The Beginning of the Gospel

by Nigel Johnstone

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Foreword

Nigel Johnstone was born in a village in the far north of the Highlands of Scotland, grew up in his teens in the city of Glasgow and has spent his adult working life in the South of England. Now semi-retired, he is a part-time Security Officer.

This book is one of three published in Nigel's sixtieth year. "Nailed to the Cross", and "The Glory of the Lord" can be obtained from Belmont Publications, 07786 346 357.

Also available is the "Songs of the Witnesses", passages from scripture converted, accurately, into verse as poetry or for singing. All of the Song of Songs, most of Lamentations and selections from Isaiah have so far been completed.

To Joanna Faith,

Independently both you and I desired to read Mark so we read a chapter a day, in the mornings before breakfast. Then we read John. Much came out of our reading together and I have written it all down for you.

I freely give, to Faith, what I, myself, have freely received.

Nigel Johnstone
Malvern, july 2012.

Unto Glory.

Behold, my messenger I'll send,
the way he shall prepare
before me and the Lord ye seek
shall suddenly appear.

He'll swiftly to his temple come,
the cov'nant messenger
whom ye delight in, saith the LORD
of hosts, he will appear ;

But who shall stand when he doth come ?
Who will abide his day ?
For he's like fuller's soap, and fire
refining pure alway

With patience he will sit beside
the fire that doth refine;
like silver's purifier, he
will watch and will recline.

Malachi 3: 1-3

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in yur hearts to the Lord.
Colossians 3:16.

The Evidence

What evidence do we have about the gospel ?

The Fact of the Evidence

In essence, sixty six books containing the law, the prophets and the gospel itself. The content of these sixty six books covers the beginning of the creation to the end of time. They even speak of things which occurred before the beginning. And they tell us of things which will be, after time shall end.

From experience, we know that many misuse these sixty six books, especially those who would, officially, make a living from them; or those who would, publicly, exalt their own self importance in front of others by them; or those who would, personally, justify themselves, unjustifiably, within their pages.

So we tread carefully as we read these books, that we may not do as these do. Even if we have gone astray in the past, now we tread the more carefully, that we may not do so, again, in the future.

Many would like to teach us of the content of these sixty six books, but what is excruciatingly obvious, as soon as they attempt to do so, is that they appear either not to have read all of the contents, or that they have totally misunderstood their contents or that they are trying, deliberately, to mislead us.

Many wish to appear knowledgeable of these books, but, put quite simply, it seems to me that the vast majority of these people simply have not done their homework.
Many appear, superficially, to read and adhere to these books, but I find that, in reality, they are actually adhering to a creed,

or some collection of articles that are historical, or to some written or unwritten doctrines, accompanied by codes of practice that are, once examined, not in proper conformity to these sixty six books. In practice, these refer, not to the evidence contained in the sixty six books, but to other documents or other, vague, undocumented references.

As for me, I am interested in the actual evidence itself: not in what others have erroneously supposed from the evidence; not in what others have neglectfully extracted from the evidence, leaving evidence behind in the extraction; and not in what others have improperly added to the evidence from other sources.

The first thirty nine books are written, in Hebrew, during the era which spans time from the Flood in the days of Noah until the coming of the Messiah. Some small parts are written in Chaldee, which is also, loosely, called Aramaic, but this is akin to Hebrew and it may as well be regarded as such, for the time being. These thirty nine books contain the law and the prophets.

All of these books also foretell of the gospel, though they do not actually contain it, as such. This becomes very evident just by reading them.

The first five of the thirty nine books - called the Pentateuch, because there are five - are the books of Moses. Then there are historical books. There are also poetical books. And there is a book, Job, whose origin is unknown. This man could, for all we know, have lived in Tibet or India. There is a book, Esther, in which the divine name is never mentioned, though prayer is mentioned. There are the so-called Major prophets - Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel - so named only because of their size, not importance. Then there are the thirteen Minor prophets, from Daniel to Malachi.

There are one hundred and fifty Psalms. These, put into verse, may be sung. And they should be sung. That is why they are there.

There is also a Song - The Song of Solomon. It is the Song of Songs. There is no song like it, nor will ever be. None shall ever write a better song than this. For some reason which I cannot fathom, I could find no versed version of it in the English language. So I versed it - all of it - myself, in the year 2010. And I did Lamentations, and some passages of Isaiah. I kept as strictly as possible to the text of the Authorised Version.

Reading these thirty nine books makes it clear that they are all interconnected. They are, actually, one book. All are totally compatible and not, to the slightest degree, contradictory.

No other book or collection of books is anything like these books; this book. Nothing in the entire world compares to the profound content, the majestic diction, the sheer spirituality, the magnificent breadth of true humanity and the utter wholesomeness of this one book which came forth from one nation - Israel.

Some have attempted to write books or collections of books which are supposed to be books of wisdom - books, supposedly, to assist men to understand themselves, their true purpose and the purpose of all things. These books do not even come close to the sheer weight, the utter dignity, the depths of wisdom or the heights of spiritual understanding of these thirty nine books.

I write as one who is now threescore years old and who has read widely in his lifetime.

We have, then, twenty seven books which were written during

the lifetime of the Apostles and their immediate associates in this, our own, age, that is the era spanning time from the ascent of Jesus Christ until the end of time itself, the last day. These twenty seven books fall naturally into obvious categories: four Evangelists - Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, together with Luke's account of the Acts of the Apostles: then twenty two epistles. Thirteen of these epistles are written by Paul; one is not attributed; one is by James; two by Peter, one by Jude and four by John, the last of which is clearly sent to seven recipients.

To attempt to attribute the unattributed epistle - Hebrews - is improper since there is clearly good reason for it not being signatured. The writer is obviously one who, being absent, writes through an unnamed party directly to his own people.

It has been said, by Eusebius and others, that Hebrews was originally written in Hebrew, then translated into Greek. But the book itself, as we now have it, neither confirms nor denies that theory, sensible enough though that theory may be. The same goes for Matthew. The actual fact is that we have, now, a Greek text for both books, not a Hebrew text.

Mark and Luke were not apostles. But both were very much associated with Paul and both are highly approved by Paul in his epistles. Paul's influence is evident in Mark, Luke, Acts and Hebrews. In passing, it should be noted that lack of office does not render a man useless or unwanted. Faithfulness is that which singles a man out for useful activity.

Also, in passing, it cannot be absolutely proved that Mark did not write Hebrews.
James is James of Alphaues, not James the Lord's brother, as has been supposed. So as not to disturb the flow of reading, Appendix One deals with the matter.

Thus there are nine apostolic writers and twenty seven apostolic books.

From God - the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost - comes this unique set of books, delivered by chosen, approved, faithful, holy apostles and their immediate associates.

We could not have been given more than has been given.
Everything possible has been given us.
There is no more.

The Nature of the Evidence

The thirty nine books in Hebrew have been diligently preserved, in providence, through the Jewish nation, across millennia. No reasonable person can doubt that what we have in Hebrew is what we should have.

As to the twenty seven Greek books there is a matter, occurring in 1881, which must - absolutely must - be commented upon.

From antiquity, the handwritten manuscripts copied from the original "autographs" of the apostles' writings were diligently preserved in providence. Greek was translated into many other languages and these "versions" travelled all over the world. Writers in the early centuries, often - improperly - called "fathers", quoted scripture in their books and these are called - improperly - the "patristic citations".

Mistakes in copying occurred, some of them being deliberate if people were offended by the text and wished to make their own, unauthorised, changes to what the apostles had actually written. The handwritten copies were, of course, subject to decay through time and through frequent use. The better the copy, the more it was used, the shorter its lifetime.

The science - and it is a proper and admirable one - of "Textual Criticism" deals with the collation of manuscripts, versions and patristic citations to arrive at the indisputable content of the apostolic writings as they were actually produced by the apostles.

With the invention of printing, a printed Greek text was produced which was the text used by William Tyndale and Martin Luther. The most available and the best available is the Greek text printed by Stephens in 1550 and is commercially available in the Englishman's Greek New Testament of 1877, hereafter referred to as the EGNT. It contains a very literal - and very accurate - English translation as interlinear text.

The EGNT shows the differences in Stephens' text to the text of others - namely Griesbach, Lachmann, Tregelles, Tischendorf and Alford but it is clear from the preface of the EGNT, and also from other literature, that the Stephens' text is to be preferred and to be used, rather than these inferior alternatives.

A text with some minor variations was produced in 1624 by Elzevir and in the preface were the words, "ab omnibus receptum" - by all received. From this quotation the Greek text of both Stephens and Elzevir, became known, quite rightly, as the "Received Text".

A very similar text, but not quite identical, was the one which was the basis of the Authorised "King James" Version of the bible. This version has, in history and in experience, been the one through which multitudes have been instructed in the teachings of the apostles. Multitudes have, through the content of this book, lived exemplary lives and died exemplary deaths. Multitudes have lived and breathed the contents of this book for four centuries. Multitudes have, evidently, shown

that this book contains something that is unique in the entire world and unique in the history of the world.

The conduct, the speech, the lives and the deaths of those who have lived by this book demand that we pay heed to it. Not to do so is crass folly, ignorant prejudice and bigotry of the highest order.

But something occurred in 1881 which must - absolutely must - be commented upon.

The Authorised Version contains faults which are well recognised. Some of these faults are detailed in Appendix Two, so as not to disturb the flow of writing. A committee came together, called the "Revision Committee" with the remit of correcting instances of mistranslation which warranted change. But two men, Dr Westcott and Dr Hort, elected to the committee, wished, later, to publish their own Greek text. Deceitfully and secretively, they abused their position and visited each committee member, individually, influencing them privately.

The chairman, Dr Scrivener, attempted to stand against the results of this scenario but, in the event, gave in to the onslaught of opinion and the result was the "Revised Version", a translation not of the Received Text, but a translation of the text which Drs Westcott and Hort then published on the back of the publication of the Revised version.

Only in religion could such deceit, such unscrupulous behaviour by academics, such contemptible abuse of position, such blatant self serving go unremarked and unresisted.

But one man did stand against the tide of apathy, indifference and flattery that prevailed in 1881. Dean Burgon, a Textual Critic of massive achievement and unfaultable technical

knowledge, published an exposure and refutation of what had been done. His book, "Revisions Revised" is still in print and still available at the time of writing.

Drs Westcott and Hort, in order to produce another Greek text - and thereby generate sales of their own, competitive product - favoured the Codex Sinaiticus and other ancient manuscripts which, by their very antiquity, were suspect. My favourite bible, with its comfortable typeface, is well used and falling apart, soon to be replaced. The one with a less readable font is in virtually pristine condition. Let logic prevail over ambitious nonsense.

From 1881, version after version has been produced - in ever more watered down, weaker and looser wording - from that same corrupt source, the Greek text which was, deceitfully and without proper authority, replaced by the Revision Committee.

The Authorised Version, whilst not the only faithful rendering of the Greek "Received" Text is the most commonly and commercially available one at the time of writing.

The Authorship of the Book of Mark

The heading of the Greek text of Mark says, literally, The According to Mark, Holy Glad Tidings. At the end of the book is a signature which is the same wording, less the word "holy". The signature - the words minus "holy" - is, in the Authorised Version, placed as a heading and translated, The Gospel According to Mark. There is no evidence, within the book itself, as to the identity of the author. Allusion, yes; but not evidence.

Mark was John Markos, the son of Mary. Markos is the Greek rendering of the Latin name, Marcus. So John Mark had a

father, presumably a Roman, with a Latin name, and a mother with a Hebrew name, Mary, being derived from Mara, bitter. It was to Mary's house that the apostle Peter came after the angel released him from his chains and led him out of the prison. Peter evidently knew Mary and Mary was Mark's mother, Acts 12:12.

Peter had been imprisoned by Herod Antipas, the son of the Herod who killed all the children under two years old in his quest to slaughter the infant King of the Jews, Jesus.

After the death of Herod Antipas, which ended that period of persecution and restriction, the word of God grew and multiplied. Barnabas and Saul completed their visit to Jerusalem, Acts 12:25, and, taking John Mark with them, returned to Antioch where five prophets and teachers, of whom, at this stage, Barnabas is named first and Saul named fifth, ministered to the Lord and fasted, whereupon the Holy Ghost singled out Barnabas, first, and Saul, second, for the work to which he had called them.

Barnabas and Saul took John Mark to minister to them as they departed into Seleucia, present day Syria, then sailed to Cyprus. Saul's name thereafter changed to Paul. Crossing Cyprus in their work, they left the island and sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, present day Turkey.

But the one who ministered to Barnabas and Saul, here named by Luke only as John, departed from them, at Perga, and returned to Jerusalem, Acts 13:13. Luke makes no comment about his return, only that he did so.

This would later be the cause of contention between Paul and Barnabas when they agreed to commence another journey across Turkey, Acts 15:36. Barnabas wished to take John, surnamed Mark, but Paul thought it not a good thing since he

had left them previously and not gone with them to the work. So sharp was this contention that they went their separate ways, Barnabas taking Mark to Cyprus, Paul taking Silas to Syria and beyond.

Nothing further is recorded by Luke of Barnabas' activities. But it ought to be noted that, after all these occurrences, when he writes his book, he reports that Barnabas was a good man, Acts 11:24, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith.

Long after this contention, Paul writes from Rome, as he awaits his trial before Caesar Augustus, Colossians 4:10, stating that Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas, is with him and salutes the saints. Paul reminds the Colossian saints and faithful brethren that they have received commandments concerning Marcus and he urges them that if Marcus comes to them, they are to receive him. It is therefore Paul who records a small piece of information regarding the prior contention in which he was involved. There was a family relationship. A woman was connected with both Mark and Barnabas.

Later still, after his acquittal, and after further journeys, Paul writes to Philemon as he awaits his second appearance before another Caesar. With Paul are Epaphras, a fellow prisoner, and, in the order Paul names them, Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas and Lucas, Paul's fellow labourers.
Paul mentions Mark once more, in his last epistle. Having fought a good fight, II Timothy 4:7, having finished his course, having kept the faith, Paul looks forward to that which is laid up for him - a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to him at that day - the day that Paul lived for, rather than each passing day.

And in this, the last epistle of his that we have, he says that Demas has forsaken him, having loved this present world. Crescens has gone to Galatia; Titus to Dalmatia; only Luke is

with him. Now, near certain death at the hands of Nero, Paul commands Timothy to take Mark and bring him to Rome. For, saith the aged Apostle on the verge of martyrdom, he is profitable to me for the ministry.

It is given to Mark, by the Holy Spirit, to be the only evangelist to record that, when all forsook Jesus in the place called Gethsemane, Mark 14:50, a certain young man, being laid hold of by the young men, and being clad with a linen cloth cast about his naked body, left it in the hands of his would be captors, and fled away, naked. Mark records that blind Bartimaeus cast off his garment and came to Jesus. Mark also records that many cast their garments in the way as Jesus entered into Jerusalem riding upon a colt.

It is also Mark, alone of the four evangelists, who records that, when Mary Magdalene and Mary of James and Salome found the stone rolled away from the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment, who said to them, Be not affrighted, Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth which was crucified.

There appears, after the resurrection of Christ, a young man. He is not specifically said to be an angel, for no angel ever appears to men in Mark's book - save to the Son of man. He is clothed in a long, white garment, as though the young man who fled away naked is now, after resurrection, in a new humanity, under a new covenant, restored.

A garment wrought in nature deserves to be cast off when the son of David comes and gives sight, then triumphantly takes possession of all that was promised to him. What use is anything of nature, now that he is come ? But one kept hold of his garment - until such time that he left it and fled, for nature will always, in the end, show that it cares for nothing but its own survival. Nevertheless, once risen in newness of life, the

young man is clothed with that which was given to him, beyond the grave.

It is Mark, also, alone, who records the words that this young man says to the women, Go tell the disciples, and Peter, that he [Jesus] goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him. Peter, who had denied knowing the Lord thrice before the cock crew, and had gone out and wept bitterly afterwards; "tell the disciples ……and Peter."

This same young man, now clothed, now restored, is the one who says, specifically, that Peter is to be told where Jesus will next be seen: there shall ye see him. And Peter.

To Mark are these things given to record. To Mark who, in going not to the work, but returning to Jerusalem, caused a rift between two such men as Barnabas and Paul. To Mark, who, yet, was received again by Paul. To Mark, of whom Paul gave commandment that he was to be received by others; of whom Paul required that he should attend him in Rome, profitable for the ministry.

For some reason, John Mark left the work in Perga to return to Jerusalem, where we know of two people connected to him: his mother, Mary - sister to Barnabas - and a damsel called Rhoda, associated with Mary's house sufficiently to be responsible for answering the door at a time of dire crisis, yet not named as Mary's relative.

Was it a family matter ? Was Mary involved, sister to Barnabas and mother to Mark ? But what matter could possibly be more important than ministering to Paul and Barnabas, two men separated by the Holy Ghost who had work to which he had called them ?

Whatever it was, Paul was adamant that, because of Mark's

behaviour, he did not wish him, at that time, to accompany him on his further journeys. Yet Barnabas, uncle to Mark, was also just as adamant that he should.
Mark : a family matter and family loyalties at a time when the spread of the Gospel throughout the Mediterranean region was the calling of God, the Holy Ghost.
Peter : a denial of Jesus at the very time when Jesus was taken by wicked hands to be judged, condemned by men and crucified.

Yet…….Clothed with a long, white garment.
Yet ….. And Peter.
Yet…….Mark is profitable.

