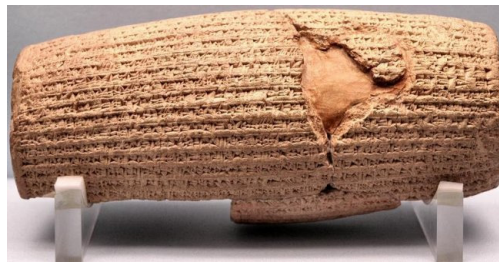


Retrospective Wisdom

*O Lord, that I might view my present walk, each test, each trial,
each concept of Thy Truth, against the glory of that perfect day.
O that with retrospective wisdom blest I could retrace each step,
remould each thought, with noon-day vision of my Father's face.*

The wisdom of retrospect is the ability to look back and trace the pattern of the Lord's leading in the life, to view the past with the advantage of a mind no longer limited to the immediate present, a mind that has gained by experience, the process of trial, and has seen the end of the Lord. (end = achievement)



Cylinder of Cyrus with direction to restore the temples

Whatever stage along the Way we may have reached today we may each look back and review our personal walk thus far, and ask, "Where am I? What have I become? How ready for the perfect day?" and with this calm assessment note the path that led to the present state. Perhaps already we detect in past experience rough or smooth, some concept of objective not then seen, a Master Mind at work and capable of using circumstance, creating situation, in relentless pursuit of that great purpose with which He first took hold upon my life. In doing this we well may realise some lesson glaring to us now but at the time not seen. Perhaps what then we missed we now with retrospective wisdom may still use to His delight, what then seemed loss may yet be seen as gain if thus in me at last He finds designed response. Revising hard at school, examination day in sight, we skimmed the pages of our work--book day by day, noting our Teacher's comments. Those things once mystery to our minds at last take shape, and now we see the reason for low marks, and understand why Teacher wrote "Point missed." "Try harder." "See me after school." With such intense reflection do we gain the confidence to enter that final test on which it seemed our future would depend.

So in the Christian way we realise, unless it reach the inward parts, truth has failed its purpose, missed its goal. Each day the lesson set was to this end, not what we know, but Who we know, how intimately twined His Way with mine. Before the church began her course she gained a text-book full of vivid pictures from a previous age. She could look back four thousand years, and could begin again where countless others failed armed with the lessons written in their lives. She could observe their course, and gain by adding to her own the vast experience of ten thousand more. These things were all typed out for us, Paul said, "on whom the ends of ages come." Stark warnings these, spelled out in human blood, to which we must take heed. But many, oh so many, heeded not.

Today the church has reached the hour of final test. Another age has passed of near two thousand years. Were any people any age before so well equipped in lessons from all history past? What retrospective wisdom now assists the humblest saint to make his calling sure! For looking back through time we can survey the scene throughout its course from Pentecost until this final hour of gathering home. The Patmos words of Jesus fell on ears made dull. The patient waiting for the Lord had given way to restless seeking of a seen immediate object of desire and worship. Again a calf was made of gold, apostasy arose, bearing poor likeness to the things divine, yet proclaiming over this man-made effigy that name of the covenant God, the people of the covenant sinned and fell by thousands and ten thousands at the very tent-doors of the Joshua and Caleb of this Christian age. These were the few of which the Master spoke, that find the gate though strait, and walk the narrow way, the footprints of a Lamb, with different spirit to the host that use the name of God and yet deny the power.

Yet greater still our privilege at this hour, for now behind us is the harvest work of more than a hundred years. At this late hour we can look back and note the harvest tests, the entrance of the sickle, bundling of tares, the heat of harvest days, the waiting of the wheat now severed from this earth, yet still not gathered home. Does He delay? Like snow in harvest comes the test, and even at this stage still many fall a prey to doubt, not of their Lord, but of their proper grasping of His Word. The evening breezes of the harvest field still test the faith of those who wait.

Yet what a vantage point is ours this latest hour. For, near the close of harvest, patterns now emerge which could not be discerned in earlier days. Those times of Brother Russell's precious ministry to saints, who then could know how closely paralleled in time those years would be, that century and more that followed the coming of Cyrus, His Anointed, His Messiah, type of Christ's return. Cyrus, whose very name foretold the rising of another 'sun,' dawn of a better day. The long drawn period of Babylon's decline. The slow interminable course of Israel's rise again. Those many lessons typed so long ago were for these corresponding years in which one age is closed, another age begins, these days in which we live.

