

# Beauties of the Truth

A Forum for the Publication of Scriptural Viewpoints  
Thought to be Harmonious with God's Plan of the Ages  
Volume 6, Number 3, August 1995

---

Cloak, Books and Parchments  
The Three Signs  
Where Does the Year Really Begin?  
The Parable of the Vineyard Laborers

---

BEAUTIES OF THE TRUTH is published as a service to the brethren to stimulate their consideration and appreciation of the boundless riches of Gods Word. It is published free of charge. Subscriptions will be entered for all who request it. Address all correspondence to: Beauties of the Truth, 10034 S.W. 52nd Avenue, Portland, OR 97219. Editorial Board: Bros. Jerry Leslie (Editor-in-Chief), Carl Hagensick, Raymond Luke, Michael Nekora, David Rice, Stephen Suraci.

## **Cloak, Books and Parchments (2 Timothy 4:13)**

This is what the Apostle Paul requested from Timothy. He wrote, "The cloak that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring with thee, and the books, but especially the parchments" These were the last days of the apostle. The words imply that these were the only possessions the Apostle Paul had before he was executed. He knew that he would not leave that prison alive. Throughout his life the Apostle Paul had exhorted the brethren, encouraged them, to endure all things. He could have been very frustrated with the state of affairs after everything he had done, but he was not. "Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes" (2 Timothy 2:10-12). What marvelous words! He endured all things for you and for me "for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." This is the sacrifice he made. He was a faithful apostle, one of the greatest. "It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him."

## **NERO, THE BASE EMPEROR**

Nero was the emperor at this time. Paul was in the Roman prison. We see two outstanding personalities, two intensely conflicting characters. It was a time when Christians were persecuted for their belief. Nero was the last of the Caesars -a cruel ruler, with the deepest of sins and abysmal depravity. The Apostle Paul was the model of excellence and holiness.

In them we see the representations of two civilizations, two religions, two histories, two distinct dispensations face to face. Nero had the power, Paul was subject to him. Nero lived the crown and flower of luxurious and guilty splendor, while Paul was in prison as an example of all who live in earthly misery and yet may be the happiest saints of God.

Nero was only thirty years of age, and stained through and through with every possible crime. He was steeped to the very depth of every nameless degradation. Of all iniquities, there was scarcely one of which Nero had not been guilty. This man was not content with every existing form of vice and sin in which the taint of human nature had found vent; he became an inventor of even more evil.

He usurped the throne. When his father died, his mother married Claudius, emperor of Rome, who designated Nero as his eldest son. When Claudius died (54 AD), Nero, under the guise of affection, poisoned Britannicus, son of Claudius, potential rival to Nero's succession to the throne. Nero had already married Britannicus' sister, Octavia, and he also poisoned her. He was tired of his mother's interference, and ordered her execution. Deep in her own guilt, she had committed her many crimes because of her love for Nero. Historians seem to have exhausted every description in this horrible catalog of vice and crime.

Nero took Christians and, in order to enlighten his large court, would put them onto a stake, tie them there, pour tar over them, and burn them. Here was Paul, a prisoner, facing this emperor.

## **PAUL, THE NOBLE PRISONER**

On the other hand, we have a great contrast in the Apostle Paul. He had spent his whole life in the pursuit of truth and the practice of holiness. Even from boyhood he was a grave and earnest student of the Law of God. He surpassed in learning and faithfulness all the other pupils of the wise, in the school of the great doctor of the Law, Gamaliel. His natural temperament was one of intense zeal even prior to the time that he was converted. When he was asked by the Lord, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" he replied, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Thus he immediately redirected his zeal to the true cause of God.

Can we blame Paul for what he did in ignorance? Upon conversion, he was convinced of his new goal and purpose in life. Most men, even the holy and learned, find it hard to admit their fallibility and mistakes and to return to the role of humble learners. Yet Paul meekly admitted that he was at fault and must change instantly.

Did ever a man toil like this man? Rise to nobler superiority over the vain objects of human desire? More fully and uncomplainingly resign his whole life to God? Has it ever been granted to any other

man, in spite of all his trials, obstructions and persecutions, to force his way, in the very teeth of antagonisms, to so full an achievement of that which God had entrusted to his care?

St. Paul had braved the disdain of enemies, friends and brethren. Shrinking from disapproval, with his warm nature ever craving human love, he had encountered violent scorn of the most intense descriptions-not only of individuals but of entire factions, not only of aliens but of his own countrymen, not only of Jews but even of those who professed the same faith with himself. As he described to Timothy very clearly, "Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works. Of whom be thou ware also; for he hath greatly withstood our words. At my first answer no man stood with me, but all forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge."

What a marvelous disposition, this faith that he had naturally preferring to withdraw from pain, he had endured all this-every form of agony. With a body weakened by hardship, the many perils and miseries were but a fragment of what he had suffered.

