

Index of Articles:	Page
Knowing God, pt 4	1
Mountains of Scripture: Mt. Of Olives	4
Abraham Mourning: Sarah's Death	6
Dried-Away Souls, pt 2	8

Knowing God; Attributes of God

Joel Portman

It is a sad commentary that is likely genuine, that very few Christians actually take time to seriously meditate and think deeply about God, being occupied in spirit with the truths that He has revealed concerning Himself. We accept certain doctrines that affect our lives and practices, but to dwell deeply on the One who has given them to us, to seek to penetrate the darkness that surrounds His Person, and to fill our hearts with the grandeur of all that He is, is not often our occupation. But when we seek to know God or deeply consider how we are to know Him, we begin to recognize that we know Him only as He has revealed Himself to men. In Himself, God is essentially unknowable, except that He has made Himself known by means of Divine attributes that display those characteristics that are His. He hides Himself from the casual gaze of most men (Ps. 18:11, 97:2), but delights to reveal Himself to those who truly seek Him. Believers have received spiritual, eternal life so that we might know Him (Jn. 17:3) and He desires that we develop a soul thirst for Him (Ps. 42:1-2). Those who wrote the Psalms reveal that they thought more deeply and longingly after God, even with their limited Scriptures, than we do with the complete Word of God and many books to help explain it. Even at the best, our limited intellectual and spiritual capabilities fail to fully grasp all that He has revealed about His Person, even though those attributes are expressed in words that we can understand. Who He is goes far beyond the descriptive power of words, and it reflects a low spiritual state of anyone to claim that they have attained a complete knowledge of God. It is better, like Moses at the burning bush in Ex. 3, to remove our shoes from our feet and stand in reverence before the One who we seek to know.

Quoting a paper that my father, John H. Portman, wrote, I note that he wrote, "God is the sum of all knowledge; therefore, to know Him is the highest undertaking for man. The object that God has in unfolding Himself is that believers might be continually occupied with His Person and His work. Every creature begins at zero in his understanding of the infinite God. The distance between the Creator and the creature ever remains the same – infinity. Men can know but a fractional part of Him. The finite can best contact the infinite through material media. Materiality is the alphabet of God's revelation. God puts nature into the minds of men as a problem to be solved; they deduce Him as the only correct solution. That the glory and mystery of Jesus Christ were both old, and also new at His incarnation, does not admit of doubt. What must have been the surprise of the heavenly hosts when they viewed the One Who they had worshiped and admired as the very brightness of full-orbed Deity shroud His effulgence or glory in the little babe who was born at Bethlehem. Never had such a thing been witnessed before. It is no wonder that they desire to look into these things. The Christian could have no higher purpose than to do the same."

In our rationalistic and materialistic society, especially of today, we have a great need as believers in Christ to study this subject. Many immerse themselves in studies of subjects necessary for their advancement in their field of work, or they study other matters having to do with their lives in this world. But a Christian should, and must, make this study his or her highest goal. It is essential to our preservation from becoming "*like those that go down to the pit.*" (Ps. 28:1). It is the only thing that is truly spiritually uplifting, and which will bring joy to our souls. We neglect this study at great spiritual/moral loss.

Attributes of God

In an article like this, the subject of Divine attributes cannot be treated extensively, but we will look at them briefly, and if one desires further study, numerous books have been written on the subject. The most exhaustive one that this author has is by Stephen Charnock and runs over 1,000 pages long ("The Existence and Attributes of God"). Others are helpful as well, including "The Knowledge of the Holy" by A.W. Tozer, "Knowing God" by J. I. Packer and "The God-

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Editor and Publisher: Joel Portman
1200 Forest Glen Ct. SE,
Cedar Rapids, IA, 52403
Write to: mail@truthsforourday.com

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head" by Lehman Strauss. All seek to give guidance to a study of Deity, but the main textbook is the Word of God itself, for it has been given to enlighten our minds to this great subject. Those who neglect the study of God's Word do so at the expense of their spiritual understanding as well as their delight in knowing God. It is the most satisfying subject that can capture the human spirit and give joy to a seeking heart.

Divine attributes are generally divided into two: There are those that are uniquely possessed and expressed only in God Himself. They are labeled, "Uncommunicated", in that no other being shares these in any measure. They are also called "General Attributes" since they are also developed and displayed in all other of God's attributes. These are His Infinitude, Eternity, Perfection, Completeness, and Immutability, or changelessness. These are seen in all other attributes, so that, for example, His holiness is infinite, eternal, perfect, complete, and unchangeable. This is also true of all other attributes that are revealed to us.

There are other attributes that are called "Communicated" since they are those that may also be seen in His creatures. These attributes include such things as power, love, grace, mercy, knowledge, wisdom, holiness, understanding, etc. These may also be seen in men in some measure, though not to the degree that they are expressed by God.

Quoting a writer of the past, Frederick Faber, who, though he converted to become a Roman Catholic priest, wrote some profound expressions dealing with God, we read,

"Thine own Self forever filling,
With self-kindled flame,
In Thyself Thou art distilling,
Unctions without name!
Without worshiping of creatures,
Without veiling of Thy features,
God always the same!"

