Christadelphian who has aspirations towards Bible knowledge should certainly contrive to get himself appointed as a Sunday School teacher—and for this purpose the older the class the better.

Without any question the most admirable way to learn something thoroughly is to teach it to somebody else. The telling of a Bible story will fix the details in your own mind as nothing will, only take care that it does not fix details of your own invention! Going over a paragraph of Scripture verse by verse with your class will often bring to your notice something of value which you should have seen before but had not.

The development of the knack of asking your class thought-provoking and often unexpected questions will mean also the sharpening of that same faculty for your own personal benefit in private study. And conversely if you do not teach yourself this immensely useful trick of asking, asking, asking questions, you will never be much good either as a teacher in Sunday School or as a student in the God’s class.

In yet another way make use of your youth by setting yourself to learn by heart a stock of “desert-island” chapters. Set to work on Isaiah 40 and 53 and 55, on a dozen favourite Psalms, on the story of the blind man in John 9, on the entire Epistle of the Ephesians and the Letters to the Churches. This recommendation comes from the heart of one who neglected to do so in early life and, regretting it ever since, has desperately tried to make good the omission later on, only to fail dismally.

Ridley, the Oxford martyr in the Reformation, learned by heart whilst a student almost all the epistles of Paul:

“Mine own dear College” (wrote Ridley, shortly before his martyrdom,) “in thy orchard... I learned to recite without book almost all Paul’s Epistles; yea, and I memorised all the New Testament Epistles, save only the Apocalypse. Of which study, although in time a great part did depart from me... the profit thereof I think I have felt in all my life-time, ever after.”

Today even learning the correct order of the epistles of Paul is deemed a burdensome task! Whose are the better standards? —the sixteenth or the twentieth century’s?

Again, learn before it is too late the invaluable habit of unselfconsciously reading the

Bible in bus or train or cafe or park, and you will add to your life many hundreds of hours of useful application which would otherwise go wasted. Do this often enough to think nothing extraordinary of it, so that you are neither proud of the act nor half-ashamed of it. After all, when proper standards of judgment are used, it is others who should be red in the face because they do not read the Bible in the bus. And on these occasions be sure to have your pencil always handy, if it is only to put a dot in the margin here and there to remind you of some new idea to be pursued or some difficulty to be investigated, when you get home.

For those who really mean business in their Bible study, the question is sure to arise sooner or later: Shall I learn Greek or Hebrew, and if so which?

The answer to this cannot be the same for all who ask it. Some have no flair for languages at all. But many young people have the opportunity to do Greek as a G.C.E. subject at school. This choice should be made, even if it means a dismal exam, result in one subject. The gain will be greater than the loss, for the Greek of the gospels is easy Greek, and even G.C.E. Greek (failed) may still mean that you are equipped to learn more from your New Testament than you otherwise would.

Those who have opportunity to read Greek as a subsidiary subject at the university and do not make use of it must reckon themselves blameworthy in this thing, inasmuch as they deem easier or greater academic success more important than facility in the Word of God.

It should, of course, be remembered that serious differences exist, both in syntax and vocabulary, between classical Greek and the everyday Greek in which the New Testament was written. But any sort of Greek done at school or university gives a marked and lasting advantage in more exact Bible study.

It is usually considered that a knowledge of Hebrew does not repay the painstaking student to the same extent as Greek, but no time spent on it is wasted. Could the effort to know at first hand the tongue of Abraham, Moses, David and Isaiah be written off as useless?

But (and this is important) let there be no amateurish nibbling. Either learn the language—whichever it is—properly, sitting at the feet of an adequate teacher and giving all diligence to the study over a long period, or leave it alone altogether. The tyro trying to be erudite does not realize what an irritating or amusing spectacle he is to others.

In any case, whether your learning in these departments is profound or defective, be careful to leave it out of your discourses, writing or conversation. The place for the original tongues is in the study.

5. READ WITH CARE

“The Bible should be studied at least as laboriously and exactly as any other book which has to be completely mastered. Every expression, every word, must be weighed; patiently, thoughtfully, systematically, reverentially.” JOHN WILLIAM BURGON.

THE first and most necessary qualification if you would really make progress in your grasp of Bible teaching is that you learn to read concentrating on the details. Be attentive to note what the words say and not what you suppose that they say or would like them to say.

The common assumption every Christmas-time, that because there were three gifts brought there must have been three wise men who brought them, is often made the ground for superior remarks about popular ignorance of the Bible. And in the same breath it is often pointed out that Matthew’s gospel says nothing about “kings” (except king Herod) but speaks only of “wise men”. That they were kings is an early Christian fancy, a kind of back inference from Isaiah 60:3, whilst their names— Melchior, Balthasar and Caspar—are an entertaining fabrication from the Hebrew and Septuagint text of Psa. 72:10.

But how many who read these words and have had their share of merriment over popular ignorance about the wise men have themselves been caught out in a slovenly reading of the nativity record? The moving fantasy that these men journeyed on week after week guided every night through mountains, forests, and deserts by a star going before them is simply not in the text (have another look at Matt. 2:2, 9). Nor, for that matter, does the record say that they came ultimately to Bethlehem. Indeed, the common assumption that they arrived within a few hours or days of the birth of Jesus is hardly borne out by the text. Note Matt. 2:16, and use the analytical concordance and lexicon on the words for “young child, children, babe” in Matt. 2:11, 16 and Luke 2:12; and ask yourself whether the incident in the temple with the aged Simeon could have happened with safety after the visit of the wise men, and why if the munificent gifts had already been received, Mary brought the small offering (Luke 2:24) of the poorest of the people (Lev. 12:8).

This need for care in getting your facts right cannot be too strongly emphasized, especially to those who hope one day, in the grace of God, to be teachers of others. How often, both in public discourse and private discussion on Bible prophecy has been heard declared concerning Jerusalem that in the last days “half the city will be taken”, yet see again Zech. 14:2. And how much more often has it been stressed that Noah could convert only his own family “even after a hundred and twenty years of preaching”? One is constrained to ask: Does Gen.6:3 warrant that interpretation? And the most optimistic answer can be: “Possibly, hardly probably, and decidedly not certainly.” On the other hand Gen. 6:18 is decisive against this “120 years preaching” inasmuch as Noah’s firstborn was born only 100 years before the Flood (Gen. 5:32

and 9:28, 29), and at the time of the first warning to Noah the three sons were all married men.

Even a writer whose book has worthily nurtured several generations of Christadelphians in the study of detail in Scripture can be caught nodding. In his 'Undesigned Coincidences' Blunt makes much of the point that before the feeding of the multitude Jesus asked Philip: "Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" (John 6:5). And why was the enquiry addressed to Philip? Because, says Blunt, they were near to Bethsaida (Luke 10) and Philip belonged to that place (John 1:44 and 12:21), so he should know; he was the obvious one to ask. Thus, Blunt adds, two gospels tell a story harmonious even in small "unimportant" details.

But John 6:6 itself supplies the reason for the question being put to Philip. It was "to prove him" as one who needed proving (John 14:8, 9). Nor was Philip the only one to come from Bethsaida. Peter and Andrew hailed from the same town. And when Jesus said: "Whence shall we buy bread..." his words were not bound to mean "From what place—" but could signify: "Out of what resources..." There is also a distinct possibility that the shores of Galilee had two Bethsaidas, miles apart. So in this instance the point is not as conclusively made as may seem at first sight (Lk. 9:10; Mk. 6:45).

One can afford to be charitable to such as Blunt, for he has been a help to many, and his reverence for the Word of God was an example to follow. But it is not so easy to be tolerant of the superior attitude of modern criticism which quotes "the kings that reigned in the land of Edom, before there reigned any king over the children of Israel" (Gen. 36:31) as a decisive argument that Genesis was not written by Moses but must have been compiled after the time of David. The careful reader will have already observed that the preceding chapter (35:11) has this divine promise to Jacob: "A nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins." One would think it evident to any of ordinary intellect that these passages were written with direct reference to each other.

In a thousand places a careful attention to the facts and details of Scripture will bring a stimulating reward.

By simply reading with your eyes open you will discover that these are two aspects of Peter's walking on the water; first to failure and almost to death, then with ease and success—and you will note with gladness what it was that made all this difference (Matt. 14:29, 32). You may perhaps surmise whether there was another occasion when he walked on the water (John 21:7). You will observe that the Messianic King, of Isaiah 11, wears two girdles (verse 5) and is therefore a High Priest also (Lev. 8:7 - Or is this Isaiah passage another example of the familiar parallelism in Hebrew prophecy and poetry?). You will underline in Matt. 20:14 the words "go thy way" and thus pick out in the parable of the labourers the main point of it all, through oversight of

which so many have ended in fantasy or perplexity. You will excitedly compile a list of passages like Gen. 28:10, 18, 29:10, 31:40, and 32:24, and then make a mental apology to the memory of Jacob for having written him off as a milksop. His mother's favourite he certainly was, but what weakling would walk forty miles in one day (as the narrative seems to imply), would raise up a stone pillar single-handed, would roll away a stone normally shifted by several men, would endure years of hard toil exposure, would wrestle with an angel? Yet no special erudition is needed to learn these things, but only a certain reverent care in reading.

This chapter could continue to the end of the volume, doing no more—and no less—than emphasize this simple truth, that there is far more in the Bible on the surface than most readers ever dream of. Yet how often does one scamper through four or five chapters in twenty minutes? The “daily readings” have been “done”.

There is a more excellent way.

6. MARGINAL REFERENCES

“Such quotations of places to be marginally set down as shall serve for the fit reference of one Scripture to another.” KING JAMES 1. One of King James’ personal instructions to the translators of the Authorized Version of 1611.

“Search into the deep things of God, not from men’s theories, but from His own words.” CHARLES KINGSLEY.

FOR the ordinary student of the Word of God there is no single tool available to match marginal references in general helpfulness. It is a token of the laziness of this generation and its disinclination to serious application to the Bible that editions with marginal references are going out of fashion. How many besides Christadelphians make serious use of them? For that matter, how many Christadelphians do so?

Yet as a help to finding your way rapidly and easily about the Book there is nothing to compare with an intelligently-compiled set of marginal references. In a thousand ways they come to your assistance, saving you endless trouble and frequently handing to you, ready made, some of the most stirring ideas the Bible can provide.

One tremendously important field is the ready identification of New Testament quotations from and allusions to the Old Testament. There is enough in this aspect of Bible study to keep any painstaking student occupied for a lifetime.

This is the kind of thing that happens: The familiar and perhaps rather wordy prophecy of Jesus about “father divided against son, and son against father; mother against daughter, and daughter against mother; mother in law against her daughter in law, and daughter in law against her mother in law” (Luke 12:53) would not easily be recognized by most as a quotation from the prophet Micah except with the aid of marginal references. But there it is in Micah 7:6—and immediately the query is provoked: Does Jesus use this language of the prophet just because it happens to say what he wants to say? or is this the Lord’s own intimation that Micah 7 tended to be read as a prophecy of the preaching of the gospel and the work of Christ?

By refusing to be fobbed off with the first of these explanations without proper investigation of all the possibilities one is led by this clue to the understanding of one of the most comprehensive and thrilling of all Old Testament Messianic prophecies. Though certainly not one of the easiest!

Another example of this kind is in Luke 23:30, the sorrowful lament of Jesus for sinful Jerusalem, when the women of Jerusalem lamented for him: “Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us.”

This time the reader is directed to Hosea 10:8, where once again the question arises: Is

this a handy prophetic phrase quoted as one might quote Shakespeare today: “To be or not to be, that is the question”? (Hamlet) or is it an actual citation of a prophecy of designed Messianic content?

At first glance the reaction is almost sure to be: Certainly not the latter, there is nothing about Messiah there. But the eye wanders over the page and in a few quick minutes collects the wing “echoes” of the gospel story:

- (a) “The days of visitation” (9:7).
- (b) “They have deeply corrupted themselves, as in the days of Gibeah” (Gabbatha?) (9:9).
- (c) “He will remember their iniquity, he will visit their sins” (9:9)-
- (d) “The firstripe in the figtree... their root is dried up, they shall bear no fruit” (9:10, 16).
- (e) “From the birth, and from the womb, and from the conception... Though they bring up their children, yet will I bereave them... A miscarrying womb, and dry breasts” (9:11, 12, 14).
- (f) “All their wickedness is in Gilgal” (Golgotha? same root)
- (g) “For the wickedness of their doings will I drive them out of mine house” (9:15).
- (h) “All their princes are revolvers” (9:15).
- (i) “My God will cast them away, because they did not hearken unto him: and they shall be wanderers among the nations” (9:17).
- (j) “Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself” (10:1).
- (k) “We have no king (but Caesar!) and the king, what can he do for us?” (10:3).
- (l) Swearing falsely in making a covenant” (10:4).
- (m) “For the glory... is departed from it” (10:5).
- (n) “The thorn and the thistle shall come up on their altars” (10:8).
- (o) “And they shall say to the mountains, Cover us; and to the hills, Fall on us” (10:8).
- (p) “At day-break (R.V.) shall the king of Israel utterly be cut off” (10:15).
- (q) “When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt” (11:1).

Any one of these, standing by itself, might read rather unconvincingly as having anything whatever to do with Jesus and Israel’s rejection of him. But two out of the list are specifically given such an application in the New Testament, and as regards the rest even if the less obvious ones are discarded there still remain far too many with verbal relevance to the same theme for the whole thing to be dismissed as coincidence. Yet who, reading Hosea without John’s gospel to guide him, would ever have dreamed of seeing here a prophecy about Christ?

Examples of this sort are far more numerous than is generally believed. The New Testament’s methods of interpreting the Old Testament are not such as a modern scholar would normally dream of employing. There is special need for humility here

so that one may be instructed in these mysteries.

“God is His own interpreter, And He will make it plain.”

All this started from a marginal reference against Luke 20:30. It would be too optimistic to assume that every marginal reference will lead to such unusual findings. A large proportion of them are of little value, and no wonder, for they are not part of the inspired text, but merely the work of fallible men. However the marginal references in the Interlinear Bible and the Two Version Bible reach a very high standard, especially the former. Those in the Schofield Bible are worthless. The New Testament with Fuller References (Oxford University Press) is almost too thorough.

Again, without any question the great Promise made to David in 2 Samuel 7 finds its true fulfilment in Jesus the Messiah. Even if the language of the Promise were not sufficient in itself to establish this, the New Testament says so in unmistakeable fashion. Marginal references steer the reader to Hebrews 1:5, where the words “I will be his father, and he shall be my son”, are given their proper application to Jesus. Doubt, if there were any, is set at rest.

But there remains the enigma of the words: “If he commit iniquity I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men” (2 Sam. 7:14). How can words: these have any kind of reference to one who was to be Son of God and sinless? Here, again, marginal references come to the rescue by indicating Psalm 89 as a commentary on this passage. A quick perusal of the Psalm picks out verses 3, 4, 19, 26 to 36 as making allusion to 2 Sam. 7, and in particular the equivalent to the words just quoted meets the eye in verses 30,: “If his children forsake my law... then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes.”

So it is clear from this that the words do not refer to Messiah but to those who are reckoned as seed of David because they belong to Messiah, the son of David (a parallel idea to Abraham’s seed” in Gal. 3:29). In 2 Cor. 6:18 Paul clinches this interpretation by similarly applying, “I will be his father, and he shall be my son”, not to Christ but to those who are in Christ.

An inspired exposition such as this is much to be preferred to a dubious tinkering with an obscure Hebrew phrase to make it mean “in his suffering for iniquity I will chasten him...”, a translation about which there can be no certainty, (Psalm 91:3: “the pestilence which is a punishment for iniquity” is the nearest approach to such a use of the Heb. Word) even though it has the authority of Dr. Adam Clarke and of respected Christadelphian writers.

A great many special lines of study can be pursued by means of good marginal references. This chapter concludes with three illustrations of the kind of thing that is meant.

Prov. 25:6, 7: “Put not forth thyself in the presence of the king, and stand not in the place of great men: for better it is that it be said unto thee, Come up hither; than that thou shouldest be put lower in the presence of the prince whom thine eyes have seen.” Even if the ear does not readily catch the echo, marginal references immediately steer the reader to Luke 14:8-10. Jesus took this proverb and turned it into a parable (for certainly the place in Luke is not intended as a lesson in propriety when in high society).

Prov. 25:8: “Go not forth hastily to strive, lest thou know not what to do in the end thereof, when thy neighbour hath put thee to shame.”

Once again the marginal reference to Luke 12:58 is hardly necessary. And once again Jesus has turned a proverb into a parable.

These two examples coming together set an enquiring mind roving ahead: Can it be that here Jesus is instructing how best to use the book of Proverbs—by turning them all into parables relevant to the problems of the gospel? What a wonderful field—utterly unexplored as yet—opens up here before the mind’s eye! Imagine a Mutual Improvement Class at which half a dozen speakers were each given a proverb to turn into a parable. This would be mutual improvement of the best sort!

But more than this—there arises the further speculation: If Jesus quarried two of his parables out of the Book of Proverbs, how many more did he get from the same source? This is where marginal references really come into their own. Here is a fascinating line of research. The present writer has followed it through only spasmodically, and yet has been rewarded with a if approximately twenty! Others will doubtless be eager to follow it out more thoroughly. The Book of Proverbs, somewhat neglected in Christadelphian circles, begins to take on a new importance.

And now a different kind of example.

Daniel’s prayer (Dan. 9:3-19) for the restoration of Jerusalem followed on a careful study of “the books” (i.e. the Bible; Gk. *biblia* means books) and of Jeremiah specifically. His prayer contains further references to Jeremiah; for example; verse 15=Jer. 32:20, 21; verse 18=Jer. 25:29. But it also has recognizable allusions to other parts of the Old Testament as well. To trace them with marginal references and concordance can be a laborious task, but the result is satisfying, for it now appears that Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Psalms, Isaiah and Ezekiel (a contemporary!) were all included in “the books” which made up Daniel’s Bible.

The marginal references go further and establish that some years later, when Nehemiah prayed for the peace of Jerusalem, he closely modelled his prayer on that of Daniel, so presumably he already had a copy of the Book of Daniel included in his

Bible!

Lastly, marginal references can be a bulwark against modern criticism.

It has come to be one of the “settled conclusions” of modern scholarship that Isaiah chapters 40-66 were not the work of Isaiah, the contemporary of Hezekiah, but of two unidentified writers at the end of the Babylonian captivity. In two ways marginal references supply first a big difficulty, and then an insuperable obstacle in the way of such a conclusion.

Disregarding for the moment the four historical chapters, Isaiah 36-39, chapters 35 and 40 would normally be consecutive in the prophecy. Marginal references quickly reveal a connection between the two. When more personal combing of the phrases follows, it is found that chapter 35 has no less than seven direct contacts with chapter 40, one with chapter 41, one with chapter 42, and is quoted verbatim in chapter 51:11.

The fairly likely explanation—some would say, the obvious explanation—is that it is the same Isaiah in the later chapters, writing about the same things and using his own characteristic phrases (compare the unconscious repetitions of phrase in different chapters of this book!). Any other explanation is by comparison unnatural and unconvincing.

But now the hunt moves to Jeremiah who wrote a hundred years after Isaiah and at the beginning of the Babylonian captivity. Jer. 10:1-16, so the marginal references reveal, has at least six references to “Deutero-Isaiah” who is supposed to have flourished about 70 years after his time! No, it will not do to say that, vice versa, “Deutero-” is really the one who is quoting Jeremiah. A comparison of the parallel passages soon shows who is the quoter and who is the quoted.

The modernists realize that that is not the way out. Instead, they claim that Jeremiah is all of one piece except for this section which, they say, has been interpolated from a later writer (this blithe assumption—and it is nothing else—would then allow time for this Deutero-Jeremiah to quote Deutero-Isaiah!).

But even this desperate device is of no avail. Again marginal references make it evident that the entire prophecy of Jeremiah, and not just his chapter 10, is dotted with quotations from Isaiah, a large proportion of them being from “Deutero-” (e.g. chapter 11:19, an outstandingly clear example). There is no answer to this. Isaiah chapters 1-66 must have been in existence, all of it, in the time of Jeremiah, and included in his Bible.

Of course it has to be recognized that belief in the unity of “Isaiah” is not without its problems, but this is not the chapter or the book for the discussion of such interesting matters. The subject is mentioned here only because the painstaking use of references

can be the means of furnishing a forceful contribution to the pros and cons of a much controverted topic.

7. ASKING QUESTIONS

“Nothing but an untrammelled individual knowledge of the Bible will satisfy the earnest curiosity that would know what the truth is.” ROBERT ROBERTS.

No one can expect to go far in Bible study except he have or develop a well-sharpened faculty for asking questions. The ability to answer questions, to find the solution to problems and difficulties, will come with experience. But if there be no lively curiosity in the first instance which reads every verse and every phrase with a large question-mark against it, progress will be: better than meagre. It matters little at the moment whether you can find the answers to the problems or not. Many of the answers will be supplied by others, because if your mind is full of questions they are bound to crop up frequently in your conversation. Many more solutions will arrive of their own accord with the passing of time and your growing over-all knowledge of the Bible. Quite a number will remain with you all your days without any convincing answer—suitable reminders of your own fallibility and limited powers, but not (it is sincerely hoped) as seeds of unfaith.

Some questions leap instinctively to the minds of all Bible readers—such things as:

What was it Jesus wrote on the ground?

What were the questions the boy Jesus asked the venerable doctors of the law in the temple?

Why does Psalm 14 come twice in the Psalter?

Why are women mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus? And why these four?

Why are there four historical chapters sandwiched in the middle of Isaiah's 62 chapters of prophecy?

Why should Joseph, the only outstanding Old Testament character about whom nothing derogatory is recorded, and who is one of the most remarkable types of the Lord Jesus, marry an Egyptian wife, and she the daughter of a high priest of base idolatry?

What sort of a woman was Bathsheba? How should her character be assessed?

Why did Jesus say to the rich young ruler: “Sell all, give to the poor, and follow me” when he had other wealthy disciples to whom apparently he commanded no such thing?

Why was Jonah found sleeping placidly through the terrifying storm when he was the

cause of it, and apparently knew that he was?

Was David right to feign madness as he did at the court of Achish?

What was the reason for that strange opening of the graves and resurrection of saints when Jesus rose from the dead?

When Jesus came to the disciples walking on the water, why should John record: “then they willingly received him into the ship”? Does a thing as obvious as that need to be recorded?

What precisely does Paul mean by eating and drinking unworthily?

Jesus says in Revelation: “Behold, I come quickly”; then why after another 1900 years has he not come yet.

A list like the foregoing is one that anybody can compile in a matter of a few minutes by the simple process of flicking over the pages of a Bible.

Many of the questions which spring to the mind are the sort to which no definitive answer is possible. Several examples of this are included in the list just given: e.g., it is hardly likely that what Jesus wrote on the ground will ever be known in this age; a likely guess is as near as one can hope to come to a solution of such a problem.

(By all means write to the author about any of these things, but please accept his assurance now that he does not have a convincing answer to quite a number of them!)

It is well therefore to appreciate in advance that there are many problems of this nature, and for that reason to be suitably undogmatic about any conclusions which may be arrived at.