What had he done? He had secured the triumph of giving a true presentation of the Messiah to his own people. He had launched Christianity before the Gentiles and the pagan world. He had created a language, coordinated doctrines, overthrown obstacles of that faith which is the one source and hope, the love and the ultimate deliverance of the world from sin and death. That is what he had done.

For this, his last days were spent in prison in Rome. Nero had imperial power; Paul, abject weakness. Nero had his youth; Paul was about 63 years old at this time.

Paul was crowned with holiness. His life had been one of utter self-sacrifice; Nero's life that of self-indulgence. Paul represented Christianity in its dawning brightness; Nero, paganism in its exhausted despair. They represented two theories of life: Paul, the simplicity of self-denial and endurance, a willingness to give up life itself for the good of others; Nero, the luxury of shameless self-love and self-gratification which valued no consideration, divine or human, in comparison with a new sensation.

Paul was the slave of Christ; Nero, the incarnation of Satanic wickedness. How much was the course of this world under the control of the prince of the power of the air! Personified wickedness was clothed in purple and seated on the throne amidst the ensigns of splendor without limit and power beyond control. And he whose life has exhibited all that was great and noble in the heart of man stood in peril of execution, fettered, despised and hated.

## **THE APOSTLE WAITS HIS END**

After his first defense, which had resulted in no decision, Paul was remanded to prison. Roman law was still Roman law, and except where passions of unusual intensity interfered, some respect was still paid to the forms of justice under this law.

For the time, at any rate, Paul was rescued out of the lion's mouth (v. 17): "Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion."

There was some flaw in the indictment, some deficiency in the evidence. The apostle well knew that it was but a recess, permitted for a time. His adversaries would soon gather more testimony, and the case would be resumed. Back in his dungeon he would, by God's grace, make good use of the little season. He could well use further time in prayerful reflection.

Besides this, he would in his second and last letter to Timothy leave his dying message. What were our well beloved Brother Paul's contemplations as he awaited his second defense in the Roman court? We cannot know, but we have this one writing, his last letter to Timothy.

He knew his doom was fixed, his end but a little distance ahead. Very probably this great man of God, approaching the end branded as a convict, was experiencing the best, richest, and deepest meditations of his life.

## **HIS LAST PLEAS**

As one would expect, his thoughts were uppermost of his much-loved son Timothy. He would call from the depths of his soul, and offer Timothy the best counsel of which he was capable, assisted by the Lord's spirit. He wished to safeguard the young man's spiritual life and heritage, and strengthen him as a true, trusted minister in Paul's absence.

In 2 Timothy 4:8 we practically hear Paul's last words. The additional expression in verse 9 is a tender, touching appeal: "Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me." The remainder of the letter is occupied with personal mention and information concerning brethren.

We pause and reflect on the apostle's last pleas. It is a simple, touching passage, seemingly incidental, yet impressive. This is where he asked for his cloak and his books, and especially his parchments-necessary possessions which may have been all he could call his own. What light this throws on the closing, sad days of the persecuted apostle!

Leaving his cloak at the house of Carpus after he was liberated from his first imprisonment may indicate his sudden arrest at Troas or on the way to it. A prisoner who was being hurried from place to place by unsympathizing keepers was little able to look after his property.

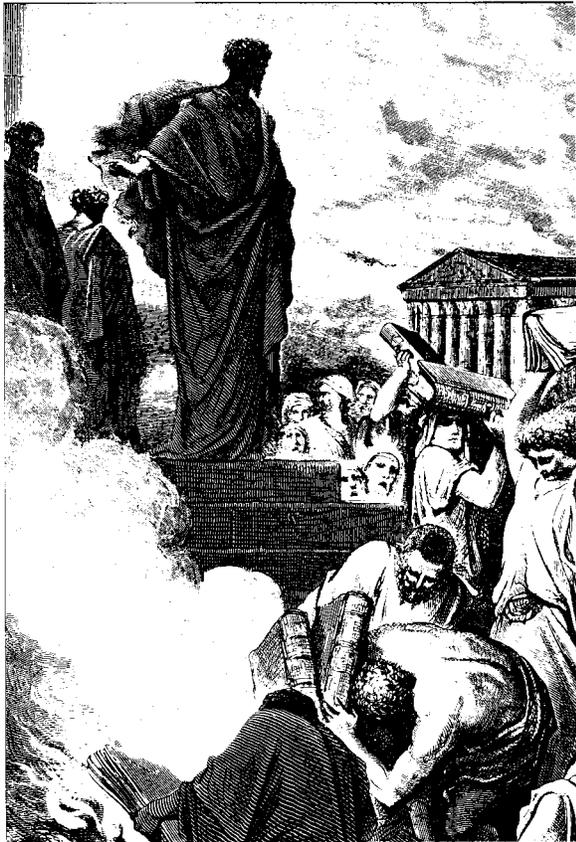
In verse 21 Paul reminded Timothy again, "Do thy diligence to come before winter." The chill of the season was setting in. The aged prisoner knew the Roman prison might be very cold. He wanted to get back his travelling cloak, one of those large, sleeveless garments we might call an overcoat.