What are Attributes?

Attributes are defined as consisting of those means by which God has revealed Himself. They are more than qualities or characteristics, they are what God is, not what He is like. We must admit that we don't know every attribute of God; He is far greater than anything that any man can know or comprehend. In the depths of God there is that which goes far beyond anything that He can make known to us in our limited understanding.

When thinking of God, we should seek to rid ourselves of natural thinking and reasonings that would limit our thoughts of Him. He is not a man, nor is He like a man. Notice Ps. 50:21, *"Thou thoughtest I was altogether such an one as thyself, but I will reprove thee and set them in order before thine eyes."* Everything about God transcends our ability to grasp or compare with anything that we know.

General Attributes of God

General attributes are those that are also displayed in all other of His attributes, so that every other attribute of God includes these that are a part of it. We can only consider them briefly, but each attribute is a means of giving us a rich and profound insight into the greatness of our God.

1. God is Infinite. Our finite minds cannot grasp someone or something that is infinite in every way, so to say that God is infinite is to say that everything concerning God has no limit or measure. The only limit would be that which His own divine nature establishes according to His will. That is to say that God can do anything, but He will only do that which His will and holy character determine. For example, He cannot sin, for that would contradict His nature and will.

Every attribute of God is without dimension in space, without limitation in His ability, and without any measurement in its quantity. He has power to do whatever He wills to do. This attribute touches on His omnipotence, for He can do whatever He purposes to do. The exercise of any or all of His attributes never results in a diminishing of it or God Himself. He is never impoverished by giving, nor is He enriched by receiving. Our righteousness, Job learned, adds nothing to God nor does our iniquity take anything from Him (Job 22:3). Of course, this reflects a deficiency in Eliphaz' knowledge of God that is corrected by other scripture, but it also indicates that He is not dependent on man for anything.

In creating all things, we read that *"He spake, and it was done; he commanded and it stood fast."* (Ps. 33:9). The context of that verse refers to His work in creation. It is awesome to think that what He had in His mind, the perfect design of all created things, was executed simply by His speaking! This challenges any human mind, for we cannot conceive all the intricate aspects of created beings being brought into existence in a moment, perfectly functioning and in perfect relation to one another. But God is infinite, and there is no limit on anything pertaining to Him. In creation (as in all other works of God), God displayed His infinite knowl-

edge, wisdom, power, and greatness to bring this creation into a perfect existence. The same is abundantly true with respect to God's provision of salvation, for it is a work so perfectly designed and executed that it upholds and displays His wisdom, power, love, grace, along with other attributes to an infinite degree. The subject of God's infinitude could be expanded greatly (one could also venture to say "infinitely"), but we must leave it with another quotation that speaks of this attribute:

Timeless, spaceless, single, lonely, Yet sublimely Three,
Thou art grandly, always, only God in Unity!
Lone in grandeur, lone in glory, who shall tell Thy
wondrous story? Awful Trinity! F. Faber

2. God is Eternal. Once again, we are faced with an attribute of God that is beyond our ability to understand. Man cannot conceive of anything or anyone without a beginning, One that has always existed. In contrast to natural, material entities, God is eternal. He is unoriginated and unending in His Person and Nature. *"From everlasting to everlasting, thou art God."* (Ps. 90:2). We find it difficult to understand One who exists outside of time, One who is equally present at any moment in creation's history, at the beginning and simultaneously present at the end of all things. Time is necessary for man's existence, serving to order events and give guidance to his activities. God is not limited by time and can simultaneously comprehend every event that has or will occur in the history of this universe. Time forces us to wait for things to happen, but it is not so for God. What will happen has already happened in His perfect understanding. This forms a basis for prophetic utterances that spoke of future events as if they were present, since to God, they were present. This is hard to describe and impossible to define, but let our minds seek to comprehend in some small measure the One who is not limited in any way by the sequences of time. This One is from eternity, dwelling in eternity, and yet in the incarnation, He chose to enter into, and continue His involvement with the events of time in order to bring men into relation with Him eternally.

When Jehovah gave Moses a word to bring to Israel in Egypt, he was told to tell them, *"I AM that I am....I AM hath sent me unto you."* (Ex. 3:14). This is a title that the Lord Jesus also expressed concerning Himself in John's Gospel, one that the Jews immediately recognized as an expression of His Deity, His timeless existence. Especially was this true when He said, *"...before Abraham was, I AM."* (John 8:58). Both

expressions mean that at every point of time and in every experience of men, He is there. Abraham had a beginning and physically ended at a point in time, but the Lord Jesus always IS. It is a word that is full of comfort to every soul in every circumstance at any time. Heb. 13:8 indicates the same in the expression, “*Jesus Christ, the same, yesterday, and today, and forever.*” That, along with what we read in Heb. 1:10-11 that is quoted from Ps. 102:24-27 emphasizes that our God is eternal. Let us rest on this great truth and revel in its personal and practical implications in our lives.

Lord willing, we will continue to touch on other attributes of our great God.

(continued)

Many seek to use God to attain some desired goal. God is not a/the means to a goal. He is the goal. One who desires anything beyond or in addition to God is guilty of idolatry.