If, however, you are going to develop any degree of thoroughness your Bible study, you must be prepared to assemble just such a battery of questions concerning the details in any portion of Scripture which you may find yourself studying. Even the most familiar Bible passage can provide plenty of opportunity for further exploration. Take for example the story of Moses’ first attempt to deliver his people (Exodus 2:11-15)— a mere five verses telling a story we have known intimately since you were very young. There is enough to keep you going for an hour:

- (a) Verse 11: “when Moses was grown.” Does the recapitulation and commentary in Acts 7 and Heb. 11 interpret this?
- (b) Verse 11: “his brethren.” At what age would Moses come to think of the Israelites as “his brethren”?
- (c) And what indication is there here about Moses’ character, that he was prepared to

think of this race of slaves as “his brethren”?

- (d) Verse 11: “an Egyptian smiting an Hebrew.” A personal quarrel, or to be explained by chapter 1:11?
- (e) Verse 12: “when he saw there was no man”—to help or to hinder? In what other places in Scripture does this phrase come? Are they relevant?
- (f) Verse 13: “behold.” Why this interjection of surprise?
- (g) Verse 13: Why this quarrel? Suggest possibilities.
- (h) Verse 14: “Who made thee a prince over us?” Suggest possible answers to this question. What other men in Scripture were similarly thrust aside?
- (i) Was Moses justified in this interference? (Is your answer a Biblical one? If not, consider the bearing of Acts 7:25 (see R.V.), Deut. 9:24, Heb. 11:26).
- (j) Is there a contradiction between this verse 14 and Heb. 11:27?
- (k) Verse 15: “When Pharaoh heard this thing, he sought to slay Moses.” Why should Pharaoh take notice of the slaying of an unimportant underling by Moses? Wasn’t life cheap in those days?
- (l) Verse 15: “he sought to slay Moses.” Can any inference be made from chapter 18:4?
- (m) Verse 15: “Moses fled.” What inference may follow from Acts 7:30 (note R.V.: “fulfilled”)?
- (n) Verse 15: “he sat down by a well.” Why should such a trivial detail be given here? Use your concordance on that verb before you jump to conclusions.
- (o) Explain Heb. 11:26: “the reproach of Christ”, with reference to Moses.
- (p) In Heb. 11:26 find the meaning of “had respect” and its special point with reference to Moses.

If a brief straightforward narrative already familiar in all its details can supply so many lines of enquiry, what should happen when you come to tackle (say) a chapter in Isaiah or Romans about which you know almost nothing?

Do not let the difficulty of finding answers to some of your problems distress you unduly. Carry these conundrums about with you. They will provide the finest conversational gambits and talking points with your fellow Christadelphians that you could wish for. And by getting them going on a problem you will benefit them also, as well as yourself when—as is bound to happen sometimes—“iron sharpeneth iron” and you stimulate each other to a joint solution.

If a satisfactory answer to your problem is not forthcoming, write it on a fly-leaf of your Bible in a place specially reserved for unsolved difficulties. One day, sooner or later, you will have the pleasure of using an eraser on it.

When you have spent an hour or so on the questions about Moses, you may be interested to compare notes with the author in Appendix 2 on page 140.

8. PARALLEL NARRATIVES

“As to the Gospels we are not to think that we have ever read them enough because we have often read and heard what they contain. But we must read them as we do our prayers, not to know what they contain, but to fill our hearts with the spirit of them.”

WILLIAM LAW in “Christian Perfection”.

Many things are told in the Bible twice over, or maybe more times than that (perhaps on the principle enunciated in Gen. 41:32). The four gospels are the most obvious and most important example. But there is also the historical ground common to Kings and Chronicles (and for the reign of Hezekiah four chapters in the middle of Isaiah).

There is also copious New Testament use of and comment on Old Testament history—consider the copious allusions by Jesus to Adam and Eve, Abel, Noah and the Flood, Lot and Sodom, Moses at the bush, in the wilderness, smiting the rock and making a brazen serpent, David and the shewbread, Solomon and the queen of Sheba, Jonah and the whale, Elijah and the famine. Rarely are these references made without supplying some line of interpretation which the ordinary eye would not see. So by all means give attention to the help thus made available to you.

There is also a great field for study in a chapter like Acts 7— Stephen’s great historical review which for some reason (what reason?) brought both intense conviction and bitter resentment to the hearts of his learned audience. Stephen—“full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom” (6:3), “full of faith and of the Holy Spirit” (6:5), “full of grace (R.V.) and power” (6:8), irresistible because of his “wisdom of the Spirit” (6:10), “with his face as it had been the face of an angel” (6:15), and “full of the Holy Spirit and seeing the glory of God” (7:55)—was doubtless better equipped to interpret the Old Testament than you are, so sit at his feet and learn all you can. The problems of Acts 7 are problems of his making simply because he is so far ahead of you. There is an excellent chapter on this in John Carter’s Oracles of God.

But the great field for comparison of parallel narratives is the four gospels. Apply yourself diligently to this and you will enjoy many wonderful experiences; the gospels will open out with a fullness of glory which you never suspected; indeed there will be occasions when the wealth of material at your disposal is almost bewildering.

They will also provide many headaches with their seeming differences of emphasis and “contradictory” statements of fact. Only see to it that your reaction to these “contradictions” is not in the direction of supreme confidence in your own powers of judgment and lack of confidence in the gospels.

The instance comes to mind of the well-educated Scot who confessed that his days of faith and Bible-reading came to an abrupt end when he noticed that one of the gospels tells of Jesus being arrayed in a purple robe whilst another says it was scarlet. Is not

this rather pathetic? Did it not occur to this acute mind to find out whether in ancient times colours were as precisely defined as in these days? And did it never occur to him that there may be such a thing as a purple robe lined with scarlet, or vice versa? Every hospital nurse on her way to duty wears a blue or a scarlet cloak according to whether you see her back or her face. And this ready-made rationalist was a doctor! Was there ever a more obvious example of a man wanting to disbelieve? “If any man willeth to do His will, he shall know of the doctrine.” (John 7:17)

So at every point of uncertainty give the gospels the benefit of the doubt—but only for a time. The day will come when they will need your long-suffering no longer, for given a fair hearing they will build up in your own mind (and your affections) such an impregnable position that your faith in them is safe for ever.

Indeed the time will come when the discovery of another “inconsistency”, instead of furrowing your forehead and giving you a vague feeling of guilt for doubting the dependability of these four witnesses, will impart a certain thrill of anticipation for experience will teach you over the years that a problem of that nature is very often the door through which you move, perhaps only after a good deal of groping, to a new and satisfying discovery.

There is, for example, the seeming discordance between Matthew and Mark (usually so very close together) over the payment of Judas by the chief priests. Matt. 26:15 has “They covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver”—R.V.: “they weighed unto him...”. Literally the text is: “they put to him” or “they stood to him”. Undoubtedly the idea is that they paid him the money there and then, for the Greek text quotes verbatim the Septuagint version of Zech. 11:12 (see your marginal references) where the Hebrew text is certainly free from any ambiguity.

Over against this is Mark’s version: “they promised to give him money.” (chapter 14:11). Yet Judas was in possession of the thirty pieces of silver a short time after this.

You have only to imagine yourself in the place of one of these unscrupulous villains making a deal with a traitor and to ask yourself, “How would I have gone about it?”, and the solution is obvious. Would you not, in their shoes, offer a token payment and the bulk of the “reward” when the job was done? The thirty pieces of silver were a down payment with promise of the rest—ten times as much?—when Judas had done all he promised to do.

And now another difficulty disappears along with this one—: the question why Judas, greedy of money, was content to betray his Master for such a comparatively trivial sum when he could certainly have driven a much harder bargain—for, remember, these chief priests had at their disposal all the annual revenues of the temple, and much more besides. They would undoubtedly have been willing to pay a great deal more in order to be rid of this troublesome Nazarene.

You can tackle for yourself the problem of the cleansing of the temple (John 2; Mark 11; Matt. 21; Luke 19)—once or twice? And the problem of the anointing at Bethany — once or twice? And the differing order of the three temptations (Matt 4. Luke 4). And the healing of the blind man (or men?) as Jesus entered (or left?) Jericho (Matt. 20; Mark 10; Luke 18). There is much to be learned from all such instances.

Concerning this last example it may perhaps be instructive to list possible explanations of one aspect of the “difficulty”, and then leave you to weigh the pros and cons:

- (a) Luke being a Gentile and writing for Gentiles, mentions the modern Jericho built by the Romans, whereas the others, being Jews, write with reference to the old Jewish city a short distance away. Jesus was entering the one but leaving the other.
- (b) “As he was come nigh” (Luke 18:35) might perhaps read “whilst he was near to”.
- (c) Between Luke 18:37 and 38 one should interpolate a lapse of time during which Jesus entered Jericho, stayed with

Zacchaeus, and was then interrupted in his progress as he left the city.

It is a good idea whenever you find yourself faced with any difficulty of exegesis (and not just when it is a “contradiction”) to write down all the possible explanations you can light on— either by your own wit or the suggestions of friends or the books you consult—and then carefully weigh one against another. Often there is some detail which is decisive in favour of one of them.

It would be a pity if you were to jump to the conclusion that the only reason for studying the gospels in parallel is to find and explain contradictions. That is only one—and a minor one—of the many advantages which come from the pooling of gospel resources.

How often, for example, does one hear the words quoted: “He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief” (Matt. 13:58) as a demonstration that the miracles of Christ depended as much on the faith of the people concerned as on the divine power with which he was endowed? One wonders how the son of the widow of Nain had faith as he lay dead on the bier; and whether it was the faith of the blind man, who knew nothing about Jesus (John 9:35-38), which gave him his sight; and whether the sinful paralytic at Bethesda with more reverence for the Jewish leaders than for Jesus, was healed because he had faith for it; and whether it was the faith of Peter which urged a fish to pick up a shekel on the sea bottom and then come straight to his net; and whether Malchus got his ear back because of his faith in Jesus.

What is this but careless reading of the gospels, the more especially too since the parallel narrative tells how they “rose up , and thrust him out of the city, and led him

unto the brow of the hill... that they might cast him down headlong” (Luke 4:29). No wonder his own city saw few of his mighty works “because of their unbelief” — what a powerful understatement of truth!

Read your parallel gospels with care, and in a hundred places fresh light will be shed on the ministry of Jesus from the printed page.

You will find, for example, that Jesus gave three separate reasons for not patching an old garment with a piece of new cloth, and all of them with meaning and force for the occasion when he gave them. You will learn much about the apostles and their families by a careful comparison of the lists of the Twelve and also of the women who witnessed the crucifixion. You will have “the kingdom of heaven suffers violence” (Matt. 11:12, a puzzling phrase!) satisfyingly explained for you. You will hear the parable of the sower more completely expounded by the Lord than you have imagined. You will have a picture of the storm on the lake vivid enough to quicken your pulse more than any television show. You will rejoice in a better understanding of the Transfiguration. You may find that there are four (or is it six, with 1 Cor. 11 and John 6?) gospel records of Christ establishing the memorial meal, and not three as you supposed. And you will be amazed at the number of times Pilate pronounced Jesus “Not Guilty”. Indeed if you have not already spent a lot of time on this aspect of Bible study you are to be envied as having such a wonderful unexplored country awaiting your eager eye, and all unspoiled.

This chapter has been almost entirely about the study of the gospels in parallel. But the same thing in principle awaits you elsewhere also.

You have already, doubtless, explained to your Jehovah’s Witness caller the truth about the Satan who “provoked David to number Israel” (1 Chron. 21:1); the simple but startling parallel in 2 Sam. 24:1 is not to be thrust aside. But have you thought of explaining the Uzzah debacle (2 Sam. 6) by the explicit details in 1 Chron. 15? Or have you established what happened to Elijah according to the narrative of 2 Kings 2 by what is also told about him in 2 Chron. 21?

Again, once you are satisfied that certain Psalms belong to the reign of David and certain to the reign of Hezekiah, these can be used to make intimate contact with the psychology and spiritual stress and strain of the Lord’s anointed in the crises through which each of these kings passed.

Likewise, when you are satisfied that Isaiah’s prophecies are to all intents and purposes contemporary with the reign of Hezekiah, you can learn almost as much more about Sennacherib’s invasion from Isaiah as from the history, including the means employed by the angel of the Lord in that great destruction.

Similarly, you can discover far more about the last four kings of Judah from the

prophetic chapters of Jeremiah than you will find in Kings and Chronicles put together.

Indeed, nearly everywhere you go in the Bible where narrative or history is involved you are liable to find a parallel somewhere—in psalm, homily, exposition, prophecy or prayer. If you neglect any of these you are the loser.

Footnote: Since there has been so much written in this chapter about studying the four gospels side by side, it is logical to go on from there and recommend the best gospel “harmony” available. For ordinary purposes that by J.M. Fuller (S.P.C.K.) is handy and adequate. So also is Gospel Parallels (Nelson). Sooner or later you will want something better. In that case: Harmony of the Gospels, published by Black.

9. WHAT DOES THIS REMIND ME OF?

“The infallible rule of interpretation of scripture is the scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any scripture, (which is not manifold, but one,) it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.” Westminster Confession, 1647.

This chapter is rather more difficult. An alternative title for it would be: Make your own marginal references; for that, in effect, is what it amounts to.

It may be taken as a fairly safe assumption that the best compilation of marginal references ever assembled has together missed far more than it has gathered. So it behoves you to fill up the omissions by assembling your own.

It has been suggested that the Christadelphians could compile the finest Bible commentary in the world by assigning one book of the Bible to each of 66 capable brethren who would then specialize over the years in collecting Bible passages illustrative of each word, phrase and idea. The pooling of these would result in the most compact and most dependable commentary ever made.

Whilst you are waiting for that to happen, be assiduous in your efforts to do it for yourself. Those which you painstakingly and laboriously collect for yourself will far outweigh in personal value what one day in the very uncertain future you may be able to purchase in a book.

This is the kind of thing that you will wish to find room for in the margin of your Bible (using “margin” in the sense of “top and bottom of the page” also): You want to convince some orthodox friend (that word “orthodox” is a misnomer; it is who are orthodox!) that he is misusing the familiar passage about “the Father’s house of many mansions” (John 14:2), when he refers it to Christ and the believer going to heaven. If John 2:16 is in your margin, the task is very much easier. If besides that you also have Mark 11:17; 2 Chron. 2:1-6; Isaiah 2:2-6; Eph. 2:19-22; 1 Peter 2:5, or others out of the scores available in the concordance, you are in a position to challenge him: “Show me one place where the Father’s house is not a temple on earth!”

Or, again, brooding over the description of the tabernacle candlestick in Exodus 25, it suddenly dawns on you that this mention of “shaft, branches, buds, flowers” is the description of a symbolic tree, and the mention of almonds also makes it an almond tree. The association of cherubim in the tabernacle takes your mind to the story of Eden where there were cherubim and a tree of life. Evidently, then, God chose the almond tree to represent the tree of life—because in the Spring it is the first of the trees to awaken into life? Next, you will recall that when Aaron’s rod budded, it “bloomed blossoms and yielded almonds”. So it became a Branch of the tree of life, and was laid up in (or, by) the Ark of the covenant as a symbol of him who died and

came to life again, whose name is The Branch, and who is now hidden from ordinary sight in the Father's presence. Your mind will go on to recall other allusions in Proverbs to the tree of life, all of them taking on new meaning now that the association with Jesus is established. And it will be strange indeed if your thought does not travel on to the gospels and its story of a tree of death which became for you a tree of life. This idea has no sooner taken root than you will suddenly see fresh reason why the apostles repeatedly referred to the dead wood of the cross as a tree—to them it was the tree of life. This lovely theme continues with the representation also of the ecclesias of Asia Minor as a seven-branched candlestick (not six-branched, as some would aver)—a tree of life being tended by the Second Adam that it may bring forth more fruit.

This is not the end of the search, but if you go no further than this, you will then wish to assemble together somewhere a genealogy of references which will make this catena of ideas readily available.

Exod. 25:31-33 Gen. 2:9
Num. 17:8; Zech. 6:12; John 19:5
Prov. 11:30; 15:4 and 13:2
Acts 5:30 and 13:29
1 Peter 2:24
Rev. 1:13

And doubtless you will wish to add others like Psa. 1:3; Ezek. 47:2-12; Rev. 2:7 and 22:13, 14. Thus a remarkable cluster of ideas can be assembled together on the space of a postage stamp, to be for the rest of your life immediately available in the margin of your Bible against Gen. 2:9.

Similarly you have only to look in the concordance at such words as “sting”, “subtlety”, “guile”, “heel”, “bruise”, and immediately a dozen allusions to the serpent in Eden leap at you from the printed page, including that quite astonishing one in the Messianic Psalm 41 where the traitor appears in the role of Righteous Vanquisher and the Servant of the Lord as the Serpent! Does this furnish an inspired insight into the psychology of Judas in betraying his Lord?

When in the course of your Old Testament reading you come across the words “innocent blood” it will be strange if your mind, on the alert with an eager “What does this remind me of” does not instinctively seek a connection with the words of wretched Judas: “I have sinned in that I have betrayed innocent blood.” It is unlikely that every occurrence of that phrase is a clue to a prophecy or typical foreshadowing of the death of Christ, but it would be surprising indeed if not a single one proved to be that. The present writer is inclined to find this true of three of them, but these are uncertain matters and must be left to individual research.

This element of uncertainty inevitably enters into Biblical interpretation in many places. Especially is it common experience that what seems to be crystal clear to one appears to be only imperfectly demonstrated or of dubious value to another. In this matter of seeking out the deeper meanings of the Word of God there is great need for toleration of the views of others and lack of dogmatism concerning one's own.

Again, what does this remind you of? Matthew's account of the feeding of the five thousand (Matt. 14) says that Jesus sought and then provided food for the crowd "when it was evening". The feeding of this great crowd would not be accomplished in much under two hours, and yet at the end of it, the narrative continues: "And when he had sent the multitude away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone." Strange, that the coming of evening should be mentioned again after this fairly considerable lapse of time! Recall here that this was at Passover (John 6:2), and it was laid down in the Passover law: "the whole assembly... shall kill it between the two evenings" (Exod. 12:6 marginal reading). Link this with the exposition Jesus gave next day in the synagogue at Capernaum, for there he identified with himself both the meal he had provided and the lamb of the Passover (John 6:26-35, 51-58), as some of them were to realize more clearly at the next year's Passover in Jerusalem. Thus Matthew's double reference to the evening appears to provide a deliberate link with the Passover type.

And what does this remind you of: "treading under foot the Son of God, and counting the blood of the covenant... an unholy thing" (Heb. 10:29)? And this? "Do you think that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently (i.e. right now) give me more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matt. 26:53). Both of them may likewise remind you of Passover. When they do, are they worth a place in the margin of your Bible?

Again, try reading Col. 4:2-6 slowly, and ask yourself: What does this remind me of? Is there here, perchance, a reminiscence of Daniel at the court of Nebuchadnezzar?

You have noticed, of course, that both Peter and Paul healed a man who was "lame from his mother's womb"; and that they both worked a punitive miracle also—against Ananias and Elymas. How far does that correspondence in miracles go? By this time you should be expecting to find that they correspond all through—and you will be right. Try it, and see for yourself. And then ask: What is the reason for this close similarity of miracles?

To most people Jeremiah is rather a dull prophecy (shame on them that they should think so!), and yet it is shot through with this kind of thing (what are you reminded of this time?):

"Sing with gladness for Jacob... Behold, I will bring them from the north country ... and with them the blind, and the lame, the woman with child and her that labours with

child together: a great company shall return thither. They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them ... He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock” (Jer. 31:7-9). Nearly every phrase has taken your mind to the Genesis story of Jacob’s return from serving Laban. Further on in the chapter you can read of “Rachel weeping for her children”, and such words as, “After that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh... Set thee up way marks (Jegarsahadutha; Gen. 31:47)... set your heart towards the highway, even the way which you went”, and in the previous chapter, “the time of Jacob’s trouble”; thus it becomes obvious that these things are there by design. But why? What design? Is Jeremiah saying that Israel’s experience in coming again to the Land of Promise is to be repeated in the experience of Israel, his sons, in the twentieth century?

Never for a moment can there be a relaxing of vigilance in your reading of Scripture. But always the enquiry must be in your mind: What does this remind me of?

A recent letter from a keen 17 year old ended with this: ‘please tell me what is the link between the cloven hoof of the clean beasts in Lev. 11 and the cloven tongues as of fire at Pentecost! “ It was rather depressing to have to reply “None at all, so far as I know”, for though the example was an unfortunate one, the instinct was right, to enquire about a possible worth-while connection on the basis of occurrence of an unusual word. That boy should go a long way.

10. THE CONCORDANCE

“At a time when the authority and character of the Sacred Record is, sadly, assailed on various grounds; when devout attention is denounced as Bibliolatry, and other standards of opinion referred to; it is a paramount duty in all that cleave to the Word of God, to “search the Scriptures” more intelligently.”

WILLIAM WILSON, compiler of Bible Lexicon and Concordance.

“Hebrew roots make grand kindling when fired by the Spirit of God”.

Harrington Lees

No student of the Word of God who values his time or efficiency can afford to be without a good concordance. As a labour saving device it is worth every penny paid for it.

For those who have some Hebrew and Greek there is nothing in this department to compare with the Englishman’s Hebrew Concordance and Englishman’s Greek Concordance, put out in the last century by Bagster. These are wonderful compilations.

Happily their finest virtues were taken over, and in some respects improved upon, when Young brought out his Analytical Concordance. All the donkey work in the compilation of this great volume was really done for Young in advance in the two works just mentioned. All he had to do was to transliterate the Hebrew and Greek terms, and re-arrange according to the advantageous system which he had lighted on, and count the number of occurrences listed under each head. He also added his own English equivalents, and this proves to be the one weakness in an otherwise wonderful aid to Bible study. Those using Young’s Concordance are warned not to follow too slavishly the translations given there of the Hebrew and Greek words listed. By far the safest guide in this matter is to consult the lexicon section at the end of the volume and note the number of occurrences of the various ways the word is translated.

For example, the Hebrew Lexicon in Young’s has this entry under the heading KOHEN:

chief ruler	2
priest	725
prince	1
principal officer	1

From this it is immediately evident that the proper meaning, the only meaning, of KOHEN is “priest”, yet in the body of the concordance, under the heading PRIEST, Young has: “Priest, prince, minister, kohen”; which is utterly misleading to those who happen to consult this place and do not look any further. It will be obvious to the

meanest intellect that the four outstanding passages where “priest” is not the translation have been imperfectly rendered. By suggesting “prince” and “minister”, Young is misleading those who depend on his scholarly authority as well-nigh infallible.

It is a thousand pities that Young did not hit on yet another improvement in his public benefaction—that of printing the Hebrew words in the lexicon with suspended small-type vowels, so that all words belonging to the same root would occur neatly grouped together. In the same way some useful device could have profitably brought together the various Greek verbs formed by adding a variety of prefixes to the same root. But this is gilding the lily! Young’s Concordance, with the one proviso already mentioned, is a magnificent tool for the study table.

There are those who prefer Strong’s Concordance, a most scholarly work which is even more detailed and complete than Young’s. Here certainly the definitions are much more satisfactory. But the chief drawback is the system upon which it is based. This makes it more tedious and time-consuming in the using, and if on average you are going to use your concordance once a day for thirty or forty years, a saving of (say) five seconds per reference is ultimately going to add quite appreciably to the useful part of your life.

For those who do not want the refinements of the bulkier concordances, good old Cruden is the obvious next choice, especially since it is usually possible to save half the cost on this by going to the nearest good second-hand bookshop or market bookstall. Certainly Cruden’s will do you very well whilst you are saving up the twenty pounds or more for a good edition of Young’s.

