

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 the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited: and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness'

Lev. 16, 22

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VOLUME 64

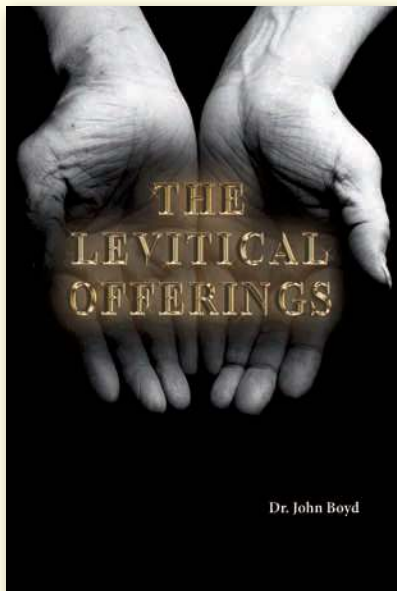
NUMBER 4

NOVEMBER 2009

Precious Seed Publications for 2010

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This is our new daily meditations book for 2010, 384 pages, paperback. 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.



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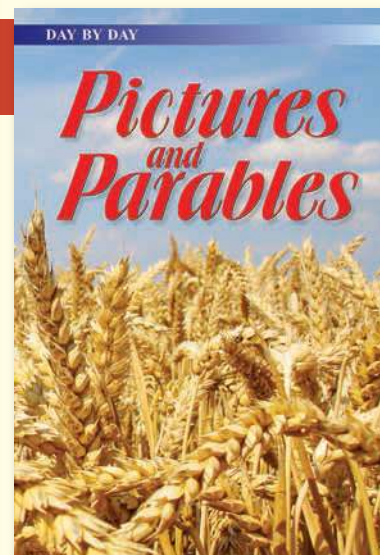
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THE LEVITICAL OFFERINGS

This 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 re-formatted to fit into our 'Booklets' series of publications. It is highly readable and makes a complex subject clear and easy to understand.

It is available now and costs, incl p&p, £4.00 per single copy. For multiple copies ordered before end December the prices, incl p&p, are: 2 copies £7.50; 3 copies £10.50; 4 copies £13.00; and 5 copies £15.00.

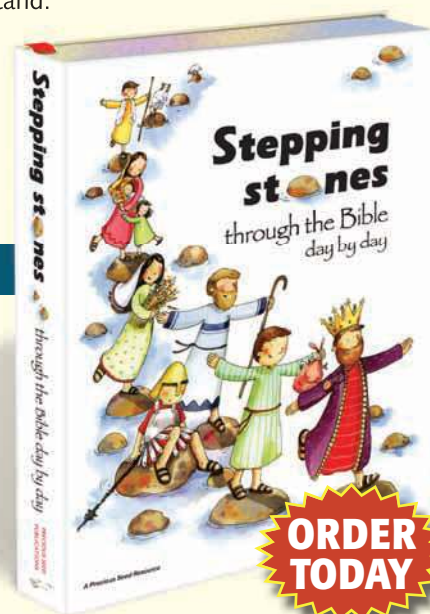


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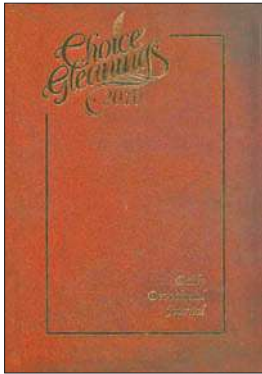
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- It is distributed, without charge, to over 100 countries.
- Numbers printed are over 18,000.
- About 50% of copies go overseas and half of these to 'third world' countries.
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Book Reviews

Books are available from the publishers shown (or from John Ritchie in the UK or Gospel Folio Press in N. America)



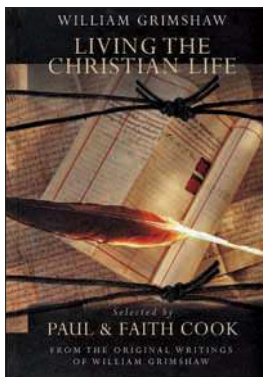
Choice Gleanings 2010 – Daily Devotional Planner Edited by Sandy McEachern

Paperback, 394pp, Published by Gospel Folio Press, 304 Killaly St. West, Port Colborne, Ontario, Canada. ISBN 1897117-35-3.

The first edition of the *Choice Gleanings Devotional Calendar* was published in 1940. The 2010 edition marks 70 years of continued publishing of the Calendar. Over the years the print runs have continued to grow and the distribution includes the USA, Canada, UK, Africa, Asia, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, China and Japan. Each year over 50 contributors from different areas of the world send in their meditations for the Calendar.

The Calendar has been used by the Lord to convict and save sinners, restore straying believers, encourage the Lord's people who are discouraged, comfort those going through times of sorrow, and to cheer the hearts of the lonely. The daily scripture reading guide has also been used to encourage people to read through the Bible each year and spend time in God's word

The planner, the focus of this review, is a well presented and practically bound version of the devotional. Apart from a month to view plan and a few pages for notes, each page is divided into two. The top half contains the normal daily meditation and the bottom section an appointment diary and 'to do list'. For those who enjoy reading through their *Choice Gleanings* calendar this A5 sized page-a-day 'diary' will be a real asset. As there is so little material like this available, Gospel Folio Press are to be commended for their efforts.



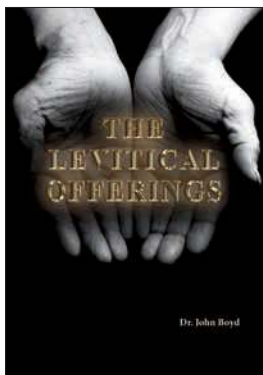
William Grimshaw – Living the Christian Life Paul and Faith Cook

Hardback, 90pp. Published by Evangelical Press, Grange Close, Faverdale North, Darlington, DL3 0PH, UK Price £7.95 ISBN 978-0-85234-691-4.

For most people, the Yorkshire town of Haworth is associated with the Bronte family. However, as this little book shows, there was a mighty man of God called William Grimshaw who also left an indelible imprint on that town and its surrounding communities.

PAUL and FAITH COOK have put together a brief account of Grimshaw's life and work, together with some pithy quotes from his unpublished writings as the main content of the book.

Grimshaw was saved in 1742 through reading a book on justification by faith. From that point he devoted himself to the preaching of the gospel. As the writer says, 'He devoted his physical and mental powers to spreading the gospel in many different parts of the north of England. He rarely preached less than twenty times a week and on occasions preached as many as thirty times'. He finally succumbed to a typhus fever epidemic in April 1763, some of his last words being, 'I shall soon be at home, for ever with the Lord'. This is an interesting little book. It is a testimony to a man of tireless energy used of God to bring many to faith in Christ and to transform communities by the power of the gospel. But it is also a collection of material that gives us a glimpse of Grimshaw's great love for God, encouraging us to live the Christian life in practice. Who would not warm to such thoughts as, 'Never did a soul go to heaven, I find, but his heart went there first. He first lives there in heart and affection, and then in person'. It is well worth reading!



The Levitical Offerings Dr. John Boyd

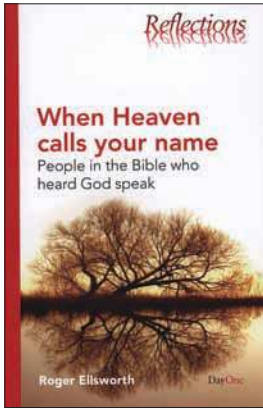
Paperback, 48pp. Published by Precious Seed Publications, PO Box 573, Fareham, Hampshire, PO14 9FB, UK. Price £4.00 (incl p&p) ISBN 978-1-871642-27-8.

This booklet was first published as a series of articles in *Precious Seed* magazine over the years 1965-66. Their publication in booklet form has been undertaken that it might stimulate a new generation to study this important if, at times, neglected area of typical truth.

As the editor states in his introduction, 'Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope', Rom. 15. 4. Whilst this verse relates to all scripture rather than the portion considered by Dr. Boyd, it is as relevant to his study as it is to those other portions of the word of God. The Levitical offerings afford a study of immense importance as they teach us so much concerning the

significance and scope of the work of Christ on the cross at Calvary. How important to deepen our appreciation of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ!

This little volume will provide something fresh and stimulating for those that read it. Anything that encourages a deeper study of the Person and work of Christ is valuable and this booklet will more than amply repay the time invested in reading it.



When Heaven Calls your Name Roger Ellsworth

Paperback, 104pp. Published by Day One Publications, Ryelands Road, Leominster, HR6 8NZ. Price £5.00 ISBN 978-1-84625-102-3.

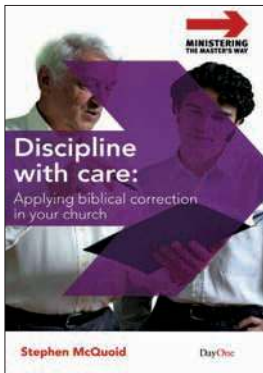
The book is sub-titled '*People in the Bible who heard God speak*'. There are many examples in the Bible of individuals God called by name, but only seven men to whom, in calling, God repeated their name, beginning with 'Abraham, Abraham' and concluding with 'Saul, Saul'. Along with these seven, consideration is also given to the lament of the Lord Jesus, 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem', and His cry from the cross, 'Eli, Eli'. The author demonstrates that the repetition of words in scripture indicates truth God wishes to emphasize and that these double-calls warrant particular study.

The nine chapters cover a wide span of doctrinal and practical teaching and each ends with a summary and reflection on the main points. Most of the scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Version. Within the sphere of these calls, attention is given to God's sovereignty and

promises, His greatness and power, His salvation and care as well as the authority and treasure of His word. In regard to Christian living, the reader is challenged to think of the things that should be given priority in the believer's life, to accept that faith will be tried and urged to submit to the Lordship of Christ, saying with Saul, 'Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?'

Very few readers are likely to be happy with the writer's comments in connection with the words of the Lord, 'Eli, Eli', that between His assertion, 'I am not alone, because the Father is with me', John. 16. 32, and His cry, 'Why have you forsaken me?', Matt. 27. 46, 'something changed'! That comment is followed by the question, 'How could Jesus be assured that God was with Him and then convinced that He was not'? How indeed! Despite that strange suggestion, this is a readable, enjoyable and, mainly, helpful book and is most reasonably priced.

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



Discipline with Care Stephen McQuoid

Paperback, 96pp. Published by Day One Publications, Ryelands Road, Leominster, HR6 8NZ. Price £5.00 ISBN 978-1-84625-125-8.

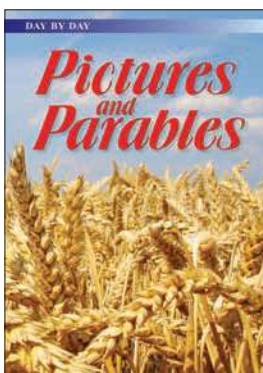
It is unusual to find a book entirely devoted to the subject of church discipline. Stephen McQuoid is to be commended for not only dealing with such a difficult subject but also for doing so in a sensitive and comprehensive way.