The Mountains of Scripture: Mt. Of Olives

Disciples Heard the Prophecy

Alan Davidson

As He sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto Him privately saying, “*Tell us, when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of Thy coming, and the end of the world?*” Matt. 24:3.

On Mount Moriah, Abraham saw the **Provision**. At Mount Sinai, Moses saw the **Pattern**. On Mount Carmel, Elijah witnessed the **Power**. On the Holy Mount, Peter saw the Glory of the **Person**. Upon the Mount of Olives, the disciples were privileged to get a far distant vision of **Prophecy** as foretold by the Lord Himself. The further we climb up the mountain, the further we can see into the distance. The disciples saw, ‘The End’.

The disciples had shown Him the buildings of the Temple. They were focusing upon a literal Temple

and a literal Kingdom, which they thought was imminent. Luke’s account of the Sermon on the Mount emphasizes the near view at A.D. 70. Matthew’s emphasis is on the far view, ‘The End’, the Consummation of the Age.

Matthew writes about Eight Mountains and deals with The Presentation of the King and the Principles of the Kingdom. On former Mountains, Matthew records the Prayers and Power of the King. In Matthew 17, we have already thought of the Person of the King as transfigured before them on the Holy Mount. Matthew 24 and 25 comprise the second discourse on the Mount of Olives that deals with Prophecy. The Gospel concludes with the Passion, and finally, the Majestic Proclamation of the King, “*All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.*” (Matt 28:18-20).

There are 4 great Discourses in the Gospels:

Matt. 5-7 The Sermon on the Mount - The Principles of the Kingdom.

Matt. 13 The Sermon by the Sea - The Program of the Kingdom. (The Sower, Seed, Soils; Tares; Mustard Tree; Meal; Treasure; Pearl; ending with the Drag Net in the Sea of Nations).

Matt .24-25 The Sermon on the Mount of Olives – The Prospect of the Kingdom. (Ending the Mystery of the Kingdom before the setting up of the Literal Millennial Kingdom.)

John 13-17 The Sermon in the Upper Room - The Present Church Age.

The language of Matthew 24 & 25 is *Jewish*, not church language. Note the following phrases: Son of Man (7 times); salvation by endurance (v.13); gospel of the kingdom (v.14); Daniel the prophet (v.15), Judea (v.16), Sabbath (v.20); great tribulation (v.21); Lord over his household (v.45); “the King shall say” (Matt. 25:34); “the King shall answer; (Matt. 25:40), are not church expressions. The kingdom period includes the Church, and the truth can be applied to the children of all ages including the present age. However, the End or Consummation of the Age is the Consummation of the Kingdom in Mystery and has nothing to do with the Rapture of the Church. The Rapture of the Saints does not depend upon their faithfulness and vigilance. Unfaithfulness will result in loss of reward but not exclusion from His presence.

Major judgments of the future are as follows:

The Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10) will follow the rapture. It will be in the air or in Heaven. All who are at this judgment will be saved and the result will be reward or loss of reward.

The Judgment of the Living Nations (Matt. 25:32) will occur before the Millennial Kingdom. It will be of those who are still living on earth prior to the onset of the Millennial kingdom, and the result will be separation of those who will enter the Kingdom from those who will be cast into everlasting fire.

The Great White Throne Judgment (Rev. 20:11) will be after the Millennial reign. It will be in space. It will be of the wicked dead and the result will be the damnation of all who stand before the Judge.

“And Jesus went out and departed from the temple.” (Matt. 24:1) At the end of the previous chapter He said, *“Behold, your house is left unto you desolate”* (Matt. 23:38). The Lord forsook Shiloh in 1st Samuel. The glory departed from the temple in Ezekiel’s day. Ornate buildings and elaborate construction are of no value to the Lord if the people are marked by disobedience to His Word. Today, the assembly of the saints is God’s building. *“Know ye not that ye are the Temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.”* (1 Cor. 3:16-17)

“And as he sat upon the Mount of Olives, the disciples came unto Him privately.” (Matt. 24:3) The Mount of Olives is the mountain from which He ascended (Acts 1:12), and also, the mountain to which He shall come again. *“His feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives.”* (Zech. 14:4). Mark 13:3 indicates that there were four disciples, Peter, James, John and Andrew that asked Him privately. There were only eleven disciples in the Upper Room to hear His other great discourse. The Lord Himself had small meetings. The disciples were interested in literal buildings, they were looking for His kingdom and they believed in Him as the Messiah. It all seemed so imminent, yet, in three days, He would be crucified.

“Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world?” Matt. 24:3. The Lord answers the threefold question and enlarges on ‘the end’, the consummation of the Age.

Matt. 24:4-14 The Characteristics of the End period.

Matt. 24:15-26 The Culmination of events in the End time.

Matt. 24:27-31 The Coming in Glory of the Son of Man.

Matt. 24:32-25:31 The Citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven seen in seven parables, signs or revelations that cover exactly the same End time.