And now you have got a concordance, how best to use it? And for what specific purposes?

There is, of course, the primary value of the volume in telling you quickly where a particular phrase is to be found in Scripture. For instance, someone quotes you “Absent from the body, present with the Lord” to prove what you know to be untrue, and you have a vague idea that the context of the passage will show the suggested meaning to be untrue. But how to find the passage so as to be in a position to reason from the context? The concordance tells you within seconds if you look up one of the salient words in the phrase remembered. Here obviously you disregard “body” and “Lord” as being too common, and look up “absent” or “present”. Against either of these you find only a small group of passages, and so your eye lights on the one that is needed immediately.

Or again, you may wish to make sure you have fully covered the ground in the course of a survey of some particular topic, e.g. the words “elect, election”, or a study of the work and character of Titus. Then a reference to the appropriate place in the

concordance will direct you to all the evidence available.

A little intelligent work with Young's can often save you from being "led up the garden path" by a flamboyant claim to specialized knowledge. Your friend, the Jehovah's Witness, will try to persuade you to believe in an invisible coming of the Lord on the grounds that the Greek word for the second "coming" is *parousia*, which strictly means presence, whence he infers (with somewhat inadequate attention to logic) an invisible presence of Jesus since 1914.

You promptly look up "coming" in the concordance and find such passages as these listed:

1 Cor. 16:17: "I am glad of the coming of Stephanas" (his invisible coming? Remarkable!).

2 Cor. 7:6: "God comforted us by the coming of Titus" (coming invisibly? Astonishing!).

2 Thess. 2:8: "Whom the Lord shall destroy with the brightness of his coming" (a bright invisible coming? Bewildering!) There is a lot of this bogus scholarship about. Ponderous expositions of John 1:1 have been built on the idea that *Logos* (which please pronounce with short vowels as in "pop off", and not "pope off") does not mean "Word" but "reason" or "purpose", thus giving the profound and impressive thesis: "In the beginning God had a Purpose, and the Purpose was with God, and the Purpose was God." Has the level-headed, intellectually-satisfying Christadelphian faith reached such depths as that?

Reach out for Young's Concordance again and find against the word *LOGOS* in the lexicon section this illuminating and factually incontrovertible catalogue of occurrences:

account	8
cause	1
communication	3
doctrine	1
fame	1
intent	1
matter	4
mouth	1
preaching	1
question	1
utterance	4
reason	2
rumour	1

saying	50
show	1
speech	8
talk	1
thing	4
things to say	1
tidings	1
treatise	1
word	208
Word	7
words	4
work	2
do	1

It needs no more than the intelligence of a child to see that this word means Word or that which is spoken, and that Reason or Purpose is at best a remote connection. Even in the two passages where Logos is translated “reason” (there is only one really; Most editions of Young have a strange misprint here, the better translation would be “word” or “utterance”).

If our nebulous expositors would only go a step further and use their Young’s Concordance on that key word “beginning”, and examine a little more carefully the sense in which it is used in the writings of John, so that the Apostle may be his own interpreter, light of a very different colour and intensity would be thrown on what has been made into a needlessly complex problem.

There is nothing to equal the effectiveness of a concordance in its power to expose the uncertain foundations of a theory.

But also, more positively, the concordance is essential to impart clarity to your ideas where they tend to be vague and shapeless. This is especially true of the study of many of the abstract terms employed in the Scriptures. The fact is that the Bible uses amazingly few abstract terms, for Hebrew—its foundation language—is essentially one of pictures, e.g. “glory” is “weight” (2 Cor. 4:17), and “usury” is “a bite”. And since New Testament Greek was written by Jews nurtured on the Old Testament the same characteristics carry over to it also.

It becomes therefore a cardinal principle of Bible interpretation that if you have to choose between two explanations of a phrase or passage, one of which is abstract or general in idea, and the other concrete, definite, precise, the big probability is that the second is the more correct.

Thus a careful and patient study of the concordance will reveal results of this nature:

In the New Testament “joy” means especially “joy in fellowship”, an association of ideas to which there is hardly an exception. And “peace” rarely means “absence of strife” but very often “peace with God”, i.e. reconciliation.

Similarly, “patience” in the New Testament is not at all the passive, colourless virtue of the modern dictionary, but is the much more rugged characteristic of “doggedness”—the very quality needed by a cross-country runner when he feels that he would like more than anything else to lie down and die. Paul would probably have approved of the modern slang “guts” as an equivalent.

Almost wherever you turn, it will be your experience that these vague shapeless words were neither vague nor shapeless to those who used them.

The modern word “meditation” conjures up the idea of thoughts drifting hazily and indefinitely where they will, or nowhere at all, but always in an equally hazy, equally indefinite atmosphere of “devotion” (a word the apostles had no use for). A quick reference to Young’s Concordance soon sets this right by revealing that Bible words translated “meditate, meditation” all have to do with speech and talking! So true meditation is not a vague musing about God in a garden or on a mountain top or out at sea in a boat, but it is a literal talking to Him, i.e. prayer, or a talking about Him to one another (Mal. 3:16).

This kind of discovery goes on almost endlessly. The familiar words “mercy and truth” which come so often in the Old Testament both together and separately are found to have reference usually (and maybe more often than that) to God’s Covenants of Promise to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David. They are called His Truth because He has sworn by Himself that these things shall be; even past history is not more certain than their eventual fulfilment. And they are called His Mercy because they express His gracious kindness and because they involve the unmerited forgiveness of sins.

In the New Testament the function of these two words seems to be taken over to some extent by the word “grace”. It is not good enough to say “Grace means the favour of God” and thus lightly dismiss one of the loveliest words in the apostolic vocabulary. Is it any more explained by such a substitution?

Again the concordance and a certain amount of midnight oil together serve to reveal that “grace” is the apostolic equivalent of “forgiveness of sins” (which term is largely confined to the gospels). And since the root idea of “grace” is that of a gift, the reason for this usage is readily apparent, for what greater gift could God give than forgiveness in Christ? From that all else follows.

But this notion of “grace” as meaning “a gift” also goes off in a somewhat different direction. There are in the New Testament many instances where “grace” means the “gift of the Holy Spirit”, as it was experienced in the early church. This is an aspect of

the subject which has suffered quite undeserved neglect, yet it should be obvious enough from the words themselves:

Grace = Greek charis

Holy Spirit gift = Greek charisma

Those who have not yet attempted to follow out this investigation in detail with the concordance open beside them have some grand discoveries awaiting them.

Other similar fields for exploration can be only briefly indicated, and the work left to the reader who is also a student.

“The Most High God” is a rather unusual name which turns out to be almost always associated with God’s purpose with the Gentiles, except in the Book of Psalms.

Another divine title “The Living God” occasionally points a contrast with lifeless idols, but more often means, “The God of the Living Creatures”, i.e. the God of the Cherubim of Glory. One passage after another is found to have this association.

The word “reprobate” (Jer. 6:30) is found to mean “tested as metal is tested, and thrown out as inferior quality”.

“Covetousness” in the New Testament mostly carried the specialized meaning of coveting a woman you have no right to.

“Anger” and “wrath” between them turn out to be the equivalents of two completely different Greek words, one signifying an uncontrollable outburst of indignation (orge), the other a cold calculating hostility (thumos).

The Hebrew words for “pleasure”, “acceptable” (ratzah, ratzori) are never far away from the idea of sacrifice well-pleasing to God. The corresponding New Testament word (euairestos) has much the same meaning.

The New Testament word for “creation, create” is found in almost every occurrence to mean the New Creation in Christ— a clue which lights up not a few difficult places.

Even the very ordinary word “place” mostly means, in the Old Testament a holy place, an altar, a sanctuary. And this idea frequently carries over to the New Testament also, with quite startling results here and there.

This exploration of meanings and usages of Bible words and phrases can be a fascinating affair, often unexpected in its results, sometimes really exciting. It is always profitable. But the Roman motto holds true NON SINE PULVERE PALMA, “If you want the highest reward, you must sweat for it”.

11. USE YOUR IMAGINATION

“Weak is the effort of my heart, And cold my warmest thought; But when I see thee as thou art, I’ll praise thee as I ought.” JOHN NEWTON.

A chapter with such a heading as this would doubtless be deemed highly appropriate in a book on amateur dramatics or fiction-writing, but its appearance in a sober discussion of how best to study the Bible may well cause eyebrows to lift. Nevertheless it is stoutly maintained here that in the study of any Bible narrative the use of the imagination can be a big help towards the proper understanding of some incidents, and can also save the student from perpetrating howlers.

It has to be remembered that most Bible narratives are tremendously compressed, and provided one keeps the imagination on a tight rein it can help wonderfully in filling out the picture in accordance with common-sense and ordinary experience.

Abraham and Isaac ascended the mount of sacrifice. Genesis 22 says simply: “So they went both of them together.” What would not a modern writer of psychological novels make of such a situation as this!

“And he said, Throw her down.” Again, the death of Jezebel invites purple writing of a different kind—the frantic grab, the brief desperate struggle, finger nails writing in blood the marks of their owner’s eager love of life, the tearing of a costly royal robe, the short high-pitched shriek of terror; the dull heavy thud; the imperious shout to the horses, the loud clatter of hoofs and rumble of chariot wheels, and then the intermittent growl of dogs quarrelling over a royal repast. The Bible has all this in a handful of one-syllable words. The rest is left to the reader. But how much the reader misses if he fails to fill out the details.

This habit will not only make an enormous difference to your appreciation of Bible narrative, but can also save you from serious mistakes which the less contemplative reader is liable to.

Saul was himself the giant to match Goliath—”from his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people”. Yet more than once there has been merriment at the idea of his equipping the stripling David with the armour which had been made for his own massive frame! No wonder David rejected it!

But here imagination has not gone far enough. If David were the half-grown youngster that is usually pictured, would Saul have been so lacking in commonsense as to think his own armour would be anything but a hindrance? The fact that he did make the offer should rather become the ground for the inference that David, although the “baby” of the family, was now grown to a stature comparable with Saul’s. Note that David’s reason for refusing Saul’s accoutrements was not: “They are too big for

me”, but: “I have not proved them”—he was not used to them. But he had proved the God of Israel!

So the Sunday School picture-book illustration of a smooth-cheeked school-boy, five feet without his sandals, going out against Goliath, can be quietly dropped.

It also needs a proper use of the imagination in order to realize just how great was the sacrifice Zacchaeus made for the sake of seeing and hearing Jesus—a sacrifice not only of repaying fourfold, but of dignity also, and to most little men this is a matter of no small importance. Imagine, then, the gratuitous rebuffs and imprecations he would receive from that dense throng round Jesus as he vainly tried to worm his way through— it was too good an opportunity to miss, to score off a publican in this fashion. And does not the thought of this man climbing a tree and balancing precariously out on a limb appeal to the imagination? And when Jesus bade him come down, would there not be smothered titters in the crowd at the sight of this despised income-tax man making such an exhibition of himself? And how much dignity would there be about this undersized citizen of Jericho as he stood there before Jesus, the focus of a hundred pairs of eyes, gasping for breath through the unaccustomed exertion, an unseemly tear in his expensive attire, and his headgear all awry? If ever a man publicly humiliated himself for the sake of Jesus, it was Zacchaeus. But what a reward was his — to have Jesus stay at his house!

There are plenty of incidents in the gospels which invite an exercise of the imagination. There are others from which the imagination shrinks — Jesus in Gethsemane, the agony of the crucifixion. But it is precisely here where the disciple has a responsibility to enter into the sufferings of his Lord. Apart from any personal tribulation, this is one way in which it is possible to “fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ”. So do not shirk this duty. It is not possible to have too full and real a conception of what the suffering and shame of the cross meant to the One who endured them.

Concerning one incident associated with the crucifixion, a further exercise of imagination leads to a more probable and more satisfying filling out of the story than has been achieved by any modern novelist. But let it be freely stated at the outset that there is no Biblical foundation for the suggestion about to be made, so it may be discarded out of hand by those who can see nothing in it. On the other hand, there may well be something in it.

The Roman soldiers gambled at the foot of the cross as to who should have which of their recognized perquisites — the shirt, girdle, headgear, sandals and coat of the crucified Jesus. The first four were quickly assigned to one or the other, and then came the problem of the seamless coat. “Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it whose it shall be.”

A few yards away stood a group of women, one of whom had very probably made that coat with her own hands. To see it now tossed across to a Roman soldier to the accompaniment of a rough jest would only add to the poignant wretchedness of the occasion. But what would they do with these garments?

Doubtless the intention was to trade them for a few drinks at the nearest tavern as soon as they were off duty.

What, then, are the probabilities that John or Joseph of Arimathea or even one of the women would step across to those hard-bitten men with the question: "What will you take for them?"

And now the imagination leaps to the morning of resurrection. When the risen Jesus was first seen by the disciples he did not appear "bound hand and foot with grave clothes", as Lazarus, but was fully clad like any other person. It is surely not irreverent to enquire: "Where did Jesus get his clothes from?" A possible answer is, of course, that the angel who rolled away the stone also supplied this need—as no doubt he will in the resurrection of the just and unjust. But another possible answer is that someone had acquired them early on the day of crucifixion, had them laundered that very day, and was at the interment to say: "Put these by his side. He will be needing them."

Pure imagination, this, from start to finish, and yet somehow it has a touch of seamliness about it. Others may think altogether differently, and are welcome to think so. But there is surely something specially apt in the symbolism of Jesus receiving back the very garments he had worn before, only now sweet and clean, never again to know the blood, sweat, tears and dust with which they had been soiled.

One of the finest helps to realistic mental re-creation of Bible scenes is to read them aloud. When you can ensure solitude, either in a room (Jesus and Thomas) or in the middle of a field (David and Jonathan) or at the top of a mountain (Elijah and the priests of Baal), this declaiming aloud of dramatic scenes from Scripture can be a great help.

From the point of view of its public worth, the dramatic presentation of Bible stories does not move one to enthusiasm, but memory recalls the gusto with which a group of youngsters from Yorkshire put over scenes in the life of David. Whatever the effect on their audience, that Scripture story will always live powerfully in the lives of those young beginners.

Another group of young people did the Trial of Jesus as a dramatic reading. Each was handpicked for the part assigned to him. The inflexion and emphasis in every phrase was rehearsed over and over again. Then it was put over to an audience as a mock radio broadcast, the readers being hidden behind a curtain. All the work was done, and

effectively done, by their voices.

The same thing was taken up by another group with equal enthusiasm. And instead of “Let’s pretend” it became a real broadcast, heard by hundreds of thousands.

Other parts of the Bible lend themselves to the same kind of presentation, and always—provided the attempt is made in all reverence—there is real gain. The story of Joseph, the trial of Paul, Sennacherib before Jerusalem, and even the Song of Songs all have the same possibilities.

Little good can be said about modern novels and films on Biblical themes. Even those which, it is claimed, aim at keeping strictly to the Bible story fail dismally in this very respect. Most of them give such rein to the imagination—and an irreverent imagination at that—that the story presented bears little recognizable likeness to what the Bible itself says. Yet the pictures, both verbal and visual, are so vivid that they have the power to establish themselves in the imagination and to warp one’s ideas and judgment for years to come. Have nothing whatever to do with “Biblical” films and novels.

But by all means treat yourself to the records on which Charles Laughton brings to life the slaying of Goliath and the story of Daniel’s friends in the burning fiery furnace. Such helps as these are pure gain to the Bible-loving listener.

12. SYMBOLIC LANGUAGE

“Let those who refuse to allegorize these and the like passages, explain how it is probable that he who out of reverence for Jesus said “Thou shall never wash my feet” would have had no part with the Son of God; as if not having his feet washed were a dastardly wickedness.” Origen on John 13:8.

The Bible teems with figurative language. What was said in a previous chapter about Hebrew being a language of pictures and concrete ideas is, of course, the main reason for it. It is this fact which introduces so much diversity into Bible interpretation, and so much difference of opinion among Bible interpreters.

When is a symbol not a symbol? Answer: When it means what it says. But then you are no nearer. When does it mean what it says? Hooker, the seventeenth century theologian, answered that question in these words which should be written on the fly-leaf of every well-used Bible: “I hold it for a most infallible rule, in Expositions of Sacred Scripture, that where a literal construction will stand, the furthest from the letter is commonly the worst.” Which in everyday modern English means: Take the Bible as meaning plainly and precisely what it says, unless it supplies you with good reason for taking it otherwise.

Thus: “Behold, a sower went forth to sow” is lifted immediately out of the field of agriculture by the preceding words: “He spoke many things unto them in parables, saying...”. And a mere four verses earlier one reads: “He stretched forth his hand towards his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren.” Once again, the indication not to take the words literally is there in the passage of itself.

When in Psa. 74:19 one encounters the prayer: “O deliver not the soul of thy turtle dove unto the multitude of the wicked”, the figurative character of that word “turtle-dove” is immediately evident. Does God take thought for pigeons? But there is a reason for this particular figure, as a comparison of Lev. 12:7 and 1:14 with the ensuing words goes on to demonstrate: “forget not the congregation of thy poor for ever.” The turtledove was the offering of the poorest of the people, and hence the identification.

This passage, lighted on haphazard in the writing of this chapter, is a good illustration of the allusiveness of Bible language which makes it so imperative to interpret Scripture by Scripture rather than by twentieth century usage and ideas.

“Thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies” has no meaning at all to one who insists on keeping his feet planted in twentieth century England or America. But to one who has seen an ancient walled city, or merely read about one, the figure springs to life, and says more in nine words than any ninety word paraphrase in modern style.

But let the Bible explain itself. “Thy seed... which is Christ”, says Paul dogmatically (Gal. 3:16), and Christ himself says: “I am he that lives, and was dead, and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.” Here the enemies are authoritatively identified, not as human rulers warring against the Lord’s Anointed, but as others even more powerful than they. And since Jesus now possesses the gate of his greatest Enemy, he and he only can decide who shall go in (to stay there for ever) and who shall come out (to go in no more).

So, wherever possible let the Bible be the guide to the interpretation of its own symbols, once you are convinced that it is using a symbol and not speaking literally.

If then you read a comment on Luke 21:25 to the effect that “the sun means the ruling powers, the moon the ecclesiastical powers, the stars are the lesser authorities, and the sea and the waves are the common people,” you will accept the truth of this not because the Epistle Dedicatory at the beginning of your King James Bible refers to Queen Elizabeth I as “a bright occidental star”, but when — and only when — good Bible evidence is supplied to you. For at least one of the items in this list none has ever been given.

On the other hand, the familiar symbolism of Joseph’s dream sets you thinking about the whole family of Israel. Then you light on Jer. 31:35, 36: “Thus says the Lord, who gives the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divides the sea when the waves thereof roar: The Lord of hosts is his name: If those ordinances depart from before me, says the Lord, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever.”

It is immediately obvious (indeed it would be churlish to question it) that in Luke 21 Jesus is appropriating, applying and interpreting the prophecy of Jeremiah about the New Covenant with Israel. His language points unmistakably to dramatic signs in connection with Israel, not with the ruling powers of the world (though they may be involved in a less important capacity). And when Jesus goes on immediately to use the figure of a blossoming fig-tree, this understanding of the earlier figure is put past cavil.

Mention of the fig-tree raises the query whether the frequently-heard application of this figure is well-founded. The Bible’s answer could hardly be more emphatic. In two places Jesus himself plainly used the fig-tree as a symbol of his own ‘nation (Mark 11:13-21; Luke 13:6, 7) and in this also he was evidently following Jeremiah (chapter 24), and the other prophets (Hosea 9:10 R.V.; Micah 7:1 R.V.; one says nothing here of the many passages where vine and fig-tree together are used as symbols of Israel).

This fairly solid foundation of interpretation of the fig-tree symbol raises interesting questions regarding other places. Is the fact that Zacchaeus climbed a sycamore-fig tree recorded simply because this is a tree easy to climb or because of some symbolic

meaning discerned by the writer of the gospel? Is the mention that Nathanael was under a fig-tree before he came to Jesus of any consequence or not? Does Genesis 3, a chapter in which no single word is wasted, tell of fig-leaf garments because of some meaning which the reader is intended to associate with them, or merely to indicate that Adam and Eve had chosen to hide from the divine presence in a fig-tree because of its dense foliage? Lastly why are signs in the sun, moon and stars associated with the figure of “a fig-tree casting her untimely figs” in the Sixth Seal of Revelation? Whatever other interpretation is made of the Seals, there must surely be found room also for an application to Israel in a day which manifests “the wrath of the Lamb” (Rev. 6:12, 13, 16).

While the fig-tree seems undoubtedly to signify Israel, there is also some evidence—though not as clear-cut as one would like—that the date-palm is used in Scripture as a symbol of the Gentiles. In the wilderness journey, so symbolic of the life of redemption, there are twelve wells and seventy palm-trees (these last suggesting the seventy nations of Genesis 10, and also Genesis 46:27; Deut. 32:8; Luke 9:1 and 10:1). Jericho, the city of palm-trees, was the first-fruits of the Gentiles devoted to Jehovah. And in Ezekiel’s temple cherubim and palm-trees alternate, as though suggesting the association of Jew and Gentile in the promised redemption.

All this leads on to an appreciation of Mark chapters 10, 11, 12 along lines which may have gone hitherto unsuspected. The healing of the blind man, the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the cursing of the fig-tree, the cleansing of the temple, the exhortation to faith and the ensuing sequence of parables are protracted symbolic exhibition of the right of the Gentiles to accept the gospel which, when Mark, was writing, was even then being rejected by Israel.

It was by Jericho, the city of palm-trees, that Bartimaeus, (Bar- is the Gentile equivalent of the Hebrew Ben- son of) hopelessly blind, sat by the highway not able to walk in it. He acclaimed Jesus from a distance as the promised Messiah, Son of David. Although discouraged by those who thought him of no consequence, he yet persisted, and was called and came to Jesus (guided doubtless by one of the disciples). Healed, he used his new sight to “follow Jesus in the way”.

Then near to Bethphage (House of Figs) and Bethany (House of Date-palms) two disciples were sent to find and bring an ass and also an ass’s colt, “whereon never man sat”. This they did, finding the animals “by the door, without, in a place where two ways met” (observe—not “where two ways parted”). The loosing of the colt was challenged: “What do ye, loosing the colt?” just as the healing of Bartimaeus was discouraged. But the sufficient answer was: “The Lord hath need of him”, as well as of the ass.

In his entry into the city as King (Zech. 9:9), Jesus discarded the ass in favour of the unbroken colt (Matt. 21:7). A great multitude went before, and another multitude

followed after, and as they greeted him, some casting their own garments before him and others waving palm branches, the Jews complaining bitterly: “The world is gone after him”.

According to Luke it was in the course of this triumphal approach to the city of his rejection that he wept, foreseeing the grim horrors that must ensue through their despising of the Man of Sorrows in their midst.

The next day as he returned to the city he came to the Fig-tree seeking fruit, for at that Spring season there should have been the beginnings of fruiting (Song of Songs 2:13; Isa. 28:4 R.V.), yet he found none, and therefore solemnly pronounced the death of that which the fig-tree symbolized. God wanted fruit, not leaves. The fig-tree withered away, being wrong at the roots, until the day foretold when it shall blossom again (Matt. 24:32). Already in this century it has begun to shoot forth—with leaves, but as yet without fruit!

