

The 2001 Millennium Wine

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Advent greetings to you! Advent is the season whereby Christians celebrate Christ's first coming as Emmanuel (God with us) with hope and anticipation of Christ's second Coming. But for the rest of the world Christmas is a time to promote and sell products by special seasonal sales together with Xmas decorations and lighting. Much of the commercialism of the world unfortunately is also creeping into the Church. The Today Newspaper of 28th May 2001, reported that a glossy magazine-style version of the Old Testament targeting young people who rarely read the Bible was due to be launched in England. However it created a storm of controversy as the publishers planned to use models such as Ms Claudia Schiffer as illustrations. One of them said that most of the models will have their clothes on, but there will be some nudity because the Bible is very sensual and they are going to exploit that. Their stated aim is to take the Bible off the back shelf and put it on the coffee table – of course we know behind this the ultimate aim is to make money. Seems to make sense from the commercial perspective by making the Bible appealing to the consumer. But from the Christian perspective it is not right. But why?



There are other similar cases that we can enumerate:

- Churches that open their worship hall to screen live telecast of Football World Cup matches
- Commercial Companies that keep sending mails, flyers, faxes or e-mails to churches to promote Christmas products to Christians claiming Christian affiliations and management.
- Church members touting and selling products before or after church services to other members.

THE CELL
GROUP CHURCH

The Pastor, council and leaders spent 3 days with Dr David Tan, studying the Cell Group church structure. Results of the study will be made available to all in the coming year.

- Churches that adopt an "entertaining" commercial approach and methods in their worship services; and to market their Services.

Here we see the tension is between trying to be relevant and seeking to please God. For the Christians the fundamental question to ask is does it glorify God or not? Glorifying God is the main aim of our existence. Which will lead to us asking the next question – does it please God? So we have to go to God's Word which is His revelation to humanity to discover the answer. Granted if one is willing to do so, it will not take long to discover that there are things that are sacred to God and cannot be subjected to commercialization and secularization.

One very important episode on this score, is the account of Jesus confronting the sellers of goods in the Temple at Jerusalem recorded in the Gospel (Matt 21:12-13). We are not so much concerned with the physical actions or drama per se. Rather let us focus on what attitudes or perspectives lies behind the selling that incurred Jesus' wrath. To get a handle on the events and physical actions exhibited by our Lord we need to ask a very pertinent question – what was the purpose of the sacred Temple in the first place? The original purpose of the Temple is at least fourfold, represented by 4Ps:

1. **Presence of God** – it is where the Presence of God dwell. Even for us humans we do not find it acceptable when our home is turned into a noisy "pasar malam" when we are present. How much more so is God's house? Instead of people becoming more like God in holiness as they worship Him and meditate on his Word, commercialization and secularization lead to people conforming their perception of God into their own image.
2. **Prayer** – the Lord Jesus reminded that the temple is to remain what it is; "the House of Prayer". The noise and commercial activities are serious distractors from meaningful, meditative prayers.
3. **Place of worship** - it is a place to worship God in reverence and contemplation. Commercialization and secularization leads to irreverence and distraction from true worship in spirit and in truth. The temple is not to be turned into a den of robbers. What robbery did the sellers commit? They apparently are just selling what people need to buy. Pilgrims coming to the Passover feast needed animals that met the ritual requirements for sacrifice, and the vendors set up animal pens. They also sold doves, doves were required for purification of women (Lev 12:6, Luke 2:22-24), cleansing of diseases (Lev 14:22), and other purposes (Lev 15:14,29). Doves were also used as offering of the poor as they cannot afford larger animals. But the fact is that they not only rob man but also God's glory in their deceitfulness. They robbed the temple of its sanctity and

purity. Commercialization is often accompanied by some misrepresentations or deceptions an added case in point.

4. **People** – it is a place where the Gentiles, or the “outsiders” so to speak can come to know and worship God. The sellers are doing the selling at the Court of Gentiles. Isaiah 56:7 assured godly non-Jews that they would be allowed to worship God in the Temple. By allowing the Court of Gentiles to become a noisy, smelly marketplace, the Jewish leaders were interfering with God’s provisions. The mission of God to reach out in grace to these people were curtailed.

The point is this:

SOME THINGS ARE SACRED TO GOD AND NOT TO BE TAKEN LIGHTLY.



O Come
All Ye
Faithful

Another case to consider to reinforce this was the case where Uzzah reached out and handled the Ark of God when the oxen stumbled while the Ark was being transported to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6: 6-7). It seemed to be a very logical thing for Uzzah to do from a purely pragmatic and human perspective. But guess what - he was struck dead by God, due to what the Bible explained was an irreverent act. Again there are things that are sacred to God, humans must not profane them lest they incur God’s wrath.

Conclusion:

During Christmas period, let us go to the house of God in a serious frame of mind, knowing what business we are about and in whose presence we are engaged. Let us beware of giving God a mere formal service, while our hearts are full of worldly things. Let us leave our business and money at home, and do not carry them with us to church. Let us beware of allowing any buying and selling in our heart, in the midst of our religious assemblies. Let us worship the Emmanuel with a thankful heart. Amen.

