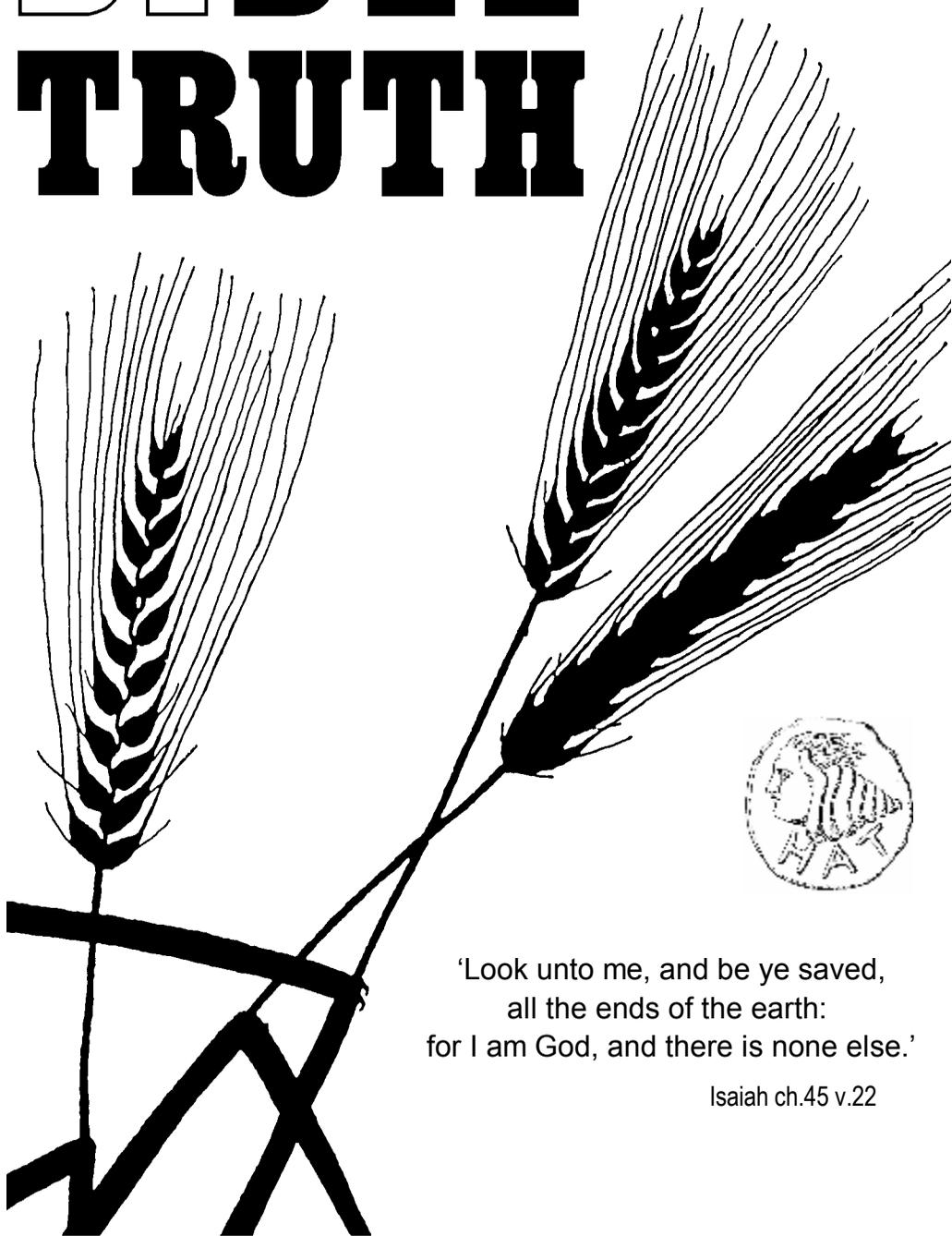


BIBLE TRUTH

No. 256
October/December
2009



'Look unto me, and be ye saved,
all the ends of the earth:
for I am God, and there is none else.'

