

PRECIOUS SEED

INTERNATIONAL



a magazine to encourage the study of the scriptures, the practice of New Testament church principles and interest in gospel work



'And now I am no more in the world . . . I come to thee . . . and now come I to thee'

John 17. 11-13.

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NEW Precious Seed publications for 2010

Day by Day Pictures and Parables and The Levitical Offerings

Day by Day Pictures and Parables is our new daily meditations book for 2010. It is of the high standard which has come to be expected of this series of books and picks out pictures and parables from both the Old and New testaments, explaining them and applying them to today's readers. It will be available from the end of October at £8.50 per copy, incl. p&p.

The Levitical Offerings is a 48-page booklet by the late Dr. John Boyd of N. Ireland. It was written originally as a series of articles for the magazine but has been revised and reformatted to fit into our booklets series of publications. It will cost £4.50 per copy, incl. p&p.

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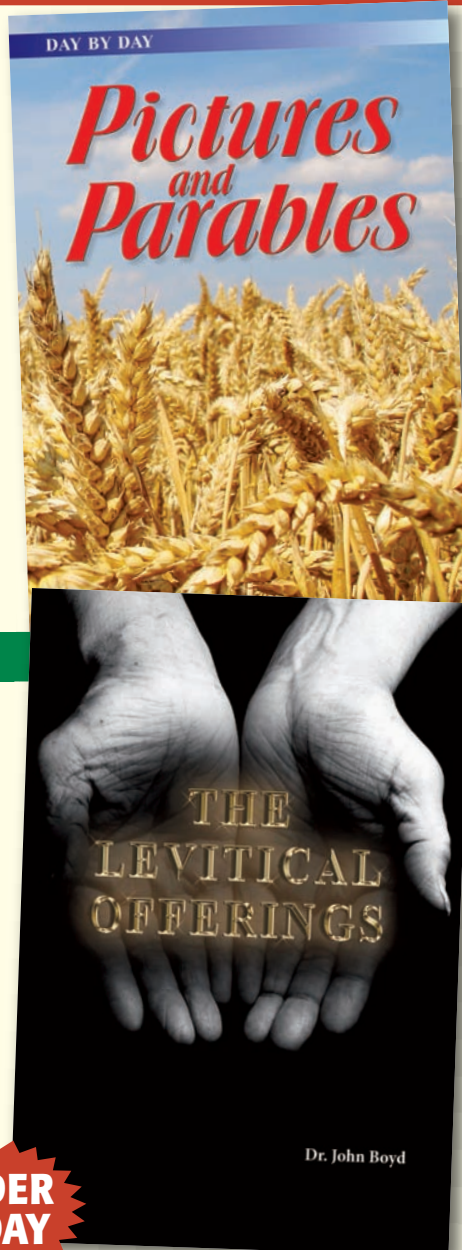
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- The magazine is published quarterly by the Precious Seed Trust. Registered Charity No. 326157.
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By JOHN BENNETT and JOHN SCARBROOK

Book Reviews

These books are available from the publishers and not from Precious Seed Publications



The Messiah and the Feasts of Israel Bryan W. Sheldon

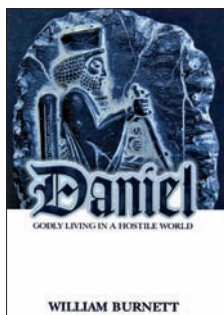
Paperback, 192pp. Published by Gospel Folio Press, 304 Killaly St. West, Port Colborne, Ontario, Canada. L3K 6A6. Available in the UK from John Ritchie Ltd. Price £7.50. ISBN 1-897117-59-0.

In this relatively small volume Bryan Sheldon considers the Feasts of Jehovah in relation to Messiah, looking at them in detail and recognizing that they describe God's prophetic calendar for the Hebrew nation and outline His plan of redemption. While the four springtime feasts have already been fulfilled, the autumn feasts still lie in the future. Of special significance to this age is that a period of indeterminate length separates the two.

The great value of this book arises from the detailed research which the author has undertaken. Not only has he drawn his material from a careful study of the Old and New Testaments but he has also consulted Jewish writings. Such background information has served to enhance the biblical account and to illuminate the events recorded in the scriptures. The chapters are so arranged that the description of a feast is followed by a chapter which relates that feast to the experiences of the Messiah.

It is well nigh impossible to read this book without being driven back to further study of the scriptures and to marvel again at the minute detail in which the Lord's life so wonderfully fulfilled the prophecies about Him, as recorded for us in the Old Testament. It would be difficult to single out for special note any part of this work but attention must be drawn to the four chapters dealing with Messiah and the Passover. Here, geographical material and historical information combine to enrich these chapters and provide spiritual refreshment which will benefit all believers. While on the odd occasion one may quibble slightly over some minor point, the overall impact of this book will spur the reader to further study and appreciation of the word of God and also to move him to worship the One who is its theme.

[Our thanks to Ed Hotchin, Hucknall, Nottingham, UK, for this review]



Daniel - Godly Living in a Hostile World William Burnett

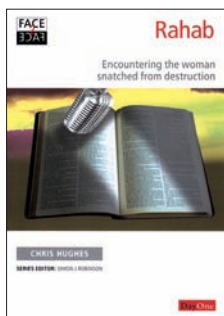
Paperback, 86pp. Published by Gospel Folio Press, 304 Killaly St. West, Port Colborne, ON, Canada L3K 6A6. Available in the UK from John Ritchie Ltd., 40 Beansburn, Kilmarnock KA3 1RH. Price £8.99. ISBN 978-189711-773-6.

Many books have been written on the prophetic chapters of Daniel but fewer that consider the character of the man that God used and the lessons that can be learned from his life and testimony. On that ground alone this book is to be welcomed.

The author draws the parallels between Daniel's experiences and that of modern situations. From the opening chapter, he emphasizes the real difficulties of facing the 'Babylonian Brain-Washing Machine', and 'The Flattery of Selection' and yet maintaining a relationship with those, such as Melzar, who had

the responsibility of carrying out the king's command. He considers how Daniel turned times of crisis into times of opportunity through united prayer and dependence upon God. The book is not comfortable reading. The writer's comment, 'We must avoid music which has Satanic and idolatrous undertones as it will destroy our spiritual life' is a telling one, ably exemplified from the situation that faced Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. Similarly, the task of telling Nebuchadnezzar that he would 'go completely out of his mind, and start behaving like an animal', or of delivering the message of coming judgement to Belshazzar, was far from easy. Yet, as the writer stresses, 'Daniel never flinched from his responsibility'.

William Burnett is to be commended for this insightful and practical treatment of the life of a great man of God who served in the most hostile of environments. A prayerful reading of this work could produce much of lasting spiritual fruit in the life of any believer.



Rahab - Encountering the woman snatched from destruction Chris Hughes

Paperback, 80pp. Published by Day One Publications, Ryelands Road, Leominster HR6 8NZ, UK. Price £5.00. ISBN 978-1-84625-135-1.

This is part of the Face2Face series of books edited by Simon Robinson. As its title suggests, it covers the scriptural record of Rahab, both in terms of the New Testament as well as the Old Testament passages. In just eleven short chapters Hughes handles the life of this remarkable individual and has much to say that is of profit.

Although some may demur with the author's use of the New International Version throughout, his lines of study are refreshing and direct. In asking the question, 'Why Rahab?', Hughes rightly observes, 'There are many more important, illustrious and, to be fair, less dubious characters from the ancient world who . . . are ignored'. Yet, as he later points out, 'God does not only forgive; He does far more than that. God is able to use . . . His people to bring to fruition His eternal purposes - whatever their background and their baggage'.

The format of the book is very much in the modern study guide genre. As such, it lays the foundation of the passage to be read, the points to be considered, issues and scriptures for further study and matters for discussion. This reviewer did not share the writer's view on judgement. Equally, some may be unhappy with the author's views on 'faith markers'. However, these should not be allowed to detract from a book that can challenge and encourage the reader.



No King in Israel – The History of the Judges Joel Portman

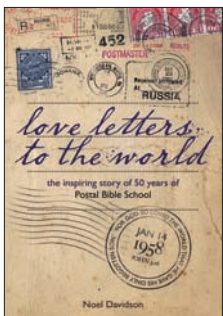
Paperback, 224pp. Published by Gospel Folio Press, 304 Killaly St. West, Port Colborne, ON, Canada L3K 6A6. Available in UK from John Ritchie Ltd. Price £9.99. ISBN 978-189711-762-0.

'This book was written to develop the link between the history of the Judges and the letters of Christ to the seven churches of Asia in Revelation chapters 2-3, as well as to suggest practical teaching applicable to every local assembly today'. So says the publisher's note on the back cover of this challenging book by Joel Portman. In fourteen chapters the author develops his theme. He understands that the Spirit of God has given us the book of Judges so that we may learn from these examples of God's dealings with Israel and that their history will instruct us in our life and service. 'God's principles are unchanged and unchanging'. The author has wisely avoided delving into detail in such matters as the chronology of this period so that he can concentrate on drawing out the pastoral and practical lessons of the book.

This work is spiritually stimulating and challenging. The style is gentle and persuasive, yet it compels the reader to face honestly many of the problems which confront assemblies today. Uncomfortable truths are clearly identified and the reader is challenged to address them. Above all, this is a book which urges its readers on to further study and meditation. The author will prompt us without spoon-feeding. Nor does he shirk his responsibility to move us to self-examination.

Inevitably, there will be some matters with which some may disagree. But to travel with the author through the period of the Judges will sharpen our awareness of our own situation and will remind us of the timeless principles which we must observe if we are to be faithful in our own day, which falls just before the setting-up of the kingdom.

[Our thanks to Ed Hotchin, Hucknall, Nottingham, UK, for this review]



Love Letters To The World Noel Davidson

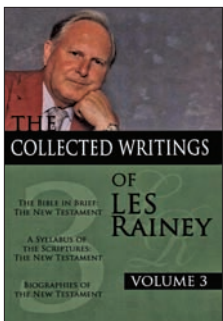
Paperback, 264pp. Available from Bible Educational Services, 19 Cog Road, Sully, Vale of Glamorgan CF64 5TD, UK. Price: £10.00, incl p&p. ISBN: 978-184030-204-2.

The book is subtitled 'The Inspiring Story of 50 Years of Postal Bible School', and inspiring it is. Many of us will have been influenced or affected by the work of Postal Bible School over the years; some of us may even have completed the lessons! Certainly none can doubt the way in which God has used this work since its inception in 1958. This delightful and well written account traces the original burden of Bert and Wendy Gray in January 1958 to offer Bible study lessons for children by post. Before the end of that year sixty boys and girls were returning lessons. At the present time 'hundreds of volunteers mark upwards of 30,000 lessons in more than twenty countries every month'.

The book begins by recounting the conversions and early married days of Bert and Wendy. Their initial burden, and particularly Wendy's desire to make her life 'count for God' even when 'Bert was often away' taking meetings, should be a challenge to us all. In fact, the constant underlying theme of the narrative is: what would God have us to do for Him? A challenge indeed!

The book is packed full of names, events, stories and anecdotes of people who have served the Lord through the work, or those who have been contacted and saved over the years. Many of these demonstrate the amazing provision, providence and grace of God and serve as a timely reminder of His love and care. The various accounts are uplifting and encouraging. One such account was God's marvellous provision of the exact amount of money required (£1,520), on exactly the right day for Noel and Liza McMeekin (the current administrators of Postal Bible School in the Republic of Ireland) to pay for the delivery of Postal Bible School prizes. The closing chapters describe the wonderful spread of the work into many foreign lands such as the West Indies, Ukraine, Romania, Canada and Russia. The concluding refrain, 'How marvellous! How wonderful!' is suitable indeed. This book is recommended to all.

[Our thanks to Daniel Rudge, Bracknell, UK, for this review]



Collected Writings of Les Rainey, Volume 3 Les Rainey

Paperback, 420pp. Published by Gospel Folio Press, 304 Killaly St. West, Port Colborne, ON, Canada L3K 6A6. Available in UK from John Ritchie Ltd. Price £12.99. ISBN 978-189711-731-6.

Volume 3 of these *Collected Writings* follows an identical format to Volume 2 with the exception that while the former united in one book three separate publications on Old Testament studies, Volume 3 brings together three studies in the New Testament. .

The first, *The Bible in Brief: The New Testament*, begins with four introductory chapters giving an insight into the political and religious background to the New Testament. Each book of the New Testament is then briefly reviewed, the writer giving a key word, a key verse and a brief outline for every book.

The second, *A Syllabus of the Scriptures: The New Testament*, opens with a chapter on the 400 years between the two testaments. Each book of the New Testament is then, again, separately considered, but this time in more detail, with a focus upon major themes. Each study concludes with a question section. It is difficult within the confines of this review to give an adequate reflection of the writer's style, but, limiting ourselves to some of his comments on the Gospel of Luke and 2 Timothy, he suggests that the leading characteristics of the gospel can be considered under these titles: 'Physically, Individually, Sympathy, Spiritually, Medically and Practically' and some pointers are given for each heading. In the outline of 2 Timothy he suggests Chapter 1 looks back over the past – The minister and his mission; Chapter 2 portrays the present – The minister and his Master; Chapter 3 points towards the future – The minister and his message; Chapter 4 directs us towards heaven – The minister and his motive.

The third is *Biographies of the New Testament* containing eighteen separate studies ranging from 'Mark' to 'Memories of Bethany'. It is almost inevitable, in bringing three separate books together, that there will be some repetition of material but, as with Volume 2, this latest publication is the product of a life-time's study of the word of God, and contains many interesting and helpful lines of study. This book is well worth purchasing.

[Our thanks to Richard Catchpole, South Norwood, London, for this review]



PRECIOUS SEED

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'He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him', Ps. 126. 6.

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EDITORIAL

BY ROY HILL

'So great salvation', Heb. 2. 3

'The common salvation', Jude 1. 3

It is a wonderful thing to be saved and a great privilege to be able to follow the Lord Jesus. We exult in the fact that our sins, though many, are all forgiven. Furthermore, we are justified and on our way to heaven. We look forward to the Lord's return but should we die before He comes we have no fear of death because it is but the door to heaven and to the presence of the Lord. Indeed, Paul himself said that he had a compelling desire to depart and to be with Christ. This he judged to be very far better. All these blessings, and many more, are ours in the Lord. The writer to the Hebrews in chapter 12 verse 6 describes it as 'so great salvation'. That is precisely what it is. It is great because of its Provider, God Himself. It is great because it was the Lord Jesus Christ who paid the penalty for sin and opened up the way back to God for us. It is great because sins are forgiven. It is great because there is no possibility of losing it, see the Answer given in Question Time on the back cover page of this issue.

Jude refers to the same salvation as 'the common salvation'. It is certainly not common because it is ordinary; in reality, it is quite extraordinary! It is described as common because it is available to all; rich or poor; young or old; great or small. Here, then, is a salvation which is truly great because it is genuinely common. We share it and rejoice together in it.

You may have noticed in the last issue of the magazine its name has been changed to *Precious Seed International*. This is to reflect the international aspects of the work in that around 50% of all the magazines distributed go to overseas addresses and an increasing number of our authors are from assemblies abroad. It also distinguishes the magazine work from the books publication programme (Precious Seed Publications) and the web site (Precious Seed Web). We plan to enlarge our book publishing operation and to develop the web site to meet the needs of our readers and especially the younger generation. We are starting work on a New Testament Commentary series and will also seek to republish some of the booklets that we have published in the past as well as new compilations from magazine articles. This is a demanding challenge in the work and extra hands are needed to accomplish the tasks ahead. By the end of this year we will have sorted out who does what and will advise readers when we have decided the various responsibilities.

Also, in the May issue of *Precious Seed International* I mentioned that another three members of the Committee will retire at the end of 2009 and it has been the committee's exercise before the Lord that we should find brethren sound in the faith and committed to assembly principles and distinctives to replace them. A number having been approached have indicated their desire to join us in the work of this ministry and we therefore are delighted to welcome Brian Clatworthy (Newton Abbot), Ian Grant (Aberdeen) and Ken Totton (Stowmarket) as trustees and committee members. The brethren retiring are Malcolm Horlock, Robert Brown and Michael Jones. A tribute to them will appear in the November issue, DV.

I do hope you will enjoy the articles in this the August edition and I would remind you that we are always pleased to hear from our readers. Many write words that encourage us and we are of course open to constructive criticism that will help the work to prosper. If you have any questions or comments please contact the Secretary, John Scarsbrook, who will answer your queries or pass your question on to the appropriate committee member.

THE MYSTERY

God

The apostle Paul in writing to Timothy, who was then located in Ephesus, was concerned that he might not be able to visit him and the saints there for quite some time. He is anxious to ensure, should that be the case, that Timothy should have some written encouragement to know how he and others ought to 'behave . . . in the house of God', 1 Tim. 3. 15. This resulted in the First Epistle of Paul to Timothy and, divinely inspired, it has survived nearly 2000 years; its message is still current and perhaps uniquely applicable to us today.

The first three chapters of the epistle are taken up with the assembly's way of doing things which is quite different to what the saints had encountered in the past either in connection with the Jewish temple, the synagogue or the heathen temples of the Gentiles. The new practices must have been very significant to the believers and, in the beginning, quite novel. Yet, they had learned that it was not only a new way of doing things but it was God's way of doing things. There is instruction about praying, who should pray in public (the men only) and when. Similarly, information on how Christian women should dress and deport themselves is discussed, as is the existence of elders and deacons and their character. Further, the fact that women are not to teach in the assembly but to learn in silence is addressed and explained. These are most certainly not man's way of doing things but they are God's way and as such cannot be improved and should not be denied nor watered down for the sake of convenience.

Following these instructions we have the phrase in chapter 3 verse 16, 'Great is the mystery of godliness', followed by a list of six things about the Lord Jesus. We would usually equate the word

'godliness' with the character of saints and therefore its presence in this context may appear to be unusual. However, if we take the meaning of the word 'godliness' to be 'God's way of doing things' it encourages us to more readily appreciate the teaching that is being brought before us here, i.e., 'Great is the mystery of God's way of doing things'. We are then presented with six things God has done in Christ to show that there can be no better way than His way and that His way of doing things is unique and appropriate. An understanding of this will impress on us that as far as the assembly is

By
ROY HILL
Bristol,
England

concerned, its structure, administration and practices cannot be improved by men. Those who advocate different ways to those proposed by scripture would imply that whatever God does they can adapt and improve; these six items indicate that is not so. We now look briefly at God's way of doing things. Previously these were a mystery but now the unique way He works is perfectly revealed in Christ:

1 God (He, or who) was manifest in flesh – Incarnation

For something to be 'manifest' or revealed it must have been in existence before the event. So, when Jesus Christ was manifest it is evident that He pre-existed; and He did so as the eternal Son of the eternal God. He was seen of men and in His life thoroughly manifested God the Father and His many attributes. So complete was this manifestation that He was able to say in response to a statement by Philip, 'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father',

RY OF iness

John 14. 9. We often think of incarnation being His birth but it is rather more than that. It includes His whole life on earth from beginning to end. In revealing Himself to mankind this was God's way of doing things, and it could not be bettered.

2 Justified in the Spirit – Vindication

During His life the Lord was, as prophesied in the Old Testament, 'despised and rejected of men'. On the occasions when this happened He did not seek to justify Himself. He accepted the rejection in humility. As the days of His sojourn here progressed so the rejection spilled over into threats and violence. Eventually, it culminated in His death on the cross. He was rejected by the Romans, by His own nation and indeed by His own earthly family. Everything and everybody was against Him; even His close friends deserted Him. But, at last, He was vindicated. Because, when He was crucified and buried, on the third day God raised Him from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit. This was the greatest possible vindication of His life and ministry. It was God's way of doing things: it is marvellous in our eyes!