It may have been a very dear possession; he could have woven it himself - of the goat's hair of his native province. It was probably an old companion used on many of his travels. Possibly it was wetted in the torrents of Asia where he travelled, whitened with the dust of the Roman roads, stained with the brine of shipwreck. He may have slept in it outdoors as a shelter on the chilly

nights under the canopy of the stars. It may have covered his bruised limbs in the dungeon of Philippi when he was there.

It was of little monetary value, but now aging Paul sat shivering in a gloomy cell, the winter nights not far away. He yearned for its warmth.

The papyrus books would be old friends of Paul. Perhaps he had acquired them as a student of Gamaliel. They may have been given him by wealthy converts.



*The Apostle Paul Preaching at Ephesus*

sunshine. He wanted that comfort.

In lesser things, as in greater, he would wait with thankfulness, even exultation, the pouring out as an offering, those last drops of effort, of which the long years had been flowing forth upon God's altar in willing sacrifice.

## **CALM AND FAITHFUL IN HIS LAST DAYS**

We see the panoramic view here, of Paul's last days. Was Paul discouraged, disheartened, disillusioned? Did he murmur or complain? No. There was nothing of a depressing nature in those final words of St. Paul.

What were the parchments?

We speculate. Perhaps among them was the diploma of his Roman franchise; perhaps some precious rolls of Isaiah and the Psalms. Probably his parents had given him such manuscripts as a life-long treasure, in those far-off happy days when they had not dreamed of all that would befall him.

Dreary and long were the days, and the evenings still more, in that dungeon. It would be a joy to read once more how David and Isaiah learned in their deep troubles, as he had learned, to suffer and be strong. This simple message from the prophets' words - Paul never relinquished his reliance on that, the Word of God. They might add comfort and relief to the tedium of his days. Perhaps he would like to give them as his parting bequest to Timothy.

It was a poor inventory of a saint's possessions. But with the cloak to warm him, the books and parchments to teach and encourage him, with Mark to help; if Timothy could come himself, then life would shed on Paul its last rays of

It is said of some great men that the characteristic of waning life is disenchantment, a sense of inexorable weariness, inevitable disappointment. Elijah had discouraging moments. John the Baptist asked "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?"

Noble, courageous men have cried "My trials are more than I can manage. Men are not worth the trouble I have taken for them" Well-intentioned world leaders have become totally disheartened. They have checked their zeal, curbed their enthusiasm, darkened with the shadows of experience the radiant hopes of their followers.

Paul might have been excused if he had come to this conclusion.

What visible success had he achieved? He had founded a few churches; the majority were already cold to him. He saw his efforts being slowly undermined, and a world utterly hostile to the faith of Christ. It had arraigned against the cross all its intelligence and power. What could doves do among serpents? Sheep among wolves? The very name "Christian" had now come to be regarded as synonymous with "criminal" and "Jew" and "pagan."

In the ruins of a storm, water and fire unite to wreck the landscape; so the opposing forces of Paul's message were united in hostility to the truths he had preached.

What had he gained personally? Power? No. At his worst need, there had not been one friend to stand by his side. Had he gained love? No. He had learned how few there were that were not ashamed even to own him in his misery. What was his condition? He was a lonely prisoner awaiting a malefactor's end. What was the sum total of earthly goods that the long labor of his life had brought him? An old cloak, some books, and parchments.

And yet, in what spirit did Paul write to Timothy? Did he regret his hard life? Did he dampen the courage of his younger friend by telling him that almost every earthly hope is doomed to failure and that the struggle against human wickedness is a fruitless fight? No. Instead, this last letter was far more a song of triumph than one of dejection and despair. For himself, life was ending, the race run, the treasure safely guarded, his day's work in the Master's vineyard well nigh over. He was assured that when it would be totally finished, the unspeakable reward would be laid up for him, held in reserve. He was looking forward to the return of his Master, when he would receive the crown of righteousness that fadeth not away.

Timothy received joy and encouragement, even in the midst of natural sadness, when he read Paul's letter. It was Timothy, not Paul, who was in danger of yielding to anger and timidity and forgetting that the spirit that God gave was not of fear but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

That was why Paul guided and directed Timothy: Bear afflictions with me. Be strong in the grace of Jesus Christ. Fan up the flame in those whitening embers of zeal and courage. Be a good soldier, a true athlete, a diligent toiler.

