

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

Dialah stood but up to his shoulders. The pistachio tree of Pumbaditha reached but up to the shoulders of Adda Dialah, and common people were but half as tall as the pistachio tree of Pumbaditha."

It appears, then, that Abba Saul must have been as high as two men and ten heads; and if he sank up to the nose in the eye-socket of Absalom, Absalom's head must have been sixty times larger than a man's body, and Absalom himself three hundred and sixty times taller than an ordinary mortal. Many people have taken this story to be a piece of rampant and inexcusable absurdity. It has, however, a very simple meaning, which I may perhaps be allowed to explain in my next paper.

F. W. FARRAR.

THE GOSPEL IN THE EPISTLES.

And by them [the Apostles] in like maner, first without writyng by onely wordes and prechyng so was it spredde abrode in the worlde that his faith was by the mouthes of his holy messengers put into mennes eres, and by his holy hande written in mennes hartes, or ever any worde thereof almost was written in the boke. . . . And I nothyng double but all had it so beh that never gospel hadde ben written, yet shoulde the substaunce of this faith never have fallen out of Christen folkes hartes, but the same spirit that planted it, the same shoulde have watered it, the same shoulde have kepte it, the same shoulde have encreased it. . . . And none Evangelist was there nor none Apostle that by writtyng ever sente the faith to any nacion, but if they were first informed by worde and that God had begon his Church in that place.—
 Sir THOMAS MORE'S *Works* [ed. 1557], pp. 158, 159.

THE writer of the above extract evidently thought that those persons to whom the Apostolic Letters were addressed could have constructed for themselves a Gospel, had no work of any Evangelist ever appeared. By an analysis of four of these Epistles, we have endeavoured to make this plain. We pur-

pose now, by following the historical order of the Gospel story, to give synthetically an outline of what must have been taught to the Churches of Rome, Corinth, and Galatia, before they could have been fit to receive and comprehend the Letters which are addressed to them.

They could have been no strangers to language like that in which St. John, in the opening words of his Gospel, speaks of the pre-existence of the Creative Word. They had heard by oral teaching of "the one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him;"¹ and also that "Jesus Christ was the Son of God, made of the seed of David according to the flesh."² Nay, they must have heard much more than this to be able to comprehend statements set before them with such brevity. The simple story of Mary his mother, who was of the house and lineage of David, must have been orally communicated to them; and, with it, of course those miraculous details which made it possible for St. Paul to speak to them of the Son of Mary as being also the Son of God. And, besides this, they must also have been told of the lowly life which Jesus led among men, and that He could say of Himself that He had not where to lay his head, before St. Paul could write concerning the grace of Christ, "Though he were rich, yet for your sakes he became poor."³ But they must also have known that Jesus claimed to be the hope of the Jews, the promised Redeemer, and, as St. Matthew calls Him, not only the Son of David, but the Son of Abraham. For without comment St. Paul writes, "To Abraham and his seed

¹ 1 Cor. viii. 6.

² Rom. i. 3.

³ 2 Cor. viii. 9.

were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ."¹ Moreover, to those to whom the Apostle could speak thus, "If when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life;"² or thus, "Our Lord Jesus Christ who gave himself for our sins;" there could have been no lack of knowledge concerning that heavenly message which at the birth of Jesus proclaimed glad tidings to all people, because One was now born "who should save his people from their sins." And that this Child, whose birth was so marvellously heralded and wondrously foretold, lived as a Jew among the Jews, and submitted to all the rules of the Jewish religion, must have been explained fully to them; for St. Paul has no occasion to say more, in speaking of Jesus, than that He was "made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law."³ This story of the miraculous birth and the childhood of Jesus must have been completely recited to those for whom so brief a sentence was enough. And we cannot think that those later proclamations of the Divinity of Jesus which the Baptist made could have been left unmentioned among those who were told that "Christ died for our sins."⁴ For how more fitly could it be explained that the sacrifice of Christ was able to do away sins, than by such testimony as John gave when he said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world"?