3 Seen of angels – Observation

Angels are often encountered in both the Old and New Testaments. They appeared on earth at various times and in different places. We are aware of their residence in heaven and of the services they render to their Creator. We know that some are fallen and await coming fearful judgement. Following the Lord's resurrection, angels appear in parts of His exodus, e.g., at the tomb, at the ascension and doubtless at His

entry back into the courts of heaven itself. While men, lower than angels, rejected the Lord and His claims, angels are associated with His return to glory. The thought is not only of observation but of intelligent close study of the Lord and of totally committed service to Him. They were quite unlike men and where men failed they, as it were, picked up the responsibility of being by His side as He ascended. This was God's way of doing things.

4 Preached unto the Gentiles – Proclamation

The great plan of Satan was to stifle the gospel message at its beginning by removing all trace of the Lord Jesus from the records of Jerusalem. This was to be achieved by distributing His remaining possessions to the Roman soldiers on duty at Calvary and by burying Him in a common grave with criminals. Later, even some Jewish believers would try to keep Him for themselves and only permit believing Gentiles into the church if they had first become Jews, been circumcised and given an undertaking to keep the law of Moses. This was their way of doing things. God's way of doing things, however, was somewhat different. He determined that the gospel of God concerning His Son should be preached among all nations even to the uttermost parts of the earth. This did not please the Jews but it was God's plan and we know only too well the success that attended the early mission of Paul and others right through until this day when the message resonates around the world giving opportunity for all men, to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. In the great plan of salvation this is God's way of doing things.

5 Believed on in the world – Salvation

On hearing this message of salvation by grace through faith many are those who have believed. He is, of course, not believed on *by* the world. In fact, the majority still reject Him; but most certainly He is believed on *in*

the world. Around the globe many from every nation have trusted Him for salvation, and we recall the words of the Lord, 'They shall come from the north . . . south . . . east . . . and the west' and populate heaven in accord with the divine plan of the provision of a bride for Christ. This is hardly the way men would have planned things but it is indeed God's way of doing things and we rejoice in it.

6 Received up into glory – Expectation

Finally, in the gospel plan, there is the problem of how to get men from earth to heaven. Some of them still alive but most of them dead, buried, and decayed. Such a venture is beyond the wisdom of man to accomplish, but God has a way of doing things and in this case it is the Rapture of the church. The living will be snatched away and the dead raised. All will be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, and then they shall appear in heaven all safely rescued from the world and avoiding the coming tribulation and other great judgements on men and nations. This again is God's way of doing things and we cry, 'Hallelujah!'

The message in these six statements is that God has a way of doing things that is perfect and cannot be bettered. We may not fully understand now why He chose these ways but we do know that they are good and right. We must also acknowledge that His way of doing things in His local assemblies cannot be improved upon either. Therefore, we should be content to follow the New Testament church pattern for praise, worship and service. His ways of doing things are past finding out and His ways are not our ways - 'Great is the mystery of God's way of doing things!'

ROY HILL is chairman of *Precious Seed* Trust.



Dispensatio

Dispensationalism has always had its detractors. There are people who will speak out against dispensationalism, suggest that it is of little importance, or who will claim it is too difficult for the average believer to understand. But dispensationalism has been at the core of responsible Bible interpretation for centuries. Generations of believers have been blessed in their doctrine and Christian walk by an understanding of dispensationalism. And so it is fitting that another generation familiarize themselves with these basic principles. These are truths that the average believer can readily understand and be blessed by.

Rather than starting with a definition of dispensationalism, perhaps it is better to look at the natural divisions of scripture and see how they point to dispensational distinctives. The most basic division in scripture is the division between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Of course there are also natural divisions within the Old Testament. There are fundamental differences in the ways in which God dealt with man before the fall in the Garden of Eden and after the fall. Another fundamental difference occurs with Noah, and still another when God started dealing with one man and nation through Abraham. And, of course, when God gave Moses the Law on Mount Sinai, the way in which God dealt with man and revealed Himself had once again changed. There are also differences in how God deals with man in the New Testament. Though the New Testament is primarily the story of the church, literal Bible interpretation tells us that there is a future Millennium when Christ will rule on earth.

So, we see natural divisions in scripture. These different interactions have some features in common. For

example, it is easy to see the importance of faith through the sweep of history. It is also easy to see that in each of these interactions between God and man, man fails. In whatever test of obedience God puts before man, man is incapable of obeying fully. So these interactions have some features in common. But in these interactions it is also clear that something is different. The ways in which God deals with mankind changes and God's self-revelation increases in each of these interactions.

Now we need to think about the importance of literal Bible interpretation. In our everyday lives, we all need to be interpreters. We need to interpret each conversation we have, each letter we receive and each report we come across. To make sense of the everyday world, we employ literal interpretation. It's the one system of interpretation that makes good sense. And so it is with Biblical interpretation.

By
**SHAWN
ABIGAIL**
Ottawa,
Canada

To interpret the Bible literally is the one system that makes good sense. The other main system of interpretation is that of allegorizing. Unfortunately, allegorizing can allow a person to make scripture say anything he wishes, and often goes against the 'plain sense' meaning of the Bible.

One of the most important implications of literal Bible interpretation is that we draw a distinction between the church and Israel. All Christians believe in literal Bible interpretation to some extent. This is why all Christians believe in the virgin birth and the deity of Christ. But where many Christians get confused is in the prophecies of the Old Testament which relate to Israel. Losing sight of literal Bible interpretation, some people confuse Israel with the church, and believe that the, as yet unfulfilled, prophecies and blessings about Israel must somehow apply to the church. But literal Bible interpretation makes good sense. For example in Ezekiel chapters 40 to 46 we read about a future temple in Israel. If we do not take the Bible literally, we are left with seven chapters

DISPENSATIONALISM

PART ONE

of the Bible which never had any meaning and will never have any meaning.

So we see that literal Bible interpretation leads us to make a distinction between Israel and the church. The church does not replace Israel in God's great eternal plans. However this distinction doesn't just rest on the principle of literal Bible interpretation, but it is also the explicit statement of scripture. We read in 1 Corinthians chapter 10 verse 32, 'Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God'. Scripture is very clear; there is a distinction between Israel and the church. The church is not a spiritual Israel, does not appropriate the blessings promised to Israel in the Old Testament, and God still has plans for the nation of Israel.

But there is one more foundational concept that we must examine before we discuss dispensationalism in more detail. Some may think that God's highest purpose is in the alleviating of human suffering. But while we are to follow our Master's example in being merciful, Christians have a higher purpose. Others may think that God's highest purpose is in saving mankind. But while the Gospel ministry is important, Christians have a higher purpose. Indeed, from scripture, we see that God's highest purpose is that He alone must get the glory.

The definitive statement on God's glory is Isaiah chapter 42 verse 8, 'I am the Lord: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images'. We can reflect the glory of God. We can be instruments of the glory of God. But we have no glory of our own. In fact, God himself is our glory, as Isaiah chapter 60 verse 19b makes clear. This is a lesson Nebuchadnezzar needed to learn in Daniel chapter 4 verses 28-32. God's glory is demonstrated in the salvation He provides, Rom. 9. 23. So, we can glorify God in His mercy. But

we can also glorify God in His righteous judgement. An example of God being glorified in his righteous judgment is in Exodus chapter 14 verse 17, 'I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them. And I will gain glory through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen' NIV. Note this well; God says that He will receive glory through the destruction of Pharaoh's army. Because God will get the glory through His mercy and through His righteous judgement, God's glory is a concept that transcends the salvation of man. And so it should be clear that God's glory is more important than whether or not mankind is saved. So God's glory is a concept that drives us to worship, Rev. 4. 10, 11.

What we have just examined is traditionally thought of as the three distinctives of dispensationalism. *First*, we follow the principle of consistently literal Bible interpretation. *Second*, there is a distinction made between the church and Israel. And *third*, God's



highest purpose is that He must get the glory. Having understood these foundational distinctives, we are now ready to think about dispensationalism proper. Dispensationalism is a theological system which rests on these distinctives and brings a unified order to the natural divisions we see within the Bible. By definition, a dispensation is 'a distinguishable stewardship in the outworking of God's purpose, where mankind or representatives of mankind are tested and found wanting in regards to God's revelation'.

Dispensationalism is about stewardships. We can learn a great deal about the concept of stewardship from the parable of the unjust steward in Luke

chapter 16. There we see two individuals; the master and the steward. The steward is entrusted by the master with specific responsibilities, to obey the master's will and look after the master's interests. If the steward does not adequately fulfill the requirements of the stewardship, the stewardship will be removed. It should also be pointed out that this concept of a stewardship is related to biblical mysteries, 1 Cor. 4. 1, 2. A mystery in a biblical sense is something that God has not previously revealed. So stewardships are related to God's unfolding revelation of His will. Three specific stewardships are mentioned in the New Testament, using the English words 'administration', 'stewardship' or 'dispensation' to translate the Greek word *oikonomia*. Ephesians chapter 3 verses 2 and 3 makes it clear that in some sense God's grace is currently a stewardship. We also see a future stewardship of the fullness of times, Eph. 1. 10, and at least one (and probably more than one) previous stewardship, Col. 1. 25, 26.

Now, let's take everything we've learned and put it together. We see differences in the ways in which God deals with man, but how can we make sense of this as a single system? The answer is, through dispensationalism. Dispensationalism is a theological system that understands the various ways in which God has dealt with man as a series of stewardships (or dispensations). Some of these dispensations are explicitly mentioned in Ephesians chapter 3 verses 2 and 3, Ephesians chapter 1 verse 10 and Colossians chapter 1 verses 25 and 26. Built upon the three principles of literal Bible interpretation, a distinction between Israel and the church, and a focus on God's glory, dispensationalism brings an orderly understanding to our study of scripture. Most dispensationalists see seven dispensations in the Bible. In the next article we will examine the first three of these dispensations in detail.

To be continued

SHAWN ABIGAIL serves as a deacon at Bridlewood Bible Chapel in Ottawa, and has the privilege of teaching the Bible in the Ottawa Valley and elsewhere, with an emphasis on Bible doctrine. He holds secular employment as a Software Manager at a Hi-Tech company. His wife Karen home schools their three children.



GOING

There are a lot of partings and separations in the Bible, many of them sad and some of them very sad. We will consider three of these involving Lot, Samuel and Demas:

1 Lot - 'Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan', Gen. 13. 11.

We all know that Lot made a bad choice. He is such a contrast with Abram, and we condemn him for his worldliness. He was a righteous man but with no spiritual emphasis or determination in his life, 2 Pet. 2. 7. He chose the well-watered and fertile land of the cities of the plain, but it was the start of his edging ever nearer to 'the dwellings of the wicked', the place of those who know not God, Job 18. 21. The testimony of scripture is plain, 'The men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly', v. 13.

Lot was possibly the kind of man who would take the largest slice of anything that was offered to him, and to people like him the world will always have a strong attraction and influence. We never read that he raised an altar to the Lord, nor that he had a good testimony in Sodom. How sorrowful it is for us to read what they said, 'This one fellow came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a judge: now will we deal worse with thee, than with them. And they pressed sore upon the man, even Lot, and came near to break down the door', Gen. 19. 9. Even his own family laughed at him when he warned them of the coming judgement of Sodom, 'He seemed as one that mocked unto his sons-in-law', Gen. 19. 14. No one took Lot seriously, so much was he compromised in their eyes. Wealth and possessions were predominant in his life; nor can his wife be excused. She is a picture of those who are so unwilling to give up the temporary things of this life for those things that are spiritual and eternal. Our Lord used her as an example and a warning as He, too, spoke of coming judgement, 'Remember Lot's wife', He said, Luke 17. 28-32.

Lot was hesitating, despite the angels' warnings, and he escaped only by 'the skin of his teeth', with nothing of his worldly acquisitions left to him. At last, he was compelled by necessity to live in a cave with his two unmarried daughters, by whom, in a state of drunkenness, he fathered two sons who would produce families opposed to his own people. It is a sad story of a righteous, outwardly respectable man making a wrong choice when he followed his own way and departed from Abram.

2 Samuel - 'They have rejected me', 1 Sam. 8. 7.

Here we have not a parting of men, but of His people from the Lord. Samuel had become old and his two sons, despite their godly upbringing, 'walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment', 1 Sam. 8. 3. The Lord still looks

By
JIM VOISEY
Cardiff, Wales

AWAY?

down from heaven upon men and their ways, even if we do not always realize this. These were no better than Eli's sons, see Gen. 6. 12; 1 Sam. 8. 3; Ps. 33. 13.

The people were looking for an excuse to change things. They desired to be 'like the nations'. In the Old Testament the Lord's people were ever harking back to the practices of the heathen nations, always ready to 'follow a multitude to do evil' and to do as they did. They were oblivious to their own privileged position among those nations. 'For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for', Deut. 4. 7, and, 'The Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth', Deut. 7. 6; 2 Kgs. 17. 15. It is invariably a sign of spiritual declension when we desire to be like others and turn our backs upon the Lord's distinctive purposes for ourselves as a chosen and special people.

Even among us today there is a rebelling against the teaching of scripture. Some are urging the appointment of an officially recognized pastor to be over the assembly. It is argued that he will take a lead in developing a spiritual focus, but inevitably it will result in a reduction of the personal responsibility we all have to contribute to the welfare and spiritual life of the assembly, a watering-down of the principle of the Holy Spirit's guiding, and, ultimately, even a return to the evils of clerisy. We should not follow the world nor its religious systems. The New Testament pattern is all that we need today. Let us be alert about these things; Israel's departure from the Lord here, as elsewhere, is a warning for us.

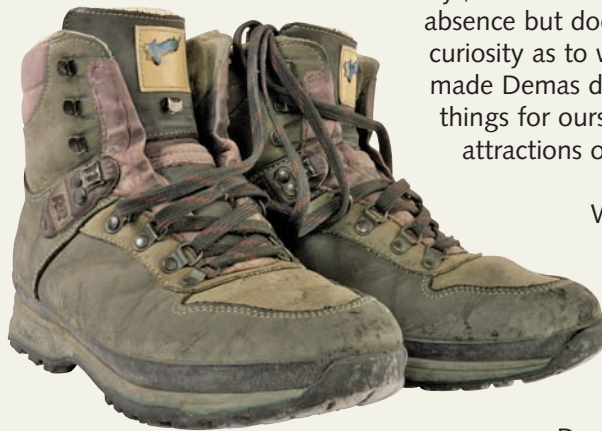
The character of Samuel himself comes out particularly beautifully. The people were turning their backs on the Lord and on him, but although he warns them, he is ever gracious and large-hearted. The people were still in his heart, 'God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you', 1 Sam. 12. 23. When Samuel died all Israel lamented him, 25. 1. Were they ashamed at what they had done and the pain they had caused such a godly man? Sometimes we do not appreciate people until they are no longer with us.

3 Demas - 'Demas hath forsaken me', 2 Tim. 4. 10.

None of the men mentioned in 2 Timothy is there by accident; each has lessons for us. These were perilous times, and we have references to those who had failed

over errors of doctrine, and those who no longer continued for various reasons. Timothy is being exhorted, and the words apply to us also today, to hold fast, to keep the good thing committed, to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, to endure hardness as a good soldier, to preach the word (come what may) and to reprove, rebuke and exhort. Part of our education is to learn from the examples of others, whether it be their opposition to truth, their failings or their virtues. Think of those who are specifically mentioned in this epistle: Phygellus and Hermogenes, Onesiphorus, Hymenaeus and Philetus, and those others who resisted the truth. Even the sickness of Trophimus, a beloved and faithful brother, reminds us that none of the Lord's servants is exempt from the frailties of human kind. So, the departure of Demas is mentioned as a warning to us today.

We have nothing to indicate that Demas had been anything but a faithful brother. He was one of Paul's fellow labourers and friends. Paul was bound by a metal chain, but just as much was he in the bonds of Christian love and service with those who shared his labours. It was a privilege for Demas to be among them and he must have been quite well known in the early church. Now, suddenly, he departed. What was it that caused him to forsake the apostle and go off to Thessalonica? Paul tells us that it was because he 'loved this present world', 4. 10, that is, the world in opposition to the will of God, concerning which John warns us, 'Love not the world . . . the world passeth away', 1 John 2. 15-17. The apostle states his absence but does not satisfy mere human curiosity as to what it was particularly that made Demas depart. We may apply these things for ourselves and assess what are the attractions of this present world to us.



We are left to imagine how much Paul would have missed him, but his place was now empty, and his Christian work had to be taken on by others. How about his own loss? Would

Demas ever hear those words,

'Well done, thou good and faithful servant, Matt. 25. 21? Paul here writes his epitaph.

Lot and Demas were worldly men. They were not made of the stuff of the Bible's spiritual giants, but separated themselves to their own loss and shame. In Samuel's time, it was the whole nation of Israel that moved itself away from its unique position among the nations of the world, just to be like them. We must learn lessons from these things, 'Therefore my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord', 1 Cor. 15. 58.

JIM VOISEY is in fellowship in the assembly at Adamsdown Gospel Hall in Cardiff. He has written several articles for *Precious Seed International*. He is now retired.



Matthew 13 — THE KING AND

In the Sermon on the Mount, Matt. 5-7, the Lord Jesus, as King, presents His kingdom manifesto, showing people the principles upon which His kingdom is based. In the subsequent Sermon on the Boat, Matt. 13. 2, the King presents His kingdom mysteries using seven parables that describe different aspects of the kingdom. This teaching is presented in symbolic form, and only the curious disciples, vv. 10. 36, are initiated into the meaning of the parables.

As with most groups of seven in the scriptures, these kingdom parables divide naturally into distinct groups of four and three. The *first four parables* describe the kingdom as seen on earth, by men. In them, the true and false are intermingled, whilst enemy forces are at work. The 'gates of hell' can never prevail against God's purpose, Matt. 16. 18, but they are seen to directly oppose it. The *latter three parables* describe the kingdom as seen from a heavenly perspective, by God. In them, attention is focused on all that He knows to be genuine about the kingdom, which He regards as complete, perfect and satisfying.

Whereas most commentaries on Matthew chapter 13 deal with various features of the kingdom, in this article the aim is different. I want to examine the passage to find the King Himself. This is surely our continuing objective. As Isaiah says, 'Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty', Isa. 33. 17. This promise will be fulfilled to the nation of Israel in the future when He returns in glory, but it should be the sincere desire of His saints today. After all, *He* is the chief attraction in His Kingdom; *He* is the 'first love' of His church, 'He is thy Lord; and worship thou him', Ps. 45. 11.

The Sower, vv. 3-8

The seed is 'the word of the kingdom', v. 19. This has been

faithfully sown by God's servants in all ages, primarily through the medium of preaching. Indeed, the Lord Jesus is the Prince of Preachers. He was the first to announce 'so great salvation', before the apostles and succeeding generations took up the work that we continue today, Heb. 2. 3-4. How patiently did the Lord sow 'beside all waters', Isa. 32. 20; whether to hard and barren Pharisees (cf. 'the way side', v. 4); potential disciples with more pressing engagements (cf. stony places, v. 5); business-minded rich rulers (cf. thorns, v. 7); or those few who gladly received Him (cf. good ground, v. 8).

The Householder, vv. 24-30

The second parable develops the King's character beyond that of a patient sower of seed across the wide and varied field. Once the wheat has been corrupted with tares, the householder is seen as the perfect administrator. When the servants ask for his advice, he has the discernment to know that the enemy has been at work, the patience to wait until the harvest time, and the authority to direct others in their service. These three qualities are apparent in the Lord Jesus Christ. John describes His perfectly discerning eyes as 'a flame of fire', Rev. 1. 14. Peter recalls the Lord's 'longsuffering', 2 Pet. 3. 9. Paul explains how the Lord has been exalted 'far above all' angelic beings by the Father, Eph. 1. 21.

The Tree, vv. 31-32, and the Meal, v. 33

In the next couple of parables, the King is not explicitly described. Interestingly, the Lord Himself does not explain the meaning of these parables to His followers. However, most commentators understand the word-pictures to refer to the unnatural growth and corruption of the kingdom, as seen from an earthly standpoint. Some people claim the name of Christ but have never experienced His salvation. When they finally meet him, He will

say, 'I never knew you', Matt. 7. 23. Sadly, this situation may be true for many people who profess to be Christians in contemporary society.

We must acknowledge that every work of God, at its inception, is pure and good, Gen. 1. 31; 1 Tim. 4. 4.

