

THINGS HARD TO UNDERSTAND (CONT'D)

BAPTISM FOR THE DEAD. I Corinthians 15:29: "Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead?" There are as many explanations to this passage as there are commentaries. The web-site of the Mormon church featured an article by Keith L. Brown, Ward Mission Leader in the Annapolis, Maryland Mormon Church that states: "The Prophet Joseph Smith first taught about the ordinance of baptism for dead during a funeral sermon in August 1840. As part of that sermon, he read much of I Corinthians 15, including verse 29, and announced to those in attendance that the Lord would permit Church members to be baptized in behalf of their friends and relatives who had departed this life. He said, 'the plan of salvation was calculated to save all who were willing to obey the requirements of the law of God.' (Journal History of the Church, August 15, 1840)."

Below are some quotes from leading theological scholars on this subject:

Henry Alford *The Greek New Testament*: "The only legitimate reference is, to a practice, not otherwise known to us, not mentioned here with any approval of the Apostle, not generally, but in use by some, of survivors allowing themselves to be baptized on behalf of friends who had died without baptism. All we clearly see from this text, is that it unquestionably did exist."

Conybeare & Howson *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul*: "The passage must be considered to admit no satisfactory explanation. It alludes to some practice of the Corinthians, which has not been recorded elsewhere, and of which every other trace has perished. The explanations which have been adopted to avoid the difficulty, such as 'over the graves of the dead,' or 'in the name of the dead' (meaning Christ), are all inadmissible, as being contrary to the language."

Albert Barnes *Notes on the New Testament*: "There is, perhaps, no passage in the New Testament in respect to which there has been a greater variety of interpretation than this; and the views of expositors by no means harmonize in regard to its meaning. It is possible that Paul may here refer to some practice or custom which existed in his time respecting baptism, the knowledge which is now lost."

G. Campbell Morgan *The Corinthian Letters of Paul*: "The Apostle Paul was referring to some custom current at that time, and he uses it as an argument, but does not justify that particular custom, whatever it was. There were some who were baptized for the dead. Possibly there had entered into their thinking, that if a man had believed, and yet had not been baptized, that it was necessary for someone to take his place and submit to the rite. One cannot be dogmatic, but quite evidently a rite was being practiced. Paul takes it. He does not say whether it is right or wrong. He does not justify it, but names it, and asks what is the use of being baptized for the dead. He takes this illustration, the uselessness of the rite if there be no resurrection."

Gerhard Kittle *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*: "This refers to a groping attempt certainly, not accepted by Paul, to apply salvation in Christ to the unbaptized dead."

We gave our own interpretation in the November 2006 issue of *Living Waters Newsletter* which we reprint below.

Perhaps one of the most confusing passages in Scripture is Paul's statement in I Corinthians 15:29: "Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them?" There are too many opinionated interpretations of the passage to list them. Suffice it to say every commentary has some explanation of the text but none can say theirs is the correct one. To my knowledge the Mormons are the only ones who actually practice this baptism for the dead by proxy. This is one of those passages which we will never be able to ascertain for certain what the meaning is. It seems logical to say Paul must have expected his readers to understand what he was talking about, but to us the passage remains a mystery. I would like to present another interpretation which takes into consideration three principles.

First, in Paul's writings he would sometimes deviate from his main topic and develop another thought in parentheses. For example: In Ephesians 3:1 he states, "for this reason" but does not finish that sentence until verse 14 where he comes back to "this reason". Verses 2-13 is a side issue of his main thought. Another example is Romans 6 and 7. His theme in chapters 1-5 is our justification by faith not law. He deviated from this subject in chapters 6 and 7 to explain how we are dead to sin and the law, then returns to his subject in chapter 8. In I Corinthians 15:12-19 Paul's subject is "If Christ be not raised." In verses 20-28 he leaves that theme for a moment and speaks of the exaltation and reign of Christ. Now let's say in verse 29 he returns to his subject "If Christ is not raised...what will those do who are baptized..."

This brings us to a second principle: that of punctuation. In the Greek there is no punctuation, so this must be supplied by the translators. Sometimes this can change the whole meaning of a passage. For example; the translation of Jesus' words to the thief on the cross: "Verily I say unto you, today you will be with me in Paradise." Now put the comma in another place: "Verily I say unto you today, you will be with me in Paradise." This change of the comma changes the whole thought of the passage. Apply this to I Corinthians 15:29: (If Christ be not raised from the dead) "Otherwise what will those do who are baptized?" (Question mark).

Now the third principle: In some passages there is an omission of one or more words that are obviously understood but must be supplied by the translators to make the sentence complete. (This is called an "ellipsis"). These words are written in *italics* in most translations. Examples: Romans 12:1: "present your bodies to God, *which* is your reasonable service..." I Corinthians 2:13: "which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit combining spiritual *thoughts* with spiritual *words*." And I Corinthians 12:1: "now concerning spiritual *gifts*..." (The word is "spirituals"). Applying this principle to I Corinthians 15:29: (If Christ is not raised from the dead) "Otherwise what will those do who are baptized? *Is it* for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all why then are they baptized? *Is it* for them?" This puts this questionable passage in context with "if Christ be not raised from the dead."

WILL ALL ISRAEL BE SAVED? Romans 11:25, 26: "I do not want you to be uninformed of this mystery, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved, just as it is written, The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will remove ungodliness from Jacob."

According to most prophesy preachers Romans 11 predicts future conversion to Christianity by the Jews as a nation. It is odd that this is the only place in the N.T. where the future conversion of the Jews is predicted. Romans 11 is predicting an event that was future to Paul, but not future to us, that is, this passage predicts a conversion of many Jews just before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

It is significant that Paul uses the term "Jews" in Romans 3:9, 29, 9:24 as in all his epistles: I Cor. 1:24, 9:20; 10:32; 12:13; II Cor. 11:24; Gal.2:13-15; I Thess. 2:14. The word "Jews" not "Israelites" is used throughout the gospels and Acts and Rev. 2:9, 3:9. Yet in Romans 9, 10, 11 "Jew" is only used one time (9:24) and "Israel" is used throughout these chapters.