Do you, Timothy, think of my chains and my hardships? They are not worth a thought. Be brave. Be not ashamed. We are weak and may be defeated if we trust in ourselves. Nevertheless, God's

foundation stone stands sure with a double legend upon it - of comfort, of exhortation. Be thou strong and faithful, even unto death.

## **THE LOYAL BEARER PASSES THE TORCH**

St. Paul handed to the dear but timid racer the torch of truth which was in his grasp through the long torch race of his life. No cowardice had hidden, no carelessness had dimmed, no storm had quenched it. Would that every leader's voice could burst forth as he falls in such a trumpet sound, thrilling the young hearts that pant in the good fight, never despairing of final victory!

The poet says, "Hopes have precarious life, they are oft blighted, withered, snapped off in vigorous youth and turned to rottenness; but faithfulness can feed on suffering and knows no disappointment." So it was with Paul. Years before he had written: "We both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place; And labor, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: being defamed, we intreat. We are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things" (I Corinthians 4:11-13). The secret of St. Paul's spiritual brilliance is that he fully gave himself up to God, to do the Father's will. God used him perhaps to a greater extent than he ever used another man, with the exception of our Lord Jesus.

Paul had the spirit of the Truth. He never wavered. He was a rejoicing saint of the New Creation. He said "I am ready to be offered. The time of my departure is at hand."

- Frank Boychuk

## **The Three Signs**

*"And the Lord said to Moses.- When you go back to Egypt, see that you do all those wonders before Pharaoh which I have put in your hand." Exodus 4:21*

It is a fact well known that the return of Moses to Egypt represents the return of our Lord Jesus to the surroundings of the earth (1 Thess. 4:17). As Moses returned to Egypt in person, so our Lord came down from heaven in person.

The life of Moses is divided into three equal parts: forty years from his birth till he visited his brethren, forty years from the flight to Midian till the angel appeared in the burning bush, forty years from his return to Egypt till his death. These periods, and Moses himself, were typical. Moses represents Christ and the three periods represent the Judaic age, the Gospel age and the time of the Parousia of the Lord.

The mission of Moses was to bring Israel out of Egypt. "So now go, I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt" (Exodus 3:10, NIV). In this

verse a great type is shown. The antitypical Moses, Jesus, will bring out of the slavery of sin and death and rescue from the power of Satan not only the Church of the firstborn, but also all mankind.

A great number of events took place after the return of Moses. Here we shall limit ourselves to studying the first three signs, and the ten plagues in a general way. Moses had said to God, "But suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice; suppose they say, The Lord has not appeared to you" (Exodus 4:1). The Lord answered Moses "What is that in your hand? He said, A rod." Then God showed to Moses the signs he should perform in the presence of the children of Israel. Finally God said to Moses, "And you shall take this rod in your hand, with which you shall do the signs" The first three signs were to be performed before the elders of Israel (Exodus 3:16). These signs were to prove to Israel that God had appeared to Moses.

### **THE FIRST SIGN**

*"So the Lord said to him, What is that in your hand? He said A rod. And He said, Cast it on the ground. So he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent,- and Moses fled from it. Then the Lord said to Moses, Reach out your hand and take it by the tail (and he reached out his hand and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand)." (Exodus 4:2-4)*

The rod symbolizes authority; the serpent represents the devil, the old serpent, Satan (Revelation 12:9). In the beginning, when God created Adam, God exercised authority over the earth through Adam. After the sin of Adam he was condemned, the earth was cursed, and God allowed Satan to usurp authority. Satan became the god or prince of this world, and held sway over all the kingdoms of this world (Matthew 4:8-10). The rod became a serpent.

But now the authority is being taken from the devil. Our Lord, who is present, is laying hold on the dragon, the old serpent, by the tail as it were. He is depriving Satan of authority, binding him, that he should deceive the nations no more. In due time, he will bruise his head (Genesis 3:15). By seizing the devil, our Lord proves that he has come down from heaven and he is taking his great power. Our Lord Jesus received this great power from his Father after his resurrection, but he did not use it until he came again. Now he is using his power. With this power he is binding the old serpent (Revelation 20:2).

When Jesus has taken away the authority from Satan, when he has completely bound this one, the serpent will be a rod in his hand. The authority all over the earth will be no more exercised by Satan, but by the Lord Jesus. This transfer of authority is in progress.

### **THE SECOND SIGN**

*"Furthermore the Lord said to him, Now put your hand in your bosom. And he put his hand in his bosom, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous, like snow. And he said, Put your hand in your bosom again. So he put his hand in his bosom again, and drew it out of his bosom, and behold, it was restored like his other flesh." (Exodus 4:6, 7)*

The hand symbolizes power, and leprosy typifies sin. In the beginning God had dominion over the earth through a perfect man, Adam. The power of God was exercised by Adam. After the

transgression of Adam, God used sinful men to represent Him in the world and to do His will. There were first Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the Prophets, then, during the Gospel age, the Apostles and the other members of the Church. All these were sinners by nature. However God used them as His instruments to accomplish His purposes, because they loved Him. God showed His power by these faithful human beings.

