

The Moving Impetus of Faith and Grounds of Our Assurance

By James E. Gibbons

BELIEF in the reality of God is the great underlying truth behind all references to faith in the Bible. But that is not the main thrust of faith as found there. Ancient man, not that far removed from creation and the Garden of Eden, had no problem believing in God. In fact, two psalms (Psalms 14 and 53) dogmatically assert that only a fool would say there is no God. Even though man fell into idolatry with its corrupted concepts of deity, he still believed in a higher being (or beings). Overall then, the main thrust of faith in the Bible is trust and consequently hope (and not just basically believing in the reality of God). “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). It involves taking the one and only true God at His Word and living in hope.

Genesis 3:15, The Moving Impetus of Faith

In view of this, trusting God, the great moving impetus of faith begins in Genesis 3:15, continues throughout the Bible and has its climax in the New Testament (and finally in eternity). Aside from this, all other exercises of faith were secondary, simply feeding into the fulfillment of Genesis 3:15. This Scripture reads, “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” Mankind had sinned in rebellion against God, and consequently fallen; the sentence of death had been passed upon them. These words were directed at the different parties involved in the transgression. There would be an ongoing struggle between right and wrong. Finally of the seed of woman one would come to bring a crushing blow to the devil (and death), restoring life. This one of the seed of woman is distinguished from others by use of the words “it” and “his.” This refers to the coming Savior. In the meantime, mankind would learn to trust God and live in hope, looking forward to that day.

Let us highlight these truths in this article as we focus on men of faith who trusted God, what they looked forward to, and God accommodating Himself to them to enhance this trust. Abraham, who was assured by God, will first get our attention and then we will notice the fulfillment of this assurance in the New Testament with the coming of the Savior.

I. THE CALL OF ABRAHAM: PROMISES, PROMISES, PROMISES

Abraham, a Nation, the “Seed”

The first major step in the fulfillment of Genesis 3:15 is seen in the call of Abraham. This happened about 2000 BC as he cut ties with his homeland in Mesopotamia to migrate to the land of Canaan. Genesis 12:1-3

tells us all about it, “Now the LORD had said unto Abram [Abraham], Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing; And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and *in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.*” It is no exaggeration to say that the rest of the Bible unfolds through these few verses of Scripture. These promises were stated over and over again as they moved toward fulfillment. God would use Abraham and his descendants as the means of bringing the “seed” into the world that would destroy the power of the devil over death and restore life to man. This didn’t happen all at once, and it took real faith on the part of Abraham and those who came after him to live in anticipation of its fulfillment.

God Accommodated Man

God accommodated Himself to man in this preliminary time of preparation for fulfillment. Although God is Spirit, at certain times He has communicated with man through angelic beings who momentarily took the form of man (Genesis 18:1,2, 17-22; 19:1,5; 32:24-30; Exodus 24:10,11 [Acts 7:53]; Joshua 5:13-15 [Exodus 23:20-23; 33:2]; Judges 13:3, 6,15-33; etc.). And, although God cannot lie, He has accommodated Himself to the customs of men to enhance their trusting Him. This can be seen when God put Himself under oath with Abraham (Genesis 22:16) and His making a covenant with him (yes, even literally “cutting” a covenant, Genesis 15:9-21—Jeremiah 34:17,18). In those early days of partial and limited revelation, this was especially reassuring (as well as later with more of an extensive revelation). God can be taken at His Word, trusted, and man who had entered into covenant relationship with God is made to realize that he must likewise keep his word.

Promises and the Oath

The writer of the book of Hebrews sums up these dealings of God with Abraham in a most excellent way (and finds a lesson and reassurance for us today). “For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things [His promise and His oath], 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; Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast...” (Hebrews 6:13-19). God cannot lie. What He says stands. As Isaiah said in the Old Testament Scriptures, His Word will not return unto Him void (Isaiah 55:11).