There are three terms describing the descendants of Abraham: 1. "Hebrews" first used of Abraham (Gen. 14:13) and generally used by the nations referring to the Jews. 2. "Israelites" (Israel) upon the giving of the covenant, is used of the covenant people who were called to be a priesthood to the rest of the world (Exodus 19:5, 6). 3. "Jews." The first use of the word "Jew" is found in II Kings 25:25 where they were being taken captive by the Babylonians. It is then used throughout Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, and the New Testament. We see that the term "Jew" replaced "Israel" during the exile and continued to describe them until 70 A.D. when they were destroyed as a nation.

Paul used the term "Israel" in Romans 9-11 to refer to those who have been faithful to the Old Covenant. of whom he has a desire to see saved. The term "Jew" refers to those who claim to be covenant people, but in essence were not. From the beginning of the nation "Israelites" were defined by covenant, not by blood or race. In Paul's writings in Romans 9-11 the "Israelites" were those who adhered to the covenant at Sinai. The "Jews" were those who had become unfaithful to the covenant. However, throughout the N.T. the word "Jew" is used to describe those claiming to be real descendants of Abraham.

How do the Scriptures define a Jew, and who is a modern Jew? We think of Jews as the descendants of Abraham, but Genesis 14:14 speaks of 318 fighting men who were a part of Abraham's household as they were "born in his house." All his household (servants, etc.) were to be circumcised (Gen. 17:12-14) and thus to become a part of the covenant, but they could not have been his descendants. When Israel came out of Egypt there was a "mixed multitude" (Ex. 12:38) that came with them. Esther 8:17 states: "And many among the peoples of the land (Gentiles) became Jews, for the dread of the Jews had fallen on them." An important man in Israel's history, Caleb, a Kenizzite, was a converted Jew (Num.32:12, Josh. 14:6) and became a part of the tribe of Judah (Num. 13:6). This means that in the time of Christ very few Jews were actually descendants of Abraham. This is why the genealogies of Christ are so important. He is, according to prophesy, established as a descendant of Abraham and David.

Twice Paul mentions "the fall" of Israel. Just what was this falling? At Mt. Sinai all the people accepted the Mosaic

Covenant (the Law). It was not long, however, before a number of the people were objecting to one of the most distinctive features of the Covenant, that of offering sacrifices. During the time of the Patriarchs the people could offer sacrifices to God on altars they erected. But under the covenant only the priests were ordained and anointed for this purpose. Sacrifices had to be made in the tabernacle and they could no longer offer them on their "high places." There was a rebellion because of the demand of God. Korah, Dathan and Abiram led a rebellion against Moses and Aaron and insisted that because all the congregation was holy they had as much right to leadership as Moses and Aaron (Numbers 16:1-11). This was a rebellion concerning the priesthood (ver. 10). A rejection of the priesthood was a going back to the older method under the Patriarchs. Although Korah and his followers were destroyed, an attitude that rejected the Covenant Priesthood persisted throughout the Old Testament. This is evident by the many references to their sin of worshiping in the "high places". This type of worship was acceptable under the old system, but rejected under the Mosaic Covenant. Another form of their rejection of the Covenant was their continual desire to return to Egypt. This can be compared to the Judaizers in Paul's day. There were Jewish Christians who instead of accepting the New Covenant insisted that Paul was changing the rules (comparable to accusations brought against Moses) and that they did not have to give up the old Jewish ways to become a Christian. Just as many of the Israelites in Moses' day wanted to return to Egypt the Judaizers in Paul's day wanted to return to Judaism. This was the "falling away" referred to many times in the New Testament. This brings us to the subject of the remnant (9:27). The "all Israel" (11:26) who will be saved were the Jews that accepted the New Covenant and left the old ways of Judaism. Just as many of the people after the destruction of Korah and his followers continued to reject the temple worship and worshiped in the high places (until the exile), so also after the destruction of the Judaizers (the Jews) in 70 A.D., many people continue in the heresies of the Judaizers by following the Talmud today.

In verse 25 Paul speaks of "the fullness of the Gentiles coming in". This has been a subject of much speculation among prophesy preachers. In Luke's account of the destruction of Jerusalem Jesus said: "Jerusalem shall be trodden down by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." This puts the "times of the Gentiles" being fulfilled in the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. According to Jewish historian Josephus, the siege of Jerusalem began in Feb. 67 AD and was completed with the fall of the city in Aug. 70 AD. Thus Jerusalem being "trodden down" by the Gentiles (Rome) lasted 42 months or 1,260 days (Rev. 11:2). This same time is stated in Rev. 12:14 and 13:5. The "times of the Gentiles" (Rome) was fulfilled when they destroyed Jerusalem.

Paul would not live to see this take place as it was future to him but past to us. Luke 21:24 indicates that the times (fullness) of the Gentiles would be fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem. After the destruction of Jerusalem (the destruction of the old Jewish system) there is no longer Jews and Gentiles, but believers and unbelievers Christians and non-Christians.

Paul's ministry to the Gentile was to bring them to salvation, but it was also designed to provoke Israel into believing (Rom. 11:13,14). During Paul's ministry to the Gentiles this "provoking" could be taking place, but is not possible today. Modern Jews are not a bit provoked that non-Jews believe the Gospel. Modern Jews get angry when Jews convert to Christ, but not when Gentiles do. (This shows that Romans 9-11 has to do with the early days of the church and is not future).