In five very readable chapters, he considers the necessity for order in the house of God and the problems this can present in a society where there are few absolutes respecting standards of conduct, and a prevailing attitude that each individual is accountable to none but himself. Three basic principles governing discipline are drawn from the Old Testament. The writer deals with God's ways with men as Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier, principles carried over into the New Testament. He

states that these are manifest in a process moving from sin, through discipline, to restoration, the writer asserting that not only shepherds of the flock but, in light of the priesthood of all believers, every member of a local church has responsibility in this matter. A chapter is devoted to 'Preventative Discipline' and the importance of systematic Bible teaching and pastoral care. Attention is given to 'Corrective Discipline' considering when it is necessary, the attitude to be adopted and the pattern to be followed in the administration of it. The book concludes with four 'case studies' to illustrate the problems that can arise in contemporary situations and the lessons to be learned from them.

All scripture quotations are from the NIV. Not all readers will totally agree with all the writer says relative to the pattern of local church government and gatherings nor with all the conclusions he draws respecting discipline. However, one fears that few believers really appreciate what is involved in assembly discipline, the spirit in which it should be carried out and the issues to be considered before it is implemented. This book seeks to address that deficiency and, as such, it deserves a wide circulation and is highly recommended.

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



Day by Day – Pictures and Parables Edited by John Bennett

Paperback, 384pp. Published by Precious Seed Publications, PO Box 573, Fareham, Hampshire, PO14 9FB, UK. Price £8.50 (incl p&p) ISBN 978-1-871642-26-1.

As the twelfth book in this popular series, this volume concentrates on the Bible's rich use of metaphor. With authors well known to many of the Lord's people, the book follows the pattern of its predecessors in providing a daily reading and meditation that will encourage, edify and, on occasions, challenge the reader, providing food for thought during the day.

In his introduction the editor states, '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 . . . 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. The symbolism of sowing, and reaping, whether in relation to cereals or other crops, would also be familiar to most'. This short extract gives us an indication of the material covered in the book

As a further encouragement to the daily reading of scripture, this book is to be welcomed and is highly recommended.



PRECIOUS SEED

VOLUME 64 • NUMBER 4 • NOVEMBER 2009

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

CONTENTS

Book Reviews Inside Front Cover

John Calvin – A man destined for greatness? 2
By BRIAN CLATWORTHY

Tried and True, or The Trial of Our Faith 4
By MARK KOLCHIN

The Sweet Fruit of Righteousness 6
By BOUSHRA MIKHAEL

A Model Way to study the Tabernacle 8
By DUNCAN MAXWELL

The Days when the Judges ruled Part 6: Abimelech – the 'Bramble King' 10
By JOHN SCARSBROOK

Paul the Runner: Part Three: Total Commitment..... 12
By JAMES COCHRANE

Park of the Palms 14

The practical application of some of our Lord's parables Part 3 Pull-Out
By MALCOLM HORLOCK

YPS Pull-Out
By IAN REES

Assembly History 15
East Fort, Thrissur, Kerala, India

Dispensationalism 16
By SHAWN ABIGAIL

Blessed be the Man 18
By JEREMY GIBSON

A Word for Today 20
By BRIAN CLATWORTHY

The Shack 21
By DANIEL RUDGE

Studies of the Sign Miracles in John's Gospel 22
By GRAHAM HOBBS

The Eternal Christ. Part 5 23
By JOHN TODD

The Seven Great Words of Galatians – Part Two 24
By JOHN TODD

Reports 25
By STEPHEN BAKER

Views from the News Inside Back Cover

Question Time Outside Back Cover

EDITORIAL

'There shall be one fold, and one shepherd', John 10. 16.

There is no doubt but that the Jews in the days of the Lord were enclosed in the fold of Judaism with all its constraints and commandments that the followers of that religion practised. The Lord Jesus became for them the Good Shepherd. He did not climb up some other way as many who had come before Him had attempted but He appeared right at the door of the sheepfold. The porter (John the Baptist?) opened to Him and He then called His own sheep by name. They, few in number at that time, heard His voice, recognized it and followed Him, at great personal cost, out of that now discredited system. Many others of course remained in the fold and lived there without experiencing the glorious liberty of the gospel of the grace of God.

Also, in verse 16, the Shepherd said, 'Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring'. Here, the reference is to Gentiles who were held securely in folds of their own; folds of idolatry, sin and shame. Yet, in His love and kindness, the Good Shepherd later called them also and joined them with the sheep previously rescued from the fold of Judaism. The AV text would suggest that He put both into one new fold, but He did no such thing. The word translated 'fold' in the latter part of verse 16 is not the same as the word in the former part. In fact, the word here means 'flock' and the phrase should read, 'There shall be one *flock* and one shepherd'. One of the great things about salvation is that it sets us free from the restrictions of various folds to enjoy green pastures and still waters. Being free brings its own dangers and it is vital that we keep close to the Good Shepherd who gave His life for us and who has promised that eventually, together with Himself, we shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Let us watch yet enjoy the privileges of freedom and the unity of the one flock.

We come now to the end of yet another year in which we have known the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ in our lives. The New Year beckons with all its promise and expectations . . . perhaps this will be the year He returns for His own! In view of that we continue our endeavour to abound in the work of the Lord knowing that our labour is not in vain in the Lord. This issue sees Question Time in the hands of Richard Collings and a new feature, 'A Word for Today' is by Brian Clatworthy

There are a number of changes to the work of this ministry effective from the beginning of 2010. I will continue as General Editor and the magazine will be split into sections with dedicated section editors. John Bennett becomes editor for Bible teaching articles and Sandy Jack takes on the Reports and News section. Stephen Baker becomes responsible for YPS (*Young Precious Seed*) and Ian Grant for the Assembly Histories and Service Organisations section. Ian Rees who initiated and developed YPS over the years is now responsible as editor for our new series of New Testament commentary books the first of which will be published at the end of the year. No doubt, so many changes happening all at once will take time to settle but I believe that with the Lord's help they will do so to the benefit all our readers.

As mentioned elsewhere in this issue three of our brethren retire from the committee (Malcolm Horlock, Michael Jones and Robert Brown) and are replaced by two new joiners, in addition to those mentioned in our last issue, Richard Collings of Caerphilly and David Coles of Bath. We welcome them to this ministry and I am sure that both will have much to contribute.

ROY HILL Chairman, and General Editor

By **BRIAN CLATY**

John Calvin

A MAN

This year marks the 500th anniversary of the birth of the magisterial¹ reformer John Calvin who was born in Noyon, north-east of Paris, in 1509. Calvin is probably the most loved and hated of all the Reformers or in the words of LEWIS SPITZ, adored and abhorred! Sadly, many people judge the man without ever bothering to read his writings. This is probably due in the main to the excesses and extremes of so-called hyper-Calvinism. It is a moot point as to whether Calvin would have agreed with much of what is attributed to him today.²

John Calvin came much later to the Reformation scene than Luther, being only eight years of age when Luther fastened his *Ninety-five Theses* to the castle church door at Wittenberg. His background and temperament were very different from Luthers. Luther was intuitively a public disputant, often bold and brash. Calvin by contrast was a more reticent public figure. On the rare occasion that he reflected on his life, Calvin wrote in the preface to his commentary on the Psalms (1557) that he had always loved the shade and retirement and sought some secluded spot where he might withdraw from the public view. Although historians suggest that Luther hatched the egg that Erasmus laid, it was Calvin who synthesized Reformed teaching and shaped it into a coherent entity.³ Calvin had originally been groomed as a lawyer, but he abandoned this to pursue his interest in humanism. God, however, had other plans for his life. After experiencing God's salvation sometime in 1533 or 1534, Calvin decided to move to Strasbourg to study. Once again God intervened. War between France and the Holy Roman Empire meant that he could not go directly to Strasbourg, but had to take a detour *via* Geneva. It was during this initial stay at Geneva that Guillaume

Farel persuaded the younger Calvin to help him advance the gospel in the city. This was a formidable task as the city had only just embraced the Reformation. Even though he was expelled from the city in 1538, Calvin returned triumphantly to Geneva in 1541 and lived the rest of his life in the city as the leading exponent of Reformed theology. He died in 1564, and typical of a man who was hostile to any form of hero-worship, he was buried in an unmarked grave to avoid any possibility of a Calvin cult developing. He believed that the glory of God should not be overshadowed by honouring people. It is a pity that Calvin's heirs did not take a leaf out of his book!

At age 26 (possibly only two years after his conversion) Calvin produced an introduction to Christian doctrine entitled *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. This work (which is available as a free download from *Esword*) set out a systematic approach to Reformed theology principally for the direction of students as they sought to engage with scripture. F. F. BRUCE notes that, 'the whole of the *Institutio* is biblically based; scripture is quoted copiously from start to finish in support of its successive propositions and arguments'. In similar vein to Luther, Calvin maintained the authority of scripture over the Roman Catholic church and rejected any idea that the church took precedence over the scriptures. When referring to Ephesians chapter 2 verse 20, he said, 'If the doctrine of the prophets and apostles be the foundation of the church, it must have been certain, antecedent to the existence of the church. The scriptures existed before the church, so it is absurd to say that the church is the power that determines the scriptures' authority'.⁴ This reflects the

logical approach of Calvin who bore all the hallmarks of a scholar, masterful in exegesis yet at the same time recognizing his limitations. In his introduction to his commentary on Romans (1540), Calvin acknowledged that in the interpretation of scripture, 'God has never so blessed His servants that they each possessed full and perfect knowledge of every part of their subject, this was so that we should be kept humble'. Calvin's other reason for writing the *Institutes* was to enable him later to concentrate his efforts on publishing commentaries on the scripture without the further need of going back over the same ground again. His commentaries are always condensed and had to be supplemented by referring back to the *Institutes*. ALEXANDER GANOCZY labelled this movement from Calvin's exposition of the biblical text to his *Institutes* and back again to the biblical text as Calvin's interpretive circle. Calvin's output in terms of biblical commentaries was prolific. He expounded every book in the Bible apart from 2 John, 3 John and Revelation. These are still used routinely by serious Bible students – some achievement after 500 years! What made Calvin an exegete *par excellence* was his ability to focus his mind on the biblical writer and determine the plain and simple meaning of the text for his readers.⁵ But as DAVID STEINMETZ observes, Calvin's exegesis was not an end in itself, but was directed toward the edification of his reader. In short, Calvin had the ability and the equipment⁶ to make the text live for his reader because for him the Bible was God's word to man. Calvin was not comfortable with the allegorical interpretation of scripture as in his view it concealed the true meaning of the

JOHN CALVIN'S TIMELINE

1509 Calvin ¹ is born in Noyon, Picardy, France, on 10 July.	1521 He receives a benefice from the bishop of Noyon and enters minor orders.	1523 Studies theology at the <i>Collège de la Marche</i> and the <i>Collège de Montaigu</i> in Paris.	1528 His father falls out of favour with the cathedral chapter at Noyon and urges him to give up the study of theology. Calvin then studies law in Orléans and Bourges.	1531 His father dies and he goes back to Paris to study biblical languages and classical and Christian antiquity.	1532 Calvin publishes a humanist commentary on Seneca's <i>De clementia</i> .	1533 He associates with a suspected Lutheran Nicholas Cop, and is obliged to flee Paris from the Inquisition.	1533/1534 He experiences an evangelical conversion in Basel.	1536 The first edition of Calvin's <i>Institutes of the Christian Religion</i> is published. He makes a detour to Geneva en route to Strasbourg, and is persuaded by Farel to stay and help him preach the gospel.
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References 1 His original name was Jean Chauvin but he adopted the Latinized form Calvinus in line with most scholars of his day. 2 Idelette bore Calvin three children, but they all died in infancy.

