



Bible Student's Notebook™

The Herald of His Grace

Presenting every man perfect in Christ Jesus. Colossians 1:28

Volume 26
Issue 647

The Unexpected in John's Gospel

by — Alan Burns (1884-1929)

The heart of man is deceitful," was the inspired utterance of an ancient prophet (Jeremiah 17:9). Not only is man a deceiver but he is also deceived. He fools others, he fools himself as well, and is the biggest fool of all in consequence.

In John's Gospel we are given an insight into the deceitfulness of the heart. We shall refer to but a few instances to be found there. Sufficient now to remark that when deceitfulness is unmasked by inspired truth the result is ever an unexpected one. John's Gospel abounds with unexpected things, some of which we will endeavor to point out.

A truly remarkable character is found in the opening chapter. The genius of the Old Testament is well reflected in him who was not so much a man as the voice of the Man who was the Word. So skillfully are the elements of the Baptist's ministry suggested to us that but little difficulty can be experienced in picturing such scenes as are outlined in :19 onward.

He had been preaching a true national "preparedness," preparedness not of the flesh but of the spirit. His message had a keen edge and a sharp point, and dealt, not with evils such as poverty and other social ills, but with the cause of all national decay, viz., national sin. Not Rome, though Israel lay beneath the heel of Roman conquest, but Israel's deceitful heart was the worst of Israel's foes.

The Baptist's voice thundered through the land, and men came to him confessing their need of "preparedness." Amongst the crowds that flocked to his baptism were many whose hearts had given them a deceitful

consciousness of superiority: men who mocked and sneered; curiosity-mongers and mere sensationalists, who cared not for what the preacher taught.

News of the revival soon reached the ears of those who were the leaders of organized religion, the men of form and ceremony, the men of Sabbaths and Jubilees. These sent their messengers to the preacher to test the various rumors which had spread abroad concerning him, and learn perhaps the truth about his origin and purpose.

The desires and deceits of the Jewish heart at that time were manifested in the character of the questions propounded to John. These questions also revealed the channels in which Judaism hoped to receive a solution of its national problems and a panacea for its national suffering. The burden of their inquiries is summarized in :25.

Here we have indicated two methods by which mankind have always hoped to attain peace and plenty: one method being government; the other education. Apparently the nation was willing to give the throne to a king who would measure up to their ideas of what a king should be. It also seems evident that they were willing to give attention to a prophet, or teacher, or educator, whose message or culture would tally with their approved standards. A king to rule, or a prophet to teach, these were the demands and expectations of the Jewish people. ►

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Are not these two things – government and education – still supposed to hold the key to the human problem? Do not the nations still imagine that a scheme of politics will yet be evolved which will destroy much if not all of the injustice in society? Do they not think that education will ultimately bring salvation to the people? Will it prove difficult to have the people confess their need of better government, or to own to their ignorance? No, they will not hesitate a moment in owning their governmental or educational deficiencies.

THE PRIESTHOOD IGNORES THE SACRIFICE FOR SIN

Let us particularly note who sent these messengers to John.

The Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who art thou?" (:19).

"Priests," mark you. These were men whose daily occupation brought them to the altars of Jehovah. These were men whose hands were crimsoned by the blood of victims slain in sacrifice. These were the men who asked for a king, and sought for a prophet, but who seemed to know nothing of *the Sacrifice*, that One Sacrifice to which the many others pointed in mute eloquence.

Surely *priests* would ask about the Sacrifice! No, they had apparently lost the sense of sin. Rule they would receive, but not redemption. A prophet but not a propitiation.

This is one of the surprising things in the Gospel of

John. It is one of the things we would not expect to find: a priesthood ignorant of sacrifice, ignorant of the first step towards the solution of evil, ignorant of spiritual destitution.

We must note, however, the character in which the Word was presented to Israel, including this ignorant priesthood. "Behold the King!" – was that it? "Behold the Prophet!" – was that it? No, "*Behold the Lamb!*" There you have it. The Spirit of God preaching Christ to Israel in the character and office in which they stood in primal need of Him.

