



Bible Student's Notebook™

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Volume XIII
Issue 323

Does God Repent?

by — Andre Piet

REPENTANCE?

How is it possible that we read in the Bible, a number of times, that God repents (see Genesis 6:7; Jeremiah 42:10)? Is it not so that anyone who repents says, in effect, "If I had known it in advance, I would not have done it?" Yet how can this ever apply to God, Who indeed knows all things beforehand? Isn't the whole idea of "repentance" by God an outright denial of His omniscience (I John 3:20; Romans 11:36; Ephesians 1:11)?



rations that are factual and true which deny that God repents.

Thus we read in Numbers 23:19,

God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?

I Samuel 15, in connection with our question, is altogether a very interesting chapter. At the end of this chapter (15:35) we read,

Samuel mourned for Saul: and the LORD repented that He had made Saul king over Israel.

However, a few verses earlier (15:29) Samuel, in stark contrast, very solemnly had said,

And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for He is not a man, that he should repent.

Two seemingly contradictory statements, almost directly behind each other. Both statements, of course, cannot simultaneously be literally true. One of them must be a "so to speak" expression. In this case, which one it is is not difficult to recognize. In relative terms, *i.e.*, for us to understand easily the intensity of His

(see *God*, page 2937)

ANTHROPOMORPHISM

Or does God merely have remorse, "by way of speaking"? The same as He also "by way of speaking" walks (Genesis 3:8), smells (Exodus 29:41), sleeps and awakens (Psalm 44:23), descends and ascends (Genesis 11:5), has arms, eyes, ears, nose, intestines, and even has a "behind" (Exodus 33:23). Each and every one of these examples is speaking of God in terms that are characteristic of human beings. Anthropomorphism (the "expensive" word for this phenomenon) is very often used in the Bible, rhetorically. Figuratively speaking, God has a nose, eyes and ears, but in a literal sense, God is spirit (John 4:24). Figuratively, He sleeps and awakens, but in the literal sense, God never tires (Isaiah 40:28), etc.

OPPOSITE STATEMENTS

When reading that it "repented God," we indeed, have to realize that such is a mere human way of speaking about God. That becomes clear when we consider other statements given in Scripture: decla-

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This free weekly electronic publication (52 times a year) is dedicated to:

- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7);
- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11);
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25);
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1);
- the organic nature of the church, the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12);
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Romans 11:13);
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15);
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13);
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with:
 - total freedom from sins (Colossians 1:14);
 - identity in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6);
 - adult sonship position (Galatians 4).

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The Shepherds

by — Rick Longva
British Columbia, Canada

I am bringing you an evangel of great joy which will be for the entire people (Luke 2:10).

On the night of Jesus' birth there were shepherds in the fields tending their flocks; when the messenger appeared to them they were terrified.

Who wouldn't be?

You're out in the hills, at night, watching over your flock, and out of nowhere an angel appears and the glory of God shines all around you. I would be heading to the creek to do my laundry.

At that point the messenger says,

Fear not, for lo! I am bringing you an evangel of great joy which will be for the entire people, for today was brought forth a Savior, Who is Christ, the Lord (Luke 2:10-11).

After a few moments the heavens open;

And suddenly with the messenger there came to be a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God among the highest! And on earth peace, among men delight!"

I like that verse; it's up there in the favorites.

GLORY TO GOD AMONG THE HIGHEST!

What had happened that evening, the birth of Jesus, was the beginning of the reconciliation of all mankind.

Wherefore, remember that once you, the nations ... you were, in that era, apart from Christ, being alienated ... having no expectation, and without God in the world (Ephesians 2:11-12).

With the birth of Jesus, God was revealing His love for all of His creation through His Son.

For thus God loves the world, so that He gives His only-begotten Son, that everyone who is believing in Him should not be perishing, but may be having life eonian (John 3:16).

Most stop there. You very seldom hear anyone go onto verse 17,

For God does not dispatch His Son into the world that He should be judging the world, but that the world may be saved through Him.

This is why the angels could say,

Glory to God among the highest.

The world may now be saved through Him (Christ).

God will do what humanism and religion can't do: save them.

John says of Jesus' first coming,

It [He, Jesus] was the true light, which is enlightening every man, coming into the world (John 1:9).

This Light will enlighten every human who was ever born, without distinction.

God's will *will* be done, as in heaven, on earth also (Matthew 6:10).

What is God's will?