WAS CALVIN PREDESTINED FOR GREATNESS?

text. Yet he seemed quite comfortable with the use of typology although even here he would revert back to the literal meaning.⁷ It is important, however, to make the point that what Calvin brought to the surface was not ultimately something new, but simply a re-emphasis on the sufficiency and authority of scripture.

Calvin hated the glare of publicity, but his life was punctuated with controversy, particularly around the death of the notorious heretic Michael Servetus who was burnt at the stake in Geneva in 1553. Whilst Calvin agreed with the verdict and sentence, he did recommend a more humane form of execution, but this was ignored by the court. Being put to death for heresy might seem to us today to be somewhat inhumane, but this was an age of extreme brutality. DIARMAID MACCULLOCH suggests that it was from this time that Calvin began widely to be perceived as not only one reformer among many, but the major voice in Reformation Protestantism. Perhaps though, more than any other issue, Calvin is known for his emphasis upon the doctrines of grace, especially election and predestination. Contrary to popular belief, Calvin was simply following in the line of many of his predecessors including Augustine of Hippo. Nor did he make this a central doctrine in his theology, and his teaching in this context is very similar to that of other Reformers including Luther, Zwingli and Bucer. TIMOTHY GEORGE states that Calvin did not permit the doctrine of predestination to be used as an excuse for not preaching the gospel. Whether we agree with Calvin is another matter especially on the issue of double predestination, but

as the late E. W. ROGERS has well stated, 'Salvation is entirely of grace and no one can either complain if passed over or boast himself if saved'.

Calvin's legacy is extensive, and is of course, a matter of history. But what does Calvin mean today for people in assembly fellowship? Space permits us to consider only two issues that Calvin strongly adhered to, and which ought to resonate with us. The first is the right and duty of private judgement in relationship to the scriptures and matters of Christian faith. Calvin (and other Reformers) saw this as an unbreakable principle in his opposition to the Roman Catholic church which insisted upon implicit faith in what the church taught. The words of 2 Peter chapter 1 verse 20 were interpreted by the Roman Catholic church as prohibiting any usage of the Bible by individuals. Calvin argued that this was an incorrect interpretation of the word 'private', which did not mean 'individual' but 'humanly devised'. So the text was not about the interpretation of scripture but with its origination. Secondly, Calvin emphasized that Christianity extended beyond the walls of church buildings and that Christian living extended beyond the hearing of sermons. He saw engagement with society as an important way of communicating the gospel with the caveat that society was kept at a critical distance. He summed this up by stating that we are to learn to pass through this world as though it were a foreign country, treating lightly all earthly things and declining to set our hearts upon them.

The jury will perhaps always be out on John Calvin as he provokes such different responses. Being human he

made mistakes and many of his actions may appear to us to be contemptible. But overarching everything else that he did in his life he always put God first. That seems a good enough reason to commemorate his short but influential life.

References

- 1 This term is used to distinguish Lutheran and Reformed activists from radical reformers such as Anabaptists. It also highlights the fact that it was connected to the state and supported by the civil authorities.
- 2 The term 'Calvinism' was first used by Lutherans in Germany to differentiate Reformed theology from Lutheranism.
- 3 ALISTER MACGRATH states that the second generation of reformers were far more aware of the need for works of systematic theology than the first.
- 4 Source: *Institutes Vol. 1*, Book 1 Chapter VII
- 5 T. H. L. PARKER writes, 'It was by his continual process of hearing and of asking on the basis of what he had heard that Calvin was able to arrive in the remarkable way that he did at the 'mind' of the author.
- 6 BERNARD REARDON states that Calvin's thorough acquaintance with humanist methods stood him in excellent stead as a biblical commentator. His ability was enhanced also by the extraordinary width and depth of his classical and patristic reading.
- 7 T. H. L. PARKER explains that although Calvin sometimes speaks as if all he were opposing was a spiritual interpretation imposed on the text ('wild allegorizing' as one would say), his real view was that the literal meaning itself is the record and interpretation of God's self-revelation in Christ, and that therefore it is unnecessary to seek another meaning.

BRIAN CLATWORTHY is a member of the Precious Seed committee.



1538 He is expelled from the city of Geneva for overstepping the mark, and settles in Strasbourg. During this period he works with Martin Bucer, and also acts as the minister for a group of French exiles.	1539 The second edition of <i>The Institutes of the Christian Religion</i> is published.	1540 Calvin publishes his commentary on <i>Romans</i> , and starts publishing other commentaries. Marries one of his parishioners – Idelette de Bure - the widow of an Anabaptist, who had two children by her previous marriage. ²	1541 He returns in triumph to Geneva.	1549 Calvin's wife, Idelette, dies.	1553 Michael Servetus is burned at the stake for heresy in Geneva. Calvin agrees the sentence but not the form of execution.	1559 The definitive edition of Calvin's <i>Institutes</i> is published. He is made a citizen of Geneva.	1564 Calvin dies in Geneva on 27 May, at the age of 55.	1909-1917 The building of the Reformation Monument in the University Park, Geneva, to partly commemorate the 400th anniversary of the birth of John Calvin.
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Tried and True or Th

It could hardly be said that any Christian enjoys going through a trial. It is one of those aspects of our faith that we would rather avoid. Depending upon its depth and length, it could shake us to the core, far more than we ever anticipated when we first began travelling down its winding (and perhaps harrowing) path. Yet after coming through it in dependence upon the Lord, we will undoubtedly admit that it had a significant part in the deepening of our faith, sharpening our once nebulous convictions, and conforming us more closely to the character of Christ, Rom. 8. 28-29.

The Benefit of Trials

Scripture refers to the purifying and beneficial effect that trials can have in the life of a Christian. When Job was going through his great trial of affliction, he could hardly be thankful for the series of calamities that befell him. But through the eye of faith he uttered his deep confession of faith with unshakeable conviction, 'But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold', Job 23. 10. Job well understood the benefit of God's refining process, a process he would have rather sidestepped if he had the option, but one that proved invaluable in deepening his faith. It is not that Job was a blatant sinner, he was anything but that. Yet, it could never have been said of him that 'he feared God for nothing', that is, for no personal benefit, thus dismissing the arrogant charge of the devil, Job 1. 9. There are a lot of trials that many believers would also have preferred to sidestep, but if they had, they would have forfeited their beneficial effect. It was a tough road for Job and it may be a tough road for many of God's own, but it can and often does, turn out to the glory of God and to be a shining example of how the Lord brings many sons to glory.

The Necessity for Trials

Sometimes, however, there are gaps in the life of a Christian that necessitate

the disciplining hand of God through trial. Peter stated, 'If need be ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations (or trials)', 1 Pet. 1. 6. There are at times those 'need be' situations in which certain sins have found entrance in a life and have been permitted to remain unjudged. Like Israel, who failed to cast out all of the Canaanites in the land, sins can be tolerated and the residue of our past life not sufficiently dealt with, Jas. 1. 21, this can only impede

spiritual progress in the life of faith. Things objectionable to God are allowed to coexist without us realizing the damaging effect that they can have in the course of time. This is exactly why trials come into the life of the Christian to jar us out of our spiritual complacency and to realign our biblical priorities. Just as Samuel had to hack Agag to pieces, so we too are exhorted to take decisive action and mortify the deeds of our flesh in obedience to the Lord, Col. 3. 5. David confessed, 'Before I was afflicted, I went astray: but now have I kept thy word', Ps. 119. 67. He knew too well the sting of the disciplining hand of God upon his life on more than a few occasions, only to express, later, the surpassing value of it. No wonder God would later call him 'a man after mine own heart', Acts 13. 22. In short, trials keep the believer on track, spiritually. Regarding this, CHARLES SPURGEON, the great nineteenth-century preacher, once related the account in his day of a rope bridge that collapsed unexpectedly, plunging many to their deaths in a ravine below. Upon investigation, it was determined why the catastrophe occurred: a little seedling which had taken root between the strands of rope and the wooden planks, had been ignored, thus weakening the bridge. Trials from the Lord help us to do the necessary inspection in our lives so that we can identify and pull out the weeds of sin that could eventually weaken and mar our testimony.

Made into His Image

God wants all believers to reflect the





The Trial of Our Faith

character of Christ in their lives. To accomplish this, He may bring about certain trials to soften the heart, making the Christian more compassionate and sensitive to the needs of others. In so doing, he will be able to comfort others with the same comfort, 2 Cor. 1. 4. Becoming more like Christ, fulfils the principle of Colossians chapter 1 verse 27, 'Christ in you the hope of glory'. Just as it was with Daniel's friends, the believer entering the furnace of affliction will sense the Lord's nearness in a trial, perhaps more than at any other time in his experience. There will be a reality to the words of Isaiah chapter 43 verse 2, 'When thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee'. Ironically, despite questioning God's ways, many often come to see through their difficulties that they actually are the object of His special affection and that their trial will ultimately serve a greater purpose. This is what Zechariah prophesied to Israel about the Man among the myrtle trees, the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus, who reassured the nation of a future glory though at the time they were at the 'bottom' and oppressed by the nations, Zech. 1. 8-11. Later, in Malachi's day, God had a similar lesson to teach them. During the future Tribulation, God will effect a great national cleansing as a result of His refining work during that time. Described as sitting, like 'a refiner and purifier of silver', He will 'purify the sons of Levi and to purge them as gold and silver that they may offer to the Lord an offering in righteousness', Mal. 3. 3. The work of any refiner and purifier of silver is to subject precious metal to intense heat in order to remove the impurities from it. The dross which rises to the top is then scooped away. As the refiner sits over the purified metal and looks down upon an even more valuable product, he is able to see his own image in the metal. And so it is

with us: our Father in heaven, subjecting His own special people to the purifying process of trial and affliction, makes of us an even more valuable and precious commodity, as we are conformed to the image of His Son, Rom. 8. 28-29.