But at present, since the return of the antitypical Moses, the hand is becoming healthy. The Lord has raised up his members who were sleeping in the tomb. Those who have had a share in the first resurrection have a spiritual body; they are rescued from sin. These ones are into the heavenly Kingdom and are with the Lord as wholesome creatures.

When the other members of the Church are all changed in a moment and have had a place in the first resurrection, they will also possess a spiritual and glorious body, the divine nature, and they will also be wholesome creatures, free from the leprosy of sin.

As the first sign or voice shows the binding of Satan has begun, so the second sign or voice points out the first resurrection has also begun. After the first resurrection the "better resurrection" will take place. When the ancient worthies are resurrected they will be perfect human beings. They will be princes in all the earth (Psalm 45:17). The Lord will also exercise his power through these human instruments.

Finally sin, symbolized by leprosy, will disappear, and the hand of the antitypical Moses will be entirely healthy.

### **THE THIRD SIGN**

*'Then it will be, if they do not believe you, nor heed the message of the first sign, that they may believe the message of the latter sign. And it shall be, if they do not believe even these two signs, or listen to your voice, that you shall take water from the river and pour it on the dry land. The water which you take from the river will become blood on the dry land.'* (Exodus 4:8, 9)

So it is in the antitype. Some spiritual Israelites do not believe the voice or message of the first sign. They do not believe that the old serpent, Satan, is being bound. Some others do not believe the message of the second sign. They do not believe that the first resurrection has begun. Others, again, do not believe two signs. However they must believe the third sign. The first two antitypical signs are not visible with natural eyes, but with the eyes of understanding. But the third sign is visible with natural eyes.

The water represents Truth, and the land represents society. Harvest Truth, present truth, was spread widely on the earth during the "faithful and wise" service of Bro. Russell. The Lord had promised he would serve his faithful ones after his coming, and that promise has been wonderfully fulfilled (Luke 12:37).

But the Truth which was so great a blessing for the people of God was repugnant as blood to those who did not receive it. The darkness hates the light, and those who preach false doctrines hate the Truth because it reprobates their errors and falsehoods.

This sign seems to have a greater signification. Present truth permits us to understand better than before the typical sacrifices of the Law and the doctrine of the ransom for all. Christ shed his blood to redeem all the inhabitants of the earth. "Without shedding of blood there is no remission" (Hebrews 9:22). This clear knowledge of the ransom was preached in all the earth. The knowledge of the Law sacrifices was also widely preached. In this sense the blood was poured on the earth.

## CONCLUSION

So we see that when Moses came again he did not go immediately into Pharaoh's presence. He summoned first the elders of Israel. He made himself known to them and transmitted the divine message to them (Exodus 4:29-31). Christ did likewise. At his coming he has not to do at once with the world, but he gathers first his faithful ones and makes himself known to them. He reveals to them his presence. According to the parable of the pounds, he settles first his accounts with his servants and deals later with his enemies (Luke 19:27, see also 1 Peter 4:17). However, this does not mean the Master will deal with the world only after the Church is complete. Psalm 46 points out that the last members of the Church will see the trouble beginning. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble, therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea" (verses 1, 2).

Then ten plagues smote Egypt. They correspond to the seven plagues of Revelation 16. Egypt symbolizes the world. It should be observed that the ten plagues smote Egypt after the return of Moses. We have therefore the assurance that the seven plagues or bowls of God's wrath, mentioned in Revelation, are poured out on the earth during the second presence of the Lord."

- Antoine Papajak, France

## Where Does the Year Really Begin?

*(The following interesting article is reprinted by permission from the b'nai b'rith "Messenger" of April 7, 1995. However, please observe some editorial comments at the end.)*

Somewhere in the long evolution of the Jewish calendar there was a minor hiccup. The Biblical system of counting the months by simple ordinal numbers, first, second, third, etc., changed quite suddenly to Nissan, Iyar, Sivan, Tamuz, and so on. As these names are pure Babylonian, it is clear that when the Jews were exiled to the Land Between the Rivers they adapted the vernacular calendar to their Jewish diary. The numbers that had no real character or meaning per se were abandoned in favor of the dominant culture.

