



scope

may09

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Minister's Letter

Hello again,
In this coming month of May we embark on a two month long series in the Sunday morning services. It seeks to place our personal set of gifts into the wider picture of what God wants Penicuik South Parish Church to be doing for the kingdom.

First of all, I recognise, by the almost audible communal sighs in the background, there is a very real risk that people will be saying "Here we go again!" Ian, don't you realise we've done this already – twice! I know there will be an extreme sense of déjà vu for more than a few people when we start asking all the 'what are your gifts?' questions.

Worse still, cynicism may lead some folks to feel there's no point. One more exercise in ticking boxes which, by the end of it, gets us precisely no where further forward. The church may know what my gifts are but they won't change anything as a consequence. I need to deal directly with that reaction.

It's been my experience as a Christian that until I show God that I am willing to truly deal with the issues that bring me down regularly then God will not move me forward into maturity. I have to die to self on the issues that God says are pivotal in my life – not my list

of issues. My spiritual progress is set by my willingness to deal with the stuff I would rather not deal with. The crucial answer to that crucial question: are you happy with Jesus as your Saviour or is Jesus your Lord as well? 'Yes' to the first means you a Christian; 'yes' to the second means you are open to maturing into a Christian that God can really use for the kingdom. Of course, I don't need to say 'yes' to the second. I can go to church and function without ever dealing with the issues that are fundamental to maturing in Christ. Penicuik South Parish Church is not good at operating a gift-based outlook in the way it goes about being the body of Christ. Identifying the abilities of the folk we have and setting our Church goals round those abilities should be the leadership's primary role. We have over many years become overly performance orientated. We need to change that outlook.

Of course, as with individuals, it would be more than possible for us as a congregation not to address these issues. We could focus on other more nice matters where we can feel OK about ourselves. But the Natural Church Development survey says we would be wasting our time.

(cont'd p4)

Minister's Letter (cont'd)

It is on this issue where the wheels fall of the bus for this church. All of us: individually; as a congregation; and everyone involved in any kind of leadership position – all of us need to become more and more attuned to the gifts that are in the congregation. The agenda cannot be set by one person or one group of people's outlook.

It starts from the belief that Ephesian's (and Scripture's) whole emphasis on God's sovereignty and our predestined part in the Christian faith is clear. No one is in Penicuik South Parish Church by accident; we are all meant to be utilised to the full in the cause of the gospel. What is our particular mix of gifts as a whole congregation? It's not just ticking a survey sheet – it really is a change of mindset.

Let me be clear, our capabilities are not the primary focus for God. But right now our capabilities certainly need to be the primary focus for this church. Our daily communion with God; our calling from God; and our character are all more important attributes of our faith than our capabilities. The point however is simple; this is our weak point – and then some! This is the stuff we would rather not deal with. This is the issue

that until we do deal with God won't lead us beyond it to maturity and growth.

Please pray that we get this right for as many people as possible, because the ease with which we can get this wrong is considerable. But to inspire us, we need to remember even the smallest betterment in this area will bring considerable results because every improvement is an increase on our weakest area. If we make improvements here you won't need me to tell you – you will feel it.

Yours in Him

Ian Cathcart

**Christian
Aid Week
10–16 May 09**

Parish News

Congratulations to Bonus and Chi Chi Fombo on the birth of Anna Joy on Monday 13th April 2009.

House Groups

A new House Group will be starting after Easter. It is intended to be a mixed group, meeting on Wednesday afternoons, at 32 West Street. Angus Bayne has kindly agreed to lead the group.

We need new members.

Anyone wanting to join please contact Helen & George Hogg 673041

Christian Aid Week 10th - 16th May

Volunteers are needed to collect in Penicuik that week. Please contact Ellen Walley 672014 or Joyce Maclean 677714 if you would like to help.

Christian Aid Lunch will take place on Sunday 10th May in South Church Hall.

All Age Services

It takes lots of ideas, time and planning to come up with all age services that have some relevance to a whole congregation (aged 0-100). We are looking for a team of people from a variety of ages and backgrounds to plan these services. Those coming up in 2009 include a transition service at the end of June, Harvest and Christmas.

If you think you have what it takes (e.g a love of all age services, a loathing of all age services, ideas, AV or IT skills) please contact Rev Ian Cathcart, Gill Mackintosh or Sheila Anderson.