Joseph's Example

Joseph also offers additional lessons about the trial of our faith. After going through many years of severe personal trial, he acknowledged the beneficial effect that it produced in his life. Rising to the rank of Prime Minister of Egypt, he was able to look back and acknowledge the hand of God at work in his life. The names of his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, outlined his



response to trials. The first he named Manasseh saying, 'God hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house', Gen. 41. 51. The second he named Ephraim, stating, 'God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction', v. 52. Despite the rejection and hurt caused by his brothers, the slander of Potiphar's wife, and being forgotten in prison by the chief butler, he was able to avoid the snare of bitterness and resentment, deliberately forgetting the plethora of personal slights against him. By so doing, he was able to attest to the fruitful result from such a course of action, and a right pattern and the right order: first, 'forgetting'; then fruit-bearing; always the inevitable consequence of committing our way to the Lord. In due time, God will honour those who honour Him.

Certainly, much more could be said about the work of trials in the life of the believer. There is Paul's request to have his thorn in the flesh removed, only to be denied by the Lord to keep him humbly dependent upon Him and cognizant of His all-sufficient grace, 2 Cor. 12. 9. There is Jacob's all-night wrestling episode at Peniel with the Angel of the Lord, ending in a limp, but also a changed life, as well as a changed name, a changed purpose and a changed direction as he crossed back over the river Jabbok to be reconciled to his brother Esau, Gen. 32. 24-32. What a picture and what a transformation! And then there is James' direct exhortation to adjust our attitude as we enter a trial to see the rounding-out of character that it produces, 'My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing', Jas. 1. 2-4.

The apostle Paul reminds us, 'For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory', 2 Cor. 4. 17. Peter stated it this way, 'The God of all grace . . . after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you', 1 Pet. 5. 10. Only as we look into the mirror of God's word, will we begin to understand more clearly the bigger picture and the wisdom of God in taking us through various trials and tribulations that He sends our way. As we do, we will be able to sing more convincingly the words of the hymnwriter, 'Every joy or trial falleth from above, Traced upon our dial by the Son of love. We may trust Him fully all for us to do, They who trust Him wholly, find Him wholly true', F. R. HAVERGAL.

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God has always been looking for the fruit of righteousness in His people. It delighted His heart to see them bring forth such fruit, because it was a reflection of His holy character in them. Likewise, in this day of grace He expects more godliness and Christ-likeness in us, for that is what this fruit speaks of; and it still delights His heart to see it in our lives. Four times in the scriptures we read of the fruit of righteousness. Once in the Old Testament and three times in the New. (In Philippians chapter 1 verse 11 the proper reading is 'fruit', in the singular). In this article we will consider these four references.

The Sweet Fruit

unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and faith; these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone', Matt. 23. 23. How about us in this day of grace? How do we feel about the weak and the poor in the flock? Do our hearts go out to them in their spiritual and their material need? Or are we indifferent to their plight? Shouldn't we recognize our duty to the weak and damaged lambs of Christ? Paul writing to the Thessalonians says, 'Now we exhort you, brethren . . . encourage the fainthearted (margin), support the weak, be patient toward all men', 1 Thess. 5. 14. May the Lord give us caring, tender hearts so that we would be considerate of the afflictions of our brothers and sisters, Jas. 2. 15-16, and do our best to alleviate their sufferings.

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mellowed by the sensitive and more mature judgement of older believers.

And if such a balanced state of love combined with knowledge prevails among us, we will have our moral and spiritual perception sharpened so that we can discern things that differ. For this is what is meant here by the words of the apostle, 'That ye may approve things that are excellent', v. 10. In Hebrews chapter 5 verse 14 we read, 'But strong meat (solid food) belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their

senses exercised to discern both good and evil'. This ability to discern things that differ should not give us a sense of personal superiority, but should teach us humility and cause us to be sincere, transparent and without guile or hypocrisy, v. 10. This in turn will guard against us becoming stumbling blocks for others.

What sweet fruit of righteousness will then fill our lives and delight our heavenly Father! This in essence is the work of the Holy Spirit reproducing Christ in us. And, indeed, we ought to realize that we cannot, in our own power, achieve such a goal. This is only possible 'by Jesus Christ', v. 11, as He lives His life in us, Gal. 2. 20. Furthermore, that fruit is not meant to draw attention to ourselves. It should be entirely unto the praise and glory of God, v. 11.

3) James 3. 13-18

This passage deals with a regrettable but not infrequent occurrence in the local assembly, namely the presence of rivalry between believers. And, if indeed such a situation existed, how should the wise brother who is endowed with knowledge behave? He is not expected to flaunt his knowledge in order to gain a superior standing, nor is he to partake of the activity of envying and strife. But he is to show in a practical manner a life lived in meekness and wisdom, full of good works to the glory of God. It is so easy to be caught up in 'party spirit' which divides and scatters the people of God. But a spiritual believer should

1) Amos 6. 12

In those sad days of Amos the people of Israel, that is those in the northern kingdom, sought after other gods. They had set up their idolatrous religion in Bethel and Dan. Over and above that they practised social injustice whereby the rich were crushing the poor, 4. 1; 8. 4-6. There was also an abhorrent moral decay in their lives manifested in consumerism and material indulgences, 6. 3-6.

Amos, a simple man from among the herdsmen of Tekoa in Judah, was sent by God to them with a serious message. It contained an invitation to repent and turn back to the Lord and seek Him, 5. 5-6. The message also contained a clear warning of a coming judgement, v. 6. Furthermore, the Lord accused them, in light of their moral and spiritual breakdown, of turning sweet justice into wormwood and leaving off righteousness in the earth, v. 7. He summed up their poor status by saying, 'Ye have turned judgment into gall and the fruit of righteousness into hemlock', 6. 12. While Jehovah expected the sweet fruit of righteousness and justice to be brought forth by the people who were called by His name, He found only the bitterness of idolatry, moral decay and social injustice. How it must have grieved His heart of love, kindness and compassion, not to see any of these lovely characteristics reflected in His people!

In the days of our Lord's sojourn on earth He addressed the leaders of the people much in the same terms, 'Woe

2) Philippians 1. 9-11

This is one of Paul's prison prayers. Here, he supplicates the Lord on behalf of the Philippian believers. He prays that their love may abound yet more and more. In the original, the word used for 'love' is the *agape* love; it describes a love that originates in the heart of God. It is a sacrificial, selfless love that cares deeply for its loved ones. It is so unlike the world's concept of love which seeks only its own. It is a love that is shed abroad in believers' hearts by the Holy Spirit, Rom. 5. 5. Here, it is likened unto a mighty river that can overflow its boundaries. Yet this love needs to be guarded by a wholesome measure of knowledge, v. 9, the source of which is necessarily the word of God. This should not be just mere head knowledge, which puffs up, but an experiential acquaintance with the word, whereby the believer has already lived it out in his day-to-day walk. Such knowledge will equip the child of God with tender moral tact in dealing with others, here referred to as 'all judgment'. Thus, the original exuberance of enthusiastic love, so characteristic of new believers in Christ would be tempered and





of Righteousness

recognize such a tendency and refrain from it. Scripture here warns against glorying in such activity, for this glorying would be tantamount to lying against the truth.

James goes on to describe the source and character of the (so called) wisdom that promotes striving and envying as a lifestyle. As to its source, it could not have descended from above, that is to say from God Himself, v. 15. It is patterned after the course of this world which glories in self-exaltation and adversarial behaviour; it is therefore earthly in character, v. 15. It is sensual pandering to human sinful instincts of pride and self-satisfaction, for it results in drawing disciples unto oneself. This will end up dividing God's people into factions and cliques. Its real source is the devil, v. 15, for, like him, it is wilful and acts in rebellion against God. Where this philosophy prevails there is confusion and every evil work, v. 16. Needless to say such behaviour should not even be named among the people of God.

By contrast, the wisdom which is from above, i.e., divine in origin, is pure, for it finds its source in God who is light and in whom is no darkness at all, 1 John 1. 5. It is conducive to peace and does not promote strife, and because it starts with the God of all peace it is therefore peaceable. Characterized by gentleness, it never resorts to harshness or rudeness, cf. Phil. 4. 5. It does not promote stubbornness, prejudice or strong-mindedness. If a believer is so inclined he will be easy to be entreated; he will not be one who takes a stand and refuses to budge from it, always willing to change his mind if so convinced of the truth, v. 17. God, who delights in mercy, is honoured by such wisdom because it is full of mercy and manifests itself in good fruits, v. 17. There is no taking of sides or respect of persons in this wisdom, for it is without partiality; what an antidote for 'party spirit'! v. 17. It is simple, transparent and without hypocrisy, without double talk and without double-facedness, v. 17.

Adopting this heavenly wisdom in assembly life demands self-control and

hard work in total dependence on the Lord on the part of those who are in leadership. As peacemakers they have to sow in peace and not in strife, v. 18. They have to show to the rest of the flock how this course is more pleasing and glorifying to God. This in itself does not exclude anyone else in fellowship from the same responsibility of shunning strife and envy and of endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, Eph. 4. 3. It is incumbent on every child of God to follow the same course, and certainly the blessed results will be the sweet fruit of righteousness that brings glory to God, v. 18.

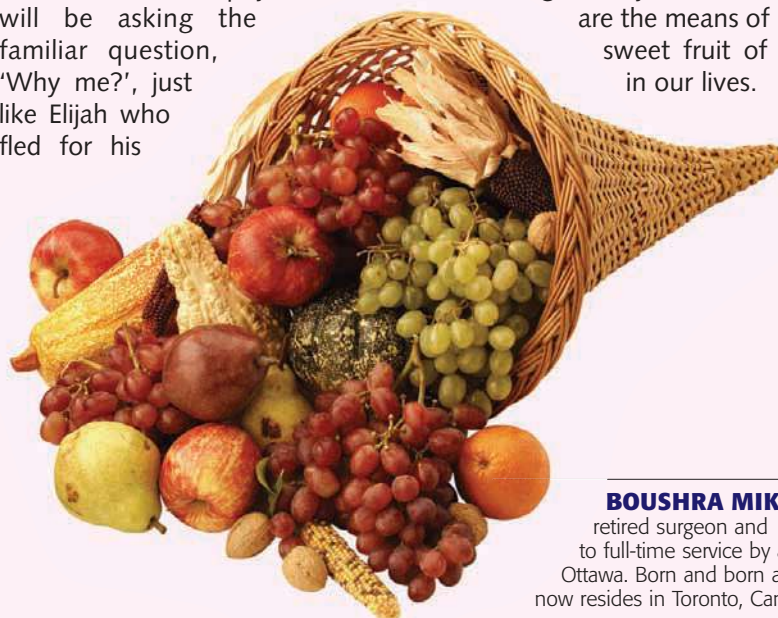
4) Hebrews 12. 9-11

The subject of this reference has to do with chastening we receive from our heavenly Father. He is said to chasten whom He loves and scourge every son He receives, Heb. 12. 6. It is His prerogative to discipline and chasten, yet we should consider it our privilege to be subjects of such dealings from Him. This chapter in Hebrews describes three possible reactions of the children of God to their Father's chastening. We are warned in verse 5 not to *despise* it. To despise it means to make light of it or to try to ignore its significance. If we were to do so we would miss out on understanding the gravity of the situation that brought it about. Then we are told in the same verse that we should not *faint* under pressure of His rebuke. Fainting will cause us to fall into the sin of self-pity. We will be asking the familiar question, 'Why me?', just like Elijah who fled for his

life and then desired to die. This reaction will cause us to be more occupied with self than with the lesson we ought to have learned. The third and preferred reaction is to be *exercised by* chastening, asking the Lord Himself to give us an understanding of why we are facing His loving scourge at the moment, and pleading that He will kindly teach us the lesson why He has sent this into our lives. He is interested in making us grow to be more like Christ. Therefore He would like to see us as partakers of a greater measure of His holiness through His loving correction, v. 10.