The Mission and Hope of Israel

The promises and oath were repeatedly given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Genesis 12:1-3; 13:14-17; 15:4-6; 17:1-8; 22:15-18; 26:2-5; 28:12-15; Exodus 32:13). Abraham's descendants would indeed be a great nation, and at the heart of all that God said, and the end results, was the promise of the coming "seed" through whom all families of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:3; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14). This was really the reason why God chose to make of them a nation, a distinct people; to be the vehicle of bringing the Savior into the world. That was their mission and hope, not to be just a pampered people with no purpose. The crescendo of Bible history continually moved in the direction of fulfilling Genesis 3:15 as anticipated and outlined in Genesis 12:1-3. The whole Old Testament system and the nation of Israel itself, and even the history of that nation, were symbolic prophecies pointing to that day (this in addition to the more explicit prophecies that are found in the Old Testament). When the New Testament finally comes, we find people who were eagerly waiting and looking for the coming Messiah (Luke 2:25,38; Matthew 11:3; John 6:14; 11:27). Later, in his defense, Paul looking back, said, "And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers: Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews" (Acts 26:6,7; also, Acts 28:20).

Abraham Believed God

Although Abraham was called by a name that meant exalted father, and later the father of a great multitude, the initial part of the promise as well as the last part made to him would be long in coming. He believed God, although he would live to see only a little of it fulfilled. Being repeatedly called by such a name, which for so long seemed redundant, could get pretty threadbare. His marriage was childless, he was 75 years of age when they first came into Canaan (Genesis 12:4), and he would remain childless for years to come. He didn't understand the details of the working of God, but he believed it would come to pass. And while he seemed to have been put on "hold" in even being a father, God told him that his unborn descendants would be sidetracked in Egyptian bondage for a few hundred years before they would even be a nation and possess the Promised Land (yes, the land wherein he was then camping out as a nomad and would be doing so the rest of his life) (Genesis 15:13-21). Still he believed God. He remained childless for the next 25 years, and contrary to nature when he was about 100 years old and Sarah, his wife, about 90 years, a son was born (Genesis 17:17; Romans 4:16-21). Then, seemingly in contradiction to all that God had promised him, Abraham was put to the test when called upon to sacrifice his son (Genesis 22:1-19). He took steps to comply, believing that God would raise Isaac from the dead (Hebrews 11:17-19).

The Climax of Faith Now and in Eternity

Hebrews 11:8-19 highlights the faith of Abraham, even looking beyond the earthly fulfillment into eternity. The concluding part of all of the promises God made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob always had as its goal the “seed” through whom all families of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:3; 22:18; 26; 4; 28:14). This was the great impetus of it all. Of course this involved man’s spiritual restoration to God (Acts 3:25,26), which reached into eternity. It is amazing that these old patriarchs saw the eternal beyond the more immediate fulfillment of the physical in God’s promises. Hebrews 11:13-16 reads, “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.” God’s whole plan for humanity would be filtered through Abraham and his descendants, and he believed it. No wonder he is called the father of all who believe (Galatians 3:7,29; Romans 4:16; 9:8) and was called the friend of God (2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8; James 2:23). He knew that God couldn’t lie. This was the assurance of his faith.

The Promise Narrowed and Expanded

There are other great and wonderful Scriptures that line up in showing us the route through which the promised “seed” would come, but for the purposes of this article we will not explore them all now. It will suffice to say that the route, now being narrowed to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (and the nation of Israel), was next directed through the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10). And finally more specifically we are pointed to the house of David and his “seed” (Psalms 89:3,4; Jeremiah 33:15-17). Then to see what would be actually entailed in the fulfillment of Genesis 3:15, the coming of the concluding “seed” would involve a virgin birth without the instrumentality of man in conception (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-35). And all of the time while this line was being narrowed through which the Savior would come, the revelation of just who and what he would be is expanded. Yes, he would be the one to crush the head of the serpent, but he also would be a prophet like Moses (Deuteronomy 18:18, 19; Acts 3:22,23). He would be the Messiah, raised to sit upon the throne of David (Psalms 89:3,4; Luke 1:31-33; Acts 2:30-33,36). Daniel explicitly speaks of the Messiah and matters in reference to him (Daniel 9:23ff). He is pictured as the suffering servant by Isaiah, bearing the sins of all (Isaiah 53:1-12; Acts 8:26-35). Amazingly, he would be raised from the dead

(Psalms 16:8-11; Acts 2:22-33; Romans 1:2-4). Also, he would be a priest (Psalms 110:4; Hebrews 5:5,6ff). These are great and wonderful prophecies, and we could go on. Behind all of them stands the immutable counsel of the Mighty God of eternity who cannot lie. Consequently the Scriptures cannot be broken and God's Word would not return to Him void. All of this inspired trust and was the grounds of blessed assurance for the saints of old. God would bring it to pass.