In the temple Jesus castigated and drove out of the divine presence those who perverted the worship of his Father; he took away the facilities for animal sacrifices, yet would he not allow the Court of the Gentiles to be used for profane purposes but in effect he proclaimed it (the Gentile part of the temple) as holy as the rest; this he reinforced first with Isaiah’s prophecy that the temple was to be a house of prayer for all nations, and then with the healing there of those who were lame and blind.

The withering of the fig-tree was made the basis of an exhortation that his disciples show greater faith in God’s power to bless the mission to be entrusted to them. The greatest obstacle to your preaching, he said, will be this mountain—Mount Zion, with the temple and the Law unshakeably established there— yet your faith will cause it to be removed and cast into the sea. The prophecy was duly fulfilled in A.D. 70.

Next day there followed three parables. First, the parable of the two sons—one who said he would serve (Exod. 19:8), but did not, and the other who said he would not, but afterwards did. The next was about husbandmen who rejected and slew the only son, the heir, and whose fate was foretold—destruction, and the giving of the vineyard to others. Then the parable of the marriage feast, in which story the invited guests despised their privilege and ill-treated the servants. For this their city was destroyed. Meantime others from the highways were gathered in to enjoy that which had been scorned.

All this is Bible symbolism at its finest and highest level. Any small part of such a symbolic interpretation viewed separately is utterly unconvincing, but taken altogether there can be no resisting the force and power of the accumulation of significant detail. (Observe also how beautifully Mark 10:42-44 harmonizes with the same theme).

Examples such as this and the outline suggested earlier (page 30) concerning Hosea 9:10, so different from the matter-of-fact ordinariness of the customary approach, should help to bring a realization that our understanding of the principles of interpretation of Holy Scripture has not really gone very far as yet— nor will it until we wear the same kind of spectacles as the inspired writers. We have much to learn. And there will be progress only in proportion to our willingness to yield ourselves to the Bible's own guidance as to how it shall be interpreted.

13. TRACE THE ARGUMENT

“All things in scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all.”
Westminster Confession 1647.

The protracted study with which the previous chapter concluded was originally designed to illustrate the symbolic thinking of Jesus and of those who wrote about him. But it did something else as well. The unifying idea of one particular part of the Lord’s ministry was exposed to view—a theme binding together a wide variety of miracles, parables, discourses and public actions.

This kind of thing happens in the Bible far more often than is usually suspected. The splitting up of the text in our common version into chapters, paragraphs and verses may be convenient for reference purposes, but all too easily it tends to impede one’s grasp of the interconnection of the various parts.

On the strength of this some people say impatiently: “Away with this old King James version.” But that is surely the wrong reaction. Instead all that is needed is rather more effort to be on the alert to trace the argument or the sequence of ideas.

This is especially necessary in studying the epistles of the New Testament. By all means concentrate on each chapter or paragraph in turn. But from time to time step back from the canvas and try to see the picture in broad outline. And if the gist of the argument can be clearly grasped it will not only often save you from perpetrating howlers of exegesis regarding some of the details but will add enormously to your appreciation of the purpose behind certain books, especially the epistles.

It is impossible to stress adequately the value and importance of this aspect of Bible study merely by writing about it. The only thing that may impress the need for special attention is a long series of examples of how it works in practice. To do this adequately would take a volume in itself, for it is almost impossible to expound the logical development of argument in Scripture without running to words, words, words.

Here, then, two or three quick illustrations must suffice.

Take first an instance alluded to earlier—the strange question why in his resurrection chapter Paul suddenly appears to go off at a tangent to talk inconsequentially about “one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds”, followed by “There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars”. What is he getting at? What possible connection is there here with his main theme? And yet he continues: “So also is the resurrection of the dead.”

The previous illustration (1 Cor. 15:36-38) supplies a clue. There the resurrection body is likened to what results from the planting of seed—"it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: but God giveth it a body, as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body". In other words, whatever God has designed it for, whatever place it is intended to fill in His creation, for that function it is perfectly adapted—and not only with seeds growing, but also with living creatures, whether beasts, fishes or birds, and also with the heavenly bodies; whatever purpose God had in view for them to fulfil, for that purpose He designed and fashioned them perfectly.

So also is the resurrection of the dead. No wonder Paul says "Thou fool!" If God intends you to live for ever, will He not equip you with a perfect body that will last for ever and will He not put you in a perfect world that will also last for ever, just as He has adapted everything else that He has made, each according to its own particular function?

The argument goes on in the same strain: "The first man Adam (and all who come from him) was made a living soul." The limitations and frailties of human life may seem to be just a tangle of imperfections, but they do at any rate provide a perfect setting for that which God most intends and desires— the fashioning of a character to the glory of His Name.

"The Last Adam is a quickening spirit", and those who belong to him will be made like him, for the praise and glory of God in eternity.

The argument is thus all of one piece. Once it is grasped, Paul's piling up of illustrations from nature is far more attractive and cogent than any amount of tedious and laborious abstract reasoning. It is a good example of how Paul, being a Hebrew of the Hebrews, thought and argued in picture language.

Perhaps, also, it should be added that the fitting together of Paul's argument has been greatly hindered for many by the assumption that he is reasoning about the process of resurrection (being brought out of the grave, appearing before the Lord, judgment, the gift of immortality). But here—as in verse 21; Luke 20:35; Phil. 3:11; Heb. 11:35—"resurrection" means the climax of the process, and not the process itself, and thus is a synonym for "the kingdom of God" (verse 50), "incorruptible" (verse 52), "immortality" (verse 53).

Consider now another example from Paul, very different in character from what has just been examined. Try an analysis of Philippians chapter 4. At first reading it is evident that verses 10-19 are all about the same thing—the considerate generosity of the Philippi ecclesia in sending Paul a present of money in time of need; verses 20-23 form the conclusion to the epistle. But the first section of the chapter appears to be a series of observations on a wide variety of topics, without coherence of any kind. It will be obvious to everyone that an exposition which exhibits these verses as

belonging to one another, tied together by the same theme, is far more likely to be correct than the view which treats each verse as a fresh departure in a different direction.

First, then, let it be noted that verse I, beginning with “Therefore”, is by that very word securely connected with the last verse of chapter 3. Those who divided our Bible into chapters made a poor job of it here.

The real beginning of chapter 4, then, is at verse 2—a plea to two women who are sisters in Christ that they drop their quarrel: “I beseech Euodia, and I beseech Syntyche (the names are feminine), that they be of the same mind in the Lord.”

There are indications that when a church received an epistle from Paul, the letter was read at a general assembly of the ecclesia on the first day of the week. On this particular occasion the congregation would certainly include two sisters in Christ with very red faces.

The letter continues: “And I entreat thee also, true yokefellow, help these women (Euodia and Syntyche) who laboured with me in the gospel... whose names are in the book of life.” It is commonly assumed, and is most likely correct, that Luke was the one appealed to by Paul to help in this quarrel. And see how tactfully Paul phrased it, reminding them that although they could not co-operate with each other, they had notably co-operated with him in the Lord’s work (instructing candidates for baptism?). Their names were in the Book of Life. They had helped others to have their names similarly inscribed. Was their quarrel now going to blot their names out of that Book?

Instead of bickering, then, “rejoice in the Lord alway”; and since in the early church “joy, rejoicing” had come to be a kind of technical term for the sweet fellowship of one another in Christ, the exhortation comes in here as still addressed primarily to the two who had fallen out.

“Let your moderation be known unto all men”, Paul urged. The concordance quickly reveals that this Greek word for “moderation” is used time after time as the antithesis of ill-temper and cantankerousness (e.g. 1 Tim. 3:3; Titus 4:2; James 3:17; Psalms 86:5, Septuagint). And why this moderation of temper? Because “the Lord is at hand”, he is near, and hears your every word of petulance and spitefulness, and reads every bitter thought.

Paul knew how women can get on each other’s nerves. Therefore he continued: “Be careful for nothing”—better: Do not nag one another over anything, but, he added, with a typical switch of emphasis, you can nag away at God as much as you like: “In everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving for answering your prayers in time past, let your request be made known unto God. And the peace of God (better than any spirit of quarrelsomeness; Col. 3:15, 13) shall guard your hearts

and minds.”

“Finally, brethren” (he now proceeded to generalize the lesson for the benefit of the whole ecclesia), “whatsoever things are worthy and Christlike, keep on imputing only intentions of this sort to those who share your faith in Christ.” The A.V., “think on these things”, suggests an exhortation to meditation. But the Greek word Paul used is the one so frequently employed by him in Romans for God’s imputing or reckoning a man righteous on the score of his faith.

Says Paul: As God reckons you righteous in His sight, when undeserving, so you should impute only good, wholesome, pure motives to others—and your quarrels will quickly be at an end, in fact they will never arise.

Lastly, Paul urges his own example: Did you ever know me cherish a grudge, did you ever see me indulge in open quarrelling? “Those things which ye both learned, and received, and heard, and saw in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.”

The achievement of the exposition of a passage on these lines adds enormously to the value of it. Instead of a collection of miscellaneous homiletics loosely strung together for no apparent purpose, it turns out that Paul was dealing with a very human situation in a spirit of kindness, yet with strength, and at the same time he used the occasion to frame an exhortation of intensely practical value to all succeeding generations.

Note, too, how concisely he expressed his ideas. An attempt to expound them even in outline, takes about three times as long as the original. It is when the student does this sort of thing for himself that the genius (putting it at its lowest level) of Paul is most clearly revealed.

Another example is given here in bare outline. The diligent student with any flair for Bible interpretation will readily clothe the skeleton with flesh and sinews.

Consider the sequence in the call of Ezekiel the prophet:

- (a) Chapter 1:1-28. The vision of the cherubim of glory.
- (b) 1:28-2:2. A symbolic death and resurrection (Scripture has at least eight more parallels to this; can you find them?)
- (c) 2:3-5. Commission to testify to a rebel nation.
- (d) 2:6-8. Signs of reluctance in Ezekiel.
- (e) 2:9-3:3. The message is symbolically committed to him.
- (f) 3:4-9. The difficulty of the task. Divine power to cope with it.
- (g) 3:10, ii. Command to go and testify to the people— apparently ignored, for -
- (h) 3:12-14. Ezekiel is taken and set in the midst of them against his own will.
- (i) 3:15. For a full week he remains stubbornly silent.
- (j) 3:16-21. “Ezekiel, testify, or their blood will be on your head.”

- (k) 3:22, 23. A further vision of the cherubim, to stir him to action.
- (l) 3:24. No response; therefore, “go shut thyself within thine house”.
- (m) 3:25. “If you will not go to them as a prophet, you shall not go about at all.”
- (n) 3:26. “If you will not speak the message, you shall not speak at all—”
- (o) 3:27. “except when I open your mouth.” (Note 24:27 and 33:22).
- (p) 4:1 etc. Ezekiel preaches the word of Jehovah by a series of acted parables, without a word spoken.

In the foregoing development of ideas, there are one or two details which are open to a slightly different interpretation, but the main development is clear enough.

The commonly held view of the prophets as men consumed with such a zeal for God that they eagerly seized every opportunity to testify on His behalf is hardly borne out by Ezekiel’s own record about himself (consider also Jer. 20:9; Isa. 8:11; 1 Kings 19:4, 10; and, of course, Jonah).

Remember, then, whenever you are studying any portion of the Bible, to try to see it whole and to discern the purpose behind it, the theme or dominant idea which binds together and makes it a unity. Whenever you find yourself treating any Scripture as a collection of discrete bits and pieces, you are probably on the wrong lines. (One notable exception—Proverbs chapters 10 to 31).

Here are further examples for you to work out in detail for yourself:

- (1) The Epistle to the Hebrews is an eloquent attempt to deter Hebrew Christians from drifting back to the synagogue. Note the repeated arguments about the superiority of Christ over all aspects of the Law of Moses and temple service, each separate argument leading on to a vigorous exhortation to faithfulness.
- (2) Note how 2 Peter 1 is held together by the phrase: “These things.” What things?
- (3) With inadequate reason the Epistle of James is usually assigned to James, the half-brother of Jesus and at a fairly late date in the first century. Yet a good deal of internal evidence suggests that James, the son of Zebedee, was the author, and that this is the first book of the New Testament to be written. Read it as a digest of exhortations given at Jerusalem in the earliest days of the church, and then sent out to the disciples when they were “scattered abroad” by the persecution of Saul. The correspondences with the early chapters of Acts are magnificent. This is a difficult exercise, but very rewarding.

14. STUDY THE CONTEXT

“When we find a passage in its own particular place, there is a Divine reason why it is there, and also why it is not in any other place.” E. W. BULLINGER.

If you are not quite sure of the meaning of that word “context”, it might be a good idea to look it up in the dictionary, and then you will realize that this chapter is a natural follow-on from the preceding one. The main difference is that here the field narrows. Instead of considering a book of Scripture or a section of a book as a unit, attention is now concentrated on reading each verse with reference to the setting where it comes. So the idea remains essentially the same—to look for “connectedness” between one verse and the next. This is specially important when you are seeking the meaning of a particular verse or phrase. By itself it may appear to suggest a certain idea, but if that interpretation does not readily slip into the context of the verse you should begin to feel worried.

Take as an illustration the familiar Matt. 12:36: “Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.”

Here the meaning seems self-evident until one pauses to reflect whether this basis of judgment squares with what one reads elsewhere about justification by faith, and the satisfying truth that in the day of account Jesus will recognize instantaneously who are his, just as a shepherd knows at a glance (and even without a glance!) which is a sheep and which is a goat. The thought of Jesus holding inquisition concerning every careless expression ever used and every little explosion of passing irritation somehow does not harmonize with what the gospels tell of him.

The context in Matthew 12 puts you back on the rails. The dominant context is: “This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils”—a diabolical insinuation that Jesus could only achieve his miracles by being in league with the Powers of Evil. This was nothing less than blasphemy against the powers of the Holy Spirit which he exhibited, and accordingly Jesus rounded on them with devastating argument and blistering invective, culminating in the warning: Every idle word that you speak concerning me, you shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.

This, you will perceive, immediately sounds right. A man is to stand or fall in the last day by his attitude towards Jesus. This, and this only, is what settles a man’s destiny.

Again, the equally familiar words of Matt. 18:20 require to be related to the place where they occur: “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” The application to only two or three met together in fellowship or at the Breaking of Bread is hardly the one which Jesus can have had directly in mind when he said this. The context scarcely allows of it—and this verse

begins with “For”, thus requiring to be linked directly with what precedes.

The problem is that of offences between brethren. Jesus counsels: First, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone. Then, take others with you. Next, tell it to the church; its decision shall be binding; and its prayers shall be heard.

In this setting the words under consideration surely mean either:

(a) The Lord promises to guide with wisdom the elders of the church deliberating on such matters;

or:

(b) Where such efforts to gather together those who have been separated by contention are successful, the Lord adds his own special blessing. (This is perhaps the more likely as well as the more satisfying view, particularly since verse 21 goes on to speak of forgiveness.)

It is worth while to note that the usual application of these familiar words is not altogether ruled out, for if they apply to such situations as those just underlined, they will surely apply at least as much to other circumstances where brethren, though only two or three, gather together in unity.

The next chapter provides an interesting example. The bringing of the little children to Jesus by their parents followed immediately on his firm discourse about the sanctity of marriage; note the word “then” in Matt. 19:13.

Similarly, the same word “then” in Matt. 25:1 firmly attaches the parable of the virgins to the Lord’s warnings about the unexpectedness of his coming. From this it follows that whilst the object is to inculcate the lesson of preparedness this parable clearly points to the generation alive at the Lord’s return. The future tense “shall be likened” supports this. Like nearly every other parable spoken by the Lord, this story has its permanent timeless message. Every generation of faithful and faithless would have been the poorer for lack of it. But the Master’s own directive does suggest a special relevance to the last generation of all—this generation. The very character of the story emphasises this. It follows then that the sleep of the virgins can hardly be interpreted as meaning the sleep of death. Must it not, then, be the sleep of unawareness (Matt. 24:36-51)? To think that in the day of the Lord’s coming, all will be taken unawares—even those who have all the timetable details of that great Day fully worked out!

This insistence on the relevance of context can be something of a headache at times. Consider, for example, the Lord’s trenchant parable about eagles and carcase. As long as attention is concentrated on its occurrence in Matt. 24, a chapter which has such

vivid anticipations of the horrors of the siege of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, the application to Roman eagles and the carcase of Israel seems fitting enough. But in Luke 17:37 the context is altogether different.

Another canon of interpretation likewise forbids application of this figure to the angels and the saints in the Last Day, or to the saints being gathered to Christ. There is a seemliness about Bible figures of speech. The incongruity of representing angels or saints in Christ by vultures, and the saints or the Lord of Glory by a carcase shouts its own rejection of these ideas. Anyone who has seen tropical vultures round a carcase would never consider them even remotely possible.

At the same time, the contests in Matt. 24 and Luke 17 being totally different in detail, it would clearly be a recommendation of any interpretation which gives the same significance to angels and to carcase in both places, whilst harmonizing with the context in each place.

These considerations lead to a completely different suggestion—an idea which may not be altogether free from difficulty but which does at any rate start from sound principles.

In Matthew Jesus is warning against false prophets who say: “The Lord has already come secretly.” Today evangelists say: “He is in your heart”; liturgists say: “He is in the church”; Roman Catholics say: “He is in the Mass—his literal body”; Jehovah’s Witnesses say: “He rules invisibly since 1914”—and some others, alas, join in this chorus and say: “He will come in secret to Sinai”! But Jesus says: “My coming will be like the lightning”, seen by all though perhaps not understood by all. But he adds: “If you show yourselves to be spiritually dead— a carcase—you will surely find yourselves a prey to these vultures.” In this way Jesus discards as “dead” those who hold perverted ideas concerning his Coming.

In Luke the same interpretation slips neatly into place. In connection with his coming, Jesus spoke of the saints, worthy and unworthy, being called away—”one (saint) shall be taken, and another (saint) left.” Observe the force of the word “immediately” in Luke 12:36.

In response to which enigmatic statement, the query comes: “Where, Lord” meaning “Left where, Lord?” for would the disciples have asked: “Taken where?”, since the answer to that is obviously “To meet their Lord.”

And to this the forbidding answer is given: “If you show yourselves to be spiritually a carcase, you will be left to the vultures” (cp. the significance of Matt. 25:10-12).

These examples have sprung almost unbidden from the pages of one gospel. But the same insistence on harmony with context is needful in a thousand other places

through the Book.

Consider the familiar words of Isa. 64:4: “Men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen... what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him.”

The meaning commonly read into this passage is that the glories of the age to come are past all human conception—a meaning extremely difficult to harmonize with the rest of the chapter. Rather is the idea this: “In all generations men have not wanted to hear or to see the ways of God—they have not been interested in or concerned about the outworking of His purpose”, and hence the divine estrangement: “Thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities”.

The context of Paul’s citation of this passage in 1 Cor. 2:7-10 fully confirms this approach: The wisdom of God was not “known”, i.e. received by “the princes of this world; had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory: as it is written...” But, Paul adds reassuringly, these things concerning the wondrous purpose of God have been revealed to us who tremble at His Word.

An example of a very different character meets the reader in Lamech’s boastful song of triumph (Gen. 4:23, 24):

“I have slain a man for wounding me, And a young man for bruising me: If Cain be avenged sevenfold, Truly Lamech seventy and sevenfold.”

There is an often unnoticed connection here with the preceding verses. One of the sons of Lamech was Tubal-cain, “the forger of every cutting instrument of brass and iron”. Here was the ground for Lamech’s boast of prowess and impregnability—he owned the world’s first armaments factory!

Let it be taken as a golden rule that an interpretation of Scripture which does not harmonize with its context is to be suspected. An insistence on this principle will save you from many an attractive but mistaken conclusion. It will also provide the best clue for the solution of many a difficulty.

15. MODERN VERSIONS OF THE BIBLE

“Truly we never thought to make a new translation, nor yet to make of a bad one a good one, but to make a good one better, or out of many good ones one principal good one.” King James Version translators, 1611.

Everybody is dependent to a greater or lesser extent on other versions of the Bible besides the King James Bible of 1611 in common use, so it may not be amiss to offer a few opinions about the best known translations. Only let it be remembered that what is said here is a summary of personal impressions. Not all would agree with everything that is submitted.

First, a strong recommendation that you keep in the main to the Authorized Version. It is, so to speak, the vernacular of all of us in the Faith. Even though the good manuscripts available for it were really few compared with what the modern translator has access to, the text from which it was made was in the main remarkably sound. And the translation itself, as a work of literary skill, has never been matched in the history of English literature. Its lucidity in some of the epistles and here and there in the prophets is not what it might be, nor is its accuracy in Job and one or two other books. But generally it is a very good translation, giving the sense remarkably well and in incomparable style, especially for reading aloud.

It is not only a treasury of matchless English but also amazingly accurate. I have often marvelled at the downright honesty of King James’s men. All translators find themselves faced with the necessity, in many a place, of supplying an extra word or phrase to avoid crudity or awkwardness. In the A. V. every smallest word of this sort is picked out by the use of italics, so that by the simple device of leaving out the italics you can have what is virtually a word for word translation.

Then, too, in the A. V. there is careful distinction made between singular pronouns — ‘thou, thy’ — and the plurals ‘you, your’

This is lost in all the twentieth century versions, and then the reader gets lost: “In this verse, does ‘you’ mean one person or more than one?”

I beg of you, therefore, do not let go the good old A.V. — and for this reason: we are an intensely conservative community (at times, almost absurdly so), and any trend away from the cadences of King James’s men is sure to be a constant irritation to the older generation. I have known of one or two insistent efforts to replace A.V. with N.I.V. (or whatever), and these have proved to be a veritable unkindness or provocation.

There is perhaps a case to be made for using a modern version at our Sunday evening meetings, for the sake of greater intelligibility in the ears of Bible-ignorant visitors.

The value of this was impressed on my mind thus: in a family I know, the very earnest parents had Bible-reading each evening with their three young children, all of them highly intelligent kids. As time went on it was evident that some of the books of Scripture had these youngsters quite bewildered. When the experiment was tried of a switch to a modern version, the immediate reaction was: "This is easy! We can understand this." They couldn't, really, but at least that ejaculation bespoke a sense of greater comprehension. So it is to be expected that others may react similarly.

But if you intend any serious accurate study of the Bible, you will sooner or later have to call in one of the other versions to help you to greater precision of detail.

So far as personal reading and study go, the ideal advice is: leave the modern translations to other people, and instead settle down to acquire enough Greek and Hebrew to enable you to make tolerable sense of the original text of any passage you happen to be interested in.

Of course, the fulfilment of such an ambition will mean blood, sweat and tears, as well as the resolution to dedicate twenty minutes a day for a year or two at least. But ultimately, what a benefit! The time spent would very soon be time saved.

If this is asking too much, then please assign the priority to New Testament Greek, which will pay far greater dividends than Hebrew can possibly do.

If you are not able to go with confidence direct to the Greek and Hebrew text, then get by you as many other versions as possible.

But — warning! — remember that the proper technique is not to hunt through half a dozen of them when in difficulty and choose the reading that you like the sound of best, or that goes best with your theory of what it ought to say, but to be guided by the general consensus of the various translations. Not that this will infallibly guide you to a completely dependable accuracy, but it is more likely to do so than the other method of picking the one whose colour matches that of your own inclination.

What of the more recent of the modern versions? Just a quick word or two to give you an impression of those I know.

