

lead remains, or else other base metals such as copper or iron. There is no goodness, represented by silver, in all the nation of Israel.

“Son of man, the house of Israel is to Me become dross: all they are brass, and tin, and iron, and lead, in the midst of the furnace; they are even the dross of silver. Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; because ye are all become dross, behold, therefore I will gather you into the midst of Jerusalem. As they gather silver, and brass, and iron, and lead, and tin, into the midst of the furnace, to blow the fire upon it, to melt it; so will I gather you in Mine anger and in My fury, and I will leave you there, and melt you. Yea, I will gather you, and blow upon you in the fire of My wrath, and ye shall be melted in the midst thereof. As silver is melted in the midst of the furnace, so shall ye be melted in the midst thereof; and ye shall know that I the LORD have poured out My fury upon you” (Ezek. 22:18-22).

The picture here is of smelting in general, and not of silver in particular. It is noteworthy that silver was smelted twice, and so it is mentioned twice in the passage. The passage is perhaps based upon a similar thought in Isaiah 48:10: “Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction”. Elsewhere there are references to the miracle of Israel’s deliverance as it were out of the iron smelting furnace of Egypt (Deut. 4:20; 1 Kgs. 8:51; Jer. 11:4). Now, the message of the Lord through Ezekiel is cutting in its severity. Because of its sins, Israel in Ezekiel’s day had become useless dross, for which the fiery furnace was

the only proper place. God’s face is here shown as One Who is terrible in judgement. Notice also that in verse 18 silver, the desired end result, is not present among the metals, it has already been extracted, or was never present; the work of the refiner is in vain. And clearly the metallurgy of Ezekiel is well established. Lead, silver, copper, tin and iron would all be known to exist in a refiner’s furnace, and would all seem to melt in the blast of air when the furnace was red hot.

“And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on My name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is My people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God” (Zech. 13:9).

This passage uses a very similar imagery to the previous ones, the refining of silver by fire being equivalent to the purification of Israel.

“But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner’s fire, and like fullers’ soap: and he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness” (Mal. 3:2,3).

In this very familiar passage the simile of the Lord as a refiner of silver occurs again. Here the prophetic application to the Lord Jesus Christ is quite clear.

(To be continued)

Redemption and ransom

Ralph Green

THE THEME OF redemption from sin and death was introduced in God’s eternal purpose from the very beginning. Our first parents, Adam and Eve, were blessed with the companionship of angels, and they had the opportunity of enjoying unending life in peace in the beautiful surroundings of the Garden of Eden.

Because God, their Creator, had given them life in the first place, He had the right to lay down conditions for its continuance. He looked

for obedience to His requirements and an appreciation of His goodness. A practical test was devised by introducing a simple law; they were not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which grew in the garden. Adam was told that if he disobeyed this command he would surely die.

Eve was fully aware of this law, but when in conversation with the serpent she was told that she would not surely die, she was being told something that clearly contradicted what God

had said. Very foolishly, she allowed herself to be seduced into disobeying what God had commanded. Eve, and also Adam, ate the forbidden fruit. Since the law had laid down death as the penalty for disobedience, death had to be applied, so sentences were passed on the three guilty parties.

God's plan of redemption

The prospect of a dying race of men and women seemed to spell failure in God's purpose in creating people with the ability to respond, if they wished, to God's ways and character. This would have been the case were it not for the fact that God had worked out a means of redeeming men and women from this sad situation.

It is the detail included in the sentence pronounced upon the serpent that arrests our attention. The sentence reads: "I will put enmity between you [the serpent] and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15).^{*} The literal serpent, because it had been responsible for inciting our first parents to sin, is here made to represent sin as a principle of disobedience to God. The class of people which would adopt this principle is called 'the seed of the serpent'. The woman's seed, on the other hand, is the class which seeks to obey God's will. Inevitably there would be a clash of outlook between these two classes, predicted in the words, "I will put enmity . . . between your seed and her Seed".

The statement, "he shall bruise your head", describes how a descendant of the woman would strike a deathblow at the serpent; it would be killed. This means that sin, which the serpent represents, would be taken away. It is remarkable how just such an event is described in similar terms in the New Testament:

"now, once at the end of the ages, he [Christ] has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Heb. 9:26);

"he [the Son of God] was manifested to take away our sins" (1 Jno. 3:5).

The Apostle John, recognising the meaning of the symbology of Genesis 3, uses that kind of language: "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil" (v. 8).

