

Then began the first of a long line of murmurings and complaints by the people against their leader, Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?". And Moses, in the first of a long line of appeals to Yahweh, "cried unto the LORD; and the LORD shewed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet" (Ex. 15:24,25). It was an act of benevolence towards, and concern for, the children of Israel, almost casual in its presentation, yet highly significant in its implications, some of which are stated, and some not.

First there was the question of the tree. Many travellers have searched the Hawwarah area for such a tree as would sweeten the waters, but have found none. Nor could they, for the tree that was shown to Moses was unique and was never reproduced. The bitter waters represented the waters of this present life soured by sin, and the tree the cross of Christ without which they could not be healed.

Secondly, the name 'Marah' is the Hebrew equivalent of 'Mary',³ the name of the mother of the Lord Jesus, who contributed the human side in the make-up of her Son, and knew the bitterness of it at the foot of the cross.

And thirdly, the miracle of the healing of the waters was a twofold guarantee, not only to the children of Israel, but to believers of all ages, of the overriding care of Almighty God through-

out their 'wilderness journey'. It is written of the Israelites that "there [God] made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there He proved them" (v. 25). Now a statute is a legislative rule in perpetuity, so strong that it cannot be changed unless abrogated by the one who made it. And an ordinance is a legislative decree that backs it up as of right and privilege according to the test of faith. The three-day journey without water was to be the first of a whole series of such tests upon which the welfare of the children of Israel would depend. God was making it clear to them that their future welfare, even life itself, would be dependent upon faith and obedience. So He said, "If you listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in His eyes, if you pay attention to His commands and keep all His decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD [Yahweh] Who heals you" (v. 26, NIV).

Thereafter the bitter waters were behind them. They came to Elim where there were twelve springs exuding sweet and potable waters, and seventy palm trees. And they encamped contentedly there by the waters.

(To be continued)

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3. Compare Naomi's plea to be called 'Mara' on her return from Moab (Ruth 1:20).

Your Letters



Brother Thomas's "fence post analogy"

In the exchange of views under the heading "Daniel 12 and the Mount Olivet Prophecy" ([Mar. 2007, p. 95](#)) Brother Stephen Hughes refers to Brother Thomas's "fence post analogy". There is, however, a problem with this analogy which perhaps he did not appreciate. Brother Thomas likened the three comings of Christ to three poles, the first representing his first advent, the second representing A.D. 70 (which he believed was Christ's second coming) and the third Christ's latter-day return. He contended that when the apostles penned their epistles they were between

the first and second poles. They could not, and therefore did not, distinguish between A.D. 70 and the latter day: He says:

"The apostleship of the circumcision occupying a stand point after the first coming and the ascension, could see an interval between that and the second [A.D. 70]; but beyond this the wisdom given did not enable the Twelve to see that there would be an interval between the second and the third. John living until the Lord came to destroy the Commonwealth of Israel, and according to tradition, for many years after, could see the second interval, a long intervening period between the second and third. Paul being a teacher of the Gentiles,

wisdom was given unto him, having special reference to their time".¹

The view that A.D 70 constituted a 'coming' of Christ is Scripturally sound. The suggestion that the apostles, in their inspired prophecies, did not distinguish between an event that was imminent and one that was roughly 2,000 years distant is not.

Christ himself prophesied (in the Olivet Prophecy) of Jerusalem's desolation and the subsequent scattering of the Jews. When the apostles prophesied of the nearness of Christ's coming, they were writing *before* that desolation. The apostles could not have been predicting the imminent *restoration* of Israel when the *desolation* of Israel had not yet taken place. To put it another way, the same Holy Spirit which had moved Christ to prophesy of Jerusalem's destruction and Gentile down-treading could not have moved the apostles to make contrary predictions regarding the timing of Christ's latter-day return. Can we place absolute reliance on what Christ and the apostles prophesied? Or do we have to use our own (uninspired) judgement to determine how much of each prophecy is the result of inspiration and how much is due to the fact that Christ and the apostles did not fully understand the relevant time periods? The answer to such questions ought to be clear.

It is true that some Old Testament prophecies compress widely separated events into an apparently seamless narrative. For example, Isaiah 61 relates to Christ's first advent and to his lat-

ter-day return, and it might have been difficult beforehand to distinguish between the two time periods. But these were both distant events in Isaiah's day. When a prophet declares that certain events are imminent, as Christ and the apostles did, then those events must come to pass as predicted (Deut. 18:21,22). If their prophecies were only correct as to the *nature* of the events that they describe but not as to the *time* when these events would take place, then this would amount to partial inspiration. And Peter's declaration that "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy [Spirit]" (2 Pet. 1:21) is as true of the Christian prophets as it was of those in Old Testament times.

References to the nearness of Christ's coming in the New Testament cannot be explained by suggesting that the apostles themselves did not fully understand the time frame involved in the outworking of God's purpose. After receiving forty days of personal instruction from Christ himself, their understanding of these matters was probably better than our own. The idea that the content of any inspired prophecy—in Old or New Testaments—could be affected by the prophet's own limited grasp of the subject is not consistent with our understanding of inspiration.

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1. *Contending for the Faith*, Logos edition, 1981, p. 31.