The kingdom only loses its pristine God-given status after man's influence has taken hold.

By
JEREMY SINGER
Manchester,
England

Thus, the young tree (before its extraordinary growth which provides a habitat for birds) and the carefully measured flour (before the unwelcome addition of yeast)

are symbols of the kingdom as God intended it, I infer. This leads us on to the following point. True citizens of the kingdom should resemble the King Himself, even as Gideon's regal characteristics could be observed in his family members, Judg. 8. 18. So, the tree and the meal should point us to the Lord Jesus. We can work back from the descriptions of the kingdom to appreciate things 'touching the king', Ps. 45. 1. We believe of course that there is no potential for corruption in Him.

Isaiah recounts how Jehovah views the earthly life of His perfect Servant, 'For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground', Isa. 53. 2.

Amongst all the barren godlessness of earth, there was vitality and a refreshing virtue in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. This delighted the heart of the Father. Heaven's silence was broken on two occasions as God declared, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased', Matt. 3. 17; 17. 5.

Like the humble beginnings of the mustard tree, the *meal* also represents what is true in the kingdom. Again, this symbol is reminiscent of Old Testament shadows of Christ. He is beautifully pre-figured in the meal offering, Lev. 2. The fine flour speaks of His perfect, sinless humanity. Paul, the man of intelligence, says that He 'knew no sin', 2 Cor. 5. 21. Peter, the man of impetuosity, says that He

HIS KINGDOM

'did no sin', 1 Pet. 2. 22. John, the man of intimacy, said, 'In him is no sin', 1 John 3. 5. The wonder of the Lord's character can be presented in a positive aspect too. Every grace is perfectly blended, so no one attribute overshadows any other. Truly He is 'full of grace and truth', John 1. 14.

The Landowner, v. 44, and the Merchant, vv. 45-46

I believe the hidden treasure represents Israel, so long dispersed and disregarded in the world, yet still the object of Jehovah's covenant love. I believe the pearl represents the church. Just as it was born in ocean depths as the product of pain, so the church is formed as a result of Christ's most profound sufferings.

The King's character is very similar in these two parables, since both the nation and the church belong to His kingdom realm. His careful searching befits the Son of man who came 'to seek and to save', Luke 19. 10. The emphasis of these parables is on the fact that He personally pays the price to gain the thing He desires. In each case, He sells all that He has. This phraseology is echoed in Philippians chapter 2 verses 6-7, '[He] thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation'. His voluntary self-humiliation was motivated out of love for us, and a desire to claim us for Himself. This teaching brings great joy to our hearts as we consider the Lord's sacrifice for us. Amazingly, it brings joy to His heart too. These two parables emphasize the alacrity and enthusiasm of the rich man as he exchanges all his

possessions to claim the hidden treasure and the costly pearl. This is a beautiful demonstration of the Lord's attitude toward us as He contemplated 'the joy that was set before him' when He 'endured the cross', Heb. 12. 2. The good Shepherd rejoices as lost sheep are returned home to the fold, Luke 15. 5-6. It is clear from these two kingdom parables that the King rejoices in the fullness of His coming Kingdom's manifestation.

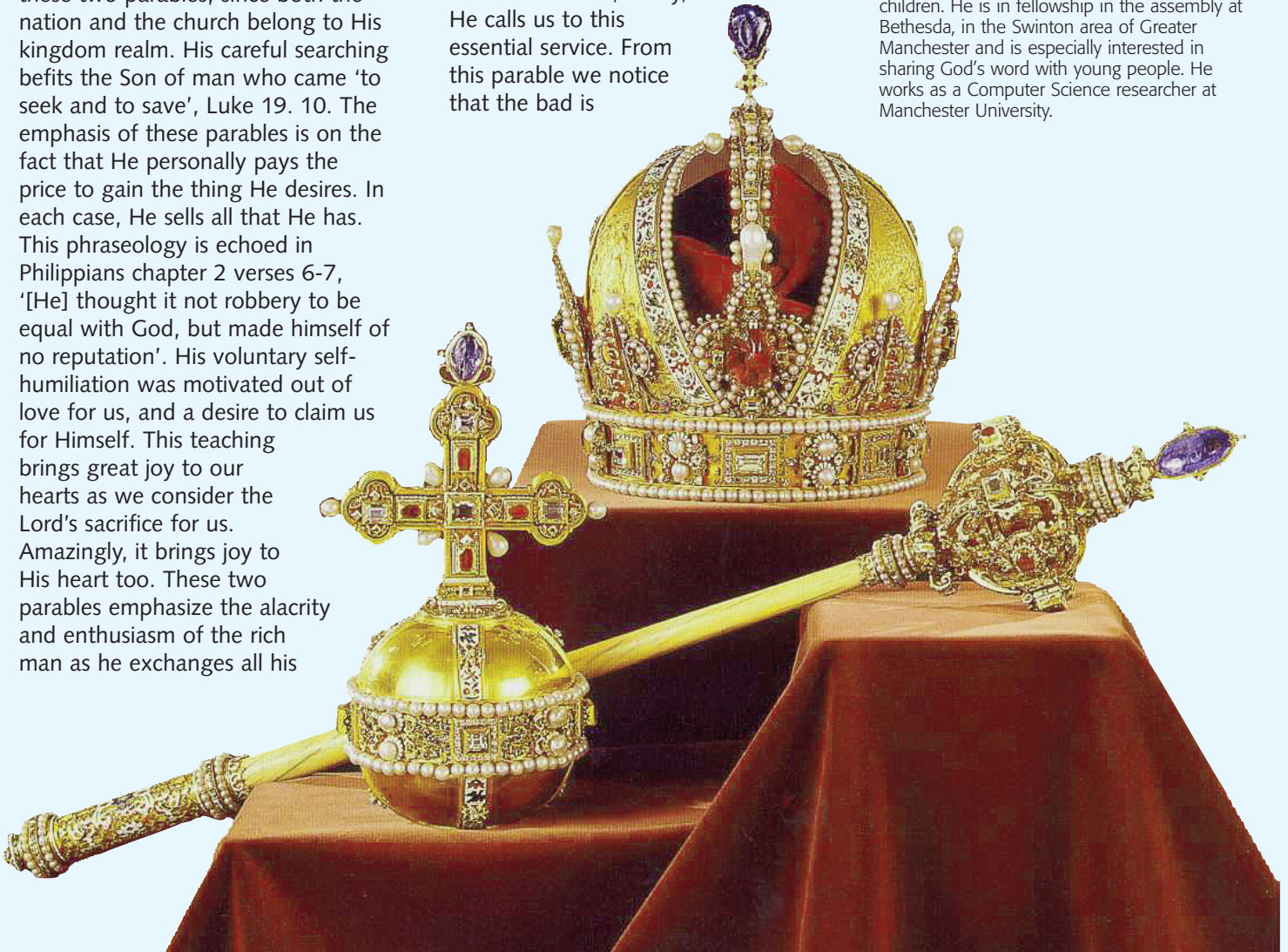
The Fisher King, vv. 47-48

Once again, in the final parable the King is not seen explicitly. However, the nature of kingdom expansion, in terms of fishing, is a familiar allegory. The Lord has already called fishermen authoritatively from the shores of Galilee, promising to make them 'fishers of men', Matt. 4. 19. Still, today, He calls us to this essential service. From this parable we notice that the bad is

separated from the good with accurate discernment. This encourages us because we can rely on the fact that at the judgement seat Christ He will review our lives with godly discernment. We can also be sure that anyone who does not belong to the kingdom will be prohibited from entering the millennial period.

He places great value upon the good fish; they are to be kept safe in vessels, whereas the worthless catches are discarded. We are glad that 'he which hath begun a good work in [us] will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ', Phil. 1. 6, and that 'He is able to keep [us] from falling, and to present [us] faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy', Jude 24. Surely, all glory and majesty belong to Him!

JEREMY SINGER is married and has two children. He is in fellowship in the assembly at Bethesda, in the Swinton area of Greater Manchester and is especially interested in sharing God's word with young people. He works as a Computer Science researcher at Manchester University.





It is not easy to accept that you have made a fundamental mistake. Every true athlete is fully committed to his sport. He may be in the spotlight just briefly, but that moment is the result of years of training. To find out that you are in the wrong race would be devastating.

Paul, the Runner **THE RIG**

Philippians 3. 4-14.

Part II

Note: Unless otherwise stated Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Version

Paul's remarkable encounter with Christ led to a serious evaluation of his life. Paul writes, 'I have counted'. Translation scholars render this verb in English as 'I reckon', 'I consider', 'I think', 'I look upon' all things as loss. By stating, 'I have counted', Paul highlights the importance of human judgement. This thought is highlighted in the scriptures. Isaiah conveyed the Lord's message to his people, saying, 'Come now, and let us reason together', Isa. 1. 18. One translation reads, 'I, the Lord, invite you to come and talk it over' CEV. The situation in Israel is not identical to Saul who is sitting in blindness in the house of Judas on Straight Street in Damascus. What the two cases do have in common is that God wants people to use their minds, their faculties, to make appraisals. We are not robots.

By
J. R. COCHRANE
Abbotsford, B.C.,
Canada

person - all that he or she is. A commitment to the Lord Jesus is not something we make superficially, but rather with due consideration we make a thoughtful, serious decision.

In New Testament times it was common to risk serious problems when you publicly acknowledged Jesus as Lord. These could involve rejection by your family, loss of employment, even danger of martyrdom; you did not make the decision for Christ lightly. The apostle's decision to follow Christ was made after he seriously considered all the options involved. This did not take a lot of time. He did it by analysing his life. In other words, he made a careful examination of what he reckoned were his assets. In Paul's case, the result was devastating. Compared to Christ, he had nothing of value. His commitment to Christ radically changed his whole life forever.

It was in Damascus that Saul began re-evaluating everything in his life. The phrase, 'what things were gain to me', v. 7, suggests an effort to built up one's own ego. After all, he had studied under Gamaliel, possibly one of the greatest scholars in the history of the Jewish faith. He excelled in his studies above many of his contemporaries. He became a Pharisee, adhering to the strictest party of his religion. By his own account he kept all the regulations of the law to the point that he was blameless. As a result, he

considered his real treasures to be these achievements, his only authentic gains. He was extremely proud of his accomplishments.

Now he contemplates them in an entirely new light. The glitter has disappeared. Their value has been reduced to zero. Gone are the glories of his life in which he boasted. Spiritually, he is bankrupt. He salvaged nothing, absolutely nothing, from his previous self-made life. There is always the danger of a conversion experience with no apparent change of values. When Christ is simply an addition to a life already formed, there are no fundamental changes.

Near Damascus, Saul was surprised by the overwhelming wonder of Jesus. He was surprised by truth, by that which is authentically real. Above all he was surprised by the glory of God so powerfully shining through Jesus of Nazareth. Nothing he had so carefully gained in thirty years of life could compare to the reality of the Lord Jesus. At that moment, everything in Saul's life paled into insignificance.

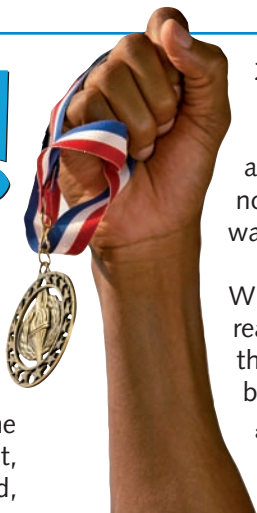
What does the apostle mean by the phrase, 'But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ'? It is important to define the phrase for it can have different meanings. Imagine we have a friend and we know that person is in need of something. So we purchase it for him in order to help him, that is, for the sake of our friend. Paul did not



HT RACE!

renounce all he had achieved in life in order to benefit Christ, to help Christ. Rather, it was because of the inescapable fact of Christ that Paul radically re-evaluated his life. Some of the old translations highlight this fact, 'What things were gain to me these I counted, on account of Christ, loss' JND, and these I have counted, because of the Christ, loss' YOUNG.

We should not take lightly the very impressive list of Saul's inherited family traditions and personal achievements. He was not a spoiled son who lived off the wealth of his rich parents. He came from a working family. From the training he received from his parents he developed a formidable life through hard work and sacrifice. Paul never minimizes the importance or the privileges of his Jewish heritage, for it contained God's written word. However, something happened to Saul just outside Damascus city that fundamentally changed him. Luke tells the story, 'Suddenly a light shone around him from heaven', Acts 9. 3. Years later Saul, now widely known as Paul, refers twice to the experience. Believing that Paul had introduced a Gentile into the temple in Jerusalem, a mob almost killed him. Fortunately, he was rescued by Roman soldiers and given the opportunity to speak to the crowd. He referred to the unforgettable Damascus experience of many years ago, stating, 'Suddenly a great light from heaven shone around me', 22. 6. Yet, it is to King Agrippa that Paul gives the most in-depth description of what happened, 'I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun at midday', 9. 3;



22. 6; 26. 13. We remember that the experience took place at noon. That light was not of this creation. It was God's glory.

What was Saul's first reaction to the sight of this glory? Did he believe that God had given to him a glimpse of the divine glory while he was still on earth? Knowing the

record of the theophanies recorded in the scriptures, many pious individuals in Saul's generation longed to see God's glory. In the case of Moses, the glory of God was so intense, so beautiful, that it left an impression on Moses' face that lingered long after the encounter itself, Exod. 34. 29-33. For a moment, did Saul believe that he had been granted this honour?

It may be difficult for us to grasp how profound the impact was on Saul when the person in the midst of the supreme glory answered his question, 'Who are you, Lord?', by simply saying in clear Aramaic, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth'. The Hebrew dialect, Aramaic, was most probably the language spoken in Galilee where the Lord Jesus grew up and was most likely the language He usually spoke. It would be overwhelming for Saul, and even for us, to try to grasp the awesome truth that a man from Nazareth in Galilee, speaking Aramaic, is standing and revealing the majestic splendour of deity!

The Lord Jesus is there because He belongs there. All that He accomplished here on earth through His death and resurrection opened the

door to bring 'many sons to glory', Heb. 2. 10. Because He is there, Paul later writes boldly, 'We rejoice in hope of the glory of God', Rom. 5. 2.

With Jesus in the midst of the divine glory, two things shattered Saul's previous life. First, Jesus was the Messiah, and second, he, Saul, highly educated and very religious, had been tragically mistaken. Out of that experience he wrote years later, 'What things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ', Phil. 2. 7. All that Paul was in the religious world of his day was nothing compared to the reality, the glory and the wonder of Christ. What Saul was in that previous world, that previous race, had kept him from Christ. He did not make his decision in a vacuum. For the first time he saw himself as he really was, lost in a pompous religious world. And he saw Jesus radiating the splendour of God's glory. The judgement was made. With loathing, which is not too strong a word, he turns away from his former life. With joy, he turns towards Christ. He is now in the right race.

In a letter to the Corinthians, Paul takes us into the wonder of that Damascus moment, for he writes, 'For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ', 2 Cor. 4. 6. Unhesitatingly, Saul jumped tracks and began running in the right race.

To be continued

JAMES COCHRANE was commended to the Lord's work in the Dominican Republic in 1950 and still visits there annually. He is well known throughout N. America for his oral and written ministry. He is a regular contributor to *Precious Seed International*.





THOUGHTS ON 'THE DISCIPLES' PRAYER TEMPTATION OF THE LORD JESUS IN TH

The Disciples' Prayer

In New Testament times it was quite common for rabbis to teach their disciples a prayer. John the Baptist gave his disciples a prayer, Luke 11. 1, which led Jesus' disciples to also ask for one. When He gave His disciples their prayer, Matt. 6. 9-13; Luke 11. 2-4, it was not a lofty prayer having nothing to do with their earthly existence; rather it was a prayer that was born out of personal experience. During His earthly journey, the incarnate *Logos* experienced things that He had not experienced prior to His incarnation. For example, He did not know what it was to be tired, John 4. 6; to be thirsty, John 4. 7; 19. 28; to weep, John 11. 35; to sleep, Luke 8. 23; or even to live in a human body. He never had to contend with the devil in the wilderness. He confined Himself to the limitations of time and space as He had taken to Himself human flesh.

First Temptation

The temptations were a part of the war between the Lord and Satan that ended with Satan's defeat shown in Jesus' shout of triumph at the cross, 'Finished!' John 19. 30. Immediately following His baptism, the Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness where He was tempted by the devil, Mark 1. 12; Matt. 4. 1; Luke 4. 1. Satan's first salvo - the temptation to turn stones into bread - was on a number of levels. Firstly, it was aimed at Jesus' physical condition, who, after forty days of fasting, was hungry, Matt. 4. 2; Luke 4. 2. Secondly, it was questioning the genuineness of His sonship, 'If thou be the Son of God', Matt. 4. 3. Thirdly, it was questioning the goodness of the Father. Was the Father going to give His Son a stone for bread? Matt. 7. 9. If Jesus had turned stones into bread, He would not have proved His sonship, He would have denied it; He would no longer have been dependent on the Father for all things. He would have become independent of the Father, the very thing that Adam did. It would have shown that the Son did not fully trust the Father for all things.

By
**ERNEST
ABBOTT**
Singapore

Within the context of our subject, our minds must be taken to the phrase in the disciples' prayer, 'Give us this day our daily bread'. The sense of this is that the disciples were to pray for their daily needs. Doing this shows a dependence on a Father who looks after His children and does not give them a stone for bread. The One who provided the children of Israel with manna in the wilderness will also provide for our daily needs. Jesus can tell His disciples to pray in this fashion because He has experienced hunger Himself. He has demonstrated His reliance on the Father to provide all His daily needs, even in the midst of temptation.

Second Temptation

The second assault in the on-going war between the Lord and Satan was His being taken to Jerusalem and set on the pinnacle of the temple. Here Satan tempted Him to throw Himself off the pinnacle to see if God would keep His promise and care for His Son, Matt. 4. 5-7. This temptation again questioned His Sonship, His obedience to and reliance upon the Father. This was a recurring temptation, not only here but also at the cross, where there is the taunt, 'If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross', Matt 27. 40.

The Son proved His Sonship by the way of humiliation, walking the path of perfect obedience that led to the cross. He did not come down from the cross to prove His Sonship, but rather, He rose from the grave to prove it! Rom. 1. 4. The Father's will was for His Son to be the Servant-King. We see this in the Father's public declaration at Jesus' baptism, 'Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased', Mark 1. 11. This declaration has echoes of Psalm 2 verse 7 and Isaiah chapter 42 verse 1. In Psalm 2 verse 6, we see the Son as the King, and in Isaiah chapter 42 verse 1 we see Him as the Servant of the Lord. The Father's will was for the Son to go to the cross. We see this in the prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus prayed,

'Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done', Luke 22. 42. There was no other way for our salvation, other than the way of the cross. This was the Father's will.

In the disciples' prayer, the phrase, 'Thy will be done in earth' is exactly what the Lord Jesus did. He did the Father's will on earth. He spoke from a life of doing the Father's will on earth. He could say, 'My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work', John 4. 34; 'I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do', John 17. 4; and, 'Finished', John 19. 30. The words 'as it is in heaven' are also words spoken from Jesus' personal experience and knowledge of heaven. This was not the only occasion in His earthly ministry that He showed His pre-incarnation knowledge of heaven. He showed it in His high-priestly prayer when He prayed, 'And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was', John 17. 5.

Third Temptation

Satan's third attack was one of offering the Lord power and authority over the kingdoms of the earth on condition that Jesus would worship Him, Matt. 4. 8-10. Here, there is no subtlety in the temptation. It was a brazen offer of power over the kingdoms of the earth. The One who had come proclaiming 'the kingdom of God is at hand', Mark 1. 15 was also the One who 'went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return', Luke 19. 12. The offer of the kingdoms of earth was a poor exchange for the Kingdom of God. Satan's so-called offer was a way for the designated King of the kingdom of God to have a kingdom without the cross. A kingdom without the cross implies that there is no sin to be judged, no propitiation to be made and no wrath of God against sin. It was by the way of the cross that Jesus was 'given a name above every name', Phil. 2. 9. Now, Jesus, the exalted One, is 'King of kings, and Lord of lords', Rev. 17. 14; 19. 16; 1 Tim. 6. 15.