They must have been told how "the twelve,"⁵

¹ Gal. iii. 16.

² Rom. v. 10.

³ Gal. iv. 4, 5.

⁴ I Cor. xv. 3.

⁵ Ibid. xv. 5.

whom St. Paul mentions with no more words than these, came to be chosen as the disciples of Jesus, and must likewise have heard of their names; for in the same passage Cephas and James are alluded to as though their names and history would be familiar to every Christian congregation. The call, therefore, on the Sea of Galilee, and all the circumstances of the life at Capernaum, must have entered into the narrative which had been orally communicated to the Christian Church of Corinth, and indeed to all the Churches; for with just the same brevity does he allude to James, Cephas, and John, who "seemed to be pillars,"¹ when he is writing to the Galatians. How these three had come to occupy that prominent place in the early society must also have been told; and also how these very men received special marks of the Lord's confidence, and were admitted into an intimacy with Him closer than that which was allowed to the rest of the Twelve. Their own eyes had seen how these early disciples of Jesus had come abroad to preach the glad tidings of his kingdom; and when the first teachers came to any church, their opening address could not have failed to contain a notice that from the beginning Jesus had sent forth his followers to spread the gospel and win converts to the faith, and had commanded that this new institution of preaching should be continued and extended after He had been taken away. With the miracles of Jesus the Epistles naturally do not deal. The apostles had learned from their Master that words like "Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house," were only spoken, and followed by the restoration of the afflicted

¹ Ga¹. ii. 9.

man, in order that men should believe that Jesus was possessed of a greater power—that of healing the soul by the forgiveness of sins. And, above all, every other miracle was rendered needless, as the ground of an appeal to the faith of the world, when Christ had triumphed over death and risen from the grave. On the Resurrection, the Letters of St. Paul insist in every page. It is “by the resurrection from the dead that Jesus is declared to be the Son of God with power.”¹ It will be imputed unto us for righteousness “if we believe on him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead.”² For “Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father.”³ And as “God hath raised up the Lord, so will he also raise us up by his own power.”⁴ And it is from God who raised up Jesus, for whom He is an ambassador, that our Apostle claims his commission: “Paul, an apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead.”⁵ For evidence that Christ was truly the Son of God they neither could nor would desire to go beyond the proof furnished by his empty grave. But the case was different with the *words* which Jesus had spoken while alive. These his disciples were to make known to all the world; and the spirit of this teaching, which was utterly new to the world, is found throughout these Epistles of St. Paul. We have already⁶ largely illustrated this similarity of tone between the Gospels and the Epistles, and have especially pointed out how much of the solemn language of the discourses preserved to us by St. John

¹ Rom. i. 4.² Ibid. iv. 24.³ Ibid. vi. 4.⁴ 1 Cor. vi. 14.⁵ Gal. i. 1.⁶ THE EXPOSITOR, vol. v. pp. 451, *et seq.*

is anticipated in the Letters which we have been examining. But the subject is not nearly exhausted. For example, how unlike to any teaching which men had ever heard before was the saying of Christ, "Be ye wise as serpents, and *harmless* as doves."¹ The world had encouraged the acquisition of wisdom after its own fashion, but the latter clause of Christ's sentence was alien to any teaching but his own. Yet St. Paul, in writing to the Romans, exhorts them in precisely the same strain in which Jesus had spoken to the Seventy. "I would have you wise unto that which is good, and *simple* concerning evil;" where he employs the same word in the original for *simple* as, in the sentence from the Gospel, is translated *harmless*. The word (*ἀκέραιος*) is not a common word, and signifies—literally—*pure, unadulterated*. St. Paul uses it once more—and only once more—in writing to the Philippians: "That ye may be blameless and *harmless*."² And we can hardly suppose the Apostle to have employed it except as having in his mind the previous utterance of Jesus, and in writing to persons to whom the now almost proverbial expression of the Lord had become familiar. The sentiment is repeated by him again when he writes, "If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise."³ And once more in the same Epistle, "Brethren be not children in understanding; howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men."⁴

Before the preaching of Christ it was only in dim vision that a future life was made known, even to the

¹ Matt. x. 16.