God, Who wills that all mankind be saved and ►

come into a realization of the truth (I Timothy 2:4).

... a Savior, Who is Christ, the Lord (Luke 2:11).

AND ON EARTH PEACE

Jesus' first advent didn't stop all wars and bring peace on earth. Some estimates are that in the last three thousand years there have been approximately two hundred and fifty years of peace, others say twenty-six days. Most of these wars have been fought in the past two thousand years since the time of Christ's first advent. In my lifetime there hasn't been one day of world peace. As far as the Scriptures teach, there will be no peace until Christ, the Prince of Peace, returns.

I think the shepherds experienced the peace the angel spoke of, as it says;

And the shepherds return, glorifying and praising God for all that which they hear and perceived, according as it was spoken to them (Luke 2:20).

They saw the heavenly choir praising God, and heard the words, "on earth peace."

On this earth they could have peace – inner peace – because of what they saw:

Jesus later told His disciples,

These things have I spoken to you that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have affliction. But courage! I have conquered the world (John 16:33).

Paul gives us a glimpse into the peace we have in Christ because of His coming:

And, coming, He brings the evangel of peace to you, those afar, and peace to those near; through Him we both have access, in one spirit, to the Father (Ephesians 2:17-18).

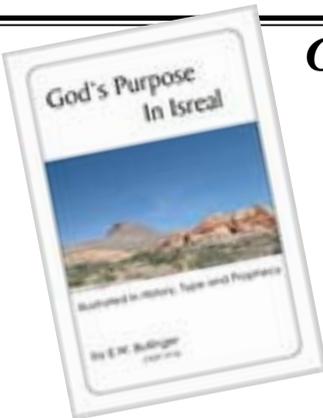
We all now have access to the Father, God, Who is the source of all peace.

These world and religious systems under which we live will one day come to an end, and in their place will be a kingdom of righteousness.

AMONG MEN DELIGHT

The opposite of delight is despair.

To be in despair is to be without hope, to have no expectation.



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As believers we have an expectation. We are to delight – delight in all of the promises that are promised in Christ.

The shepherds had no despair; they walked away knowing that the Savior had arrived. Although their salvation wasn't fully realized, they had seen the Savior, they now had an expectation.

The Apostle Paul told the believers in Rome,

For to expectation were we saved (Romans 8:24).

We, the believers are awaiting the coming of Christ; this is our expectation: the completion of our salvation.

Whenever Christ, our Life, should be manifested, then you also shall be manifested together with Him in glory (Colossians 3:4).

He goes on to say in Romans;

Now, if we are expecting what we are not observing, we are awaiting it with endurance (Romans 8:25).

We wait with endurance, along with the rest of creation:

In expectation that the creation itself, also, shall be freed from the slavery of corruption into the

glorious freedom of the children of God. For we are aware that the entire creation is groaning and travailing together until now (:21-22).

That longing we all have for something better is built into all of us from God. Most people feel that more money or better health will make all of their travail go away. You don't have to look too far to see that that isn't true: everything earthly is temporal, temporary. Money dries up, health fades; but the God-given expectation for something truer and better never leaves us.

Yet not only so, but we ourselves also, who have the firstfruit of the spirit, we ourselves also, are groaning in ourselves, awaiting the sonship, the deliverance of our body (:23).

The shepherds walked away from the stable no wealthier or healthier. They went back to their mundane life of tending their flocks, yet they were richer than any human on earth at that time. They saw the beginning of their expectation – an expectation that they wouldn't realize in their lifetime – yet they walked away glorifying and praising God for His Son, Who will one day bring "All in all" (I Corinthians 15:28).

And all who hear marvel concerning that which is being spoken to them by the shepherds (Luke 2:18).

God (continued from front page)

grief, He expresses Himself humanly; but in absolute terms, GOD obviously has no remorse, "for He is not a man" who makes a mistake or ever can be surprised.

REPENT OR COMFORT?

Something that is not to be ignored, either, is that the Hebrew word, hidden behind our translated word "repent" (*nâcham*), has a much broader meaning. It is related to the word for "warm" (*châm*). It is often used for "warm" feelings such as "mercy," "compassion" and "consolation."