II. THE FULFILLMENT: WITNESSES, WITNESSES, WITNESSES

The "Seed" Has Come

With all of that said, let us now hurriedly move on to the New Testament Scriptures. Here we see the grand climax of it all. It is no longer the message that the "seed" was coming, he has come. Galatians 4:4 states that "when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman..." As the time was fast approaching for his arrival, the angel explained the unusual situation to Joseph, "And she [Mary] shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sin" (Matthew 1:21). Before, the angel had personally said to Mary, "Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke 1:31-33). With the birth of Jesus, the angel called out to the shepherds in the field, "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11). Just before Jesus started his public ministry, John the Baptist said that the time was fulfilled and told the Jews to "repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:15). They already believed in God, but their faith was to be taken to a new level in believing in Jesus Christ. Read Romans 1:1-4 and then the 15th chapter of 1 Corinthians. John declares that "for this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). It was "through death he [Christ] might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil" (Hebrews 2:14; Genesis 3:15). Paul, viewing the greater scope of it all and its wonderful outcome, speaks of the "hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began..." (Titus 1:2,3). Yes, Jesus was the "seed" that was to come. Paul nails this down in Galatians 3:16, "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one. And to thy seed, which is Christ..." Peter, in his preaching following Pentecost, openly declares that Jesus is the "seed" through whom all families of the earth would be blessed and he explains about this blessing (Acts 3:25,26). How great and wonderful are all of these truths in their fulfillment!

“In the Mouth of Two or Three Witnesses”

Fittingly, the New Testament Scriptures begin with the four gospel accounts of the life of Christ (although the New Testament proper does not begin until after his crucifixion, Hebrews 9:15-17). There was a principle laid down in the Old Testament, which reoccurs throughout the Bible, that is quite relevant here. That is, “in the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established” (Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15; Matthew 18:16; John 8:17,18; 2 Corinthians 13:1). Here we have two witnesses doubled, or one beyond three witnesses. Actually two of the writers, Matthew and John, were first hand witnesses and two, Mark and Luke, were “witnesses” in a secondary sense. Matthew and John as apostles of Christ had accompanied Jesus in his ministry and were among the official witnesses set aside to tell about it. Mark and Luke were somewhat removed, but very close. It is generally thought that since Mark was a close associate of Peter, his writings directly represent Peter’s preaching. Then since Luke was very close to Paul, Paul’s preaching would be reflected in his writings. Luke speaks of the faith of Christians and witnesses that verified the truthfulness of it (Luke 1:1-4).

The Synoptic Gospels and John

Upon reading the four gospel accounts, it becomes apparent that the first three are much alike in the way they present the life of Christ. Consequently, they are called the “synoptic” gospels (seen together). John is different in his approach. Matthew seems to have been written initially for a Jewish reading audience, and it is believed by this writer to have been the first written. The gospel was first preached among the Jews and such a document at an early date would have been highly desirable. Perhaps that is why it was placed first in the New Testament canon of Scriptures. It has been suggested that Mark was especially suited for a Roman reading audience, and Luke, bearing the name of Theophilus (a Greek name) as the one who received it, was for a Greek audience. John with its simple, yet awesomely profound, gospel message comes last and is regarded to have been the last one written.