Although Messiah had come, long years would pass. The test of time and waiting still remained. Then, at the very time marked out in Esther's day, a sinister hand would once again attempt to wipe out God's elect, both natural and spiritual seed, Jews and saints. In Europe Jews were coaxed to enter the gas chambers unsuspecting of their fate. While saints began to flee for their spiritual lives when Jezebel once more pursued and used the very channel of such blessing of the past. What troublous days indeed, and yet accompanying the very signs of their Messiah's works.

The threefold message of the Lord so meaningful to them that century after Cyrus came, relates with even greater force to needs of saints today. Haggai, means "Feast of the Lord", from Hebrew root implying dancing and delight. How well described that feast of Truth, the joy of early harvest days, and to what end? That His people turn from feathering their earthly nest, pursuing earthly things, to centre all upon that sanctuary of God. Like David in Psalm 132, they should not rest until they had prepared with all their might a place full worthy of His Name, where He would be at home. While Zechariah, "remembered of the Lord", encouraged vision of faith surmounting earthly trial, and though so little progress could be seen in those long days awaiting still more tangible signs of hope achieved, yet should they never lose their vision of a present Lord abiding with His people there in the lowly vale of myrtle trees.

Malachi brought the Lord's last word, the final "messenger" of the age. The test of time and waiting would reveal in our time as in those last days, such need for diligence sustained, the keeping of the heart entirely His. The passing years may dull the edge of sense once sharpened to perceive and love His perfect Will, and yet persist in outward forms of godliness. It may resent, like Peter hurt by repeated questioning of the Lord, "Do you indeed love Me above all else?" and in amazement ask, "Wherein did I fall short?" Such are the lessons for this latest hour, that we might as a Bride in full adornment wait that final knock to hear upon the door that says, "I have come to take you to Myself."

The Lord raises up His messengers of comfort for Zion

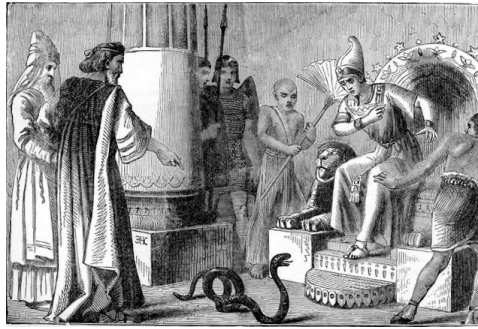
Though these days need bring searching of our inmost thought that we might share that joy of saints now raised above, the Lord knows well our need of courage too, and confidence well founded on His love, and His abiding faithfulness. He sends His Ezra to our aid, his Nehemiah too, to meet our every need. For Ezra's name means "Help", and Nehemiah, "Comfort of the Lord." This help and comfort from above will lead us on those last steps of the way. A light of Truth He has sent forth, revealing of divine desire so sacred to our hearts, to bring us to His holy hill, while every day of life his goodness and His steadfast love still follow in our wake. As Jacob's face was turned at last towards his home, we read that angels met him on his way. (Genesis 32:1) So at this special moment of all time as saints are gathered one by one, they know they are surrounded by a love so great, and many hands reach out to help and to sustain and keep from stumbling those who have found that closeness of Shaddai, and share with Jesus that special place within the Father's breast.

With passing time we now can see these giant patterns in the history of God's dealings with those emerging from a Babylon doomed, then in days of Cyrus, now in days of Christ. Two mighty signs emerge to ground our faith on solid rock. For though so long a time each process takes, the going down of Babylon, and the rising up of Israel, neither takes place before Cyrus appears, neither take place today before the second coming of the Lord. These are sure signs indeed that He has come. We see Him in His works, the works of a present Messiah. And other witnesses arise to add their testimony to this truth so full of meaning to His saints today. In Exodus 4:1, Moses receives instructions from God concerning his return to the people of Israel in Egypt. This is his second advent! He had been rejected by his own people at the first, and during the intervening years since his departure had won the affections of his bride. Now he returns, at God's command, to save. "But, behold," he says to the Lord, "they will not believe me..." They would fail to recognise the presence of God's appointed deliverer. So God gave three signs that it might be known that the divinely ordained deliverer had come... the rod, and the leprous hand, and the water that turned to blood.