From your point of view, as a student of the Word, seeking all the help you can glean from any source, the first consideration in assessing the value of a translation must be its accuracy. You want to know, as exactly as possible, what God says to you through His prophets and apostles. For this purpose there is no better tool than the Revised Version.

Yet the R.V. has never shown any sign of taking hold of the affections of the English-speaking, Bible reading public. To some extent this was because the N.T.

section was “stormed at with shot and shell” by Burgon, Cook and a number of others as soon as it appeared. Their criticisms were largely justified — the poor literary quality of many of the “improvements”, the vast number of trivial alterations of no consequence, and the prejudice of the translators in favour of textual readings of doubtful value. But the fate of the R.V. was settled by its literary inferiority to the well-loved New Testament of 1611. In place of the dignity and grace of the latter it too often offered a stilted awkwardness and ungracious pedantry. And so the R.V. died, so far as public acceptance went, almost before it was born; which was a pity in many respects because the O.T. section is a really first-class piece of work, and the N.T., once allowance has been made for its idiosyncrasies, remains a masterpiece of accurate, and even too accurate translation.

Then by all means get yourself a serviceable copy of the R. V., but do not omit to inscribe on its fly-leaf two important provisos:

- (1) In the O.T. the marginal reading is usually to be preferred to what is read in the body of the text.
- (2) In the N.T. (gospels especially), when the R.V. omits a phrase or hints in the margin (“some ancient manuscripts omit”; “many ancient manuscripts omit”) that certain words should be left out, such directions are usually suspect. In such cases it is safer to follow the A.V.

There are, of course, one or two familiar instances such as 1 John 5:7 where item 2 above clearly does not apply, but these can be counted on the fingers of one hand.

Without question, the best plan is to purchase an Interlinear Bible for regular use. This gives the A.V. text in bold type, but at the slightest difference between A.V. and R.V., even though it be only a difference of punctuation, it breaks up into two parallel lines of small type, and at such places the eye of the reader can readily compare the two. The marginal references in this Bible are probably the best set ever compiled. The Interlinear, however, has a very narrow margin. Interleaved copies, rather bulky and expensive, are probably available through The Christadelphian, 404 Shaftmoor Lane, Birmingham 28, for the one who insists on having plenty of space for notes.

It is a great pity that the Moffatt translation and the Weymouth New Testament have now gone out of fashion. The former is worth having for its lively phrasing and readability, and the latter for its fine faithfulness to the Greek original.

The New English Bible was given to the world with an impressive “flourish of cornets”, and immediately became a bestseller, read in London buses! It is in many respects an excellent piece of work. Its modern idiom, in contrast to the archaic style of the A.V., is deemed one of its great virtues. Too much has been made of this as an advantage to the modern reader. Those who find the sixteenth century style of the

seventeenth century A.V. unintelligible, or even a considerable hindrance, are not likely to be numbered in their thousands among the readers of this book. But certainly 2 Corinthians, where the A.V. reaches its lowest level, is born again a vigorous handsome child in the N.E.B.

Nevertheless A.D. Norris was a faithful mentor when he wrote in his review of the new translation: "This version is never to be trusted, If ever, as we read it, we come across an attractive thought, we must go to some reliable authority to find out whether it is correct. Otherwise there is the gravest danger that in using this version without discrimination we shall be found false witnesses of God." (The Christadelphian; August, 1961)

The Revised Standard Version (American) is comparable to the R.V. in many respects, and the same warnings about omissions in the gospels are necessary. The translation itself tends to be freer than the R.V., giving at times what is almost a paraphrase rather than a translation. These characteristics notwithstanding, the R.S.V. is a splendid piece of work, a tool of proven value.

At one time, the Revised Standard Version showed signs of commanding the loyalty of most of the Bible-reading public, but now (fashion again!) it is being edged into the background by the Jerusalem Bible and the New International Version. Considering that the former of these was done by a team of Catholics (note my prejudices!), it is a surprisingly competent job, and its copious footnotes are always worth attention.

There is little doubt in my mind that the N.I.V. is the Bible of the future. Although not without its faults (what version is?), its overall quality is very high. Also, with considerable foresight and enterprise its publishers have brought out an N.I.V. Study Bible and Concordance. So if you settle for this version, I would recommend that you go straight for these very helpful elaborations.

A word of advice here on the buying of Bibles, especially of the types just mentioned. Most Bibles are available in bindings of different qualities, the insides being exactly the same. Cloth bindings usually work out at about half the cost of high quality morocco. Yet if your Bible has a fairly big page, the floppy soft leather cover is more of a handicap to easy handling than a help. You are advised, therefore, to purchase the cloth bound Bible in the first instance. After two or three years when the cloth cover shows signs of disintegrating, whilst the inside still has years of life in it, take it to a reputable book-binder or even a capable amateur, if you know one, and tell him to put on it a good quality cloth cover (library binding), and for moderate cost you will then have a Bible to last you the rest of your days. But be sure to warn him against tampering with the inside in any way whatever, or his professional zeal will run away with him, and he will take the book completely to pieces, slice a valuable quarter inch off the inside edge of each page and then return it to you with a look of pride in his eye but without the same high degree of serviceability in the Bible.

The Living Bible and the Good News Bible are also useful in making private reading of the Scriptures easier going, but these are too paraphrastic to be depended on for accuracy. So also, I'm sorry to have to say, are the smooth-flowing and vivid readings to be found in J.B. Phillips' New Testament translations. This scholar, in his enthusiasm for making more evident some of the subtleties of the Greek phrasing, often fails to keep close enough to literality for our purposes.

If you are the sort that likes to have handy a word for word translation with the Greek text alongside, choice lies between the Emphatic Diaglott (done by an early Christadelphian) and Bagster's Interlinear Greek-English New Testament. With reluctance, it is the second of these which is recommended as a really first-class scholarly production. The drawbacks to the Diaglott are the inadequate Greek text on which it was based and the fact that the author was too enthusiastic a Christadelphian, so that at a number of crucial points he let his confidence in a Christadelphian interpretation colour a little too perceptibly the character of his translation. Of course King James's translators did this very obviously in many places where the doctrine of the Trinity or of the Devil was involved, so it wouldn't be fair to censure our old stalwart too severely on that score.

Summing up, all I can say is: in some respects all — I repeat, all — versions of Holy Scripture are at fault, but until you have acquired a fair amount of Greek, I would prescribe A.V., R.V., N.I.V.

16. “TYPES OF US”

“It is precisely because we take Scripture “literally”, that we are constrained to think it so deep and mysterious.” JOHN WILLIAM BURGON.

God’s history repeats itself. This is one of the Bible lessons there is no evading. Even if this fact were not plainly discernible to an average alert reader, there is the highest possible authority for believing that this mode of interpretation of sacred history is on right lines.

Melchizedek is picked out as a clear foreshadowing of the Messianic Priest-King; both in what is told about him, and in what was omitted—”without father, without mother, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life”—he is “made” (in the very shaping of the record concerning him) “like unto the Son of God”. (But why, one may well ask, is there no mention in Heb. 7 of Melchizedek “bringing forth bread and wine”, perhaps the most obvious point of all?)

In Galatians 4 there is that utterly unexpected allegory of Hagar and Sarah as types of the two dispensations—the one under Moses and the Law, and ‘the other the covenant of grace in Jesus Christ. Here, indeed, is a signal lesson from the Apostle Paul that, though the Bible means what it says, it assuredly means a good deal more. The secondary or typical meaning is there by design and is intended to be sought out by those who are reverently curious enough to investigate such things by a diligent comparing of Scripture with Scripture.

In 1 Cor. 10, the experiences of Israel are catalogued for the reader not only as history but also as history written in advance. For, says Paul “these things became types of us”. This is the literal translation of “these things were our examples” (1 Cor. 10:6). He mentions first the deliverance of Israel and the crossing of the Red Sea as a figure of baptism; then he appropriates the miraculous provision of water in the wilderness as another type—”that rock was Christ”. Jesus had already used the same idea in John 7:37-39 “If any man thirst, let him come unto me. And he that believeth on me, let him drink; as the Scripture hath said, Out of his belly (Christ the smitten, rock) shall flow rivers of living water.”

But not content with this, Paul then goes on to catalogue six incidents in the wilderness, in all of which “these things happened to them typically, and were written for the purpose of admonishing us”. Here is Paul bidding his readers study a certain part of the history of Israel as a series of types. But who takes heed and follows his bidding?

Stephen, “full of faith and of the Holy Spirit” so that “they were not able to resist the wisdom with which he spake”, had precisely the same approach to the narrative of Genesis and Exodus. His defence of the truth and claims of Jesus of Nazareth was

most ingeniously and convincingly done without so much as a mention of anything to do with the crucified prophet. All Stephen did was to rehearse the familiar facts about Joseph, the well-beloved son, whose indisputable claims were rejected by his brethren until through suffering and steadfastness he rose to high honour which in due time his brethren were only too glad to acknowledge.

Then Stephen proceeded on similar lines with the story of Moses, which his hearers knew as well as he did, only now they were being made to consider it from a point of view that was altogether new to them—as a foreshadowing of the divine birth, mission, rejection, and ultimate triumph of the Messiah. And since the portraits of Joseph and of Moses fit Jesus of Nazareth perfectly (and Stephen doubtless went into much more detail than the condensed account in Acts chapter 7 reveals), what other conclusion was possible than this—that Jesus was the Messiah. Or if not Messiah, then he was at least as important a type of Messiah as Joseph and Moses had been. And either way, what a condemnation of the men who had crucified him and who were now thirsting for the blood of Stephen!

But today what Christadelphian reasons from Scripture using the method which Paul and Stephen used? What Christadelphian today considers types of this kind a sufficient ground for a conclusive argument? Yet both Stephen and the men of the Sanhedrin evidently thought so, or they would not have cut short his speech with their vicious indignation.

Instead, today (shame on us!) the details of a type in Scripture are regarded by many as a spiritual frivolity, a kind of game in divinity all right for those who have that bent. But it is surely worth while to stop and consider whether the memory of Stephen and Paul, and Peter (1 Peter 3:20, 21) and Jesus and all four writers of the gospels, is honoured by a light-hearted attitude towards a method of Bible interpretation which, they were all accustomed to use.

But the proof of the pudding is in the eating. The way in which the types of Scripture have been exhibited has often been most inadequate and unconvincing, so that it is hardly to be wondered at that in the minds of some the subject has come to be viewed with mistrust. Any topic inadequately presented, whether in the Bible or out of it, is bound to be unconvincing and unattractive. If the examples expounded in the rest of this chapter do not strike a spark, the fault—it may be confidently assumed—lies in the presentation rather than in the subject itself.

When Paul wrote: “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all...”, he was making almost direct quotation from the Septuagint Version of Gen. 22:12, the story of the “offering” of Isaac. This suggests that he saw Abraham’s offering of Isaac as a figure of the greater sacrifice made of a more perfect Son by a Heavenly Father. This idea of Isaac, the seed of Abraham, runs right through the Genesis narrative. Thus:

Chapter 12: The Promise of a Seed who Chapter 13: shall inherit the Land.

Chapter 16: The seed, born after the flesh, who is refused inheritance.

Chapter 21: The miraculous birth of the true Seed. Chapter 22: The union of the Seed with his Bride.

This sequence is in itself a remarkable prophecy, authorized in its interpretation by Paul. But the student is now recommended to consider especially the details of chapters 22, 24 in the light of what has already been discerned. Here the type will be found to fill out in quite remarkable fashion—at least, it would be remarkable if it were in any other book.

In all generations the manna given in the wilderness has been seen as a type of the true Bread of God, given to sustain the life of His people. But the topic has been clouded and confused by the way it has been handled. There is no excuse for this, the more so since Jesus in his discourse on the Bread of Life (with its many references to the manna in the wilderness) gave a clear lead as to the mode of interpretation: “Labour not for the meat which perisheth (compare the manna given daily), but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed” (John 6:27).

Is it not clear that here Jesus is comparing himself, the Word of God, to the manna which never corrupted and which was laid up in a golden pot* before the Lord?

(*Note the implicit contradiction in these two words! The Greek word for “pot” means “an earthenware jar”.)

Then is it not equally clear that the manna which came every day and had to be gathered every day is a figure of the written Word of God which sustains the life of God’s pilgrim people in their wilderness journey?

Once this distinction has been grasped, the way is open for interpretation of the type with a satisfying fullness of detail. In perusing the record, the eye lights on such points as these:

The manna was given apart from any merit in the people.

It came from heaven,

to all alike, without distinction.

It was like a natural product, but greatly superior to it. (It is difficult to see how the Hebrew of Ex. 16:15 can mean: “What is it?” Far more likely the people confused it

with the natural commodity which they already knew by the name “manna”, and to which it bore a superficial resemblance.)

It was adequate for the needs of all.

It was white and pure and sweet, and pleasing to the taste.

It was given only in the wilderness; when the Land was reached, it ceased, and was indeed unnecessary.

It came with a manifestation of divine glory.

The very provision of it was a proof that “I am the Lord”.

It was suited to everyone’s appetite.

It was the responsibility of the men to gather it, each for his family (yet the women prepared it).

When properly shared out, none went short.

If stored unused, it corrupted.

With the rising of the sun, it melted away.

The taste of it resembled that of honey, and also that of “fresh oil”.

It could be prepared and served in a wide variety of ways. The ungodly despised it as “this light bread”.

The explanation of the typical significance of this lengthy catalogue of details (and of others also, not listed) is taken as read, because there is yet more to be explored in this subject.

The command to Moses was: “Fill an omer of it to be kept for your generations; that they may see the bread wherewith I fed you in the wilderness ... So Aaron laid it up before the Testimony, to be kept.”

But, it may be asked, if this golden pot of manna was laid up in the Holy of Holies which was entered by the High Priest only, and he only once a year, how could the people see its contents?

Clearly this could only happen if the pot of manna was brought out from time to time and displayed before them. And since the Holy of Holies was only entered on the Day

of Atonement, and by none but the High Priest, it must have been on this annual occasion that the instruction to Moses was fulfilled.

But this incorruptible manna was a figure of Jesus, the living Word of God (as he himself explained; John 6:27). How appropriate, then, that it should be displayed “unto them that look for him” (Heb. 9:28) in the day when sin is put away for ever and the great High Priest comes from the divine Presence to bless the people in the name of the Lord? The type is complete and satisfying, and its interpretation is backed by the highest authority.

The New Testament goes a good deal further than is usually supposed in supplying hints and directives concerning the types of the Old Testament. One recalls hearing the self-confident observation of one who thought the study of Biblical types a fantasy of the human mind: “If Joseph was intended as such a wonderful type of Christ, it is strange surely that the New Testament nowhere says so.” The originator of that bright remark cannot have read Stephen’s speech with very great attention—nor the rest of his New Testament which supplies no fewer than seven other separate hints that the story of Joseph is the story of Jesus.

Yet there was some excuse for the sceptical remark, for more often than not this interpretation of the life of Joseph has been so confused and unsystematic as to shed only an uncertain light on the great theme of redemption. It needs to be realized that Joseph is really a type of Christ twice over, with reference first to the Jews, and then to the Gentiles. Thus:

He is the good shepherd, beloved of his father, who testifies against his brethren. There is a great future predicted for him, and for that very reason he is despised and rejected by the others. He is consigned to the pit, which is later found to be empty. He is taken away to a far country, and long afterwards he is revealed in power to his brethren who now worship the one they had rejected.

And now again:

Joseph, a faithful servant, is tempted and tried, but yet sinless. He goes to “prison”, suffering with two others whose fates are predicted. He is exalted to glory and acknowledged as Saviour of the World, for his wise provision of Bread of Life. People out of all countries are saved by coming to him. And he marries a Gentile bride.

These are only bare outlines. They can be filled out to include a list of some sixty or more details. How many readers care to make the effort?

In another place the New Testament gives a remarkable hint of a type which would otherwise surely go for ever unsuspected.

“Quit you like men, be strong”, (1 Cor.16:13) Paul urged the Corinthians in a brief exhortation which appears to have no special connection with anything. But here marginal references take the alert student to a much-neglected corner of the Old Testament— 1 Sam. 4:9. And immediately the mind is curious to know why Paul should suddenly phrase his exhortation in words from such a place. Let it be remembered here that one of the major conflicts which faced the early church was the struggle with Judaism. Was the new-made Gentile convert to be brought under the yoke of the Law, or not?

It is remarkable, then, that in the story of the loss of the ark in battle the Israelites are represented as an apostate faithless nation, whilst the Gentiles are shown as having more faith than they in the working of Jehovah: “Woe unto us! Who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty Gods that smote the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness?” (The Philistines did not know their Bible stories as well as they might! This confusion provides a delightful touch of verisimilitude.)

Here, then is the picture which this chapter presents:

Faithless Israel, putting superstitious reliance on the tokens of divine preference in their midst, contend with the Gentiles for possession of Ebenezer (the Stone of Help). The Gentiles, showing both faith and courage, quit themselves like men and do not become “servants unto the Hebrews” (the Gospel triumph over the Law). Israel are put to the worse, the symbol of God’s Covenant passes into Gentile hands, and the outcome is the sudden end of a blind priesthood after a period of forty years (A.D. 30-70). The Glory is departed from Israel! And the herald of the outcome of the struggle is—a man of Benjamin!

No wonder that Paul took delight in this prophecy of himself and the work he was associated with. No wonder he quoted these words to his Gentile converts with such gusto: “Be strong, quit you like men, that ye be not servants to the Hebrews.” Doubtless when he was yet with them he had told them all these things. All they needed was a reminder.

But it was not only in Old Testament type that Paul saw his own great work foreshadowed. Doubtless in later days he often brooded on his remarkable experience at Lystra (Acts 14). There his preaching was wonderfully received by the multitude. The power with which he was endowed created wild enthusiasm, and he was hailed as divine. But through the plotting of hostile Jews, popular favour turned to hostility, and Paul was then dragged out of the city and left “dead” (was he actually dead?). But he recovered miraculously, and went away to another place, only to return later “confirming the souls of the disciples”. (There is no doubt about this being a miracle. Lystra to Derbe was thirty miles—a fair walk for a man who had been stoned! And the narrative here uses the usual Greek word for resurrection.)

The close parallel with the experience of his Lord would not escape his keen spiritual insight. Indeed, he wrote about it to these same brethren of Lystra and Derbe in the region of Galatia: “O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you ... before whose eyes Jesus Christ was openly set forth (R.V.) crucified among you?” And again: “I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus” (Gal. 3:1 and 6:17). The Galatian brethren had seen these things with their own eyes, besides hearing the gospel of Paul.

There is need for much care in this study of the types in Scripture lest one lose one’s sense of proportion and wander off into trivialities. In the thrill and enchantment of the subject it is easy to forget one’s powers of self-criticism. So, go carefully.

Bear in mind this warning, and you can spend a stimulating hour or two on the following types most of which are indicated by the New Testament:

- (a) Adam, “a figure of him that was to come” (Rom. 5:14). There is more in this than you would believe possible.
- (b) The destruction of Sodom. “As it was in the days of Lot, even thus shall it be...” (Luke 17:28, 30).
- (c) Jacob and Esau (Jew and Arab).
- (d) The story of Ruth (Christ and his Gentile Bride).
- (e) The leprosy of Miriam (the rejection of Israel).
- (f) The Passover. The detail here is most impressive, as also, in the number of New Testament comments.
- (g) The cities of refuge.
- (h) David and Goliath.
- (i) David and Absalom’s rebellion (several hints in the gospels).
- (j) The entire reign of Hezekiah—magnificent!
- (k) Jonah, of course.

It would be a mistake to assume that this list is exhaustive.

17. PARABLES AND MIRACLES

“As for the particular interpretation of God’s word, we may be bold to assume that our only sure teaching will be derived from a careful examination of those specimens of interpretation which it has itself furnished.” JOHN WILLIAM EURGON.

The parables and miracles of Jesus occupy such an important place in the gospels as to warrant separate consideration.

The starting point of all such study must be the Lord’s own exposition of the reason why he used parables: “Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but unto them (Mark: “those that are outside”) it is not given.” Thus the use of parables had a double purpose—to enlighten further those who were capable of being enlightened, and at the same time to mystify those who were already unreceptive or hostile.

To take the latter point first—the lack of explicit factual statement and the avoidance of clear definition of idea which parables involve was not only to baffle the unspiritual but was also calculated to leave hostile critics pawing the air. On the other hand the one who brings a willing contemplative mind can find more and more of value in the vivid forceful stories which the Lord brought forth “out of his treasury”. “For whomsoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I unto them in parables” (Matt. 13:12, 13; compare John 15:2).

The point is given renewed emphasis in Matthew’s own commentary: “And without a parable spoke he not unto them: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 13:34, 35). The context of the Scripture cited here emphasizes delightfully that the parable is the ideal form of instruction for the teachable child-like mind (Psalm 78:1-8), whilst at the same time leaving the wise of this world to grope unsatisfied.

There are two main schools of thought about the interpretation of parables—besides the school of no thought (“a parable is a heavenly story with no earthly meaning”).

So, first, the main question is: Should one seek a meaning for every detail in every parable? Or is a parable intended to convey one main idea or spiritual truth? In the latter case the greater part of the story must be regarded as constituting the outer clothing of the lesson involved, the frame round the picture. In the former the attempt to find meaning for everything often lands the student in a morass of difficulties or else comes to grief completely in some parables.

These difficulties notwithstanding, your present mentor is persuaded that one should

look for significance in every detail— and this for three fairly weighty reasons:

- (a) The most slender acquaintance with the gospels makes it evident that Jesus does not waste words. In the rest of his teaching every phrase tells. It is difficult indeed to believe that if his intention was to teach one main idea, he would not have conveyed that point by some other much more concise method.
- (b) So many of the parables, even at first reading, seem to shout for an interpretation which takes account of details; e.g. the vineyard, the wedding garment, the pounds, the ten virgins, and—strangely enough—the parable of the good Samaritan, which the context proclaims as being told in order to drive home one main lesson.
- (c) The remarkable fact tends to escape attention that the four gospels include something like two score parables but interpret only three—the Sower, the Tares, and the Drag Net (all in Matthew 13). Here, significantly enough, in the only parables where the Lord's own exposition is given, the method is quite simply that of supplying a meaning for each item in turn. The thing is reduced almost to what the mathematician likes to call a one-to-one correspondence:

“He that sows ... is the Son of man;” ...
“the field is the world” ...
“the good seed are the sons of the kingdom”
“the tares are the sons of the wicked”
“the enemy ... is the devil”
“the harvest is the end of the world”
“the reapers are the angels”

and so on.

This supplies a framework into which all the rest can readily be fitted. And similarly with the parable of the Sower, and of the Net.

This last point should surely be decisive, standing by itself. Jesus can probably be depended on to know which is the best method of handling his own parables. Mark 4:34 is also very significant: “But without a parable spoke he not unto them: and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples.” This reads strangely if a single sentence would adequately sum up each parable which he spoke to them.

The approach to parables, then, which is here recommended is that you come to them looking for a one-to-one correspondence between the facts of the story and the meaning of each detail. Start on the more obvious examples first, and satisfy yourself

that it exists there. Even in these instances some unexpected and very interesting points of exegesis arise. You can graduate later to those which present more difficulty.

And when you come to grief on them, what then? Have the grace to recognize that there are many things in the teaching of Jesus which you cannot expect to understand at the first or even the tenth reading. If you could understand clearly all the teaching of Jesus at first attempt, he would not be worth following. This is not obscurantism, but sheer common sense. For who would choose as Leader one who was on no higher level than himself?