Where Each Gospel Writer Begins the Story of Jesus

Interestingly, in presenting the wonderful story of Christ, Matthew identifies Jesus as the “son of David” and then takes us back to Abraham and his line of descent (Matthew 1:1ff). For a Jewish reading audience, this would be very impressive and necessary. Although it states that the Lord’s birth was a virgin birth, the ancestral lineage here is considered to be that of Joseph as this would be a legal requirement for Jesus to be the Messiah in the way that Jews looked at things. Next, Mark in the beginning of his account ushers us right into the dynamic of John the Baptist preaching, the baptism of Jesus and then we move with rapid pace into the Lord’s earthly ministry (Mark 1:1ff). Following, Luke’s account traces the lineage of

Jesus all of the way back to Adam (Luke 3:23-38). This is significant because it is thought that this ancestral table is that of Mary, the mother of Jesus, wherein the Lord actually made his flesh and blood contact with humanity. Then the gospel of John in its prologue takes us all of the way back into eternity with awe-inspiring information. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1), and amazingly we learn that God became flesh in Jesus Christ (John 1:14). The gospel accounts are great and wonderful in their scope and presentation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Our faith is grounded in the records of these faithful witnesses.

The Gospel of John: Witnesses, Testimony, Bearing Record, Believing

The gospel of John is unique and in many ways stands alone in its graphic presentation of the mighty Son of God. We would have no trouble understanding what John is trying to get across, but after almost completing this great work, he states, “And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (John 20:30,31). Throughout this gospel, John is preoccupied with witnesses, testimony and bearing record of that which has taken place. With him witnesses, and especially having two or three credible witnesses, is basic to faith and the acceptance of the truthfulness and reliability of what he writes. The Jewish nation already believed in Jehovah God as revealed in the Old Testament. Now they must be convinced that Jesus is God incarnate, the Christ and the promised Savior of the world. The miracles and signs that Jesus did were his credentials. They inspired faith and trust.

Keep This in Mind

When we read John, if we keep John 20:30 and 31 in mind (as well as witnesses, testimonies and bearing record), it will be amazing how this will help us get hold of what John is driving at. The prologue establishes the truth that the Word became flesh and introduces us to John’s first witness of this truth. “There was a man sent from God, whose name was John [the Baptist]. The same came for *a witness, to bear witness* of the Light, that all men through him might *believe*” (John 1:6,7—read this entire chapter). In chapter 2 after the miracle at the wedding feast, John writes, “This beginning of *miracles* did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples *believed on him*” (2:11). With the cleansing of the temple, the Jewish leaders wanted a “sign” from him to validate his having asserted such authority. He spoke to them of the ultimate “sign” that was to come, which they didn’t understand. “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (2:18-22). But some of the leaders believed because of his miracles, like Nicodemus in chapter 3. Notice the reoccurrence of the words “testify” and “witness” in this chapter (3:11, 26, 28, 32, 33). In chapter 4 the

Lord's supernatural knowledge about the Samaritan woman brought about an early declaration of faith from these people (4:29,39-42). The nobleman's son is healed—another “sign,” faith (4:46-54).

More Than One Witness

Jesus heals a man on the Sabbath day, who had been an invalid for 38 years, to the dismay of the unbelieving Jews (John 5). And on top of that he called God his Father. They accuse Jesus of making himself equal with God, and what he said in answering them no doubt intensified their hostile feelings toward him. He ties his works and that of the Father together. He declares his authority, even to judge the world. He appeals to witnesses beyond himself in reference to his identity. (1) There was the witness of the Father (5:32, 37-39, 46,47—perhaps including the Old Testament Scriptures). (2) There was the witness of John the Baptist (5:32-35). (3) And the works that Jesus did bore witness of him (5:36). Then again this principle of two or three witnesses surfaces in 8:17 and 18 when Jesus answered the Pharisees at another time. “It is also written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true. I am one that *bear witness* of myself, and the Father that sent me *beareth witness* of me.”

The Connecting Theme Continues

So the thrust of the connecting theme continues throughout the book of John. John 7:31 reads, “And many of the people *believed* on him, and said, When Christ cometh, will he do more *miracles* that these which this man hath done?” Jesus said, “I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work” (9:4). Thereupon he heals the man blind from birth. Later we read of the prodding of the Jews and how the Lord answered. “How long dost thou make us to doubt [hold us in suspense]? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly. Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they *bear witness* of me” (10:24,25).