No religious leader of that time or even later seemed to mind that some of these months actually bore the names of pagan deities. One is not a little surprised to discover that the god Tamuz, who is actually mentioned by the prophet Ezekiel as an idol in the Babylonia pantheon, as well as others, should have been adopted and incorporated into the Jewish calendar. This surprise needs some further explanation. When the Israelites left Egypt, somewhere around the 15th century BCE (800

years before the exile to Babylon) they dramatically commenced this new period in their history with a new calendar. This was in the month Aviv, the Spring month, at which time Moses announced "This month shall be unto you the first of the months, it shall be the first month of the year" " Nothing could be more explicit or precise than this pronouncement. One might ask nevertheless, what was wrong with the Egyptian calendar that they had used for 4 or 5 generations? Answer: it was to be a fresh start, the beginning of a new chapter, but at the same time an opportune moment to jettison that calendar replete with the names of Egyptian gods. ... "You shall not have any gods before Me"

The difference between the Egyptian and Babylonian experience is clear. In the latter, the Judeans were exiles, not slaves. They acculturated quickly, married local girls, spoke the local Aramaic language to the point that Hebrew became their second language, and of course used and adopted the national calendar. What Jew today be he ultra-Orthodox is even aware that January is named after the threshold deity of the Romans, that February is the month of ritual preparation, or that March honors Mars, the Roman god of war?

So our ancestors accommodated themselves to a new vocabulary. The first day of the seventh month has been singled out by Moses in the Torah as a "day of sounding the shofar, a day of Holy convocation, no work is to be performed." The Torah gives no reason why this seventh month is to begin with a fanfare, or why it is significant. Somewhere along the line this important "Day of the shofar" becomes Rosh Hashanah, another New Year. In fact, the newcomer is so impressive and dominant, it so completely upstages the old New Year, that by comparison the former fades into insignificance.

Later on, in the Mishnaic period, the first of Nissan is designated the "New Year for Kings," but it does not have the status of a Yom Tov, or a religious red-letter day. The first day of each month, Rosh Chodesh, was New Moon Day, a gazetted half-holy day. The first of these New Moon Days, despite its prominent position, never became a Festival in its own right, a day of rest and a Holy Convocation. The new Rosh Hashanah in the seventh month encountered little opposition. This development must have taken place in Babylon at a time when the calendar received its new nomenclature. The indigenous peoples most probably celebrated a major festival which gradually became identified with the Day of the Shofar. It appears somewhat iconoclastic to imply that the holy day of Rosh Hashanah was borrowed from a pagan culture then completely Judaized. If one looks closely, however, how Jews through the ages have been influenced by their surroundings, one totally endorses the Yiddish proverb *azoi kristlesech, azoi yulesech*, the Jew behaves as his environment behaves. There is a constant process of osmotic adaptation, particularly in a benign and positive context. Such was the Babylonian, and after them the Persian scenario in which the Jews had equal opportunities and a good life. When these refugees first arrived on alien soil they were so depressed at the loss of their beloved homeland, the Songs of Zion stuck in their throat so they hung up their harps on the willow trees ... later under Persian rule they were allowed to return, but only a small number elected to forsake the fleshpots of Persia for the land of Judea. Twenty-five hundred years ago, Rosh Hashanah did not loom as large as it does today. The impressive liturgy and ritual that we now possess did not exist at that period. Far more attention was paid to the three Pilgrim Festivals of Pesach, Shavuot and Succot that highlighted the agricultural climaxes of the year. So the changed status and the upgrading of the *Yom T'ruah*, to a New Year's Day was evolutionary rather than revolutionary.

The sages of the Talmud persistently debated the question “when was the world created;” as the answer conclusively determined when time and the annual cycle began. The school of Rabbi Joshua maintained that G-d created the world in Nissan, while Rabbi Eleazar opined that the planet began its existence in Tishrei. It was the latter point of view that prevailed. As today we only have one New Year, the synagogue service reflects the Tishrei date. “On this day the world was born, on this day G-d puts on trial the creatures of this world” “This day is the beginning of Your work, the anniversary of the Creation Day.”

One cannot deny that teaching the workings of the Jewish calendar to children presents a thorny problem. The civil year is most uncomplicated with New Year's Day on January 1, whilst the Hebrew equivalent commences in the seventh month. Some schools have already cut the Gordian knot by making Tishrei as the first month of the year and completely abandoning Nissan to oblivion. This move is drastic and dangerous, and runs counter to the very prescription of the Torah itself. How indeed can the seventh month become the first, just because it is difficult to teach Nissan, Iyar, Sivan, etc. Our national history began in the Spring month of Nissan-Aviv and must be celebrated accordingly in perpetuity. The original mandate is unequivocal, “This month (Nissan) shall be unto you the first of the months’ “ It would clearly be against the halacha to interfere with the sequence of the months, and a blatant example of thoughtless expediency.