² Phil. ii. 15.

³ 1 Cor. iii. 18.

⁴ Ibid. xiv. 20.

Chosen People. It was Christ who brought life and immortality to light. Of the lot of man after death He is reported to have spoken thus in the Gospels : "The Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father, with his angels ; and then shall he reward every man according to his works."¹ The teaching of the first preachers would not have been complete without the communication of this heaven-sent revelation. And that they did set it forth we can see clearly from the words which St. Paul is able to use to the Roman Church, and also to the Corinthians. To the former he writes, addressing an impenitent sinner : "Thou treasurest up to thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God ; who will render to every man according to his deeds."² To the Corinthians he says, "He that planteth and he that watereth are one ; and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour."³ And in his Second Epistle even more fully : "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."⁴ The world had known nothing of these solemn truths before the appearance of Jesus Christ, and it could only have been by the oral teaching of the first Christian missionaries that the congregations in Rome and Corinth had been instructed in them ; and yet we find the Apostle alluding to them as teachings with which they were all sure to be familiar. How truly, too, is the spirit of Christ's teaching in the Gospel on mercy to the erring set forth in the Epistles of St. Paul,

¹ Matt. xvi. 27.² Rom. ii. 5, 6.³ I Cor. iii. 8.⁴ 2 Cor. v. 10.

although this was no common teaching before Christ came into the world. We seem to hear the Lord's "He that is without sin among you let him cast the first stone," as we read, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye that are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted;"¹ and in these, "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves."² Had it not been known that these were among the precepts of the Master, his disciples would hardly have been bold enough to originate such lessons, and would surely have found it impossible to win acceptance for them. Nor would it have fared better with those lessons of consideration for others which are to be found in passages such as, "Take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling-block to them that are weak;"³ or, again, in the same Epistle, "Let no man seek his own, but every man his neighbour's well-being."⁴ Neither were lessons of universal benevolence ever inculcated before the coming of Christ, nor could they have been enforced on Christian congregations unless those congregations had already received them as among the words of Jesus. When these had been heard, but not before, it was possible for St. Paul to write to the Galatians, "As we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men;"⁵ and to the Romans: "Bless them which persecute you, and recompense to no man evil for evil;"⁶ or to write his wondrous eulogy on Christian charity;⁷ or to pen the words, which seem

¹ Gal. vi. 1.² Rom. xv. 1.³ I Cor. viii. 9.⁴ Ibid. x. 24.⁵ Gal. vi. 10.⁶ Rom. xii. 14-17.⁷ I Cor. xiii.

like a brief summary of the life of the Master Himself, "I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved." ¹ It was only when Christ had preached and practised such love as this, only when He had prayed for his murderers, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," that such a spirit was inspired into men. And to have spoken to these Christian congregations in such language would have been impossible had they not known of the teaching of that Master in whose footsteps St. Paul strove to tread.

After what has just been said, in addition to those illustrations which we have before ² given of the great resemblance which exists between many of the teachings of St. Paul and the authoritative utterances of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount, as well as between the language attributed to the Saviour and that used by the Apostle on such subjects as the last judgment, the power of faith, the influence of the Spirit, and the office of the Holy Ghost, we feel that no more need be adduced to shew how entirely these Epistles, written so long anterior to the publication of any Gospel, accord with the lessons of our blessed Lord. Their brief injunctions, almost always unaccompanied by a reason, would have found no response in the hearts of those to whom they were addressed, had not the teaching of Christ, orally communicated by the earliest preachers, prepared the way for the practical application of his lessons by those on whom should come the care of the Churches.

¹ 2 Cor. xii. 15.

² THE EXPOSITOR, vol. v. p. 453.