5,000 People Fed, Lazarus Raised

The feeding of 5,000 people with merely five barley loaves and two small fish and the raising of Lazarus from the dead are miracles of greatest magnitude. John records them both. Even after feeding the vast multitude of people from such a small initial amount, there were twelve baskets full left over. “Then those men when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world” (6:14). And the raising of Lazarus is only exceeded by his own resurrection. When Martha came out to meet Jesus, he spoke these reassuring words to her, “I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die...” (11:25,26). Lazarus had been dead four days, and his unembalmed body in that warm climate had already begun to decay. Arriving at the tomb after the emotional encounter with the other sister,

Jesus prayed and then he said, “Lazarus, come forth.” “And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave clothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go. Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, *believed* on him” (11:43-45). Only Almighty God would have power over life and death in such a manner. What a sign! (And signs!) In the feeding of the 5,000 life was sustained. In the raising of Lazarus from the dead life was brought back. Believe! Believe!

The Sign of All Signs

The ministry of Christ and the week leading up to the crucifixion were now behind him. John has vividly highlighted some of this for us. His “hour” had come (13:1; 17:1). Now Isaiah 53 will be graphically fulfilled right before our eyes. The heel of the “seed” of woman would be bruised as he crushed the head of the serpent. Then in concluding the awful ordeal of the cross and the excruciating suffering that the Lord had to endure, he cried out, “It is finished!” (John 19:30). But the crowning victory, and the sign of all signs, was yet to be witnessed. This happened three days later with his resurrection from the dead. The empty tomb, his repeated appearances to his disciples, all proclaimed his victory (and the victory for all of mankind). And, as Paul would write of the Lord Jesus later, “Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification” (Romans 4:25). For some reason Thomas was not there when Jesus first appeared to his disciples after his resurrection. In unbelief, He said, “Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe” (John 20:25). But after eight days and the unquestioned appearance of Jesus in their midst, this was not necessary. Without hesitation Thomas spontaneously cried out with emotion, “My Lord and my God!” (20:28). Then we read, “Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed” (20:29). This is when John told us as to why he wrote his gospel. There were many other signs that Jesus did, but this was the apex of them all (his resurrection), and these things were written that we might believe and in believing that we might have life through his name (20:30,31). Amen!

More Witnesses, The Holy Spirit and the Apostles

The emphasis on witnesses is found throughout the gospel of John, but that is not the end of the story. Jesus, speaking to his disciples the night before his crucifixion, told them of the coming of the Holy Spirit who would guide them into all truth (John 16:13; 14:26). He also said, “He shall *testify* of me: And ye [the apostles] shall *bear witness*, because ye have been with me from the beginning” (John 15:26,27). Here we learn that the Holy Spirit and the apostles are appointed to be witnesses. Not

only are they to be witnesses, but, as we shall see, witnesses in conjunction with one another. Witnesses were very important in verifying God's truth. Bona fide eyewitnesses were especially important in backing up the claims of the resurrection of Christ. This new phase of witnessing is parallel with the coming of the New Testament (that must be verified by witnesses, Hebrews 9:15-17) and the carrying out of the Great Commission (Mark 16:20), as well as supplying the affirmative grounds for all belief and trust. In the book of Acts we see these things unfold before us.