Pastor Martin Yee

Is the King James Version the only true word of God?

(Conclusion)

Doctrine of Deity of Christ.

Proponents of KJV claims that the modern versions deny the biblical teaching that Jesus Christ is God and that the translation is done by 'liberals' who refuse to translate the truth of Christ's deity. Riplinger makes this astounding claim in her book "Why I wrote the Book: New age Bible Versions", "Working 12 hours a day for nine months, comparing every single word in the New Testament, left me shocked and horrified at the blatant and gross omissions and perversion in new versions. I found the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ has been deleted at every turn." Likewise Cecil J Carter, in his Book "New American Standard Version and the Deity of Christ" claims. "A characteristic of new Bible versions is found in the way that virtually every one of them alters Scripture which plainly teach the Deity of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Riplinger, Carter and others claim that NASB, NIV, NKJV are guilty of deleting the deity of Christ. Riplinger claims in her aforementioned book in "over one hundred instances". She also cites Philippians 2:5-7 and that every new

version denies the deity of Christ in this verse.

If we compare Philippians 2:6-7 in the KJV and the modern version, we find that the deity of Christ is not denied at all, but in fact more clearly caught in the NIV than in other versions.

(Phil 2:6-7)

KJV Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:

NKJV Who, in the very form God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God.

NIV Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

The NIV by translating "Who, being in very nature God" is much clearer.

DA Carson, a renowned and well respected Bible scholar made a study of eight primary verses declaring that Jesus Christ is God, examining the KJV, Revised Version, RSV, New English Bible, Moffatt, Goodspeed, Today's English Version, NIV, Modern Language Bible and even the

Jehovah's Witnesses' New World Translation(NWT).

Only the NWT omits all references to Christ's deity. Even the theologically liberal translation such as Moffatt and Goodspeed have one and three references respectively ascribing the deity of Christ. The KJV has four of the eight verses as reference to Jesus' deity. The NIV has highest by far seven of eight references clearly teaching the deity of Christ. These findings can be found in a chart in "King James Version Debate" by DA Carson.

James white in his book "The King James Only Controversy" and a similar study company KJV, NIV and NASB on 12 primary references to Christ's deity. Of the 12 references, NASB is clear on 12, NIV 11 of the 12, KJV is clear only on 6 of the 12 references. It appears that the newer version corrects the KJV in order to properly declare the deity of Christ.

As an example in Titus 2:13 and 2 Peter 1:1, the KJV inaccurately translates these passages by splitting the terms "God" and "Savior", preaching "the great God and our Savior, Jesus Christ". The translation implies two persons being spoken of:

- 1)The great God and
- 2) Our Savior Jesus Christ

Jehovah's Witnesses use this ambiguity to argue that Jesus Christ is not "our great God" but only "our Savior".

The KJV translators were unaware of a grammatical rule for translation of Greek, which was only discovered in the early 19C. The KJV translators knew Greek less well than Latin and constantly used Latin to get themselves through the Greek. This explains the mistranslation of Titus 2:13, 2 Peter 1:11.

The NIV, NASB having full knowledge of the rule translate these verses correctly "Our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ", showing Jesus is both God and our Saviour.

Although there are instances where the deity of Christ is not clearly translated in the KJV, this does not mean the KJV denies the deity of Christ.

Lucifer and the morning star

Why did the KJV use "Lucifer" and the modern version the term "morning star" in Isaiah 14:12. The term "Lucifer" comes from the Jerome Latin Bible, the Vulgate, which the KJV sometimes used for their translation. The Latin word for "morning star" is Lucifer. You can check any good English dictionary and you will find that they give the

meaning for Lucifer as "morning star". The term is used figuratively to describe the rise and fall of Babylon. Thus when the modern version translates the term "morning star" they are being true to the text because that is what the original Hebrew says. To associate the morning star in Isaiah 14:12 with someone other than the king of Babylon must be reading into the verse meaning from somewhere else.

How did Lucifer for morning star become equated with Satan? This is something the medieval church (during around 500 - 1000 AD) authorities imported into the text without scriptural warrant. Thus to associate the Latin word "the morning star" to Lucifer with the concept of Satan can only be derived in a secondary sense.

Revelations 22:16 describe Jesus as the true bright and morning star. This does not mean that Isaiah can't use the Hebrew word for morning star to speak of the king of Babylon. There is no basis whatsoever for saying that the modern version is trying to link Jesus to Satan.

Is the KJV more readable than modern versions?

Proponents of the KJV have even claimed that based on scientific facts the KJV is as readable or superior to that of modern

translations. Those who have read the KJV and modern translations would find this difficult to agree with. Results obtained by NKJV editors observed that the KJV was more difficult to read than modern translations. The KJV required 12th grade reading level, NASB 11th grade, RSV 10.4, TLB 8.3, NKJV 8, NIV 7.8.