The more we think about these signs the more remarkably suggestive they appear of the signs that mark the presence of the Lord today, confirming to our hearts that He is HERE, that greater Moses now returned to save. The count-down to deliverance has begun. Time now allows but brief recall of subjects on which much more has been recounted for our day.



'Exodus' in our day



Sign number one. Exodus 4:4.

Moses had fled before a fearsome serpent hissing at his feet. “And the Lord said unto Moses. Put forth thine hand, and take it by the tail... And it became a rod in his hand.” What does that suggest to the mind? The Serpent... the devil? Moses fleeing before it... Jesus first, then His people down through the age suffering under the Satanic power of darkness? Revelation 12 speaks of the conflict between the dragon and the woman and her seed. The same Greek word for “dragon” in that passage is used again in the Septuagint Greek Scriptures in Exodus 7:9,10, for this very same serpent of Moses. A fearsome symbol of Satan, yet Moses put forth his hand, to catch it by the tail, and paralyse that serpent, until it stiffens and lies as helpless as a rod within his hand... And in that rod God had given to him a symbol of his great authority as the typical arm of Jehovah. 2 Thessalonians 2:8.(Rotherham) “Whom the Lord... will... paralyse with the forth shining of his power.” We will return to this sign later.

Sign number two. Exodus 4:7.

The leprous hand of Moses is restored. “Behold, it was turned again as his own flesh.” That expression, “turned again,” permeates the Old Testament. Repeatedly it is used for the turning, the repentance, recovery, and restoration of Israel to the Lord. They are the work of His hand (Isaiah 64:8). They are the natural seed that the Lord will use to bless the families of the earth when He opens His hand and satisfies the desires of every living thing. They will perform the work of His hand, but this instrument of the Lord’s blessing has not been worthy to show forth His praise. The hand has been leprous, full of sin. (Isaiah 1:4-6) Isaiah describes their sorry state, a sickness that cannot be cured by human remedy. For so long has Israel lamented, in the words of Psalm 74:9-11, “We see not our signs; there is no more any prophet, neither is there among us any that knoweth how long. O God, how long shall the Adversary reproach? Shall the enemy blaspheme Thy name forever? Why withdrawest Thou Thy hand, even The right hand? Pluck it out of Thy bosom...” Psalm 80:15-19, “The vineyard which Thy right hand hath planted, and the branch which Thou makest strong for Thyself (that is, for Thy use,) it is burned with fire, it is cut down, they perish at the rebuke of Thy countenance. Let Thy hand be upon the man of Thy right hand, upon the son of man (son of dust) whom Thou makest strong for Thyself. So will not we go back from Thee. Quicken us, and we will call upon Thy name. Turn us again, O Lord God of Hosts. Cause Thy face to shine, and we shall be saved.” That hand which was made abhorred and useless by sin, is to be restored as His flesh. It is to be cleansed, animated by His Spirit, made responsive to His great mind, and performer of His work as epitomised by that perfect ‘servant’ of Isaiah. Jesus Himself was the very prototype of what Israel yet will be. The sign of the commencement of this process is evidence, infallible proof, of the presence and work of the deliverer.

Let us review these two signs. First, the taking by the tail of Satan, and the beginning of the work of paralysing that great system of Antichrist, Satan’s masterpiece of deception, Babylon the great. Second, the commencement of the restorative process of Israel, first to

their land, then to their Lord, that will ultimately result in their readiness to be used of the Lord for His kingdom work.

As we have seen, neither process could be accomplished before the advent of Christ, but both processes were demonstrated in the days of Cyrus to occupy many decades. The collapse of Babylon was not the work of a moment. Even after the coming of Cyrus Babylon remained religious centre of much of the area it dominated. It also remained the centre of trade by reason of its position in the world. But its temporal power was gone. No longer could it appoint governors and kings in any part of its once wide empire.