Isaiah ch.45 v.22

GIVING

by Michael D. Bennett

1. God's giving

It is not sensible to address the topic of our wealth and giving without first considering God's giving and ownership. It is clear from the Bible that God is the Creator of all things. Consequently He owns the freehold of everything. However, God made all things for a purpose, and given His inherent generosity of Spirit, He has given many things to created beings, who consequently enjoy them as lease holders for periods which God, not they, decide.

'The earth is the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.'

Psalm 24 v.1

'Ye are blessed of the LORD which made heaven and earth. The heaven, even the heavens, are the LORD'S: but the earth hath he given to the children of men.'

Psalm 115 vv.15-16

'Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.'

Revelation ch.4 v.11

God is generous, and unstinting in His giving to the sons of men. Probably the most famous text in the Bible concerns God's giving not just of things, but His most precious person, demonstrating His infinite love for people. This is the pinnacle of His giving, His 'unspeakable gift'. This powerful proof of His love leads to the conclusion that a God who will give Himself, will not hold back from giving all other lesser things.

'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.'

John ch.3 v.16

'Thanks be unto God **for his unspeakable gift.**'

2 Corinthians ch.9 v.15

'He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?'

Romans ch.8 v.32

God's great giving is fully comprehensive. He gives us our life and existence; our entire environment; our senses and sensibility; and, all our ability to gain, enjoy and use wealth.

'All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. ... the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.'

John ch.1 vv.3-4 & 9

'God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; ... For in him we live, and move, and have our being; ...'

Acts ch.17 vv.24-26 & 28

'But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day.'

Deuteronomy ch.8 v.18

It is impossible to over-emphasise the extent of God's giving. He gave Eden and its fruit as food to Adam. He gave Eve to Adam. He gave the Promised Land to Abram, Isaac, Jacob and his seed and confirmed it by giving His oath. And He gives children.

'And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat.'

Genesis ch.1 v.29

'And the LORD said unto Abram, ...all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered. Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.'

Genesis ch.13 vv.14-17

'... he giveth his beloved sleep. Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward.'

Psalms 127 vv.2-3

‘And he [Esau] lifted up his eyes, and saw the women and the children; and said, Who are those with thee? And he [Jacob] said, The children which God hath graciously given thy servant.’
Genesis ch.33 v.8

It is important to recognise that God’s character is unchangeable. ‘... I AM THAT I AM ...’ (see Exodus ch.3 v.14). So His giving was, continues today and will always extend into our eternal future.

‘The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.’
Psalm 145 vv.15-16

‘Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.’
James ch.1 v.17

‘One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.’
Ephesians ch.4 vv.6-8

Not surprisingly therefore, the last book of the Bible contains many statements and promises concerning God’s giving. Indeed, its last chapters are not lacking in this regard, as He gives the water and tree of life, and His eternal light.

‘... To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, ...’
Revelation ch.2 v.7

‘... be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.’
Revelation ch.2 v.10

‘... To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, ...’
Revelation ch.2 v.17

‘... and he that overcometh ... to him will I give power over the nations: ... And I will give him the morning star.’
Revelation ch.2 vv.26 & 28

‘And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. ... I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.’
Revelation ch.21 vv.5-6

‘And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. ... And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.’

Revelation ch.22 vv.1-2 & 5

‘And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. ... I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.’

Revelation ch.22 vv.12 & 16

2. Our giving

In view of the above it should not be surprising to know that it is God’s plan and purpose for man to give, and to do it generously. It is inherent in man’s nature to give, because man was (and is) made in God’s image. Failure to understand and obey this instinct is a sin (robbery) against the Almighty. So meanness wars against our basic nature. It robs us of much satisfaction, happiness and peace in this life, and of everlasting treasure and reward in the next.

‘But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for **God loveth a cheerful giver**. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work:’

2 Corinthians ch.9 vv.6-8

God sees what we give, and is on particular record as interested in how we give it.

‘And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.’