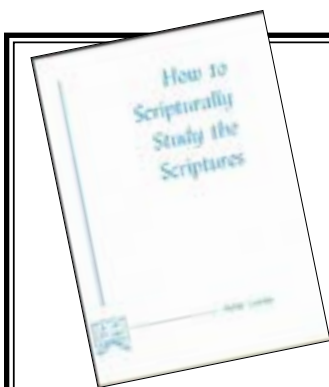
They would accept Him on a throne. "No," God decreed, "you shall accept Him on an altar first." Yet, the priesthood, the class that should have known all about it, knew not the mind of God concerning the matter.

Is it any different today? Do the leaders of organized religion know what they should know? Have they the conception of sin which these Jewish priests lacked? Alas! No! The Gentile heart is not different from the Jewish. It is still deceived as to its real need.

This is the first unexpected thing that we find in this Gospel. There are many others. We shall look at the next.

LEAVEN AND IDOLATRY ARE FOUND IN THE TEMPLE OF JEHOVAH

Inspiration purposely calls our attention to the occasion on which the recorded visit to the Temple was made by the Master. It was a solemn national event – "*the Jew's Passover was at hand*" (2:13). This was a



72 pp., BK

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How to Scripturally Study the Scriptures

by — Adlai Loudy (1893-1984)

This book deals chiefly with the correct partitioning of the Word of Truth. The seven chapters are titled as follows: God Has Spoken; A Divine Admonition of Endeavor; How to Scripturally Study the Scriptures; Have a Pattern of Sound Words; Distinguish the Things that Differ; Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth, and the Conclusion.

"The book should prove extremely valuable in introducing the knowledge of Paul's special ministry to those who are strangers to it." – A.E. Knoch (1874-1965)

busy time for every Jewish family, for every house was subjected to a rigorous search lest ceremonial defilement should be found therein in the form of leaven. “No leaven within your houses” was the dictum of the Law at this time.

The Temple, the sacred palace of the God of Israel, was the center of Israel’s ceremonial purity. It was the hub of the law of the priests. Israel gloried in her temple. Was it not that which marked Israel from the nations as the favored people of God? What other race on earth could speak of Jehovah dwelling in their midst? Now the One of Whom the priests knew not came to His Father’s house.

Let us not imagine that those who sold the where-withal of sacrifice were without argument or excuse. They could justify themselves if asked to do so, for the merchants as well as the priests had hearts “*deceitful above all things.*” Did they not make worship easier?

The Light discovered the darkness. The finger of God was placed on the real motive which lay beneath the sale of sacrifice. The covetousness of the heart was the dictating motive of it all.

What is covetousness? The same Spirit who inspired the history refers to it as leaven (see 1 Corinthians 5). What horrible desecration is this? *Leaven in the temple of Jehovah!* With all of their searching of house and home, Israel had forgotten to search the house of God. What priest for a moment would have thought of finding corruption there? Yet, the Light shined into Jewish darkness at the Feast of Passover and discovered leaven in the most sacred spot in Israel’s possessions.

A darkened priesthood and a degraded temple! Sad, too, to know that the more we contemplate the then-existing conditions the darker does the picture grow, and the deeper the degradation becomes. For instance, we have in part referred to the Spirit’s symbol for covetousness. Let us examine it more fully.

First let us bear in mind Israel’s age-long boasts in the purity of its monotheism. The many gods and countless deities of the heathen nations were unknown to Israel. The nation prided itself upon its freedom from idolatry. Now let us, from another Scripture, complete the definition of covetousness;

Covetousness which is idolatry (Colossians 3:5)!

Not mere leaven in the physical sense, not mere covetousness (as men would lightly describe it) but *idolatry* was what the Son of God found in His Father’s house!

The magi found the infant King in the very last place human wisdom would have expected to find Him. Man’s reasoning would have led their steps to Jerusalem, and indeed did so, but it was divine illumination which compelled their retracing them before their search was crowned with success. If these wise men had been told that the task appointed them was to discover idolatry in Israel, the Temple would have been the last place they would think of searching, as the stable would have been the last in their search for the royal Babe.

Though their hands were crimsoned, so to speak, with the blood of bulls and goats, the priests had failed to learn the true meaning of sacrifice. As ►



Prophetic Study: Its Importance and Interpretation

by — E.W. Bullinger (1837-1913)

What is the importance of prophecy? Why study it? How do we interpret the prophetic Scriptures? These are the themes of this short work.

50 pp., PB See order form.