But not only were the lessons which Christ gave to his disciples made known to the first-founded Churches, but from the fact that the apostles themselves were the first missionaries, the early congregations, to which St. Paul wrote, were well informed on the personal history of the apostolic band and of those who had lived with Jesus. Thus it comes to pass that St. Paul can allude without explanation to the circumstance of Peter's marriage, and the marriage of some of the brethren of our Lord; and speak of "the other apostles" ¹ in such general phrase as makes us quite sure that further explanation was not needed by those to whom he was writing.

How entirely in accord with what was afterwards made public in the Gospels is St. Paul's expression, "The Jews require a sign!" ² How thoroughly does it represent to us the oft-repeated demand, "Master, we would see a sign from thee." ³ And whence did St. Paul derive that unusual simile of the leaven, which he so frequently employs—as, for example, in the phrase, "Purge out therefore the old leaven" ⁴ and how did it become so familiar in the Churches, that they at once recognized its meaning, if not from the use which the Lord Himself made of the word when speaking of the corrupt teaching of the Pharisees and the corrupt practices of the Herodians? So that, not only the substance, but the phraseology and very words of Jesus are to be traced in these Letters, and were used because they would appeal to the first teaching which the Churches had received. How like in tenour too is that language

¹ 1 Cor. ix. 5; Gal. i. 19.

² 1 Cor. i. 22.

³ Matt. xii. 38.

⁴ 1 Cor. v. 7, and several times in the same chapter.

of St. Paul where he says, "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty,"¹ to that thanksgiving of Jesus, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight."²

With the events which the Gospels record concerning the last days of our Lord's life, the Churches to whom these Letters were written must have been most thoroughly acquainted. They knew that the solemn meal which our Lord ate with his disciples was eaten on the evening of "the same night on which he was betrayed." But we cannot suppose for a moment that the details of the preparation for that feast, which the Lord had so earnestly desired to eat with his disciples before He suffered, had been omitted from the narrative to which they had listened. Rather must we believe that as the institution of the Lord's Supper took place on that evening, and was to continue as a sacred memorial in the Christian Church for ever; and as the abolition of the Paschal Sacrifice was now to be made, and the simple reception of bread and wine to take its place, both Jewish and Gentile audiences would need to hear the whole history of those events which led up to the appointment of the Christian Sacrament. They must have heard that the Lord looked upon it as the precursor of his own sacrifice. When they could, in such short phrase, be reminded of Christ's betrayal, the story of

¹ 1 Cor. i. 27.

² Matt. xi. 25.

Iscariot's crime must have been fixed in every memory. No doubt they had been told, too, how Christ, during the Supper, had shewn that He could read what was in the heart of his treacherous follower. And no detail of the crime would be omitted,—the bargain with the Jews, the thirty pieces of silver, the kiss as a sign, the terror of the band of soldiers, the remorse of Judas, his return and confession, how the Jews scorned at his restoration of the blood-money, and how in despair he went out and hanged himself. We cannot believe that one word of all this was unfamiliar to the Corinthian congregation, when, in order to recall it to their memories, only that brief sentence needed to be written which begins, "The Lord Jesus in the same night in which he was betrayed."

Nor can we believe that those solemn discourses, which St. John records as having been uttered at the Paschal Feast, were left undescribed to the audiences to which the first disciples preached. Have we not the echo of those mysterious teachings time after time in these Letters of St. Paul? Christ had said, "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever."¹ Exactly in the same tenour does St. Paul write to the Romans: "Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father;"² and a little afterwards in the same Chapter, "The Spirit helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."³

In speaking of the same gift of the Spirit, Jesus

¹ John xiv. 16.

² Rom. viii. 15.