These passages refer, of course, to the mighty work of redemption wrought by the sinless Lord Jesus in his sacrificial death and condemnation of sin by crucifixion. The victorious Saviour,

though bruised in the heel by the serpent, was raised to life and immortality on the third day by his Father. The coming of sin and death into the world did not, after all, spell complete failure in God's plan because a means of redemption had been worked out for the 'seed of the woman', those who would believe and serve God in their mortal lives.

Although men and women would henceforth eventually die and return to dust, those who do what God requires will, because of the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus, be raised again from the dead. They will be rewarded with incorruptible life, free from sin, to be enjoyed in the presence of their redeemer, the Lord Jesus, and his almighty Father. Well might the recipients of such a joyful consummation join in the "new song" about their redeemer, saying, "you were slain, and have redeemed us to God by your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth" (Rev. 5:9,10).

The redemption of a nation

Redemption of another type was accomplished when the descendants of Abraham were freed from slavery in the land of Egypt. They had gone there in the days of Joseph to find subsistence when famine ravaged the land of Canaan. Under God's providence they multiplied in Egypt to such an extent that the Egyptians feared they would be outnumbered, and decided to make slaves of them. The slavery was harsh: "So the Egyptians made the children of Israel serve with rigour. And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage" (Ex. 1:13,14). There was no prospect of their being able to escape or to find relief from their suffering.

At this time God raised up Moses, who was instrumental in rescuing His people from their bondage. The rescue was accomplished only after God had inflicted ten plagues on the Egyptians, the tenth being the slaying of their first-born males.

To prevent the Israelites from suffering the same fate, Moses was instructed to tell the Israelites to keep the Passover. The blood of a slain lamb was to be brushed on the doorways of their houses to show where the obedient

* All quotations are from the New King James Version.

Israelites lived, thus identifying the houses which the destroying angel was to pass over. They were to roast and eat the lamb overnight and get prepared to leave the country in the morning. On that same night the first-born males of the Egyptians were slain. There was a great outcry throughout the land, and the Egyptians immediately thrust out the Israelites, fearing what else might happen to them if they kept them in bondage any longer (12:31-33).

We can imagine how joyful all the Israelites would have felt as they left the country, freed from slavery, to begin their long journey to the Promised Land. One more obstacle had to be overcome. The Red Sea was in their way. By God's wonderful power a pathway through the water was made, enabling them all to reach the other side. The Egyptian army followed but were drowned in the returning waters. By this great deliverance the nation of Israel owed an immense debt of gratitude to their God Who had saved them in such a wonderful way. The Lord their God thenceforth viewed them as His people.

The Passover and redemption

As the destruction of the serpent became a type of the taking away of sin, so the Passover is used by the Apostle Paul as a type of the deliverance from sin accomplished by our Lord Jesus. He wrote: "For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us" (1 Cor. 5:7).

The principles involved in the Passover are expanded in Paul's letter to the Romans, in which he explains that the believer in Jesus Christ, when he is baptized, is symbolically freed from the bondage of sin by a symbolic death. He is then able to commence a new life in faith and righteousness (6:12-18). This new life should be regarded as a journey to the Kingdom of God, the antitypical Promised Land, when the Lord Jesus will reign victoriously over the whole earth.

Redemption in the Law

The Exodus of Israel from Egypt was later referred to by Moses as a redemption: "the LORD [Yahweh] has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage" (Deut. 7:8). It is not surprising, therefore, that, among the later enactments in the Law of Moses, this redemption was memorialised.

For instance, all the first-born males born to the Israelites from a month old were required to pay redemption money of five shekels of silver to the priests in order to be allowed to continue

living in the community (Num. 18:16). A similar law had to do with the time of a census, when the males over twenty years of age were being numbered: "every man shall give a ransom for himself to the LORD . . . The half-shekel shall be an offering to the LORD" (Ex. 30:12,13). This silver half-shekel is called "atonement money", and was to be used for the tabernacle service (v. 16).

In these laws redemption was based on a financial transaction that, if obeyed, allowed those concerned to remain alive. They did not secure freedom from an eventual death. The Apostle Peter may have had this thought in mind when he wrote: "you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct . . . but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet. 1:18,19). That no financial arrangement for redemption from death is possible is clearly emphasised in Psalm 49: "none of them [the wealthy and rich] can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him . . . that he should continue to live eternally, and not see the Pit [the grave]" (vv. 7,9).