The disciples asked ‘when?’ This is answered in vs 4-14 in dealing with the persecution of the faithful. *“Then shall the end come”* (v.14). The disciples asked, *“what shall be the sign of thy coming?”* The Lord answered this (vs.15-27), *“so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.”* v.27. This section deals with the abomination of desolation. The disciples asked, *“And what shall be the sign of the end of the world?”* This He answered clearly in vs. 28-30, dealing with celestial signs. *“Then...shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory”*.

The outstanding features of these last days will be: **Deception:** (24:4) *“Take heed that no man deceive you, ...shall deceive many”*. This corresponds to the White Horse in the First Seal of Rev 6. *“He that sat on him had a bow”*, to achieve victory at a distance. *“Conquering, and to conquer”*. Rev. 6:2. Through the media, propaganda, political spin, and the sense of false peace and prosperity, the prince of the power of the air will seek to conquer the minds by what is known today as the wars of antenna.

Disturbance: (24:6-7) *“Wars...famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes”*. The Kings of the earth and great men will realize that they cannot rule and by great climatic upheavals they will come to face the power of their Creator.

Delay: (24:6) *“The end is not yet”*, v. 8 *“the beginning...”*. God seems in mercy to wait, yet He has appointed the day when the Son of man shall come in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. *“Then...”* (v. 9) *“then....”* (v. 10), *“then...”* v. 14. God is “longsuffering, not willing that any should perish...” (2 Pet. 3:9). He waited in the days of Noah. The message of repentance will again be preached as man rises to the zenith of his apostasy.

Desolation: (24:15) The sacrilege of the abomination of desolation under antichrist in the middle of the seven-year week, will usher in the Tribulation, the great one, when God again will deal with Israel, the remnant shall flee, and two thirds of the city will be destroyed. These features are beginning to be manifest today. Presently there is only one thing that does not fit in, one feature that is holding back the revelation of the man of sin. It is the presence of Church saints on earth indwelt by the Spirit of God. *“Be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled...that day shall not come...what withholdeth”* (presence of NT saints, neuter) *“that he might be revealed in his time.”*

For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only He” (masculine, Holy Spirit) “who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.” 2 Thess. 2:2-7.

The saved of this Age of Grace are not watching for signs but listening for the shout. *“For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first”.* (1 Thess. 4:16) The Lord upon the Mount of Olives was speaking about the end of the Kingdom in Mystery age. He will come as the Deliverer of the Nation to commence His literal 1000 year reign. He will not come **for** His Bride as at the Rapture, but He will come **with** His Bride in Manifestation.

“Then shall the Kingdom of Heaven be likened unto ten virgins”. (Matt. 25:1) There is no grammatical break between ch. 24 and ch. 25. “Then” continues the sequence of events commenced in ch. 24 taught by the Lord in seven parables, signs or revelations – Matt. 24:32 to 25:30. These verses relate to the citizens of the Kingdom in the end times.

1. The Parable of the Fig Tree – Matt. 24:32. The national tree of Israel slowly budding and eventually producing green foliage.

2. The Days of Noah – Matt. 24:37. The complacent apathy of ordinary living in light of imminent disaster.

3. The Unexpected Separation of those toiling in the field or grinding at the mill. Matt. 24:40. One shall be ‘taken’ in judgment, the other ‘left’ for the Kingdom.

4. The Householder whose house was broken up. Again, as the Lord refers to the coming of ‘the thief’. He is emphasizing the unexpected. Matt. 24:43. 5. The Servants; ‘faithful and wise’ Matt. 24:45 or ‘evil and drunken’ who said, *“My Lord delayeth His coming”.* Matt. 24:48.

These parables seem to correspond to the period covered in Ezekiel 38-39 when there will be false peace. The Nation in confederacy with the beast will dwell in unwalled villages in a state of complacency and ease.

5. Matt. 25:1-12. The parable of the virgins. *“While the Bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept”*, covers the same period. The Marriage being over in eastern custom, the bridegroom and the bride returned to the home of the bridegroom for the marriage feast. The virgins were not the Bride but the ‘friend of the Bridegroom’ as was John Baptist. The ‘oil’ of the Spirit was not indwelling but available. *“Blessed are they which are called unto the Marriage Supper of the Lamb”.* Rev. 19:9.

6. The story of the talents concludes, “After a long time”. Matt. 25:19.

These stories therefore run concurrent until the ultimate final state of the Kingdom of Heaven. Note the language of the ‘End’ – “took them all away”; “taken” and “left”; “house broken up”; “weeping and gnashing of teeth”; “the door was shut”; “outer darkness”; “weeping and gnashing of teeth”; “everlasting fire”; “everlasting punishment”.

7. The purging of the Kingdom at the Judgment of the sheep and the goats when only the real subjects of the Kingdom who are ‘ready’ will enter the Kingdom in manifestation. Matt. 25:32-46. This is the Judgment upon earth of the true and false after the Great Tribulation Period during which a cup of cold water given in His Name will not go unrewarded.

Practical Lessons

There are practical lessons applicable to all the citizens of ‘the Kingdom of Heaven’ in any period. The Church is not the Kingdom, but the Church exists in the Kingdom period. We are members in the Body, but we should also manifest the features of subjection and readiness seen in the citizens of the Kingdom.