It was the reading difficulty of the KJV that was the reason for the NKJV. The KJV, 400 year old English is indeed anything but clear. Certain words and phrases are completely out of use and convey little meaning to the readers, for example:

Chambering (Romans 13:13), "cieled" (Haggai 1:4); "clouted upon their feet" (Joshua 9:5); "cotes" (2 Chronicles 32:28); "suretiship" (Proverbs 11:15); "sackbut" (Daniel 3:5); "scall" (Leviticus 13:30); "brigandines" (Jeremiah 46:4); "amerce" (Deuteronomy 22:19); "wen" (Leviticus 22:22); "nitre" (Proverbs 25:20); and "tabret" (Genesis 31:27). In addition we find words like almsg, neesing, chode, habergeon, purtenance, aceldama, blains, wot, trow, churl, ambassage, collops of fat, wimples, hole's mouth, ouches of gold, naughty figs, and fetched a compass (which does not mean to go find a compass but "to turn around"). These were the words chosen by KJV translators in their day to signify the meaning of the Hebrew and Greek words I

doubt any modern readers would understand the meaning of such old English terms today? Translators now find current English words in use that more accurately convey the meaning for our own era.

Conclusion

Modern versions of the Bible have been used by God for the salvation of many unbelievers. Kenneth Barker, general editor of the NIV, comments, "My files are replete with testimonial letters from people all over the world testifying as to how they've been brought to Christ – a saving knowledge, a saving faith through reading the NIV... Christians all over the world have been blessed and spiritually taught and matured in their Christian life through using the NIV."

It would be ironic if this Bible version labeled by some as satanic is used by God in such a mighty manner. The modern versions are godsend having brought the word to hundreds of millions of people in an understandable readable form. Today we are indeed blessed to have the complete revealed word of God in the Bible. We have the choice of various translations, not to speak of the comprehensive study guides and Christian literature. We should be comfortable with whatever version, which we can read and understand well. Let's not be misled by those who try to lead

us to believe that the word of God has been corrupted. Jesus said in Matthew 5:18-19:

"I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

It is easier for heaven and earth to pass from existence than for the least stroke to a pen to disappear. Can we think that God in his providence allow genuine errors in Scripture which will mislead us on a mass scale? Jesus himself said, "Thy Word is truth." Can we think otherwise?

Dr Baldwin in his talk in Jul this year entitled "Which is the Best Bible?" has impressed us that really there is no such thing as the best version of the Bible. God in his divine providence has preserved the Bible such that from the more than 5,300 Greek manuscripts of the NT which exists today, there are only very minor variants among them. A noted church historian, Philip Schaff estimated that there were only 400 variants (which is a very small

percentage of the extant manuscripts) that affected the sense of the passage and only 50 were actually important – but none affecting any article of faith. The same applies to the OT, which has been so accurately preserved. Eminent OT scholar Dr Robert Dick, Wilson, after 30 years of research examining every consonant of the entire OT (Note only consonants were used in the ancient text), commented, “I can affirm that there is not a page of OT concerning which we have any doubt”, apart from minor copyist errors, “we can be absolutely certain that we have the text of the OT which Christ and the apostles had and which was in existence from the beginning.”

Based on these research and from what we heard from Dr Baldwin we can be confident that the Word we have in our hands, even after many generations and translated into our modern language today is the Word of God. As Charles Spurgeon once wrote of the rudeness of those who question the inerrancy of the Bible, “This book is untainted by error... Why? Because God wrote it. Ah, charge God with error if you please; tell Him that His book is not what it ought to be.”

This debate on Bible versions is an unnecessary distraction and can cause confusion and division within churches. The energies of the Church can be better used in more

positive action in obedience to the Word of God. The debate has also done damage to Churches, when it makes statements, which question the very foundations of our faith. The extent to which some were prepared to make damaging statement in the cause of defending a particular version has also resulted in mean spiritedness and unfounded accusations.

As I said from the outset, I am not promoting or attacking any one version. Some prefer the more literal NASB, other the easier to read NIV, still other the KJV for the use of language. I believe that enough scholarly research has been done to give us the confidence that it truly is the Word of God. I hope that readers would feel assured with the particular version you are using.

Tan Swee Leong

If you are interested in reading more on this issue, the following references are useful:

The facts on The King James only Debate – John Ankerberg & John Weldon. Available from the Library.

Other references quoted in the article are also useful.

PYRAMID SCHEMES

The "pyramid" scheme is essentially a business variation of the familiar "chain letter." It works this way:

Promotor ("P") offers A and B the chance to "invest" by purchasing "distributorships" at \$1000 each. The "distributorships" give A and B the "exclusive" right to sell "distributorships" to others for \$1000 each and to sell certain products to the public. However, each \$1000 that A and B receive from their sales of "distributorships" must be divided with P, say 50-50. Thus, theoretically, A and B can realize \$500 on each "distributorship" they sell and can completely recover their initial \$1000 "investment" by selling only two "distributorships." P, however, has received not only A's and B's \$1000 each, but also \$500 for each "distributorship" that A and B sell. Initially, it appears that this can go on forever, with no one being hurt and everyone making money. But, the chart below shows that the number of investors needed to keep the pyramid scheme working quickly exceeds the population of the United States. (The chart assumes P initially sells "distributorships" to six persons, each of whom brings in an additional six "purchasers" per month.)