Coffee Rota

The new coffee rota is now ready and can be picked up in the coffee area. There are still spaces for coffee duty in the evening, please volunteer to fill them!

As Natascha House is moving away at the end of April we need someone to organise the rota. Please speak to Natascha if you are interested.

Leprosy Mission Scotland

Taken from the Leprosy Mission Scotland magazine.
Contributed by Jennifer Ruddick

We are thrilled and grateful for all groups who fundraise on behalf of the Mission - the work of our Area Committees and other groups is vital and really appreciated!

However, we want to share with you the vision of the North Kirk in Penicuik who have taken responsibility for building 20 low cost homes per year for people who have been affected by leprosy in Northern India. This is a long term investment by the Church over a number of years and the funding for 8 houses has already been raised by the congregation and their supporters. A member of the church is providing a bible in each home and it is hoped that some of the young people from the church will actually be able to visit the projects and be involved in the construction of the homes and learn something more of life in rural India and the work of TLM in that needy sub-continent.

All this activity is in addition to the sterling work undertaken by the Penicuik Area Committee every year in their fundraising for the Mission. This year their fundraising will directly support the work of TLM Zimbabwe where the needs of

leprosy sufferers are so pressing in the current economic situation of that land.

What could your Church do to specifically help the work of the Mission - if you are inspired by the vision of the North Kirk you might prayerfully consider how you too as a fellowship could help! We can help translate your ideas into tangible plans and actions - if you want more information then please speak to Stanley Bonthron at the office. Do you have an Area Committee in your area? This is an excellent way of starting fundraising in your area and there is no doubt that the North Kirk initiative grew partly out of the valiant work of the Area Committee over many years of excellent fundraising! Please think about how you and your friends might share in this vital work!

South Church Leprosy Mission reps.

Liz Murray 673231
Wilma Wilson 678045

Minibus Project

As you may be aware from Ian's announcement at the morning service a few weeks ago, the purpose of the minibus project has now changed.

For the time being we will no longer be raising money to purchase a minibus, instead Katrina, Lynne and I would like to see the money that we have already raised be put to practical use. This will be done through the hiring of minibuses for church activities and funding for individuals to undertake Midas training. The demand for hiring and training will also demonstrate to us whether the church actually requires a minibus.

So if you or your group require the use of a minibus for church activities e.g. conferences, youth activities or afternoon services please speak to Katrina, Lynne or myself and we will arrange funding to enable you to hire one. Or if any individual within the congregation would like to undertake their Midas training to enable them to drive a minibus please speak to us.

Thank you for your support.

Mary Hadwen, Lynne Turnbull and
Katrina McDonald

Ladies Coffee Morning on Logos Hope

On Tuesday 7th April, Penicuik South Church was well represented on Logos Hope berthed at the dock at Ocean Terminal, by the ladies and children from the Tuesday morning housegroups. Here are some thoughts about our visit:

The first thing that struck me was the size of the ship – it's huge. We later learned that there are over 400 staff and 40 children permanently on board. Our coffee/tea and cakes was followed by worship songs, a talk on Hannah, which reminded us that God had used her in her time of trouble, and interviews with some of the resident ladies. They were from all parts of the globe and included a granny, a young mother of four, a newly married lass and a Scottish girl, who had given up her job at the Parliament to work on the boat. It was so encouraging to hear how God was working in their lives, so that they wanted to extend their two year contracts. The Book shop and Café on board were very busy, and people were still coming on to the boat when we left. I'm sure the staff would be so encouraged by the interest being shown in the work of the boat.

Mary Darling

From here to divinity

This article appeared in the Sunday Times on April 5, 2009. It is a fresh look at the issue and I thought it might be of interest.

Open Minds: Both scientists and theologians need a new way of understanding God, argues Tim Lott. As soon as I lost my faith in God at around the age of 14, I started looking for something to fill the God-shaped hole. Just a few years later I discovered the spiritual possibilities of science after stumbling on a remarkable book called *An Index of Possibilities*. Eschewing equations and textbook pedantry in favour of cartoons, humour and wild graphics, the book explained in layman's terms the remarkable philosophical and theological implications of relativity, quantum theory, gravity and other science fundamentals. *Index* suggested that what I had thought a tiresome academic discipline could actually stimulate the imagination rather than murder it. Over the decades that followed, I joined in the growing public fascination with popular science, and it occurred to me eventually that the real question was not "Is there a God?", but "What does science tell us about the modern meaning of the idea that the word 'God' points towards?" For there can be as much narrow-