From the story of the goodman of the house (Matt. 24:43-44) we learn the lesson of the importance of WATCHING. Seven times in the New Testament we are exhorted to be ‘looking’, ‘looking expectantly for’, lit. ‘to wait up for’. We are waiting for the Blessed Hope. (Titus 2:13).

We should also manifest the features of those who are WAITING. *“But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation. For God hath not appointed us to wrath (tribulation wrath), but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ”.* 1 Thess. 5:8-9.

We apply the story of the Talents to the necessity to be diligently WORKING. Each has some God-given ability. Do not bury your ‘talent’, but seek increase in the currency of redemption. Put wealth in the bank of glory beyond this scene of inflation and financial crisis. Such toil and labor will not be in vain when we hear Him say, ‘Well done’.

It is so beautiful to notice that the Lord’s discourse upon the Mount seems to rise to two majestic peaks. Matt. 24:30: *“And they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory”.* Matt. 25:31: *“When the Son of Man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the Throne of His Glory”.*

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“Lo! He comes with clouds descending,
Once for favored sinners slain;
Thousand, thousand saints attending,
Swell the triumph of His train;
Hallelujah!
Jesus comes, and comes to reign.”

John Cennick 1718-1755
Charles Wesley 1707-1788

Christ's Faithfulness

Walter Scott

From the manger to the throne, He never swerved from the path of absolute obedience to the Father's will. He passed on and on in His devoted and solitary path, uncheered by human smile or commendation. Like Him, never lower the flag, never compromise, never adapt the testimony of God to altered times and changing circumstances. Hold on! Hold fast! Press on! Truth is eternal as the years of God.

Abraham Mourning Sarah's Death (Gen. 23:1 - 20)

Larry Steers

She had traveled a very long journey of life. The first years of her sojourn on this earth were in Ur of the Chaldees. Turning from the idols of Ur, she responded with her husband to the revelation of the living God. The easy life experienced in the luxuries of Ur had been exchanged for the hard life of a tent dweller. A life of faith had been commenced desiring “a better country” (Heb. 11:16).

A tent would be her home. In contrast to Lot's wife, when the angels arrived “*Lot made them a feast*” (Gen. 19:3). His wife evidently was not in the tent, but may have been wandering in Sodom. That was her life. When she could have been rescued she looked back more concerned about the life she was leaving.

Three men visited Abraham who “*hastened into the tent unto Sarah*” (Gen. 18:6). In the New Testament we read that the aged women are to teach the younger women to be “*keepers at home*” (Tit. 2:5).

They had settled for a time in Haran and eventually, led by God, had entered the land which would be promised to Abraham and his seed.

From the time she departed the land of her nativity until death she was constantly by the side of Abraham, a faithful partner. Yes, there were failures in her life as in ours. But notice that when she is referred to in the New Testament, there is no reference to faltering steps. The Hebrew writer reminds us “*Through faith also Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age*” (Heb. 11:11). “Received strength!” “Passed age”. The Holy Spirit, surveying her life has incorporated Sarah into the great chapter of faithful men and women.

She was ninety years old at the birth of Issac. Sarah had grown in her faith. The same verse in Hebrews 11 reads “*she judged him faithful who had promised*”. Peter dwells, not on her failures but her faithfulness to Abraham when he writes “*Even as Sarah obeyed Abraham calling him Lord*” (1 Pet. 3:6).

It is certain that some brethren and sisters reading these words have experienced the death of a loved one. Perhaps, as in the experience of Abraham, a faithful companion in life, or as in the case of Isaac, a mother. Perhaps as a mark of honor, the age of Sarah is revealed. She was 127 years old when she died. The scriptures reveal the age of no other woman when their earthly pilgrimage ended.

The tent had been pitched in Kir-jath-arba (v .2), which later became known as Hebron (Josh. 14:14-15).

Evidently, Abraham was absent when Sarah died for he “came to mourn” (v. 2). As the scene unfolds, Sarah is lying in state surrounded by Isaac and the servants. Abraham arrives to mourn and to weep with a broken heart. Certainly, death would have caused tears prior to Sarah's death, but the tears first recorded in scripture are Abraham's shed in this tent.

Death is an invader in God's creation, resulting from Adam's sin of disobedience in the garden. Tears flow because of what sin has produced. The great, solemn object lesson that all have sinned is death. (Romans 5:12).

The Lord wept at the tomb of Lazarus. The Thessalonians sorrowed over the departure of loved ones (1 Thess. 4:19). Recently, standing at the open grave with a sorrowing family, they were reminded that this is not goodbye but only good night. “*Weeping may endure for a night but joy cometh in the morning*” (Psa. 30:5). Very soon “*the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout ...the dead in Christ shall rise first*” (1 Thess.4:16). It cannot be long for “*the coming of the Lord draweth nigh*” (James 5:8).

Sarah would have a dignified burial in a specially

chosen location. Abraham evidently had his thoughts on the cave of Machpelah, at the end of a field possessed by Ephron the Hittite. In the process of negotiating to purchase the cave, the testimony of Abraham radiates from the scene. He was highly esteemed by the Hittites. He was a stranger and a sojourner among them. They recognized him as, "a mighty prince" (v. 6) and addressed him as "my lord" (v.11). They would give Abraham the field and the cave.