Month	Participants
1	6
2	36
3	216
4	1,296
5	7,776
6	46,656
7	279,936
8	1,679,616
9	10,077,696
10	60,466,176
11	362,797,056 (Exceeding US Population)
12	2,176,782,336
13	13,060,694,016 (Exceeding World Population)



The chart also shows why such a scheme is called a "pyramid" - the promoters are at the top of a pyramid-shaped flow of money. Money coming from later investors flows upward to the top.

From the above "pyramid" scheme we can see that if Christians were to be as committed to bringing people to Christ as these who sell the pyramid distributorship, we could have won the whole world to Christ in just merely 13 cycles or generations. What motivates these pyramid practitioners - money? What motivates us - the love of Christ?

My Thoughts on Christmas

Christmas means different things to different people. To some, it is that time of the year for the expected caroling and special worship services; for others, it is again the dawn of an annual season for merry-making and the expected gamut of pleasures. What does Christmas mean to you? Whatever it means, it is a fact that both Christians and non-Christians alike, whether enthusiastically or grudgingly, know its historical association with Christ.

Of course, to the world, the teachings of Jesus Christ are harder to follow and obey than the appeals of gifts and fun that children effortlessly associate with Santa Claus. I would have less reservation about the Santa Claus feature in Christmas celebrations if not for the way generations of people have corrupted the understanding of this popular figure according to their own popular preference for fairy tale and fantasy.



In fact, 'Santa Claus' was a Bishop of Myra (modern-day Turkey) by the real name of Nicholas. He was a faithful Christian who preached about the blessings of secret giving (**Matt. 6:1-4**) and practised what he preached:

1 *"Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.*

2 *"So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.*

3 *But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,*

4 *so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (NIV)*

He would not have been found out and 'embarrassed' for his secret giving of alms to needy folks over the years if not for a determined beneficiary, who sought to find out who was behind a generous gift of gold that arrived in the nick of time to save his daughter from being sold to slavery.

St. Nicholas was a God-loving man who applied the message of Matt. 6:1-4 in his altruism. Even before his death, people started following in his footsteps of secret giving without seeking personal recognition. So the story of a good man spread beyond the shores of Myra and his name transformed to 'Saint Nicklaus' (in Germany), to 'Sinter Klaus' (in Dutch) and finally to 'Santa Claus' when the story reached America.



People today may tell the story of a rotund Santa Claus coloured with the myth of a red-nosed reindeer pulling a sleigh, of oversized socks, chimney adventures, etc.; and shopping centres are always in season to be decked with Santa symbols to buy and give – but where is the spirit of giving according to the message of Matt. 6:1-4 that the real St. Nicholas preached and applied in his own life?

So you see how the modern-day babble about Santa Claus is nothing on charity but a lot on self-serving (or selfish) motivations. The saving grace is that amidst the nonsense of the world, there do exist pockets of benevolent organizations and individuals who, consciously or not, respond to charity calls in this season of peace and good will in accord with the message of Matt. 6:1-4. In other words, they give out of their true heart of love for the joy of others while seeking no personal credit.

I have no problem with the true story of St. Nicholas, but I have little affection for the corrupted story of Santa Claus. Children should be told the real place of Santa Claus in fantasy and the real example of St. Nicholas as a Godly man who did what he preached on selfless love and benevolence without drawing attention to himself for his charity.

While the world may be carried away with its distortions of the Christmas story, Christians ought not follow suit. What does Christmas mean to you?

If you say that the spirit of Christmas is not detached from the spirit of giving and of peace and good will towards men, you are absolutely correct.

It was on Christmas Day two millenniums ago that the giving of the Son of God took place. That was the most precious gift sinful man could have asked for – for the babe in the manger born of a virgin fulfilled God's promise in Scripture. A Saviour was born to the world! We do not deserve the gift of a Saviour. We deserve condemnation. But God in his love gave not because of our asking. It was a free gift that conferred on those who received, those who believed in Christ's name, the right to become children of God. (John 1:12) Salvation as a 'gift' or 'free gift' is referred to many times in Scripture. (See Rom. 3:24; 5:15-17; 6:23; 2 Cor. 9:15; Eph. 2:8; James 1:17-18).

Hence, the birth of Christ must be the greatest expression of the true spirit of giving out of love and good will, but not out of demand.