Redemption from death

As we have seen from Peter's first letter, God has made provision for redemption from the grave through the blood of Christ. Several confident declarations to this effect are made in the Old Testament. For instance, in Psalm 49 we read: "God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave, for He shall receive me" (v. 15); and in Hosea 13:14 God says categorically: "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. O Death, I will be your plagues! O Grave, I will be your destruction!". In this poetic outburst of triumph over the thralldom of sin and death, God as it were "made bare His holy arm" (Isa. 52:10) to make possible redemption for the righteous. The Apostle Paul thanks God that this victory over death is achieved through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:57).

Ransom

A dictionary definition of 'ransom' is "(liberation of prisoner in consideration of) a sum of money or value paid for release". When God imposed a ransom according to the law, it is seen to be reasonable and fair. Our redemption from sin and death through Jesus Christ, however, is said to be by His precious blood. Jesus called His sacrificial offering "a ransom for

many" (Mt. 20:28). When we consider the magnitude of this price 'paid' as a ransom from the prison-house of the grave, we can only feel immensely grateful that it has been so paid.

On a different level, it is quite possible that unscrupulous villains may imprison innocent people for the purpose of extorting ransom money. This can even happen at the hands of officials of a régime where such a procedure is accepted. If we should be so unfortunate as to find ourselves in such a situation, what are we to do? Can we accept the kindness of a friend who is willing to pay the ransom money? Why not? The Lord Jesus warned His disciples that a time would come when this could happen to His followers: "You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. And you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But not a hair of your head shall be lost" (Lk. 21:16-18).

On another occasion Jesus commanded His disciples: "when they persecute you in this city, flee to another" (Mt. 10:23). This means that, wherever or whenever there is an opportunity to escape from persecution, this should be taken.

A persecuted prisoner who is freed because of the payment of a sum of money comes into this category. It is a "way of escape" (1 Cor. 10:13). We are not called upon to make ourselves martyrs for martyrdom's sake. The question Jesus posed as to whether it would be lawful "to do good" and "to save life" was urged when it was possible for Jesus to release a handicapped man from his infirmity (Lk. 6:9). Jesus had compassion on the unfortunate man.

The Apostle Paul in prison

It might be thought that we have an example to follow in the case of the Apostle Paul, who, when he was in prison, had the opportunity of gaining freedom by paying money to the Roman governor, Felix. Luke records: "he [Felix] also hoped

that money would be given him by Paul, that he might release him" (Acts 24:26). But Paul did not take this course.

It must be remembered that Paul had been imprisoned for his own safety. Claudius Lysias, the Roman commander in Jerusalem, wrote a letter to Felix that is very illuminating. Here are two extracts: "This man was seized by the Jews and was about to be killed by them. Coming with the troops I rescued him . . . when it was told me that the Jews lay in wait for the man [to kill him], I sent him immediately to you" (23:27,30).

Most of the time, Felix treated Paul with unusual consideration: "he commanded the centurion to keep Paul and to let him have liberty, and told him not to forbid any of his friends to provide for or visit him" (24:23). Later on Paul was even invited to state his case before King Agrippa, and was at the same time able to witness to his faith in his Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.

It can be seen that Paul's case is very different from one where imprisonment is due to a desire to extort ransom money. Paul's desire to remain in protective custody is quite understandable.

Conclusion

Whatever experiences in life we may have encountered, whatever hardships we may have had to endure, whatever enmity we have had to contend with, it is very comforting to know that, in accordance with God's redeeming purpose, a priceless ransom has been paid for our release from an eternal grave.

Subject to our worthiness, we are now able to rejoice in the prospect of another life free from the temptation to do things contrary to God's laws. It will be a new life spent in the company of our loving redeemer, the Lord Jesus, and the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth, throughout the ages of eternity.

Israel today

According to the *Jerusalem Post* (30 July), the United Nations has just published its 'Human Development Index', which ranks countries according to life expectancy, levels of education and standard of living. The figures relate to 2002. Israel is ranked twenty-second in the world. Top is Norway, bottom is Sierra Leone. Israel has the eighth highest life expectancy (79.1 years), ahead of both the UK and the USA. Japan is top. The adult literacy rate is 95.3%. Israel's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per person, the usual way of measuring a nation's prosperity, was \$19,530, making it the twenty-seventh most prosperous country in the world, but well behind the USA (\$35,750) and the UK (\$26,150). It should be noted that these figures differ from those given last month (p. 302), though those also came from the *Jerusalem Post*.