And look at Peter in Mark 9:33, his savouring of the things of men rather than the things of God such that Jesus tells him, Get thee behind me, satan. Such that, in response, Jesus calls the people and, in verses 34 to 38, makes it clear what is entailed in truly following him. Such that, after six days, Jesus takes Peter, and others, and is transfigured before them. And even then, Peter calls Jesus only Master and desires to retain Moses and Elias to tabernacle with Jesus; in response to which a voice comes out of the cloud, This is my beloved Son - hear ye him.

Mark writes, and Peter is mentioned. These men, though an apostle and an apostle's associate, were men of like passions as we are. Men in whom the flesh still resided. Men still prone to nature and all that nature can do.

And both were restored. Restored under a covenant which is a covenant of hope, not a covenant of endless condemnation.

Restored in a new man, risen from death. Restored in a new humanity. Restored to what ever was in the purposes of God, before the foundation of the world. Restored in a covenant

between the Father and the Son, that man just cannot affect, one way or the other. Restored in newness of life, beyond the grave, sin for ever put away in the body of Christ. Restored to serve the living and true God, all the transgressions under the first covenant having been, justly, remitted through the sufferings of Christ. Restored out from under the law, a covenant which had been, voluntarily, entered into, against God's commandment, and had brought in nothing but sin, bondage, slavery and death.

Such men as Mark and Peter were restored, and such men speak to us from across two millenia, telling us of a glorious gospel.

Surely the likes of us should hear what these men have to say ?

The Gospel

And what does Mark have to say ?
What does he bring us ?

Mark, John Mark, brings us the beginning of the *euangellion*, the evangel. The word angel means messenger. The word evangel is a certain kind of message. An *eu* message. Mark reports Jesus, Mark 14:7, as saying that we have the poor always with us and whensoever we will we may do them good - *eu*. Those things which are helpful, beneficial and that make things well. It is a good message. A well message. A message of benevolence. Something told us that is for our benefit.

What is this message ?

Mark begins his book with eight Greek words.
Arche, followed by seven words, all with the same grammatical ending.
Arche…..tou....euaggeliou....'Iesou..Christou…uiou….tou….Theou.

Beginning..of the.evangel…of Jesus Christ….son of…the…. God.

In Romans, Paul writes, in chapter one and the first two verses, the *euanggelion* of God …. concerning [*perí*] the Son of him…..The content of the evangel concerns the Son of God.

In Mark we read that the evangel is, also, of Jesus Christ.
It is he, himself, who speaks it.

Saith the writer to the Hebrews, See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that, on earth, divinely instructed them - that is, Moses - much more we, if we turn away from him who is from the heavens.
Hebrews 12:25, [EGNT literal translation.]

Thus, if we wish not to turn away and if we would, therefore, know about this evangel, then we must begin at the beginning.

The Beginning of the Evangel

Arche is the first word that Mark writes. The word archetype in English refers to a typical example of something; a copied original; a prototype. Or it is a recurrent symbol - something that constantly appears. The word architect in English means, properly, one who is appointed to manage a project from the outset, who then appoints others under him, as required, overseeing the entire work to completion.

The word *arche* is not just that which happens, in time, before something else. Other scripture uses the exact word, *arche*, to denote those principalities who, from the beginning of creation, were given authority which continues to the end of time. Other appointments were made, under them, which also continue.

The same word, *arche*, is used in Hebrews 6:1, Leaving the

principles, *arche*, of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith towards God. The Hebrews addressed are to leave the principles. They are not to lay again the foundations. Ergo, the principles are the same as the foundation. Thus the principles, arche, laid down in the beginning, are a foundation, themelion.

Mark refers to the *arche* of the *Evangel* of Jesus Christ: the beginning of the gospel.
Hebrews refers to the *arche* of the *logos* of Christ: the principles of the doctrine.

Arche is something that is foundational in both temporal precedence and future establishment. *Arche* will never cease; it will always be there. *Arche* must never be undermined or all that comes after it will collapse. *Arche* shall never be denied or everything must be denied. Laid down once, *Arche* need never be laid again. In fact, it should not be laid again. *Arche* is laid, secure, never to be repeated.

But it, itself, is not an end in itself. It is the beginning.

Mark immediately supports what he has written in the first verse with evidence from the Hebrew prophets, firstly Malachi and then Isaiah. Both Matthew and Luke also quote the reference to Isaiah in relation to John the Baptist, but only Mark refers to Malachi and, thereby, reveals something about the purpose of his book, that is relevant to his alone.

This quotation, peculiar to Mark, is also the first in order, despite that Isaiah prophesied first in time and Malachi wrote his book long after the prophet Isaiah had departed this life. This quotation is, therefore, given supreme importance by Mark. The quotation is linked, directly, to the opening words, Arche of the Evangel.

What Mark is clearly drawing attention to, and that immediately in his opening words, is the fact that two messengers are in view. Malachi 3:1 and 2 :-
Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts.
But who may abide the day of his coming ? And who shall stand when he appeareth ? For he *is* like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap: and he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver:

Note, first, the presence of two messengers in Malachi's words.
My messenger, who shall prepare the way.
The messenger of the covenant, who is also the Lord.

Note, secondly, that the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come….saith the LORD of hosts. The use of the lower case and then capitals denote, from the Hebrew names - *Adon* and *Yahweh* - different persons, though one God. As David writes in Psalm 110:1, The LORD said unto my Lord… sit thou…. Of which Christ said, how doth David call him Lord, when he is his - David's - son ?

Note, thirdly, that we see slight differences in the words which we read in Malachi from the words which we read in Mark. These differences are quite logical.
Malachi: I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me.
Mark: I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.

The authors of the Gospel writings spoke and wrote in Greek,

and almost certainly used the Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures, called the Septuagint.

The Septuagint renders Malachi's wording "before me" as *pro proswpou mou*. The Received Text wording of Mark's words is *pro proswpou.sou* - a difference of one letter - which both the EGNT, the Englishman's Greek New Testament, and the AV, the Authorised Version, render as "before thy face". But proswpou may also be rendered "presence" rather than "face". "Before the face of me", "before the presence of me" and "before me" all mean the same thing and are just a matter of translation.

Regarding the different pronouns, Mark's words in reference to the words of Malachi are as they appear in the Septuagint but with the alteration of one letter, *mu* to *sigma*, such that they reveal what Malachi could not - that the Father sent the Son. I send my messenger before me, says Malachi. I send my messenger before thy face, reveals Mark. The words are completely compatible for the Father and the Son are one.

Mark expands what he is able, by the Holy Ghost, to further reveal of God, by adding the words, "before thy face" to clarify the sending of the preparation messenger and the work which the preparation messenger will do, indicating, by the expansion of wording, that both the sending and the preparing are before the face of the Lord.

God speaks and says the way is before me. Mark expands and indicates that God, the Father, sends God, the Son. Mark changes one letter, with the further enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, the Ultimate Author of all scripture, and thus further enhances the revelation of God.

Malachi speaks of not one, but two messengers, the first messenger who is sent and who prepares the way "before me"

and the second messenger of the covenant, who is the same person as "the Lord, whom ye seek" who shall "suddenly come to his temple".

The Greek word behind the English word, messenger, is *angellos*, angel. Unlike Matthew and Luke's accounts, here, in Mark's account, angels - messengers - never appear or minister to men, other than the son of man. That is the Son; of man. In Mark, the emphasis is upon two messengers only, the Preparative Messenger, sent primarily, and then the Messenger of the Covenant. Angels minister, privately, to the Messenger of the Covenant immediately after his temptation, but are never sent, in Mark, to other men.

He was made a little lower than the angels, Hebrews 2:9. Yet angels ministered to him. The first covenant was received by the disposition of angels, Acts 7:53. But in this covenant they have the part, not of administrators but of ministers, ministering not only to the Messenger of the Covenant, but also, once the covenant is actually brought in, to the recipients of it. Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation ? Hebrews 1:14.

The first messenger in Mark's quotation from Malachi is, evidently, the same as the messenger referred to in Mark's quotation from Isaiah - The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, Isaiah 40:3.

The Lord will not walk in crooked paths. The inward path of the soul must be straightened prior to his coming. No man can serve two masters, says Jesus. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways, says the Apostle James, therefore

purify your hearts, ye double minded, he exhorts. Be wretched and mourn and weep, he advises: let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to heaviness, James 4:9.

Here is the high place being made low !
Here is the crooked being made straight !

This ministry does not cease once John the Baptist is beheaded. Nor does it terminate with the ascent of Christ. Nor does it end once the Apostles are no longer with us. Nor has it become extinct with the French, American, Russian or Industrial Revolutions. Nor does it lapse with the harnessing of the power of electricity and electronics and with man's journey to the moon. Nor can it be jettisoned with the casting off of all social order; the denial of proper authority; and the rebellion against personal responsibility in society.

Building a tower to heaven can only result in chaos upon the earth. And the dissolution of proper distinctions among men will only permit the spirit that is in mankind to flow the more freely - and the more lawlessly.

The *archon* of the Gospel, the beginning of the Gospel, exactly and precisely as Mark lays it out, is that upon which the Gospel will be founded till the end of time.

If there is the absence of the first messenger, then the second will never appear.

The Audience of the First Messenger

Before considering what the Preparative Messenger says, it is important to notice to whom he says it. To whom are his words relevant ? The answer is that his audience is the whole world. His message is to the entire earth, to the north, south, east and west. It is universal.

Notice that in Mark 1:4, Came John baptising in the wilderness.
What wilderness ? Where ? Later, yes, the specific location, at that time, in that area, is then focussed upon - in the Jordan river, verse 5. But it is as though the scene is set beginning with the whole earth. He baptises in the wilderness - the wilderness of the whole world. True it was that, at that time, a certain situation existed in Israel and that is what, then particularly, is recorded.

But the ministry of preparation shall not be confined to that place and that time. This ministry shall continue to the end of time, wheresoever the Gospel shall be preached - and at the end of Mark, the Lord, yes the Lord, commands those whom he sends to, Go ye into all the world, the kosmos, and proclaim the evangel to all that is created, ktisis.

If the evangel is to be proclaimed to all that is created, then, of a necessity, so is the beginning of that gospel to be proclaimed, likewise, to all that is created.

None is exempt. None is too far. This is to every soul of man who has being.

The Content of the Message

So, what is the actual content of the message of the preparative messenger ? Let us look at what evidence is actually before us in the book of Mark.

Firstly, we have words which are not precisely recorded as spoken by John, as such, but they are the prophesied content of his message. These prophetic words may be taken as those pertinent to his ministry, that is, the words quoted by Mark which are evidently a summation of what appears in Isaiah 40.

But if so, then we can infer the whole passage as being the content and purpose of the ministry of John the Baptist.

Mark quotes, Mark 1:3, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight, from Isaiah 40:3. But we may surely infer the whole of Isaiah's passage, from verse 3 to verse 8, as that which is the content of what John has been given to speak :-
3. The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
4. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain:
5. And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see *it* together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken *it.*
6. The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry ? All flesh *is* grass, and all the goodness thereof *is* as the flower of the field;
7. The grass withereth, the flower thereof fadeth away: because the Spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass.
8. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.

Secondly, we are told, in Mark 1:4, of John's preaching, but not the words he actually said. We are told by Mark that John did baptize in the wilderness, and that he preached ….. The baptism of repentance unto [*eis*] the remission of sins. These are not his quoted words, but these words do summarise his preaching.

Thirdly, spoken words are given us in Mark 1: 7 and 8.
And [John] preached saying, There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose. I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost.
These preached words are addressed to those who have

already been baptised of John. Those addressed have already received the former preaching, that is, the preaching of the baptism of repentance unto the remission of sins. This preaching is additional to the previous preaching in verse 4.

John's clothing and food are not reported in connection with his first preaching: they are mentioned by Mark in relation to John's second preaching. This second preaching is an herald. To those who had already received his preaching of the baptism of repentance unto the remission of sins, John further addresses them and heralds the coming of one mightier than he. And he heralds a superior baptism, also.

And there are, fourthly, some reported words, Mark 6:18, which John said before his imprisonment and his death, It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife - the words which resulted in both his incarceration and his execution at the hands of Herod Antipas, the son of the Herod who slaughtered children under two years old in an attempt to kill the infant King of the Jews, Jesus.

These reported words are simply a statement of fact. It is not lawful…..

In the book of Mark, this is the sum total of words which can be attributed to John the Baptist. Other words, are, of course, available to us from the other three accounts of Matthew, Luke and John. But as to the purpose of Mark's writing, the particular purpose given to Mark by the Holy Spirit, which purpose is unique to Mark, we should confine ourselves to what is contained within his book.

I make one exception, later, to prove a point, only because it is an extremely important point and one that has, I believe, been misunderstood. The matter of *exesti.*

Thus we have, firstly, words that can be inferred from the prophets.
Then we have, secondly, a summation of John's initial preaching.
We have, thirdly, words in herald of the coming Messenger of the Covenant, the Lord.
And, fourthly, John's last, reported words - a statement of fact - before his imprisonment.

From these words can several things be established as to the character of John's message, the message of the messenger who is sent before the face of the Lord. First of all it is very plain that the initial inferred words, those of the one crying in the wilderness, are imperative.

1…..Imperative

The inferred words of John are the words which the prophet Isaiah wrote, Isaiah 40:3, some seven hundred years or so before John ministered beyond Jordan. "Prepare ye", is not an invitation. It is not a request. It is not an imploration. It is not an appeal.

This is an imperative.

Says Paul the Apostle at Athens in about AD 50 or thereabouts, Acts 17:28, In God we live and move and have our being; we are the offspring of God; and the times of ignorance God has overlooked, hupereidon; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent.

God has mercifully and patiently overlooked the former ignorance of men but has now sent his Son, Jesus Christ, into the world that Christ might, through his own sufferings and death, deal with all that righteously separates men from God. That he might taste death for every man. That he might be a

propitiation - an appeasement - for the whole world. That he might bear the sin of the world.

This being the case, God - now - commands, yes commands, all men, everywhere, to repent.

John the Baptist, Mark 1:6, was clothed with camel's hair and a girdle of a skin about his loins. This man was born after his father and mother, both stricken in years, his mother barren, had been visited by no less a personage than the angel Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God. This man ate locusts and wild honey in the desert.

It is most evident that what this man has to say is to be regarded. For this man is the fulfilment of the prophecies of both the prophet Malachi and the prophet Isaiah. This man is the messenger whom God Almighty has sent before his own face. Whom God the Father has sent before the face of God the Son.

What he says is imperative - he makes two proclamations.

The first is the baptism of repentance unto [*eis*] the remission of sins. The second is the heralding of the second messenger.

Shall we not listen to what he says ?
Shall we not do it ?

See the example of one who did listen, but who allowed other things to move him. Unrepentant, he suffered something else to be a greater influence to him than the preaching of John.

Herod Antipas, the son of the notorious slayer of children, had married the wife of his brother, Philip. And John the Baptist faced him with his behaviour.

For John's ministry, who prepares the way of the Lord, is demonstrably not concerned with what people say or with whom their parents are, good or bad. Whether some say, We have Abraham to our father, as they did, Luke 3:8, or whether someone, such as Antipas, has a despotic murderer for a father, it matters nothing, either way, to the one who prepares the way of the Lord.

For the preparation is the preparation of the heart. And nothing betrays the heart like behaviour.

Men and women may say all they like and profess all they like and pretend all they like. It is the actual, observable behaviour that indicates what is in the heart and what the heart really loves and what the heart really wants, not the mouth. John faced Herod with the fact - the fact - of his unlawful behaviour. Herod appears not to have retaliated in any way. But neither did he put away the woman and break the unlawful relationship.

What was he waiting for ?

Did he wait for a "more convenient season", as did Felix, who, trembling at Paul's words, the reasonable words of temperance, righteousness and judgment to come, said, When I have a more convenient season, I will call for thee. Tremble though he did, Felix did not actually repent. Just tremble. Acts 24:25.

Which is not enough.

Something else was on Felix's mind, for he called for Paul a number of times, not that he might hear, and do, the things that Paul said, but he hoped that Paul might give him money to release him. But then circumstances changed and Felix, willing to show the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound.

Much as Herod behaved towards John the Baptist.
In Mark 6:20 we read that Herod feared John, much as Felix trembled in Paul's presence. Mark tells us that Herod heard John. Herod observed John. Herod heard John gladly. But Herod, like Felix, did not actually repent and circumstances arose, as in the case of Felix, which tried and tested Herod Antipas.

Life, time, the passing years, sift us. They prove us, of what sort we are. Circumstances, adversities, pressures, opportunities; they all test us.

Eventually, Herod decided to please Herodias who had attempted to kill John for his words, but could not, Herod being, apparently, so keen to observe, hear and hear gladly, the man who had told him what was not lawful. But time, and life, and circumstances, worked together to expose the heart, as they always will. And Herod's true evaluation of the man he seemed so diligent to hear, and observe and hear again, gladly, was to be seen by all men.

Firstly, Herod pleased his wife by imprisoning John, Mark 1:14 and Mark 6:17.

How like the first man, who is of the earth, earthy, this is ! Adam suffered a woman to come between himself and the tree of life. Adam listened to what she had to say, rather than obey the very words which God had spoken to him. Eve paid heed, not to the words that the man - instructed by God - had told her, but she paid heed to what she heard inside herself. And then informed Adam of what was going on inside her. Who also became caught up in what was going on inside her.

But the second man is the Lord from heaven. He will not be diverted. They have no wine, saith the woman. Woman, saith

he, what have I to do with thee ? mine hour is not yet come. Touch me not, he saith to a woman, for I am not yet ascended to my father.