But the exercise of Abraham had long since been rooted firmly in his soul. After the battle of the Kings recorded in chapter 14, the King of Sodom offered Abraham "take the goods to thyself" (Gen.14:21). Abraham refused to accept the offer from a thread even a shoelatchet "lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abraham rich" (Gen.14:23).

Following is another rich lesson we can learn from Abraham. Whatever the suggested price he would pay in full. To maintain his testimony he paid the asking amount. When pressed Ephron valued the cave and the field at four hundred shekels of silver. "Abraham weighed Ephron the silver, which he had named in the audience of the sons of Heth" (v. 16).

God had made tremendous promises to Abraham and to his seed. They would possess the land from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates. Of that vast area Abraham possessed only a cave and the field.

The procession bearing the body of Sarah made its way to the cave solemnly, reverently, and tenderly laid her there. How blessed are the words of the apostle which encourages even us at such a moment. "It is sown in corruption: It is raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body" (1 Cor. 15:42 - 44).

As Abraham takes his last look at his faithful Sarah, we can be certain that his thoughts went to a mountain and an altar. With the sacrificial knife raised he was confident that Isaac would be raised from the dust of the ashes. He had told the young men "I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you" (Gen.22:5). Abraham and Isaac were coming down the mountain and Sarah would exit the cave. It has been suggested that Machpelah had an entrance in and an exit out.

Today the location of the cave is well known. The historian Alfred Edersheim states that of all the so-called holy places, the cave of Machpelah can be positively identified. Over the cave is the Mosque of Haram, two hundred feet long by one hundred fifty feet wide and fifty feet high. For years neither Christian nor Jew has been allowed entrance.

No other place in the Holy Land holds so much precious dust.

"Abraham buried Sarah, his wife" (Gen.23:19). Abraham was laid there, "Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah" (Gen. 25:29). Isaac and Rebekah were buried in the cave (Gen.49:31). Jacob says "There I buried Leah (Gen.49:31). Jacob was embalmed in Egypt, carried across the desert and buried the cave of Machpelah (Gen. 50:13). Perhaps Joseph, who was embalmed in Egypt and laid in a coffin, years later, was carried out of Egypt by the children of Israel and laid in cave of Machpelah.

A word in conclusion. In the cave when Sarah was laid to rest, there was no prayer, nor sermon, but there was a quiet dignity. When Joseph and Nicodemus laid the body of the Lord in the garden tomb there is no recorded prayer or message but a reverence. Devout men carried Stephen to his burial.

The soul never sleeps but is consciously aware of its destination, heaven for the saint and hell for the sinner. The body of the believer sleeps. Being brutally stoned, Stephen fell asleep (Acts 7:60), awaiting the redemption of the purchased possession (Eph. 1:14). The body of the believer is the property of the Lord. This demands a dignified, reverent funeral.

Christ's Tears

God wept through human eyes in a profound expression of divine sympathy with men. "Jesus wept," is one of the briefest Bible utterances, but O, how humanly touching and sympathetic! He wept in the garden, He wept over Jerusalem, and He wept with the sorrowing sisters at Bethany. We weep, but soon the hand of God will be gently laid on every tear-stained face. We shall weep no more.

Walter Scott

Dried Away Souls, pt 2

Prayer

Robert Surgenor

Before our Lord chose twelve men to accompany Him in His ministry, He resorted to the mountainside and spent the night in prayer. He highly

valued His communication with His Father. What about ourselves? Do you say prayers, or, do you pray? I have never said a prayer since God saved me, but I pray daily. God has imparted to us the Holy Spirit to enable us to pray effectively. *“Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered”* (Rom. 8:26).

Remember, *“He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might He increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint”* (Isa. 40:29-31).

Prayer moves the hand that holds the world. Paul was a praying man. In his epistles, he always mentioned to the saints that he prayed for them. However, prayer not only empowers us, it preserves us. Before engaging in anything, do we make it a matter of prayer first? Before leaving to travel, do we pray? When we arrive safely, do we pray? Paul exhorted the Thessalonians; *“Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. Quench not the Spirit”* (1 Thess. 5:17-19). What connection does “quench not the Spirit” have with prayer? Simply this. An ungrieved Holy Spirit is essential to effective prayer.

So, there’s the essentials to staying spiritually “fat and flourishing,” and not “dried away.”

The Mixed Multitude

We are not finished with this subject yet. We have considered things that can trigger the downward path to drying away, and three things that can inoculate us against this disease, namely eating the Word of God, abiding with Christ, and praying in the Spirit. *“Two are better than one ... and a threefold cord is not quickly broken”* (Eccl. 4:9, 12). However, there is another vital expression I want you to seriously consider. Notice. *“And the mixt multitude that was among them fell a lusting: and the children of Israel also wept”* (Num. 11:4). “The mixt multitude.” Who were they? They were people that “jumped on the bandwagon” and escaped Egypt by mingling themselves in the throng when Israel left Egypt. Many of them may have been Egyptian slaves, or downtrodden people, and thought that this was as good a chance as any to escape. They had never partaken of the Passover, nor been sheltered in their homes by the blood on the door as the children of Israel. They represent people of our day

who have never been redeemed, yet are in God’s assemblies who, after time, some begin lusting.