It is also known that Christ was born during a period called *pax Romana*, a time of peace and prosperity when Rome was under Caesar Augustus. While this was so, and the people enjoyed a feeling of goodness and safety, the religious climate was one of widespread polytheism. Ritualism, formalism, materialism ... reared their ugly heads. "In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken ..." (Lk 2:1) It was in those days, under the prevailing circumstances of spiritual corruption, of false comfort in



the covetousness of materialism, and of Messianic hope, that Christ was born. The temporal and false peace of man was to be swapped with the true and lasting peace that the coming of the Son of God offered. **"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."** (Lk 2:14 KJV)

Are we different in our present spiritual and materialistic states compared with the Roman Empire under Caesar Augustus? Have we been living under a false sense of comfort and peace with our material possessions the have-nots envy, or are we experiencing a stirring of discomfort and insecurity in the wake of frightening global events? Do we grasp the difference of 'temporary peace' and 'lasting peace'? Where can we bank our security for higher returns?

On Christmas Day two millenniums ago, Christ was born to the world for a purpose and in answer to a need during a time of Messianic hope; yet, the sense of wonder and amazement that struck the magi and the shepherds was contrasted by the perverse resentment and crafty vindictiveness of Herod the Great. While one may humanly understand (though not agree with) the rejection of Christ by the Gentiles, the Romans and the Greeks, it is tough to explain why even the Jews, Christ's own people, rejected Him when they were in fact anticipating the Messiah. "He came unto His own and His own received Him not" (John 1:11).

Contradictions! Contradictions! Even the circumstances of Christ's birth itself showed a 'contradiction'. It was prophesied in Scripture, and so it was predestined by God in accord with His will, for the Christ child to be born in Bethlehem. Still, wasn't it man's will at work when Caesar Augustus ordered the census that compelled Joseph and Mary to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem and thereby caused the birth to take place in Bethlehem? Experiences in life are by nature fraught with paradoxes and a thousand and one questions have been pondered by Christians and non-Christians alike: Why does a loving God permit evil? Why does an omnipotent God not just move his hand to wave away the sin of the world?

...

To me, the confluence of God's will and man's will in the birth of Christ is a significant manifestation of divine reality – Everything,

whether we are able to understand it or not, is possible with God; every prophecy in Scripture will be fulfilled if it has not yet been, even though natural minds may find it impossible to reconcile divergent notions whether in one's experiences or in our contemplations of what is to come. The nativity scene of Christ's birth was not just



humble surroundings, miraculous virgin birth, visits of the wise-men, angelic celebrations and the like. With a good knowledge of Scriptural prophecies to guide us as we mentally travel back in time to the nativity scene, we can see how there was more than met the eye. Since it fitted perfectly the prediction of Scripture, we would see the certainty of the unfolding of other Scriptural prophecies in time. From our present vantage position, we see that the growing up of the babe to die on the cross has been fulfilled. His resurrection has been fulfilled. Looking to the future, we await the day when Christ returns to reign on earth with the crown.

How will our Lord's second coming be different from His first coming? How will our response to the second coming compare with the responses of the magi, the Gentiles, the Greeks, the Romans and the Herod? For sure, our hope of salvation set down at the first coming will be fully realized in His second coming. This is of course contingent upon our spiritual state being warm with preparedness. Christ will come like a thief unannounced. We are told to be watchful. (Rev. 16:15) If when He comes we, being lacking in vigilance, are caught cold with apathy like the city of Jerusalem in the past that crucified Him rather than repenting of their sins, we shall answer to ourselves how Christ will receive us. If we take the claims of Jesus seriously, we should know that even Herod did so although, regrettably, his selfish intentions got the better of him.

As we approach another Christmas celebration, we will have caroling and special services in the Church. It is time for celebration. It is time to worship Christ our King. We must do all this, not overshadowed by our holiday mood but guarded by the proper biblical standpoint on this important Christian event. If you wish to have a personal Bible study to acquire a broad perspective on the Lord's first coming and His second coming, here are some Bible verses to follow:

1. Genesis 3:15; 12:1-3; 22:1-18 (see Galatians 3:8); 49:10
2. Exodus 12
3. Leviticus 16
4. Deuteronomy 18:15-19 (see Exodus 33:17-33)
5. 2 Samuel 7:12-17
6. Psalm 2:1-12; 16:7-11; 22, 23; 110:1 (see Matthew 22:41-45); 118:22
7. Isaiah 7:14; 9:1-7; 52:13--53:12
8. Jeremiah 23:1-6; 32:37-40; 33:6-9, 14-18
9. Daniel 2:31-45; 7:13-14; 9:24-27
10. Micah 5:2-5
11. Zechariah 9:9; 13:7; 14:1-11

May God bless us! May He bless the Church!

John Lee



Sarah

by Tan Swee Leong

Introduction

Sarah, the wife of Abraham was originally known as Sarai, meaning princely. Sarah is a sacramental name, which is a name given by God himself in association with God's gracious purpose and promise. God gave this name as a sign of God's promise as God declared in Gen 17:15,16: "God also said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her." Through this promise Sarah was associated with her husband in the blessing of the Abrahamic Covenant. Sarah, which means princess, the source of nations and kings, became the mother of nations, kings and peoples as promised.