For this cause a woman must be silent in the church. She must not attempt to influence men in spiritual matters. She must submit to her man in all things, also, in order that peace may reign and not strife. A woman must not attempt to teach in the church - it is not to be suffered. The Head of every man is Christ. The head of the woman is the man.

But Herod desired to please his - unlawful - woman, rather than to hearken to the messenger sent of God to prepare the way of the Lord.

Then Herod, for the sake of them who sat with him as the daughter of Herodias danced, Mark 6:21, valued John the Baptist's head as less than half of his kingdom. He uttered the oath, no doubt, to impress, knowing that a slip of a girl could not grasp the real value of anything and that she would ask for what, to her, was a vast gift of unimaginable proportions, but what, to him, was of insignificant value. But the girl asked her mother, who, rather than secure for life the financial security of her own daughter, valued her revenge far greater. Her venom for the messenger, the messenger who prepares the way of the Lord, was such that all she wanted was John's decapitated head.

These two women, the mother and the daughter, had been made an offer which would secure the future, materially, for both of them, whether or not John would have been able to influence Herod to give up Herodias. Herodias chose to slaughter John and, thus, have her revenge and, possibly, maintain her financial and social status.

In the event, it would not be a very long time before she lost

Herod altogether.

How did the daughter value John's head ? Less than pleasing and obeying her mother.
How did Herod value it ? Less than the opinion of them that sat there and less than half of his kingdom.
How did Herodias value it ? Less than whatever it was moved her and her ambitions.
How did them that sat by value it, who did not intervene nor raise an objection ? Less than their position and status with the king.

How shall we value the messenger who prepares the way of the Lord ? Do we not realise that, without him and his words, we shall never see the Lord ?

Herod's fearing; Herod's hearing; Herod's observing; were all, utterly, worthless. For Herod did not repent.

He was preoccupied with pleasing others - his unlawful woman and those who sat to watch a damsel dance.

Later, he killed the apostle James, John's brother, with the sword and saw that it pleased the Jews. So he proceeded to take Peter also. After Peter's release by angelic means, Herod ascended a throne and was lauded as a god by the crowd. Had he but spake the words in denial, he would have been spared. But he loved the praise of men and judgment fell upon him.

Herod wanted to please his - unlawful - woman.
Herod wanted to please them with whom he sat to watch dancing.
Herod wanted to please the Jews.
Herod wanted to please the crowd and be a god in their eyes.

But Herod never wanted to please the One for whom John was

sent to prepare the way. For Herod never repented.

For the only way to change one's behaviour is to change the way one thinks. The only way to change how one thinks is to have another mind. And that is the beginning of the gospel.

But to return to the words of the messenger who prepares the way. John says to Herod that it is not "lawful" to have his brother's wife. This reveals something fundamental about John's ministry.

We have seen, first, that John challenges behaviour, not anything else. This is quite clear from Mark's book and we need no further confirmation. It is clear from what John's words are actually reported as being. Few though they be, they indicate, quite incontrovertibly, the tenor of his preaching. It faces the hearers with their behaviour and challenges them to change it.

But if confirmation be demanded, it is forthcoming from Luke. In Luke 3: 10 the people ask John what they should do. John's answers are exactly in accord with what we see in Mark. Each category of enquirer is faced with the type of behaviour typical of their status and circumstance and they are challenged not to behave in that way.

All are challenged, if they have two coats, to impart to him that hath none. There are no conditions to this, no extra qualifications, no provisos about the needy being genuinely needy or partially needy or having to satisfy the giver about the necessity. It is quite categorical. If someone has no coat, they should be given one by someone who has two. The same goes for meat.

The publicans - those who properly take taxes from the populace - are to exact no more than is appointed them to do

so by the power who receives the tax. Soldiers, who lawfully are appointed to preserve order among the populace are to do violence - unlawful aggression - to no man, nor to falsely accuse anyone and are to be content with their wages.

Behaviour. They were to bring forth fruits worthy of repentance.

In the proper, lawful order of any society, government governs and taxes are necessary for administrative purposes. Government, also, must authorise a force which can impose, and maintain, good order. John questions none of this. He accepts it. Among the populace, personally, charity is expected by John. He does not expect charity from the government, but from the people, one to another. If John's words are heeded, then a peaceful, prosperous and harmonious society will be the result.

Why on earth should anyone object to John's words ?
Why on earth would anyone not be inclined to do as he says ?

Why, indeed. For it is these simple and sensible words that prepare the way of the Lord. The ministry of the Preparative Messenger is logical and incontrovertible.

2……Logical and Incontrovertible

John's reported words to Herod are, It is not lawful for thee to have her. The word for not lawful is *exesti*, a remarkably simple, yet remarkably profound little word. *Ex* means out of. *Esti* means is. Out of; is.

Exesti : contrary to existence : out of is.
Outside of that which is proper to existence.

Something is. It exists. And, from its very existence, one knows

what it is for and what one should do with it. The thing itself tells one what is its function and how it should be viewed and used. No law is necessary. No instructions are required to tell one what to do with it. Its very existence is sufficient information. It is to be used as it exists.

Simple logic tells me that, since I exist and there exists one other, like as I, then if I have two coats and someone else has none, I should impart my second coat to the coatless person. Sheer, simple, uncomplicated logic. Utter common sense.

Simple, sensible, practical reason tells one that if an administration benefits the populace and appoints one to collect the wherewithal from the community, such that the community will benefit, then the collector should only collect what is required by the party which organises the communal benefits. Perfectly reasonable.

When the governing body, as it must, employs suitable persons to impose and maintain due order among the populace, and to protect the people from external threat, then such persons should not exert unauthorised violence, should not accuse anyone of doing something they have not done and should be content with the wage they are paid for doing the privileged occupation that they do. Totally proper.

Paul the apostle uses the exact same word, Acts 21:37, in addressing a soldier, or, rather, no less than a chief captain - a man set in authority over centurions - who was rescuing Paul and calming a breach of the peace. Paul respectfully asks the man, *Ei exestin moi eipein ti pros se* ? Is it *exesti* for me to say something to thee ? Is it out of order to speak ?

I would suggest the word “improper” is suitable. That which is not appropriate.

Paul desires to know what the Chief Captain considers to be the proper procedure in such a situation. Is it appropriate for Paul to speak ? Or is not a proper thing for a man in his position - at that time - to converse with a man such as a Chief Captain in the execution of his public duty.

Given the existence of a suspected disorder and given the involvement of such a Senior Person, appointed by Government to keep due order, Paul enquires is it 'out of is' to speak. Is it inappropriate ?

The word is used by Mark later in his book in chapter three and verse twenty one, when those 'of' Jesus, translated as 'friends' in the AV, say that he is 'beside himself' - *exesti.* As if a man stepped out of his own existence, out of is, and did things or said things that were just inappropriate to his own being.

This is so instructive regarding the ministry of John the Baptist. What the preparative messenger has to say is not, actually, a matter of law. His message is to the whole earth, whether one is conscious, or not, of the existence and the authority of law itself. One only has to exist for John's words to be appropriate.

Nor are his words, or his ministry, at all difficult to understand. As a child of six years old, I became aware of my own existence and I became aware that my existence was part of a Greater Existence and I became aware that my existence had purpose.

I can remember the location and my circumstances when I first became aware of my own being. Together with that sensation, I was also aware of something else - that behind my own being was a Greater Being. I was conscious that my being had an origin: that the whole creation had an origin.

At about that time, whether before or after it I do not know, I received instruction at school from a book that told me that my being had a purpose. The Shorter Catechism was laid before me. I can remember, vividly, the first question and answer. The question is wrong and the answer is wrong. As wrong as the Serpent. As wrong as Eve. As wrong as Adam. And I ate of the fruit that was offered to me.

The ministry of John the Baptist is relevant to every soul of man in all creation. If a man exists, then John preaches to him, whether he will hear or not. And all John does is to face a man with what is reasonable, given the nature of the existence of man.

Given that food exists, that is how it is to be used. Gluttony is unreasonable. An excess should be given to one who has insufficient. Food is, in the nature of its existence, not the purpose of life; it is to sustain life in the pursuit of a purpose.

Given that male and female exist, that is how male and female should conduct themselves toward one another. Relationships involving man and woman, parent and child, family members, are all self evident. The union of male and female is clearly not the purpose of life; it is to propagate life that life may pursue a purpose.

Given the existence of parent and child, it is self evident that authority must be exerted and that submission must be offered. Otherwise, life cannot be sustained. Then, also, order in society must be maintained or chaos will result. One must accept one's place and function in order that the purpose of life might be achieved.

The acquisition of possessions, materials, objects is self evidently not the purpose of life. They are necessary for various purposes of clothing, shelter, food production, food

preparation, healthcare and so forth. But the manufacture, distribution and possession of such objects is, self evidently, not the purpose of living. They are used, in order that life may pursue that purpose for which it lives.

It is evident that man does not exist for man's sake. Else, what is the purpose ? What is man's origin ? What of death ? If there is a purpose, why do we die ? What shall happen to the world after one has departed ? Where will one go ? What will happen to one's existence ?

And what of religion ? It is clear that religion should not be a selfish exercise merely to make one feel pleasant. The purpose of one's existence is not, self evidently, to merely have pleasant sensations, whether sensations of joyfulness or self exaltation or self righteousness.

Then what is the purpose of the Creator ?

How shall one serve his purposes ?

Why has one not done so heretofore ?

Why, when one tries to do so, does one find conflict within ?

Why does this flesh, this nature, this humanity do the things it does ?

What is wrong with me ?

The logical, incontrovertible message of John, once received, pervades the whole of the life, the whole of the being, the whole of one's existence and exposes all that one says, all that one does and all that one seeks after.

Given John's plain, simple, reasonable and sensible words,

there is no alternative but to expose oneself utterly to the searching nature of his ministry. There is no logical reason to refuse it. To resist John's words is to be dishonest, and to remain wholly in darkness.

For John came to bear witness to the Light, John 1:7. He, himself, was not that Light but was sent to bear witness of that Light. For the Light had shone already. But the darkness comprehended it not. So John came, to bear witness of it. That all through him might be saved.

John's ministry will cause men to turn from darkness and to face the Light. As many as receive him who is the Light, to them gives he power to become the sons of God.

The Preaching of the First Messenger

There are two mentions of John preaching in chapter one of Mark's book. Firstly, in verse four, John did baptize….and preach the baptism of repentance unto [*eis*] the remission of sins. Secondly, verse seven, Preached, saying there cometh one mightier than I after me……

The first preaching was in the wilderness.
Then there was baptism in Jordan, with confession of sins.

Forgiveness of sins is not mentioned. Confession of sins is entailed in receiving John's words and being baptised as a result. This baptism was unto remission of sins. It, itself, is not the actual remission of sins. Under John's ministry, sins are exposed; sins are admitted; sins are confessed. No more.

Firstly, John preached the baptism of repentance.
Secondly, to those who received the first preaching and were baptised, he heralds the coming of Another.

The content of the message of the first preaching is summed up by the words, 'the baptism of repentance unto the remission of sins'. This was what he preached. Nothing else and nothing more.

To Israel, and only to Israel, there was an outward figure to which they must submit. It is perfectly clear in Acts that the Gentiles did not receive this baptism. Gentiles, however, also quite clearly, were commanded to repent. The baptism of John was administered only to those who went out of Israel, Israelites, and attended his baptism in Jordan. All the land of Judaea and they of Jerusalem, were the recipients of John's baptism.

Thereafter, both Jew and Gentile, who believed in Jesus Christ, would be baptised and would receive the Holy Ghost. This is another matter.

John the Baptist was the greatest of the prophets, yet he was less than the least in the kingdom of heaven. His baptism was unto, only unto, the remission of sins. His baptism was a figure, not a reality. His preaching exposed conditions and his preaching heralded the One who could answer those conditions.

As a preparation for the coming of their own Messiah, each and every Jew must - must - submit to the baptism of John or they would not be properly prepared - they would not be prepared at all - to meet the Promised One.

The Lord shall suddenly come to his temple. And now was the time. Preparation was urgent. His coming was imminent. Nothing else was as important, as urgent, as pressing as this. All activity in every other matter, ceased. And all Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, went out to the wilderness, to receive the baptism of repentance.

This baptism was an admission that no natural birth can ever change the heart. No mere ancestry can bring one into the kingdom of heaven. No heritage, however substantial, even if it be God-given in providence, can ensure an inheritance in the Kingdom of God. For all flesh is as grass. Yes, all flesh. However cultivated over the centuries - even millenia - however well informed, however well brought up, however well educated, however schooled in all that is right and proper, yes, all flesh is grass.

The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, Isaiah 40:3, and all flesh shall see it together. All flesh shall see the salvation of God. Luke 3:6. See, yes, but flesh shall not partake of it, for flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven. Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God, John 3:5.

That which is born of the flesh is flesh: and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit, John 3:6. All Judaea and they of Jerusalem must go out to the wilderness and acknowledge that their birth and national privilege and natural heritage are of no account when all is fulfilled and when the true purposes of God are about to be fully manifested.

Natural Israel set forth a figure. They were privileged to be a material representation of what would be spiritually revealed. And they had significant advantages, in the flesh, by so being. But, in the outcome, when Messiah came to bring in the spiritual reality of all that had been shown forth, naturally, in a national setting, their advantages were no longer pertinent.

The time is fulfilled, would say the Messenger of the Covenant, Mark 1:15, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye and believe the gospel.

And if Israelites, with all their history and heritage; all their privileges and upbringing; all their knowledge and advantages; if they should no longer have any higher standing than the nations as all is fulfilled, then shall any other ? Shall any other, lesser, nation expect some sort of special regard with Almighty God ? Nay, they shall not. Repent.

Yet, in Mark, what did Jerusalem do with their King, with the Lord of whom the LORD said, The messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in, Malachi 3:1, behold he shall come ?

From Jerusalem there came down scribes who said of Jesus, He hath Beelzebub ! Mark 3:22. From Jerusalem there came down Pharisees who found fault, Mark 7:2. When he first went up to Jerusalem, Jesus looked round about, said nothing and went out, Mark 11:11. On his return the following day, Mark 11: 12, having stayed overnight in Bethany, he found no fruit on a fig tree, just leaves, and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever.

Having once visited it and seen what was there: no man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever.

Then he cast out from the temple them that sold and bought, overthrowing the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of them that sold doves. And he would not suffer any man to carry a vessel through the temple, for some would wish to merely use the temple as a thoroughfare, on the way to somewhere else. Vessels are to be brought to the temple, and there they are to remain. And he taught them, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer, but ye have made it a den of thieves. And the scribes and chief priests heard it and sought how they might destroy him.

In the morning, they come again to Jerusalem, the fig tree being found dried up from the roots on the way, and Jesus

asks the chief priests, scribes and elders, The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men. And they answer that they cannot tell, for they fear the people.

They that receive not the baptism of John shall proceed no further. The highest in religion in the most advantaged nation that has ever been on earth were those of whom, in essence, Jesus said, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever.

All flesh is grass.

The millenia have proved it. Israel evidenced it. All nations have witnessed it. What more is there to say ?

Repent.

Heed the messenger who prepares the way.

Jew and Gentile. Young and old. Rich and poor. Privileged and common. Male and female. Whoever has being. Whoever is; esti.

Repent.

The Meaning of Repentance

The Greek word commonly translated repentance in the AV is *metanoia. Meta* means change. *Noia* means mind. But this is not what we casually refer to as a "change of mind". What is usually meant by that is, actually, a change of opinion or, even more superficially, a change of decision.

To change one's opinions is not to repent.

The superstitious barbarians on the island of Melita, Acts 28:2, first thought that Paul was a murderer when a snake bit him.

They had a superstitious opinion, unfounded on proper evidence. However they then changed their opinion when Paul remained unharmed and, again superstitiously - and now idolatrously - thought he was a god.

The AV reads that they 'changed their mind', Acts 28:6. But this is a bad translation. The word here is *metaballo*, not *metanoia*. *Metaball*o is to 'change cast'. As though, when one has an opinion about a person or an event or a scenario, one casts a net over it to encapsulate it, label it and store it in the memory as a particular thing. If circumstances change one's opinion about that matter, one changes the cast, one casts again - a different 'net' - and one's mind retains another view of that which the eyes see.

The mind is the same, unchanged. It is changed circumstances that have caused one to cast, from the mind, another net over a visible scene, that catches it up and retains its memory as an item of a certain character.

'Pigeon-holing', as we call it. Capturing what we see and hear, and retaining the memory in a labelled area in our mind. Then re-capturing it to place it in another 'pigeon-hole'. Information storage and retrieval, as it might be termed. But *metaballo* is not repentance. *Metaballo* is just a change of opinion by the same, unchanged mind. The mind may retrieve many things, sort them out, re-label them and replace them in different areas. But repentance is something else altogether.

It is comparatively easy to change one's religious opinions.
But that is not what repentance means.

With changed opinions may come a change in circumstances and a change of company. That is still not what repentance means.

Repentance is to have the mind itself changed, not merely its contents. Repentance is to have a different mind, with a different way of working.

The beginning of the gospel is the changed mind which results from the ministry of a preparative messenger. A changed mind is suited to an honest and good heart. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel, saith the Lord, Hebrews 8:10. Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers. They continued not in my covenant - that is, the first covenant, the legal covenant made with natural man - and I regarded them not, saith the Lord.

No, this is the covenant that the Lord makes with the house of Israel - that is the true seed, not natural Israel after the flesh - I will put my laws into their mind, *dianoia*, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God and they shall be to me a people.