Rebuilding the walls of Zion

Those days were past, never to return. Israel's restoration too, after the seventy years in Babylon, was as a pre-run of the equally drawn-out and eventful sequence of our day. Both processes are taking place. That fact cannot be denied. Both are the works of Messiah. They are signs so big that it would be difficult to conceive greater. Neither process, Babylon's decline, nor Israel's rise, could commence before the approach of Cyrus then, or the coming of Christ this end of the age. We commend all Bible students to carefully compare the century and a quarter history of events following the coming of Cyrus with those since 1874.

Those years were full of hazards and disappointments, as well as those brighter moments of rejoicing. The same was true in principle in the days of Moses, though events were more consolidated. Things did not go smoothly for Israel at either period. There was a moment when Moses cried out to God, "Why hast Thou sent me?" It seemed then that the only result of His coming was greater fury on the part of the oppressor. Those new-born hopes of Israel that were to mark each typical period of her deliverer's presence, were to be dashed and shaken, her groans increase. Jewish tears were to be shed even in the days of the presence of her deliverer.

Sign number three. Exodus 4:9.

What of that third sign of Moses, the pouring out of water which turned to blood upon the soil of Egypt? In Exodus 4:9, the Lord said to Moses that if they fail to recognise the meaning of the other two witnesses, this should be the third. Has there indeed been a third sign, a witness as unmistakable as the going down of Babylon and the rising up of Israel, and which particularly marks our day? Water represents life, and also truth. Why, then, when it is poured upon the ground does death result? Blood represents death when spilled on the ground. We believe that water represents here as elsewhere the living truth of God's holy Word. The ground of Egypt is the territory of Pharaoh, representing the domain of Satan, the ground of his lies and deceptions. This, then, is the effect of the pouring out of the water of Truth upon the territory of error and ground of lies. The pouring out of Truth spells destruction, death, to darkness and error.

To fully appreciate the force of this sign we would need to study closely the history of the nineteenth century. In retrospect we now can see the preparations taking place during that

seventy-five year period between the running out of the 1260 years and that of the 1335 years leading to the blessedness foretold. First, the growth and work of the Bible Societies, then the clarifying of the meaning of Bible languages, and the growing interest in Bible matters. In 1800 one in every fourteen of the population of USA professed a Christian belief. By 1850 it was claimed to be one in three. The way was prepared for the great King of the sun rising to open the sluice-gates for the flood of truth that was to pour forth during the last quarter century and beyond.

The effects of that truth flood we all have come to know. Gladness of heart for the truth-hungry, but that which was a savour of life unto life for the Lord's people proved to be the savour of death unto death for the very ground of Satan's errors, the deathless soul, hell-fire, the second person of the trinity who could only pretend to die for sins because He Himself was God, the lost hope for the world... for these and other errors the sweet waters of truth were to be a savour of death unto death. The waters turned to blood upon the ground of Egypt. It did the same for Egypt's rivers and springs. It was to be the Master's last supper with His people on earth, a feast indeed, enriched by the bringing out of the store-house spiritual treasures new and old, beautifully prefigured in those chapters of precious sharing, John 13 to 17. And as He blessed those Heaven—provided truths to our hearts, did they not burn within, and were not the eyes of his loved ones opened to His presence, though now invisible to natural sight.

Three great signs, so immense, so incontrovertible.

We have not followed cunningly devised fables concerning the *parousia* of the Lord, for we are eyewitnesses of His majesty. These signs are for His people, that they may know that THIS IS HE that was to come, their Master, Lord, and Deliverer.