AND THE WILDERNESS

The condition was to offer Satan worship. To this Jesus replied, 'It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve', Matt. 4. 10. No created being is worthy of worship.

The opening lines of the disciples' prayer reminds us who is being addressed and where He is, 'Our Father . . . in heaven'. By using the words 'hallowed be thy name', Jesus was teaching His disciples that it is God who is to be worshipped and God alone. This should be clear from the Ten Commandments, the first four of which have to do with the character and person of God, Exod. 20. 1-17.

In dealing with the offer of power and influence, the disciples are taught to pray for the Father's kingdom, 'Thy kingdom come'. This is clearly an antidote for any disciple who may be attracted by thoughts of power and influence in place of God's kingdom. In God's kingdom, it is the servants who are the greatest, see Luke 22. 26. Jesus had as a priority the kingdom of God; He tells us, His disciples, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness', Matt. 6. 33. God's kingdom is to be our priority as well.

Finally, in the disciples' prayer, there is the supplication, 'Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil', or 'the evil one'. Clearly, Jesus, through His personal experience, knew the force of temptation. He knew the subtlety of the Tempter. He faced the Tempter and temptation squarely, and was triumphant. From the words of the disciples' prayer, we can see that 'we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin', Heb. 4. 15.

ERNEST ABBOTT was born and brought up in the south of England and in 1991 he moved to Singapore and now works in the National University of Singapore as a research engineer. He is married and has two teenage daughters. He fellowships at the Depot Walk assembly in Singapore.

GENESIS 15. 1-6

Thy Shield and Exceeding Great Reward

A sample page from *Pictures and Parables*, see p. 20.

This dual picture must have provided great comfort for Abraham at a critical time in his life. Violence and bloodshed had been a feature of human behaviour since two separate killings in Genesis 4, but chapter 14 contains the first record of war in the Bible. With courage, Abraham had marshalled his servants to pursue the triumphant confederacy that had kidnapped his nephew Lot, and in a night attack he had gained the advantage. When the dust of battle had settled, and he was restoring the captives and their property, the king of Sodom made him a lucrative offer that he promptly rejected, but with the whole incident now history, and the excitement over, Abraham had time to think, and evidently, he was anxious.

'Fear not'. Why the 'fear not' if he was not afraid? What if the vanquished army should regroup? He faced the reality that he was no general, only a nomadic herdsman and thus vulnerable! 'Fear not, Abram, I am thy shield'. The promise of divine protection calmed his mind and there is not a word of objection to it; he was confident that he was safe. I am 'thy exceeding great reward'. Here

was compensation far in excess of the spurned wealth of Sodom, but now he does have a query. 'What wilt thou give me?' v. 2. Childlessness rankled; what was the point of increased wealth if it was to be bequeathed to a servant? At this point God again graciously promised a son who would be his heir.

Perhaps because of present circumstances you are as apprehensive as Abraham was. Let this first 'fear not' of the Bible be an encouragement. Your anxiety may be far different from Abraham's, but God is saying, 'I am thy shield'. The people of God are never exempt from the dangers that affect mankind in general, but there is the assurance that, 'The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him', Ps. 34. 7. We have no guarantee of safety from physical harm, but let us rejoice that precious blood shields us from eternal judgment.

There is also rich reward for those who like Abraham reject the prospect of material advantage for the sake of maintaining their integrity, and to avoid being obliged to a wicked world.



Collecting Bible Coins

By **RICHARD STROUT** Sherbrooke, QC, Canada

Sometimes Christians feel they would like to have a hobby to enjoy in their spare time. Some pursuits may militate against spiritual things or have the potential to do so, but there are some which complement spiritual interests: here is one such.

I returned from a visit to Turkey and Greece following an 'In the Footsteps of the Apostle Paul' tour in 2003, and was disappointed not to be able to bring back with me some artefacts that might prove helpful in the teaching situations I was facing. Like many others, I had returned earlier from Israel with water samples from the Lake of Galilee and other sources, a few stones from the Valley of Elah, and bits of pottery from the ruins here and there. Having long been intrigued by the Bible's talents, pennies, denarii, shekels, staters and mites, as well as tithes, offerings and money-changers, my interest turned to the collecting of ancient coins, such as this bronze one from Thessalonica where Paul would have visited several times. It bears the images of the emperor Tiberius, 14-37 AD, and his mother. (See A+B).

It did not take long to begin finding such coins with the help of the internet. *Ebay.com* has proved to be a good source although one must be sufficiently knowledgeable in order not to be overcharged or to end up with something which is other than it was



B

advertised to be. Another, and better, source is *Vcoins.com*, a website which hosts a significant number of reputable coin dealers. As I was to learn, one can find coins that were minted in almost every town and

village visited by the apostle, so my collection began to grow rapidly. Some of these were struck long before Paul's day while others did not appear until after his decease. My collection has since become more focused, thanks to a volume by Peter Lewis and Ron Bolden, *The Pocket Guide to Saint Paul: Coins Encountered by the Apostle on His Travels*. This volume, and the beautifully illustrated *Money of the Bible* by Kenneth Bressett, are indispensable to collectors.

The teaching value of such coin artefacts is gratifying, first to the collector, whose knowledge of the culture in which Paul travelled and its potential impact upon his thinking is increased and, ultimately, to students in the classroom or believers in the assembly. One's understanding of the word and particularly of the Acts of the Apostles is enriched through a study of these coins. One or two examples will suffice. (See D+E).

While Paul was at Ephesus in 53-54 AD, the city had recently been authorized to strike a coin bearing the image of Claudius, one of five Roman emperors whose coins Paul would have seen. The obverse of the coin, as can be seen, displayed the head of both the Emperor and his bride, Agrippina II. On the reverse is the image of Diana of the Ephesians. (See C+D).



A



B



C



D

Without doubt the apostle would have seen and handled these shiny new bronze pieces as he went about his tent-making business in the public marketplace. A few years later he was to pen his Epistle to the Ephesians and one cannot help but wonder if perchance that particular coin might have come to mind as, in chapter 5, he addresses the subject of husbands and wives.

One of the most intriguing questions has to do with the collection for the saints at Jerusalem. For well over a year Paul had encouraged giving on the part of believers throughout Asia Minor as well as in Macedonia and Achaia, 2 Cor. 8 and 9. Homeward bound from his third missionary journey, the apostle was carrying this collection with him. Exactly what coins might have been sewn into the folds of his garments? It is to be assumed that he was carrying silver coins and, perhaps, even gold ones. The greater value of such would mean he would have to carry fewer coins, thus decreasing the overall weight. We are left to speculate. The silver coin pictured here with the head of Emperor Claudius, 41-54 AD, was struck in Cappadocia and circulated in Asia Minor; could it have been possibly part of that collection as it is of mine. (See E+F).

Coins served as the newspapers of their day, carrying images of emperors and events, gods and goddesses of the Roman world. Recognizing Paul's ability in his teaching to refer to the known in order to build a bridge to the unknown, e.g., Acts 17. 22-31, one cannot escape the impression that, from time to time, he followed his Lord's example, Matt. 22. 20, drawing lessons from the very coins his hearers held in their hands. Holding these same coins in our hands is one of the joys of collecting them, a joy not altogether unlike that of an actual visit to the lands of the Bible.

RICHARD STROUT is an elder and teacher in assembly fellowship in Sherbrooke, Québec. He is editor of the trimestrial missionary news publication of assemblies of Christians in Quebec known as News of Quebec. He is married and has four children and ten grandchildren.



A HISTORY OF WEST FIFTH BIBLE CHAPEL

HAMILTON, ONTARIO, CANADA

The name Fenton is probably not known by most of the Christians of this generation in Hamilton. Nevertheless, all the assemblies in this highly industrialized area have received from William Fenton a rich spiritual heritage. He and his wife frequently conducted evangelistic services in Gore Park, a beauty spot in the centre of the city planned and donated by George Hamilton. Mrs. Fenton had a sweet singing voice with which she attracted the people and Mr. Fenton preached the gospel. It was their usual custom to invite any interested in spiritual matters to come to their home. There they would show them the way of life or teach them the ways of the Lord for His beloved people. One night, a young man, John Carnie, recently arrived from Aberdeen, Scotland, accepted the invitation.

It was soon evident that the guest had a deeper knowledge of the things of God than did his hosts. He taught them 'church truth' as he had learned them from God in the Old Land. On June 14, 1874, a few Christians met in the Fenton home to partake of the Lord's Supper. On the suggestion of John Carnie, two evangelists were invited to come to Hamilton for a special effort in the gospel. Soon, Donald Munro and John Smith arrived and immediately began preaching on street corners and in homes. Later, a hall was rented which was located on the north side of King Street, near MacNab Street.

The tiny assembly that had been meeting in Mr. Fenton's home eventually moved into a rented hall on King Street West. The saints remained in this location for approximately two years (1874 to 1876). A hall three stories above street level is not the most attractive centre for evangelistic efforts. The growth of the assembly and its various activities in the gospel required a more suitable

location so the saints became interested in a vacant Baptist Church on MacNab Street. In 1904, the land and building were sold to W. A. Wilson, one of the elders in the Hamilton assembly.

From its inception the MacNab Street Gospel Hall maintained the biblical autonomy of a local church gathered in the name of the Lord Jesus. The elders have always believed that they were responsible only to the risen Head of the church, Christ, and that they had to be submissive to His absolute Lordship.

The Lord's people soon learned that for the proper functioning and the perpetuation of the testimony, God had fitted two groups of men for administrative purposes and for the ministry of the word of God.

Around 1965 it became necessary for the assembly on MacNab Street to move elsewhere. Spiritual roots had penetrated deeply. There had been so many sacred, precious experiences in that Gospel Hall. The Building Committee was authorized to purchase land on West Fifth Street for \$17,500. This amount was already in the Building Fund. Thus, in 1967 the assembly owned land upon which it could eventually build.

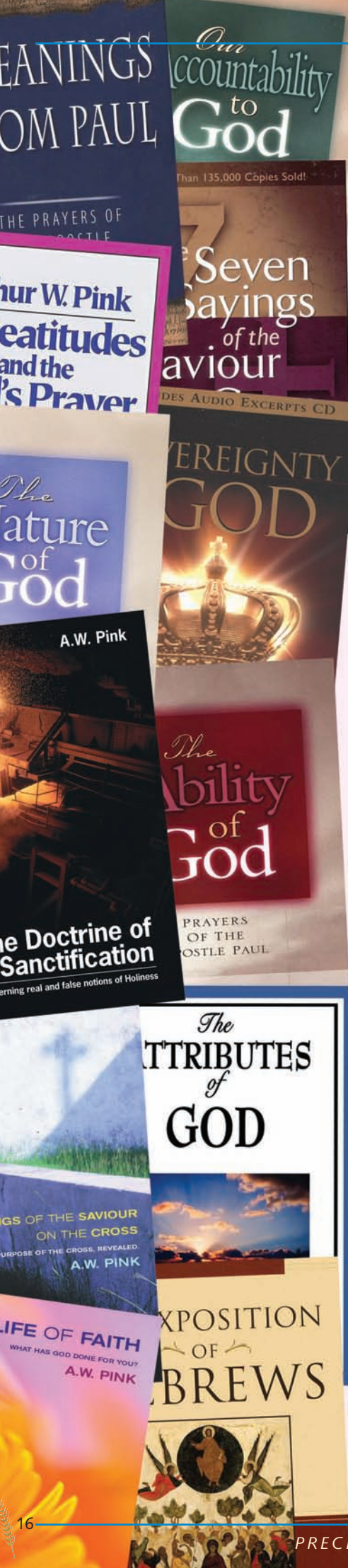
With a mortgage from Stewards

Foundation the new spacious building was erected, and on Wednesday, March 4, 1970, the assembly took legal possession and regular services commenced in the new West Fifth Chapel on Lord's Day, March 8, 1970. In the evangelistic meeting that evening Arnot McIntee of St. Catharines preached the gospel with clarity and power. It was soon apparent that God, who had been with the work in the Gospel Hall, MacNab Street, was still with His beloved people in the Gospel Chapel, 440 West Fifth Street.

Many challenges have been faced over the years but the principles and practises have remained true to His word. In 2004 it was decided to commemorate the 130th anniversary of this continuing fellowship of believers. On Sunday 13th June a memorial service was held prior to the Family Bible Hour. Letters were read from old time members. Alex Grant a very long time member came forward to give his account of the years gone by. After the service a group picture was held outside the Chapel. We shall all remember how good our God is and, if He be not come, we pray that He will continue to bless us.

Summarized from a 70-page booklet, *A Century in Retrospect June 14 1874 to June 14, 1974*, by James Gunn.





GLEANINGS I

I recently read a sad story. An older brother lent me the book *The Life of Arthur W. Pink* by I. H. Murray. Many of us have enjoyed the writings of Arthur W. Pink, especially his earlier works. I derived much pleasure reading *Gleanings in Genesis*¹ some years ago and more recently found his studies in the *Gospel of John* of enormous help – this volume alone extends to over 1000 pages.² These are only two of many books authored by A. W. Pink, the majority of which were originally written for his monthly magazine, *Studies in the Scriptures* (1922-53). How did he achieve so much? Remember, this was all done when everything was written out painstakingly by hand and then typed up. Microsoft Word with editing at the touch of a button did not exist.

sovereignty and divine election were unacceptable to them, he moved to another church, becoming pastor at Belvoir Street, Sydney. Here he became unhappy with the over emphasis on the sovereignty of God. A split ensued. He became pastor of the break-away group but after only a few months he withdrew from them also on the basis that it had been, in his view, 'set up in a poor spirit'. I could not help but contrast this wandering preacher to godly men I have known who have stayed faithfully in one assembly for many years ministering God's truth. I still remember reading some telling words that John MacArthur's father said to him, 'The great preachers, the lasting preachers who left their mark on history, taught their people the word of God', and 'they stayed in one place for a long time'.³

By
JEREMY GIBSON
Derby,
England

Arthur W. Pink was born in Nottingham, England, on April 1, 1886, and converted when 18 years of age. Two years later he joined the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, USA. However, after only six weeks he found the teaching to be overly simplistic and rudimentary, at least for him. Feeling that two years spent there would be 'wasting my time', he moved immediately to a pastorate in Colorado. I feel this early action was a sign of things to come. Arthur was no doubt exceedingly bright; this coupled with the capacity to study incessantly for hours every day seems to have fostered within him an impatience for those without his own depth of understanding of the Bible. With this intolerance came an inability to listen to or learn from others, or to acknowledge any authority apart from his own. More than this, and perhaps more disturbing, was his focus on his own ministry to the exclusion of almost everything else.

Arthur moved back to England in August 1928. Then, after nine months, he returned to the USA, initially to Morton's Gap, Kentucky, then on to Los Angeles; after this he moved to Millmont and then York, Pennsylvania; but when speaking opportunities repeatedly dried up he returned to England, to Cheltenham, England, in 1934. Even by this stage he had practically withdrawn from having regular fellowship with other believers. It was in the winter of 1934-35 that he commented, 'It is now seven years since my dear wife and I partook of the Lord's Supper!⁴ In the UK he continued to move. He lived for a time on Great Western Road, Glasgow. Here he preached wherever opportunity arose, ranging from the Free Presbyterian churches to even in some assemblies. For example, he preached in Bethany Hall, Falkirk, in October 1935. With seeming naivety, he could not understand why his diary was not instantly filled with preaching commitments. After being blocked from further preaching in the Free Presbyterian churches and not being immediately invited back to preach in the assemblies he moved south again, this time to Hove. Finally, during the Second World War, he moved for the last time, to Stornoway on the Isle of Lewis, off the North West coast of

He never stayed in one place for any length of time. He moved from one pastorate to another in the USA and then on to Australia. He determined that his views alone should prevail. After some time ministering among Baptist churches in Australia, when he found that his teaching on God's

N PINK

Scotland. Here, he and his wife remained for the rest of their lives, never, as far as one can tell, having fellowship with any local church.

Although Arthur Pink moved repeatedly, there was one constant in his life: his monthly magazine, *Studies in the Scriptures*. In Stornoway he and his wife lived in a small two room apartment. He went out for about one hour each day, the rest of every waking hour being spent either in written correspondence or preparing articles for *Studies in the Scriptures*. And he kept at it with unflinching discipline till he could do it no more, dying aged 66 years. His writing for the magazine was so far in advance that four monthly issues could be published after his death and his wife ran a further year with reprints supplementing unused manuscripts. It was during this final year that she suffered a stroke resulting in a right sided weakness. What a legacy this man has left: volume upon volume of in depth Bible exposition – truly, 'he being dead yet speaketh', Heb. 11. 4.



He is highly quotable. Regarding the sovereignty of God, he wrote, 'sovereignty characterizes the whole being of God. He is sovereign in all His attributes. He is sovereign in exercising His power. His power is exercised as He wills, when He wills, where He wills. This fact is evidenced on every page of Scripture. For a long season that power appears to lie dormant, and then it goes forth with irresistible might'.⁵ He described the eternal security of every child of God as 'the infrustratable certainty of their entrance into the inheritance purchased for them by Christ and unto which they have been begotten by the Spirit'.⁶ And concerning the reality of Christ's death he wrote, 'but how could Jehovah's

"Fellow" suffer? How could the eternal one die? Ah, he who in the beginning was the Word, who was with God, who was God, "became flesh". He who was in the form of God took upon him the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men; "and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross", Phil. 2. 8. Thus, having become incarnate the Lord of glory was capable of suffering death, and so it was that he "tasted" death itself'.⁷ A. W. Pink began his discussion on the divine inspiration of the Bible with these words, 'Christianity is the religion of a Book. Christianity is based upon the impregnable rock of Holy Scripture. The starting point of all doctrinal discussion must be the Bible. Upon the foundation of the divine inspiration of the Bible stands or falls the entire edifice of Christian truth. "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" Ps. 11. 3. Surrender the dogma of verbal inspiration and you are left like a rudderless ship on a stormy sea, at the mercy of every wind that blows. Deny that the Bible is, without any qualifications, the very Word of God, and you are left without any ultimate standard of measurement and without any supreme authority. It is useless to discuss any doctrine taught by the Bible until you are prepared to acknowledge, unreservedly, that the Bible is the final court of appeal. Grant that the Bible is a Divine revelation and communication of God's own mind and will to men, and you have a fixed starting point from which advance can be made into the domain of truth. Grant that the Bible is (in its original manuscripts) inerrant and infallible, and you reach the place where study of its contents is both practicable and profitable'.⁸

I stand in awe of the man and at what he achieved, but at the same time saddened. He is to be highly commended. He had nothing of this world's wealth, ever living in spartan

circumstances. He served with unswerving energy till the end. His wife was thoroughly devoted to him and a great supporter of his ministry. But it seems that Arthur Pink became so consumed with his own sphere of service that it even replaced fellowship with other believers. May God give us the passion of Arthur Pink for the Holy Scriptures, his steadfastness in service, and the grace to hold the wealth of this world in such low esteem, but at the same time preserve us from imbalance, 'not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is', Heb. 10. 25.

For those who are interested, many of A. W. Pink's books can be viewed on line, free, at:

http://www.pbministries.org/books/pink/pinks_archive.htm

Care, however, should be exercised due to Pink's association with amillennianism and some hyper-Calvinistic teachings.

Footnotes

- 1 Pink A. W. *Gleanings in Genesis* (Chicago: The Moody Bible Institute, 1922).
- 2 Pink A. W. *Gospel of John*, 3 volumes in 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975).
- 3 MacArthur J. *Rediscovering Expository Preaching* (Dallas: Word, Inc., 1992), p. 347.
- 4 Murray I. H. *The life of Arthur W. Pink* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1981), p 86.
- 5 Pink AW. *The Sovereignty of God* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1928), p. 22.
- 6 Pink AW. *Eternal Security* (Grand Rapids: Guardian Press Inc., 1974), p. 11.
- 7 Pink AW. *The Seven Sayings of the Saviour on the Cross* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1958), p.1.
- 8 Pink AW. *The Divine Inspiration of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1976), p.5

JEREMY GIBSON resides in Derby where he is in fellowship in the assembly at The Meeting Room, Curzon Street, Derby. He is active in ministry and the gospel, particularly in his own locality. He is married to Dorothy and they have three young daughters. He is a doctor with the NHS and works mainly with patients challenged by disabilities.