Background

Sarah came from the land of Ur of the Chaldees in Babylon; she was the daughter of Terah, which makes her the half sister of Abraham by the same father. Marriages between near relatives were accepted though it was not known if marriages between step children were acceptable. Sarah was ten years younger than Abraham. Her original name of Sarai (meaning princely) identifies her as possibly coming from an honored family.

God called Abraham and told him to leave his land and relatives and go to country God will show him. The call

was linked to the promise in the Abrahamic Covenant in Gen 12:1-3. Abraham left his rich and settled life and took on a life as a semi-nomad and finally settled in Haran about 600 miles north of Ur.

The first reference in the Bible to Hebrew was given to Abraham in Gen 14:13, who is in fact a Gentile. Hebrew means "immigrant". As such Sarah was the first Hebrewess, the joint ancestor of the Jewish race, the mother of the Jewish race from whom "the nations of the earth shall be blessed. (Gen 12:3)

Character

Sarah was unusually beautiful (Gen 12:11,14), even as the age of 90, Abraham feared that kings would fall for her beauty.



Her beauty however proved her peril, for when they went to Egypt due to the famine. Abraham out of fear that the Egyptian may kill him and take his wife led him to dishonor his wife to save his own neck. Abraham asked his wife to lie, saying that she was his sister and not his wife. The pretense is a half-truth as Sarah was his half sister. A half-truth is always a lie. It was inconceivable that Abraham had allowed his wife to be given to Pharaoh and taken into his harem. God intervened and delivered Sarah by sending plagues upon Pharaoh and his household.

The same sin was repeated when Abraham moved to the Negev region and living in Gerar. Abraham was led to lie to Abimelech., King of Gerar, saying that Sarah was his sister. God protected Sarah and in a dream commanded the King to restore Sarah to Abraham for she was his wife. Abraham was severely rebuked by King Abimelech for this deceit.

Abraham received the promise of a child when Sarah was sixty-five. Sarah waited until she was ninety before the promise was fulfilled. In the long years of waiting Sarah wanting to continue her husband's hereditary line said to her husband, "The LORD has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her." (Gen 16:1). Her word made it sound as though God's promises has died in her and she had relied on her own way to fulfill what she think God did not. Abraham the God fearing man went along with her suggestions, which resulted in much heartache and tragedy not just for the family but for the Jewish race and mankind.

Sarah died at the age of 127 in Kiriath Arba (Hebron) in the land of Canaan and was buried in a cave at Machpelah, which Abraham purchased.

Lessons we can learn form the life of Sarah

Her submission and obedience

Sarah submitted to Abraham and the decisions he made. She had submitted to the decision to move from Ur to a place that the Lord had promised. Abraham was rich and they probably lived a comfortable life with friends and relatives. This was exchanged for uncertainty and a roving existence. Sarah respected her husband and honored his decisions.

The Bible did not record of Sarah disobeying Abraham even in very trying circumstances. Peter states that Sarah called Abraham, "My Lord", (Gen 18:12) as a declaration of her submission and respect for her husband.

Sarah was upheld by Peter in 1 Pet 3:6 as an example of a submissive woman: "They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master." She indeed is an exemplary model of submission and obedience in a godly manner.

Her impatience

Sarah was tested as she was past childbearing age and still no sign of the promised child. Her impatience caused her to waver in her faith. She asked her husband to take Hagar her Egyptian maid as a concubine. (Gen 16). As a result Hagar bore Ishmael. That decision resulted in much discord within the household and Sarah not only blamed her husband (Gen 16:5), but

mistreated Hagar so badly that she fled from her.

The incident reveals the human failings of Sarah who tried to rationalize her bad decision resulting from her departure from faith in God's promises. The consequence of Sarah's decision is severe in that the descendants of Ishmael, the Arabs proved to be a source of pain, conflict and tension with the Jews even up till today. The lesson is that whilst God can work in all situations, decisions we make can have lasting consequences which we have to live with.

Her faith

Sarah was one of two women commended in Heb 11, in the gallery of the heroes of faith, the other being Rahab. Sarah was commended for she believed in the faithfulness of God. She continued to believe in the God's promise of a child though humanly it had seemed impossible.

Conclusion

The Bible always paint the portraits of its character in its true colours, with all its strengths, weaknesses, exemplariness and flaws. Sarah is no exception, though she in her human fallenness had made some bad mistakes which had dire long lasting consequences, she among all women of the Bible represented what Paul called the "freewoman" and "mother of us all." (Gal:4:19-31). It is through her as the mother of all who believe and through her faith and by the

promise given by God we as Gentiles have received the blessing in the Abrahamic covenant where "all the nations will be blessed through you." Sarah is a woman used by God in the fulfillment of his redemptive plan for all mankind.