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learners in God's great kindergarten they had failed to read the meaning of the pictures and emblems He had spread before them. Little wonder that when the higher knowledge was unfolded to them in the Incarnate One they were unable to discern the truth.

We have been told by some that John's gospel is not dispensational. But, as we read, there appears to be a very definite purpose back of the historical facts as grouped together by its writer. He reveals an ignorant priesthood in his first chapter. He exhibits an idolatrous temple in the second. Who can fail to see dispensational intimations here? Israel, on the very threshold of the Promised Land – for was not the Kingdom of Heaven "at hand"? – was about to be turned back again into the wilderness.

The time of fulfillment was ripe; the doors of promise were ajar; all prophecy awaited its consummation; God was ready; the King was ready – but Israel was unprepared. Their spiritual unreadiness is revealed by John. He goes on to tell us more of this.

AN IGNORANT TEACHER WHO KNOWS NOT THE SCRIPTURES

Who has not seen at night the pencil of light thrown by a searchlight into the surrounding darkness? Who has not seen it moving to and fro, hither and yon, until at last it rests its beam upon some hitherto unseen object, which now stands out in sharp relief from the surrounding gloom? Just such a shaft of revealing light is found in John 3:

Art thou a teacher in Israel and knowest not these things? (:3).

This simple inquiry reveals something of the depth of Israel's night.

The evidence against Israel is cumulative. We would have gone to Jerusalem to find the King. We would have approached the priests to learn of sacrifice. We would have gone to the Temple to behold true worship. We would have sought such as Nicodemus in order that we might learn. Our every expectation would have been blasted with disappointment, for official religion was spiritually bankrupt.

An ignorant teacher! A professor who knew not his own textbooks! How similar to the incident we found in chapter 1! A priesthood whose ignorance of man's need of redemption has to be placed alongside of the fact that their daily occupation had to do with redemption's machinery; a teaching class ignorant of the lesson lying on the surface of the scroll which they held open before their eyes. Such was Professor Nicodemus – a dunce in the school of the prophets.

We need not linger upon these aspects of Israel's grave condition. Indeed, the whole of this gospel appears to have been written in view of Israel's approaching national dissolution. Consequently the doctrine, or rather the fact of resurrection, occupies a place in this gospel that is not given to it in any of the other three, as if national hopes and promises could find fulfillment only beyond the grave.

IDOLATRY IN JERUSALEM! WORSHIP IN SAMARIA!

If we would have gone to Jerusalem, with its temple, its priests, and its teachers, to learn the secrets of



A Reply to R.A. Torrey's "The Exact Truth Regarding an Eternal Hell"

by — A.E. Knoch (1874-1965)

A scriptural response to Torrey's attempt to defend the traditional doctrine of Hell.

49 pp., PB

See order form.

God, of worship, and of truth, who could possibly imagine that one would find these secrets unveiled by a weary, way-worn Hebrew, by the side of one of Samaria's wells?

Who were the Samaritans? Perhaps a knowledge of their past history will throw light upon this scene of John 4. How would we expect to read of them in history? Would we not imagine that such a highly-favored woman, and such highly-privileged people, would be the descendants of some race of age-long seekers after God? Would we not think that they must be the progeny of men who had spent the centuries in one grand endeavor to purge their thoughts and ceremonies of every false and impure admixture? The truth about the Samaritans would once more strike imagination dumb in its own confusion.

In II Kings we have the unlovely story of their origin. Let us now go very carefully, for we tread upon the borderland of wondrous grace and no less wonderful gloom. Having acquainted ourselves with the facts of II Kings 17, we would naturally expect that, when the Master visited Jerusalem and Samaria, He would find idolatry in Samaria and worship in Jerusalem. Not so! The record reads: *idolatry in Jerusalem; worship in Samaria!* Yes, idolatry in the home of worship, and

worship in the land of idolatry!

Let us cease our vain imaginings, dear reader, and seek instead simply to follow with adoring hearts the unnumbered revelations of our Father's grace. What we think will be, more often than not, never is. Our assumptions are but poor, blind, groping, haphazard things at best. Our heart's best thoughts, if not supported by His Word, defraud us of the truth.