Gideon may well have been disappointed with the response when he blew his trumpet in Abiezer. True it was that the first to gather to his banner were those of his own home town; men of whom he had been fearful when he threw down the altar of Baal and destroyed that idolatrous grove. But, as so often happens, when we seek to do a work for God, encouragement comes from an unexpected source: his own father, whose religion Gideon had challenged, had spoken in his defence! Now Gideon waited as the Northern tribes gathered to him.

THE DAYS WHEN THE GIDEON The weak con

There was, however, another good reason for the ranks to be reduced. We have to admit that at times we can become obsessed by numbers; we love to count heads! How often when considering assemblies of the Lord's people, attendance at gospel meetings or conferences, the first thing we ask is 'how many?' Another factor that God takes into account is that man loves to boast in what he considers to be his achievements, the results of his own efforts. We so often fail to appreciate that anything accomplished for His glory is, 'Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord', Zech. 4. 6.

Left with his 10,000 men, Gideon may have thought that he faced an impossible task in hoping to defeat the Midianites. Then another communication came to him from the Lord, 'The people are yet too many!' It is encouraging to notice that even though Gideon was witnessing the diminishing of his army, there is no word of protest or even a question asked. In chapter 6 verses 36-40, he had put God to the test and through that test he had received assurance that God would save Israel by his hand. Now when God in turn puts Gideon to the test he remembers his fleece and trusts in his God.

It would have seemed to these men a perfectly natural thing to be offered opportunity to quench their thirst before the ensuing battle. They had no idea that they also were being tried. The water may speak to us of the legitimate things of life which naturally engage our interest each day; home, family and livelihood; all perfectly genuine and rightfully demanding of our concern. The question is, however, how much of our time and attention do they occupy, and do they take priority over that which the Lord has called us to and fitted us for?

Just three hundred men passed the test! In the absence of a full scriptural explanation we can perhaps infer that those who lapped 'as a dog lappeth', simply scooped up water in their hands while remaining alert and ready to react should the Midianites put in an appearance. On the other hand, the 9700 who failed the test paid more attention to their own perceived needs, bowing down with their faces to the water, rather than maintaining a careful watch for any unexpected attack by the enemy. The spiritual lessons are on the surface, but so often we fail to

heed the repeated injunctions given both by the Lord and in the Epistles, to 'watch' in all the various circumstances of life. For Gideon, less than 1% of those who originally responded to his call actually passed the test and were considered ready to face the adversary! Would we have been among the three hundred? Remember, He is constantly watching and testing us in the everyday things of life;

The required fighting force was now ready. Yet, still, the Lord will give His servant a further assurance of victory, and that from the very lips of the enemy! In Old Testament times God used dreams on a number of occasions to make known His purposes, even to ungodly men like Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar. In these examples it required a godly man to interpret. In Judges chapter 7, however, such is the sovereignty of our God that a fellow Midianite is given the ability to interpret the dream of his companion! For the benefit and assurance of Gideon, he is made privy to a conversation as, under cover of darkness, he and his servant approached the enemy camp. The dream involved a cake of barley bread causing havoc in the camp. Without hesitation, the

By
JOHN SCARBROOK
Killamarsh,
England

When the Israelites entered the land, the combined fighting force of Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali was almost 185,000 men. In response to Gideon's call, just 32,000 men from those tribes gathered at the well of Harod to face the Midianites who were 'as grasshoppers for multitude'. In light of what followed it would appear that the place was well named, for Harod means 'trembling'. Imagine the bewilderment that Gideon experienced when the Lord said to him, 'The people that are with thee are too many', Judg. 7. 2! All too often we forget that our God's ways are frequently contrary to human reasoning, and yet the psalmist reminds us that 'his way is perfect', Ps. 18. 30.

The laws of warfare given in Deuteronomy chapter 20 as the nation was about to enter the land, made provision for those who were 'fearful and fainthearted' to return home. When Gideon offered this option to his hastily assembled army, 22,000 men, almost 70%, turned their backs and walked away! When this choice was first made available to His people, God knew, of course, that in the arena of conflict fear can be very contagious. We remember Israel's first attempt to defeat Ai. After the initial counter attack in which thirty-six men of Israel were smitten, they fled, and 'the hearts of the people melted, and became as water', Josh. 7. 5. The 'fear of man' so often becomes a hindrance to the testimony and to our wholehearted involvement in the work of God and our warfare against evil.

ounding the mighty PART TWO

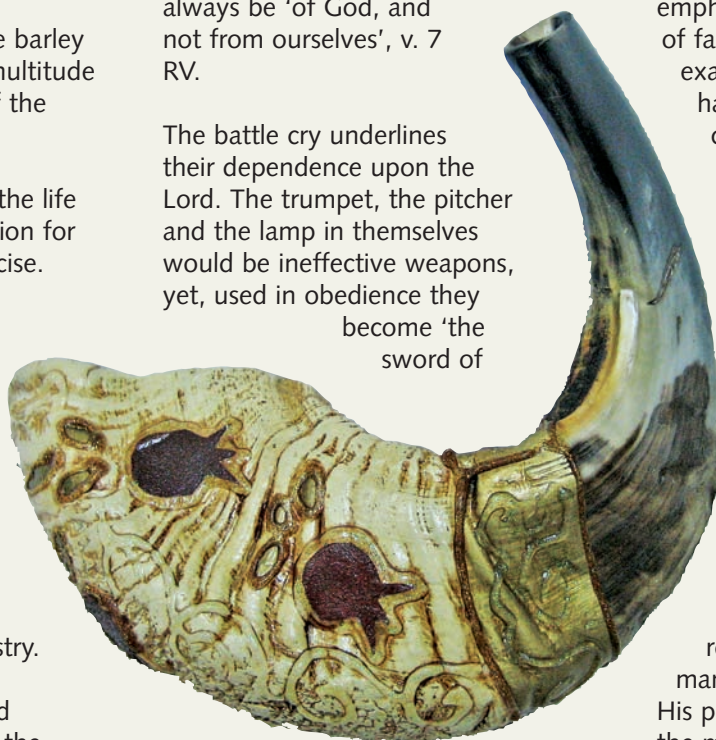
explanation is perceived to be the forthcoming attack by Gideon and his subsequent triumph; the moral victory was already won! Barley bread in biblical times was the food of the poor. Barley was grown primarily to provide food for cattle and horses. Its value was half that of wheat, 2 Kgs. 7. 1. To portray Gideon in such terms would emphasize his total dependence upon God. He had already acknowledged this; remember his words to the angel in chapter 6, 'My family is poor in Manasseh', v. 15. He would need to retain that spirit in order to appreciate his own inadequacy. The apostle Paul in his time had to realize that the Lord's strength was 'made perfect in weakness', 2 Cor. 12. 9. Gideon would later be included among those who 'out of weakness were made strong', Heb. 11. 34. Remember also how just five barley loaves provided food for a multitude when placed in the hands of the Master.

All we have seen thus far in the life of Gideon has been preparation for service, it is detailed and precise. Scripture abounds with examples of men and women who spent time, often a long time, in the 'school of God', before engaging in what was sometimes just a brief service. Even the Lord Jesus spent thirty preparatory years under the eye of His Father before entering into His public ministry.

Now the time for conflict had finally come, and what were the weapons of choice? Not the conventional, and expected, swords, spears and bows, but trumpets, pitchers and lamps! Our God never ceases to surprise us by constant reminders that His thoughts and ways are not the same as ours, they are far higher, Isa. 55. 8-9, and always better.

It may be that the apostle Paul had Gideon's experience in mind when he wrote his second letter to the Corinthians. In chapter 4, writing of the rich and rewarding ministry committed to the servants of God, the sound of the trumpet is heard in verse 5, 'We preach . . . Christ Jesus the Lord'. The light is seen in verse 6, and the pitcher, the earthen vessel, in verse 7. But the light must be allowed to shine forth, so the apostle emphasizes that 'we preach not ourselves'. It would have been far less effective if Gideon's men had kept their lamps hidden within the pitchers, and just blown the trumpets. Plenty of noise but no light! May we ever remember that in every sphere of witness, if anything of lasting value is to be accomplished, 'the exceeding greatness of the power' will always be 'of God, and not from ourselves', v. 7 RV.

The battle cry underlines their dependence upon the Lord. The trumpet, the pitcher and the lamp in themselves would be ineffective weapons, yet, used in obedience they become 'the sword of



the Lord', and also of Gideon. Our responsibility is to use 'the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God', Eph. 6. 17. That same word will then do its own work as applied by the Spirit to the hearers. The effect upon the enemy in Gideon's battle was that they 'ran, and cried, and fled'.

In like manner, 'the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds', 2 Cor. 10. 4.

As so often happens when a victory is gained, the adversary redoubles his efforts in seeking to cause division and strife among the people of God. Not for the first time, Ephraim complains; cf. Josh. 17. 14. They had not responded when Gideon blew his trumpet to assemble the tribes, but now that the victory has been won, they want some of the glory! Gideon, with his diplomatic response, is able to take the heat out of the situation and avoid a confrontation; brethren and sisters with the ability and wisdom to do this in assembly life are invaluable!

Most of the verses in chapter 8 are taken up with the aftermath of the battle and the churlish behaviour of the men of Succoth, for which they received appropriate retribution. The Spirit of God does not dwell too long on the rather disappointing end of Gideon's life, preferring to emphasize the exploits of the man of faith; we will follow the Spirit's example. Suffice it to say that having refused the offer of a crown in verses 23-23, the man who began his career by vigorously opposing idolatry, is responsible for making an ephod of gold 'which thing became a snare unto Gideon, and to his house', v. 27. How careful we all need to be throughout life; remember it is to elders that the warning is given concerning 'the snare of the devil', 1 Tim. 3. 7.

So Gideon passed to his reward in a good old age, a man raised up by God to deliver His people, finding his place among the men and women of faith, Heb. 11. 32.

JOHN SCARBROOK is a member of the Precious Seed committee.



Day by Day – Pictures and Parables

The following article forms the Introduction and two pages of our latest book in the ever popular Day by Day series. The theme for this volume is 'Pictures and Parables' and these selections are to give the magazine reader a flavour of what will be available when the book is published later this year. See also pages 13 and 25.

The world has a well-known but difficult to attribute cliché that, 'a picture is worth a thousand words'. In His earthly ministry this was a lesson that could well have been taught by the Lord as, in communicating divine truth, He so often resorted to metaphors and illustrations. For example, who could forget, 'A sower went forth to sow', Matt. 13. 3?

The Lord could identify and use familiar situations and figures. Moving around the region of Galilee, His hearers would understand the ideas of fishing and fish. Hence, the Lord would tell Simon Peter and Andrew his brother, 'I will make you to become fishers of men', Mark 1. 17. Similarly, to illustrate features of the kingdom of heaven, the Lord likened it unto 'a net, that was cast into the sea', Matt. 13. 47.

In an agrarian society, most would understand the pictures the Lord used in relation to animals and crops. He spoke of the vineyard and the labourers, Matt. 20. 1, as well as the vineyard and the husbandmen, Matt. 21. 33. Those familiar with the prophet's song would appreciate the significance of this latter picture, cf. Isa. 5. 1-7. The symbolism of sowing, and reaping, whether in relation to cereals or other crops, would also be familiar to most. A nation that had been identified with sheep as long as Israel had would have no difficulty in appreciating the many lessons that the Lord illustrated using this animal. It was an illustration of significance and weight to the shepherd king, David, cf. 2 Sam. 12. 1-5, as well as to a generation different, Luke 15. 1-7.

In relation to their religious life, which was based so much upon ritual, the metaphors of the leaven and the whited sepulchre would have resonance to the nation. That hidden ingredient, yeast, has a significant and visible effect when it is inserted into the dough. What a remarkable picture of sin and the effects of sin! For those who could become ceremonially unclean by contact with the dead, it was of utmost importance to avoid such contact. While today we decorate graves with headstones and inscriptions, the graves of the period

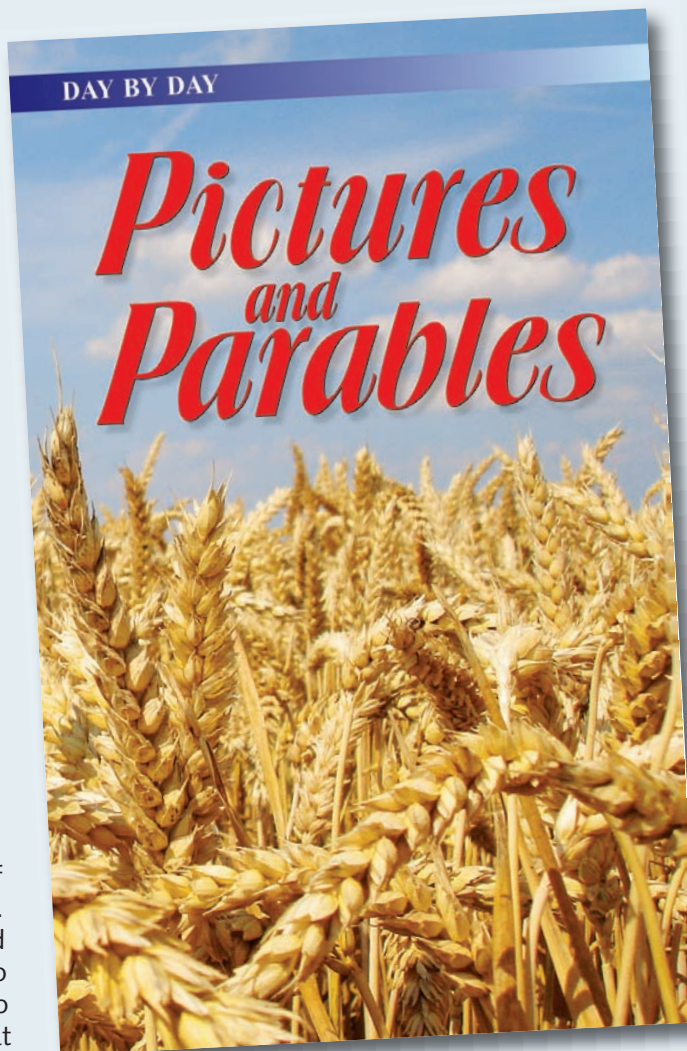
Introduction by John Bennett

used by the Lord seems to permeate the teaching of His followers. All have metaphors that they use to illustrate the truth they wish to teach. In the practice of the early disciples and in the teaching of the apostles, the figure of baptism was death, burial and resurrection. Hence, the apostle states, 'Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord', Rom. 6. 11. What should accompany such a step as baptism is that described very pictorially in Romans chapter 12, 'present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God', v. 1. How graphic and challenging an illustration of what the believer's life ought to be!

As we consider the believer's life there are many different biblical metaphors that may come to our minds. Those familiar with the games would understand the illustration of the race and one 'that striveth for the mastery', 1 Cor. 9. 25. The need for self-control is clear. Self-indulgence does not bring success in the race and, equally, does not bring progress in our spiritual lives. Examples of what that self-control may entail can be found illustrated by more biblical metaphors. The 'washing of water by the word', Eph. 5. 26, is intended to keep us morally and doctrinally pure that we may be presented as a 'chaste virgin to Christ', 2 Cor. 11. 2. Apart from removing the defilement

that comes from our daily contact with a sinful world, we should also seek to exhibit the 'fruit of the Spirit' rather than 'the works of the flesh', Gal. 5. 19, 22.

Following on from the character of our lives, what should be the focus of our spiritual activity? Again, the



were painted white to enable them to be seen and avoided, Matt. 23. 27. The aptness of the illustration as it applied to the Pharisees was not lost on them and generated further hatred against the Lord.

Later the richness of the language

ures and Parables

richness of the Bible's pictures and parables is evident. Paul speaks of having our feet 'shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace', Eph. 6. 15, which is an indication of what he later describes as 'redeeming the time', Col. 4. 5. We are 'ambassadors for Christ' in an alien world, living for and representing Him to those around us, 2 Cor. 5. 20.

In our care one for another, there are various illustrations that convey what we should be. In the context of believers young in the faith, Paul gives the example of his conduct amongst the Thessalonians, 'we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children', 1 Thess. 2. 7. How important that care is for the growth and development of the young!

But our care for fellow saints should extend beyond the young. We should be aware that people characterized as 'grievous wolves' have designs upon 'the flock' of God. How important, then, that overseers should 'take heed . . . to all the flock . . . to feed the church of God', Acts 20. 28-29!

But there is also the individual responsibility that we bear. No believer should stand still. We should seek to make progress in our spiritual lives and this provision of a daily reading based upon a passage of scripture is fulfilling in part that injunction of Paul to Timothy, 'Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth', 2 Tim. 2. 15.

Perhaps the most helpful use of imagery in the scriptures is that relating to the Person of Christ and our future in His presence. We would all acknowledge that the finite mind cannot appreciate the infinite. It is only with the help of the Spirit of God that we can understand what we do. John's gospel presents us with many statements where the Lord described Himself as 'the bread of life', 'the light of the world', 'the

door', 'the good shepherd', 'the way, the truth, and the life', and 'the true vine'. What a wealth of teaching is involved in each of those metaphors.

In the book of the Revelation, John also uses rich imagery to help us appreciate something of his vision of the Saviour. He describes His voice, His head and His hairs, His eyes, His feet, His right hand, His mouth, and His countenance. In it all, we acknowledge what a tremendous vision that must have been. Small wonder that John says, 'And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead', Rev. 1. 17. And yet, later John would see the same person but, seemingly, in a different form, 'I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne . . . stood a Lamb as it had been slain', Rev. 5. 6. This Lamb was the one who took the book and opened the seals and released the judgement of God upon an unsuspecting world.

But how could John help us to understand something of the scene in heaven that he saw? Paul spoke, in relation to his experience, of hearing 'unspeakable words' as part of his visions and revelations of the Lord. John, however, is given the privilege of describing One who sat upon the throne, a throne before which there was 'a sea of glass like unto crystal', Rev. 4. 6. This is only one of a number of visions that, if pieced together, may offer us a glimpse into the experience that awaits the believer in the presence of God.

In the meantime, we await the coming of one who described Himself to John as 'the bright and morning star', Rev. 22. 16. The days may grow darker, with conditions in this world growing ever bleaker for the child of God, but in that title assumed by the Lord there is the assurance that He is coming. That coming will dispel the darkness of the believer's experience and usher in an endless day of glory bright. It is worth contemplating that before you finish the readings of this book we may all be face to face with Christ our Saviour. Maranatha!

The Flight of Faith

The bird let loose in the eastern skies,
When fondly hastening home,
Ne'er stoops to earth her wing, nor flies
When idler wanderers roam;
But high she shoots through air and light,
Above all low delay,
When nothing earthly bounds her flight,
Nor shadow dims her way.

So grant me, God, from every snare
Of sinful passion free,
Aloft, through virtue's purer air,
To wing my course to Thee.
No sin to cloud, no lure to stay
My soul, as home she springs;
Thy sunshine on her joyful way,
Thy freedom on her wings.

Moore



You can read two of the daily meditations that will appear in the *Day by Day Pictures and Parables* book on pages 13 and 20 of this magazine. The book will be available late October but you can order it now for a special one-off price. Please see the advertisement in the front cover flap and the order form on the back cover flap. You may also order on the web site shop or by telephone.



POSTAL BIBLE SC



First Postal Bible School students.

It is amazing how a work of God which starts in a very small way can grow and increase beyond the wildest dreams of those involved. The grain of mustard seed - smaller than all the seeds on earth - becomes greater than all herbs, and shoots out large branches, see Mark 4. 31-32.