However, not every difficulty or trial we pass through is a chastening from God, for we are sometimes the authors of our own troubles. We need to be always watching how we conduct our lives and walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, Eph. 5. 15. Scripture argues that our earthly fathers, to whom we gave reverence, have corrected us for the few days of our childhood, and that it was according to their own wisdom and knowledge. Should we not then rather subject ourselves to the all-knowing and only wise God our heavenly Father and live? And though it is often grievous and not joyous to be in the midst of the trial of chastening, yet by trusting in the wisdom of our Father, it ultimately yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness. However, note that the condition for blessing is only when the child of God has been *exercised by* it.

In summary: caring for needy saints, love guarded by knowledge, sowing in peace in the assembly and being gratefully exercised by chastening are the means of producing the sweet fruit of righteousness in our lives.



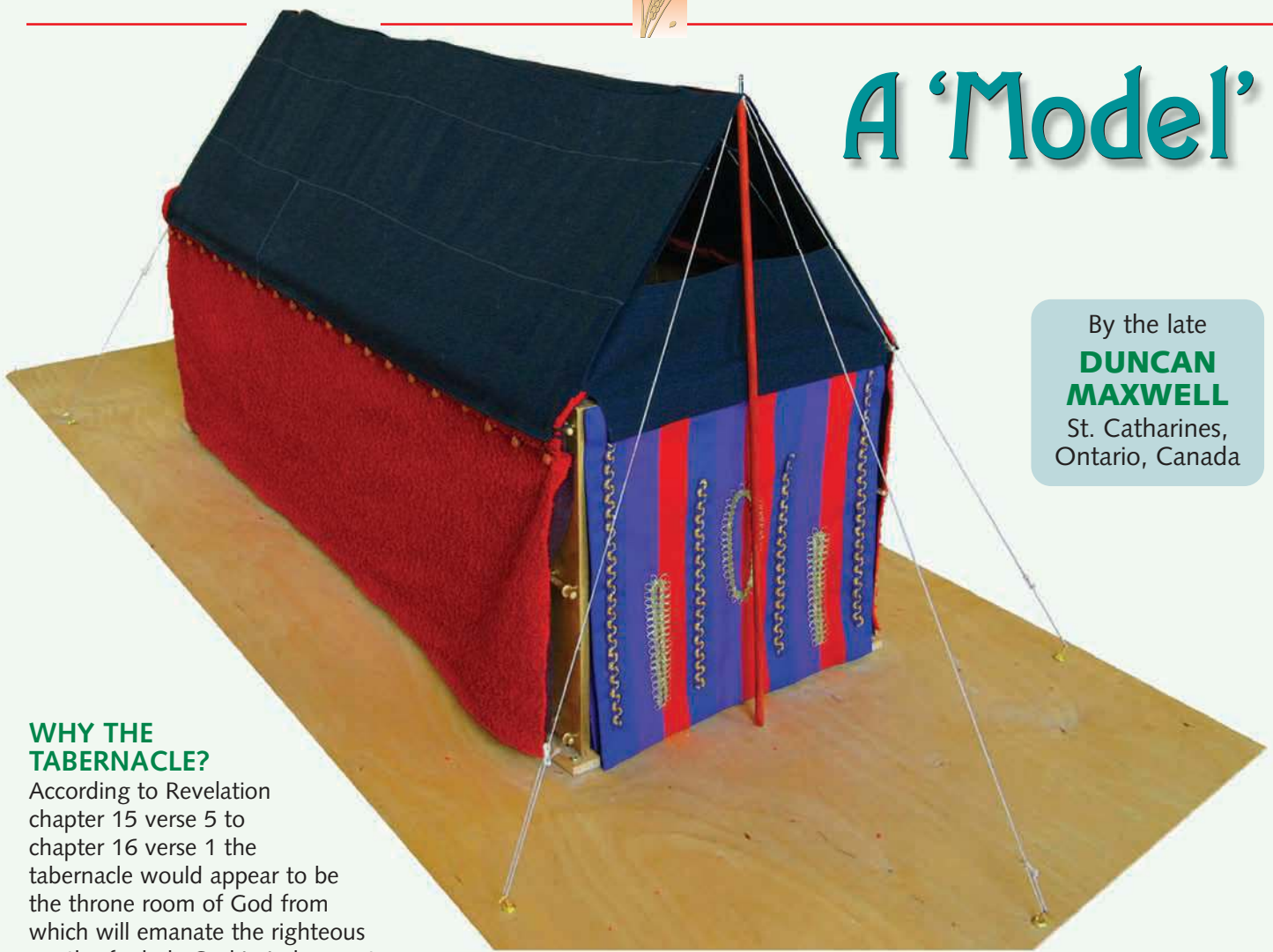
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A 'Model' Wa

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WHY THE TABERNACLE?

According to Revelation chapter 15 verse 5 to chapter 16 verse 1 the tabernacle would appear to be the throne room of God from which will emanate the righteous wrath of a holy God in judgement upon the earth. The earthly throne, Exod. 25. 8, 9, 16, 21, 22, would eventually be forgotten, Jer. 3. 16-17. Where better can we learn of God than in His dwelling place described by Moses in the book of Exodus?

WHY A MODEL?

The 'eye-gate' to the mind is a superior method of learning to the spoken word, especially when we consider the complications of translation from an original language. Chalk board, charts, flannel graphs and PowerPoint are all proven methods of illustration. Likewise, a model. Model making is not necessarily suited to everyone, but with a little manual dexterity, some artistic appreciation and a modicum of common sense, much can be achieved.

THE PURPOSE

The purpose in building a model of the tabernacle will, in part, determine the size and method of transportation. If, for example, the purpose is to use it in various places, then the size is important.

Models of the tabernacle are generally large and may require more than a car to transport! The building of a model requires dedication and discipline to examine each detail given in scripture and finding a means of representing that detail to the scale you have chosen. The ideas of others have been recorded in the many books published on the subject and there is no limit to the research you can undertake. The challenge is to put together a result in which you are reasonably satisfied that you have produced a useful representation of that defined in scripture. I faced this challenge some years ago when reading a book entitled *The Tabernacle of Israel - Its Structure and Symbolism* by JAMES STRONG.

This book is described as 'an exhaustive, scholarly investigation of the structure and components of the tabernacle, by the renowned author of *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*'. In his conclusion, Strong challenges the reader not to disregard his presentation for lack of real and thorough examination.

Strong's presentation is substantially different from all I had seen and noted since my teenage years.

I determined to build a model in accordance with his suggestions. I had a purpose. It was to see how closely Strong's presentation related to scripture and see if the assembly of the parts was practical. Your purpose might be quite different, in that if you use it as a Sunday School lesson, it may simply be cardboard painted, or simplified in detail. Where detail is important, some parts and some furniture may be constructed to different scales for illustrative purposes.

THE PREPARATION

The scale chosen defines the size and the first decision is where to store it while constructing and when complete. Rather than debating the size of a cubit, make the scale relate to the cubit as all the scriptural dimensions are in cubits. For example, a scale of one half inch = one cubit would make the courtyard 50" x 25"; anything less makes it difficult to manufacture parts and



Way to study the Tabernacle

the furnishings would be so small that they would require to be simple cardboard replicas. I suggest a scale (1/2" = one cubit) to illustrate the relationship of the dwelling place to the courtyard and use a larger scale (1" = one cubit) for construction of the tent, in order to make parts of a reasonable size. A good lexicon such as Gesenius and a concordance should be well studied before proceeding too far with building. Be prepared to spend much time and study even on small details. Historical research and reference to books published by a variety of authors can be useful in comparing ideas. When you have satisfied your own mind in relation to scripture, you then face the challenge of replicating the detail on your scale model.

THE PROBLEMS

The pattern was given to Moses; Bezaleel was given the Spirit of God in wisdom and understanding and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, together with Aholiab as an assistant. No one today can claim to exactly replicate the tabernacle; the best that can be done is to endeavour to interpret scripture to give a measure of understanding of the subject. The Hebrew word *ohel* means 'a tent'. The Hebrew word *mishkan* means 'a residence', 'a dwelling place'. At the erection of the tabernacle, Moses places the *ohel* over the *mishkan*, Exod. 40. 19. In the English text, in some places tabernacle is used to translate both words.

Regarding the boards of the *mishkan*, the thickness is not specified and there is no clear definition of the meaning of 'doubled in the corners'. The arrangement of the five bars on the sides and end of the *mishkan* has caused much controversy.

Why are there no fillets between the pillars supporting the veil? With no fillets they require to be stayed but there is no mention of them

requiring stays. What type of embroidery goes on the curtain of the *mishkan*?

There is no clear understanding of the Hebrew word *tachash* translated in our English Bibles as 'badger skin'. The fire on the brazen altar was to burn continuously, yet there is no clear instruction for carrying the fire when the camp moved.

These are but a few of the problems and, perhaps, some are unresolvable because of the sparse nature of the scripture data.

THE PRIESTHOOD

Aaron, the high priest, and his sons were an integral part of the tabernacle and the presentation of offerings. The nation of Israel denied God's desire by refusing to become a nation of priests, Exod. 20. 19. Jacob said of Simeon and Levi, 'Ye have troubled me to make me to stink among the inhabitants of the land', Gen. 34. 30. Yet, God in His grace and mercy establishes the priesthood out of the tribe of Levi.

The golden altar, or altar of incense, the laver and the anointing oil were specified only after the description of the high priest's garments. Study the stones on the shoulders, and the breastplate, and the character represented in the blessing of Jacob, Gen. 49, and of Moses, Deut. 33.

This leads you to the offerings and the Day of Atonement.