mindedness in scientific circles as there is in religious circles. Many scientists are not only reluctant to acknowledge that there might be valid forms of knowledge outside the scientific method but blind to the godlike implications of what modern science has revealed to us. Perhaps because new-age "magical thinkers" have misinterpreted much of the evidence to come up with spurious and irrational conclusions. However, the new-agers are right about one thing. The universe is profoundly weird, and even godlike. The Big Bang itself, entirely inaccessible to the tools of scientists, is an extraordinarily theological phenomenon - a whole creation emerging out of nothing in an instant. And why should there be anything at all, rather than nothing, for ever? It would be much less trouble to have no events, no stuff. Yet here we are, millions of years on, evolved from that formless energy into you reading and me writing. Why? Science is silent. The queerness of the universe goes much further than this. For instance, it isn't really there in the sense of which we think of it. The amount of actual "stuff" in the human body, for example, can be contained in a grain of salt - the atoms and molecules that we are made of consist almost entirely of space. Of course, we feel solid, but at the most fundamental level there's almost nothing there. We are such stuff as dreams are made on.

Furthermore, at a subatomic, quantum level, matter springs in and out of existence in a kind of "quantum froth". Something all the time is coming from nothing then reverting to nothing again. And it is scientifically unquestionable that the mighty cosmos, from one distant corner to another, including the particles that make up you and me, is all made of the same stuff/energy - the same stuff/energy, down to the last infinitesimally small particle, created all those millions of years ago in the Big Bang. Not a single iota has been destroyed or created since. We are, literally and factually, both all one and eternal. Since all is one, the universe is you - or at least expressed through you. The universe is dead without human beings to conjure it into life — to give it colour, meaning, shape. In that sense, we are still at the centre of the universe. Science, in its constant breaking down and measuring, obscures the truth that there are not multitudes of events - just one event. Not many things - just one thing. And that event, that thing, could be described as the unfolding of "God". It's a God that has nothing to say about morality, or judgment, or heaven. But it is unquestionably real - and it is evidenced in our ability to imagine and perceive. We are the universe become conscious of itself. These are all extraordinarily godlike

ideas, and yet as factual, as "real", as the dinner you eat or the road you walk upon. The trouble is that science gives us no way to feel these miracles as lived realities. The human soul is left unnourished by equations and syllogisms. Science needs a dose of humility before it can start working out what a scientific God might look like - and feel like. Science hates God because it shows that scientific powers are limited in the face of an ultimately unfathomable universe. But scientists need to take note of the Zen nostrum, "If you ask where the flowers come from, not even the god of spring knows." Or, as Sir Arthur Eddington put it when talking about fundamental particles, "Something unknown is doing we don't know what." Science respects ignorance and "the cloud of unknowing" in a way that religion based on sacred scriptures often does not. But we shall not move towards a new vision of God until science acknowledges the limits of its own disciplines and makes the poetic leap from measurement and analysis to meaning and synthesis. This is perhaps a job more for poets than scientists. If so, poets need to read science books more - and scientists need to understand what poetry is for and the irrefutable realities of which it, too, speaks.

Contributed by Paul Hayes

pull it out! **What's On?** pin it up!

Saturday 2nd May	Coffee, Craft & Chat Afternoon	West St. Hall	2.00pm - 4.00pm
Saturday 2nd May	Fischy Music Launch Concert £6/£4	King's Hall, Edinburgh	2.30pm
Saturday 2nd May	Men's Night @ World of Snooker	World of Snooker	8.00pm - 10.00pm
Sunday 3rd May	Morning Service - Mark 14:1-2; 10-11; 43-50	South Church	11.15am
Sunday 3rd May	Evening Service - The Shack with Joyce Maclean	South Church	7.00pm
Sunday 10th May	Morning Service - Christian Aid Sunday	South Church	11.15am
Sunday 10th May	Christian Aid Lunch	West St Hall	After Service
Sunday 10th May	Traditional Service	South Church	3.00pm
Sunday 10th May	Evening Service - Psalm 1	South Church	7.00pm
Tuesday 14th May	Kirk Session meeting	South Church	7.15pm
Saturday 16th May	Care for the family Engage Conference	Corn Exchange, Edinburgh	9.30am - 5.00pm
Sunday 17th May	Morning Service & Dedication - John 15: 1-17	South Church	11.15am
Sunday 17th May	Evening Service - Psalm 148	South Church	7.00pm
Sunday 24th May	Morning Service - The Purpose of Your Gifts I - 1 Corinthians 12:1-31	South Church	11.15am
Sunday 24th May	Evening Service - Psalm 55	South Church	7.00pm
Sunday 31st May	Morning Service - The Purpose of Your Gifts II - Romans 12: 1-21	South Church	11.15am
Sunday 31st May	Evening Service	South Church	7.00pm