When God gives a man a new mind, in which he writes his laws; and a new heart, in which he also writes his laws; then, in such a condition, after such a baptism, is a man ready to receive the messenger of the covenant.

But 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, I Corinthians 2:14. Paul could not speak to the Corinthian church, at a certain time, as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal. He could only speak of carnal things to them.

Just as he speaks to the Galatian churches, I travail in birth again, until Christ be formed in you, Galatians 4:19. And as the writer to the Hebrews in chapter six and verse one, Leaving the principles, archon, of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on…..

The ministry of John the Baptist, the preparative messenger, is a ministry that prepares the heart and mind for the coming of Christ to the soul, as conveyed in the gospel. It, itself, does not convey Christ. It prepares for that event. And if the preparation is not received, nor will Christ be received.

Witness the first of Jesus' parables in Mark, of the which he, himself states, Mark 4:13, Know ye not this parable ? And how then will ye know all parables ?

First of all it needs to be seen when, and to whom, Jesus gives the explanation of the parable, Mark 4:10. Jesus was alone. But the twelve were with him and so were 'they that were about him'. But how can 'they' be about him, with the twelve, when he is 'alone' ?

Surely this indicates that Jesus is separate, in some way, alone. Then there are those who are 'about' him. These are 'with' the twelve.

The word 'alone' translates *katamonas*. *Mono* is as it sounds - to be by one's self. *Kata* is a word which I understand to be indicative of headship. *Kata* has meanings referring to that which comes down from above; that which exerts a force downwards. Surely here we see the risen, ascended Head of all that is, now, in 'the Christ'.

Then there are those about him, who are 'with' the twelve. These are clearly they who are in the fellowship with the apostles. They do not transgress, II John 9, but they abide in the doctrine of Christ and they have both the Father and the Son. They continue steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, Acts 2:42.

There can be no fellowship where there is no doctrine.

It is to these, in such circumstances, that the parable is revealed. And, if so, that this prime parable is revealed, then here, in such circumstances, shall all things be revealed. And in no other. From the risen, ascended Head, in fellowship with the apostles, shall those who are under the headship receive, from above, all revelation.

And these, all of these, have, first, been baptised by the Preparative Messenger.

Which is the teaching of the parable. That four conditions of earth - north, south, east and west - received the seed of the word. The seed was the same in each case. So was the sower. What was different was the degree of preparation.

1…….The Wayside Ground

Satan is involved in the sowing of the word. And he always will be. That immense being, possessed of God-given authority over creation, who, rightfully, retains that power until the end of this present creation, just as men, who, though sinners, still retain their God-given immortality. This immense being of vast intelligence and global power - expressed in vision by a great red dragon with seven heads and ten horns, Revelation 12:3 - will, always, be intensely interested, and wholly involved whenever in time and wherever on earth the gospel is preached by one who is prepared by God to preach it, taught of God to preach it, sent by God to preach it and anointed by God to preach it.

Satan, has, of course, multitudes of his own preachers who are already fully under his own, powerful control. The man of God is not his, and for this very reason he will appear, as he appears nowhere else, when the seed of the word of the truth of the gospel is sown.

Immediately, he will snatch it away as soon as it is sown.

The word was sown in the heart. Satan has access to - these - hearts. And, if he has access, he will take away the word that was sown in the heart.

None can resist this process, if they be wayside hearers. Hearers in which there was no preparation whatsoever. The ground had not come under cultivation at all. The seed lay, exposed, upon ground which could not support its growth. No labour whatsoever had been expended to ensure that if seed fell, it would grow. The ground was utterly unfit for the purpose of growing seed. It was suitable for feet to trample upon it and served that purpose well. It was walked all over, day by day.

This ground, unprepared for cultivation by the Sower, was permitted to be trampled upon by anyone who felt like trampling on it. Free access was given to any foot that wished to pass over it. It was never preserved by any kind of barrier, in order to mark it out for cultivation. No barriers; no signs to warn people away; no distinctions; no special treatment of the ground in preparation; nothing.

No fence to keep people out. No sign to tell people that this was a special piece of ground for a special purpose. No, anyone may walk all over it at any time. Trample away; feel free.

He that *hath* no rule over his own spirit *is like* a city *that is* broken down *and* without walls, Proverbs 25:28.
But she who is being prepared, as a bride, is like a garden enclosed, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed, Song of Solomon.

Without a changed mind, the heart is accessible to Satan and, unchallenged, he removes the seed forthwith. The ground

belongs to him.

2....The Stony Ground

Some become offended. This is because of lack of roots. And the lack of roots is caused by insufficient depth. And the insufficient depth is due to stoniness.

But it takes time to reveal this condition, for, at first, they were, apparently, the best of hearers, the most receptive, seemingly, showing gladness. The most responsive were they, outwardly, and that with great rapidity. As soon as the seed was sown, there was an abundance of movement, a wealth of emotion - on the surface. But no fruitfulness, for all was just superficial growth which, in the event, was incapable of actually bearing any fruit at all. The growth that was visible was not able to bear fruit - produce seed - nor was that, actually, the purpose of the growth.

Stoniness is not apparent - at first.
But circumstances will reveal it.

To produce seed, there must, first, be invisible growth below ground - the putting down of roots, deep into the soil, so that nourishment may be gained for the strong growth which is required that a plant may produce after its own kind. Mere vegetation is pointless. The sowing of seed for cultivation purposes is to produce more seed. Some of the seed produced will be, say, ground for flour and some will be re-sown next season.

There is a Sower involved. This is to purpose, not random. Albeit the Sower knows that some seed will be fruitless, nevertheless the seed is sown, gratuitously, that some increase might be gained.

But some will be offended in this process. Persecution or affliction was not on the agenda for these. It was all about them. They sprang up, gladly - immediately. Afterward, their gladness turned to sadness as did one who came, running, and kneeling, Mark 10:17, eager to know what he might do to inherit eternal life. But he went away sad, for Jesus told him to go and sell what he had, and give to the poor, and come, take up the cross, and follow me. He went away, grieved, for he had great possessions.

His heart was where his treasure was. On earth. And his running and eagerness were just not deep enough. Had he meditated on these things by day and by night? Did he think on the very things that were, in fact, preventing his spiritual progress? Or was he preoccupied with the very things that were dragging him downwards and backwards ? Was his joy and pleasure, in fact, in the great possessions which he had acquired, and held on to ?

But clean beasts chew the cud and walk with carefulness on a cloven hoof. The blessed man meditates in the law - torah; instruction - of the Lord day and night, Psalm 1:2. He delights in the teaching of the Lord. No man sees this ruminating, re-digesting, thoughtful pondering that proceeds, when no eye on earth perceives, by day and by night.

None see when a man repairs to his closet and shuts the door. Some, of course, in effect, leave the door open by telling us what hour they start and finish their private devotions. But the godly man does not. Nor do the godly show any interest in the privacies of another. Hast thou faith ? Have it to thyself, before God, Romans 14:22

Heart matters are conducted deep, deep in the heart. Such occupation, at times, will attract criticism from others. Often, it will be from those closest to oneself.

Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business ? said the boy, Jesus. But his mother took no offence at that saying. Rather she, Luke 2: 51, kept all these sayings - that is, the one which is reported to us and the many other like sayings which have not been reported to us - in her heart.

Deep, deep down, the sayings of her son, Jesus, penetrated into the heart of his mother. And she was not offended. At first, she had made an enquiry. But on hearing the response, the word of Christ fell upon good ground.

Nor was she offended when he, now grown, responded to her statement, They have no wine, with, Woman, what have I to do with thee ? Mine hour is not yet come. No, not offended. Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it, she commanded unto the servants. John 2:3 -5. Spiritualities took precedence. She accepted the rebuke. She submitted, correcting the situation. She took no offence. For the mother of Jesus had long kept things in her heart.

Long before, thirty years before, all who heard the report of the shepherds of the angels and the babe in the manger, 'wondered' at those things, Luke 2:18. And many still do, admiring, marvelling, wondering. It goes no deeper. But Mary, the rather, verse 19, kept all these things and pondered them….. in her heart.

Mary kept the matters of the birth of Jesus Christ and pondered them in her heart. Twelve years later, she heard sayings from the lips of the boy, Jesus of Nazareth. And kept all of those sayings in her heart. Eighteen years later, she was not offended when Jesus of Nazareth said to her, Woman, what have I to do with thee ?

Nor did she take offence on another occasion when, coming to

the door of a house where Jesus was preaching, and enquiring after him, he said, Who are my mother and my brethren ? They that hear the word of God, and do it.

No, not offended; but retaining all that she heard in her heart, she pondered. And accepted rebuke and correction, when it was applied to her. Such is the ground, prepared by the Preparative Messenger, wherein the word of God, when it falls there, takes deep, deep root. And, in due time, with patience, brings forth abundantly.

But stony ground does not permit roots to push down into the depths, that moisture and nutriments may be accessed for growth. The stoniness keeps roots out of that area which would, if accessed, provide nurture. The stones form a barricade that is impenetrable. No growth is possible, for the stones should, first, have been removed.

Before sowing seed, effort must be applied to dig deep enough and remove resistance in order that, when the seed is sown, roots may be formed to sufficient depth to ensure downward growth. Upward growth is still possible, but will soon - very soon - prove unsustainable if no nourishment - water and minerals, phosphates and nitrates - can be gathered from the depths.

To survive in times of affliction or persecution, a good root is necessary. Else, the hearer will be swept away. Every profession will be tried, in time. It is of the Lord that it is so. The Lord trieth the righteous - the justified. The Lord permits trials and afflictions to assail the godly. And he delivers the godly out of them. Or preserves them through them.

Malachi asks us, Malachi 3:2, that when the Messenger of the Covenant, the Lord whom ye seek, comes, who shall abide the day of his coming ? Who, indeed. Only those who have been

prepared by the first messenger. Only those whose hearts are ready for the word to be sown into good ground.

Only those whose hearts are not so stonily hard that the word cannot send down roots into them. Those whose hearts are still hard shall not abide the coming of the Lord.

But those whose heart is a heart of flesh - a warm, living, pulsing heart - they love the Lord. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth, Revelation 14:4. They shall never be offended, even unto death. They take joyfully the spoiling of their goods, Hebrews 10:34. And what shall I more say ? For others are tortured, not accepting deliverance, Hebrews 11:35, others have trials of mockings and scourgings, yea moreover of bonds and imprisonments. These all, and many others, obtain a good report through faith.

For every single one of them was baptised, first, by the Preparative Messenger, before ever the word was sown.

3....The Thorny Ground

This condition is one where another life form intrudes on the growing crop. It is a matter of competition by another kind of living growth.

The word 'choke', Mark 4:19, is *apopnigo*. *Pnigo* means to choke. The prefix *apo* may be a superlative or it may be repetitive. Here I must say that, in my own view, the lexicographers have not, generally, appreciated the imaginative Greek use of the prefix *apo*. To constantly, and irritatingly, simplify the prefix to 'away' is not helpful to those who diligently seek the true subtleties of the wording that the Holy Ghost has used in the God-breathed scriptures.

The translators, in this place, have given us 'choke' for

apopigno when that is exactly what the root word *pnigo* means. Perhaps, unable to simply dismiss *apo* as meaning 'away', they wished to venture no further. 'Choke away' would have been ridiculous, so we are left with 'choke' and are given nothing for *apo*.

Apo can be a superlative. It can also be repetitive. *Apo* is an extension of the verb it prefixes. *Apo* extends the meaning of the root word. It may extend the meaning in different ways, but extension of meaning is definitely what it does as even a cursory glance down the list of meanings of *apo* verbs will indicate.

So *apopnigo* could be repetitive choking or it could be superlative choking, that is, choking to death. Since Jesus says, specifically, that the word becomes unfruitful, rather than being destroyed altogether, I would say that repeated choking is in view, not destructive, fatal choking. Whatever is the case, it is the unfruitfulness that is paramount. If it was choked to death, as it were, then it is unfruitful. If repeatedly choked to the degree that it failed of its purpose of existence, then that is, in effect, the same thing.

Choking is a threat to life. Prolonged, it is fatal. This is a question of survival. The thorns compete for space, light, water and nutriment from the soil. Thorny, they are useless as fruit. They serve no purpose to the Sower. They cumber the ground. They choke what might have been of purpose.

Cares of this world, note; not things of this world. Deceitfulness of riches, note; not money itself. Desires of other things, note; not the existence of the things themselves. It is not possible to live in this present body and in this present world without some interaction with material things. Food, clothing, eating utensils, bedding, shelter, the necessity of earning an honest living, the need to learn a trade, the state of

marriage, the responsibility of children; all these things, in and of themselves, are not the actual issue, here. Nor is money, itself. Nor things. Nor even the desire for things, in and of itself.

It is the 'entering in' that is crucial.
Note again the wording of Jesus. Entering in is what matters.

Those who would forbid the eating of meat, or would frown on eating as such, ridiculous as that is; those who would forbid to marry; those who would criticise the learning of a proper trade; these will pounce, ignorantly, on passages such as this, attempting to foist their own unpleasant attitudes on others.

Read properly, this place clearly demonstrates that the unfruitfulness of the word is a matter of the heart. It is that which enters the heart that disrupts fruitfulness. The objects themselves are not the issue. We are told that time is short and that certain who use this world should not abuse it, I Corinthians 7:31. Those who have wives should be - that is, should be in heart - as those who have none. They that weep should not be consumed and overcome with their sorrow to their own spiritual detriment and the detriment of others.

There are those who, due to their station in life and their natural abilities, are able to use this world to profit, using their talent and benefiting many. But they are not to be so preoccupied that it is damaging. Marriage is beneficial to many but should not be allowed to be a hindrance to spiritual exercise and spiritual growth and spiritual fruitfulness.

Money itself is needful and earning it is an honourable thing to do. But not to the degree that ambition or pride or the whole natural process takes up so much time, so much energy or so much mental and emotional preoccupation that one's spiritual life suffers.

All things are lawful unto me, writes Paul, with his own hand, to the church of God which was at Corinth, I Corinthians 6:12, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.

The man who has been prepared by the first messenger for the coming of the Lord is a man who will be in control of himself. Spiritual things will come first. The word is paramount. His time, his natural duties, his bodily necessities, his responsibilities will be kept in balance such that the word will grow within his heart, unhindered by the excessive intrusion of other things - of any thing - into his heart.

Of course, things, themselves, do not enter the heart. It is the cares, the deceitfulness and the desires that enter the heart. Things in the world attract care, deceitfulness or desire and it is these that enter the heart. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him, saith John, for all that is in the world is not of the Father. That is, all that is the adorning - the *kosmos* - is not of the Father. The creation of God, in and of itself, was good. It is what mankind, under the influence of the Serpent, has adorned the earth with - the adorning of the earth - that is the world which contains what is not of the Father.

It is the world - the adorning - that, through the senses, affects the sensibilities. Then, these sensibilities enter the heart. The heart begins to desire things. The heart is deceived by things. The heart starts to care about things. The heart starts to desire things. So much so that, by degrees, and repeatedly, the word is choked.

For the word is that which should be growing in the heart, unhindered. It is through the word that The Word himself is formed within. I travail in birth again, says Paul, until Christ be formed in you, Galatians 4:19, at a time when, their

understanding being affected through bad doctrine, Christ was not dwelling in their hearts by faith, Ephesians 3:17, and, having begun in the Spirit, Galatians 3:3, they now attempted to perfect themselves by the flesh, and were, thus, not strengthened with might by the Spirit.

Through false words, their understandings were affected, the pure word of truth was no longer that which filled their mind. Had they changed their mind back again from the following of Christ ? O foolish Galatians, says Paul, 3:1. Have ye suffered so many things in vain ? If it be yet in vain.

It would all be vain, what they had suffered; a waste of time; a waste of effort; if their mind was changed back to their former state. Paul, nevertheless labours on their behalf with…. with what ? A message in song ? A booklet of daily 'devotional' messages to flick through, with cosy, warm sentimental phrases ? A hymn book stuffed with flowery, unscriptural, wishy washy tripe - with choruses *ad nauseam* ?

Verily not. Paul laboured in his epistle to the foolish Galatians with sound doctrine. He travailed over them with reasonable arguments. He fought for their souls with logical statements. Paul speaks to their minds, desiring to change their minds that they might have the mind of Christ. That Christ might, yet, be formed within them. That Christ might, through the word, understood in the mind, dwell in their hearts, by faith.

Faith is not an emotion. Faith is not a sentiment. Faith does not spring from, nor reside in, the flesh. Faith is the gift of God, for men are saved by grace, through faith, and that not of themselves: it is the gift of God, Ephesians 2:8. It is not of works, lest any man should boast.

They boast, however, who claim that faith was their doing; that it was they who chose Christ; that it was all down to their

'one good decision'; that they 'took that one step'; and that they, afterwards, now that they, themselves, have done something, themselves, that others do not - thus earning themselves wages of some sort - afterwards they can now take up the law again and perfect themselves after the flesh, having no need of the Spirit. So they believe of their own accord and they perfect themselves by means of the law. If so, then it is the flesh that perfects itself. For the law speaks to the flesh.

Thus, they do it all themselves. And they pray thus with themselves, God I thank thee that I am not as other men, Luke 18:11.

But those who receive the messenger who goes before the face of the Lord discover the truth of the depths of their own hearts. John's ministry pierces deep within them, imperatively, logically, sensibly and reasonably. By sound, sensible truth which cannot be denied; by sheer incontrovertible logic; by all that is reasonable; by all that is true and honest and right; by everything that rightly challenges the conscience and questions the very existence and being; by all this does the word of John purge the soul in the cleansing of baptism.