While not part of the model, it is integral to the understanding of the total operation and the activity that surrounds the other items of furniture; the brazen altar, the laver, the table of shewbread, the lampstand, the altar of incense and the ark of the covenant with the mercy seat. All of these items can be modelled as their details are studied. The best commentary on the subject of the priesthood is the Epistle to the Hebrews, which you should study to appreciate the

symbolism of the tabernacle.

PERSONAL ENJOYMENT

This 'Model' study is not for the fainthearted but is to be recommended to anyone with a passionate desire to understand and appreciate the scriptures relating to the tabernacle. It is the most thorough, exhaustive and spiritually enlightening study I have ever pursued. My attention was directed to many scholarly books on the subject and my knowledge expanded by a word study of every situation. To be able to share the knowledge with others as it surfaced was a delight. It is truly a revelation that God's desire is to be with His people, 'Let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them', Exod. 25. 8, in the tabernacle, in the temple, on the earth for 33 years, and in the eternal state. 'The tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them', Rev. 21. 3.

What a thrill to link every aspect of the tabernacle with our Great High Priest 'who is set on the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens; a minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man', Heb. 8. 1-2.

ENCOURAGEMENT

So, if you need a hobby that will also be spiritually profitable or something practical to do during the long winter evenings, make a start on building your own model of the tabernacle. You will be remarkably blessed in so doing.

DUNCAN MAXWELL recently went to be with the Lord. He was born in central Scotland and was in active fellowship with assemblies there. He was an engineer and a naval architect and spent most of his career in shipbuilding. From 1958 he resided in Canada. Shortly before his homecall he wrote a book called *The Shepherd's Hut* which is about the Tabernacle and its spiritual teaching. It is available from Gospel Folio Press and John Ritchie Ltd.





THE DAYS WHEN THE ABIMELECH the 'I

There are occasions both in the scriptures and in daily life when we come across an individual who seems to be totally devoid of moral worth; Abimelech was just such a man. It is a moot point whether in fact he should be counted among the Judges of Israel; he certainly took the title of king and 'reigned three years over Israel', Judg. 9. 22, though this may have been a parochial administration at best. However, Abimelech's sole ambition was self-promotion and although there was never any indication that he was raised up of God, we do know there are times when the permissive will of God allows ungodly men to take prominent positions. And, if the Spirit of God has deemed it necessary to leave on record such a long and detailed chapter of Abimelech's nefarious exploits, then there must be lessons for us 'upon whom the ends of the world are come', 1 Cor. 10. 11.

In the latter verses of Judges chapter 8, we are given the sequel to Gideon's victory over the Midianites and it was an expected consequence that Gideon would be offered the responsibility of ruling over Israel. At first he appeared unwilling to do this and insisted that the Lord should rule over the nation, v. 23. Yet, it would seem that he did take up the task in some capacity and presided over Israel for forty years during which time the land had peace, but in which time also the seeds were sown for the disastrous events that followed.

It is perhaps a comment on the moral conditions of the day that although Gideon was not the first to have more than one wife, he is the first recorded as having such a multiplicity of wives as to produce seventy sons! In spite of that, however, he still felt the need to have a concubine in Shechem, some distance from his home town, and as a result of this association, Abimelech was born. His name means 'my father

is king', which is in fact the very title Gideon refused! Abimelech, however, was determined to exploit family connections to his own advantage and set his sights on a place of prominence.

If God equips a man to take a leading role among His people He will make sure that all the necessary training is given, and, as seen in the life of David, the Lord will order the timing as well. When men

exhibit the character of Diotrefes, 'who loveth to have the pre-eminence among them', 3 John 9, then little of any value will follow.

We are not surprised that Abimelech found a ready following among the men of Shechem, his mother's people; Shechem was a place of mixed associations. It was a place of sacred memory, for there the bones of Joseph were buried when the nation entered the land, Josh. 24. 32. It was also the place of solemn meeting where Joshua challenged the people of God regarding their allegiance, Josh 24. 15. Yet, long before this, in Genesis chapter 34, Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi had wreaked an awful vengeance upon Shechem, leaving it a city of slain men because of the Shechemites' behaviour towards Dinah their sister. Although the city had been allocated to the tribe of Ephraim, there is no mention of its conquest in the book of Joshua. It would seem therefore that the indigenous population of Shechem remained, and they would feel no affinity with the sons of Jacob.

Abimelech gained an acceptance among the men of Shechem, persuading them to finance his mercenary following of 'vain and light persons'. With them he went to his father's house, and, in order to neutralize any potential opposition to his rule, he slew sixty-nine of Gideon's sons; the calculated and merciless act being emphasized by the phrase 'upon one stone'.

Jotham, the sole survivor, managed to

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JUDGES RULED PART 6

'Bramble King' Judges chapter 9

escape the carnage and waited his moment to deliver a very incisive parable to the Shechemites. He chose his moment as Abimelech was celebrating his coronation. The vantage point he used to deliver words, which proved to be prophetic, was mount Gerizim. This was the designated mount of blessing for Israel, yet their actions and their idolatry had resulted in blessings being forfeited and just retribution anticipated.

Jotham paints a picture in words of the trees seeking to appoint a king. The olive, the fig and the vine are approached in turn as potential rulers. On each occasion the offer is refused. All are producing something of value, fruit, food and fulfilment for the people of God. They have no ambition to rule over others, just to carry out the service for which they are fitted. Is there a lesson for us? How many divisions would have been avoided among the Lord's people if individuals had made it their ambition to produce fruit for the benefit of others, rather than seek a place of prominence? In desperation the trees turn to the bramble, a worthless, barren shrub, producing only symbols of the curse, thorns to pierce and briars to snare those who come into contact with it. Such would be the legacy of Abimelech's reign, culminating in judgement by fire both upon ruler and ruled.

Ignoring Jotham's perceptive warning, the Shechemites put their trust in the shadow of the bramble king and for a while all seemed to run quite smoothly. Yet, inevitably, retribution would come, 'God is not mocked', and after three years the chain of events leading to Abimelech's downfall began. The quotation attributed to Longfellow seems quite appropriate, 'Though the mills of God grind slowly, they grind exceeding small'.

From the beginning of chapter 9, heaven has remained an interested observer as events unfolded. Now in

verse 23, God takes a hand. His omniscient eye was still upon the bloodstained stone in Ophrah; such cruelty could not go unpunished. It is interesting to watch as men are moved around from place to place, taking issue with one another, initiating strife, challenging and meeting the challenge. Yet behind all this activity is the hand of a sovereign God, to whose will these men, Abimelech, Gaal, Zebul and their followers are unwittingly responding like pawns on some terrestrial chessboard, moving swiftly to the inevitable checkmate and total loss.



It is good to remember that our God has never abdicated his sovereignty with regard to this world's affairs. The posturing of self-important leaders, thinking that they are masters of their own destiny, and the destiny of nations, are all subject to His will. All the plans and purposes of ungodly rulers which we see played out around us are but setting the stage for the final great events foretold and unfolded in the scriptures. We observe with interest and anticipation, knowing with assurance that 'now is our salvation nearer than when we believed', Rom. 13. 11.

The evil spirit sent by the Lord in verse 23 did his job well. Throughout the

remainder of chapter 9 it is as though we stand where Jotham stood on mount Gerizim and view the whole panorama of events. The ambushes set up by the men of Shechem to destabilize Abimelech; the attempted coup by Gaal; the secret envoy sent by Zebul, Abimelech's accomplice, to warn him of the mounting opposition. We watch the manoeuvring of troops, the execution of military plans and counter-plans, until at last smoke arises from the tower of the idol temple in Shechem where a thousand men and women had taken futile refuge as 'fire came out from Abimelech and devoured the men of Shechem', exactly as Jotham had foretold.

Flushed with success, Abimelech proceeded to lay siege to the neighbouring city of Thebez, doubtless expecting a similar victory to enhance his reputation and secure his position of authority. Again, the inhabitants take refuge in the tower built for such eventualities, and, again, Abimelech applies the same strategy so successful at Shechem. However, he reckoned without considering a resourceful woman who had hauled a piece of millstone to the top of the tower! What follows is possibly the first example of a guided missile; guided that is by the hand of God! It finds its intended target with unerring accuracy and Abimelech is mortally wounded. Pride is paramount to this man even in his death throes. Appearance is everything; it cannot be said that he, the mighty soldier, was felled by a woman! Abimelech summons his armourbearer, the very man whose responsibility it was to protect him, and he renders the *coup de grace*. So ended the career of the man who would be king, yet who left God completely out of the reckoning.

It is interesting to observe that the only other time Abimelech is brought to remembrance in scripture is in 2 Samuel chapter 11 verse 21. David, while seeking to justify the death of Uriah beneath the walls of Rabbah, recalls the fact that Abimelech died by the hand of a woman. The one thing that he was desperate to avoid being remembered for!

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Many will have heard of the athlete from Africa who was running in a long-distance race far from his homeland. During the race he suffered an accident that slowed him down considerably. Those at the finish line cheered when the first runners crossed the line. As people began to leave, the runner from Africa came into sight, limping. Some asked him why, under the circumstances, he kept on running. His answer was simple and right to the point. He said, 'My country did not send me this long distance to start the race, my country sent me to finish the race'.

How very easy it is to become distracted, weary, discouraged. The Christian as a runner never has the luxury of stopping. True, he may be limping because of the circumstances of life, because of the blows he has taken in the service of God, yet he keeps running. It is difficult, if not impossible, not to think of the Lord Jesus when we read, 'I gave My back to those who struck Me, And My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting'.¹ Then we read, 'The Lord God will help Me; Therefore I will not be disgraced'. Yet, in spite of the unmerited, cruel blows, He endured, we read, 'Therefore I have set My face like a flint, And I know that I will not be ashamed'.² One translation reads, 'I brace myself to endure them. I know that I will not be disgraced'.³ The Lord Jesus is the example for all of us, for He is the runner *par excellence* who continued to run in spite of all the obstacles He encountered. He said, 'My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work'.⁴

Looking back, for Paul is nearing the finish line, he writes, 'What things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ'.⁵ He uses the past tense of the verb, 'I have counted', referring to a point in history more than thirty years in the past. During the years that followed he had prematurely aged, primarily because of all he suffered physically at the hands of his enemies and the emotional strain of caring for

Paul, the Runner Part III (1) TOTAL

Unless otherwise stated scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Version

'The excellence of the knowledge

all the churches his opponents were trying to destroy.⁶ Yet, the apostle never stopped running. He did not run for the applause of men and women. He did not run to be famous. He did not run to please himself. Whatever adverse circumstances he faced he continued to run because of his love and devotion to the Lord Jesus. This is total commitment!