Soaring like an eagle

"Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint". (Isaiah 40:30-31)



The sun, the grass and a little bit of the sea – These were what a number of youths saw on the 2nd Sunday of November during an outing to Marina Bay. A little way back in my life, I would have probably rejected the notion of 'soaring like an eagle' under the sun in an out-of-the-way area; but thanks be to God that there was a catered air-con bus to take us to and from our destination, and the soothing sun did not leave us any burn marks. Besides, the gusty wind added ease to the lesson of 'soaring like an eagle' although some people still could not put right their flying act till very late into the day. Ask Elaine... So what did we exactly do over there?

We gave thanks to God for the kind weather, worshipped the Lord joyfully, sang praises to His glorious name, had good laughs on Pei'en's action songs and of course not forgetting to take some candid photographs - courtesy of Anthony!

We organised the youths into groups and played "Draw til you drop". None of us did really draw till we dropped but the drawings of some groups did make most of us drop our jaws! More interesting was the game of building the highest building using balloons and a limited amount of masking tape. The team spirit was evident as some members in the group were in charge of blowing the balloons, some in charge of managing the amount of tape to be used and others in charge of toting up the shrill decibels that were assumed to forestall the bursting of the balloons. Ask the girls...

Now, what's after the games? Prizes, of course! Or more specifically, food! As usual, the winning group got the biggest spoils. But another characteristic of Christian love came into play when eventually the food was shared fairly. Ask the hungry youths...

Soon came the time to let our 'wings' soar like eagles in the sky! Kites were bought at a reasonable price and you could see the glow in the eyes of many youths. Everyone was excited to fly his/her kite. And yes, the kites surely did fly high in the sky; and with them our spirit of joy, relaxation and peace became like eagles' wings soaring and gliding effortlessly bathed in the glow of the golden sun. One of the over-jubilant kites did fly off the hands of a youth. Was it trying to reach for the freedom of the heavens? Ask Sabrina...



Other youths who were more adventurous went all the way to the bank of the river to fly their kites. Many got their kites entangled, but that did not dampen the mood of the kite-flyers. Patience was the key to getting these kites untangled and in no time, they were up again. But I still did not know why one particular kite got a can tied to it. Ask Jacinta...

Meanwhile, some of the adults took their rest on a mat, listening to Christian songs, enjoying the weather, munching on their favorite crackers, enjoying fellowship with one another.

In a twinkling of an eye, the sun started to set and the cool sea breeze gave us an indication that it was time to leave. Things were packed up and the bus was on time to fetch us back to our church.

What did we learn from this trip to the South? Well, for me, at least I knew how to fly a kite for the first time. Watching the freedom, strength and confidence of the kite was a great relief from the common pressures of being a youth. The beauty of the following song mirrors the feeling.

*I want to soar like an eagle soars
Not bound to this earth anymore
To fly with the Lord so high
And feel His presence so high
(chorus)
Not to be an equal
I just want to fly like an eagle
I want to sing a song so clear
That the whole world can hear
A song to fill the skies
That floats like a butterfly
(chorus x2... 1st verse/chorus)*

Words and Music by Jerry Heater
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Camp Hearts

I attended the K.I.D.S. camp from 17th to 19th November.

I enjoyed the many interesting activities lined up to keep us well occupied. One of these was the glass painting taught to us at the Church on the day of reporting for the camp. It was fun learning the art. Following that, we were also well fed by the sumptuous spread of food on the table. Then we set off for Sentosa.

We hunted for treasure along the beach at Sentosa. Some secret treasures were discovered. All the treasure hunters were perspiring and rushing for the bath when they returned to the campsite.

The musical fountain show with its dazzling laser displays was beautiful and exciting. The supper after the show was both a delight for hungry stomachs and energizing for tired bodies.

Morning exercises, beach activities, quizzes, photo taking, skits performance, etc. had all the camp participants busy throughout the camp. Breakfast, lunch, dinner and supper kept us all well charged with enough energy for our activities.

Many thanks to God for His blessing of fine weather throughout the camp duration. It rained heavily immediately when I reached home after the camp.

Next year will be my final year with K.I.D.S. I look forward to another K.I.D.S. camp. Many thanks to the uncles and aunts who have sweated to make it possible for us to have both fun and learning.

Shawn Lee

STEPS TO LIFE

One day a farmer's donkey fell down into a well. The animal cried piteously for hours as the farmer tried to figure out what to do. Finally he decided the animal was old and the well needed to be covered up anyway, it just wasn't worth it to retrieve the donkey. He invited all his neighbors to come over and help him. They all grabbed a shovel and began to shovel dirt into the well.

At first, the donkey realized what was happening and cried horribly.

Then, to everyone's amazement, he quieted down. A few shovel loads later, the farmer finally looked down the well and was astonished at what he saw.

With every shovel of dirt that hit his back, the donkey was doing something amazing. He would shake it off and take a step up. As the farmer's neighbors continued to shovel dirt on top of the animal, he would shake it off and take a step up. Pretty soon, everyone was amazed as the donkey stepped up over the edge of the well and trotted off!