Thus shall the heart be made good and honest, Luke 8:15. The flesh is not made sinless. For sin is discovered in the flesh through John's ministrations. The heart is honest about the sin that dwells in the flesh. The heart is good in that it admits there is no goodness in the first man that is of the earth, earthy. No, John cries that all flesh is grass. And so it is. Flesh is not spirit. And the spirit that dwells in man lusts to envy, James 4:5. The soul is brought to mourn under John's words. To mourn the presence of a spirit that is contrary to all that is good, which affects the flesh and which stirs up sin in the flesh. And to mourn the absence of a better Spirit.

But blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted. By a Comforter.

But until such a Comforter come - O wretched man that I am ! cries Paul, Romans 7:24, under such a ministration as John Baptist's, Who shall deliver me from the body of this death ? Paul discovered covetousness within himself. No matter what he could do outwardly, a Pharisee of the Pharisees, yet nothing he did would quench the sin that rose up within his own flesh.

The good that he would do, that he does not. I am carnal, he admits, sold under sin. Sold, yes, because he sold himself, in Adam, embracing a covenant of works, but not having a Spirit within himself which would give him the life and strength to keep it. But there was a covenant yet to come, and a Messenger of the Covenant yet to be revealed, for which he should have waited patiently and in which he should have believed, obediently, accepting God's word that partaking of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil would result in death.

Voluntarily submitting himself to a covenant of works; of obligation, debt and reward; This do and thou shalt live; Paul found that the commandment which was to life, was, in his experience, unto death.

Alive, once, in his condition, satisfied with all his performance, replete with all his advantages and all his attainments, yet, once the piercing, irresistible, reasonable, logical, imperative and incontrovertible words of the messenger began the preparation, Paul - Saul, at the time - was slain. I know, he cries, that in me - that is, in my flesh - there dwelleth no good thing. I find a law that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.

None of this is outward. Men see nothing. It is all within the soul and the heart and the mind of the man being prepared.

Under the message of the preparation Paul discovered that his own existence was unbearable. Wretched.

Wretched, Paul ? What ? Thou who hast all that a man on earth could possibly want ? Circumcised the eight day of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin; an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless; brought up in Jerusalem at the feet of Gamaliel; taught according to the perfect manner of the law; zealous toward God; profited in the Jews' religion above many his equals in his own nation being more exceedingly zealous, Philippians 3:5; Acts 22:3; Galatians 1:14.

Yes indeed, says Paul. Wretched man, that I am. Who shall deliver me ? For the law said to him, thou shalt not covet. And Paul found another law in his members warring against the law of his mind. And what Paul discovered was that he needed a new mind and to wait for the Messenger who would speak a New Covenant to his wretched condition.

But only to those who, thus, have been prepared will the word spoken by the Messenger of the Covenant be fruitful. If the wayside is uncultivated, if the stones are left in; if the thorns remain, the word will just…..not……grow.

Thorny ground hearers can easily continue in a profession of religion and many shall be able to hide their true state from their fellows. For what is wrong is wrong in their heart. It is what is entering into their heart, day after day after day, that is choking the word. They are still hearing the word, but it does them no good for as soon as it grows, it is choked by the competing life forms that are penetrating the heart and choking the life of the word. Each seed of word sown grows to

a certain stage - and then is choked.

O, what a miserable existence is this - a half hearted state of lukewarmness that neither goes fully after the world nor goes zealously after the Lord. What is the point of doing this ? Indeed, there is no point. But without the deep spade work of the preparation, this is all that man will ever do. For salvation is of the Lord.

Those who have not been prepared shall eagerly, gladly, grasp at a gospel suited to their condition - the condition of man in the flesh who has not been awakened to the true reality of his appalling existence. Who has never really appreciated the ghastly state in which he has been brought into being. Who has never, ever, faced the reality of his origin or of his destiny. But it is not the gospel which is in the mouth of the Messenger of the Covenant. It is another gospel, which is not another. It is a perversion, Galatians 1:7.

Not so Paul and those who follow him, as he followed Christ. For Paul was first baptised by the preparative messenger, as is singularly obvious from Romans 7. For to follow Christ necessitates following him, first, through John's baptism. Jesus submitted to John's baptism, but a voice declared from heaven, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. We must follow Jesus' example and submit to the first messenger if we desire to follow Jesus himself.

This is the beginning of the gospel. The first messenger prepares the heart so that the seed sown by the Messenger of the Covenant will be fruitful.

4……..The Good Ground

But what of that ground which brought forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixtyfold and some an hundred ?

Of the three previous conditions, Jesus says that … they heard the word. But of the fourth he says, that they hear it and receive it . That is all.

These did nothing else.
No works are attributed to them at all.
They did nothing of themselves.
They were no different from the others in any respect other than this one thing.
Receptiveness.

That is what the preparation did. It made them receptive to the word.

The preparation of the ground made it receptive to seed. And therefore seed survived in it. And therefore seed grew in it. It is the seed that grows, not the ground. The word itself, grows of itself. It just needs a suitable environment, is all.

Given ground that is suitable for it, the word, itself, will flourish and produce fruit. All that a seed requires to grow and multiply after its own kind is already within the seed. It needs nothing other than a suited place to grow. That is, a separate place set aside for cultivation - not the wayside. And the absence of hard obstacles that just do not permit growth - not stoniness. And the absence of competing life forms that overwhelm the growth of the crop - not thorny ground.

Everything necessary is within the seed itself. Yes, a seed needs air and light and water and trace elements but these do not figure in the parable. The parable is about ground.

The word itself multiplies, given a suitable place. Witness the feeding of the five thousand, as reported by Mark. Three times is it mentioned in Mark 6: 30 to 35 that it is a desert place. And

it is five, of thousands.

The first significant use of the number five in scripture is in Genesis 43:34 when Joseph gives to his close brother, Benjamin - his mother's other son - five portions of food, during a time of famine. In Genesis 45:6 there are yet five years of famine, but Joseph says, God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. Yet again, Joseph gives his brother Benjamin five changes of raiment, Genesis 45:22. And, finally, when Joseph presents his people, the Hebrews, to Pharoah, Genesis 47:2, it is a representative five that he presents.

In a time of famine, Joseph, the one chosen by God to deliver and preserve his people, to preserve them as a posterity on the earth and to save their lives - it is Joseph who supplies his own close kindred with food times five and raiment times five. And it is five who represent God's preserved people before the earthly rule.

Seen as a preserved posterity in the providence of God. Seen as those who will, ever, be nourished by God as they sojourn, a chosen nation, from which nation will come all deliverance for the whole earth, the number five is used in significance and in representation.

The five thousand, unsustainable in the desert, are fed with food which multiplies to their need in the hands of those sent - 'apostles' are specifically mentioned, unusually, in Mark 6:30. And this under the direction of the Messenger of the Covenant himself.

He had expected the apostles to do this of their initiative, Give ye them to eat, Mark 6:37. But he, himself, must needs display a figure which could have been portrayed by the apostles themselves, without his direct involvement. Later, Jesus walks

upon the sea and would have passed by them. Only because they are troubled does he join them in the ship, saying, Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid.

But they were amazed, and wondered. Both of these words are used in the gospel writings to denote that which is merely carnal, not spiritual. For, Mark 6:52, they considered not the miracle of the loaves: for their heart was hardened.

Hardened ?
After John the Baptist's ministry ?
Stony ground ?

Yes, and Jesus, incorporating the ministry of the preparative ministry into his own ministry - as he does - shall face them with their hardness, in due course, for it shall not go unnoticed; it shall not go unremarked upon; and it shall not go undealt with.

In association with Galilee - 'Galilee of the Gentiles', an area halfway, as it were, between Israel and the heathen nations - and in association with Decapolis, ten cities - a representation of the complete number of cities on the whole earth - Jesus desires the apostles to feed four thousand, a number significant of north, south, east and west.

I have compassion on the multitude…and if I send them away…they shall faint, Mark 8:3 But his disciples question, Whence can a man satisfy these with bread in the wilderness ?

Again, Jesus has expected the initiative to come from them. I have compassion. If I send them away, they shall faint. And he waits for their response.

Later, they reason about bread, Mark 8:16. Perceive ye not ? he asks. Neither understand ? Have ye your heart yet

hardened ? Having eyes, see ye not ? Having ears, hear ye not ? Do ye not remember ?

He asks questions of them. He receives monosyllabic answers.

And he said unto them, How is it that ye do not understand ?

The truth is that under the direction of the Messenger of the Covenant there will be those appointed to whom he gives the authority, and the ability, to multiply the word that it shall satisfy all. And he expects them to do it.

Many shall attempt to do it who are neither called to the task nor given the ability. It will be evident that the word does not multiply in their hands. And the people shall be hungry.

But under the direction of the Messenger of the Covenant, the Lord himself, shall food abundant be given to all who hunger.

And under the direction of God, the Father, who sends the preparatory messenger before the face of the Messenger of the Covenant, the Lord, shall the word of the first messenger sink deep down in the ears of those hearers who shall, thus prepared, receive the word, later, when it is sown, by the Lord himself, through chosen vessels.

But those who rebel against the methods of God Almighty shall make no progress whatsoever. They may do as they wish. They may attempt to copy and mimic what they will. Their rebellion and defiance of the Almighty shall do themselves no good whatsoever. This is the way he has ordained.

For this is the only possible way for men to be saved.
Salvation is not possible by any other means.

Therefore, hear the word…… and receive it.

And in order to hear, and receive, the word of the truth of the gospel, it is, first, necessary to receive John's baptism.

The Baptism

Two words are used, predominantly, in the gospel writings in regard to washing, *louo* and *nipto*. Jesus says to Peter, as recorded by John 13:10, He that is washed, louo, needeth not save to wash, nipto, his feet, but is clean every whit.

Washed wholly in regeneration, the heart and the mind, it is needful only, day by day, to be cleansed by the Lord, in his grace, of that which mires us in our walk through this sinful world. Yet Jesus says to Peter, If I wash, *nipto*, thee not, thou hast no part with me, John 13:8. To remain dirty is to have no part with Christ.

Yet there is a constant temptation to shrink from a daily cleansing. Pride, fear, shame, distrust all work to keep the soul from the only way, the unique way, of receiving cleansing on the journey through this arena of evil. Within, sin in the flesh still lurks. That which is without, in the world, has its correspondence to that which is within us. Not till the flesh is actually, physically deceased in the grave will sin cease to, physically, be present in flesh and blood.

Sin may rise up within, making its presence known, defiling - to some extent - the interior. We may stumble, we may even fall. But a justified man falleth seven times, Proverbs 25:16, and riseth up again.

We need but to receive the washing that he gives who laid aside his garments - his glory - and took a towel - his humanity - and acted the part of a servant to wash his own people. For

all those who are washed in regeneration shall find that they are the ones for whom Christ suffered in order that their sins might be remitted. The baptism of John is unto [*eis*] the remission of sins.

And for every sheep for whom Christ suffered, there is a fountain opened in the house of David for all uncleanness. In David's house, where David reigns not only as a King but as the Head of the household, there is a fountain. And, once bathed in the baptism of regeneration, we only need to have our feet washed.

The washing of regeneration, under the ministry of John, and the renewal of the Holy Ghost, Titus 3:5, which is shed abundantly through Jesus Christ the Saviour is not, Titus 3:5 again, by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saves us. It is not anything to do with any works that a man ever does. It is all - absolutely all - according to the mercy of God our Saviour, who will have all men to be saved, I Timothy 2:4, that is every kind of men, every disposition found amongst men, every type of men - none is excluded because of background, birth, nationality, disability of mind or body, lack of gifts or lack of abilities, personal susceptibilities or personal weaknesses - no, none whatsoever. All men.

If no works are required then ability is not an issue.
Nothing is an issue.

This grace is not earned; it is received.
This mercy is not deserved; it is yielded to.
This salvation is not wrought by us; it is gratuitous.
Faith is not a work of the flesh; it is the gift of God.

Let him that is athirst, come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely. Revelation 22:17.

The baptism of John, particularly, at the time it happened, was the last thing that Israel would show forth in figure. Thereafter, all was reality as the Messiah, himself, walked among them.

As to John's baptism, Jesus said, Matthew 3:15, Suffer it now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Once this was accomplished, fully, throughout Judaea and all Jerusalem, there was nothing left to show forth in figure, type and depiction. All was fulfilled.

Israel showed forth, typically and figuratively, the Preparation of the first Messenger. There is a baptism which is that of the heart and the mind - this is the reality. The baptism to which Israel submitted, in Jordan, was the figure of this reality. And it was the last thing that Israel would do, figuratively. Thereafter they should, as individuals, receive the reality of the baptism of regeneration.

Louo and *nipto* are used of washing, generally.
The word *baptizo* has been kept, by the Holy Ghost, specifically to refer to spiritual cleansing or to refer to that outward and public confession of what has occurred spiritually.

Both Mark and the writer to the Hebrews also use the word, first, cynically, in reference to the washing of crockery and earthenware when it is clear that persons are carrying out a 'baptism' of ritualistic dish washing rather than submitting to an inward and spiritual baptism, Mark 7:4; Mark 7:8; or, secondly, comparatively, when weighing the importance of figurative ritual against fulfilled reality, Hebrews 9:10.

Four times, also, the word is used in connection with Judas Iscariot who, evidently, did not submit to the baptism of John,

else he would have had the lust of money removed from his heart and he would not have betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. The word, *bapto*, or its equivalent, *embapto*, is used, therefore, ironically, in John 13:26, Matthew 26:23, Mark 14:20 and, again in John 13:26. Judas Iscariot had but to receive, not just hear, the words of John in regard to sharing two coats with the possessor of none in order that the word might go deeply within him and root out the thorns which would, eventually, choke the word and end in his betrayal and suicide.

Right to the very last moment, when Jesus uses the word *bapto* of dipping the sop, there was opportunity for Judas Iscariot to repent - to have another mind with regard to money and its use and its importance. To just be reasonable about what he was doing. Jesus reminds him that they were both baptised in the communal "dish". He that baptiseth with me. Both had been in the waters of Jordan. But Judas took the sop and went out.

Furthermore, the word is used in Luke 16:24 by the rich man who cries to his father Abraham that Lazarus - the erstwhile poor beggar whom the rich man had driven past daily as he begged at his gate - the man now in the bosom of Abraham would dip, bapto, his finger in water that he, the rich man, may have his tongue cooled in his torment. How ironic that the man who had paid no heed to the universal message that having more than one's neighbour is, self evidently 'out of is', should, his own self, use the word baptise of a finger dipped in water. Had he been baptised, in reality, he would have been in Abraham's bosom himself.

Great care is required in commenting on Luke 16:19 to 31. This much I would say, that the rich man has Abraham to his father, of which John the Baptist said, Begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father. Had the rich man

submitted to John's baptism, he would have no need that Lazarus should baptise his finger in water for his own sake.

And, lastly, Revelation 19:13 tells us of one upon whose head are many crowns, and he is clothed with a vesture dipped, *bapto*, in blood. His name is called the Word of God.
Jesus said to the sons of Zebedee, Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of ? And be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with ?

Baptism is a matter of washing; cleansing. It is intimate. It is personal.

In the washing of John's baptism, the subject is separated from the wayside area, first, in order for the cleansing process to be applied. Not outwardly, for this is a spiritual process. Ascetic seclusion is not in view. This is a heart process. Outward circumstances may, or may not, be present to assist the process. It is not important. The process will still be done, whatever the facilities happen to be. The heart will become unavailable to Satan that he will no longer be able to pluck away every word that is sown. There will be a separation of heart. Cleansing.

The changing of the mind, *metanoia*, will ensure that the understanding itself is altered. The understanding will then be wholesome. Satan will not have access. He will still attempt it, but, James 4:7, Resist the Devil and he will flee from you. Resist him with the understanding of the mind.

Stones will be removed that the word, to be sown later, shall not be hindered from sending down roots. Cleansing.

Blockages to the understanding will be removed as the mind, itself, is changed. Then, the understanding will be free.

The thorny growths already present in the ground, above the surface and underneath it, will be removed so that there will be no competition to choke the word when it shall be sown. Cleansing.

All that is in the world will be seen in a new way. The understanding, in the new mind, will perceive all that is in the world for what it really is.

Change the mind and the understanding is changed.
This is a cleansing. This is a baptism.

And how does it actually happen ?
It happens in the same way that the word, later, is sown.

It is done under the ministry of a messenger. Who speaks.

Everything is by the word. Everything depends on the reception of the word. Those who do not receive the word of the first, preparatory messenger shall not be suitably prepared for the second, Covenant Messenger. If they heard, but did not receive, the first word, they shall hear, and not receive, the second word. Maybe there will be apparent growth. But it shall not last. It will bear no fruit.

For who shall abide the day of his coming - the Messenger of the Covenant ? None but they who have received - not just heard - the preparative messenger.

And what shall be the end of those who receive not the preparation and who, as an inevitable consequence, are simply not able, despite their glad receiving and sprouting up, despite their enduring a while as the thorns repeatedly choke, just not able to bring forth any fruit at all ?

Well, many shall seek to enter in, but shall not be able, Luke

13:24. No, because they did not receive the preparation.

Many will continue all their lives in a profession of some kind or other, sitting in pews, always hearing, but never making one foot of progress for the rest of their lives. For this cause many shall heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears. Yes, their ears itch to hear anything - just anything - other than that to which they have already hardened their hearts - the preparation. Desperate to receive momentary sensations, desperate to qualm the growing fear of death, desperate to maintain a pretence of religion, desperate to convince others, and themselves, that they are what they profess to be, yes, desperately shall they hear anyone and anything - but not the preparation.