Israel had a mixed multitude at their very beginning as a nation. The Church had the same from its beginning. Paul speaks of *“false brethren unawares brought in”* (Gal. 2:4). Jude also speaks of *“certain men crept in unawares”* (Jude 4). Simon believed, was baptized and helping Philip the evangelist in his work, yet not saved (Acts 8:23).

To the unredeemed, the assembly’s pattern is too dull, or boring. Dissatisfied, they seek to introduce “better” methods and programs that are more appealing to the flesh. The virus is airborne and soon affects others. The simple and scriptural way of ordering the assembly soon gives way to modernism. “We remember.” Ah yes, they remember how lovely their former church affiliations were. Everybody was so broadminded, and everything was lovey-dovey. The choir sang so beautifully, the games were so thrilling, and social drinking was so exciting and soothing. The slide shows and movies were educational, and the women almost looked and acted like the men. Sister Warbler’s solos were so inspiring, brother Joker’s magic show was thrilling, and sister Melody played the organ so well. Oh for those lovely days in our former church where hell was never mentioned, nor blood, death, or the need of repentance. The preaching was so soothing and self- uplifting. Brother PleaseThemAll made us feel so important and he really had such good jokes in his sermons. Yes, “we remember.”

The Danger of Unsaved Friends

There is also another danger in which to beware: Unsaved relatives, or friends who seek to draw us to their way of life. They may say, “Your religion is OK, but don’t ruin your whole life being totally absorbed with it. Be more flexible. Don’t waste your life living like a hermit. Loosen up and enjoy life for a change. Ah yes, soon brother Withering is going with his unsaved friend to this and that event. His thirst for the scriptures is dwindling, his prayers are becoming more mechanical, his love for Christ is diminishing, and things in the assembly don’t seem to thrill him as before. Finally, he becomes a “dried away soul.” The luster is gone. What a calamity!

Nourishing What Nature?

It is impossible for us to grow in the divine life if we are only making provision for the flesh. The world’s food cannot nourish the new nature. What are you

nourishing, the new or the old nature? The divine nature cannot possibly feed upon the vain things the world offers. May we seriously think upon this. Paul instructs us. *“This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh”* (Gal. 5:16). Notice, he doesn’t say, “ye shall not feel the lust of the flesh.” No, no. He says, *“ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.”* You may walk as close to God as you can, but you will still feel the lust of the flesh, but you will have the Holy Spirit power to resist the temptation and not fulfill it.

May the good Lord help us to walk in the Spirit that the Lord may ever be a satisfying portion for our hearts. Had Israel walked with God, they never could have said, *“Our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all beside this manna before our eyes.”* That manna would have been quite enough for them. Brethren, if we closely walk with God, our souls shall be entirely satisfied with the portion He gives, which is Jesus our Lord.

A Satisfying Christ

If Christ can satisfy the heart of God, He certainly can satisfy our hearts. He satisfies the hearts of heavenly angels. He is their everlasting theme, He is everything to them, the object of their adoring homage. Is He not the one grand subject of everlasting counsels and purposes? Yes He is! The history of His ways overlaps eternity. Is not this holy One, in the deep mystery of His Person, in the moral glory of His ways, and in the brightness of His character, not enough for our hearts? He absolutely is, without a shadow of a doubt! What’s needed to fill up the vacuum in our souls? The world’s fish, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic? Hardly! What’s needed is a more intimate association with Christ. Listen to His gracious plea. *“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me”* (Rev. 3:2).

The Manna

Consider the manna. God gave it on a daily basis, except on the Sabbath. It has been estimated that in order to feed over two million people that at least 4,500 tons were required for each day. That amounts to 12 million pints. That would be enough to fill 300 railroad cars loaded with 15 tons each!

The characteristics of this heavenly food speak of Christ. It was small (Ex. 16:14), reminding us of Him, who *“made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men”* (Phil. 2:7). It was white, an emblem of

our Lord’s holiness, and sweet (Ex. 16:31), reminding us that there is no sweeter name on earth than the name of Jesus. *“O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in Him”* (Ps. 34:8). It was like coriander seed. This seed is used today for medicinal and culinary purposes. The seed, in itself, is beautiful to behold with its golden color and intricately fine black lines. It is rare in the fact that different people may perceive the taste of coriander leaves differently. Those who enjoy it say it has a refreshing, lemony or lime-like flavor, while those who dislike it have a strong aversion to its pungent taste and smell, characterizing it as soapy or rotten. Considering our Lord, as we gaze at the fine markings of His faithful pathway on earth, we see behind it the golden radiance of heaven.