Paul tells us, 'I have fought with beasts at Ephesus'.⁷ In Daniel's case, the lions did not touch the prophet! Taking Paul's words at face value, he actually fought with beasts. Few survived these encounters with wild animals. For that reason, some wonder if Paul is using the term 'beasts' in a figurative sense. He writes, I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries'.⁸ Is he referring to his adversaries when he speaks of fighting with beasts? On the other hand, it may well have been the very real danger of facing wild animals, for undesirable individuals in the society of two thousand years ago were often thrown to savage beasts just for the entertainment of the general public.

When Paul writes to the church in Rome, he shares with the Christians the bravery of Aquila and Priscilla. They were with Paul in Ephesus and were extremely brave in their commitment to the Christian cause

and in their love for the apostle. They went farther than just witnessing together with Paul. With great feeling, Paul shares with the Christians in Rome that they 'risked their own necks (both Aquila, the husband, and Priscilla, the wife) for my life'.⁹ We wonder if this could be related to Paul's allusion to fighting with beasts at Ephesus and how he came out of the experience alive.

There were many other forms of startling persecution. Passing through Philippi, Paul and Silas were severely beaten, thrown into jail and finally asked to leave the city. In Thessalonica their witness caused many to turn to the Lord, but many who did not believe the message created a major uproar in the city. Friends succeeded in saving the lives of Paul and Silas by getting them out of the city in the middle of the night and sending them on their way to Berea. The atmosphere in Berea was more favourable, but the enemies in Thessalonica followed them to Berea and again Paul was sent on his way, this time to Athens. In Athens they just laughed at Paul's message about a man who rose from the dead. This probably hurt him more than the threats and physical sufferings he had already endured on this trip.¹⁰

As already noted, in spite of rough physical sufferings and deep emotional upheavals, and numerous enemies determined to undermine his work,¹¹

nothing moved Paul from his commitment to Christ. He never yearned for his old life. He enjoyed a permanent, close, vibrant relationship with his Lord. There is no indication that he ever wavered in his allegiance to the Lord Jesus. He counted and he continued to count day by day not just the gains of his previous life, but all things loss for Christ. These many experiences of rejection, persecution and

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AL COMMITMENT

edge of Christ Jesus my Lord'¹

close encounters with death never modified his fundamental commitment to Christ. We note again his clear testimony, 'Indeed I also count (present tense - after about thirty or thirty-five years in which he endured a great deal of hardship) all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord'.

The word 'indeed' marks the very abrupt change from the apostle's past, 'I have counted', to his present, 'I also count', or 'I continue to count'. The firm decision Paul made at Damascus was reaffirmed every day.

We may not suffer persecution like Paul, but we may suffer opposition, bereavement, disappointment, failure, illness, financial setbacks and many other unexpected experiences in life. Writing to the Christians in Rome, Paul, perhaps indirectly, refers to his own life when passing through such experiences, for he states, 'And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope'. Under God, Paul used the adverse experiences of his life to grow as a Christian. He knew exactly where the race he was running would take him and while he was running, in spite of all the obstacles along the way, he was rejoicing 'in hope of the glory of God'.¹²

We note again that Paul was an old man, not so much in years as in hard experiences, yet the Damascus experience was just as real as ever. He writes, 'Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord'. By using the present tense, 'I also count all things loss', he indicates a continuing, constant commitment to Christ that neither time nor frustrations nor sufferings could alter.

Paul then adds, 'For whom (Christ Jesus) I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that

I may gain Christ'. The word behind 'rubbish' is a strong word. Some translations use 'refuse', 'garbage', 'worthless trash'. J. N. DARBY comes close with the word 'filth', for that word visualizes something from which we would turn away in disgust.

We know that Paul had momentary glimpses into the eternal realm, but we, with an open Bible, should be forming in our minds day by day an understanding of the incredible sphere of glory that awaits us. As we move towards the day when we will enter forever into that glory, we may have to suffer loss. Only the vision of that coming glory, so clearly seen in the scriptures in Jesus Christ, our Lord will sustain us as we run the race that is set before us.¹³

Paul confirms this by one of his remarkable phrases, 'For the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord'. 'Excellence' is the object of 'for.' The words 'for' or 'because' refer directly to the reason for this radical re-evaluation of his life's values. 'Excellence' is a powerful noun underscoring the value of that for which Paul turned his back on all his previous values. It is the reason why the apostle 'counted' loss everything he formerly considered valuable. It was because of this outstanding 'excellence'. The term 'excellence' refers to 'exceptional quality', to 'outstanding worth', to 'wonderful beauty'.

Paul is referring to a 'worth' that far outshines any glory this world can offer to a human being. It is a greatness that exceeds anything of merely earthly or heavenly origin. It is a blessing that cannot be equalled with anything in history nor, from what has been revealed to us in the scriptures, with anything in heaven. It is so precious that it overrides all other

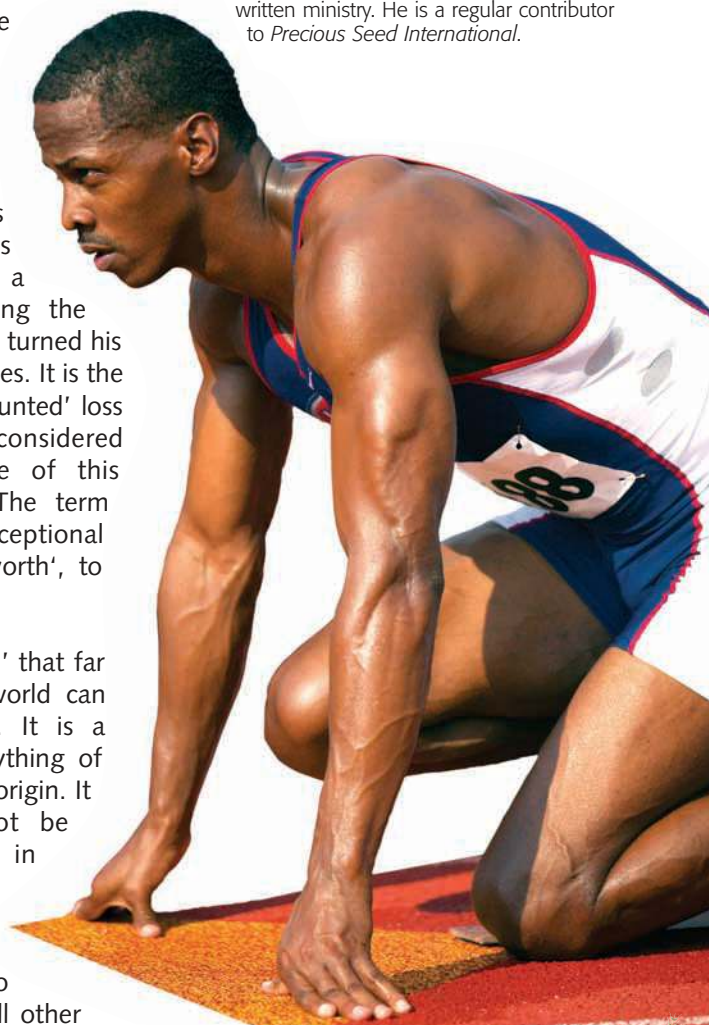
values available anywhere, even those of the highest possible importance.

This 'excellence' is defined as 'knowledge', 'the excellence of the knowledge'. The nouns 'knowledge' and 'excellence' are closely related. What is this 'excellence'? The answer is 'knowledge'! What is the nature of this 'knowledge'? The answer is 'excellence'! Thus, 'excellence' and 'knowledge' are the same thing.

References

- 1 Phil. 3. 8.
- 2 Isa. 50. 6, 7.
- 3 *Contemporary English Version*.
- 4 John. 4. 34.
- 5 Phil. 3. 7-14. This article refers repeatedly to this portion.
- 6 2 Cor. 11. 23-28.
- 7 1 Cor. 15. 32.
- 8 1 Cor. 16. 8, 9, *English Standard Version*.
- 9 Rom. 16. 3, 4.
- 10 Acts 26. 11 to 17. 34.
- 11 Acts 21. 30, 31; 23. 10, 12; 27; Gal. 1. 6-9.
- 12 Rom. 5. 1-4.
- 13 Heb. 12. 1-3.

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*.





Park of the Palms

1) History

Over thirty years ago, Park of the Palms, Inc., started as an assembly Bible Conference Grounds located on 25 acres in north central Florida. As the conferences progressed, and individuals from across the country visited, they became interested in retiring to the lovely climate of the area. So developed the Park of the Palms Christian Retirement and Assisted Living Facility of today. A feature of the Park, enjoyed by many guests, is the beautiful Gilbert Lodge. Each room is fitted out with a private bath and many other amenities

One of the attractions of the area, for retirees, is the pastoral location and close proximity to premier medical care. It is situated an hour south-east of the world-famous Mayo Clinic in Jacksonville, and only thirty-five minutes northwest of the Shands University of Florida Hospital in Gainesville which is renowned for its heart and orthopaedic teams. The property is near to a paved walking/bike trail — currently thirty miles long, with plans for expansion from St. Augustine (the nation's oldest city) to Lake City. Recently an adjoining spur was added to provide access from the Park to the award-winning Gold Head State Park (just seven miles from Park of the Palms).

2) Current Ministry

The mission of Park of the Palms, Inc. is to provide a community of caring where adults in their fully mature state can continue to participate in activities that stimulate them spiritually, physically and emotionally so as to find fulfilment in their final years.

Retiring believers from around N. America find the Park a place of gracious living allowing use of independent apartments that provide contemporary accommodation and access to high-speed internet. As aging and health issues become more evident, an Assisted Living Facility is available that leads to a higher level of care referred to as Extended Congregate Care in the state of Florida.

The Park offers a LifeLease that provides a personal unit for residence during independent years and then automatic entrance into the Assisted Living Complex when necessary. Among the available services for independent and assisted living health care is on-site therapy, an in-house doctor service, a fitness centre, 24/7 on-call nursing assistance, a swimming pool and shuffleboard court as well as dining in the Weir Dining Room overlooking Lake Brooklyn. More services are planned for the future. A major building renovation programme began in 2005 and continues.

Throughout the year, believers fellowship around the word in specialized sessions for different interest groups, then enjoy the normal

weekly meetings in the Chapel. Beginning in mid-February, week-long Bible conferences with well-known speakers are an attraction for residents as well as the 'snowbirds' who enjoy spending winter in Florida. Schedules of the speakers are available at www.parkofthepalms.org.

Accommodation may be reserved in the Gilbert Lodge and all guests enjoy the cuisine at various venues throughout the Conference season. The plenary sessions are convened at the on-grounds assembly Chapel, and breakout sessions are held in the lakeside Mojonner Library and other rooms.