They shall, for the rest of their lifetimes, seek to enter in.
But they shall not be able.

Because they are dishonest.
And, deep down, they know it.

Luke 8:15, But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.

The heart is made good and honest under the baptism of John, before ever the gospel is even preached. It is the cleansing of the ministry of preparation that makes a heart good and honest, nothing else.

The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it ? Jeremiah 17:9.
God knows it. And God sends his preparative messenger to deal with it. And God, in the person of the Holy Ghost, is the One who takes the words of John and applies them in the soul, driving them deep, deep down. He is the One who, by the word

of John, digs and delves deeply to eradicate all that is contrary. He is the One who separates a man and then removes stones and thorns, cleansing the heart and making it good and honest.

My lovers and my friends stand aloof from my sore; and my kinsmen stand afar off, Psalm 38:11. As the Holy Ghost works within the depths to reveal to the soul the true condition of one's own vile heart - the depravity of it, the deceitfulness of it, the hypocrisy of its ways, the movings of sin where none can see but the soul can feel, the eruptions of the natural life that is deeply tainted with sin, the lusts that heave within where no human eye can observe - as this is faced by the soul, it is like a festering sore or boil that runs and oozes, by day and by night. And all will stand aloof.

Natural man does not wish to admit to the truth of what is within. All manner of pretence and covering up and hypocrisy, however, cannot hide the actual reality of the state of the human heart. Condemnation of others is universal; it is one of the means that man has of diverting attention away from himself, to condemn one - whom he thinks to be - worse than he is.

But the Holy Ghost, using the words of John, will drive this one fact deep into the soul - that he, himself, must face judgment. Thine arrows stick fast in me, Psalm 38:2, and thy hand presseth me sore.

There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither rest in my bones because of my sin, Psalm 38:3.

Writhe this way and that; try to escape; attempt to divert the mind; strive to cast it all off; nothing - but nothing - will avail if the word of John is applied by the might of the Holy Ghost. Nothing.

I write from my own, personal experience of repeated breakdowns, as they might be termed, when I tried to resist this work, for I felt I should not receive it. I conscientiously believed that it was not possible for me to receive such a ministration. Therefore I resisted with all my strength. I just could not.

A hand pressed down upon my soul, pressing the word of God forcibly into my mind, till the word ran like water within me, word upon word, flowing like a river through my soul.
Cleansing.

A cleansing flow as the mind was changed by the formation of the word within.

Fighting for all I was worth against what I believed was not for me, I either tried to distract myself or tried to drown the ministrations with other occupation. Nothing, but nothing availed. In the end, I realised, perforce, that what I had understood to be the case - that I could not be a subject of such a work - was simply not true.

I passed through judgment, while all my sins came before me, right back to my infancy. And the sins most brought to my attention - for this was not my doing, it was done to me - were sins of unbelief. Unbelief against Christ. Disbelief of the true nature of God himself. A deep distrust, gendered in infancy, lurking within my own nature and fostered by the influences of others, was exposed to my own soul.

I came to realise that God was not, at all, whom I supposed him to be. My bondage and my darkness were all - all - due to the willing subjection of myself to a way of self righteousness that does nothing but lead to death.

Born in Adam, I was already enslaved, but, as soon as I was

able, I also chose the way of self righteousness, self preservation and self exaltation. It is the only choice I ever make, as a man in the flesh. It is a way of death.

In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die.

And die I did. And die I always would. For nothing can come of that way but death. Sold under sin, was I. O wretched man that I am ! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death ? Romans 7:24.

All these things I endured alone, for none was with me to help me. Night after night I wandered in the dark, in distress of soul, with none to speak to me and none to advise me or instruct me. I could do no other than receive all that was laid upon me. I yielded to it all. Cleansing.

Baptism.

For the truth is that the baptism of John is part of the process of being born again. Saith Jesus in John 3:5, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

Being born again necessitates a preparation by God Almighty himself, by the words of the preparative messenger which he, himself, authorises and sends. Receiving these words, there will be a cleansing that will separate a soul and remove from the soul that which prohibits the growth of the word within it.

This, and this only, is the beginning of the gospel.

This is the *archon* of the evangel, Mark 1:1.
This is the principle of the doctrine, Hebrews 6:1.
Being born of water results in a change of mind, that is, the mind is changed. It is not possible to access the heart save

through the mind. The heart is not the natural affections, let it be said. The heart is the core of the being. It is that which wills. It is that which pulses. There is nothing deeper.

Natural affections, sentiments and emotions are all subject to fluctuations. The heart is that which is fixed on a purpose. Many may talk about their hearts when they are actually referring to momentary feelings and affections. They thus avoid facing the fact that their heart is set, like a limpet stuck to a rock, on one certain thing.

The heart is always set on one certain thing. That is its nature.
It is possible to have a double mind.
And they that have two minds are enjoined to purify their hearts, James 4:8.
That is, to resolve the issue by forsaking one of those minds.
For there can only be one heart.
Only one purpose.

Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things. But one thing is needful.

Nothing, but nothing, can move the heart from one purpose to another, except through the mind.

Religion which attempts to influence people through the emotions and the sentiments and the natural affections is not only futile, it is quite disgusting, for all such coercion has no place in religion whatsoever.

This sort of behaviour should be left in the hands of that disreputable section of the retail trade which is known to deliberately employ 'hurry-up' music in their establishments - specially chosen, psychologically aimed portions of music which affect the emotions in such a way that 'impulse' purchases are more likely.

It is utterly disgusting to sit in a pew or a chair as someone on a platform or a pulpit attempts to coerce members of the public with emotional influences. This may be using sentimental influences aimed at inducing momentary feelings of the flesh, or it may be using legalistic bullying in an attempt to induce naturally guilty feelings, often about quite legitimate, natural instincts. Whichever way, it is utterly disgusting.

The gospel of God speaks to the mind.
To be precise, it speaks to the changed mind.

For the carnal mind is at enmity with God. It is not subject to the laws of God, neither indeed can it be. But we, writes the apostle Paul, have the mind of Christ, I Corinthians 2:16.

John's ministry, the ministry of preparation, is not a legalistic ministry. In fact, one of the purposes of this preparation is to dig far, far deeper than the type of ministry that terrorises its hearers into adopting a system of legality - a collection of religious duties, performed under fear. This type of ministry will do nothing for the soul except either induce sheer hypocrisy and a self-important attitude, Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou, Isaiah 65:5, or it will result in utter despair and, possibly, a state of desperate rebellion against impossible tasks.

As to terror, they who know the terror of the Lord persuade men, not terrorise them, II Corinthians 5:11, and Jeremiah prays to the Lord that he will not be a terror unto him. Be not a terror unto me: thou art my hope in the day of adversity, Jeremiah 17:17.

But those who, like the Son of man, Mark 10:45, come not to be ministered unto but to minister are, though they be the

greatest - in ability, gift, prominence and expression - yet are they as the servants of all, not having dominion of the faith of others, but being helpers of their joy, II Corinthians 1:24.

To those afflicted and tossed with tempest - as they patiently receive the word of the Baptist and meekly submit to the effects of that word, in the ministrations of the Holy Ghost - it is said, All thy children *shall be* taught of the Lord. For it is spoken to heavenly Jerusalem, the city of God, the people of his choice. Taught of the Lord, they are told, Thou shalt be established in righteousness: thou shalt be far from oppression; for thou shalt not fear: and from terror; for it shall not come near thee, Isaiah 54: 11 to 14.

The word *peitho* - persuade, in II Corinthians 5:11, Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men - is elsewhere translated assure, have [or give] confidence, make one's friend, trust. Ten times it is 'persuade'. Those who, singularly, know terror from the Lord do not, then, terrorise others. That is not the purpose of a certain few being led through such deep waters. No, they, as a result, persuade, assure, give confidence, to others.

These have no desire to enslave others or to bully others into a state of bondage, that they may rule over them with rigour. Such as do so know only how to misuse law and how to elevate themselves into Moses' seat, without authority.

John's ministry digs deeper than this. We have seen, already, that John speaks of exesti, that which is improper in the very nature of existence.

John persuades men with reason. He faces men with what is profoundly sensible. And these words, in the ministration of the Holy Spirit are the means by which a changed mind is given to those who hear and receive such a ministry.

God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power and of love, and of a sound mind, II Timothy 1:7.

For repentance has been given - a free gift - to Israel, Acts 5:31, by him who has been exalted with the right hand of God to be a Prince and a Saviour. And God is glorified for he hath also, Acts 11:18, granted - freely - repentance to the Gentiles.

A changed mind is a gift from God to both Jew and Gentile.

John challenges his hearers to do that which is reasonable in their own circumstances and status. He adds no obligations or burdens. He requests the performance of no other duties than those which, naturally, fall to the lot of his hearers.

He makes no emotional appeal whatsoever. A changed mind is the result of his ministry - a cleansing worth the name of baptism.

Under such a ministry, the receptive hearer will face the deepest possible question. What is the purpose of existence ?

This is the heart discovered. The most fundamental aspect of the being. Why does it exist ?

For myself, I first faced this question at the age of six years old in the far north of Scotland where, at the time, the Shorter Catechism was taught to infants in primary school.

What is man's chief end ? asks question one, from the convocation in Westminster of the supposedly 'learned' and the supposedly 'divine' in 1643. The question is wrong.

Such a question brings the wrong answer, as is evident in the printed response taught, at the time, to infants just about able

to consume their free half pint of milk without assistance.

Just as the Serpent asked a question of a woman he should not have been addressing. She should not have replied. Her husband had been commanded by God with regard to a certain tree. Any question should be asked of him, the instructor. And should he be asked, he also should not reply. He had received instruction from Almighty God.

The question is wrong. For the gospel is not a matter of debate or discussion or committee meetings or convocations. The gospel is declared, proclaimed, by those who are authorised by God, separated by the Holy Ghost, prepared by the Lord, anointed by the Holy Spirit and sent, as under the apostles, though in their absence.

Let those who confer and conjoin and debate and discuss hear this :-

The purpose of God was, from everlasting, to bring many sons unto glory.
The purpose of God was, from everlasting, in his Son.
And he, the Son of God, is the one who appears as the Messenger of a Covenant which shall, forever, ensure the purposes of God and the Father.

Now tell me, what law will assist in this purpose ?

But this, of course, is the revelation of the gospel. Which will only be received by those who have received the preparation.

Others will be conspicuous, either by their rejection of the revelation or else by their apparent acceptance of it, for a time, until affliction or persecution causes offence or until the cares of this life, the deceitfulness of riches and the lusts of other things cause choking. But they may not, necessarily, leave

their profession or leave their 'place of worship' as men call their buildings.

Moreover, now we also see that 'apostasy' of which the apostle Paul prophesied, II Thessalonians 2:3. This is a Greek word which has been transliterated into English without being translated. Then a meaning, 'falling away' has been arbitrarily attached to it. I dispute the attachment of that meaning.

The word is *apostasis*.

Stasis, itself, has been translated dissension, insurrection, sedition and uproar. So it would seem to mean uprising. Clearly an 'uprising away' is illogical. If *apo* be an extension of the verb it prefixes and if it be, sometimes, a superlative or, sometimes, a repetition or, sometimes, another kind of extending of the meaning of the verb it enhances, then I take it that, in this case, it is a superlative uprising; an uprising *en masse.*

It would seem to me that the evolution of Hellenistic Greek over the several centuries during which it developed, at a time of great interest in the freedom of art, architecture and government from unimaginative restrictions, resulted in a breadth of concept which is expressed in classical Greek. To restrict *apo* to merely 'away' or 'away from' does not do justice to the language itself or to the civilisation responsible for its structure.

Thus if I be correct in what I say, we do not see a falling nor do we see a departure away.

We would understand that there is an uprising, a mass rebellion, a superlative rebellion and sedition in the very place where those who rise up are already in place. That is, they rise up, in concert, superlatively - or perhaps repeatedly - and

certainly extensively - in an uproar and a dissension which effectively means that they have taken over the place wherein thy rebelled.

They haven't gone away, anywhere. More's the pity. They are all still there. And they are all still, united, ecumenically united, in a superlative dissension against - against what ? Well against the doctrine of the gospel, for the time will come that they will not endure sound doctrine but will heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears, II Timothy 4:3. So we have, now, heaps upon heaps of teachers, many of them scurrying around the countryside on a sunday creating unnecessary traffic on the roads as they go from their own town to another town, pointlessly, to stand up and 'teach'. Where on earth is the apostolic precedent or the scriptural justification for doing that, I beg to be informed ?

Who on earth dreamed that one up, I ask you ?

But it matters not what anyone does, now, for there is a superlative uprising of seditious uproar by those who remain in place, going not 'away' anywhere, nor 'falling' down at all, but sturdily standing up, *stasis*, in dissension, *en masse*. This is the very opposite attitude of those who meekly receive the word of the preparation and the word of the gospel. But the uprisers, to a man - and, more pertinently, to a woman - will have none of it. Not only, now, do they not receive the word - now, they will not endure even to hear sound didactics.

Now, we have *perilous times, traitors, fables, men of corrupt minds, seducing spirits, hypocrisy* and *heretics*. The words in italics are all taken from the pastoral epistles of Paul the apostle, who prophesied of everything that we now see around us.

But to those who have been through the cleansing baptism of

John, the revelation of the mystery in the gospel is all they want and all they hope for.

It is the answer to their very existence.

Such as these will, with meekness, receive the engrafted word which is able to save their souls. They will receive the very mind of Christ in a mystery. Their understanding will be no longer darkened. They will receive a love of the truth that they might be saved. Christ, himself, in a mystery, will be formed within them. Believing on the Lord Jesus Christ they will be saved and they will receive another Comforter, even the Holy Ghost, sent by the risen, ascended Christ himself. And they shall have a God - the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ shall be their God and their Father.

For they heard, and received, the ministry of the one sent to prepare the way.
For this, and this only, is the beginning of the gospel.

Then, in their own soul - within their own being - not externally in the company, not out there in the congregation, but - the kingdom of heaven is within you - yes, within, shall it be true that :-
Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain.

The Witness

John the Apostle tells us in his account, John 1:6, that there was a man sent from God whose name was John. John came to be a witness. He came to bear witness of the Light. John

himself was not that Light. But he bore witness of that Light.

That Light was the true Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world. The world was made by him. He was the Word, in the beginning. All things were made by him. And also, without him was not anything made that was made. That is, that there was a union in creativity.

John tells us that in the Word was Life. And the Life was the light of men. The light shone in the darkness. And the darkness comprehended it not. Thus the reason that John came. To bear witness of that which already shone, but of which the darkness comprehended not.

The Life of the Creator shone. That Life was the light of men. But the darkness comprehended it not. So a witness must come to bear witness of the Life which already shone but which was not comprehended.

Why did men not comprehend that Light ?

Why, when the Life of their very Creator shone with blazing Light - the Life that was in the Word - were men not able to see that Light ?

Jesus tells us that the light of the body is the eye, Matthew 6:22. And if our eye be evil - poneros - then our whole body shall be full of darkness, not light. But he tells us more. For he says that if the light that is in us is darkness, how great is that darkness.

The light of the body is that which takes in light. But if it is evil, it takes in darkness. He is not saying that if our eye is shut, the body inside will be dark. He is saying that if our eye is evil, we will take darkness into ourselves. And that darkness will fill

us. And we will walk according to that darkness. We will think that we walk in light. But it is not light, it is darkness. Then, if the light that is in us - the light by which we walk - if that light is darkness, how great is the blackness of such a darkness !

And the true Light shines. But the darkness comprehends it not.

But if there is a true Light, then there must also be a false light. That is what the darkness is. It is a false light. A light so opposite to the true Light that it deserves the name - darkness.

This is what John witnesses. That there is a Light to which we are blind. And the reason that men are blind to the true Light is that they see a darkness that appears to them to be light. That is why they do not see the true Light which blazes - the very Life of the Word who created them.

And this is no marvel. For Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. A gleaming one who mesmerises. Satan, the adversary, is transformed into a Serpent. And therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be tranformed as the ministers of righteousness. Which, of course, they are not. But they appear to be, II Corinthians 11:14, 15.

For the false light is a light that appears to be righteousness. But it is not. It is, in fact, darkness. It is the Life that is the true light.

The reason that the false light is so attractive, so mesmerising, is that it appears to be righteousness.

For the mystery of iniquity already worked in the time of the Apostle Paul, II Thessalonians 2:7. Then would one be taken out of the way who hindered. Then shall that Poneros be revealed whom the Lord shall destroy with the brightness -

the brightness - of his coming. The true Light will consume the false light.

The coming of the Poneros is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish. It is decitful because it appears to be righteousness when it is actually unrighteousness.

Those who perish will appear to be following righteousness. So deceitful will this be that, were the days prolonged, the very elect would be deceived.

From the beginning of time until its very end, Satan works in deception enticing mankind with what appears to be righteousness but what is, in fact, darkness.

But God sent a man, called John, to be a witness of the Light.

God was the Word.
In him was Life.
And the Life was the light of men.
That Light is the true Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.

The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.
We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

This is the one of whom John bare witness.

John bear witness to the Light that all through him might believe. He was in the world and the world was made by him and the world knew him not. He came unto his own and his own received him not.

The world, as such, knew him not. His own, when he came to them, received him not. But those who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God - these believe on his name.

This is the One of whom John bare witness. Of Him John said, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me.

One came after John. But he was before him.

John came, but was not before he came.
This One was before he came.

This One is preferred before John.