³ Ibid. viii. 26.

says again, "The world cannot receive him, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him."¹ In words that can have no other source than this, St. Paul writes, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God : for they are foolishness unto him : neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."² And with what full meaning do those further words of Jesus in the same Chapter—" Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me : because I live, ye shall live also "³—come before us when, after the Resurrection, we hear them thus translated, so to speak, by St. Paul: "Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept."⁴ These sublime Chapters of St. John's Gospel would furnish us with abundant material for illustrating this portion of our subject; but as the reader can supply many of the instances from his own memory, we will be content with quoting only two more from the succeeding Chapters, that it may be seen how fully the sense of the whole discourse is reproduced in the Apostolic Letters. Jesus says, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."⁵ With the full consciousness of what was about to come upon Him on the following day, Christ uttered these words. He knew, too, that those who heard Him would soon shew their weakness by forsaking Him in his hour of arrest. Yet He hesitated not to die for them, although they were, as St. Paul puts it, "without strength." And read the words which follow in the Epistle : "For scarcely for a righteous

¹ John xiv. 17.² I Cor. ii. 14.³ John xiv. 19.⁴ I Cor. xv. 20.⁵ John xv. 13.

man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”¹ We cannot but feel as we read these sentences that there must have been fully set before the Roman Christians the teaching which Christ embodied in this last solemn discourse. And this feeling is deepened and confirmed when we compare the prayer of Jesus—“That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me”²—with the Apostle’s words to the Romans, “We, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another;”³ or to the Galatians, “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”⁴ When we reflect that the Gospel of St. John was not written till long after the time when St. Paul penned these Epistles, we see that the whole body of believers must have been instructed orally in the truths of the Gospel long before any one of the Gospels was composed.

That they were familiar with the details of the death of Christ, we might infer from the constant mention in these Epistles of the Cross of Christ, as that in which the Apostle gloried, although it was foolishness to the Gentiles and a stumbling-block to the Jews. The manner of the death, by crucifixion, must have stamped the procedure as a judicial act of the Roman power; and the facts which we possess in

¹ Rom. v. 7, 8. ² John xvii. 21. ³ Rom. xii. 5. ⁴ Gal. iii. 27, 28.

the Gospels must have been recounted, in order to explain how the malice of the Jews gained over the executive power of their conquerors to work out its desire. We have only to read the brief summary of the last events of the earthly history of Christ which is given by St. Paul to the Romans, to know how current the whole Gospel history of these events was. All that he says is, "To this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be the Lord both of the dead and living."¹ And with like brevity are the Ascension and the second Advent alluded to in the same Letter: "Who is he that condemneth? Is it Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us?"² And, again, "God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel."³ The baptism by which all converts were admitted into the Christian Communion was not likely to be administered before the converts had been taught that this Sacrament also was of Christ's own institution, and specially appointed as the sign of a covenant between Him and his followers. The long enumeration⁴ of the appearances of Jesus after his resurrection which St. Paul gives, with almost the bareness of a catalogue, demonstrates how completely the whole narrative of the forty days had been made plain by the words of preachers; for how, otherwise, would it have been possible for the Apostle to preface a solemn argument with a list so meagre of details? The memories of those to whom he wrote could supply the particulars of each appearance, and it was

¹ Rom. xiv. 9.² Ibid. viii. 34.³ Ibid. ii. 16.⁴ 1 Cor. xv. 5-8.

enough for his purpose to give a simple enumeration.

Thus, from the birth of Jesus to his ascension, there is little in his life or teaching to which some allusion cannot be found in these Letters of St. Paul. His Jewish parentage, his miraculous birth, his humble life, his kindred in the flesh, his chosen companions, his precepts to them and to the multitude—precepts so novel that the world had never heard the like before they came from the lips of Jesus—his new ordinance of preaching, his persecution by the Jews, his death at the hands of the Roman authorities, the treachery of his disciple, the Sacraments for the observance of his Church, his resurrection, his manifestations of Himself to his disciples, his ascent into heaven—all these things must have been heard of till they were thoroughly well known by the Congregations for whom these Letters of St. Paul were written, and to whom the briefest allusions were enough to quicken the memory of what they had heard. Ere a word of the book of the Gospel was written, the Gospel itself was imprinted by oral teaching on the hearts of scores of Congregations. And it is one—and that not the least—of our many guarantees for the accuracy of the Gospels we now hold in our hands, that they were accepted with one consent by Churches, which, both from the oral and epistolary teaching of the Apostles themselves, had long been familiar with the life and teachings of Christ Jesus the Lord.

J. RAWSON LUMBY.