The work of the Postal Sunday School began in 1958 with one student in Ballydehob, Ireland. Bert and Wendy Gray had a vision to reach the children scattered throughout southern Ireland and, in view of the distances involved, it was decided that a Postal Sunday School was one of the best ways of bringing the gospel to them. Slowly, lessons were written and then printed and distributed. Others in the UK saw the possibility of using these lessons in their areas and so a number of Postal Bible School Centres commenced in different parts of England.

A system was soon established whereby each child was sent a set of four lessons for each month and when they have completed these lessons they are returned to the Centre and a team of markers, or teachers, is responsible for marking the lessons. Correct answers are awarded points so that, every so often, prizes are distributed and, in certain areas, prizegivings are held and an endeavour is made to bring all the children and their parents together for the special

event. Hundreds of faithful Christians, month by month, spend time marking lessons and adding suitable comments for their students.

Four levels of lessons were written to allow for specific age groups, 4-6's, 7-9's, 10-12's, 13-15's, and the work slowly grew. Today, there are fourteen main Postal Bible School Centres in the UK and Ireland and approximately 8,000 lessons are distributed each month.

Around twenty-five years ago it was realized that the lessons which were currently being used had a number of shortcomings and needed to be completely revised. A team was formed to edit and re-write the lessons. This project is on-going. Lessons have been written for a three-year syllabus for each grade and the designs from the late 1980's have been revised twice so that the lessons now are in a modern, full-colour format giving students today the opportunity of studying God's word in an attractive and interesting way.

Bert and Wendy Gray handed over the running of the Postal Bible School in Southern Ireland to Noel and Liza McMeekin in 1992, but they have continued to be very involved in the publishing of the lessons and in the overseas work.

Our concern is that these lessons should be more widely used, especially in the UK. We are all conscious that we live in a country where less than 5% of our children attend any place of

worship on a Sunday, so there is a mission field on our doorsteps. We need committed leaders who, in their homes and churches, with their families, and in any other way possible, can introduce children to PBS lessons and encourage them to study God's word.

A large number of people have been blessed and helped through studying the Postal Bible School lessons. A parent writes, 'Thank you for all the marking you have done for our daughter's Bible Time Lessons. She professed faith in the Lord Jesus when she

was eleven years old and is going on well with the Lord, being a blessing to us, in the family and at the church. Her brothers and sister aged 10, 8, and 4 would also like to commence doing the lessons'. A missionary mother writes, 'Thank you for the input into my daughter's spiritual life; it is a big help since most of the meetings and Sunday School are in the local language which at present she does not understand'.

A Charitable Trust (Bible Educational Services) has been set up to be responsible for the publishing of the lessons and the overseeing of the work as a whole, but each Postal Bible School Centre carries its own financial and administration responsibilities.

Over the years, Bert and Wendy Gray have made a large number of trips overseas and there has been a growing interest in the lessons being translated into other languages and used in other situations. The first major step forward

By
**STEPHEN
GILLHAM**
Bournemouth,
England



Bert and Wendy Gray.



Mountmellick Office in the 1970s.



Zaporozhie Conference

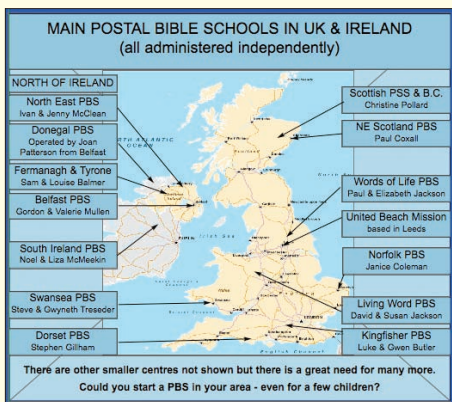
produce the lessons in their own language within the standard BES formats. Support and encouragement have been given to establish Postal Bible School Centres in these countries. In the last two years there have been many enquiries about the possibility of either using these lessons in English-speaking countries or translating them into other languages from virtually every continent of the world. God's timing is always right, and as the work has grown He has called Sam and Louise Balmer (from Northern Ireland) to become the International Secretaries and they are making a major contribution in the overseas work. To date, we would make a conservative estimate that at least 32,000 children (and some adults) around the world are regularly doing PBS lessons.

the world, with many different languages, to download lessons from the internet. The new website www.besweb.org will have lessons in many languages and it is planned to set up a contact team to deal with lessons in whatever language students may choose to return them to us.

Prayer would be valued in these busy days that the Lord will raise up others to share in this ministry and that the work will go forward unhindered, and, as a result, many more children and adults will study the scriptures which, as with Timothy, will be able to make them wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

For further information in connection with the Postal Bible School and Bible Educational Services you may contact: Stephen Gillham, 01202 873500; Bert Gray, 029 2053 1445; or Sam Balmer, 0286 6327 801.

A book has been recently published charting the history and development of the Postal Bible School and it is available from John Ritchie Ltd. Authored by Noel Davidson it is titled *Love Letters around the World*. There is a review of it in the Book Review section of this magazine.



was when the Primary and Junior lessons were translated into Korean and they are now widely used amongst Korean Christian families.

Peter Smith left the Editorial Committee in 1999 and moved to serve the Lord in Canada. He commenced a Postal Bible School work there which has grown rapidly to over 1,300 regular students.

However, the main thrust has come in Eastern Europe, particularly after the end of the Cold War, and the work has been established in Romania, Hungary, Russia and the Ukraine, with other developments in Poland, the Czech Republic and Armenia. Teams of translators have worked very hard to

No one could possibly have imagined that the work which commenced in such a small way in an obscure part of Ireland could have developed into such a massive outreach in producing Bible Study lessons for children and adults world-wide. Neither can one really begin to estimate the impact that the lessons have had in children's and adult's lives. We give God the glory and acknowledge His hand upon this work recognizing that the potential is even greater as technology gives the opportunity for students in many parts



Postal Bible School Leaders



Emmaus Course Team



For a period of forty days after His resurrection the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to His disciples 'to whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days', Acts 1. 3. At the end of this period He ascended back to heaven from whence He came, 'While they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight', v. 9.

The Eternal Christ

Part 4 Minis

By
J. E. TODD
Chesterfield,
England

The absence of the Lord from this earth and His presence in heaven is not regarded in scripture as a time of inactivity. On the contrary, His present work in heaven is of the utmost importance for the individual Christian and for the church.

He is the Glorified Man

The Lord had said that His ascension would be complementary to His birth, 'I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father', John 16. 28. Only the One who was eternally God could leave heaven and enter the human race on earth and only by means of the virgin birth; only the One who is God and was now truly man could leave earth and return to heaven, and only by means of the ascension, see Acts 1. 9-11.

The Lord ascended into the eternal realm of heaven in an immortal body. The fact that He ascended into heaven in a physical body underlines that heaven is a real place, 'Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have', Luke 24. 39. He also said, 'I go to prepare a place for you', John 14. 2.

He is the Rewarded Servant

The Lord did not merely return to heaven, He returned to the position of supreme authority in the universe, 'All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth', Matt. 28. 18. He now manifests continually the glory which He veiled when He came into the world, 'And now, O Father, glorify me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was', John 17. 5. He shared once again the throne of divine sovereignty, 'the throne of God and of the Lamb', Rev. 22. 3.

All this was not only His by sovereign

right as the Son of God, but also His reward as the Son of man. For, by His obedience to the point of death He had fulfilled, as God the Father's Servant, the plan of salvation, 'Behold my servant', see Isa. 42. 1-9; 52. 13-53; also, Phil. 2. 9-10, 'Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth and things under the earth'.

He is the Perfect Priest

Man in his sin and guilt cannot even approach God in His perfect holiness. Man must have someone to intercede with God on his behalf. This is one of the great lessons taught in the Old Testament scriptures, being illustrated by the Levitical priesthood of Israel. But the priesthood of Israel was imperfect, 'If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood . . . what further need was there that another priest should rise?' Heb. 7. 11.

The Levitical priest, being a man, must first make an offering for his own sins, 'For that he himself also is compassed about with infirmity. And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins', Heb. 5. 2-3. The Lord Jesus Christ is the perfect Priest, 'We have a great high priest . . . Jesus the Son of God . . . in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin', 4. 14-15.

The Levitical priest's offerings, consisting of animal sacrifices, could only cover, but never remove the guilt of sin, and so must be made repeatedly, 'For it is not possible that the blood of bulls

and of goats should take away sins', 10. 4. The Son of God offered up Himself, the perfect and final sacrifice for sin, 'But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever . . . for by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified', vv. 12-14.

The Levitical high priest could not enter the presence of God in heaven; he could enter only the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle, and later the temple, and that but once a year, see 9. 6-10. The Lord Jesus Christ has entered the very presence of God in heaven, 'For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us', v. 24.

Christ's present intercession before God in heaven guarantees forgiveness and therefore peace for each one who repents and has faith in Him as their personal Saviour, 'How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?' v.14.

He is the Giver of the Holy Spirit

When the Lord Jesus told His disciples of His imminent departure to the Father, He cheered their sadness with a promise, 'It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you', John 16. 7. From heaven, He fulfilled that promise on the day of Pentecost, 'they were all filled with the Holy Ghost', Acts 2. 4.

The Lord has continued to fulfil His promise down the years as each sinner repents, believes and is born anew. From His exalted place in heaven,

The Heavenly y of Christ

Christ bestows the gift of the Holy Spirit upon each Christian, 'In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise', Eph. 1. 13.

He is the Head of the Church

In the first reference to the church in the New Testament, the Lord refers to it as 'my church', Matt. 16. 18. It belongs to Him because He created it, 'Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore . . . the church is subject unto Christ', Eph. 5. 23-24.

As Head of the church He now, and continually, exercises His authority over the church. *First*, in a universal sense, over the whole company of His people, 'Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish', vv. 25-27.

Second, He continually exercises His authority as Head over His local churches. This is the continuing purpose of the New Testament scriptures. The Head of the church still speaks from heaven to His local churches through these inspired writings, 'What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia', Rev. 1. 11; 'He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches', 2. 7.

Each local church can still communicate with the risen Head in heaven by means of prayer, see Acts 1. 14; 4. 24-31; 12. 5.

to be continued

JOHN TODD has contributed articles to assembly magazines since 1986. He was evacuated from London during the 'Blitz' as a teenager to Chesterfield where later he and his wife began work amongst children that led to the establishment of the assembly. He is now retired and serves the assembly as an elder and in the ministry of God's word.

Cast Thy Burden upon the Lord

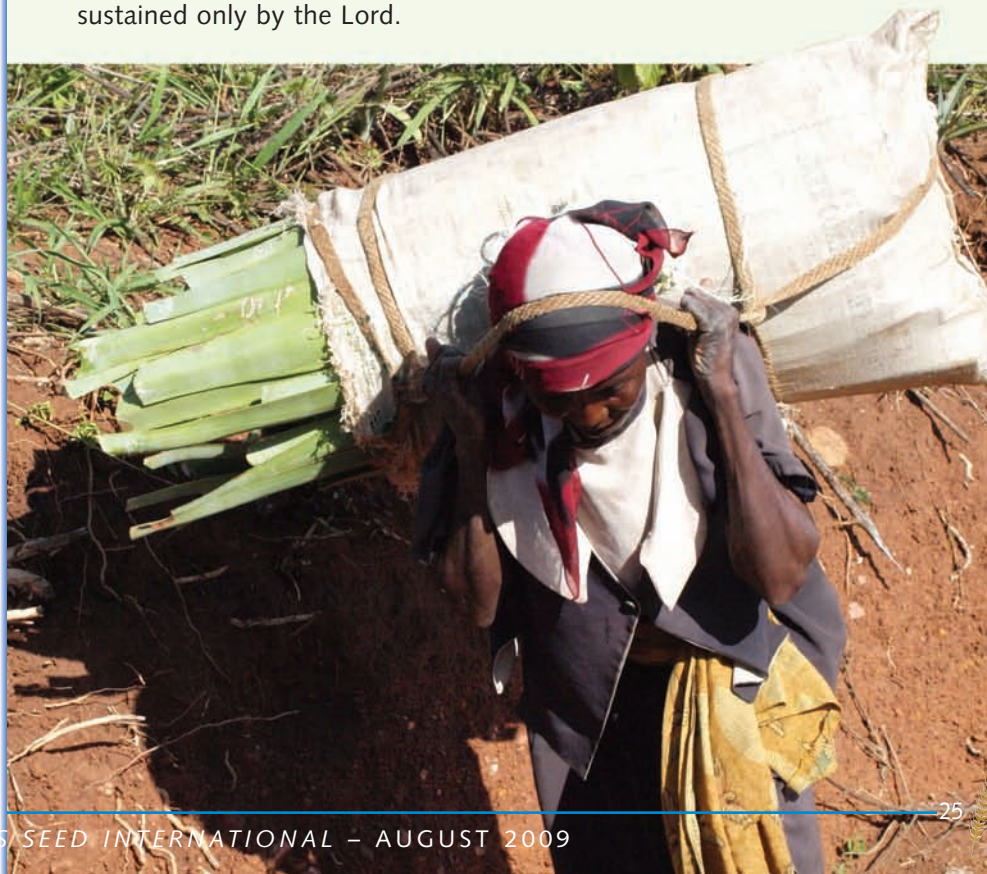
Psalm 55. 1-23 A sample page from *Pictures and Parables*, see p. 20.

This psalm contrasts the themes of trust and treachery. Following his repentance, David had experienced the blessedness of 'sins covered', Rom. 4. 7. Although God had forgiven him, another nursed a deep sense of grievance and looked for an opportunity for vengeance. David regarded Ahithophel as 'a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance', v. 13. But Ahithophel was the father of Eliam and therefore the grandfather of Bathsheba, 2 Sam. 11. 3; 23. 34. His opportunity to revenge his family's honour came during the time of Absalom's rebellion, when David least expected his treachery, 2 Sam. 15. 12, 31. The experience of David at the hand of his friend was an echo of the trouble of spirit that the Lord would know when He was betrayed by Judas Iscariot, John 13. 21. These events also foreshadow the rise of the Antichrist who will betray Israel by breaking his covenant with them, v. 20; Dan. 9. 27.

David's burden was not unknown to the Lord. In fact, the Hebrew word used could be translated 'a lot'. This burden was divinely given to David. God is able to trust His people with burdens. The Levites were numbered 'every one according to his service, and according to his burden', Num. 4. 49. How good to know that our God has taken account of the burdens His people bear for Him.

David learned to take the burden God had given him and to cast it back upon the Lord – to admit that he was unable to bear it himself. The apostle Paul learned to do this. Three times he besought the Lord that the thorn in the flesh would depart. 'And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness', 2 Cor. 12. 9. Paul lived his life glorying in infirmities and the greater part of his ministry came not from Paradise but from a prison.

The Lord Jesus taught all who were 'heavy laden' to come to Him, for, 'My yoke is easy, and my burden is light', Matt. 11. 30. Every divinely given burden in life is intended to drive us to Christ. Each disappointment, grief, hurt, and even betrayal only serves to show how much Christ can be trusted. The burden given by the Lord can be sustained only by the Lord.





REPORTS REPORTS REPORTS

GOSPEL WORK AND OTHER ACTIVITIES

Compiled by STEPHEN BAKER



Cheltenham and Gloucester

The believers in Cheltenham and Gloucester report that their winter series of Saturday rallies were really encouraging. Excellent ministry was given by all the speakers during the session and the numbers present at the meetings exceeded previous years. The Bible Teaching Conference in October and the Missionary Conference in January reflected an exceptional interest from the local believers.

The second Combined Cheltenham and Gloucester Easter Conference was very well attended. It showed that when everything is geared towards the edifying of the saints and the glory of the Lord the result is that the believers' hearts are gladdened and their spirits raised to go forward in the work of the Lord. This is encouraging as New Testament church testimony is weak in Gloucestershire.

The organizers of the conferences and meetings would like to thank all the believers who attended from many areas surrounding Gloucestershire for their support and fellowship during the year. They look forward to renewing fellowship during the 2009/10 series of Saturday meetings and conferences, in the will of God.

London Young People's Day

London Young People's Day was intended as an annual event when it was inaugurated at **Bermondsey Gospel Hall** in October 2008. Positive feedback saw the second event being held just six months later, in April 2009. It is a whole day of very practical Bible teaching arranged for young people by young people. At the latest event John Salisbury of Northampton used the Epistle of James to explore handling temptation, knowing God's will and effective prayer. The event drew over one hundred and twenty young people from across the south of England. Many who attended the previous event

brought new folk along. As the Gospel Hall only has one hundred chairs, the conveners are considering a larger venue if the event continues to flourish.

During the free time in the afternoon, the young folk people took advantage of a two-hour sightseeing trip that had been arranged on a chartered open-topped bus around central London in glorious sunshine. A good time of fellowship was deeply appreciated.

Recordings of the event are available on the web site www.bermondsey-gospel-hall.org.uk under April 2009 LYPD on the audio page.

Spencer Bridge Road, Northampton

Bible Exhibition

At the beginning of March, the Ayrshire Bible Exhibition returned to **Spencer Bridge Road Gospel Hall, Northampton**, for its sixth visit. The visit had been eagerly anticipated by the many schools who had expressed interest in attending. As early as the previous December one school had even arranged its own transport to ensure their children could attend.

Over one thousand children were conducted around the displays and as always gave their full attention to the presentation of the gospel message. This year more of the teachers and helpers, sixty or so, went around with the groups. It would be interesting to ask how many weeks it would take your assembly to reach that many people with the gospel! As always, the teachers were impressed with what the children had learned in such a short time, based on the enthusiastic responses to the quiz.

BBC Radio Northampton covered the event again, this time coming to visit it and were given the opportunity of interviewing a local headmistress who was extremely positive about the exhibition 'experience'.

The number of visitors coming in 'off the street' was disappointing but there were some pleasant surprises in store.

A pastor from a Pentecostal fellowship phoned to ask if he could bring a children's group to see the exhibition. His daughter had visited with her school and enthused about it so much that he had been persuaded to arrange the visit. They came, and the next day he phoned again to ask if his congregation could visit, which they did. Their warmth and appreciation for the exhibition were a real encouragement. Members from another Pentecostal fellowship came, one young lady more than once, expressing great interest in the displays. During the visits of both these groups the opportunity was taken in various conversations to 'teach the way of God more perfectly'.

PLEASE PRAY for all who attended and for the organizers of the exhibition that they may be given health and strength to continue in this great service for God's people.

Children's Campaign

For two weeks at the end of April/beginning of May special children's meetings were held with David Raggett as the speaker. Invitations were distributed around the doors and via the schools in the locality and several prayer meetings held to pray for the meetings and the children who would attend.

Although numbers are not the biggest issue, the response to the invitations was disappointing. The few new children who came did so mainly as a result of word of mouth invites from friends. Some twenty or so children and teenagers attended each evening. Their behaviour was very good and they paid attention as the gospel message was faithfully presented. David showed great enthusiasm and stamina over the seventy-five minutes of the meeting. The children learned a gospel verse and gospel facts each evening and these were well remembered at the parents' evening at the end of the event. Numbers of parents attending the evening were disappointing, maybe reflecting 'the spirit of the age' with little interest in spiritual matters concerning themselves or their children.



On the Saturday evening a 'Teen Night' was organized which allowed time for activities, food and a gospel message. Attendance here was encouraging, especially as this was a relatively new venture for the assembly and this will be repeated in the future. Please pray for the seed sown in these young hearts.



Harrogate

For over four years the assembly at **Harrogate** has annually hosted two or three Bible study days per year, specifically aimed at younger believers (although older saints are very welcome!). The average attendance of young folk has been eighty to ninety with approx three hundred to three hundred and fifty attending overall. A number of brethren have kindly given their time on a Saturday to speak. They covered a range of subjects which were particularly aimed at stimulating and challenging younger Christians. The most recent one was held on 30th May when Brian Dunning took three sessions on 'The Reliability of Scripture', giving sound advice on defending the authority of the Bible to unbelieving friends. The aim of the day was not only to give appropriate Bible teaching but to encourage fellowship between young believers, some of whom may come from small assemblies and may not have opportunities to meet regularly with other Christians. Thanks must also be given to brethren and sisters from various parts who have made great efforts in providing transport, as well as to the saints in Harrogate for providing the catering (nobody needs to go away hungry!). The next day planned is 31st October 2009 and if anyone is interested in details contact Paul Richardson at Richardson.paul1@sky.com.