When it says in Genesis 6:6, "it repented the Lord," then it uses the same word (*Strong's* #1562) as in Genesis 24:67, where we read, "Isaac was **comforted**." If the translators in Genesis 6:6 would have used the same word as they did in 24:67, we would read: "The Lord was comforted that he had made man ..." Does this rendering not throw a glorious light on our wonderful GOD? No matter how wickedly humanity manifests itself, it "comforts" God that He has made man. The very fact that HE is the Creator and Maker of man is the best guarantee for a happy ending!

Translation from Dutch by Peter Feddema

Proving the Will of God

by — Aaron Locker

Romans 12:2 tells us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. For what purpose? So that we may *prove* what is that good, acceptable and perfect will of God. You can make of this verse what you wish, but a few things are clear in this verse. Firstly, that the word “*prove*” is an important one. Here’s what the *Strong’s Concordance* has to say about it:



from G1384; to test (literally or figuratively); by implication, to approve: – allow, discern, examine, X like, (ap-)prove, try.

As you can see, Strong’s definition of this word is to test or approve, and all of the ways it’s translated reflect that. Look at the way the word is used in I Corinthians 3:13 and 11:28. In 3:13 it is rendered (in the *KJV*) as “*try*.” This verse is talking about the way every man’s purity will be tested at the judgment seat. In 11:28 it is rendered as “*examine*,” and addresses the way a man should look over and test himself.

It is clear to me that this word, “*prove*,” means to discern, examine and try/test God’s will, NOT in order to try to change Him to something we would want Him to be, but to understand Him better. To examine what dwells in a person’s heart will always be the best way to define him. This is no different with God. It is understanding why someone does what they do, not cowering from it in fear and self-pity, that tells us who they are.

God says “I am love,” and if at any point it seems like He is not love, we should not say “well, we lowly humans just can’t understand this.” No, according

NEVERTHELESS (continued from back page)

ionship, of joy. Yet, there will be an *afterward*, and we may be sure that when the *afterward* has opened its treasures, it will be seen that God is good and loving in just what He did.

You cannot see this *today*. It seems to you, in the keenness of your sorrow, that nothing that may come

to Romans 12:2, we should examine the situation to see why there seems to be a lack of consistency. God would never have said “*let us reason together*” if man was incapable of understanding Him.

Secondly, the will of God is accompanied by three adjectives here. “*Good*,” “*acceptable*” and “*perfect*,” according to Paul, are accurate and appropriate ways to describe God’s will. This, of course, is through the eyes of someone who has already been transformed by the renewing of his mind.

It is not robbery to think ourselves to be in a position of examiners of God’s will. When confronted with the question, “*What is good, acceptable and perfect about God sending babies, mentally ill people and those who have not heard about Him to hell?*” we need not cower from the obvious answer, but only ask ourselves, “This isn’t adding up with my current beliefs. What is it that I don’t understand here?” It is only when we know that God loves unconditionally that we can cast out our fear of Him (I John 4:18).

God has revealed His will to us in the Bible, and He would have us to read it, study it, examine it and understand it (Ephesians 1:9). At no time are we ever required to hold God to fulfill His Word, because we know that He will hold Himself perfectly to it; but we should understand that when He says something, when He reveals to us His will and His nature, He will follow through without fail. To bank on His perfect commitment to do as He says He will, or to be who He says He is, certainly is not stepping out of line; it is only trusting in the Lord fully. ■

in *afterward* will make up for what you have lost – but trust God with that. The future is long. If not in this life, then *afterward*, you will be able to say, “Now I understand!”

1908

Nevertheless, Afterward

by — J.R. Miller (1840-1912)

Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby (Hebrews 12:11).

Things are not finished – as we see them today. The *bud* you see one morning in the garden will be a full-blown rose in a little while. The brown seed you dropped in your window-box will be a beautiful plant by-and-by. We must always take account of the *afterward*, in whatever it is we are doing, through whatever experiences we are passing.



Education looks to the building of the finest, noblest *character* in the end. It is especially so in God's school, for He is the perfect Teacher. His purpose is not to give us an easy time at present – but to make something of us *afterward*.

There are some plants that would die in the warmth of a conservatory. They must be kept in the cold, if they would live and grow. One of the papers not long ago told of a strange plant recently discovered in northern Siberia. It shoots up out of the ice and frozen ground. Its leaves grow on the side of the stem toward the north. Each leaf appears to be covered with little crystals of snow. On the third day the extremities of the anthers show minute glistening specks like diamonds. These are the seeds.