Empowered Witnesses Bearing Witness

Before he ascended to heaven the Lord said to the apostles, "But ye shall *receive power*, after that the Holy Ghost [Spirit] is come upon you: and ye shall be *witnesses* unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Christ's plan called for twelve apostles to guide the establishment of the early church and to be his official eyewitnesses. Judas was no longer with them. Peter, their leading spokesman, addressed the situation. He said, "Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained [placed] to be a *witness* with us of his resurrection" (Acts 1:22). Obviously with the Lord's approval, Matthias filled the slot (Acts 1:24-26). The outpouring of the Holy Spirit comes upon the apostles in the next chapter. They explain what is going on to the curious crowds that have gathered and bear witness to the resurrection of Christ (2:1-4, 14, 22-36). All was in accordance with what the Lord had said (John 15:26, 27). Peter summed up his witnessing by saying, "Therefore let all the house of Israel *know assuredly*, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." In response to his clear-cut words, 3000 believing people repent and are baptized into Christ (2:36-43). Reference to witnesses is repeatedly found in the book of Acts (3:15; 4:33; 5:32; 10:39; 13:31; etc.). The witnessing of the Holy Spirit in connection with the apostles is clearly seen in Acts 4:33, "And with *great power* [of the Holy Spirit] gave the apostles *witness* of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all." This same truth is repeated in Acts 5:32 ("And we [apostles] are his *witnesses* of these things, and so is also the Holy Ghost [Spirit], whom God hath given to them that obey him"). The writer of Hebrews (2:3, 4) likewise sums it up nicely. He speaks of the "great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was *confirmed* unto us by them that heard him [the apostles]; God also bearing them *witness*, both with signs and wonders, and divers [diverse] miracles, and gifts [distributions] of the Holy Ghost [Holy Spirit], according to his own will." This supernatural manifestation of divine power backed up their personal testimony about Christ. Their message was thereby authenticated as being from God and people believed.

Paul appeared belatedly on the scene, but he was nonetheless an apostle in the full sense of that word (which involved miraculous powers and being a witness). He was a special apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 26:16-

18; Acts 9:15; Romans 15:16; 1 Corinthians 9:1; 2 Corinthians 12:12). He bore witness.

John Bears Witness Again

We have already noticed that John in his gospel account was preoccupied with witnesses and bearing witness. In his other writings this still seems to occupy his thoughts. He makes this declaration as he begins his first epistle. "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and *bear witness*, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you..." (1 John 1:1-3). Later in the book he will declare again that "we have seen and do *testify* that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world" (1 John 4:14). The fifth chapter is full of references to witnesses, even speaking of sets of witnesses by three (1 John 5:6-11). Why all of this writing? Why this incessant appeal to witnesses? He tells us. "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe [continue to believe] on the name of the Son of God" (1 John 5:13). Witnesses boost our faith and make sure the grounds of our assurance.

Conclusion Appeal

Yes, we believe in the reality of God, who is from everlasting to everlasting. But this faith only becomes meaningful when we trust Him. In Adam and Eve the human race sinned and became a dying race. But God spoke, God promised triumph over the serpent and God cannot lie (Genesis 3:15; 12:1-3). This was the great impetus of man's faith through the ages, and knowing that God cannot lie meant that it would surely come to pass. Yes, God became flesh, incarnate, in Jesus Christ to save us from our sins and their awful consequences. The resurrection of Christ anticipates our resurrection and assures our hope. Witnesses verified the glorious news of his resurrection. This is the gospel. Our trust is in Jesus. That old hymn states it well:

*Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!
Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,
Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.*

And another hymn so vividly expresses the sentiments of our heart.

*'Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus,
Just to take Him at His Word;
Just to rest upon His promise;
Just to know, "Thus saith the Lord."*

*O, how sweet to trust in Jesus,
Just to trust His cleansing blood,
Just in simple faith to plunge me
'Neath the healing cleansing flood.*

*Yes, 'tis sweet to trust in Jesus,
Just from sin and self to cease;
Just from Jesus simply taking
Life and rest, and joy and peace.*

*I'm so glad I learned to trust Thee.
Precious Jesus, Savior, Friend
And I know that Thou art with me,
Wilt be with me to the end.*

*Jesus, Jesus, how I trust Him;
How I've proved Him o'er and o'er;
Jesus, Jesus, Precious Jesus!
O for grace to trust Him more.*

KIND READER, have you through faith accepted the Lord Jesus Christ to be your Savior? With the apostle Peter we say unto you, "Therefore let all...*know assuredly*, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye [they] crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). Those people who heard this testimony of Peter and his conclusion on that Day of Pentecost, cried out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Peter's reply: "Repent, and be baptized [immersed] every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost [Spirit]" (Acts 2:38). Accept the Christ of God today and know personal victory in your own life. Trust him.



The SWORD and STAFF
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