- Rabbi Ron Lubofsky

*(This article maintains the scriptural Practice of numbering the Jewish months from the spring, which is commendable. However it fails to notice ancient and scriptural references to the fall year- which some term the civil year, or the agricultural year- which began with the month of Tishri. As far back as the book of Exodus the “End of the year” (and therefore the beginning of the next) was in the fall (Exodus 23:16, 34:22). Evidently the regnal years of the Judean kings were fall years, as the numbered year did not change with the coming of Nisan (compare 2 Chronicles 34:8, 35:19, and the intervening context). In Ezekiel 40:1 “the beginning of the year” refers to month seven (when month one is intended it is specified by number as in Ezekiel 29:17, 30:20). The Law itself marks day one of month seven more prominently than day one of month one (Numbers 29:1 cf. Numbers 10:10.) Certainly the Jews did not acquire a fall year from either the Babylonians or Persians, whose kings unambiguously used spring years.)*

# The Parable of the Vineyard Laborers

Sometimes known as the “Parable of the Penny,” this story of Jesus in Matthew 20:1-16 has been explained in a variety of different ways, but not often is it connected with the incident of the rich young ruler recounted in the previous chapter. The division is at an unfortunate point; the passage from verse 16 of chapter 19, to verse 16 of chapter 20, is all one account and should have constituted a chapter by itself. It tells of the rich young ruler who came to Jesus asking what good thing he should do that he might have eternal life. Jesus told him to sell all that he had, to give to the poor, to take up his cross and to follow him. At that the young man went away sorrowful, “*For he had great Possessions.*” And Jesus took advantage of the incident to warn his disciples with what difficulty a rich man must enter the Kingdom of God, a warning that puzzled them greatly, so greatly that they asked “Who then can be saved?” To their still material minds it seemed inconceivable that if the rich, with all their advantages, could not attain the Kingdom, any other man should do so. But Peter, with his habitual quickness of mind and impulsiveness of speech, came out with a blunt enquiry as to what *they*, who *had* given up all for his sake should have therefore, and by then it was becoming apparent that some sound instruction was necessary; so Jesus told this story of the man who hired laborers to work in his vineyard and what happened to them at the end of the day.

We shall miss the point of the parable, therefore, unless we bear in mind that it is intended to teach the disciples the truth regarding this matter of ultimate rewards in the heavenly Kingdom. *Here* is a rich man who was debarring himself from entrance because he would not give up his riches; *there* were other men who would attain to glory and power in that Kingdom because they *had* given up their scanty possessions. But there was something else beside. They had “followed” Jesus; the rich man had failed to follow. The sacrifice of worldly possessions was not of itself enough; there must also be the willing acceptance of the life of labor “with him” if the desired end was to be reached. And above all things, the idea of, and the thought of, personal advancement in front of one's fellows must be eradicated from the mind; there can be no ruling over one another, no taking precedence or assuming superior glory, in the Kingdom. All will be brethren, and there will only be one Master, Christ. The story of the request made by the mother of James and John, that they should be given special favor in the Kingdom, comes immediately after the parable and probably not without design. The princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them, said Jesus, but it shall not be so among you. So the parable of the vineyard came readily to the Savior's lips in furtherance of his purpose to show his disciples the better way.

“For the Kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire laborers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the laborers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard’, It is the vintage time; the husbandman has tended his vines assiduously throughout the growing season with the help of his own regular servants -he had a steward according to verse 8 and therefore must have had servants in house and field -and has brought his crop to fruition. But the vintage must be gathered quickly and he needs additional temporary help, and so, as morning dawns - 6 am in the East - he goes to the marketplace where the casual laborers congregate and engages sufficient men to complete the work. It is important to the right understanding of the story that this point be appreciated; *the householder engaged all the laborers he needed*, at the normal time for starting work. Other employers would be there too,

engaging men for their requirements, until the demand was satisfied, and then, just as in later and, to us, more familiar days, the unfortunate ones who had not been engaged would resign themselves to another day of idleness and loss of wages.

But the particular employer who occupied the center of the stage in this little drama which Jesus, with his consummate skill, was working out for the benefit of the enthralled disciples, was not as other employers. He left his own duties and went out into the market place again about nine o'clock and, probably as he anticipated, found men standing about idle, not having been hired. He had no need of them, but he sent them into his vineyard to labor, and they evidently went gladly. At noon, when the work of the day was halfway through, he went again, and found more men idle, and sent them in similarly. Came three o'clock in the afternoon and the sun swiftly dropping down the western sky, and yet a little knot of men, renewed hope in their faces, wending their way to the householder's vineyard for three hours work before the night came in which no man could work. A strange but a welcome employer to have this altogether unusual concern for the unemployed and hopeless.

The disciples must by now have been wondering toward what this story was leading them. They were of the working classes themselves, and they had no illusions about the characters of employers. An employer who went out of his way to employ, and pay, laborers he did not really need was just as much a rarity then as it is now. No wonder the disciples were interested. But Jesus had not finished the story yet.