Just as some like the seed, others detest it. How true that is of our Lord. Isaiah lamented concerning Israel’s appraisal of Jesus the Christ. *“When we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected of men”* (Isa. 53:2-3). As John states, there were those who received Him, and there were those who received Him not (Jn. 1:11-12). The manna was round (Ex. 16:14). A measuring rod has a beginning and an end, but something round has neither. A steering wheel on an automobile has no beginning, and no end. The manna was round, a picture to us of the Son of God who never had a beginning, and who will never have an end – He is eternal. From everlasting to everlasting, He is God, *“having neither beginning of days nor end of life”* (Heb. 7:3). We read in Exodus 16:21 21, *“And they gathered it every morning, every man according to his eating: and when the sun waxed hot, it melted.”* This reveals the priority of gathering the manna before becoming engaged with other affairs and responsibilities of life.

My dear brother or sister, what place does Christ occupy in your busy life? Are you a “ME FIRST,” person, like those in Luke 9:59, 61? Or do you resemble Peter, who exclaimed, *“Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life”* (Jn. 6:68). Lo, we have left all, and followed thee” (Lk. 18:28).

Is there anything we desire above Christ? Is it necessary for us to get some worldly magazine, or newspaper to fill a vacuum in our souls? Are we so confident in ourselves, that we leave our home to enter a wicked world to accomplish our needs, without prayer first? Self-confidence would better be described as self-carelessness. What is your priority? Is it like Paul’s who said, *“For to me to live – Christ”* (Phil. 1:21)?

The World's Quest

There is a quest in this world for entertainment, excitement, and lavish vacations. Speaking of vacations – on one occasion while talking with the late Albert McShane in his home, he mentioned that he had never taken a vacation. I told him that he was “one step” ahead of me, for I had one, and it was a disaster. My wife and I drove to Florida, and stopping at a motel overnight, she got chiggers. While in Florida our car was totaled, and she suffered a severe asthma attack. We were glad to get back home, thanks to United Airlines. We could sing, “Be it ever so humble, there’s no place like home.”

My idea of a satisfying, and sensible vacation would be relaxing in the back yard reading God’s word. What could be more profitable? What could be more healthful? What could be more delightful? Enoch’s vacation and vocation is described in Genesis 5:24. “*And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him.*” Thus, God bore this testimony concerning him – “*He pleased God*” (Heb. 11:5).

In 1970, a working man and his wife forfeited a two-week vacation to help an evangelist go door to door with invitations for gospel tent meetings. The result was, an assembly was planted. When the converts were baptized, it was the vacation-forfeiting brother who was called upon to baptize them. Their reward is in heaven where they are presently residing. Those two weeks were a profitable time, well spent.

Altering the Manna

What these murmuring people did with the manna is also interesting. “*And the people went about, and gathered it, and ground it in mills, or beat it in a mortar, and baked it in pans, and made cakes of it: and the taste of it was as the taste of fresh oil*” (Num. 11:8).

The application is twofold. First: their treatment of the manna (beating it), corresponds to what was done to Christ on the cross. They “*beat it in a mortar.*” The word “beat,” is very similar to that which is applied in Isaiah 53:5 to the sufferings of Christ when He is said to have been “*bruised for our iniquities.*” The second application is very practical. God gave them the best from the beginning, but alas, these dissatisfied people thought that they could improve on the manna by altering its taste. They beat it and baked it, changing its texture, shape, and taste. They wanted variety. The original wasn’t good enough. My oh my, if this doesn’t ring a bell. The grumbling mob is still with us. Listen to them. “That old King James Version is tasteless, it needs to be changed. Our modern,

intellectual generation is so intelligent that they can’t understand those archaic words. That version is antiquated, we need something more suited to our advanced times.”

Ah yes, we need something, but it’s not another new version. What we need is God, and the indwelling of an ungrieved Holy Spirit. “*But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth (discerneth) all things*” (1 Cor. 2:14,15). To the Christian, the indwelling Spirit gives the spiritual discernment to understand the scriptures. Notice what our Lord did for His own. “*Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures*” (Lk 24:45). A Christian cannot understand the scriptures apart from God’s help.

A Christian with a grieved Holy Spirit within will not receive help in understanding the scriptures. That is why it is imperative to live a life pleasing to God.

Changing Christ

The manna primarily speaks of Christ. Today, we have mentally warped people who seek to change Christ, making Him a mere man as themselves. They dress Him up in their imagination as some lovely prophet on a par with Muhammad, Buddha, or Confucius. Or, in some so-called “Christian churches” He is considered as just a loving fellow who set an example for us how to live. The J. W. cult looks upon Him as a mere man who was not God, and who never rose from the dead. The list goes on and on. He is beaten, baked in pans, and made cakes. This is all the devil’s work. Originally, the “*the taste of it was like wafers made with honey*” (Ex. 16:31). By the time Israel got through with it “*the taste of it was as the taste of fresh oil.*” The sweetness was gone. Oh how sweet to the redeemed souls to taste of Him, to enjoy His redemptive work for us on the Cross, His powerful resurrection from the dead, His glorious ascension to the Father’s right hand, His untiring daily intercession for us as our great High Priest, and His faithful promise to come again. We the redeemed have the best of both worlds. May he ever fill our hearts, minds, and souls, so that we may never shrink into dried-away souls. AMEN!