Says John the Apostle, We beheld his glory. They who were chosen to be with him, beheld his glory. Three in particular beheld his glory - Peter, James and John. They beheld his glory, full of grace and truth.
Of this fulness of grace have all we received, says John. And grace for grace.

"For" here translates anti, a Greek word which does not mean the same as the English prefix 'anti-'. The expression "grace for grace" is, to me, a meaningless phrase. Grace anti grace means grace corresponding to grace; or grace against grace. The Englishman's Greek New Testament translates the phrase "grace upon grace", which is, in my view, much better, much more preferable, but still not precise.

Despite man's evil, grace has been shown to mankind. Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord, else would the entire human race have been, justly, properly and suitably, wiped out entirely in the Flood. It is by grace that the Word was made flesh and dwelt among men.

In response to evil, grace was shown. But this grace was not received and mankind returned evil for grace. Nevertheless more grace was shown, not according to the evil that was returned but corresponding to the grace already shown. Grace against grace; rather than evil returned for evil.

"Grace against grace" I believe to be the better translation, with a marginal note, "corresponding".

The glory of the Father was beheld when the Word was made flesh. Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.
The only begotten Son declared the Father.

The law came by Moses.

The Darkness

The tree of the knowledge of good and evil is not said to be in the garden of Eden. Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life also in the midst of the garden.
And the tree of knowledge of good and evil.
Genesis 2:9.

Adam was given instructions regarding his position of dominion over the earth - Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth and subdue it: and have dominion. Regarding natural things, God gave Adam dominion and encouraged him in the gracious dominion which God had freely given to Adam.

But as regards righteousness, God warned Adam not to partake of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. For in that very day, he would surely die. Adam received no other instruction regarding righteousness. Only a warning not to do

something.

But Eve was enticed. By subtilety and stealth was she attracted to that which was made to appear good for food - when she saw, Genesis 3:6. Good for food, pleasant to the eyes and a tree to be desired to make one wise was what she saw.

The lust of the flesh; the lust of the eyes; and the pride of life.
None of it is of the Father, I John 2:16.

Then she took of the fruit. And did eat. And gave also to her husband with her.

With her ?
Saying nothing. Just with her.

No objection. No reminder of God's warning.
Just with her.

Just there. In the company of a woman.
Letting the woman take the initiative in moral and spiritual matters.

Just there, allowing the woman to be enticed by the sight of her eyes.

But the woman's eye was evil.
And she became full of darkness.

She thought it was light.
Oh, how great was that darkness !

Thus must one be sent from God to bear witness for the darkness is so black that the true Light is not comprehended. Witness must be borne of that which shines in the darkness but which is not comprehended. Thus a new mind is required

to comprehend it, for the understanding itself is darkened, Ephesians 4:18.

Moses needed no witness. Two tables of stone witnessed that he had been in the mount Sinai and had received the testimony from God. They were written upon with the finger of God. But they lay at the foot of the mount, broken. Broken because of sin and rebellion. Then two more were written upon by Moses. These lay in the ark of the testimony. Until, that is, they were carried away into captivity and never returned. Lost because of sin and rebellion.

Nor did John bear witness to the law. John bore witness to the true Light.

God is Light. God is a spirit. God's divine nature is not that of a created being with a manifestation within the material creation. God dwells in spirit. God is one in spirit.
Man has a material manifestation in the creation. Man also has a spiritual, immortal being. But if man dwells in darkness, he is separate from the God who is Light. Then man's spirit is not one with God. The darkness comprehendeth not the Light.

John bears witness to the true Light which man does not comprehend.
But he does not bear witness to the Law. Not as such. The Law is not light.
The Life of the Word is Light.

Nor did John even draw attention to the law. He exhorted men to stop doing. To cease from activity. He exhorted men to receive something - the baptism of repentance. His was a ministry that gave something to men, not that required anything of them.

John instructed men not to say within themselves that

Abraham was their father. To refrain from saying this within themselves, Luke 3:8, was a fruit of repentance. The assertion of the flesh, in its natural state, was to be denied. This would be a fruit of a changed mind. The mind should be changed and then the thought would not arise.

The flesh attempts to reach out and lay hold on something of itself in which to trust for righteousness. Not to do such is the fruit of a changed mind. To refrain from acting in the flesh; to deny the flesh in its self assertion; to remain passive despite the urging within to grasp at that which will justify oneself; this is a fruit of repentance.

The flesh desires some special treatment from God towards its own particular type of flesh in order that it might trust in this as a means of justification. National origin, natural advantage, gender, cultural background, social status - any or all of these will the flesh attempt to rely upon that special consideration should be given it by God in his judgment.

But God is no respector of persons. God judges justly and equitably, without partiality or favour.

After all, God is able, Luke 3:8, from the stones of these to raise up children unto Abraham.

John's ministry exposes true conditions. If a tree is not fruitful, it is hewn down and cast into the fire. What is the point of a fruitless tree ? It is fit for nothing but burning. And fruit is a matter of behaviour. Words without deeds are worthless. Thoughts of self advantage are not to be said within oneself.

The high places of haughty thoughts will be brought down by John's ministry. Not only the mountainous thoughts of Jewish heritage but also the hills of present day national difference will be levelled. The depths of self pity; the low places of mean

apprehensions of God's goodness and grace; the deep, dark lurkings of the soul - its miserable excuses, it's churlish arguments, it's deceitful worldiness; all such low places will be elevated under John. By sheer logic and unarguable reason shall the Messenger of Preparation do this.

All that is crooked, devious, evasive, will be straightened under John. The path of the soul must be straight. Direct. Open. Nothing is hidden from the Lord.

All that is rough and uncultivated; all that is difficult to traverse; obstacles, stumbling blocks, blockages ot progress; all shall be removed.

And all of this is by receiving the word which John speaks.

John's ministry is to curb the flesh. It is a ministry which, if received, results in a changed mind which does not think in the old ways. And because it does not perceive matters in the old way, the soul no longer attempts to use the flesh to assert itself. The legitimate sustenance and occupation of the flesh is not argued with, Luke 3:11 to 14. One coat and enough food for one's own needs is reasonable. Collecting proper taxes, lawfully exerting power through soldiery and the receipt of adequate wages is all legitimate.

It is the excessiveness of the flesh in going beyond its proper bounds that draws John's approbation. Possessing more than is necessary and not being charitable; collecting overmuch tax illegitimately; undue violence beyond genuine necessity; the desire for more remuneration than has been agreed upon by appointment; all are matters of the flesh going beyond its providential bounds. Then it is a matter of that within the flesh which causes the flesh to act in such a way.

In short, sin is exposed.

John accuses not. He makes no suppositions. He makes no sweeping statements about the generality of mankind. He does not argue from general truths about mankind to accuse individuals. He does not state what is true of all mankind and then assert that condition to the individual.

John makes simple, logical, unarguable and reasonable statements about behaviour. If these words are received and taken to heart, his ministry will be such that the heart of the individual is laid bare. Under his ministry a changed mind is given. This is a baptism.

Having been baptised with this baptism of repentance, the disciple of John will be further instructed. Yet again, no works of righeousness are considered or required. Submission to the ministry is all that is required.

A yielding. A responsiveness.

Resistance, argument, belligerence, indifference and truculence will all be dealt with during John's ministry. They must all be removed prior to the next stage.

Those who continue in rebellion will never even be baptised, far less proceed to what John does next.

For what John does next is utterly, utterly remarkable.

John confesses, John 1:27, that he is not worthy to unloose the latchet of the shoe of the one who, coming after him, is preferred before him. That is, that he is not worthy for the coming one to have his shoe loosed that he may abide in that place. John is not worthy for the coming one to remove his shoe and abide where John abides. The coming one will not remain in the place where John remains.

Pass by, yes. But never abide. Bethabara, John 1:28, is the house of passage. Not a place of abode.

John stood, John 1:35, and two of his disciples. One of these was Andrew who later went and found his brother, Simon Peter. So Peter was not the other one. Peter and Andrew together with James and John were, of course fishermen from Galilee. Here, they are with John the Baptist in Bethabara. It is highly probable that the four were together. It is highly probable that the second disciple was either James or John. And since John does not name himself in the book, save to identify himself at the very end, it is, again highly probable that the second disciple is John himself. Not certain, of course, but I accept it to be close to certain.

Looking upon Jesus as he walked, the stationary John said, Behold the Lamb of God !
The two disciples heard him speak.

They heard because they were attentive to his ministry. Others would hear through their attentiveness. Andrew would find his own brother, Simon Peter, and declare to him.

Such was their disposition that they took the initiative to follow Jesus and to make a declaration to another. Once told Behold, and they not only did so, they did more.

By faith.

Not by instruction. By their own faith.

This the result of John's ministrations to them. All they had learned under John culminated in John standing still, unworthy to loose the shoe of the passing Jesus that he, also may remain there. And ended with the words, Behold the

Lamb of God !

Not just see, but observe; focus upon; remain focussed upon; give attention.
Behold !

Who are we to behold ?
John has already told us in John 1:29 to 34.
This is enough to hold our attention for the rest of our days and for all eternity. Enough to behold for aeons to come.
Oh behold !

He is the Lamb of God. The Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world.
I have repeatedly heard this text misquoted. It is in Ephesians 1:4 that we are told of something before the foundation of the world. Paul the Apostle says that certain were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world.

The Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world. I understand that to mean slain in figure and slain in prophecy. Slain in figure when Abel offered of the firstlings of the flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel, first, and to his offering, second.

Abel took notice that the Lord God made coats of skins for Adam and his wife and clothed them. Naked, he clothed them. Unable to clothe themselves with anything other than fig leaves, he shed blood, slaughtered, skinned and then clothed Adam and his wife, despite their transgression.

Slain, in figure, from the foundation of the world. By him, and by him alone, is the sin of the world taken away.

The sin of the world is taken away by the Lamb whom God has provided. The world made no effort to compensate for sin. Nor

indeed could the world, even had the world shown any inclination to do so.

The world thinks that God is obliged to it. The world regards God as its servant. The world thinks to ignore God until such time as the world wants something, Then the world regards God under obligation to immediately provide the world with its demand.

The world not only offers nothing for its sin, the world does not accept the very concept of sin.

Sinful deeds - or, rather, excessive crimes - are weighed against the crimes of others and justification or mitigation expected on the basis of favouritism or excuses. But the world simply does not accept the presence, or the gravity, of sin itself.

Until the words of John the Baptist are heard and received, that is.

Then sin is exposed. The receptive hearer will realise the depth of John's words. The obedient disciple of John - who actually does what John instructs, rather than just hearing his words - will discover the presence of sin within that conflicts with all that the soul attempts to do in order to actually carry out what John requires.

To take just one example, if the soul honestly receives the exhortation to be content with wages, then sin will be discovered within as the disciple lives under the exhortation, being obedient thereto not just sometimes, but always.

The single instance of contentment spoken by John is quite clearly extendable - depending on status, circumstance and responsibility - to many other aspects of life. The true state of

the inward man will be revealed within to the honest follower of John's instruction.

The evasive, the dishonest and the self-justifying will suffer no qualms because they will avoid the inwardness of the consequence of what John requires.

The obedient hearer will discover within themselves a propensity which, before, was unrealised.

The truly remarkable thing is that John does not make reference to the law. He makes reference to one's actual existence. The simple reality of one's being in the world and one's experience of one's own existence. Nothing more and nothing else is mentioned by John.

Under the commandment of the law, Thou shalt not covet, Saul of Tarsus found that the good he would, he did not. The evil that he would not, that did he. And he found a law, Romans 7, that was not the law of life, but a law of death. An unavoidable law of fact and consequence. When he would do good, this law was that he did it not. And when he would not do evil, this law was that he did it.

To those without Saul's advantages of heritage, parentage, upbringing, tuition and example, however, John the Baptist's words are just as potent. Simply being told to be content with what one is paid will have the same effect.

No religious backgroud is necessary. No attendance at ceremonies of any kind is in view. Prayer is not mentioned. The scriptures, as such, are not a feature.

Just be content with your wages.
And give your second coat, and your extra food, to the needy.

To the sinlessly perfect, this is no burden at all.
To those who love, this will be a joy.

But for those who are under the dominion of sin, this will be a torment.

Let any who disagrees with me, carry on and do it.

Those who receive John's words and do them will be baptised, however.
And to these who have been baptised, John says, Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.

Before anything else, the sin of the world must be taken away.
God shall not even approach mankind, all of it together or any individual within it, unless the sin of the world is taken away.
An appeasement is required. Wrath against the world, as such, needs to be propitiated.

This, the genuine hearer of John will understand. One who has learned the realities of righteousness will appreciate the necessity of the satisfying of divine righteousness in respect of the sin of the world. The deaf hearer will just not have the mentality to perceive the importance of the Lamb of God. Such will have no regard for the One sent by God to take away the sin of the world.

Those who have just a mere vague sense of unease about their own wickedness and the evil of the race into which they have been born shall not value the Lamb of God for the sense of sin has just not entered their heads. Emotions might well be stirred. Self pity could arise. Self preservation may be disturbed enough to cast about for some means of escape.

But to those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, these issues are of utmost consequence.

How shall man be just with God ?
How shall the sin of the world be taken away ?
O wretched man that I am ! Who shall deliver me ?

The fact of one's existence.
The nature of one's humanity.
The responsibilities of one's actions.
The consequences of one's deeds.
The inward state of one's sensibilities.
The moral state of one's life.
The debts one has accrued by one's daily passage through life.
The effects of the words one has uttered, or not uttered.
These mount and mount in the soul as it receives, and receives, of John's teaching.

But greater far are the enormities above.

The existence of God.
The nature of his existence.
The relationship of creature to Creator.
The purpose of the Creator in creating one's own being.
The consequences of one's attitude, words and deeds upon the Creator.
The response of the Creator to one's deeds.

The absolute necessity of judgment in righteousness.

Only those in whom the ministry of John the Baptist has been fully expressed will know the effect of the contemplation of these matters of righteousness.

The effect is to flee from the wrath to come.

John himself expects his hearers to do no less. And he desires none to come to his baptism than those who do so, Luke 3:7.

Such as do so will hearken to his imperative: Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.

John goes further in identifying who this is, John 1:30, This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me.

Verse fourteen of John chapter one tells us that the Word was made flesh. John bare witness, verse fifteen, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me.

Now, in context, we see that the Word made flesh is a man.

This man was conceived six months after the child of Zaccharias and Elizabeth - the babe called John. He who came after John was Jesus, born in Bethlehem, of Mary, a virgin espoused to Joseph.

Yet of him saith John, He was before me.

John was not before he came. He came into existence at his conception.
But of Jesus it is said, by the prophet Isaiah, Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given. He was a Son before he was given. Before he came into the world, he was. And before he came into the world he was a Son, in union with the Father. From everlasting.

All things were made by him. Without him was not made anything that was made.
In perfect unity with the Father as he created all things did the Son create all things.

I despise to even state the contrary opinions of men regarding the Sonship of the Son from everlasting, much less to answer

them. If logic be logic; if Greek be Greek; if English be English, what ever else can the plain word of scripture mean than that which is blazingly clear to anyone who reads the words ?

Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee, Psalm 2:7, plainly relates to the declaration of Jesus Christ as the Son of God upon the resurrection. All that Christ accomplished is ratified by the resurrection. Then and only then, is he declared to be the Son of God with power. Raised in newness of life, he is the firstbegotten from the dead.

What occurred between the Jesus Christ and God Almighty occurred in the darkness from the sixth hour until the ninth hour. Then he gave up the ghost and the vail in the temple was rent from the top to the bottom.

On the third day he rose from the dead through our justification, God thus declaring him to be the Son of God with power. That is, the power of God expressed in raising him from the dead, the first begotten from the dead.

Jesus Christ was breathtakingly careful in what he said about himself. The man who offered himself up to God did so as man. No less than awesome is his restraint. Words fail to give adequate reverence to his utterly righteous attitude in the humility of his sacrifice. He fulfilled all righteousness as a man, as a Jew and as a sacrifice.

Behold the man !

Behold him who was conceived in the womb of the virgin, a new creation, conceived of the Holy Ghost under the overshadowing of the Highest. Behold his utterly unique manhood, a second man, the firstbegotten of a new race.

Behold him in whose likeness Adam was made. Let us make

man in our own image. Adam and all his seed were made in the likeness of that which was created in the womb of the virgin.

Behold him who suffered to fulfil all righteousness in bowing to the baptism of repentance. Humbly receiving from John what all Judaea and Jerusalem went out to receive, he arose from the waters and was baptised with not only water, but by the Holy Ghost who descended upon him like a dove.

Driven by the Spirit to be tempted of Diabolos, nothing, but nothing could be found in him but filial service to the Father; nothing but holy desire. Nothing but worship as man; nothing but service as a priest; nothing but righteous government as a king.

Oh behold the man !

Behold thy king cometh ! With thousands of horsemen to sieze an earthly kingdom ? With legions to wreak judgment on them who had stolen his things ? With armies to recapture all that had been wrested from God ? With pomp and trumpets and harpers and cavalcades ? No, meek and lowly came he, upon an ass and a colt, the foal of an ass. Hosanna to such a king !

What man shall he be who shall appear in response to John's baptism ? A man set for judgment upon the recipient of all that John has to teach ? A man who shall lay grievous burdens upon the diligent hearer of John's words ? A man ready to activate the flesh to achieve all that has previously been failure ?

Not at all.

Once John's ministry has revealed the true state of man's nature to the obedient soul, nothing is required of that flesh

any further.

Behold, saith Pilate, the highest judicial authority available, I bring him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him. Then came Jesus forth, having been scourged, having been smitten by all the soldiers, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe.