How utterly opposed are the ways of God and Man. How foolish man's reasoning is! How wise God's foolishness! A lesson of tremendous importance is contained within the limits of John Three and Four. Man's methods turned topsy-turvy and simply because God chose to do the unexpected thing.

We have already remarked how human wisdom would have led us to Jerusalem to find the King; to learn of worship; behold the undefiled shrine of a nation free from idolatrous custom; and find a priestly and a teaching class who were intelligently acquainted with the need and nature of sacrifice and regeneration. The same so-called wisdom would have led us to reverse the order of ministry in these two chapters.

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Let us consider the sharp contrast between the two persons with whom these passages are concerned. Nicodemus is presented to us on the one hand, and on the other the unnamed woman of Samaria. A religious ruler and a moral outcast. A learned Rabbi and an ignorant woman. There was a national, social and intellectual chasm between the two which nothing could bridge.

Now here is where the bankruptcy of our ideas would be manifested, for if we had met this noble Jew and this unnamed Samaritan, *we* would have preached the new-birth to the woman, and the nature of God and worship to the man. However, *He* in Whom divine wisdom was incarnate preached new-birth to the religious leader and unveiled the secrets of true worship to the outcast woman of Samaria.

Other designed contrasts may be easily found in these two chapters. It has been a question with many as to just why the learned Jewish teacher chose the darkness of the night in which to approach Him who, verily, was a “*teacher come from God.*” They have felt led to question the current or popular theory that it was “*for fear of the Jews,*” on the ground that such a reason for his so coming is never given in Scripture. We feel, however, that the numerous contrasts which abound between these two chapters indicate that the traditional view is correct.

The contrast is not between Nicodemus and the woman whose name we do not know (but which in all probability was on the tongue of every gossip in her village), but between Nicodemus and the Lord. Remember that it is night in chapter three, but broad daylight in chapter four.

We are all careful of our reputations. Our “good name,” of all things, must be guarded well. If we had Nicodemus’ standing in the community; if we had his position and place, we might not have come to Jesus by night, *we might never have come at all!* If we had come to Him by night, the overwhelming probability would have been that it was in order to safeguard the reputations that we loved so well.

If it was his reputation which brought the Ruler under cover of night to the Master, is there not a designed contrast in the broad publicity given to His meeting with the woman at the well? *We* would not have done it *that* way! All of the difference between what He did and what we do lies in this:

He made Himself of no reputation (Philippians 2:7).

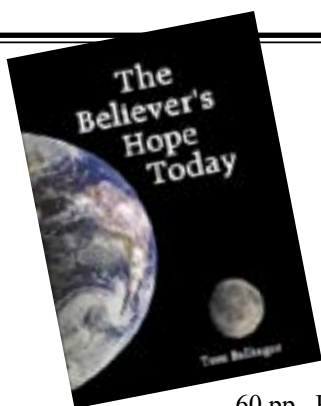
Oh, that each of us would learn the sacred art of dwindling! That we might just dwindle and dwindle until in the end we just dwindle away into nothingness, that nothingness of self-esteem which alone makes room for His being “*All in all.*”

— *Unsearchable Riches*, Volume 8 (1916)

(*edited*)

TOPICS:

Major: Idolatry; Israel; John, the Gospel of
Minor: Blindness; Deceit; Religion



60 pp., PB

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The Believer's Hope Today

by — Tom Ballinger

This is a look at the believer's “*blessed hope*” at Christ's appearing as contrasted with “*the hope of Israel*” in the Acts period. It will show that the hope about which Paul wrote in I Thessalonians 4 and I Corinthians 15 is found not only in the Old Testament Scriptures, but was taught by Jesus Christ in His earthly ministry in Matthew 24 and other places. It also reveals our hope for today as found in Paul's latter epistles.



Editor's Desk

“Clyde, all your friends are dead!”

Among the greater influences of my life have always been authors. I know that doesn't come as a surprise to you. Likely you already know this from all of the authors that we carry in the *Bible Student's Notebook*, *Daily Email Goodies* and, of course, the many that we also publish through *Bible Student's Press*. These men have meant a lot to me; not only do we carry their rich words, but we also endeavor to acquire and share a bit of their personal stories as well.

Many years ago one of my critics said, “Clyde, all your friends are dead!” They were mocking my love for books and their authors – suggesting that all my friends were dead authors of the past.