Is not this plant an illustration of many lives? God seems to set them in beds of ice and snow – and yet they grow up out of the wintry cold – into lovely and wondrous beauty. We would say that the loveliest lives of earth would be those that are reared amid the kindest influences, under summer skies, in the warm atmosphere of ease and comfort. Yet the truth is that many of the noblest developments can grow only in the wintry gardens of hardship, struggle and sorrow.

Trial, therefore, is not something meant to discourage us, to stunt and dwarf our life and mar its beauty. The snow plant would die in a tropical garden.

We must have the plough cutting through the ground if we would have the harvest of golden grain. There is no trial in our lives which does not come to us as the bearer of good.

We cannot see all of this today. It seems to us in the passion of our sorrow that nothing which may ▶

It is only when we learn the truth about life that we are able to live with faith and courage. Because they have not learned it, many people fall into despair in the midst of present disappointments and sufferings. They see only the *hard things* in their circumstances, and *pains* that make the days almost unbearable, the *wrongs* and *injustices* that are crushing them. They stand right in the midst of all of the bitter trials and see no light, no hope, no comfort.

We need to learn to stand away from the *immediate present* and get a view of the experience from a remoter distance. We see only *part* of the experience, while we are in its midst. We are *too close* to it yet; but when we get farther away, when the sharpness of the pain is past, when the hardness is over and forgotten, the music grows sweet. Not until *afterward* comes – with its comfort, its alleviation, its peaceable fruit, its new blessing – do we begin to understand the meaning of the experience that was so hard. *Afterward* it yields peaceable fruit.

It is only *afterward* that the meaning of God's providences can be clearly read. The things we think destructive and calamitous are really blessings *yet in their first stage*, fruits still green and bitter, not yet ripened and mellowed.

Life is a school – all of its experiences are lessons. God is educating us. School is not easy. All true ed-

come in any afterward will make up for what we are now suffering. Yet if not in this life, then somewhere *afterward* we shall be able to say, "Now I understand."

Remember Joseph. He was cruelly wronged by his brothers, torn away from his home, sold as a slave, maligned and cast into chains – a dark beginning, surely, for a young man's life. Yet *afterward* came honor, influence, glory. It takes time to work out *God's best things*.

There is a story of a man who met a child carrying a basket closely covered. "Tell me," said the man, "what you have in that basket." The child answered, "If my mother had wished that any one should know what is in this basket, she would not have covered it up." If God had meant us to know all His plans of love for us, He would not have covered them up under experiences of pain and suffering. We may be sure, however, that for all our times of trial – there is an *afterward*, full of glorious good, waiting for us.

We miss a great deal by living so entirely in the *present*, and not thinking of the *afterward*. We are alarmed when we find ourselves in hard conditions and circumstances, forgetting altogether that these are only *processes* through which we must pass to reach fineness, sweetness and strength. We are too short-sighted when we are in trouble. We see only

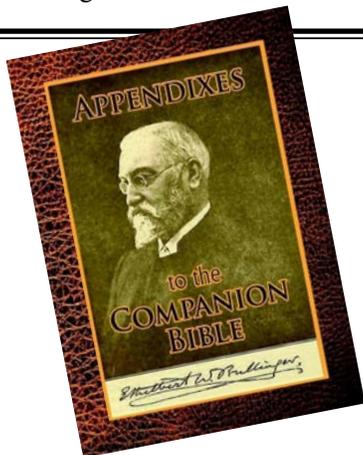
the suffering, the loss, the struggle, and do not think of the *mission of the trouble* and what is coming out of it. We should *widen our vision* so as to take in the *afterward* as well as the present hour.

Life is all *one piece*. One experience follows another. God always loves us – loves us just as surely and as tenderly, when all things seem to be against us – as He does when all things seem to be favoring us. When trouble comes, no matter what its direct and natural cause, it has a mission. Instead of vexing and fretting ourselves with the question about how God can truly love us – and yet allow us to suffer, to endure loss, to be treated unjustly and wrongfully – we would do better to change our attitude altogether toward our trials, and ask rather what *errand* this pain or affliction has for us, what *lesson* it should teach us, what *change* it should work in us.

There is no *trial* in our lives that does not come to us as the *bearer of a blessing*.

The other morning, one told of an unhappiness which came from the loss of a friend – not by death, but by the friend's unfaithfulness. Well, it is hard when one has to lose out of one's life such a friend who for years has seemed to be true and whose friendship has come to mean so much of strength, of compan-

(see *NEVERTHELESS*, page 2938)



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