Coffee, Craft & Chat Afternoon

Saturday 2nd May
South Church Hall 2-4pm

Come along and enjoy a relaxing afternoon over coffee or tea. If you wish, create a simple exploding book, perfect for a gift or just spend time catching up with friends and family.

If you are able to bake for this event please speak to Alison Herd or Sharon Mckenzie or email alison.herd@sky.com for further info or if you'd like to come and help.

Fischy music's Eagerly Awaited New Album - 'Down to Earth' - The Launch Concert.

2nd May 2.30pm- King's Hall, 41a South Clerk Street, Edinburgh.

Tickets are £6 for adults and £4 for children and can be purchased at www.fischy.com

Plus before the concert there is a special CD signing at Wesley Owen, come and meet Stephen Fischbacher and the other Fischy performers at 11am -12pm.

Men's Night @ World of Snooker

Saturday 2nd May 8-10pm

Opportunity for everyone to play snooker or pool. Approx cost £8.50. Final cost depends on numbers. This price includes a buffet.

Any guys fancy coming along contact Ash Wood 674796
Ken Gordon 07821641512
Billy Hudson 674086
Please let us know by Sunday 26th April

Deadline for articles for next issue of Scope: Monday 25th May 2009

Best Prayer I Have Heard In A Long Time....

Heavenly Father, Help us remember that the jerk who cut us off in traffic last night is a single mother who worked nine hours that day and is rushing home to cook dinner, help with homework, do the laundry and spend a few precious moments with her children.

Help us to remember that the pierced, tattooed, disinterested young man who can't make change correctly is a worried 19-year-old college student, balancing his apprehension over final exams with his fear of not getting his student loans for next semester.

Remind us, Lord, that the scary looking bum, begging for money in the same spot every day (who really ought to get a job!) is a slave to addictions that we can only imagine in our worst nightmares.

Help us to remember that the old couple walking annoyingly slow through the store aisles and blocking our shopping progress are savouring this moment, knowing that, based on the biopsy report she got back last week, this will be the last year that they go shopping together.

Heavenly Father, remind us each day that, of all the gifts you give us, the greatest gift is love. It is not enough to share that love with those we hold dear. Open our hearts not to just those who are close to us, but to all humanity. Let us be slow to judge and quick to forgive, show patience, empathy and love. Matt 5:44

Contributed by Sheila Anderson

A Lesson in Friendship

A man and his dog were walking along a road. He was enjoying the scenery, when it suddenly occurred to him that he was dead. He remembered dying, and that the dog walking beside him had been dead for years. He wondered where the road was leading them.

After a while, they came to a high, white stone wall along one side of the road. It looked like fine marble. At the top of a long hill, it was broken by a tall arch that glowed in the sunlight. When he was standing before it he saw a magnificent gate in the arch that looked like mother-of-pearl, and the street that led to the gate looked like pure gold. He and the dog walked toward the gate, and as he got closer, he saw a man at a desk to one side.

When he was close enough, he called out, "Excuse me, where are we?" "This is Heaven, sir," the man answered.

"Wow! Would you happen to have some water?" he asked.

"Of course, sir. Come right in, and I'll have some ice water brought right up." The man gestured, and the gate began to open.

"Can my friend," gesturing toward his dog, "come in, too?" the traveler asked. "I'm sorry, sir, but we don't accept pets."

He thought a moment and then turned back toward the road and continued the way he had been going with his dog.

After another long walk, and at the top of another long hill, he came to a dirt road leading through a farm gate that looked as if it had never been closed. There was no fence. As he approached the gate, he saw a man inside, leaning against a tree and reading a book. "Excuse me!" he called to the man. "Do you have any water?" "Yes, sure, there's a pump over there, come on in."

"How about my friend here?" the traveler gestured to the dog. "There should be a bowl by the pump."