It's not that I don't have friends who are alive, in fact, God has graciously granted me some extremely dear ones, but I certainly do admit that I have an affinity to dead authors. This attraction is not *because* they are dead, but is due to the passionate research of Scripture that they have richly stored within the pages of their books.

Somehow these Bible students from the past come “alive” to me through their writings and I establish a sort of “relationship” with them, a sense of a bond with them that is beyond the parameters of time.

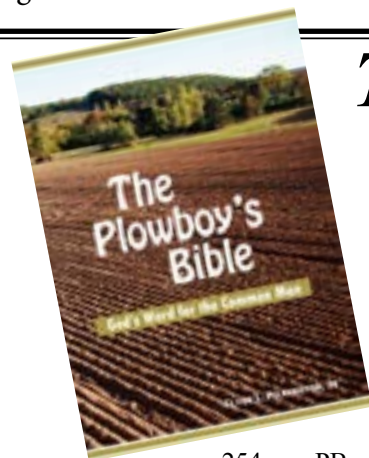
Of course, I see all of this as spiritual, since these authors with which I find a bond are believers. This certainly means that I'll have a lot of catching up to do with these men one day.

There is a long list of those whom God has used in some fashion to impact my life over the years. Not unlike living influences that come and go throughout one's life, placed there at just the right time by God, so it is with these authors. Old “friends” from the past continually give way to newer “acquaintances” and “friendships,” each holding a dear and special place in my heart.

With hindsight, some of their influences were perhaps brought into my life, intended for a future contrast of some grander truth. In some way even these seem to require recognition for their influence, whether negative or positive, as they were divinely appointed to intersect with my life.

Some may wonder why we even carry articles and books by certain authors that we have seemingly “outgrown.” We do so because they are our spiritual ancestors and we desire to honor them, as well as to connect¹ with those who share such similar lin- ▶

1. For more information about fellowship, see:
– *The True Basis of Fellowship*, A.E. Knoch, [Bible Student's Notebook #546](#);



254 pp., PB

See order form.

The Plowboy's Bible

God's Word for the Common Man

by – Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

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ages. They are our connecting points of the past, with anticipation that having had such similar pasts, God may grant us a special influence upon them to some greater truths. This has been a repeated reality.

Through our various written ministries we have the privilege of introducing our readers to some of my “friends” and “acquaintances” from the past. How varied and colorful Father has made these past students and authors; by His providence He has preserved their written ministries for us, and we are now thankful that we contribute a small part in that preservation. May we be found ever faithful stewards of such a trust.

In His bonds,



Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.
The Pilkington Abbey
Windber, PA

TOPICS:

Major: Editorial; Ministry; Study

– Our Attitude Towards Others, Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr., [Bible Student's Notebook #549](#).

Several “Raptures”

We would note that many have seen, in reading the Apocalypse, that place must be found for several “Raptures,” beside the one mentioned in I Thessalonians 4.

In Matthew 24:40-41; Luke 17:34-37; John 14:2; Revelation 7:9-17, we have specific “Raptures” referred to. In Revelation 11:12 we have the ascension of the two witnesses. In 12:5 we have another; while chapters 14 and 15 may refer to one of these or to further “Raptures.”

These will all doubtless take place after this present Dispensation of Grace has been closed; but, in the face of these, why may not our “calling on high” (Philippians 3:14 and I Timothy 3:16) take place before any of them? Why may not I Thessalonians 4, which was open to Israel as a nation (until Acts 28), be the one referred to in Matthew 24:40-41, Revelation 7 or in John 14:2; and [our “calling on high”] taking place even prior to that?

— E.W. Bullinger
Things to Come
Editorial (December, 1908)

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- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7);
- the affirmation that God will 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 in ages past” (Romans 16:25);
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1);
- the organic nature of the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12);
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Ephesians 1:1-3);
- 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);
- union in His death, burial and resurrection (Romans 6);
- adult sonship position (Galatians 4).

We do not claim infallibility for the contents of this publication. Our readers are asked to be as the Bereans and search the Scriptures (Acts 17:10-11; I Thessalonians 5:21).

This publication is not connected with any “church,” “denomination,” “movement,” “organization,” “mission,” “creed,” “meeting,” “school,” “conference” or “fellowship.”

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