

to substitute blind adherence with principle-based decision-making. There will always, however, be a place for rules in any well-ordered family, society or ecclesia.

Legalism is defined as the “exaltation of law or formula” (*Oxford English Dictionary*). The problem, therefore, is not with law as such, but with an inappropriate emphasis being placed upon law. God provided for an elaborate range of sacrifices and offerings in the Law of Moses, but it was not His desire that these rituals should replace a loving and faithful response to His grace: “I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings” (Hos. 6:6; see also 1 Sam. 15:22).

A truly (as opposed to superficially) conservative approach to life is at odds with licentiousness, but it is a mistake to equate conservatism with legalism. The two are in no way related. Radical people often are extremely legalistic, especially when advocating for their right to act as they see fit. Legalism elevates law; thus, a radical who invokes rules and process to impose his will on others is just as legalistic as a conservative who seeks to impose rules that reflect his preferences at the expense of others.

The Christlike life

There is no room in our life in Christ for self-indulgence expressed in wantonness and self-

centred pleasure-seeking. There is also no room in our life in Christ for self-indulgence expressed in an ascetic approach to rules and regulations, which can actually become a means of gratifying the flesh. Paul warned the Colossians of the danger of ‘will worship’:

“If you have died with Christ and have escaped from the world’s rudimentary notions, why, as though your life still belonged to the world, do you submit to such precepts as, ‘Do not handle this’; ‘Do not taste that’; ‘Do not touch that other thing’—referring to things which are all intended to be used up and to perish—in obedience to mere human injunctions and teachings? These rules have indeed an appearance of wisdom, where there is self-imposed worship and an affectation of humility and an ascetic severity. But not one of them is of any value in combating the indulgence of our lower natures” (Col. 2:20-23, Weymouth).

The Christlike life involves denial of self: “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Mt. 16:24). Our attitude must be that which was manifested by the Lord in the Garden on the night he was betrayed: “not my will, but Thine, be done” (Lk. 22:42).

“Shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works” (Jas. 2:18).

Exposition

Fruit trees as symbols in Scripture — The almond

David Green

THE ALMOND is the first tree to blossom in the Holy Land, sometimes as early as January. Its blossoms, which appear before the leaves, are pink or white. For this reason it is easy to see why the writer of Ecclesiastes likens a white-headed old man to a flourishing almond tree in full bloom: “. . . when men are afraid of heights and of dangers in the streets; when the almond tree blossoms and the grasshopper drags himself along and desire no longer is stirred” (12:5, NIV).

The Hebrew name for the almond tree is *shaqed*, which is derived from *shaqad*, meaning

‘to watch’ or ‘to wake’ because the tree in bloom is the harbinger of spring. The name means ‘the awakening tree’. So, paradoxically, the almond tree is used as a symbol not only of old age but also of resurrection.

A striking example of its resurrection symbolism occurs in Numbers 17, in the episode concerning Aaron’s rod that budded: “And Moses laid up the rods before the LORD in the tabernacle of witness. And it came to pass, that on the morrow Moses went into the tabernacle of witness; and, behold, the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi was budded, and brought forth buds, and bloomed

Aaron	Jesus
Moses and Aaron chosen by God but rejected by the Israelites (Num. 16:1-3)	Jesus rejected by the Jews but chosen by God (Lk. 19:14)
Dead almond rod budding and then bearing flowers and fruit (17:8)	The resurrection of Jesus
The waking to life of the almond rod was confirmation of Aaron's authority from God to be high priest (16:10; 17:10)	The resurrection of Jesus was confirmation of his authority to be both ruler and high priest, as it witnessed to his claim to be the Son of God (Rom 1:4)
First tree to blossom in the spring (Heb. <i>shaqed</i> = the waker)	The resurrection of Jesus was the firstfruits, with many to follow (1 Cor. 15:20)
The rod was a symbol of authority (for example, Gen. 38:25, where the same word is translated 'staff' in the AV). The Hebrew word <i>matteh</i> is also frequently translated 'tribe'	Following his resurrection, Jesus was given all authority in heaven and on earth (Mt. 28:18, NIV)
Aaron's rod was laid up in the most holy place (17:10), which typified heaven.	Jesus Christ ascended to heaven (Heb. 9:24)

blossoms, and yielded almonds" (vv. 7,8). In this way God confirmed His choice of Aaron as high priest and put an end to the grumbling of the Israelites regarding the leadership vested in Moses and Aaron (v. 10).

This event has a typical significance clearly pointing forward to God's vindication of Jesus' claim to be the Son of God by raising him from the dead and giving him the authority to take up the dual office of both king and high priest. A full comparison of the events of Numbers 16 and 17 with their fulfilment in Christ is set out in the table.

The idea of watching that is involved in *shaqed*, the Hebrew name for the almond tree, is brought to the fore in an early vision of the prophet Jeremiah: "The word of the LORD came to me: 'What do you see, Jeremiah?' 'I see the branch of an almond tree,' I replied. The LORD said to me, 'You have seen correctly, for I am watching to see that My word is fulfilled'" (1:11,12, NIV). The same idea of God being watchful and prompt (Heb. *shoqed*) to carry out His purpose in either punishing or blessing His people is to be found in Jeremiah 31:28; 44:27; and Daniel 9:14. This passage in Daniel reads as follows in the AV: "Therefore hath the LORD watched upon the evil, and brought it upon us . . .".

The tabernacle lampstand

Exodus 25 records the details of the seven-branched lampstand (Heb. *menorah*) that was placed in the tabernacle to illuminate the holy

place. The central stem (shaft) and six branches were embellished with a number of ornamental knobs, flowers and bowls. The knobs were in the shape of pomegranates (Josephus), the flowers were probably anemones and the bowls (cups, RSV) were in the shape of almond blossoms. The total number of bowls amounted to twenty-two, each with its own knob and flower.

All things to do with the tabernacle in the wilderness were a shadow of good things to come, with the reality to be found in Christ (Heb. 10:1; Col. 2:17, NIV). The menorah giving out its sevenfold light in the holy place pointed forward to Christ and the saints being "the light of the world" both now and in the age to come (Mt. 5:14; Jno. 8:12; 9:5). This being so, the twenty-two almond-shaped bowls could point to the preaching of the Word of God, there being twenty-two letters in the Hebrew alphabet (compare twenty-two sections in Psalm 119).

But why are these golden bowls or cups in the shape of almond blossoms? Gold points to incorruptibility and the almond to resurrection, so the complete fulfilment of what is foreshadowed by these golden almond blossoms is in the Kingdom age. Then Christ and the saints, sharing in the resurrection glory of immortality and incorruptibility, will be the source of spiritual light to the mortal population. This subject will be dealt with more fully in the final part of this series, where the olive tree and olive oil will be considered, God willing.

(To be continued)