They went through the gate, and sure enough, there was an old-fashioned hand pump with a bowl beside it. The traveler filled the water bowl and took a long drink himself, then he gave some to the dog. When they were full, he and the dog walked back toward the man who was standing by the tree. "What do you call this place?" the traveler asked.

"This is Heaven," he answered.

"Well, that's confusing," the traveler said. "The man down the road said that was Heaven, too."

"Oh, you mean the place with the gold street and pearly gates? Nope. That's hell."

"Doesn't it make you mad for them to use your name like that?"

"No, we're just happy that they screen out the folks who would leave their best friends behind."

Contributed by Maurice Dower

Stones of Stumbling

The gospel of peace often grows peace out of the division it causes. This gospel was going to bring division, set family members against one another, lead to family betrayal¹. Jesus was a stone over which men would stumble and be broken.

In the Old Testament the pattern for this peace out of division was Israel itself. Israel through its Messiah was to bring blessing to the whole world. The blessing was the removal of the curse of death declared in Genesis yet Israel itself was a 'burdensome stone'², and this continues to be the case to this day.

When we let our family know that we were taking up the role of representatives for Christian Friends of Israel – well, to say the reaction was interesting is the understatement of the century. Still we had a great Christmas and New Year and there was no falling apart. But it did make us realise very sharply how divisive an issue it is for both Christians and non Christians.

When we started to advertise monthly prayer meetings for Israel and her neighbours we had support from a distance and some very welcome input of other points of view and in particular one book – 'Zion's Christian Soldiers? – The Bible, Israel and the Church' by Stephen Sizer³ that seeks to educate bible students and challenge common misperceptions and misunderstandings over 'end-times prophecy' was provided for us to review.

Stephen contrasts the main two approaches to Israel where different stages– Dispensations focussing on different groups – Jews and non Jews are

¹ Luke 12:51 Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. Matt 10:21 Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. (from The Holy Bible: New International Version. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, by International Bible Society)

² Zech 12:3 3And in that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people: all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it. KJV

³ Inter Varsity Press, 2007, ISBN978-1-84474214-1

contrasted to the agreements or covenants God made with Israel and which were conditional on their faithfulness. These covenants Israel as a whole failed to keep and it was only a remnant that remained faithful. The covenants were fulfilled in Jesus and implemented by the inclusion of Jews and Gentiles by Faith in the Christ's body of the Church in hope of the return of Jesus and the resurrection of the dead and the end of sin and death.

There is much that is good in the book. His guidance on sound exposition in chapter 2, and the encouragement to read the Bible progressively is central. He contrasts Israel and the Church and asks 'Who are God's chosen People' in chapter 3. He meets head on and accepts that the Jews have not been cast off and that 'all Israel' will be saved as Paul states in Romans 11 v 25 and uses Calvin very effectively to tackle what he thinks Paul means by 'all Israel'.

Stephen points out that there is a New Covenant of forgiveness promised in the Old Testament in Jeremiah⁴ and the basis of Jesus ministry to Jew and Gentile that replaces⁵ the Old Covenant of required obedience given in Exodus to Israel.⁷

⁴ Jer 31:31-32 31Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah:32Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: KJV

⁵ Heb 8:13 13By calling this covenant "new", he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and ageing will soon disappear. (from The Holy Bible: New International Version. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, by International Bible Society).

⁶ Ibid page 16.

⁷ Ex 15:26 26He said, "If you listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, who heals you." (from The Holy Bible: New International Version. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, by International Bible Society)

As Paul makes clear in Ephesians⁸ and Romans⁹ however it is not – as Stephen maintains, this covenant that is the basis of God’s faithfulness to the Jew and the people of Israel but the promises to Abraham. The Jew was always one who was spiritually after the faith of Abraham. The promises to Abraham were always, even under the Old Covenant founded on the law of commandments given them as they came out of Egypt, the underpinning and overarching

⁸ Eph 2:11-20 Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (that done in the body by the hands of men) — 12 remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,¹⁵ by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace,¹⁶ and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.¹⁷ He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.¹⁸ For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.¹⁹ Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow-citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household,²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

(from The Holy Bible: New International Version. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, by International Bible Society)

Eph 3:4-6 4 In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ,⁵ which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets. 6 This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

(from The Holy Bible: New International Version. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, by International Bible Society)

⁹ Rom 4:13-14 13 It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.¹⁴ For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless,

(from The Holy Bible: New International Version. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, by International Bible Society)

foundation of God’s faithfulness to them. They were why He promised time and again that whatever they did and however badly they sinned and however severely He punished them He would never forsake them and cast them off as He would others to whom He had not given these promises.