Maimonides, the learned Jewish scholar, counselled: "Learn to say, I cannot understand this." An unwillingness to acknowledge that there are difficulties to which a full and satisfying answer is not immediately available has been the curse of much Bible study, even in the Christadelphian community. Far better to face problems as problems and to pray that in due time the grace of God will bring a fuller light. It may be an encouragement to some to know that a parable, which had presented serious difficulties to the present writer for at least twenty years, quite recently took on a new look thanks to a hint from the prophet Jeremiah.

The elucidation of the details in the parables of Jesus is an excellent opportunity to prove the truth of Bacon's aphorism: "Writing makes an exact man." You will find it worthwhile to try out the idea of one-to-one correspondence by means of a line drawn down the middle of the page. The parable of the fig-tree (Luke 13:6-9) sorts itself out like this:

Parable	Meaning
(1) The man	God
(2) The vineyard	The Land of Promise.
(3) The fig tree	Nation of Israel.
(4) Seeking fruit	Fruits of righteousness
(5) Three years	The ministry of Jesus
(6) Cut it down	to which the Jews did not respond
(7) It cumbered the ground	Preaching to Gentiles hindered, not helped, by Judaism.
(8) Let it alone this year also	Last year of ministry.
(9) I will dig about it, and dung it.	Christ's special appeal to the nation.
(10) If then no fruit,	Little hope of change
(11) Thou shalt cut it down	God's destruction of the nation in A.D. 70.

There are places here and there where the parables of Jesus may not be quite true to life, and always for a reason; e.g. the unrealistic rates of pay in the parable of the labourers, the cancelled debt uncanceled in the parable of the two debtors, the shepherd leaving ninety-nine sheep in the wilderness that he might find the one that is

lost, the rich man going to hell, not because he was wicked but because he was rich—and here in this parable the labourer saying to his employer: “Thou shalt cut it down”; the judgment on Israel in A.D. 70 was the work of God, not of Jesus (compare Matt. 22:7). The parable is exact in its symbolism, down to the smallest detail.

Another example of this technique was promised earlier in this chapter—the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Although the occasion required Jesus to establish only one main point by it, i.e. the answer to the enquiry: “Who is the neighbour I am to love?”, it will be seen that Jesus went a good deal further. His parable, when interpreted point by point, turns “neighbour” into “Neighbour”.

“A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves.” Jerusalem is the city of peace with God. Jericho was the city of curse and destruction (Joshua 6:26, 24), and there is hardly a more downhill road in all the world. Here, then, is a picture of the human race in its natural state. The evil work of the thieves shows each man as a prey to his own personal sins as well as his inherited condition. As this wayfarer was “stripped of his raiment, wounded and half dead”, so each sinner, whilst not yet dead, is in a dying and utterly hopeless condition. He can do nothing to help himself. His own robe of “righteousness” is torn from him. He is naked and helpless. The sacrificial and the moral law represented by priest and Levite only served to emphasize the hopelessness of his case. If they could not help him, who could? They also were going downhill. “By the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified ... By the Law is the knowledge of sin.”

But then came one who was despised and rejected of men—it does not say he was going downhill!—and this man “came where he was”. This unexpected saviour identified himself with the stricken man as closely as possible—Jesus shared the very nature of those he came to redeem. Contrast the priest and Levite “on the other side”—the Old Testament doctrine of holiness put a wide separation between God and the worshipper.

This saviour, moved with compassion (for “God so loved the world”) bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine. Here the gracious ministry of Jesus is clearly shown. The Samaritan would not travel equipped with bandaging. What wrapping for those wounds and that naked body except his own garments?

Then “he set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn”. Thus, without any effort on his part, the wretched castaway found himself where normally his saviour would have been. Thus the sinner becomes identified with his saviour (the figure of baptism?), and he is brought to a resting place where he is cared for. “In my Father’s house”, said Jesus, “are many abiding places.” There he “took care of him”—it is a picture of the continuing care of repentant sinners by their Saviour.

“On the morrow, when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host.” This “two pence” is the exact equivalent of the half-shekel of the sanctuary (Exod. 30:15) which was to be paid, under the Law, by all whether rich or poor, “to make an atonement for your souls”. Is it accident then that this particular sum of money found its way into the parable? Jesus might just as easily have said “one penny” or “three pence”. How remarkable that he did not!

And is it accident that this was “on the morrow” (and not “the same day” or “two days later”)? For this implies that the Samaritan slept and rose again before he went away—the Saviour was “raised again for our justification”. Could details be more apt than these? But there is more behind.

“Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again I will repay thee.” Here is the promise of a return, and also a guarantee that everything needful for the man’s restoration will be fully provided. The sacrifice of Christ is all-sufficient, not only to cover sins done aforetime but also those which call for the exercise of divine grace in the days to come.

And now comes one of the most subtle, and certainly one of the most lovely, touches of all.

Jesus had said: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God... and thy neighbour...”

“But who is my neighbour?”

For answer there followed the parable, ending with:

“Which now... was neighbour to him that fell among thieves?”

“He that showed mercy on him.” The Samaritan, representing Jesus, was “neighbour” to the wayfarer, representing the sinner. The parable is usually carelessly misread the other way round—that the sinner was “neighbour” to the Samaritan, and therefore the Samaritan loved him.

But again it can hardly be accident that Jesus phrased it the reverse way. The wayfarer is bidden love his “neighbour”, the Samaritan. The sinner is bidden love his Saviour Jesus. Is there any other commandment big enough to stand alongside: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God”? And if a man loves Jesus as he should, will he not honour his Saviour by loving his fellow men also, even as he did?

It is tempting to spend a good deal longer on this section, especially with a view to anticipating and removing some of the difficulties which you are sure to encounter in your attempts on some of the less straightforward parables. But it is time to move on,

for this little book is intended to show you what to attempt, and not to do it for you.

It has often been observed that in John's gospel the miracles of Jesus are always referred to as "signs". Then what was their significance? Again the question faces you—one main idea? Or are these miracles acted parables to be interpreted in detail? It is difficult to give a clear-cut answer to this question, but certainly some of these signs are significant all the way.

The miracle of the feeding of the five thousand, given in all four gospels, is quite remarkable in this respect. Consider the sequence of episodes associated with it as a picture of the work of Christ.

He separated his disciples from the world by water, taking them to the other side of Gennesaret. There in the wilderness they were joined by a great multitude. He taught them and then miraculously fed them with Bread of Life. It was a Passover meal ministered to them by the Apostles. Twelve baskets of fragments were carefully gathered up. Then came the night during which Jesus was in a high mountain, praying. In the meantime his disciples were storm-tossed on the water and in spite of every effort were making no progress. Then, when day was about to break, Jesus came to them walking on the water. As soon as he joined them, the storm ceased, "and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went". The people recognized him at once, and they brought the sick to him from "villages, and cities, and country", and he healed them.

Assuredly the feeding of the five thousand, and everything associated with it, was a "sign". No other book ever written has features of this sort.

The same approach to the other "signs" in John is not without its difficulties, but you should have a stimulating time with the healing of the blind man, the changing of the water into wine, the healing of the sick man at Bethesda, and perhaps also the miraculous draught of fishes. But do not stop there. In the other gospels many another miracle of Jesus almost asks to be regarded as a parable. There is a big field here wide open to you. As yet very little work has been done in it.

18. A SERIOUS KIND OF JOKE

- Pun: 1. noun. The humorous use of a word to suggest different meanings.
2. verb. To consolidate by pounding or ramming. Shorter Oxford Dictionary.

In modern times the pun as a form of wit is somewhat under a cloud. The double entendre — especially the shady one — reigns in its stead. Yet in the Bible the pun, especially in the form of a play on the meaning of a name, is to be found everywhere. Those without acquaintance with the original tongues can often trace them by a careful use of Young's Concordance. Isaiah's prophecy especially is a great quarry for them, but indeed these puns (Greek, paranomasia) are liable to turn up almost anywhere.

Everyone is familiar with the Lord's pointed allusion to the meaning of Peter's name: "But I say unto thee, that thou art Petros (masculine, a little stone), and upon this petra (feminine, solid rock) I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18). That Petros means "a little stone", and not the kind of foundation stone the Roman Catholic Church claims it to mean, is proved by Matt. 16:23 (a stumbling-stone), by Amos 9:9 (margin), to which Jesus was alluding in Luke 22:31, and by Isaiah 44:8, R.V.

Abigail saved David from violent action, which he would afterwards have repented of, by means of a pun: "Nabal (fool) is his name, and folly is with him" (1 Sam. 25:25).

Similarly by a play on the meaning of the name Paul persuaded Philemon (he surely did!) to receive back Onesimus, the runaway slave, without wrath: "which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me" (Philemon 11). Onesimus means "profitable"; but in this instance there was no actual pun — Paul switched to another word. (euchrestos, "useful" perhaps to show the difference between commercial profit and God's use). But there is something very much like Onesimus in "let me have joy in the Lord" in verse 20. (onaimen)

Nearly all Jacob's sons were named in a punning way and the birth of John the Baptist became the occasion of a triple allusion to the names of the family: "To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; the oath which he sware to our father Abraham" (Luke 1:72, 73). John means "the gift or grace or mercy of Jehovah"; and Zacharias means "Jehovah hath remembered"; and Elisabeth is "My God hath sworn with an oath".

How similar in spirit is Isaiah's exultant prophecy of the restoration of Zion under the figure of a marriage (it is the marriage of Hezekiah to a Gentile wife which is the basis of the figure): "But thou shalt be called Hephzibah (the name of Hezekiah's wife; 2 Kings 21:1), and thy land Beulah (married)"; (Isa. 62:4). But it remains an interesting problem for the experts to cope with why the names of Hezekiah and Hephzibah come side by side in the Hebrew text embedded in the heart of a prophecy

about Cyrus! (Isaiah 44:28 and 45 = 0)

Similarly there is a hidden play on the name Levite (one joined—to the Lord) in Isa. 56:3. And in 52:5: “Make them to howl” is a shattering parody of Hallelujah in the original text. There is not a page of Isaiah without instances of prophetic paranomasia.

Paul was great at it too. “For I am the least of the apostles”, he wrote, juggling with his own name, a word meaning “the wee one”. In Phil. 2:30 he did the same with the name Epaphroditus, named after Aphrodite, the gambler’s goddess of good luck: “He came nigh unto death, gambling his life, to supply your lack of service toward me.” And in Rom. 2:29 he rounded off the first section of his argument with an easily recognized play on the meaning of Judah, “Praised”: “He is a Jew... whose praise is not of men, but of God.”

It is possible to swing from one extreme of being all unaware of the existence of these Bible puns to the opposite extreme of being positively obsessed with them. Some expositors, including one or two famous names, have fallen into this trap.

For example:

“Jeremiah, what seest thou?” “I see a rod of an almond tree (Heb: SHAKED).”

“Thou has well seen: for I will hasten (Heb: SHOKED) my word to perform it” (Jer. 1:11, 12).

The expositor who draws attention to this double use of the same Hebrew root may think that he has explained the passage, but indeed he has not. God did not talk to His prophets in paranomasia of this kind just for the cleverness of it. There is more behind, as a glance at Numbers chapter 17 speedily reveals.

Similarly, in Amos 8:1,2:

“Amos, what seest thou?” “A basket of summer fruit (Heb: qayitz).”

“The end (Heb: qetz) is come upon my people of Israel.”

If this is a pun then it is a rather feeble pun, but not so feeble as the exposition which draws attention to the fact and then thinks it has done its job. Once again, if there were no Law of Moses to help the student on his way, his understanding of this vigorous symbolism would be completely hamstrung.

The interplay between a Hebrew name and its meaning, already illustrated earlier, is traceable in many an unsuspected place. The Book of Genesis has five separate incidents where there is meaningful allusion to the name of Isaac, as Young’s

Concordance speedily reveals under its headings tsechoq, tsachaq, but because of the over-simplified transliteration of the name Yitschoq (Isaac) it is easy to miss these. There are also as many instances of play on the name Ishmael.

In Micah 1 the doom pronounced by the prophet against cities of Judah loses much of its force in the Authorized Version. Moffat is invaluable here in showing how the lightning of the prophet's judgment crackles to illuminate the theme: "according to your name be it unto you."

Again, how much more force is imparted to a simple statement like: "Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld (Sodom)... as the garden of the Lord" (Gen. 13:10), when it is realized that Lot means "born with a veil". What a difference it makes to the reading of such verses as Psa. 107:35, 36 and Isaiah 41:18 and 53:2 and 25:5, 6 and 32:2 to know that "Zion" means "dry". And would not Daniel find a deep reassuring satisfaction in associating the meaning of his own name with the very last thing that God said to him?

19. A BOOK AT A TIME

“Nothing which a Harmony will ever bring to light can compensate for the neglect of what the Gospels severally teach.”

“Suffer the Bible to be its own interpreter. Let men for a while be content to read and to wonder ... Then, indeed, a judicious commentator will be of real use. At present, he would only perplex and mislead.” JOHN WILLIAM BURGON.

Over and above day-to-day Bible reading, any student of Scripture worth his salt will keep going a systematic study of some book of the Bible, to which—most days—some time will be given, if it be only a quarter of an hour. There is no better way of becoming really familiar with the Bible.

Many ecclesial Bible Classes make this kind of thing the staple diet of their sessions—an excellent feature, which should always command your own support. But alas, what diversity there is to be seen in the methods adopted!

To choose a textbook or commentary on a given book of Scripture and then devote a long session to the wearisome reading from these volumes is a prodigal waste of God-given opportunities. Such are not Bible Glasses at all but Eureka classes, Robert Roberts’ Law of Moses classes, John Carter’s Gospel of John classes.

Let there be no misunderstanding here. The man who says that the books just mentioned, and other such, are profitless is a fool. But this is not the same as studying the text of Holy Scripture itself. With the experience behind him of several years of classes of this particular character, the present writer has no hesitation whatever in saying that the same amount of time given to the direct study of the text of The Book itself will result in much greater profit. Even if the harvest of ideas is not so great, the sustained attention to the very words of Scripture, as distinct from what has been written about it, will gradually develop a grasp and insight which thenceforward are part of one’s personal equipment. In course of time this is bound to mean greater efficiency in handling the Word. Let it not be forgotten that your ambition as a Bible student should not rest content with familiarizing yourself with what others have achieved in this field. You must become so equipped personally that at least as much can be accomplished through your own efforts. In this field personal achievement far outweighs in value what others might do for you

Again, it has to be emphasized that the labours of those who have gone before are valuable and should in no wise be neglected. But they should be conned at home, and the fruits of such reading brought to the class for the benefit of the rest. This, and nothing higher than this, is the proper function of our standard textbooks. The Bible, and the Bible only, must be the authority at all our meetings.

Again, whilst on this theme, when your Bible Class is studying a book of the Bible—or any other topic, for that matter, but especially at such times—see that you spend some time on the allotted portion yourself before leaving home, so that when the meeting begins there are already certain clear issues in your mind which you would wish to see resolved before the evening's study is concluded. Or it may be that you will light on some useful discovery which you will then be able to contribute to the discussion for the benefit of the rest. The tacit assumption in most Bible Classes is that the speaker will do—has done—all the work, and the rest are there to have it imparted to them. It is a thousand pities that the tradition has not become established that all conscientious members of a Bible Class will make their own contribution before they even get to it. How many can compare in this with the example of the enthusiast who over a period of years prepared for the class as though he were to be the speaker every time it met?

Some excellent results have been achieved in some classes by inviting a speaker of special ability in exposition to make a concentrated study of some book of Scripture that he might then give the rest the benefit of his researches in a weekly session right through the winter. Where this is possible, it can do a vast amount of good. But, again the warning is necessary, it can do untold harm by encouraging the rest in laziness. The example of parson and congregation in the churches should be sufficient to emphasize the dangers.

It cannot be too strongly emphasized that no amount of Bible study by other people can ever compare in the benefit imparted with what you do for yourself.

It is assumed, then, that you mean to attempt the study of a book of Scripture, devoting on an average anything from 15 to 60 minutes a day to it. But which book?

Why is it that young Christadelphians always want to fly before they can crawl? Why will they insist on getting bogged down immediately with the complications of Revelation, why will they assume so blithely that John's gospel and his first epistle are well within their grasp just because the words are all monosyllables? What makes them think that in their early years their digestions can tackle Paul's Romans and Ephesians, the cream of his maturity? (In the Old Testament, Psalms and Isaiah and Job assuredly belong to the same category.)

Everybody makes this mistake. How effective will these paragraphs be in warning others away from it? One's own early-ambitions in Bible study followed the same pattern - first, three years of a Eureka class, then followed personal onslaughts, mostly ineffective, on Zechariah, Leviticus, the Psalms, and thence to rewarding years on the Four Gospels.

Far better to start on books which are mostly narrative. Here the same degree of concentration on detail and argument is not called for, and the story helps to carry you

on. Also, choose short books of the Bible to begin with. Ruth, Jonah, Thessalonians, Timothy are good choices. And be sure to come to Genesis, Exodus, the Gospels and Acts fairly early on.

And how best to go about it?

First, assemble together by the most honest means at your disposal half a dozen good commentaries and books of reference dealing with the subject of your choice. Take care to leave all of these unopened until you have concluded your own detailed laborious combing through the first chapter, at least.

Certainly do not spend much time reading through turgid “Introductions” designed to fix your main ideas about the book before you have studied it for yourself. And in so far as they are intended to supply “background” information, they are mostly useless. If you are not already fairly familiar with the text of the book selected, read it through once at a sitting before you start in on chapter 1.

As already recommended, leave the commentaries severely alone until you have tried your hand at the first chapter untrammelled by other people’s wisdom. When you have struggled alone for an hour or two you will be in a better position to appreciate how little many of these commentators themselves know.

There is a much greater reason for this recommendation. Experience shows that if you go to the books first to see what they have to offer, your own powers of analysis of and reasoning about the text are thereby frozen—you will not have an original thought of any sort in your head; you are already in a strait-jacket of other people’s ideas; you have put on their spectacles and can only see what they want you to see.

So get to work on the text for yourself, without any adventitious aids other than marginal references and a good concordance. Go through every verse, as with a small-tooth comb. Every unusual word, every remarkable phrase, every link with the context, every echo of some other similar passage must set you thinking and asking questions and investigating. Use any and every method of approach which you have found applied in this volume, but especially that of asking a question about every detail.

Suppose, for example, you are going to work on Ruth chapter 1. The first five verses are enough for your first bite. Here are a dozen questions of the sort which should spring to your mind in as many minutes as you patiently read them through four or five times at least:

(1) Why does the book begin with “and” (R.V.)?

(2) “When the judges ruled.” Where in the four hundred years does the Book of Ruth

fall?

- (3) “Famine.” What would be the cause of it? And is there any connection with the meaning of Bethlehem?
- (4) Why Bethlehem-Judah? Did any other place in Judah carry this suffix?
- (5) Why did they emigrate to Moab and not to Egypt, the granary of the ancient world?
- (6) And how is one to square this move to Moab with the oppression by Moab (Judges 3:12)?
- (7) Are there any other instances of taking refuge in Moab?
- (8) Did Elimelech do the right thing in going to Moab? And if not, what should he have done?
- (9) What are the meanings of the names in this paragraph?
- (10) Why are they called Ephrathites? (It will be surprising here if your concordance does not land you in some remarkable and complicated researches in 1 Chronicles.)
- (11) Should these Israelite boys have married out of their race? What alternative? What religion would these wives follow?—any details accessible?
- (12) Ten years married, and no children. Marriage to Boaz (an old man—can you prove it?) immediately fruitful. Comment?

When you have sorted out your own conclusions about all such points of interest as these—or have had the grace to say: “I can’t make sense of that” or “There ought to be a more convincing explanation than this which I have found” or “I just don’t know what this means”, then—and not until then—turn to your commentaries and see what they have to offer. You will find that for the most part they carefully ignore the points on which you need their help, but spend lots of time and space on matters of no conceivable use to anybody. Nevertheless, here and there you will find something useful. But increasingly, as you become more experienced, you will find that the best function of a commentary is to provoke further investigation on lines which you would otherwise not have considered. Probably your conclusions will be vastly different from those of the commentator, but you have to thank him for setting you off in the right direction.

It will be a strange thing indeed if your researches do not also set you talking about

various points of interest which have arisen in the course of your researches. There is no need to put the brake on such an inclination. Talking about things usually tidies up your ideas and often helps further development of them. And the fresh point of view, and maybe criticisms, which others bring to bear will show up any weaknesses. Especially is it true that the unsolved problem often solves itself in the very process of re-stating it to somebody else. Then, too, there is a fair probability that when you talk about your Bible study your enthusiasm will be infectious. And the more people you can infect the better. So by all means let your Bible study overflow into your conversation.

20. “LET THEM ALONE: THEY BE BLIND LEADERS OF THE BLIND”

“I find in the scripture, that they which walk in their carnal birth, after the manner of the children of Adam, cannot understand the things of the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2).

WILLIAM TYNDALE.

“The Bible does not yield its treasures to its critics.” JOHN CARTER.

This chapter is not a long one, but it is important. Please read it with care.

You will have noticed, doubtless, the many resemblances and parallels which exist between the Bible, the Word of God, and Jesus, the WORD of God. No doubt Jesus is frequently referred to in the New Testament by this title because he was and is the fullest revelation of the Father’s character and purpose, His will and instruction, that it is possible for mortal men to receive (John 1:1, 1 John 1:1, Rev. 19:13; but also Luke 1:2 (The R.V. removes the second comma here—correctly, according to the shape of the Greek sentence), Acts 10:36 (?) and 20:32 (?), Heb.4:12 (where the context strictly requires reference to Jesus), James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:23, 25; Col. 1:25-27(?), Rev. 6:9).

This similarity between the written Word and the living Word is doubtless designed—or should one say inevitable?

As Jesus was both human and divine in his origin (two parents), so also is the Book that tells about him. The Bible became in course of time many books in one; Jesus also is Many in One. Compare the pomegranate on the hem of the robe of the High Priest—many seeds in one seed. Compare also the designed ambiguity about “the Seed” (singular or plural) in the Promises to Abraham. The Bible is the Book of Books, as Jesus is the Man and is destined to be King of kings.

To a mere superficial judgment, both the written Word and the living Word have appeared outwardly unattractive. And both have received the same indifferent or hostile reception from men. Yet efforts to destroy the one and the other have utterly failed.

The Bible exposes a man’s thoughts and motives, his character and aspirations, as nothing else can. Jesus likewise “knew what was in man”, he could read a man’s character and a man’s need at a glance.

The Book is the power of God unto salvation; it “effectually worketh in you that believe”. That same power of Christ is alive in every man who is his.

The written Word is a judge of all human actions; it provides an imperishable standard by which to assess all human behaviour. And the word that Jesus spoke shall judge a

man in the last day, when he is Judge of all.

Such things as these are evident as soon as they are mentioned, and from them an extremely important conclusion follows.

Would you dream of coming to any of the sayings or actions of Jesus critically? Would you interpret his cursing of the fig-tree or his withering denunciation of the Pharisees as outbursts of temper? Would you construe his hiding from his enemies or his tears in Gethsemane as tokens of cowardice? Would you deem him inconsiderate or unkind in his austere answer to the man who said: "Suffer me first to go and bury my father"?

Then ought you not to hesitate a long time before you adopt such an attitude towards the written word of God?