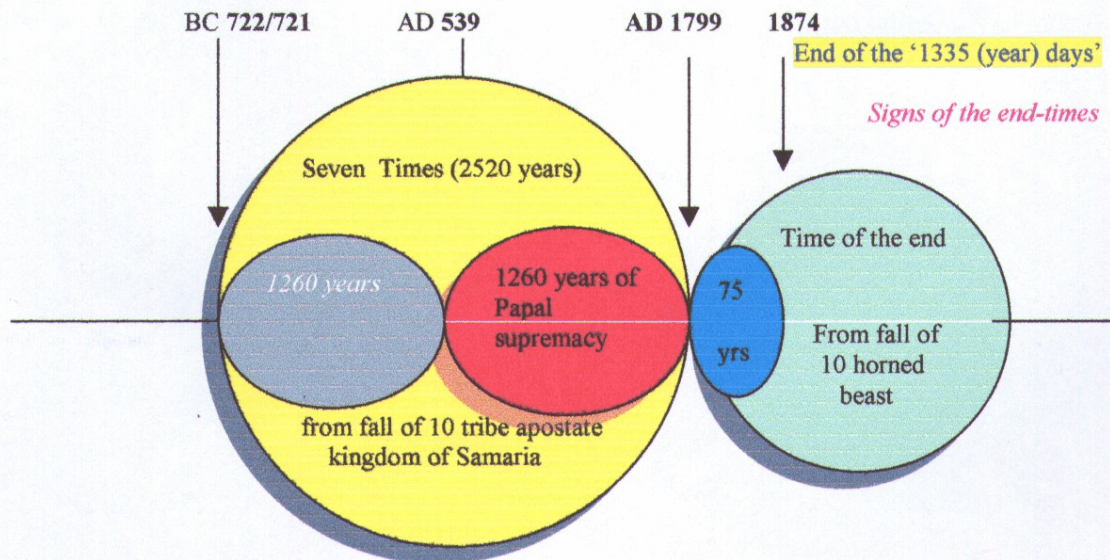
Now with retrospective wisdom we can look back on those early harvest days and ask, "Were we deceived?" "Has the passage of time disproved or has it vindicated those early convictions?" To which the answer comes with resounding clarity and force, "We were not deceived." Since the days of Brother Russell far greater confirmations have arisen than anything he was privileged to witness in his earthly course. Particularly has this been true with regard to Israel. There are Jews in Israel today who know that what they are witnessing taking place around them and before their eyes are the works of their Messiah. Because they cannot see Him they are puzzled. They speak of the days since 1948 as the "Messianic Era"! They know, as many Jews before them, that these works of restoration are the works of Messiah at His coming. This was a great concern in the minds of the disciples when Jesus was about to leave them.

He was Messiah, yet He was going without fulfilling His appointed role of restoring the kingdom to Israel. How could He do that? Later, Peter had the task of telling his fellow countrymen that their Messiah had come, and that He had also gone again. Immediately he knew he had to explain how this could be without the work of Messiah so long waited for. How could this be that He had not fulfilled Messiah's role? So Peter explains that heaven must receive Him UNTIL the time was due for the restoration work to proceed. It takes only a moment's serious thought to realise that, whatever other aspects of Messiah's restoration work may be eventually entailed, it was THIS, the restoring of Israel, that was uppermost in mind, both for Peter, and his audience. This would be the sign that no longer was He retained in heaven. The great "until" has been reached, as every phase of Israel's restoration proves beyond all doubt. The other aspects of blessing are also mentioned in Isaiah 49:6, but this came first, that He should restore the desolations of Israel.

The Time of the End.

This began in 1799 which marked the end of the 1260 years of Papal supremacy when the Pope died a prisoner under Napoleon. As Papacy rose in stages it is easier to note the prominent point commencing her demise, but this date has now been confirmed beyond doubt by the realisation that it marked the exact end also of seven times from the fall of the ten tribes of Israel in 722-721 BC. This period was bisected into two periods of three and a half times (1260 years), the latter of which formed the period of Papal supremacy referred to in Daniel and Revelation.

Daniel 12:12 *Blessed is he that waiteth, and cometh to the 1335 days.*



We are now living in a most wonderful time of that restoration process thus far. The Jewish year from the end of 1944 to 45 was to witness an outstanding turning point in the experiences of the Jewish people. The precise moment had arrived for them to leave the wilderness state, and to infiltrate the land of Promise. The wandering suffering Jew became a fighting Jew, fighting for his land. Within so short a time there then emerged the Sovereign State of Israel. That turning point just happened to be 30 years after the running out of the Gentile Times in the Jewish year 1914/15. 45 years further was to see a time of blessedness for Israel. So unexpectedly and dramatically it came, the answer to the prayers of Jews of so many years, as throughout Europe, and other places too, the gates were opened, restrictions lifted, for Jews to return to their land by the thousands. Even during the Gulf war the flow continued unabated. The story we know. It is still taking place. Yet so suddenly and unexpectedly it began, just 45 years on from that notable year 1944/5. The year commencing at the autumn of 1989 had arrived. We are now just in a position to look back and notice with the wisdom of retrospect what we could not have guessed before the event., that Israel too was to have an eventful extension of a 1290 and 1335 years, just as the spiritual seed before her following 1799.