Life is going to shovel dirt on you, all kinds of dirt. The trick to getting out of the well is to shake it off and take a step up. Each of our troubles is a stepping stone. We can get out of the deepest wells just by not stopping, never giving up!

Shake it off and take a step up!

GB Junior Camp

I hope you all had a wonderful time working with one another, knowing one another, having fun, in spite of all the stress with taking care of 12 to 14 girls, and had a good learning experience. In order to achieve the above, I guess we need to have the right attitude in doing all things and a teachable heart. May God continue to grant us strength and wisdom to serve Him and Glorify Him in all that we do. I am so thankful to God for his protection to all of us during the camp. We are also thankful for God's provision. Tay, Jim and the children coming to the rescue when we were short handed to do the fire starting for BBQ. Of course not forgetting Wei Yang, Jerome and Kenton for their high standard in scrubbing the mess tins.

God knows who is best for each job. He has given us wisdom to ask Grace & Esther to come and help us. I must say they stayed in the kitchen from 6 am to 9pm or even 10pm before they knocked off their duty. Thank you ladies God has been so kind to us to send you both to be helpers.

Thank God for Beng Lay's high power energy. Without you I don't think we could manage the handicraft work.

Soo Wei, Liqin, Jasmine, Myrtle, Uma, Meili thank you for joining us and I must say Uma you did a good job. You did well keep it up.

Susan and Cecilia thank you for volunteering to run the camp. May God continue to grant you a wonderful time of serving Him and give you greater strength.

May Ling thank you for doing the last minute print out for us. Hopefully next year you will not be press for time and able to join us full time so that you can enjoy the camp.

Theresa, your role this year is different and as usual you did well and do your parents and God proud in spite of your age. Keep it up and may God continue to grant you strength and passion to study well.

Mindy and Stephanie thank you for coming to help us. Mindy, I thank the Lord for your strength and indeed God has used you to help to carry the girl out of the bus to her bed. Thank you so much for carrying her because I don't think I have the strength to do that. Stephanie, thank you for staying up so late to wait for Joanne's father. I hope you two will consider joining us for next year's camp and I can assure you will gain much in experience. By the way how about joining us in the Girls Brigade junior ministry?

Betsy thank you for joining us and I am glad Sabrina was with us. I hope she can continue to join us in our future camps. Julie I know you don't really enjoy being in the group as leader with so many kids to care for. But I hope you did enjoy yourself and we look forward to have you as our next camp commandant. Thanks Hui Ling and Hui Wen for joining us, I hope you girls had fun and hope to have you all again next year.

I hope I did not leave anyone out. I want to thank the Lord for giving me so much strength during the camp. May the Lord's name be magnified and glorified in all that we do. Amen.

Thanks.

Michelle.

(below is a greeting letter from Rev Daniel Nelsson - the First Pastor of JCC)

Dear Friends around the world,

When you have celebrated your Golden Anniversary and both of you have turned 80 you ought to be prepared for a change. But who wants to think of a separation from a lifelong fellowship with the person you once upon the time brought to the altar? But prepared or not it happened to me on Tuesday evening **March 6th** this year. I had been holding Solveig in my arms for quite a while before I realized that Solveig's spirit had left her body. Together with Staffan and his son Jens and Dorothy and Örjan we could gather together around her body, well taken care of by the nurses in the hospital in a nicely made-up bed and thank God for what she had meant to me during 56 years and for our children and grandchildren. We were all gathered in our parish church on March 23rd for a very beautiful memorial service, the church filled to the last seat with friends. From there we proceeded to the parish hall of our local district church here in Savja, where short but to the point speeches witnessed about the impression Solveig had made in many peoples' lives. I know that in a short while we will meet again in the new world that Jesus has promised his disciples the last evening together *"In my Father's House there are many rooms.."* In God's vast universe there are many solar systems, where Jesus has prepared a new world of peace and love for those who have put their trust in HIM and HIS promise that a reunion there will be! What joy and happiness to meet them all! In the midst of sorrow and loneliness you have a great future to look forward to!

In the meantime I try to adjust myself to the new situation. I have invited two students to share the house with me. There is a tremendous need for housing for students moving to Uppsala to further their studies. Some of them have to rent an apartment 50 - 60 km away and travel by train and bus. My two students can use their bicycles when weather permits or travel for only 20-25minutes by bus.

I am still with the team of retired pastors, counseling people in distress in the Cathedral. You meet them in tears the first time. After a few sessions they have mustered up courage to tackle a difficult situation and start a new life. That is a great experience. We have the greatest remedy for troubles: faith in Jesus, who can change our lives and give meaning to it.

Christ, who was born into this world 2000 years ago is still working and therefore I wish that you would be drawn closer to Him during the coming Advent and Christmas season. The New Year might bring more disasters to the world but let us remember that Christ won a great victory on Calvary's cross, the darkest hour in history. He is still with us and His Church Universal, bringing us Peace, Joy and protection. He is still using us, His poor and weak servants to promote the message: Joy to the world....

Yours in Christ

Daniel Nelsson