Five o'clock came; the eleventh hour. In sixty more minutes the sun would sink suddenly below the western horizon and darkness would drop down, quickly and completely. The day's work was virtually over; and yet here is the householder, once again in the market place, asking the few remaining stragglers why they stand there all the day idle. "Because no man hath hired us" they answer, perhaps resentfully, perhaps wonderingly. A strange question to ask; he knew very well why they thus stood. But the rejoinder was stranger still. "Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive." They needed no further encouragement, and an hour later were standing before the steward, probably thankful for the small portion of payment they expected for one hour's more or less nominal labor. They received, each one of them, a full day's wage!

By now more than one or two of the other laborers were convinced that this householder was not altogether accountable for his actions. A whole *denarius* for one hour's work; such a thing was unheard of! It looked as if some of them who had been fortunate enough to start earlier in the day would take small fortunes home to their families. They stepped up in their turn, covetous eyes seeking to discern what their fellows were getting, and "they received every man a denarius"

Of course, there was disappointment, and expostulation, and talk of injustice. The householder was called to the scene, and listened to their complaint. Quietly he told them that none of them had suffered loss; all had received the amount for which they had bargained, the amount they had expected, the amount which, if commonly accepted observation be true, was the normal day's wages for a laborer at the time. True, they had worked longer and harder than had the late comers, but it was their good fortune that they had obtained work and in the ordinary way the others' misfortunes that they were workless. Their material needs were the same; their families at home

needed food and clothing in equal measure and the householder had recognized that fact by giving to each, *not according to his accomplishment, but according to his need*, and without injustice or hardship to any one of them.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like that, said Jesus to his listeners. They sat round him, chins supported in cupped hands, flowing robes gathered closely, seeing in the mind's eye that coming day in which they would sit, each on a throne, twelve men on twelve thrones in all, judging the tribes of Israel, and the rich man who could not find it in him to sacrifice wealth and position *now*, bereft of it *then*, taking his place amongst the crowd. A group of men, some having worked long and hard, others for a little time only, all receiving the same at the end, without distinction in position or reward. *The Kingdom of Heaven is like that!* What Kingdom of Heaven is this?

Evidently from the fact that the parable is given in consequence of the disciples' question regarding future reward for-present sacrifice, it has reference to the spiritual phase of the Kingdom of God in the next Age, the Messianic Age, when the Church of Christ, glorified and associated with him in the spiritual realm "beyond the Veil" will have ceased from their labors in the vineyard of this Age and appeared to receive their "hire," the "reward" of their consecrated walk before him. The householder, of course, is the Lord himself, going out himself to find disciples who will serve his interests in this world. His "going out" thus continues during the whole of this Gospel Age, from Pentecost until the setting up of the earthly Kingdom, but the third hour, sixth hour, and so on must refer, not to the early, middle and late centuries of the Age, but to stages in the lives of individuals at which the call comes to them. Quite obviously no one has labored from Pentecost until today, for life does not last so long. But some there are, and such there have been at every point of time throughout the Age, to whom the call came in youth or early life, and who heard and obeyed the call and labored zealously and faithfully until old age ended their labors. These are they who were sent into the vineyard "early in the morning" Others receive the call in middle life; these are they who respond to the householder's invitation at the third or sixth or even the ninth hour. And some are already in the evening of life when they give themselves in whole-hearted surrender to the Lord Christ; they come in at the eleventh hour but the Lord has work for them to do and a work to do in them.

So it will be, then, when the hope of every true believer is realized, and the "General Assembly of the Church of the Firstborn, whose names are written in heaven" has become an accomplished fact. We shall meet our fellows and our companions of the pilgrim way, those that have gone before us into the glory land, the saints and martyrs and prophets and apostles of earlier times, and we shall find that we are all equally citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem, thinking no more of station or rank, of preferment one above another, but all rejoicing together in the wondrous companionship and over-lordship of Christ our Head, the heavenly Bridegroom. "With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought; they shall enter into the King's palace." The "penny" which each one will receive is the prize of eternal association with the Lord Jesus Christ in the glory of his Kingdom, and before the presence of the Heavenly Father; and, associated with that for the duration of the Messianic Age, the inestimable privilege of working together with the Savior for the conversion of the world.

Some will ask what there may be in this happy state to correspond with the "murmuring." Is there to be murmuring in heaven, amongst the redeemed and glorified saints? The idea is both absurd

and unthinkable. Jesus meant something quite different from that, his story showed the disciples what *they* were making of the calling to which he had called them, and was yet to call others. *They* were the men who were manifesting the spirit of self-assertiveness, who wanted to be greater than others in the Kingdom, who even quarreled among themselves as to which of their little band should be greater than the rest. That is the spirit, said Jesus in effect, which would lead you at the end to murmur against Me when I finally apportion the crowns of life in the Kingdom. It was a warning, and the subsequent history of the disciples shows us that, though in some cases the lesson was long in being learned, at the end it was learned, and well learned.

- *Bible Study Monthly, January/February 1990*