1799 was the end of the 1260 years for the church. How important to be sure of that date! For on it depends the 1335 years ending 1874, the date of the Lord's return. Can we be sure? Why not choose some other notable date in Papal history, perhaps 1870, end of temporal power, surely that was a notable date! 1799 has been confirmed beyond all doubt. We do not have to be clever at numbers to grasp that 3½ times is just half of 7 times. 1260 years, 3½ times, is half of 2520 years, 7 times. Supposing we look back over the whole period of 7 times of which the 3½ times is the second half. Where does that take us back to? Where does the seven times begin that ended in 1799?

It begins at a most remarkable and notable date indeed, for it was then, in the year 721/2 BC that Samaria fell. God marked the hour in the fall of the ten-tribe apostate and nominal people of God that would commence that great period to end at the fall of the ten-horned apostate and nominal people of God of this age. Could He have done more to confirm our confidence? "How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord, is laid for your faith in His excellent Word..." Now the two extensions of Daniel 12, the 1290 and the 1335 days or years, had to do with the spiritual seed. Nothing would be particularly noticeable in terms of this world's history to mark those times running out. The work is spiritual and invisible to natural sight, and has to do with the coming of an invisible Lord, and their gathering unto Him. How important then that the base date, 1799, be so surely fixed in history beyond dispute.

The gathering of the natural seed is different. This is a gathering to a land, a physical gathering that can be seen. The whole world can see it taking place, though few if any understand. Only the wise will understand, the Lord said to Daniel. Yet these visible demonstrations of the running out of 1290 and 1335 years for the natural seed confirm beyond doubt that the event marking in history 115 years before a similar period relating to the nominal and true spiritual seed did indeed take place.

"Brethren, the time is short." Just how long those Jews in Israel can go on talking about the Messianic Era before their eyes are fully opened and the Vail removed we cannot know, but that sign is there, reminding us that this is our cue. We Gentiles came in when the blindness began. We go out when their blindness is removed. We see our signs, and realise fully their implications. This is no hour to falter, or cling to things of time, nor wander from the pathway with such a hope divine.

There is a retrospective wisdom that is wise when it is too late. Jesus speaks of such in more than one parable, the wise and foolish virgins is one of these. In the light of perfect day many of our present experiences will look different. Many problems that now seem enormous will take new perspective. Afflictions so trying at this hour will then be viewed against the eternal weight of glory when we see what He has wrought in the trying of our faith and our faithfulness even unto death. We are not yet endued with that full wisdom of retrospect, and yet it cannot be other than the most desirable exercise to try to anticipate that hour of perfect vision when we shall look back and trace the Lord's leading in our life. Today we can look back over the past and learn so much that must affect our present walk. The lessons of men's lives are ours, the noble example of Peters and Pauls and Johns, the warnings of failing to hear what the Spirit says to the churches. It is all there for you and me, on whom the ends of the ages are, come.

When we ask for the Wisdom of the Lord we ask for the greatest and most wonderful wisdom there is. We would much rather have this than our own wisdom. We do not wish to lean to our own understanding. The Lord is dealing with us as dear children. He longs to share so much, yet He knows so well our frame. Nevertheless what delight it must bring to His great heart of love to see His children seeking that true wisdom of their Father. No doubt He smiles to see our reaching out with longing for that full wisdom of that perfect maturity of sons of God. If He does smile, it must be a smile of pleasure, and we do so long to please Him more.

O Lord, that I might view my present walk, each test, each trial,
each concept of Thy Truth, against the glory of that perfect day.
O that with retrospective wisdom blest I could retrace each step,
remould each thought, with noon-day vision of my Father's face.

AMEN.

Note. As 539 AD marked little that was an outstanding event but rather a point of time during the process of Papacy's development, in similar way a point 1260 years before 1914 of significance to the Jewish history, ie. 654 AD, was a point in the midst of the development of Islam, the Jews' great enemy, between the coming of the prophet and the building of the mosque upon the temple site. It was around that time that the Koran was first edited into much the form we have today.