Mark ch.12 vv.41-44

God is a Being of order, so it is not left to man to invent his own form of giving, ‘... whatsoever is right in his own eyes ...’ (see Deuteronomy ch.12 v.8). God has revealed the form and pattern of giving. Moreover He included this as a part of the legal system which He gave to Moses when He first founded Israel as a sovereign nation after the Exodus.

This system of giving includes three main elements, namely tithes, offerings and vows, which can operate successfully at any level to benefit individuals, families, tribes and nations. While this perfect system was incorporated into Israel’s national legal framework, it is clear that many principles and practices it embodied long preceded Levitical government initiated under Moses. For example, the practice of tithing did not start with Moses. Abram paid tithes to Melchizedek about four centuries before Moses and the Levitical law. Similarly, Jacob made a vow about giving involving his tithe (tenth) at Bethel as he fled from His brother Esau’s wrath, about 250 years before Moses and the Levitical law.

‘And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all.’

Genesis ch.14 vv.18-20

‘And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, So that I come again to my father’s house in peace; then shall the LORD be my God: And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God’s house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth [tithe] unto thee.’

Genesis ch.28 vv.20-22

Indeed, Genesis contains incontrovertible proof that God’s laws were known and obeyed before Moses and so predate and are independent of the Levitical priesthood.

‘Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I sware unto Abraham thy father; And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; Because

that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.’
Genesis ch.26 vv.3-5

The laws concerning the fundamental distinction between clean and unclean animals governing which can be both offered to God or eaten were not invented at the time of Moses for the Levitical priesthood. They already existed a millennium before at the time of Noah, who knew which to offer to God in the clean new world after the flood.

‘And the LORD said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation. Of every clean beast thou shalt take to thee by sevens, the male and his female: and of beasts that are not clean by two, the male and his female. Of fowls also of the air by sevens, the male and the female; to keep seed alive upon the face of all the earth.’

Genesis ch.7 vv.1-3

‘And Noah builded an altar unto the LORD; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And the LORD smelled a sweet savour; ...’

Genesis ch.8 vv.20-21

After the Exodus, offerings were restricted to the Levitical priesthood, but prior to that there was a priesthood of believers led by those who ruled their house to obey God’s laws. Abel, Noah, Abram, and Jacob/Israel all functioned, as did the head of every family in every tribe of Israel, in preparing the Lamb which was eaten by all at the Passover feast God ordained prior to initiating the Levitical priesthood. Israel was and will be a kingdom of priests, and the pattern for this was embedded in laws and practices which precede the Levitical priesthood from the Creation.

‘Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house: ... And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening. And they shall take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it. And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it.’

Exodus ch.12 vv.3 & 6-8

‘But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.’

1 Peter ch.2 v.9

Limited space precludes a full account here of God’s laws concerning tithes, offerings and vows. In short He gave them to His Israel people to whom alone they belong (Deuteronomy ch.4 v.8). [Yet ‘pick and mix’ churches teach tithing which has only an Old Testament basis, because it suits them, while denying the food laws God gave.]

Tithes are paid more than given, and are generally due as a tenth of all increase, as the ordained mode and level needed to finance the kingdom. Offerings were due to cover wrongdoing, and freewill offerings were given and accepted to express thanks and celebrate God’s goodness. Paying vows often marked special answers to prayer.

Once men paid tithes and gave offerings at any time and place. But later the season at the end of the agricultural year (synonymous with the sabbatical and jubilee year) our September/October was specially set for this purpose. This was the most fitting time to take stock of the increase which had occurred, and to take it in kind (or converted to money) to a central place of worship appointed for eating a feast (Tabernacles) as families with rejoicing ‘before the Lord’, or to distribute it to meet all local needs.