Schools in Manchester area

David Raggett continues to get real encouragement from having so many opportunities to spread the good seed of the gospel in schools. There was tremendous interest in the run-up to Easter with Easter assemblies and workshops. Since last September, David has been teaching foundational, and vital, teaching on

'Creation' in school assemblies – up to eighteen lessons in all – and these will continue to the end of July, God willing. This has been a real opportunity especially with all that has been presented in the media and still is being propounded, regarding Darwin and evolutionism! Please pray that the teaching that has been given - the good seed of the word of God - will be remembered and blessed of the Lord in days to come. Several teachers have also been challenged; and we look to the Lord to continue to speak to them in His grace and power and to bring them to Himself, as only He can.

In June, David ran two weeks of full days with his Bible Exhibition in various schools. Years five and six each visited the exhibition for a full day. That equalled about five hours of so of teaching on the importance, message and relevance of the Bible; it was a great opportunity. The children are always very attentive and interested and each child received a gospel booklet at the end to take home, and many do read them. Please pray that there will be a harvest for the Lord's glory as a result of the sowing of the seed in this way.

Bakewell

The Christians from **Bakewell Gospel Hall** and the surrounding fellowships would value your prayers for the planned outreach at the Bakewell Show in August. This will be the thirtieth year of outreach where people are offered refreshments and free literature about Christianity, including promotional leaflets for the Postal Bible School. In past years this has been a great way of contacting many of the visitors to the show. The local saints hope that this August many more will stop to chat, take literature and Bibles, and, ultimately, be saved.



Mayfield Gospel Hall

At the end of April and the beginning of May, Ainslie Patterson and Leslie Craig shared in four weeks of gospel work in fellowship with the assembly in **Mayfield**. The first week was aimed at children and it was encouraging, not only to see a good number coming along, but also the good attention

given to the word of God. Over the three weeks that followed the preachers and the local saints were delighted to see a good number of unbelievers coming under the sound of the gospel. After listening to the gospel being preached and then speaking with some of the believers, one young man in his thirties later confessed that he had trusted the Lord as he returned home. In spite of the general apathy and disinterest that Ainslie and Leslie met as they visited people at their homes they were encouraged to have the opportunity to engage in a few good conversations. Please continue to pray that the seed sown through the efforts of the assembly will eventually bear much fruit to the glory of God.

The assembly at **Culloden**, near Inverness, arranged a special Gospel Weekend at the end of March 2009. Stephen Clegg, from Killamarsh, spoke on 'God's Power in Prison'. He preached the gospel using stories of real-life conversions to illustrate how God saves and changes lives. It was encouraging to see a number of visitors from the locality attending. The climax of the weekend was a special meeting in the community centre in the village of **Avoch**, on the Black Isle, north of Inverness.

In May 2009, the Celt Street assembly in **Inverness** arranged a Creation Conference with Ian Campbell of Newcastle. A testimony and report meeting was held on Friday evening, then on Saturday, in four shorter sessions, Ian explored creation themes, and used digital projector slides very effectively. Again, the second part of the last session 'Fearfully and Wonderfully Made' was held in the **Avoch** community centre on Lord's Day evening.

On both occasions in **Avoch**, around twenty visitors from the village were present. For some time the small assembly there has held similar special meetings periodically and the response from the local community has been excellent. The believers in **Avoch** appreciate the support they receive from neighbouring assemblies. Further meetings are planned and prayer would be appreciated for this form of outreach, and for the work done in **Inverness** and **Culloden**.



OVERSEAS

Armenia

Wendell Webb of Cork writes to thank believers for prayer fellowship with him in the work for the Lord in Armenia. He says, that it is deeply appreciated by him and by the saints in Armenia. The work is expanding in Armenia but life is most difficult for the saints because of the effect of the world economic crisis. Unemployment is a big problem amongst the believers. In the countryside the unemployment rate is about eighty percent, and somewhat less in the cities. There is no state aid so the saints depend on their families working abroad either in Russia or the USA and on the little help received from the local believers. The practical fellowship of saints in the UK is therefore most helpful.

There has been great progress in the work even since Wendell's last visit in November/December 2008. There are currently two assemblies – one in **Yerevan**, the capital, and the other in **Gyumri**, the second city. Both assemblies have an outreach work. The brethren have for the past three years travelled from **Yerevan** to a little village called **Dvin** (a distance of forty kilometres) to preach the gospel in a house which has been made available for this work. Since then, about twenty-eight folk have been saved and most attend the two meetings held each week, i.e., the Lord's Day and the mid-week meeting on Wednesday.

A few weeks ago, while visiting in the village, Wendell went into a home in which there was a young widow of about twenty-four years of age wanting to speak about getting saved. Having heard the gospel just recently, God's way of salvation was further explained to her and she immediately repented of her sin. Wendell and the local saints 'went on their way rejoicing'. When they next met her she too was rejoicing in the Lord. Do pray for this girl; her name is Eveta.

A sum of money has been paid as a deposit on an unfinished house in the village to secure a dedicated property for the purpose of gospel outreach. As the work is expanding with more attending the meetings, it was thought better to have a separate

building, and hopefully one day soon an assembly will be established.

Do pray for two brethren who are showing leadership qualities; one called Yasha and the other called Argam, that they will be preserved. Unemployment is a big problem and with no income these men are tempted to go to Russia to earn a living. That creates its own problems as work there is also hard to find. Wendell believes that Satan wants them out of the village as it is obvious the Lord has His hand upon these brethren and the area in which they live.

Toros Pilibosian is the only assembly missionary in **Armenia**. He is currently busy translating two books, one entitled *Assembly Gatherings* and the other, by John Ritchie, *The Second coming of our Lord Jesus*. These should be a good help and will add to the small number of books available in the Armenian language which are suitable for the saints.

The intention (God willing) in **Gyumri** is to build a small 'centre' to replace the 'soup kitchen' where gospel meetings are held every Friday. Wendell was there to preach the gospel on April 3rd 2009 and he was thrilled to have almost thirty unsaved people present; this is the case each week. This outreach from the assembly commenced six years ago, and some of those saved are now in assembly fellowship. The giving of the free soup finished about six months ago but the people still come to hear the gospel! It proves they were not just coming for the food! This 'soup kitchen' was operated by an NGO, but they have now left and allowed the meetings to continue. The local saints hope to recommence the 'soup kitchen' in the new building, if the Lord will, as the present building will not be available much longer.

It is encouraging to see a good number of young people coming to the meetings. There is a young man called Hrach who was saved about two years ago in the meetings held by the **Yerevan** assembly. He is going through a difficult time since he commenced university. Please pray that he will be

preserved, as he showed good promise and there is great potential in this young life. Pray for Christig in **Gyumri**. She had been attracted to the things of the world and left the meeting in 2007 but is now coming back to all the meetings, and bringing her unsaved father with her. Her mother was saved and has been in fellowship for the last three years.

Wendell writes, 'Again, sincere thanks for your love and fellowship with me in the gospel; the Lord has given me a love for the people in Armenia'. I do appreciate the fellowship of the Lord's people with me in this exercise. I came home very much encouraged, yet with burdens for the saints and the work there, so much to give thanks to the Lord for and to continue to pray for'.

Serowe, Botswana



Franklin McIlroy from Botswana writes, 'It is hard to believe we are almost half way through 2009! The winter is now here and although during the day it is still very pleasant (can be up to 30 degrees), the evenings are much cooler. The rainy season is over, so it will probably be October before we see any more rain. The grass is dying off, so there is plenty of dust around.

The gospel meetings continue twice weekly at **Leina Hall** and are well supported by the local believers. We have tracted the area quite a number of times with invitations but not many come to hear the word of God. We have been encouraged as over the past three to four weeks a group of about six to eight teenage boys have come (usually arriving half-way through the meeting) from around the Hall and so we pray that what they have heard may be used of the Spirit to work in their hearts. Remember Mothusi and

2. The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant, Matt. 18. 21-35. Part 1.

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

If we are to understand correctly the meaning and significance of the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant we must first delve into the context in which it was spoken. This is the purpose of the present article.

The word 'then' which opens Matthew chapter 18 verse 21 informs us that the passage which follows (including the parable) is directly connected to the events which had gone before. And Matthew chapter 19 verse 1 makes it clear that the passage which begins at Matthew chapter 18 verse 21 details the last recorded event of our Lord's current stay at Capernaum.

The section begins properly back in chapter 17 verse 24, when Jesus and Peter returned to Capernaum,¹ and ends in chapter 19 verse 1, when our Lord left Capernaum for Judea. The theme and subject of this entire section is that of 'offences'; 'offences', that is, in the sense of causes of stumbling.²

It is likely that the Saviour was then staying at Simon Peter's house, as He had during His earlier visit to Capernaum.³ This would explain why, apart from Peter's prominence in the apostolic band, the Temple tax-collectors asked Peter about our Lord's attitude to the tax. As Peter's fellow-townsmen, they knew him well. But, doubtless, they approached Peter, not only as Jesus' host, but as the acknowledged spokesman for the twelve. For we note that, when speaking to Peter, they referred to Jesus as 'your (plural) Teacher', and not as 'your (singular) Teacher'.

Chapter 17 verse 24. The tax in question was not a tax paid to the Romans.⁴ It was the half-shekel, 'the atonement money', which, according to Exodus chapter 30 verses 11-16, was paid by each Israelite as 'a ransom' for his soul. In our Lord's day, the proceeds were used to defray the expenses of the Temple at Jerusalem, much as originally they had been used to defray the expenses of the Tabernacle.

The Rabbis had drawn up a whole set of rules concerning the collection of this tax. Their directions said, for instance, that 'on the 15th (of the month *Adar*; our February/March), the money-changers outside Jerusalem seated themselves at their tables (to provide the people with the necessary half-shekels; for the tax had to be paid in half-shekels only). As soon as the money-changers seated themselves also in the city, the taking of pledges from the tardy ones commenced'.⁵

As far as the tax-collectors of Matthew chapter 17 knew, it was possible our Lord reasoned that, as a recognized Teacher, He was exempt from the tax. They therefore enquired whether or not He would be paying it. Indeed, it is possible that they deliberately framed the question as they did ('Does not your Teacher pay the tax', lit.) so as to invite the answer, 'Yes, of course He does'.

Verse 25. Certainly, in perhaps the shortest sentence Peter ever uttered, they obtained a 'Yes'. For the apostle confirmed that the Lord did indeed pay the tax. Clearly, Peter saw no need to bother Jesus with what was, in his eyes, such a seemingly trivial and straightforward issue. And, in any case, as we discover shortly, Peter's mind was focussed on something which to him and to the other apostles was a far more pressing and important issue!

And so, altogether in character, Peter impulsively responded, 'Yes'. Indeed, it may be that there was an element of faith in his answer. For it is possible that there was no money available in the apostolic funds at the time,⁶ which would explain, of course, the most unusual procedure adopted by our Lord to obtain the required payment.⁷

Our Lord witnessed the encounter between Peter and the men. But, although He perceived the drift of their conversation, He was too much of a gentleman to correct and embarrass Peter there and then in public. But once inside the house, Jesus 'preceded'⁸ Peter. Jesus, that is, spoke first.

I suspect that you always needed to be quick to get in before Peter. But the more so today. For

he was simply bursting to broach the (to him) burning issue of chapter 18 verse 1, an issue which had exercised the minds of the whole apostolic band on the road to Capernaum. Mark reports that our Lord 'came to Capernaum. And when He was in the house He asked them, "What was it you disputed among yourselves on the road?" But they kept silent, for on the road they had disputed among themselves who would be the greatest'.⁹ Sadly, the disciples had not been discussing what the Lord Jesus may have meant by His recent reference to His forthcoming betrayal, death and resurrection.¹⁰ To them at the time, their own relative position and greatness constituted a more pressing subject for debate!

When our Lord mentioned '*customs*', He was referring to duties paid on *goods*, and, when He mentioned '*taxes*', He referred to taxes paid on *persons*, such as would, for example, follow a census. But, whether by way of direct or indirect taxation, the issue the Lord raised was 'Who is liable to pay?' Did earthly monarchs demand payment of tax 'from their own sons'¹¹ or from strangers?¹²

Verse 26. When Peter answered (as he had to) 'from strangers', Jesus responded, 'then ('so then', 'surely then') the sons are free'. Our Lord's reference to 'sons' was clearly designed to point Peter to Himself as the Son of God. The Temple at Jerusalem, for the benefit of which the tax was being collected, was His Father's house. Not many months later, when overturning the tables of the money-changers at Jerusalem, He would quote the words of God through Isaiah, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer'.¹³

Alas, Peter had not grasped the full significance of the Father's revelation he had received at Caesarea Philippi, expressed in his confession, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God'.¹⁴ Nor had he thought through the implications of the Father's declaration he had heard on the Mount of Transfiguration, 'This is my beloved Son'.¹⁵ For, if Jesus was indeed God's Son, then it followed necessarily that He was exempt from any requirement to contribute towards the upkeep of His Father's house.

Verse 27. 'Nevertheless', our Lord added, 'lest we should offend them'. Before leaving Galilee after His previous visit there, His last recorded action had been to accuse the scribes and Pharisees of giving precedence to their own

teachings over the word of God and of misunderstanding the nature of true defilement. Following this, when alone in the house with Jesus, His disciples had said to Him, 'Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?'¹⁶ On that occasion, the 'offence' had been inescapable (being caused by the truth itself), but the present situation was very different. Now it was possible, and indeed right, to avoid causing an offence which was wholly unnecessary. And we do well to pray that the Lord will help us to distinguish between the unavoidable offence of the message of the cross¹⁷ from the unnecessary offences we can so easily cause.

The Lord Jesus knew that, Son though He was, it was right for Him to pay the Temple-tax so as to avoid any possible misunderstanding on the part of those around. Because they lacked the knowledge that Peter had, a knowledge which held the key to our Lord's personal exemption from paying the tax; namely, that of His divine Sonship.

For Jesus had deliberately not proclaimed Himself openly as the Son of God. Indeed, following both Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi and the disciples' experience on the Mount of Transfiguration, He had strictly charged them that they should keep what they knew and had seen to themselves. 'He commanded His disciples that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ . . . Jesus commanded them, saying, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead"'.¹⁸

And, without such knowledge, the Jews could not be blamed if they had walked away with the impression that, by non-payment of the tax, the Lord Jesus would have happily cut off all financial support for the house of God, and was therefore totally indifferent to the honour of Him who dwelt there. And we should remember that there were rumours circulating to the effect that He had once said He would destroy the Temple and build another in three days.¹⁹

Determined to avoid causing any unnecessary offence, Jesus sent Peter to obtain the necessary payment from the local 'bank', by which I refer, of course, to the shore of the Lake of Galilee!²⁰

In passing, we note that our Lord spoke to

Peter of his making payment, not 'for us', but 'for me and you'.

And this because the reason that He submitted to pay the tax was very different to the reason that Peter needed to pay it. For, unlike in the case of Peter, it was not for Him, who had come to give His life ('soul', lit.) a ransom for many,²¹ to pay 'a ransom' for His own soul!²² The Lord Jesus paid even though, as Son, He was exempt; Peter paid because, as a sinner needing to be ransomed, he was liable. For Jesus to pay was a case of consideration for others; for Peter to pay was a case of obligation to the law of God.²³

But, for the purpose of the present study, the expression we need to underline is 'lest we offend them'.²⁴

Chapter 18 verse 1. 'At that time' ('In that hour', lit.). As we noted above, the disciples were then fired with selfish ambition and had debated about their own greatness on the way to Capernaum.²⁵ Jesus had noted the discussion, but had said nothing. And now they wasted no time in asking Him to settle their dispute.²⁶

Verses 2 to 4. The Lord chose a child as His means of instruction, the child being held up as a model, not so much of innocence or purity, but of humility and lack of concern for social status. Here then was one who, unlike the twelve, was humble and unassuming, free from rivalry, envy and self-seeking. And along with such humility came childlike trust. And the Lord therefore warned the disciples, 'Unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means (emphatic; a double negative) enter the kingdom of heaven', let alone be the greatest in it!

Verse 6. The Saviour then steered His teaching back to the subject of 'offences'. 'Whoever offends', He said literally, 'one of these little ones who believe in me', and then sounded the solemn warning that it would be better for a man *to have a stone²⁷ hung around his neck* and for him to be 'drowned in the depth of the sea' than for him *to be guilty of putting a stone in the path of another believer*, thereby causing him to stumble.²⁸

Verses 8 and 9.²⁹ Still on the subject of 'offences', Jesus now introduced the thought of removing all occasions of stumbling in one's

own life, no matter how great the cost. In characteristic hyperbolic language (of severing a hand or a foot, and of gouging out an eye), He confronted the disciples with the need for them to be altogether merciless and unsparing with anything which they knew could lead them to sin. It was a good policy which Hezekiah, king of Judah, followed, 'when Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib had come, and that his purpose was to make war against Jerusalem, he consulted with his leaders and commanders to stop the water from the springs which were outside the city; and they helped him. Thus many people gathered together who stopped all the springs and the brook that ran through the land, saying, "Why should the kings of Assyria come and find much water?"'³⁰ After all, it makes no sense to allow your enemy the benefit of resources which he can use against you!

In summary, to this point our Lord had spoken of causing offence (an occasion of stumbling): (i) to unbelievers ('*them*'),³¹ (ii) to fellow-believers ('*one of these . . . who believe in me*'),³² and (iii) to oneself ('*you*').³³

Verses 15-20. In this section the Lord outlined the procedure to be followed if the believer happened to be the offended (the injured) party. 'If your brother sins against you', He said. That is, the Lord now turned from warning the disciples against causing offence to giving them instruction and counsel as to how they should respond if they found themselves at the receiving end of some 'offence'.³⁴

Do not harbour a grudge, nor let feelings of bitterness and resentment build up inside, our Lord was saying, but rather 'go and tell him his fault (lit., 'reprove him', 'convict him') between you and him alone', which teaching was altogether consistent with the law of Moses, 'You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbour, and not bear sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people'.³⁵ The second phase of the procedure also rested on the teaching of the Law, 'If he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that "by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established"', our Lord's quotation coming from Deuteronomy chapter 19.³⁶ Finally, 'If he refuses even to hear the church' (for there is no higher earthly authority³⁷), then 'let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector'. Without

for one moment endorsing the Jews' treatment of Gentiles and tax collectors, Jesus accepted that treatment as a fact, and used it as an illustration. The writer of the Gospel could certainly be expected to remember the words 'like . . . a tax-collector'. He knew their meaning all too well!³⁸

Thus far then, our Lord has spoken of the possibility of the disciple causing offence (i) to unbelievers, (ii) to fellow-believers, and (iii) to himself, and has outlined the route to be followed if the disciple happened to be the one who has been caused offence. In one sense therefore, the subject of 'offences' has been fully covered. But not to Peter's satisfaction! As far as he was concerned, it was all very well for the Lord to require him to do all he could to reclaim (and, by implication, to forgive) a brother who had wronged him, but what Peter wanted to know was precisely how many times he was expected to forgive the offending brother.

And there we leave our study, with the stage set for Peter's question which will give rise to our Lord's 'Parable of the Unforgiving Servant', to be considered, God willing, in the next issue.

To be continued.