Yet criticism of the Bible is commonplace today. Even youngsters still desperately trying to achieve a few O-level passes in their school examinations are encouraged to read this greatest masterpiece of the ages (putting the Bible now at its lowest level) with a superior condescending attitude, as though they can consider themselves superior to the unscientific ignorance of men of God and can afford to be patronizingly discriminating about a Book which has nurtured the highest ideals of many a generation.

And yet there is something marvellously plausible about modernism's approach to the Bible. By a convenient ignoring of inconvenient facts it is possible to displace the Bible from its rightful position as the supreme authority upon earth to that of a collection of ancient writings where one may choose the good and refuse the not-so-good, according to personal taste and judgment. The moral consequences of this turning away from the Bible's claims to authority are more evident every year in a civilization which now knows itself to be on a desperately slippery slope.

Then for your own sake, and for Christ's sake, keep as far away from modern criticism of the Bible as possible. There will be times when it will thrust itself upon your attention, and when it does on no account should you shrug it off, for you are called to "anoint your eyes with eye-salve" (Rev.3:18), not bury your head in the sand. At such times, face the issues squarely, but always with the attitude: "I know I have the best of reasons for depending on the Bible, so I owe it the benefit of the doubt until the case against it is completely established." Such a frame of mind is only reasonable. You do not throw overboard your best friend just because someone whom you are not too sure about breathes a word of criticism against his character. And when the need arises, the Bible will vindicate itself in ample fashion.

In your earlier years, then, until your grasp of the Bible is reasonably comprehensive, hold modern criticism at arm's length. It is more dangerous than open atheism.

Especially should you avoid books which are written with that approach.

Some years ago, a conference of young Christadelphians spent several sessions on a certain Bible study and were issued with duplicated notes to help them continue the good work at home. Excellent! But not so excellent was the recommended bibliography to guide their further reading, for it included at least one book which could have had a disastrous effect. Protest and reproach to the one whose oversight had led to this recommendation became an obvious duty. But that did not recall the injudicious advice. One was left hoping that not many took notice of this unfortunate guidance.

It would be a pity if this chapter were to leave readers with the impression that they are to shut themselves up behind convent walls, and stubbornly refuse entry to any thoroughgoing honest attempt to grapple with the main problems which fuller knowledge of the Bible involves. The plea is rather for a postponement of a consideration of any critical approach to the Bible until you are better equipped to assess its value. Had the present writer read the book just mentioned when he was twenty, the probability is that his faith in the Bible would have died or at least would have carried a scar for the rest of his life. Today he can read the book with profit (and sometimes with amusement), picking and choosing between what is worthwhile and what is shoddy.

Indeed, the modernists can be turned into valuable allies in one's own Bible study in a rather unexpected fashion. Some of the modern commentators have sieved and analyzed the text of prophets and apostles with an attention to the minutest detail such as often shames those who believe these inspired writers more than they do. And by "virtue" of their particular approach, these men have turned up many difficulties and problems which the non-specialist Bible believer often fails to notice. Such things are promptly catalogued by them as evidences of late date or composite or pseudonymous authorship. Too, with your confidence in the Bible as the Word of God, know that such conclusions must be wrong. Is there another explanation? And of course there is, though very often a great deal of minute investigation is necessary before the thing is cleared up.

Experience shows that very frequently an encounter with a Bible difficulty is only the prelude to a stimulating discovery and a better appreciation of the Book. In your later days the critics can be invaluable in this respect. They will supply you with problems galore. As you discover the answers you will thank God that even those who criticize His Word can be turned to His glory.

One last point about modernism. It is almost universal experience that when a man becomes a convert to modernism, he ceases to convert others to Christ. The very will to convert dries up within him. This has been observed in individuals and in communities over and over again.

List the outstanding preachers of the gospel in your own personal experience. Not one of them has any manner of sympathy with Biblical criticism.

At the universities the Student Christian Movement, sympathetic to the modern critical approach to the Bible, has little interest in evangelism as such. The Inter-Varsity Fellowship, fundamentalist, is vigorous in that field.

In overseas missions the same distinction does not have to be sought. Missionaries with modernist views are rare, and the missionary zeal of such few as there are is not exactly exuberant. It is the whole-hearted Bible believer who has the will to convert and the power to do it.

When Jesus said: "Ye shall know them by their fruits", he was talking about preaching and conversion. Look at the context and see for yourself. And then learn the lesson with regard to modernism.

21. IT ALL DEPENDS ON YOUR FRAME OF MIND

“As the student pursues his course of continuous reading he will light upon thousands of incidental harmonies, analogies, allegories and signs, directing him in the way of life, and adding continually to a mental store already large enough for his needs.”

ISLIP COLLYER.

“It is not at all incredible that a book which has been so long in the possession of mankind should contain many truths as yet undiscovered?” BISHOP BUTLER.

So far this little book has dealt almost exclusively with what might be called the technique of Bible study—the various methods by which an accurate understanding can be built up. Yet, be your application to the Bible never so systematic and painstaking, it may fail in achievement if certain other factors are not present, and these have to do with your attitude of mind more than the methods you adopt or the books you refer to.

The first of these is an intense conviction that the Bible is a limitless mine of treasure. There can be no end to the possibilities of instruction to be got from it.

Yet the assumption is often made that the stalwarts in our earlier generations have already discovered all that is of value, and that therefore it simply remains for us in later days to sit at their feet and absorb what they can teach. Such an approach, so much akin to the sterile traditional Jewish method of quoting the opinion of Rabbi So-and-So and the learned Somebody Else, can hardly be too severely censured.

This is no derogation of the value of their work. Indeed, were they here among us again, and able to read this sentiment they would doubtless applaud it vigorously, for they themselves worked with the tacit assumption that their search for Bible truth would be increasingly rewarded. This generation has inherited from them a corpus of First Principles of Bible doctrine which none can question—it is all too firmly and solidly planted on an unshakeable foundation, the over-all teaching of the Scriptures. Such things, which made up the main part of the life work of Dr. John Thomas, constitute the ordinary stock-in-trade of young Christadelphians by the time the age of twenty-five has been reached (in many cases, a good deal earlier). Shame on those for whom this is not true.

The value of this “flying start”, a high Christian privilege, is rarely appreciated as it should be. For it means, in effect, that by that age you already have had laid for you the foundation which the early brethren, and John Thomas especially, had only succeeded in laboriously constructing for themselves by the time they had reached middle-life. It is then a matter of simple commonsense that you should be able to go further than they. When you stand on other men’s shoulders, you can reasonably expect to see further than they.

But it is also well to remind yourself that any discoveries in Scripture which are made beyond what your forefathers achieved will harmonize with those already made. The Bible does not contradict itself; and since the principles which form the foundation of your baptismal faith are so solidly established, it must be that additional discoveries will harmonize with them. In fact, this provides a plumb-line, easy and simple to use, by which to test the quality of anything you may find for yourself. If there seems to be conflict with some foundation principle already learned, then look again—analyse and check the details afresh, scrutinize with great care every step in reasoning, until either your new discovery finds its place harmoniously alongside the rest or discordantly in the waste-paper basket.

With guiding principles such as these, there is no reason why you should not reach out beyond your already well-established boundaries of Bible understanding.

But it would be a mistake to assume that this must mean spending your time and effort in the more enigmatical parts of Scripture such as the book of Job, the prophecies of Ezekiel, the complexities of Revelation. When Jesus, unrecognised, walked to Emmaus with two of his disciples, “beginning from Moses and from all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself”. But Moses and the prophets from which Jesus began covers all the Scriptures known in those days (Luke 16:29, 31; Acts 26:22 and 28:23). The words, then, seem to imply that first Jesus made a rapid survey, quickly touching on the more obvious places where scarcely any explanation was called for, and that then he began again, explaining more fully in the places where detailed exposition was called for.

The effect of all this was: “Did not our heart burn within us... while he opened to us the scriptures?” (In Acts 17:3 the second Greek verb probably means “setting side by side” of prophecies and the facts fulfilling the prophecies).

Doubtless many of the Old Testament passages which Jesus alluded to were already well known to those two wayfarers. As he began to quote, they would be able to finish the quotation. Yet only now for the first time in their lives was the veil withdrawn and they saw the truth which had been there all the time. The fog had been in their minds, not in the Scripture.

All students of the Word of God have this Emmaus experience. With some it happens often. Therefore, never assume that you have fully understood any passage in the Bible, no matter how familiar you may be with it, no matter how much time you have spent poring over it, no matter how profound the teaching you have already found in it. There may still be further instruction awaiting you there.

Take three simple examples of single verses which you already know and understand.

The curse on the serpent in Eden included also a promise of a Redeemer: “And I will

put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed, and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Genesis 3:15). You already understand, doubtless, that here is a prophecy of the conflict between Jesus the Seed of the Woman, and the serpent power of Sin. The bruise in the heel symbolizes what Jesus suffered and recovered from in the course of the fight. The blow in the head indicates the utter destruction of the power of Sin in the world. All this you know. Yet is it possible that there is more than this?

The verse has three pairs of balanced phrases

(1) Thee (the serpent)	The Woman
(2) Thy seed	Her Seed
(3) Thy head bruised	by her Seed
(4) The heel of her Seed	bruised by the Serpent

Another scrutiny reveals that they are not really balanced phrases. The third and fourth are out of balance. On the basis of the first two one would expect:

The head of thy seed (serpent’s seed) shall be bruised by the Seed of the Woman;

and

Thy seed (the seed of the serpent) shalt bruise the Seed of the Woman in the heel.

Why, then, does the second half of the verse not follow the pattern of the first half? The answer is surely this: It was necessary to indicate the victory of Christ not only in himself and in his own time but in all generations right from Adam. In other words the merits of the sacrifice of Jesus are efficacious to cover all sin from the very beginning. He bruised not only the seed of the serpent, but he utterly vanquished the Serpent itself.

This same truth concerning the power of Christ’s sacrifice to cover “sins done aforetime”, a truth so vitally important to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all who died in faith before the appearing of Christ, is emphasized also in the New Testament: Rom. 3:25, Heb. 9:15. And here, surely, is the explanation of the mystery of the resurrection along with Jesus of disciples who had died during his ministry (Matt. 27:52, 53). This marvellous happening was needful to emphasize the all-embracing timeless scope of the Lord’s work of sacrifice as being not only prospective as far even as this generation, but retrospective also, as far back as to Adam. That it was done by means of such a prodigious miracle is a measure of the importance of the principle involved.

Here is yet another illustration of this need for an unflagging assumption that even the most familiar Scripture may have more instruction to impart: “There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse...” (Isa. 11:1). How many pause to ask why in this

majestic prophecy Messiah, the Son of David, should be referred to as “out of the stem of Jesse”?—Jesse, about whom nothing is known except that he was the father of David. So many of the Messianic prophecies speak of the coming King as Son of David. Then why not “out of the stem of David”? Kay, the prince of Victorian commentators, put his finger on the answer: “Out of the (hewn down) stock of Jesse indicates that Messiah was to come at a time when the once ennobled line of David had sunk to the level of common life. The royal house of Zion had fallen back upon the family domain in Bethlehem.” (Hence also Micah 5:2, where the same truth is implied.) This was true of Jesus in his first advent—the Davidic line existed, but without royalty; and at his coming again there will be no royal line established in Jerusalem, even though there be a state of Israel in existence. His kingship will be as much a new beginning as was the exaltation of David, son of Jesse.

Yet another familiar prophecy where the overtones can be all too easily missed: “The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool” (Psa. 110:1).

It is a Psalm of David, in spite of what the critics may say, because Jesus said so, and David is the prototype. Only once is David himself described as sitting in the presence of Jehovah, and that was when he went into the sanctuary to offer prayer and praise for the great Promise which had just been made to him through the prophet Nathan (2 Sam. 7:18). Now he writes of one greater than himself sitting at God’s right hand—for what purpose if it be not for prayer, like David his forefather? No wonder, then, that the psalm goes on to describe this Davidic Messiah as also “A priest after the order of Melchizedek”, a king-designate praying for his people.

There can never be an end to this kind of searching. The most familiar passages are liable to take on an altogether fresh appearance at any moment. So on the occasions when an almost too familiar Scripture—Gen. 3; Psa. 72; Acts i; 2 Peter 3; 2 Tim. 3—is being read in the course of a Sunday evening meeting, this should in no wise be taken as a gratuitous opportunity for mind-wandering, but rather as a challenge to discover, in readings with which you are over-familiar, some new thought or instruction. It can happen more often than you think.

But this experience of unfolding truth comes to those who hunger and thirst for it. “In the sweat of thy face shall thou eat bread”—but first there must be sweat. “Much food is in the tillage of the poor”—but there must be tillage. “The statutes of the Lord... are sweeter than honey and the honey comb”—but there must be a palate that can properly appreciate such a delicacy.

So be alert for any signs in yourself of boredom or weariness. When the disciples shared out the bread at the feeding of the multitude, the more they distributed, the more it multiplied. The widow’s cruse of oil kept on pouring as long as there was a vessel to receive it. Jesus discoursed to Mary because it was she who sat at his feet.

With the best intentions in the world and a sense of service that was wholly praiseworthy Martha could not lay on for him as good a meal as Mary did, for the eagerness with which Mary received his word imparted a stimulus to Jesus which, one may be sure, far outlasted the benefits of Martha's kitchen. And what Mary received that day was hers for ever.

Is it not appropriate, then, at this point to remind readers of a simple and extremely worthwhile device by which iron may sharpen iron?

During the drab days of the Second World War there were often held in the Midlands of England what, for want of a better term, might be called Bible parties. Ten or fifteen Bible students would foregather at the home of one of them. The programme could hardly be less elaborate. Each brother was expected to come prepared to talk for (say) three to ten minutes about his latest enthusiasm in Scripture, the most recent product of his Bible study (it was, of course, tacitly assumed that each of the brethren was addicted to real Bible study and would have some treasure to display). It was all done in most informal style. After each contribution there would be a few minutes for discussion and questions. Then on to the next. In those sombre days of tight rationing there often had to be a pooling of resources out of the kitchen as well as the study, so that the gatherings might also be cheered by the sharing of another sort of food. But the fellowship at those Bible parties was, first and last, a fellowship in the truth of the Word.

It seems a great pity that such wholesome and profitable times came to an end. Will no one make an effort to get them going again?

22. CHRIST IN ALL THE BIBLE

“The scriptures spring out of God, and flow unto Christ, and were given to lead us to Christ, Thou must therefore go along by the scripture as by a line, until thou come at Christ, which is the way’s end and resting place.” WILLIAM TYNDALE.

Whatever part of the Bible your reading takes you to, one of your foremost preoccupations must be a constant look-out for two people—Jesus Christ and yourself. This chapter is primarily about the former, and although as chapters go it will be reasonably short, it could with little trouble be filled out to the size of a very large volume.

There can be no doubt at all that the work of Jesus, in one of its many aspects, is to be read all through the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament—by direct prophecy, which cannot possibly apply to any but Jesus; by prophecy which was occasioned by the circumstances of the prophet’s own day; in the form of “apocalyptic” (to appropriate a bit of modern theological jargon); in legal enactment or moral principle; in the symbolism of tabernacle and temple, and in the unique ordinances associated with them; in type and shadow. “Divers manners”, truly; the phrase of Heb. 1:1 is eloquent.

It is necessary then, first of all, to warn against an approach to the Old Testament on these lines: There are places in the Bible here and there where Christ is foretold very clearly (e.g. Psalm 22; Jer. 23; Isa. 9 and 53; Daniel 9), but those are in a category to themselves; they are about Christ, and the rest is not, but is about the people and circumstances of the time when the books were written.

Such a point of view is woefully inadequate. It badly underestimates the place which Christ has had and does have in the divine programme. If he was “foreordained before the foundation of the world” and if he has “in all things the pre-eminence”, it is only reasonable to expect that God’s purpose in him will appear in all aspects of the divine handiwork.

In the world of Nature this is true—for there is no part of Genesis chapter I which is not given some symbolic reference to Jesus in the New Testament. Similarly the acts of God in the history of Israel, and the revelation imparted through Israel, can fairly confidently be expected to find their highest meaning when read as having relevance to the main idea—the redemption of the human race through Christ, and the glory of God in him.

There are, admittedly, parts of the Old Testament where you will not be able to maintain this thesis as fully as you could wish. However, perhaps already this volume has supplied one or two reasons for believing that Christ as the theme of all Scripture is somewhat more credible than you originally thought. It is a wholesome attitude of

mind to believe that Holy Scripture contains many profound teachings which at present you are quite unable to appreciate. Isaac Newton regarded his own epoch-making discoveries in mathematics and science as just one or two beautiful pebbles found on the shore of a limitless ocean. The same humble recognition of one's own limited outlook on the Bible most becomes the seeker of God's Truth. Better than to say "I have found it" is to say "Alas, what a lot there must be which I haven't found! Lord, open Thou mine eyes to perceive..."

It is something of an eye-opener as to the relationship of Christ to the Old Testament to consider the book of Genesis. The following list may be in the nature of a revelation to some readers.

Genesis as a foreshadowing of God's Purpose in Christ:-

1-3	Adam.
3:15	Promise of the Seed.
4:1-16	Abel and Cain (?)
6	Noah.
7	The Flood.
9:26-27	The Blessing of Noah.(?)
12,13,17,22	The Promise of the Seed to Abraham.
14	Melchizedek.
16	Hagar and Sarah.
18, 19	Destruction of Sodom.
22	Offering of Isaac.
24	Marriage of Isaac (?)
28	Bethel, and the Promise to Jacob.
31	Jacob's return to the Land.
32	Jacob's wrestling with the angel.
37-45	The story of Joseph.
38	Judah and Tamar.
48	Joseph's two sons.
49	Jacob's prophecies.

For all except those marked (?) there is definite warrant elsewhere in Scripture for a typical or prophetic interpretation over and above the ordinary literal meaning.

It is deliberately left to the reader as an exercise in Bible-searching, using marginal references and concordance, to find the Messianic interpretations which other Scriptures supply.

It would be very surprising if this catalogue were exhaustive. But even as it stands, it is not a little impressive. One of its remarkable features is this—a big proportion of these places in Genesis which the Bible itself (mostly the New Testament) uses with

reference to Christ would never have been given that kind of meaning by modern readers, if the Bible itself had not led the way. From which fact again it is surely wise to learn how widely different are the best methods of Bible interpretation from those which come naturally to a twentieth-century reader. Our modern education and knowledge are not unmixed blessings.

But you may be saying to yourself: “This kind of argument is hardly fair, for a book has been deliberately chosen where there are lots of Messianic anticipations. It is not like this all through the Old Testament.” The objection is a reasonable one. Then instead let two other very unlikely books of the Old Testament be considered—2 Kings and Jeremiah. These have been selected without two minutes’ prior thought. And before any start is made in examination of these, it must be admitted that comparatively few Bible readers would deem either of these books rich in Messianic material.

Christ in 2 Kings

1:2, 3 These verses show the fantastic nature of the charge against Jesus in Matt. 10:25. Baalzebul could only bring a man to death, not to health (verse 4).

1:10 Marginal references take one to Luke 9:54, 55 and thence to Heb. 12:29; 2 Thess. 1:9; whilst 2 Tim. 1:16, 17 R.V. margin may even be an allusion to this place.

2:9 Elisha’s double portion is found to express itself in sixteen recorded miracles as against eight of Elijah’s. And since Elijah is a figure of John the Baptist (Matt. 17:12), who does the greater and less austere Elisha foreshadow? (cp. “that prophet”: John 1:21); cp. verse 15 with Mark 9:15, after the Transfiguration.

Ch. 3 Suggests Joel 3:12.

Ch. 4 There is surely something typical here. Gehazi goes before with the rod, but cannot heal. The woman puts her faith in Elisha himself. When he comes, he stretches himself (and yet contracts himself) upon the child, adds his intercession, and at his second coming resurrection takes place. And again (verse 33-44), there is a dearth in the Land, the wild vine is gathered, a means of death to many; but the food is made wholesome by Elisha’s meal; then loaves and corn are miraculously supplied.

Ch. 5 The Gentile cleansed and the unworthy servant punished with an outlawing disease (which is later cured; ch. 8) suggest the grace of God to Gentiles and Jews. Some of the details are very impressive.

Ch. 6:1-7 Another type here probably.

Ch.6:13-23; Compare Paul’s experiences—persecution, the vision of the Glory,

blindness, led into the city, sight restored, food and drink, enmity ceased. Rom. 8:31 and 12:20, 21.

Need one go further? And the reign of Hezekiah (so much maligned through misunderstanding of Isaiah 39:8) is the prototype upon which the Messianic prophecies of Isaiah and of many of the Psalms are based.

The details concerning Hezekiah provide a framework round which much more Messianic detail can be built;

- His birth and glory foretold.
- His re-consecration of the temple.
- His re-institution of the Passover.
- His call to those afar off to join in the Passover.
- His mediation on behalf of the unclean.
- His personal suffering, as a leper, for the sins of the nation.
- His miraculous “resurrection” on the third day.
- His personal intercession in the Divine presence.
- The destruction of the great Enemy through faith in him.
- The great year of Jubilee.
- The restoration of captive Judah.
- The honour paid him by kings of the earth.

Christ in the prophecy of Jeremiah:

The mind goes at once to the great prophecy of the Lord our Righteousness in chapter 23:1-8, and the three superb and detailed chapters (31-33) about the New Covenant and the restoration of Israel, with their appealing pictures of moral regeneration which disallow for ever Jeremiah’s title to the nickname. “The gloomy prophet”.

The ultimate regathering of the spiritual Jew, the New Covenant in Jesus Christ and the free forgiveness of sins in him, his abiding Melchizedek priesthood and kingship, the gracious character of his Kingdom—all of these are set forth in three winsome chapters which are mostly honoured with neglect. These are already anticipated in the stirring section: chapter 16:14-21.

Chapter 25:15-33 foretells with matchless power and vigour the mighty work of judgment on the nations in the last days; and this is expanded in chapters 46-51 with details of God’s judgments against individual nations. Doubtless these prophetic dooms had a good deal of relevance to the times of Jeremiah. But there are nevertheless indications of further fulfilments yet to come (chapters 48:47 and 49:6, 39), whilst chapters 50, 51 —unmatched anywhere for sustained intensity and unrelieved hostility—supply one figure after another for the grim picture of the apocalyptic overthrow of Babylon in the day of Messiah’s triumph (Rev. 17, 18).

But besides all these, which in themselves make Jeremiah one of the most Messianic of the prophets, there are also numerous other more subtle touches which are only to be appreciated against a background of detailed knowledge of the gospels.

There is the close resemblance between the circumstances and personal experiences of Jeremiah and Jesus; note on this 1:5, 9 and 11:18, 19 and 37:15 and 38:13, and his attempts to reform a cynical, grasping priesthood, to cleanse the temple of a multitude of abuses, and to renew a spirit of true religion in a people filled with superstitious dependence on formalism.

There are also clusters of subtle connections between prophet and gospel. For example: “Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen it, saith the Lord... They have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people, saying, Peace, peace, when there is no peace... In the time of their visitation, they shall be cast down... No grapes on the vine, nor figs on the fig-tree... Why is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?... Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people... Oh ye women, teach your daughters wailing, and everyone her neighbour lamentation... For death is come up... to cut off the children from without” (chapters 7:11; 8:11, 12, 13, 22; 9:1, 20, 21; cp. Mark 11:15-17; Luke 19:41-44; 20:10; 23:38; Mark 5:26, 41).

From the point of view now being considered, the Book of Psalms calls for special attention.