‘Thou shalt truly tithe all the increase of thy seed, that the field bringeth forth year by year. And thou shalt eat before the LORD thy God, in the place which he shall choose to place his name there, the tithe of thy corn, of thy wine, and of thine oil, and the firstlings of thy herds and of thy flocks; that thou mayest learn to fear the LORD thy God always. And if the way be too long for thee, so that thou art not able to carry it; or if the place be too far from thee, which the LORD thy God shall choose to set his name there, when the LORD thy God hath blessed thee: Then shalt thou turn it into money, and bind up the money in thine hand, and shalt go unto the place which the LORD thy God shall choose: And thou shalt bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth: and thou shalt eat there before the LORD thy God, and thou shalt rejoice, thou, and thine household, And the Levite that is within thy

gates; thou shalt not forsake him; for he hath no part nor inheritance with thee. At the end of three years thou shalt bring forth all the tithe of thine increase the same year, and shalt lay it up within thy gates: And the Levite, (because he hath no part nor inheritance with thee,) and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, which are within thy gates, shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied; that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hand which thou doest.’ Deuteronomy ch.14 vv.22-29

It is easy to forget, or to never learn, the reason behind the pattern of annual meetings including our Thanksgiving in early October. Fathers were commanded to explain these things to their children in Israel, and so we are right to remember and timely to rehearse the reasons for our faith and practice. As British Israelites we recognise and keep the three great feasts which God appointed to Israel, Passover (Easter), Pentecost (Whitsun), and Tabernacles. The latter, which follows harvest home, is known as Thanksgiving, when a special thanksgiving offering for the Lord’s work in the British Israel Bible Truth Fellowship is given and received at the set time of ingathering.

‘Thou shalt keep the feast of unleavened bread: (thou shalt eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded thee, in the time appointed of the month Abib; for in it thou camest out from Egypt: and none shall appear before me empty:) And the feast of harvest, the firstfruits of thy labours, which thou hast sown in the field: and the feast of ingathering, which is in the end of the year, when thou hast gathered in thy labours out of the field. Three times in the year all thy males shall appear before the Lord GOD. ... The first of the firstfruits of thy land thou shalt bring into the house of the LORD thy God ...’.

Exodus ch.23 vv.15-17 & 19

Older members will recall the large meetings and offerings at Thanksgiving years ago. Indeed, the offerings in the 1950s and 1960s were often counted in tens of thousands of pounds, and were sufficient to fund the work and wages of several full time staff each year. Those attending were intent on giving generously and in making special efforts to support the work and witness. We can learn from their zeal and seek to match their generosity in cheerful giving.

We are very foolish to withhold giving tithes and offerings which God has sanctioned, because to do so is robbery which forfeits His blessing and invites a curse instead.

‘Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts. And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightful land, saith the LORD of hosts.’

Malachi ch.3 vv.8-12

People often ask what proof is there that God exists? Yet God invites men to prove His existence by a simple test of obedient giving. There is a world of difference between what we can do with our things and wisdom and what God can do in the same situation, as disciples have often discovered.

‘And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net. And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake.’

Luke ch.5 vv.5-6

‘Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No. And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes. ... Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the fish which ye have now caught. Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three: and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken.’

John ch.21 vv.5-6 & 10-11

Many members and readers pray longingly for revival in our nation. Recent events have shaken the financial world to its foundation, and there is a new national mood for cleaning up politics and Parliament. Significantly, many special times of blessing and revival recorded in scripture followed the rediscovery of God’s laws and a new wholehearted keeping of His feasts (e.g. Hezekiah, 2 Chronicles 30 and Josiah, 2 Kings ch.23 v.21). We can all consider our giving, and seek to make Thanksgiving 2009 memorable for rejoicing, giving thanks, and moving forward in God’s work as we pay vows, send tithes, or give freewill offerings.

'Thou shalt keep the feast ... none shall appear before me empty: ... The first of the firstfruits of thy land thou shalt bring into the house of the LORD thy God.'

Exodus ch.23:vv.15 & 19

*We thank Thee then, O Father, For all things bright and good,
The seedtime and the harvest, Our life, our health, our food;
Accept the gifts we offer For all thy love imparts,
And what Thou most desirest, Our humble, thankful hearts.*

*All good gifts around us, Are sent from heaven above,
Then thank the Lord, O, thank the Lord, For all his love.*

Matthias Claudius; tr. Miss Jane M. Campbell