Footnotes

- 1 Now known as Jesus 'own city', Matt. 9. 1.
- 2 The connection is obscured in the NKJV by the use of the phrase 'causes you to sin' in chapter 18 verses 6, 8 and 9, where the same word occurs as is translated 'offend' in chapter 17 verse 27.
- 3 Matt. 8. 5, 14.
- 4 The word here translated 'tribute' in the KJV differs from the word which the KJV renders 'tribute' in verse 25, which latter is levied by the kings of the earth. It differs also from that to which the disciples of Pharisees and the Herodians refer later, 'Tell us therefore, what thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?', Matt 22. 17 KJV.
- 5 Forming part of the so-called Babylonian Talmud, the tractate Shekalim in the Mishnah deals with the Temple-tax contributions. The quotation in our main text comes from Mishna 1 (c). (The whole of the tractate Shekalim can be accessed at http://www.sacred-texts.com/jud/t02/shk05.htm#fn_1.)
- 6 See John 12. 6; 13.29.
- 7 Matt. 17. 27. The word translated a 'piece of money' is literally a 'stat r', which was the equivalent of a full shekel or four drachmas. Cf. FLAVIUS JOSEPHUS, Antiquities of the Jews, Book III, Chapter VIII, Paragraph 2. It was therefore the exact amount needed to pay the Temple-tax for Jesus and Peter.
- 8 The Middle English word 'prevented', employed here by the translators of the KJV, meant 'anticipated' in the seventeenth century. The word now has a very different meaning and would therefore be misleading as a translation of the word (pphan) used by Matthew, cf. 1 Thess. 4. 15 KJV.

- 9 Mark 9. 33-34.
- 10 See Matt. 17. 22-23; Mark 9. 30-32 ('they did not understand this saying, and were afraid to ask Him').
- 11 Not 'children', as in the KJV.
- 12 'The kings of the earth' may stand in contrast to the One known as 'the King of Heaven', Dan. 4. 37, who features in the following section; see 'kingdom of heaven', Matt. 18. 3, 4, 23; 'your Father who is in heaven', v. 14, 'My heavenly Father', v. 35. Note also that the parable introduces 'a king', v. 23, who clearly symbolizes God.
- 13 Matt. 21. 13, quoting Isa. 56. 7.
- 14 Matt. 16. 16.
- 15 Matt. 17. 5.
- 16 Matt. 15. 1-21; Mark 7. 1-23.
- 17 1 Cor. 1. 23; Gal. 5. 11.
- 18 Matt. 16. 20; 17. 9.
- 19 Matt. 27. 40, taken with John 2. 19-20.
- 20 This time the Galilean fisherman is found, not, as usual, with a net, but with a line and hook in his hand.
- 21 Matt. 20. 28.
- 22 Exod. 30. 12. Indeed, our Lord's words in the Greek text of Matthew 20. 28 are more or less identical to the Septuagint rendering of Exodus chapter 30 verse 12.
- 23 This was one of several miracles which our Lord performed for Peter's benefit, cf. the healing of Peter's mother-in-law, Mark 1. 29-34; helping him to catch fish, Luke 5. 1-11; enabling him to walk on water and saving him from drowning, Matt. 14. 22-33; healing the ear of Malchus, Matt. 26. 47-56; and setting him free from prison, Acts 5. 19-20 and 12. 6-11.
- 24 In one sense, this could be said to be the one miracle which, in part at least, Jesus performed to meet His own needs; contrast Matt. 4. 3-4. But, in truth, even this miracle was performed, not for His own sake, but for the sake of others, lest they be stumbled.
- 25 Mark 9. 33-34.
- 26 The Father interrupted Peter on the mountain, Matt. 17. 5; the Son anticipated Peter in the house, Matt. 17. 25.
- 27 The 'millstone' referred to is the large, upper millstone, of the kind pulled by an ox or ass. The size and weight of such a stone would, of course, eliminate any possibility of the body rising again to the surface of the sea and of it then being buried by family or friends, a consideration which, to the disciples, would only serve to increase the horror of such a death.
- 28 'Causing to stumble' being the meaning of 'offending' in this verse.
- 29 Our Lord's warning here is more or less a repeat of that which He gave in Matthew chapter 5 verses 29-30, save that there, in the context of lust and the seventh commandment, He mentioned the eye first, cf. Job 31. 1; 2 Sam. 11. 2.
- 30 2 Chron. 32. 2-4.
- 31 Matt. 17. 27.
- 32 Matt. 18. 6.
- 33 Matt. 18. 8-9.
- 34 The onus is on us to begin the reconciliation process, whether we have something against our brother, Matt. 18. 15-17, or our brother has something against us, Matt. 5. 23-26.
- 35 Lev. 19. 17, 18.
- 36 'One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established', Deut. 19. 15.
- 37 See 1 Cor. 6. 1-8.
- 38 Matt. 9. 9-13.



especially Kedibonye in your prayers; they lived opposite our old house last year. They came to the meeting in December for the first time. Since then, usually they come on a Sunday morning and also on a Tuesday night. One Lord's Day at **Leina Hall**, I was preaching on 'Saved' and from the platform I noticed the lady, Kedibonye, was disturbed a little. The following Lord's Day as I was preaching, again I could see a couple of times that tears had filled her eyes and so I would ask you to earnestly pray for her that the Spirit of God will convict her of her sin and that she may not rest until she finds true peace in Christ. The other couple of neighbours come quite often and there are usually a few teenagers who also come each Tuesday evening. The Saturday morning children's meeting continues each week with around one hundred and fifty to two hundred coming, ranging from the age of four to thirteen years old.

At the other Hall, at **Malela Ward in Serowe**, there are a number of unsaved who come every Lord's Day to the gospel meeting including the mother of a teenage boy who professed salvation last year and the mother of the girl, Ofentse, who trusted Christ in April this year. There are also two ladies in their twenties who are studying in the teaching college and they come almost every Lord's Day while they are at college. Others come now and again and we are thankful that people still come want to hear the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Adult men don't often frequent the Hall to hear the gospel and so to see a man coming to the meeting is encouraging. At Easter we had our annual conference in **Serowe** in the tent and two brethren from Scotland, Bill Stevely and Ian Grant, were with us for the ministry of the word. The picture on page 28 shows the gospel meeting on the Lord's Day morning when around four hundred and fifty people were present. Quite a few of unsaved attended, including an older man who brought seven of his friends. We trust that the Lord will continue to bless His word to all who were present.

I continue to speak on a regular basis in the gospel in **Setswana** although I certainly feel my limitations. Each message is prepared on paper before being checked over. Although I can speak a little in the gospel in Setswana,

I have a long way to go before being confident in the language. At the moment, it is still very difficult to understand even a little of what a local brother is saying when he is preaching the gospel in Setswana. I value your prayers as I try to make progress in this. This picture shows some of the teenagers who regularly attend the gospel meeting (Bible class) on a Lord's Day afternoon at 4 pm. It was a joy to hear of two teenage girls professing faith in our Lord Jesus Christ earlier this year.



Each week, I continue to preach at four of the secondary schools in **Serowe**. As full assemblies are held only on Mondays and Fridays, this limits the number of schools we can attend. Although peaking time is limited to five minutes, we are thankful for this opportunity to tell them about the word of God and the way of salvation. Along with about two thousand teenagers, around one hundred and twenty teachers listen to the message being preached. I have also preached at the senior secondary school in **Serowe** where there are another two thousand four hundred teenagers aged sixteen to eighteen. However, because of the problem of time, I have had to leave this for a while. Please pray that the door may open to perhaps go on a monthly basis to preach the gospel at that school as around one hundred and fifty teachers also heard the gospel each week.

Each Friday morning I visit the local hospital to distribute tracts to the outpatients and also around the wards. Last week, around six hundred people received a tract in Setswana and also in English (some of the staff, along with Zimbabweans, cannot read Setswana and many of the locals prefer to read English rather than Setswana). It is a real joy to see so many reading the tracts as they wait to see the doctor. One lady who has a food stall outside the front door of the hospital told me last week that she really enjoys reading the tracts each week. Another member

of staff had requested a Bible and when I gave her a Setswana New Testament, she kissed it and danced with joy. Please pray that the written word of God may bear much fruit.

The printing of literature continues with around one hundred and twenty thousand tracts printed this year. We have now managed to print all the gospel tracts in two colours of ink rather than one colour as was done previously. We are in the process of putting all the tracts onto a computer template for printing rather than printing from a master photocopy. We have just completed the typesetting for the booklet *Vital Questions* by Clifford Law, both in English and Setswana, and hope to have them printed in full colour in **Gaborone**, the capital, in the next couple of weeks. We plan to print at least ten thousand copies for gospel outreach distribution. We also have managed to have printed a large selection of full-colour gospel texts both in Setswana and English in A4-A6 sizes which will be available for Sunday school work, Postal Bible lesson work, etc. The Postal Bible lessons continue to be sent out all over Botswana with many young and older people learning about the word of God and the way of salvation. Last week, I noticed a lesson which had come from a village about six hundred kilometres from Serowe. We look to the Lord to bless the sowing of the seed.

Our children, Joshua, Bethany, James and Matthew have settled well in Botswana. Joshua and Bethany have recommenced at the International School near **Palapye** (forty-five kilometres away). At the beginning of this year, Jenny commenced teaching Joshua, Bethany and James in English during Sunday School in English because they are not picking up the language. Another Zimbabwean girl who doesn't understand Setswana has joined the class. Please continue to pray for our children as they are not able to understand anything in the gospel meetings each week and we are very conscious of this.

We take this opportunity to thank all who have remembered us in prayer. We value this, and appreciate your interest for us in the work of the Lord here in Botswana. May the Lord richly bless and keep you until He comes'.

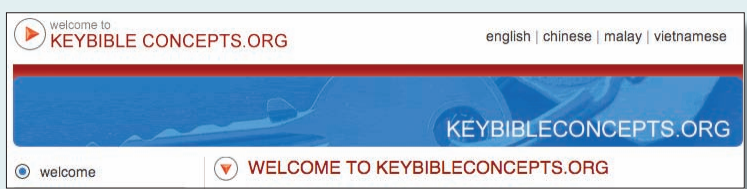


MAGAZINE ORDER FORM

Some Study Web Sites

It would be difficult to do justice to the vast range of study materials that are available on the web. Like books, different resources suit different methods of study – some like subject surveys and topic outlines and others like detailed word studies. This article includes two web sites and, in future issues, we intend to feature others.

<http://www.keybibleconcepts.org/>



As the title page indicates, 'A proper understanding and use of the Bible requires not only familiarity with the contents and concepts of the Bible, but also a sound grasp of certain key principles of analysis and interpretation of the Bible as inspired literature'. This web site is helpful in that it makes available the text of several books by Professor David Gooding and Professor John Lennox. The foundational book, which provides a clear explanation of the key concepts which underpin much of the message of the Bible, is *Key Bible Concepts*.

The site also contains downloadable copies of David Gooding's commentaries on Luke, Acts, and Hebrews. They are in pdf format.

<http://www.stempublishing.com/>



Although a review of this site was included in a previous issue we received some additional information from its compiler that might be of interest. Our thanks to Les Hodgett for these notes.

For users of the web browser Firefox you can obtain programs which cause the Bible references in the articles to become live links to the Bible and open the Bible at the place in a sidebar. It also enables 'reverse searching', that is, the user can click on the Bible verse to search for any help there is on the site relating to that verse or section. Alternatively, you can simply use the Google search box on the site to search for, say, 'John 3. 16' and this will achieve a similar thing, though not in a sidebar.

One of the features of the original *Morrish Bible Dictionary* was its inclusion of latitude and longitude for about 300 places. Where these occur they are linked to GoogleEarth, so if you have that free program on your computer then by clicking the links you will be 'taken to' an aerial view, e.g. Babylon.

By downloading from www.codamusic.com a free program called Finale NotePad you can view the music scores of the hymn tunes and adapt them, change key and almost any other change anyone might wish for.



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Views from the News

COMPILED BY STEPHEN BAKER

NURSE WITH FORTY YEARS EXPERIENCE SACKED FOR SUGGESTING A PATIENT 'GO TO CHURCH' TO RELIEVE STRESS

A NHS Nurse with over forty years experience has been sacked after he suggested two 'patients' might go to church to relieve stress during a role play session on a training course.

Committed Christian, Anand Rao, aged 71, was taking part in simulated situations as part of an exercise in palliative care. He had elected to go on the training session and found his own grant funding to do so. The Christian, a bank staff nurse in hospitals run by the Leicester NHS Trust, advised two persons playing the roles of husband and wife patients they might like to try going to church to relieve stress. He has recently instructed the Christian Legal Centre to advise him and is considering taking legal action for religious discrimination against his former employer. Anand Rao says that he, and thousands of his former patients, will be staggered that someone who has given four decades to caring for people can be treated in the way he has. He feels the action by his employers is 'heavy handed and disproportionate'.

In the simulated exercise Mr. Rao was involved in he was asked to advise the wife with a serious heart condition. In the exercise the trainers were looking to elicit how a nurse would deal with advising a patient about reducing stress through the patient's sexual intimacy with her husband. Mr. Rao said, 'Mrs. Jones [a made-up name] told me that her doctor had informed her that she would not live long and this had created stress. I advised her going to church might ease her anxiety and stress'. It is understood the woman 'patient' in the role play situation felt she did not receive sympathetic, suitable advice.

The course directors raised this concern with Rao and told him that they do not want him to talk about God. Subsequently, the course organizer, Leicestershire and Rutland Organization for the Relief of Suffering (LOROS), sent a report to his employer raising concerns over his performance.

Mr. Rao, who worked for the Leicester NHS Trust since May 2005, was initially suspended by his employer on the grounds that 'concerns have been raised about your professional conduct by the course directors at LOROS'. The care worker did not attend a disciplinary hearing on 23 January 2009 when the allegations against him were being examined as he had not been given, despite several requests, a copy of the questions and answers from his training meeting. Mr. Rao had his contract terminated in a letter from his employers which addressed concerns about his behaviour at the training course.

Andrea Minichiello Williams, Director of CLC commented, 'How is it possible that a nurse who has served the public for forty years should find himself dismissed because in a training exercise he advised someone to go to church? To seek to censor and suppress this kind of language and belief is the first fruits of a closed society'.

Source: CLC 25/5/09.

ATHEIST BUS CAMPAIGN

For the past week, 25 buses from in Chicago have been bearing an unusual advertising slogan. The large ads read, 'In the Beginning, Man Created God', and they are scheduled to remain on the sides of the buses through June. They're part of an effort by the Indiana Atheist Bus Campaign, with the help of the American Humanist Association. The board that runs South Bend's city bus system recently agreed to allow ads on that city's buses reading, 'You can be good without God'. The group had hoped to have the ads installed on 20 South Bend buses before appearance at the University of Notre Dame last Sunday, but that move was delayed.

Bloomington, Indiana's city bus service recently rejected similar ads, prompting a lawsuit.

Source: Chicago Tribune 23/5/09



Bits & Bobs

We'll force gay youth workers on churches, says Government

The Government says its new Equality Bill will force churches to accept practising homosexuals or trans-sexuals in youth worker posts and other similar roles. Equalities minister Maria Eagle said religious believers should push 'gay rights' in their communities, but in the meantime the state would do it.

The Bill's explanatory notes make it clear that churches could not insist that 'a church youth worker or accountant be heterosexual'. The Bill says nothing about the difference between an active homosexual and someone who has left the lifestyle.

Source: Christian Institute, May 09



Mother in battle with school over Jesus 'ban'

A primary school receptionist whose five-year-old daughter was told off for talking about Jesus in class is facing the sack for seeking support from her church. Jennie Cain's daughter, Jasmine, had been overheard by a teacher discussing 'heaven and God' with a friend and was pulled to one side and admonished. Mrs. Cain said she sent a private email to ten close friends from her church to ask for prayers for her daughter and her school, where she works, after she was called in and reprimanded. After the message was passed on to the school's headmaster, the 38-year-old mother of two is now being investigated for professional misconduct for allegedly making claims against the school and staff.

Source: Daily Telegraph, 12/2/09

Atheists are given a thought for the day by the BBC

The BBC has agreed to broadcast a non-religious version of *Thought for the Day* for the first time, following the success of the atheists' bus adverts. Ariane Sherine, the founder of the



Atheist Bus Campaign, will give an atheist *Thought for the Afternoon* on Radio 4's PM programme, broadcast at 5:30pm on Saturday. It comes after 1,660 people emailed the BBC urging it to acknowledge atheists.

Source: Daily Telegraph, 10/1/09

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Question Time



QUESTION

**Saved then lost
– is it possible?**

ANSWER

There is a belief floating about that people who have been saved can lose their salvation. Our standard for teaching must always be the word of God. So what do the scriptures say?

We must bear in mind the following principles of biblical interpretation: a) scripture does not contradict itself; b) we must use straightforward verses and passages to explain the more complicated; and, c) scripture explains itself by reference to other passages of scripture, 1 Cor. 2. 13.

Straightforward scriptures first! In John chapter 10 verse 28, the Lord is recorded as saying, 'I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand'. In verse 29 the Lord says, 'My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand'. The Lord is teaching the double security of salvation. This is how safe it is to be saved; we are in the care and security of the Father and the Son. Our security for salvation is not dependent on our grasp of God but on His grasp of us, see 1 Pet. 1. 5. Note the expression, 'My Father, which gave them me'. Similar statements are made elsewhere in John's Gospel; we are taught that believers are given to Christ. Individuals believe, receive Him (the Lord Jesus) and, as a result, the Lord, by His power, makes them children of God, John 1. 12. In respect of the Father's involvement in our salvation, He is giving souls to Christ, John 6. 37, 39; 17. 2, 6. This fact alone makes our salvation absolutely secure.

In Romans chapter 8 verse 1, we learn that 'there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus'. You may ask, 'How are we classified as "in Christ Jesus"?' Paul writes to the Corinthians, 1. Cor. 1. 2, that it is believers that are 'sanctified in Christ Jesus'. One further helpful verse in this Epistle contrasts being 'in Adam' with being 'in Christ', 15. 22. Being 'in Adam' defines all of humanity. Being 'in Christ' describes those who are saved and have eternal life. The rest of Romans chapter 8 should leave the reader in no doubt about the eternal security of the believer. As you read the potential challenges that are levelled against the saints, and then the clear conclusion of verse 39, your heart should be thrilled to think that nothing can separate you from the love of God.

What about people who turn their backs on the truth and even influence others so that they are led astray? Could they still be saved? The Spirit of God addresses this issue through Paul's writings in 2 Timothy. There were two men, Hymenaeus and Philetus, who deviated from the truth and were teaching that the resurrection was a past event. They had such influence that they had overthrown the faith of some of their fellow believers. Were they saved? Paul says two things: firstly, the Lord knows those who are truly saved; and secondly, 'Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity', 2. 19. In other words, ultimately only the Lord knows those who are the true believers, but the evidence of this should be seen in the believer's desire to move away from evil teaching and behaviour.

We must be clear that the only way that we can convince others that we are truly saved is by how we live. The Lord said, 'By their fruits ye shall know them', Matt. 7. 20. The proof of conversion is persistence in a life of good works. Good works and good living do not save a soul but they are an evidence that a person is saved.

Finally, what about those well-known passages in the Epistle to the Hebrews? I would not attempt to answer all of the issues in this short piece. Again, we must understand the difficult passages taking into account the simple statements of scripture. There was something unique about the situation of those early Jews if they turned against Christ. If they went back to Judaism and made sacrifices again, they would be personally repudiating Christ, Heb. 6. 6; 10. 29. It is interesting to notice that the writer is not persuaded that those who had professed faith would go back but rather that they would go on, see, 3. 12; 4. 1, 11; 6. 9; 10. 23, 35-39; 12. 12-15. In other words, he does not write to doubt their genuineness but to warn and encourage them that the evidence of their true faith will be seen in their continuance in the faith. So it is today. 'Once saved always saved', but the proof that you are saved should be evidenced in the life that you live for God.

STEPHEN BAKER

FRONT COVER ILLUSTRATION

Doves and turtledoves were the only birds that could be offered in sacrifice, as they were clean according to the Mosaic law, Lev. 5. 7; Luke 2. 24. The dove was the harbinger of peace and rest to Noah, Gen. 8. 8. It is often mentioned as an emblem of purity, see Ps. 68. 13. It is a symbol of the Holy Spirit, Matt.



3. 16, and also of tender and devoted affection, S. of S. 1. 15. There is a species of dove found at Damascus 'the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold', Ps. 68. 13. Perhaps one of the best-known attributes of a dove is its homing instinct. Does this not remind us of the Lord, 'And now I am no more in the world... I come to thee... and now come I to thee', John 17. 11-13.

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Source: CMML Missionary Prayer Handbook 2009

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