Behold the man.

Thus did he go to take away the sin of the world.
Mocked, spit upon, scourged, humiliated, bruised, beaten, crucified. Rejected of Israel. Despised by the highest religious authorities on earth. Exonerated, but not saved, by the Roman Empire's representative. Railed upon even by the thieves crucified with him. Mocked by all them that passed by.

Behold.

Thus did he go to be a propitiation for the wole world who thus treated him. Did any assist ? Did any care ? Did any of the whole of mankind offer anything at all towards the appeasing of the wrath of God on their own behalf ?

They all forsook him and fled.
There was none to help.

Alone, he offered up himself as a propitiation.

Had he not done so, then it would have been unrighteous for John to be sent to bear witness of the Light.

It would have been righteous for men to perish in the darkness that they loved.

To those who truly know the plague of their own hearts; to

those who have been washed in the baptism of repentance; to those who have received a changed mind under the word that John expresses; to those who have yielded to the reasonable, logical, sensible utterances of the Baptist; to these I say - Behold the man !

Behold him who came after John. But Who was before him.

Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God and there is none else, Isaiah 46:22. There is no God else beside me; a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside me.

The Coming of the Light

It is "the next day", verse 29, that John says, Behold the Lamb of God, and, there cometh a man. And it is "again the next day" in verse 35 of chapter one. The "day following" occurs in verse 43 and the "third day" is in chapter two verse one.

So before the time that John seeth Jesus coming unto him, it is prior to the first day. All that John ministers of himself is in the night. For John is not the true Light. He witnesses to men of the Light which shines in the darkness, chapter one verse 6. He speaks of one who will come.

Once Jesus has come, it is day. Then, John witnesses to the Light as manifest. In the day.

Once the earth and heaven flee away from the face of him who sitteth on a great white throne, Revelation 20:11, then there shall be a new heaven and a new earth. Then the holy city, new Jerusalem, shall come down from God out of heaven prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. The city shall have no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God shall lighten it, and the Lamb shall be the light

thereof.

He himself is Light. He always has been.
All other is darkness.

The gates of the city shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there.
There shall be day for ever in the city.
And there shall be no darkness outside the city.
The gates shall never need to be shut against the darkness.
For darkness shall be no more.

They that are of the day shall enter into the city.

By three gates shall they enter on the east; by three on the north; by three on the south; by three on the west. The gates have names upon them, of the twelve tribes who sojourn in their several tribes and who enter into rest as a company. For this is not individual. By companies shall they sojourn. By companies shall they enter in.

As individuals they were baptised unto the remission of sins. But even under John's ministry they are found no longer singular. It was two disciples together who heard John and followed Jesus. In company already, having been baptised by John, they follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth, following him to a city that hath foundations - twelve of them - whose builder and maker is God.

The one to whom John witnesses, John 1:29 to 34, is the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world, first. He is the man who, coming after John, is preferred before John, for he was before John was. He is the one who is made manifest to Israel. He is the one upon whom the Spirit descends like a dove and abides. He is the one who baptizes with the Holy Ghost. He is the Son of God.

Having passed under John's ministry; having made self discovery by his teaching; having understood the reality of the first man in the first creation by receiving, and doing, the words of John; having plumbed the depths of one's own humanity and mortality; having admitted of the failure of one's first existence; having confessed one's sins and having been baptised; all that is left is for John to stand. He has finished his ministry.

John can take a man no further. John stands.

John is not that Light. All he can do is bear witness in the dark to the Light which shines in the darkness which comprehends it not.

Comes Jesus and light shines - it is day, John 1:29.
Behold the Lamb of God !

Immediately the two disciples hear and follow.
Told only to behold, they nevertheless follow.
At first they follow a back that is moving away from them.
Stand still and he will be gone.

John can take a man no further.
Behold !

Remain rooted to the spot and one will lose sight of the Lamb as he progresses.

There is a necessity.
And faith rises to it.
They follow Jesus.

It is God who has led them thus far. It is God that worketh in them to will and to do of his own good pleasure. This is the

work of God that they believe. It was God who sent a man whose name was John. It was God who worked in them under John's ministry. It was God who gave them the gift of a renewed mind. It was God who enlightened their understanding.

All is of God.

It was of God that Jesus passed by. It was of God that they stood there with John as he did so. It was of God that John uttered what he did.

All is of God.

And it is God who works in them, as they behold the Lamb and it is of God that, without further ado, they follow the Lamb.

They will follow him all their days. They will follow him out of the world. They will leave behind all. They will follow him to new heavens and a new earth.

They will follow him out of their first existence. Follow him out of an old creation. Follow him in his sufferings, be united with him in his death, rise with him in his resurrection.

Jesus turned, John 1:38, and saw them following, and saith unto to them, What seek ye ?
They said unto him, Rabbi, where dwellest thou ?
He saith unto them, Come and see.
They came and saw where he dwelt and abode with him that day: for it was about the tenth hour. Twenty times in the book is the word "hour" used. The Holy Ghost has somewhat to teach us regarding Jesus' hour.

What they sought was where he dwelled. He invited them and they went and saw and remained with him. But first, Andrew

went to find his brother Simon. Beholding him, Jesus said, Thou art Simon, son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas.

A new abode. A new name.
For this is a marriage. This is a union. The Lamb has a bride.

The Filling

On the third day, there were six waterpots of stone standing at the marriage feast in Cana of Galilee and the mother of Jesus was there. And Jesus and his disciples were called to the marriage.

After the purifying of the Jews had they stone pots for water. Six of them. But they were not filled. A man will never be filled and will never be purified by pots of stone, or tables of stone. He shall discover only his own emptiness and only his own uncleanness by the tables of stone and by the baptising of cups and plates and such like things.

Jesus does not fill them. Servants fill the six pots up to the brim. Sevants like John the Baptist fill a man to the brim with clean water. No-one shall be baptised with foul water. This is a cleansing process. And the whole man shall be cleansed. Up to the brim shall he be filled. The water of John's baptism will reach to every part of his interior. Every part of his manhood will be cleansed.

The baptism of repentance is unto [eis] the remission of sins. Under this baptism there is a confession of sins and an acknowledgement of sin. John cannot remit sins but the good and honest heart given under his ministry will freely confess the truth. This is to do truth and to do righteousness. Doing righteousness is a matter of being honest about one's past unrighteousnesses. It is a matter of being truthful about the iniquity that dwells within one by conception. Behold, I was

shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me, saith David, Psalm 51:5. Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts.

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Once filled with water to the brim by John's baptism and once the Lamb is present and once a union with him is arranged to which he has been called then, oh then, is the water no longer water.

He who is the anointed One, under whose oversight the filling has been conducted - he who will pass by at the exact time when it is appropriate to do so - once all has been fulfilled and the cleansing is complete, the filling will be no longer water but wine.

They shall all be full of the Holy Ghost.

These are they who, thus, enter the kingdom of God, John 3:5, being born of water and of the Spirit.

Of these does the chief of three - architriklinos - receive that which is gratifying and pleasurable from the vessels. The AV translation "governor of the feast" hides this detail from the English reader.

They who are thus born of the Spirit of God are indwelt of that same Spirit; they walk in the Spirit; they are led of the Spirit. They serve the Father in newness of Spirit. In Christ, they bring forth that wine of the kingdom which pleases the Father.

And the friend of the bridegroom - John the Baptist - shall stand by and rejoice to see such a union.

He must increase, saith John, John 3:30, but I decrease.
He that is of the earth is earthly, saith he of himself.
He that cometh from heaven is above all.

The Father loveth the Son and hath given all things into his hand.
He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

Thus saying, the words of John are ended.

He that hath heard and received John's words and hath Beheld, indeed, the Lamb of God, shall assuredly believe on him and shall have everlasting life. He that believeth not - the wrath of God abideth on him.

The wrath from which we flee is the wrath to come. As yet, God restrains from exerting that which he actually feels. He expresses what he feels in warning, but does not, yet, exert it. Our God is a consuming fire, saith the apostle. That consuming fire has fallen upon His own Son and those who believe shall escape the wrath that will, inevitably, fall upon the heavens, the earth and all that dwell in them.

But now, God commandeth all men, everywhere, to repent.

God has nothing else to say to men.
He nailed the handwriting of ordinances to the cross of his own Son, Colossians 2:14.
Having wiped it, first. There is nothing there to read, anymore.

John calls to men, Repent. Those who receive John's words are baptised.

They remain with John until that time when Jesus comes. Then

John says Behold the Lamb of God.

To those who refuse the words of John, there is nothing left to say.

The wrath of God abideth on them.

But for those who have submitted, learned and received, the way of the Lord is prepared within them; a straitened highway in the desert, Isaiah 40:3,4.
Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain:

And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed.

Nigel Johnstone
Malvern, july 2012.

"The Glory of the Lord" is now available from Belmont Publications, 07786 346 357.

Appendix One - The Apostles and The Apostolic Office.

James, the writer of the epistle, is James of Alphaeus, not James the Lord's brother as some suppose.

The other apostle James, John's brother, was killed by Herod. Thus if either the brother of John or him of Alphaeus had written the epistle before that time, it would have been necessary for either of them to distinguish who it was. That James the writer does not do so indicates that the epistle was written after James, the brother of John, had already been killed by Herod. James the writer, being an apostle, need not make any distinction as he was, at that time, the only apostle with the name James.

Thus the writer is clearly not James, the brother of John, or he would have said so.

James, the Lord's brother, is mentioned by Paul, Galatians 1:19, in connection with apostles. But it is evident that this James had not been appointed to that office by Jesus Christ but by men. Matthias had been appointed, by lot, Acts 1:26, and it had evidently become clear that he was not, inherently, an apostle. So men had tried, again, to replace Iscariot the betrayer with another choice, the Lord's brother, trying to do what only Jesus Christ could do from heaven. But Jesus Christ had already made choice of the twelfth and it was Saul of Tarsus, the persecuting blasphemer. But time was required for him to show fully his faithfulness and the calling which he had received. In the meantime, Paul made no quarrel with the appointment, by men, of James the Lord's brother whom, when he comes to write his epistle to the churches of Galatia, he simply accepts as having been numbered as an apostle at the time, save that he does not, precisely, name him as such.

Later, it became clear that James the Lord's brother, despite

his family connections, was not the twelfth apostle, and Paul took the office which was evidently his, for a man's gift shall make room for him.

The writer of the epistle is the apostle James, brother of Jude. James is the senior brother, in apostleship but not necessarily in age, since he does not reference himself to Jude, but rather Jude, in his own epistle, references himself to James. Jude is also called, by Matthew, Lebbaeus whose surname is Thaddaeus.

Peter, the chief apostle, named first in all accounts and most prominent during the ministry of Jesus on earth, clearly gives place to Paul and demonstrably references Paul in his epistle, II Peter 3:15, not only calling him Beloved Brother, not only verifying Paul's writings as scripture, but remarking that in Paul's writings are many things hard to be understood which the unlearned and unstable wrest to their own destruction. Then let us be learned and stable and let us meditate, believingly, on the things, some hard to understand, which the Apostle Paul, supported by the Apostle Peter, has written.

There were twelve apostles, no more, as John incontrovertibly makes clear in the Book of the Revelation - the twelve apostles of the Lamb. Revelation 21:14. Some others have laid claim to apostleship but they have already been tried and found to be liars, Revelation 2:2, under the approval of the Apostle John. Paul does indicate a called, sent and anointed ministry in Timothy and Titus. But neither of these receive any appointment to the apostolic office.

Miracles and healings evidently attended Jesus Christ in the beginning of the Gospel. They also evidently attended, together with the sign of tongues, the Apostles in the initial continuance of the Gospel, particularly at momentous events. Events such as the first preaching of the Gospel to Jews

gathered from distant Gentile nations, on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem; such as the first preaching of the Gospel to a Gentile household, that of Cornelius, living within the confines of the nation of Israel; and such as the first apostolic preaching of the gospel to certain outside of Israel who had, as yet, only received the baptism of John and honestly confessed that they had not even so much as heard whether there be such an one as the Holy Ghost.

These signs attended the apostolic - the sent - preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ and only the apostolic preaching of Jesus Christ. These signs were, evidently, given to accompany and mark out, indisputably, as a sign to the whole age - the time between the ascension of Christ and his return - the beginning of the gospel. The beginning of the gospel was, first in the mouth of Jesus Christ himself, then in the mouth of his personally appointed eleven, then in the mouth of the twelfth who was also personally appointed. Thereafter, neither Peter, nor Paul, nor John, nor Matthew, nor James, nor Jude - the six named apostles whose writings we have - make any other such appointments indicating that the apostolic office has continued. Mark and Luke were, of course, not apostles and could not, therefore, make any such appointment.

Paul regulates matters at Corinth which relate to supernatural occurrences and in his last epistles to Timothy and Titus says nothing about them whatsoever. Were such things intended to continue beyond the decease of the Apostles, then both Timothy and Titus would most certainly have received charges concerning them. The charge-message to Timothy and Titus, alongside the gospel-message itself, would have contained instructions regarding them. That it does not, clearly indicates they had already, or would immediately, cease.

The writer to the Hebrews makes it clear that salvation, at the

first, began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us - the "us" being, in context, those who were not present - by them that heard; God also bearing witness, both with signs and wonders and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost according to his own will. Evidently, the signs and wonders and miracles and gifts were a witness to the veracity of what was spoken by the Lord and a witness to the veracity of what was confirmed by them that heard him.

Now that the Lord has ascended and now that those who heard him - actually heard him speak the words on earth - have departed this life, it is blindingly obvious that the signs and wonders and miracles and gifts have ceased.

They are liars who claim to extend the apostolic office, or the signs which accompany it, to our times.

Appendix Two

Some Necessary Corrections to the Authorised Version and Some Disputed Passages

1. Italics are used in the AV when the English does not actually represent a Greek word but when a word is added, in English, as necessitated by the very grammar of the language in order to make sense to the reader. Or so it should be the case.

This is evidently not the case in I John 2:23 where half a text is in italics. This half text should be removed. No Greek exists to justify its insertion. The history of why it has been inserted reveals that it just should not be there.

2. Likewise the history of why the so-called 'Johannine Coma' was inserted clearly indicates that its inclusion is not warranted. Nor does it make sense in context. I John 5:7 should read, For there are three that bear witness, the spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.

Wettstein detailed all the evidence about this matter when Basel Town Council lodged a charge of heresy against him in 1729. Erasmus introduced the Coma in his third edition of 1522 but Martin Luther omitted it in his own German translation of the Textus Receptus.

No Greek manuscript prior to the sixteenth century contains it, except as clearly variant readings without substance. Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, Slavonic, Ethiopic and Arabic versions omit it. Old Latins omit it. The oldest witnesses to the Vulgate omit it. Later Vulgates only include it as a variant.

Wettstein demonstrated that the words entered the Received Text as a marginal comment added to a Latin translation after Eugenius, Bishop of Carthage, included the words in a so-

called 'confession of faith' at the end of the fifteenth century.

The unedifying history of why men wanted the Coma to be inserted clearly demonstrates that, actually, it should not be.

3. The last twelve verses of Mark have been disputed but Dean Burgon's book of that exact title, The Last Twelve Verses of Mark, thoroughly supports and demonstrates their inclusion. Mark 16: 9 to 20 should, with no shadow of doubt, appear in scripture.

Hammond in his 'Outlines of Textual Criticism', 1880, also defends them.

4. The record of the woman taken in adultery in John 7:53 through to John 8:11 is disputed but Codex D has it. F,G,H,K,U and over 300 cursives have it. So do b*, c, e, ff2, g, and l. The Vulgate has it. Syr J has it. Jerome testifies to it. Augustine defends it and Ambrose alludes to it. It is also abundantly clear why unspiritual men want rid of it.

5. Luke 22:43, 44 Today shalt thou be with me in paradise - and following. D,F,G,H,K,L and all cursives have it. Syr,C,P,H and J have it. Referred to by Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Dionysius, Hilary, Jerome and Augustine. There was what is called a 'lectionary error' involving these verses, but they should most definitely be included and, yet again, it is obvious why heretics want them removed.

6. I Timothy 3:16. God was manifest in the flesh…. [not 'who' was manifest]. Dean Burgon wrote extensively about this and about the reasons for its disputed reading. Of the lectionaries and copies which read "God" there are 289. Only one has "who". Six have "which". The copies and 'fathers' all support the word, "God". Here again, it is the unspiritual and heretics who desire the alternative reading.

7. Romans 5:11, By whom we have now received the "atonement". The word atonement means cover. The word in the Greek here is *katallage*. The translators of the AV were inconsistent to their own rendering, elsewhere, of *katallage* which they usually give as "reconciliation". *Katallage* does not, in fact, bear the meaning which English carries for the word "reconciliation". However, at least it should not be "atonement".

8. The translators have been inconsistent with this same matter, again, in Hebrews 2:17 where they have given "reconciliation" for *hilaskesthai,* which should be "propitiation".

9. Colossians 2:14. "Nailing it to his cross" makes no sense at all. The words *tw* staurw mean "the cross" and nothing else. God nailed the handwriting of ordinances to the cross. A book is available from Belmont Publications, called "Nailed to the Cross" which goes into detail.

10. Adoption. The word "adoption" is a very bad translation of *hiuothesia*. The rendering should be "sonship", however ungrammatical that may sound.

11. "Market place" is not the correct translation of *agora*. A brief examination of the usage of this word in scripture indicates that "place of concourse" is correct.

These few notes, covering some of the issues, are not extensive, but merely indicative