There is no separation between Jew and Gentile in the promises to Abraham. The good news that Jesus came to bring was that Jew and Gentile were both heirs of the promises made to Abraham by faith in Jesus Christ¹⁰. The true Jew is one who is faithful after the pattern of Abraham who was given the mark of circumcision as a sign of his faithfulness. And in the same way as we know that He will ‘never, never’ leave us nor forsake us so the same unbreakable promises were given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as our forefathers in the faith¹¹.

There are some outstanding and astounding words of God that we do well to notice in the same chapters of Jeremiah that bring to us the New Covenant God was going to make with His people.

¹⁰ Gal 3:26-29 26 You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, 27 for all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.

(from The Holy Bible: New International Version. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, by International Bible Society)

¹¹ Heb 6:13-19 13 For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, 14 Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. 15 And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. 16 For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. 17 Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: 18 That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: 19 Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; KJV

God can no more forsake this nation than give up on the laws of creation¹².

Stephen concludes a discussion on 'The Promised Land: From the Nile to the Euphrates' in chapter 4 with this "The inheritance of the saints was never ultimately an 'everlasting' share of the territory in Palestine but an eternal place in Heaven'. This conclusion summarises his whole approach of setting the positions of men one against the other as they express them from scripture rather than going first to scripture and looking to see the whole pattern and unity of God's purposes revealed in Scripture. When we do that we come to conclusions and adopt interpretations that not only fail to balance and maintain the unity of scripture but we also restate error. As Bishop Tom Wright shows so well in his writings¹³ God's purposes are worked out on this earth not in heaven. An earth reunited with heaven is the dwelling place of the resurrected saints.

Jesus is promised the throne of His father David. He will rule from Jerusalem and His kingdom will extend to earth's remotest end and we shall reign with Him by His grace and forgiveness.

If we are watchful and ready for His return, showing this by loving care of our brethren and sisters, which includes all the oppressed, suffering and persecuted of this earth, then we shall receive an answer of peace.

Meanwhile we should pray for the peace of Jerusalem and earnestly desire the return of the Lord Jesus to this earth. The greatest sign of the nearness of that return is the return of the Jew to their own land and despite Stephen's assertion to the contrary this is in clear fulfilment of Jesus words in Luke 21 and the promises of the Old Testament¹⁴. So many of his attempts to dismiss

¹² Jer 33:23-26 The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: 24 "Have you not noticed that these people are saying, 'The LORD has rejected the two kingdoms he chose'? So they despise my people and no longer regard them as a nation. 25 This is what the LORD says: 'If I have not established my covenant with day and night and the fixed laws of heaven and earth, 26 then I will reject the descendants of Jacob and David my servant and will not choose one of his sons to rule over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. For I will restore their fortunes and have compassion on them.'" (from The Holy Bible: New International Version. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, by International Bible Society)

¹³ NT Wright, 'Surprised by Joy'

the ongoing relevance of the earthly and spiritual fulfilment of God's promises completely fall once we grant that the return of the Jew to the Land was always in God's purpose. There is a very much larger body of serious expositors of scripture of recent centuries who held to this belief than Stephen acknowledges¹⁵.

The state of Israel is a work in process as is the whole of creation, ourselves included. God uses weak, frail and fallible individuals in his Kingdom. He uses nations to fulfill His purposes in the earth and Israel are still His witnesses and will witness the coming of their Messiah whom they crucified and repent. We should not judge them or ourselves before the time even if we have to judge their actions now.

We need discernment as we read any Christian writing and we should not only apply the principles that Stephen lays out but we should apply them in a way that is consistent with the unity of scripture.

Paul Hayes

¹⁴ Isa 11:9-12 he will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. 10 In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious. 11 In that day the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the remnant that is left of his people from Assyria, from Lower Egypt, from Upper Egypt, from Cush, from Elam, from Babylonia, from Hamath and from the islands of the sea. 12 He will raise a banner for the nations and gather the exiles of Israel; he will assemble the scattered people of Judah from the four quarters of the earth.

(from The Holy Bible: New International Version. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, by International Bible Society)

¹⁵ Hatikvah Trust DVD, 'The Destiny of Britain'.

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