Certain of the Psalms are outstanding in their Messianic anticipations and in the interpretation which is given to them in the New Testament. Psalms 2, 3, 16, 18, 22, 40, 41, 45, 69, 72, 109, 110, 116, 118, 133 come readily to mind as falling into this category. But what about the rest? Are they to be read as having no direct association with Christ and his work? Is it that the psalmist, whoever he was, was sometimes inspired to “look into the future, far as eye could see”, whilst at other times he wrote with concentration on his own relation to God or about the glory and majesty of Jehovah, without reference to any particular occasion?

It is a big and complex subject. Here it is only possible to give a few brief suggestions as guidance for a profitable approach.

Many of the psalms were certainly written by David (the psalm titles can generally be accepted as authentic). A big proportion of the rest belong almost certainly to the reign of Hezekiah and may have been written by him or by Isaiah (the verbal contacts between Psalms and Isaiah are often quite astonishing). It seems not at all unlikely that the Psalter was completed before the Babylonian Captivity. (This comment is made with knowledge of, but little esteem for, the arguments for dating some psalms

to the Babylonian Captivity and the time of the Maccabees.)

If this view is correct, that the psalms mainly cluster round the experiences of David and Hezekiah, there is seen to be a big additional reason (besides the natural devoutness of these two kings) why the psalter should be their work: among all the kings of Judah, these two stand out as quite remarkable types of the Messiah in the experiences that befell them. Thus many a psalm can be studied twice over—first, as an expression of the feelings of David or Hezekiah, as the case may be, in circumstances which are often identifiable; and then as a prophecy of Messiah foreshadowed by the experience of a royal forefather. Acts 2:30, 31 (“he seeing this before”) strongly suggests that David knew himself to be rehearsing beforehand in a shadowy way the things that were to come upon “David my servant”, the Messiah.

Psa. 41 provides an excellent illustration of how this works out. The circumstances which gave birth to it were, almost certainly, Absalom’s rebellion and the traitorous behaviour of Ahithophel, David’s chief counsellor. Everything in the psalm fits neatly into this framework, especially David’s confession of sin and recognition that these things came upon him in retribution for his own evil deeds—as they doubtless did; in his “Undesigned Coincidences” Blunt shows the chain of circumstances linking Absalom’s rebellion directly to David’s sin with Bathsheba.

E.g. read Psalm 104 as his commentary on Isaiah 6:3 R.V. margin; and Psalm 98 is a mosaic of phrases characteristic of Isaiah.

But at the Last Supper Jesus appropriated the words of Psalm 41, and applied them to his own betrayal by Judas: “Mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me” (John 13:18). Again the details fall neatly into place with the big exception of the awkward verse 4: “Lord, be merciful unto me: heal my soul; for I have sinned against thee.” Is this a prophecy of Christ?

The same feature crops up in other psalms which the New Testament likewise refers to Jesus: Psa. 40:12; 69:5; 31:10. The explanation of this, which has been a stumbling block to many, is ready to hand in a multitude of scriptures which emphasize that there can be no disowning of the sin of the community of which one is a unit. Daniel confessed the sins of Israel as though they were his own. So also did Nehemiah, Ezra, Jeremiah. No matter how strange this might appear to modern thinking, it is not to be evaded by Bible believers (Dan. 9:5-19; Neh. 1:6, 7; Psa. 106:6; Joshua 6:25, 26; 7:1, 24; 22:20, 18; 24:6, 7; 1 Chron. 15:13; 21:13; Ezra 9:6; 2 Sam. 21:1; Lev. 4:3; 26:40; Isa. 59:8, 9; Jer. 3:25; 10:24; Matt. 18:25; 23:35, 36; Acts 9:4; Rom. 5:12-21).

Hence, then, the apparent incongruity of Messianic prophecies including confessions of sin. It is the Bible’s emphatic teaching that Jesus truly shared the nature of those whom he came to save, and that “the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all”. And if it be asked why these prophecies should state this truth in what might be thought to

be misleading language, the primary application of the psalm to David (or Hezekiah, or whoever) supplies the explanation. In the primary sense of the words, it was the literal personal sin of the psalmist. In the more important Messianic sense it was the sin which the Christ came to bear and take away, the sin which was the very reason for his coming into the world, and to which his own nature was so intimately related.

It is strongly recommended that as many as possible of the “personal” psalms be studied in this way, as relevant first to the psalmist’s own experiences, and then—in the light of the historical background thus discerned—with reference to Jesus. But it is important to keep clear in mind from the outset that, fascinating though the historical setting of the psalms (and other prophecies) may be, the thing that really matters is the prophetic meaning concerning Jesus.

It has been well said that there is another Life of Christ in the Psalms besides the four gospels. One day some one will take this study really seriously and compile a Psalmist’s Life of Christ. It would be a revealing document, and would materially add to present knowledge of the days of his flesh, especially of his own mental struggles about which the gospels say almost nothing, and it would fill out present understanding and appreciation of his future glory. But this could only be done by taking all the psalms, and not merely a handful, as belonging to Christ. Is this a step which the present generation fears to take? Yet it would prove itself as the work went on.

23. “LORD, IS IT I?”

“We go to the Bible to be learners, and learners only. We may not even choose our subject; for we go to the Bible in order to learn this very thing, viz. what are the subjects to which Almighty GOD would have us direct our attention.”

JOHN WILLIAM BURGON.

“And if these lessons be not written in thine heart, then is all the scripture shut up as a kernel in the shell, so that thou mayest read it, and commune of it, and rehearse all the stories of it, and dispute wittily, and be a profound sophister, and yet understand not one jot thereof.” WILLIAM TYNDALE.

In the gospels the disciples of Jesus do not always show up in a good light, but one of the most revealing and satisfying glimpses of their collective character is in the account of the Last Supper. When Jesus began to warn them that he was to be betrayed by one who sat with him at the table, the first reaction was: “Lord, is it I?” Only later did they “look one on another, doubting of whom he spake”. And only after that did they “begin to enquire among themselves, which of them it was that should do this thing”. It was later still that the question was put to Jesus point blank: “Lord, who is it?”

So, then, your second question in any piece of Bible study (after the one considered in the previous chapter) is: “Lord, is it I?” Or, when you are reading of Judas: “There, but for the grace of God, go I?” Or, if you are reading of Paul the dauntless: “There, by the grace of God. go I?”

Everywhere, in all Bible study, the personal impact of Scripture must be allowed. Indeed, it must be encouraged, for the human heart does not take kindly to the incisive probings of the Holy Spirit, and will never be reluctant to erect its own defences against the Bible’s efficient soul-searching. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God”; but it is all too easy, in the pursuit of mere knowledge, to miss the most essential aspect of all: “... and it is profitable for...”

In the staff-room of a school in Sheffield, the teaching of Scripture by members of the different departments or faculties was a long-standing joke. The geography man had his class draw a map of Palestine with physical features and notes on climate. The English staff required lists of Biblical figures of speech or the re-writing of the parable of the prodigal son as a three-scene play. A modern languages teacher put the French version of the Good Samaritan on the blackboard and had it turned into modern English. The mathematics teacher set about computing the weight of bread needed for the feeding of the five thousand and how far Philip’s two hundred pence would go, whilst the scientist explained laboriously that there was really no miracle at all, and then gave a lesson on how “Mother Nature” does the same thing every year.

Such futility!—and all in the sacred name of education and culture.

To a less degree the same danger exists in your own Bible study. You are considering the storm on Galilee. How will you go about it?

You will doubtless wish to ascertain whence and where the ship of Jesus was going. You will be curious, no doubt, about this phenomenon of sudden storms of exceptional violence on a small inland lake. You may be interested in the three separate gospel records of this incident as a facet of the Synoptic Problem (the inter-relation of Matthew, Mark, Luke). In a different direction you will have a stimulating time exploring the Old Testament connections of this incident. Getting nearer to the heart of it, you will perhaps give special attention to the character of the disciples as it is revealed in the details here.

But if you get up from this study without having asked yourself time and again: “What is the lesson of faith for me in this incident?” you will have masticated the rind and thrown the good of the fruit away. When hit by a cyclone in the vicissitudes of life—and these experiences come to all sooner or later—what is to be your reaction? Will it be: “Save, Lord, we perish”; or differently: “Carest thou not that we perish?” Or yet again: “Jesus is in this ship. Then will God let it sink?” It is in this kind of approach that the simple gospel story proves its worth most of all. You may even turn it to account for the benefit of others by considering that those experienced fishermen might have argued plausibly: “Jesus does not know this lake as we do, or he would not want to cast off now. Let us be sensible, and wait until the danger of a storm has passed. It is not reasonable to ask us to set sail just now.” True enough, if the apostles had refused to sail when Jesus bade them, they would not have had to endure a very frightening experience, but neither also would they ever have seen “the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep” and been led to “praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men”.

This little incident is God’s answer to your own problem of evil in a nutshell. But not if you study it as geography or as literature. Always then, and everywhere in the Bible, take your own personal problems with you.

You will observe that Jesus sent out his canvassers and preachers in two’s. “The Lord’s ideal team for the job”, was the gruff practical comment of an experienced campaigner, “and the Lord’s ideal committee, too”, he added.

You will pause a little longer over the familiar words of Jesus about the cup at the Last Supper being “the new covenant in his blood for the remission of sins”, and will wake up suddenly to the fact that it means your sins, the very things you have done during these past few days which have been such a cause of shame and misery to you. And you will go down to your house justified, and with more comfort to your soul than you would have thought possible.

You will read again, with a little more imagination than sometimes, the story of the captive maid daring to tell her mistress that the cure for her master's leprosy lay with a prophet of a foreign God. And you will ask yourself: Did this wisdom come tripping from her tongue instinctively because she thought so much about these things and spoke them unselfconsciously? Or was her word hesitatingly said, with nervous mien and palpitating heart and only after hours of desperate attempts to muster the needful courage? And whichever way it was, what sort of example does she set to me, and what are the comparable circumstances today when I may be in a position to help by a word of advice or of good cheer?

You will patiently piece together the records of Peter's denials of his Lord, to find that each of them was itself a vociferous reiteration that Jesus of Nazareth meant nothing to him. And you will probe for an answer to your mystification as to why Peter should ever have risked his own life so far, and after the renewed danger signals and the first cock-crow should still go back again and thrust his head into the jaws of the lion. You will doubtless take special note that it was the presence and look of Jesus which changed the entire situation; it was that which caused Peter to remember too late. And if you have really-entered into Peter's experience there, you will know that as he went out weeping bitterly, he castigated his wretched soul with the reproach: "Why did I not remember his word of warning earlier? Then I would have been saved all this!" And then you will realize with a feeling of shame that your own denials of your Lord have followed exactly the same pattern—a cocksure playing with fire, and for a plausible enough reason; a gradual change of perspective, with Christ out of sight, and the world all round you and within; and when you are ashamed of your own disloyalty and shut up to your own wretchedness and self-contempt, the thought of the risen Lord's special message to Peter (Mark 16:7), and his special appearance to him alone (1 Cor. 15:5), will give you heart to believe that one defeat does not make a disaster if only the lesson can be learned. And that lesson is that the man who faces temptation confident of his own powers is bound to fail no matter how high his motive, but the one whose confidence is in the grace of Jesus Christ will rise from his old failures forgiven and reinvigorated for greater achievement than he would have thought possible.

Once you have reached the conviction that the men and women who meet you on the pages of Scripture are the same flesh and blood as yourself, with the same kind of impulses and ambitions and weaknesses, you will begin to find your own experiences written beforehand large as life. For this reason the study of Bible characters is not only fascinating in itself but a vast accumulation of examples and warnings set down on the printed page for your benefit.

But take care that you do not fall into the common error of confusing a catalogue of facts about king Saul with the developing tragedy of his character. The story of Ruth is not the same as the character of Ruth. If you are to get real benefit from records such as these, you will need to read and read again until each separate episode is as

vivid before your mind's eye as if it came to you on television. You will need to pause and pry into the motive behind every action. Only in this way will these men and women who sleep in dust come to life for your lasting benefit. They will enter into your life as your guides, examples and warnings only in so far as you enter into theirs.

You will find that you are identifying yourself with the timidity of Timothy, and will then realize that Paul's admonitions to his son in the faith are his admonitions to you. You will admire the staunch loyalty of Epaphroditus, and then wake up to the fact that there has been little to match it in your own easy-going existence. You will enter into the bewilderment of John, languishing in prison, as he puzzled over the big disappointment that Jesus of Nazareth, whom he had proclaimed to the nation as the Lamb of God who should take away the sin of the world and as the divine Judge burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire, was showing no sign of fulfilling either of these roles but instead was become a popular preacher and healer drawing vast crowds from all parts of the country. And from John's dilemma you will learn patience for your own affairs when God's sense of the fitness of things does not square with your own.

You will sympathize with poor Hosea, tied by divine fiat to a harlot wife whose unfaithfulness left him with three motherless children and—later on—the unpalatable duty of redeeming her from promiscuity and a slave market back to the love of a husband prepared to bury the past. And if it sets you praying God never to test your faith with hardships of this kind, it will perhaps teach you something more of divine grace that God was prepared to do all these things for faithless disloyal Israel.

Hosea himself had this knack of seeing the application of Scripture to others besides those actually mentioned in the page of holy writ: "God found him (Jacob) in Bethel, and there he spake with us" (12:4). That pronoun is a plain intimation that Hosea read Genesis 28 as God's word to himself and his contemporaries—a lesson for the nation about to go into Assyrian captivity, even as it was for Jacob going forth from home to a hard life in that same Assyrian land.

This, then, must be an integral part of the equipment of every Christadelphian in the study of the Bible—a constant readiness to relate that which he reads to that which he lives, a faculty for bringing the wisdom, counsel and example of the Word to bear on the affairs, big and small, of everyday life. The professional theologian comes to the Bible with a detached, dispassionate and often critical mind. He is studying a text. For you, "upon whom the revenues of the ages are come" (1 Cor. 10:11), such an approach is near to blasphemy. God has given you this Book not merely to supply information but to mould and fashion your life to the glory of His Name.

Harry Whittaker, 1965

APPENDICES

A1. BURGON'S QUESTIONS ON GENESIS 1 (see Ch.1)

- (1) On which of His creatures is it related that God bestowed names?
- (2) What about the creation of the waters?
- (3) Rehearse in order the works of Creation.
- (4) Describe exactly the food assigned to man.
- (5) In what terms is the origin of fowls described?
- (6) Are any of God's works singled out for special commendation?
- (7) How are the names of the sun, moon, and stars introduced?
- (8) Is it said concerning the work of every day, that "God saw that it was good"?
- (9) What is there peculiar in the employment of that sentence concerning the works of the six days?
- (10) What is said (of that kind) concerning the creation of man?
- (11) Over what part of Creation did God first assign to man the dominion?
- (12) Is man's "dominion" spoken of before, or after, his creation?
- (13) How is Adam mentioned, and out of what is he said to have been created?
- (14) Is Eve alluded to?
- (15) Which divisions of the vegetable kingdom are enumerated, as the work of the third day?
- (16) Is the Creator distinctly said to have pronounced a blessing on Man? on the beasts of the earth? on the fishes of the sea? on the fowls of the air?
- (17) What divisions of time are here mentioned?
- (18) What is said of the food of beasts? fishes? birds? creeping things?
- (19) What is the Earth said to have first brought forth?
- (20) Judging from the italics employed in the KJV, how much of that statement, "He made the stars also", exists in the Hebrew?

A2. HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS ON EXOD. 2:11-15

Suggested answers to the questions on page 39 about Exodus 2:11-15.

- (a) Acts 7:22, 23 fills out the picture. Ex. 2:11 (Heb. and LXX) is literally: “Moses became great.” Heb. 11:24 suggests a big occasion when Moses was to be designated heir to the throne of Egypt, and deliberately (and publicly?) refused the honour.
- (b) Thanks to his mother’s faithful guidance, there would be no time when he did not think of himself as Israelite rather than Egyptian.
- (c) Amazing humility (Num. 12:3) that he was thus prepared to thrust aside Egyptian honours and think himself one with a race of slaves.
- (d) The Hebrew word suggests ch. 1:11.
- (e) Isa. 59:16 and 63:5 suggest: “no man to deliver”, but “looked this way and that way” suggests “no man to hinder”. Which?
- (f) Adversity makes comrades, not enemies.
- (g) Quarrelling over the claim of Moses to be their God-sent Deliverer. This is surely right, but there is no proof except by arguing back from Moses being a type of Jesus.
- (h) “Jehovah” is the correct answer here (see answer to next question). But “appointed by Pharaoh” or “self-appointed” are possible answers, either of which might have been in this Hebrew’s mind. Other examples: Joseph and Jesus, of course.
- (i) The answer of the three passages is clear-cut and definite: “God was giving them deliverance” through Moses, and they sinned in refusing it. The more usual view that Moses, with the impatience of youth (at 40!), was not prepared to wait God’s good time, is definitely wrong, and a serious slander against the character of Moses. See answer (o).
- (j) No contradiction. Two different occasions. Heb. 11:27 refers to Ex. 12:37 and 13:17, 18.
- (k) Pharaoh’s reaction is a clear intimation that Moses’ deed was an open demonstration of an all-out intention to lead Israel to freedom.
- (l) Very probably Pharaoh attempted this in person in the palace.
- (m) “Fulfilled” suggests a prophecy. Did Moses flee because he was bidden do so by God, and told to stay away for forty years?
- (n) He dwelt or settled there. It is surely a mistake to think of him sitting there weary and travel-stained. Other evidence (4:20) suggests his marriage to Zipporah near the end of the forty years.
- (o) The reproach which Christ himself was to suffer centuries later—rejection by the very people who should have welcomed his leadership.
- (p) Literally, “he looked away unto the recompense of the reward”. His eyes were not on Egyptian splendour and prosperity, but on the remote Land of Promise (2 Cor. 4:18).

A3. WORTHWHILE BOOKS

It has already been said in this volume and it must be said again. There is no Bible study to compare with what you do for yourself. Yet in spite of this, the truth of which every competent Bible student will vouch for, many rush to acquire big collections of books as an easy substitute for personal effort.

This Appendix, then, is included with some reluctance, and only because the writer has been badgered many a time with the enquiry: What are the best books to get?

It is assumed here that you have already had that question answered for you, and have already equipped yourself with a shelf-full of Christadelphian classics. It is a good idea always to keep one of these going as part of your normal reading. "Two pages a day, year in, year out" is the valuable prescription of a well-read Christadelphian veteran.

Personal judgment and enthusiasm vary so considerably that any student's compilation is likely to provoke a good deal of disagreement from others both as regards titles included and titles omitted.

One finds with experience that it is not titles or topics that matter most but authors. Once you become acquainted with a good writer or expositor, the best plan is to lay hands on as many of his works as possible.

Most Christadelphian students of the Word are agreed that the modern commentators are by no means as helpful or stimulating as the Victorians. The reason is simple: The Victorians believed the Bible to be the Word of God, the modernists do not. This is not to say that modern scholars are useless. But it is certainly true that you will learn a more wholesome approach to the Bible from the Victorians (and the Puritans) than you will from most of the 20th century authorities.

For the Christadelphian, then, the prince of Bible commentators is William Kay, of Lincoln College, Oxford. His "Isaiah" and "Hebrews" in the "Speaker's" Commentary, his "Psalms" and "Corinthians" are all close-packed, and full of dependable scholarship. These are not works for beginners to browse in. Only when you have done a lot of Bible study for yourself do these books begin to have their true value.

By all means comb over any old issues of "The Christadelphian" and "The Testimony" which you may have access to. But read with discrimination. The oldest are not necessarily the best. You must certainly give concentrated attention to the miscellaneous articles by John Carter. If he had written in a more readable style, he would have been a world-beater.

But what other books?

There is no attempt here to catalogue the titles which you simply must have. The list would become endless and not necessarily useful, for all students of Holy Scripture do not have the same approach, the same bent. The following are almost random suggestions, dictated largely by the present writers own personal taste.

First, a few standard books of reference.

Josephus, of course. It used to be possible to pick up a good copy for a shilling. But, alas, those palmy days are gone for ever.

You cannot do without a really good Bible Atlas and also a well laid-out Harmony of the Gospels (that published by Black is perhaps the best).

One or two detailed volumes on Bible Archeology should be acquired; e.g. Pleiffer's "Cyclopoedia of Biblical Archeology" and "Documents from Old Testament Times" by D. Winton Thomas. That wee book: "Modern Discovery and the Bible", by Rendle Short, is full of good material.

John William Burgon, preaching at St. Mary's, Oxford, in the middle of last century, begat some competent spiritual children, among them, C. H. Waller, Griffith Thomas, and Harrington Lees. Any books of theirs are worth getting hold of. The first of these was a contributor to Ellicott's Commentary. So also, very copiously, was Plumptre, Dean of Canterbury, whose articles in Smith's Bible Dictionary are also worth careful attention.

Fausset was another stimulating expositor of that period. His study of Judges, lately re-printed in America, is the best that has been done on that subject. He also wrote a book on Psalms, and was responsible for half (much the better half) of the Portable Commentary, done in appallingly small print.

Here are a few more miscellaneous names to look out for.

Ramsey's "Paul the Traveller" is really good, but his other books don't compare in quality.

The best commentary on Acts is by Rackham. He did nothing else worth talking about.

Beginners will enjoy David Smith's "The Days of His Flesh", but later on will realise how that volume suffers from neglect of the Old Testament. His "Life and Letters of Paul" is useful, but a bit superficial.

Farrar, Dean of Westminster, was a man of astonishing scholarship. All his New Testament work makes useful contributions (especially in the footnotes), but his

exposition of Daniel is appalling.

Instead, on Daniel and Isaiah, get Boutflower - if you can.

There is lots of good scholarship in Pusey's "Minor Prophets" and also in his "Daniel", but this isn't so good.

Some of the volumes in the Cambridge Bible are worthwhile (e.g. Farrar on Luke; Moule on Romans), but there is also a lot of rubbish. Can any good thing come out of Cambridge? Well, now and then.

The Tyndale Commentaries are another patchy collection, but anything with Kidney's name on it (Genesis, Psalms, Proverbs) is worth going for.

Don't look for a decent commentary on Psalms. There isn't one. Do your own. And indeed, as you progress and increasingly mean business, regarding large areas of both Old and New Testaments you will be driven to this expedient of self-reliance and hard labour.

Plummer on any of the gospels is useful, but a bit dull. Trench on Miracles and Parables is wordy but with lots of ideas. On the Sermon on the Mount, Martyn Lloyd-Jones is another wordy writer, but easy to read, whilst our own L. G. Sargent ("Teaching of the Master"), who was never appreciated at his true value, is too compressed and therefore hard work. "Two pages a day!"

One or two other general works which are worth a place on your bookshelves:

Get acquainted with the Apocrypha. It will fill you in fairly dependably between the Testaments, and will provide much other informative and stimulating reading. Also, an Apocryphal New Testament, if only to learn the sudden and shouting difference between the inspired New Testament and the palpably uninspired stuff that followed.

Angus's "Bible Handbook" is a mine of handy information. Edersheim (especially "The Temple") and Girdlestone are both very useful. Bullinger's "How to enjoy the Bible" would be even more enjoyable if he had developed a more exhilarating style of writing.

And of course J.J. Blunt's "Undesigned Coincidences" (reprinted as 'Undesigned Scriptural Coincidences') goes without saying.

Where does this name-dropping stop?

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Ark
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