3) Future

The renovation of all independent living units is under way and expected to be completed in six years. An expansion plan is also under way to increase the capacity of the Assisted Living Facility, doubling the size and providing care for those suffering from 'memory disabilities'. The incidence of memory-related diseases in the current retiree cohort group is increasing and will require a growth in the resources assigned to this need. Health services, in addition to those identified above, are constantly evaluated to determine applicability and where appropriate, are added to the service line. As we look to the return of the Lord, we pray it may be today yet in the meantime we plan and work vigorously to improve the Park for this generation of retirees.

Should you find yourself in the Keystone Heights area do call in to see us, and to fellowship with the assembly. You are of course welcome to attend the conferences. For further information go to www.parkofthepalms.org





A HISTORY OF THE ASSEMBLY AT EAST FORT, THRISSUR, KERALA, INDIA



During 1895-96 the Rev. Father Kuruvilla used to preach repentance in the Chaldean Syrian 'Big Church' in Thrissur. Unlike the other priests, Rev. Kuruvilla held the Bible in his hands and preached repentance and regeneration clearly from the Gospels. Church members were encouraged to read the Bible. Eventually, nineteen men testified to being born again. These nineteen, along with their families, started gathering in homes every Lord's day after the normal church service. When the home group really began to grow, the church prohibited it and posted Rev. Kuruvilla to a distant place.

Yet, the families continued as before. In 1901, a child of Mr. Antony Puthukatukaran died. The church officials refused to bury the body in the church cemetery as Mr. Antony was the leader of the now prohibited home group. Mr. Antony buried the body of his child in the backyard of his own house. In 1902, twelve families withdrew from the Home Group being afraid of remaining independent of any organized denomination. They joined the Marthoma church. The remaining seven families were excommunicated by the Chaldean Syrian Church. Still, the group went on as a Home Church under the able leadership of Mr. Antony.

As God would have it, Mr. Antony happened to meet a Mr. Volbright Nagel of Germany. Mr. Nagel was originally a Lutheran missionary working with the Basel Mission in Malabar. His personal study of the Bible guided him to leave the Mission and work for the Lord independently, looking to the Lord only for all his needs. (The story of Mr. Nagel is so fascinating that it resembles the events of the apostolic days!) Later, he met with Mr. Handley Bird, an English missionary in South India. He was baptized by Mr. Handley Bird. Thereafter, he worked tirelessly and established assemblies in several neighbouring towns. Mr. Antony invited Mr. Nagel to Thrissur. He came and taught the home group the New Testament truths of baptism and separation. Four persons from the seven families were baptized by Mr. Nagel and in 1903 a gathering to celebrate the Lord's Supper was started.

The assembly is now 105 years old. The believers gathered in rented buildings from 1903 to 1909 and due to the powerful evangelization of Mr. Nagel and his co-

workers many souls were saved and baptized. Then, in the will of God, in 1910 Mr. Nagel bought a plot of land in the East Fort area and built a mud-walled and thatch-roofed hall. After about fifty years, a large terraced hall replaced the old one. Presently, we are prayerfully planning to erect a new building with better facilities. We have submitted the plans and are waiting for the sanction of the civil authorities to start building. We hope to complete the building by 2010, exactly 100 years after the first property was purchased by the assembly. We are looking to the Lord for the finances.

When the assembly was started in 1903, Mr. Nagel arranged for Mr. A. M. Ittoop to be the minister of the assembly. Mr. Ittoop was one of the firstfruits and a co-worker of Mr. Nagel in the town of Kunnankulam. Mr. Ittoop shepherded the assembly until 1950. He then stepped aside because of old age. The assembly then recognized Mr. M. J. Paul as the responsible elder. Mr. Paul was a high-school headmaster. After retirement, he used much of his time shepherding the assembly. When Mr. M. A. Joy was called to full-time ministry in 1974, the assembly asked him to assist Mr. Paul. By 1976 Mr. Paul had become ill and the assembly entrusted full responsibility to Mr. Joy.

In 1992 the assembly recognized the need for a plurality of elders among them. At present we have seven elders formally recognized by the assembly. We have about 250 believers in fellowship who attend the Malayalam service and about 70 others in the English-speaking assembly. Both these services hold the Lord's Supper on Sundays at different times. So, our assembly has about 320 believers breaking bread.

By God's grace our assembly is very active in evangelization and from time to time we choose a particular village and concentrate on working there. During the last thirty-eight years the Lord has established nine new assemblies within a 30km radius of the East Fort assembly. All are going on well and growing. At the moment we are concentrating our outreach work in two villages with the hope of starting new assemblies there. Please do pray for us.





Dispensation

Dispensationalism is a theological system which 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 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. Most dispensationalists see seven dispensations in the Bible. In this article we will examine the first three dispensations in detail

1) Innocence

The first dispensation was the dispensation of innocence. God revealed His will to Adam and Eve. They were to have children and to rule God's creation, Gen. 1. 28. This was the stewardship which was given to them. Perhaps this accounts for the reason why abortion is so popular in the Western world! God's first command was to be fruitful and so the sinful nature wishes to shake its fist at God's command right from the start. In addition a test was placed before them; they were not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Gen. 2. 16, 17.

Now, let's ask a question. In this first stewardship, how did man respond to the test? Regrettably, the answer is that man initiated the first of a series of failures. Eve ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and Adam ate as well, Gen. 3. 1-6. They believed the half-truth of Satan; their eyes were opened and all mankind has paid the price ever since. The judgement was described in Genesis chapter 3 verses 16 and 17. The birth of children would now be an event

preceded by pain. There would be discord between a husband and wife. And God's blessing of provision would now be accompanied by toilsome effort.

Here we see a pattern which is often repeated throughout the dispensations. A stewardship was established. A test was placed before mankind. Man failed the test and was judged. But frequently we see this judgement accompanied by an additional Messianic revelation. In this case, the Messiah was predicted in Genesis chapter 3 verse 15. In the years following, Eve must have wondered at this statement. How could one of her offspring crush the head of an angelic being? But this was the self-revelation of God, that the Messiah would be truly human. As for Satan, he has now done his worst. At a place called Calvary Satan struck the heel of the Messiah, and now there is nothing left for him but to wait until Messiah crushes his head.

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So this was the first dispensation; innocence. But let's pause to consider what we know about human nature. Given the choice between confessing on one hand that God is just and man is sinful, and on the other hand blaming God, fallen man will certainly choose to blame God. And so it is not too hard to imagine mankind complaining against the judgement of God, 'But we didn't know what it would be like to know good and evil. We had God's words, but there was nothing within us that could help us discern good from bad'. And so God instituted the next dispensation. One stewardship has been taken away and another stewardship takes its place. God gave them something that will allow them to discern good from bad; a conscience. And God instituted a new dispensation, the defining characteristic of which was conscience.

2) Conscience

In the previous dispensation God spoke directly to Adam and Eve. But

nationalism

PART TWO



now a change is effected and God spoke to His people through their conscience. He provided a means by which all people could discern good and evil, Rom. 2. 15.

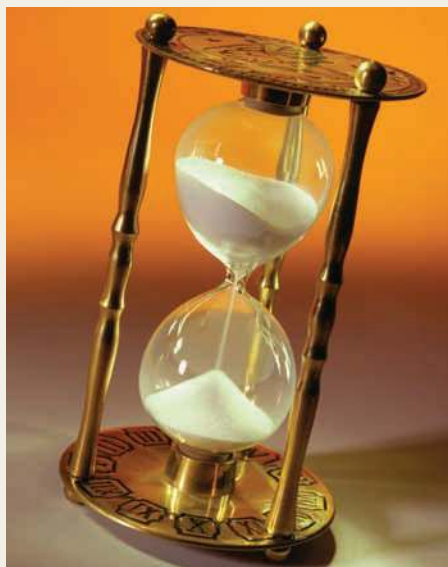
So, the stewardship placed before mankind was simply to obey the dictates of their conscience. But how did mankind respond this time? Once again we see failure on the part of mankind. Cain and Abel offered God their sacrifices, Gen. 4. 1-7, but Cain's sacrifice was not accepted. Cain was told, 'If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?' God didn't need to instruct Cain that murder is wrong because He didn't have to; Cain already had a conscience. And so we see a test placed before the representative of mankind, 'If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?' But in Genesis chapter 4 verse 8, Cain failed the test and murdered his brother. God gave mankind a conscience. He helped them distinguish good from evil. And almost immediately Cain committed one of the worst imaginable sins.

As in the previous dispensation the test was failed, and judgement needed to come. We read about this judgement in Genesis chapter 4 verse 11. If life was difficult in leaving the Garden of Eden, life now became worse. Cain was a man of the soil. He was a man who tilled the ground to yield its crops. And so his judgement was related to that in which he had his pride; he was to be a restless wanderer for whom the ground would no longer easily yield crops.

But the judgement didn't end there. This whole dispensation was filled with rebellion against the conscience which God had provided and, quite tellingly, we read, Gen. 6. 5, 'And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually'. And so while Cain was a representative of mankind in this dispensation, there was a further judgement on all mankind; the great flood.

So we see the typical pattern of a stewardship: a test, a response and a judgement. But there is a further revelation of God's Messianic purpose, for in the middle of this story, at the end of chapter 4, we read of the birth of Seth. And it was through the line of Seth that the Messiah came. Messiah didn't come through Cain, the murderer. Messiah didn't come through Abel, the victim. Messiah came through a different line, that of Seth.

But once again, it is not too hard to imagine mankind complaining against the judgement of God, 'You gave me a conscience, but there was nothing to restrain me. When my conscience became dull, there was nothing to stop me from sinning'. And so God instituted the next dispensation, giving them something that would restrain them; human government.



3) Human government

The third dispensation was the dispensation of human government, which began after the great flood. To understand why human government was the defining characteristic of this dispensation, we must understand something about human government itself. Government is nothing more and nothing less than how we organize ourselves as a society, and the defining characteristic of government is that it tends to have authority and powers which are not granted to individuals. This is most evident in a criminal justice system. While most countries allow citizens the right of self-defence, individuals are typically not allowed to punish crimes. That is a task for the governing authorities. And the

ultimate expression of this authority is in the death penalty. This is why the dispensation of human government was inaugurated, Gen. 9. 6. This verse does not teach the start of a private code of vengeance, but rather human government being given the ultimate authority to restrain evil behaviour. Human government is a force of restraint on society. Even if people have dull consciences, the knowledge that society will punish wicked behaviour is a restraint. Of course, human government, if inaugurated by God, must serve God's purpose. So God placed another stewardship responsibility before mankind, 'And you, be ye fruitful, and multiply; bring forth abundantly in the earth, and multiply therein, Gen. 9. 7.

How did mankind exercise the responsibilities of this stewardship? Did mankind obey God and spread out across the face of the earth? Regrettably mankind's reaction to God's command was to build the Tower of Babel, 'Lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth', Gen. 11. 4. And so judgement once again came, this time in the confusion of languages, Gen. 11. 7. Mankind used his power of governmental organization to stay in one place, so God confounded their ability to organize themselves and spread them out across the face of the earth.

In this dispensation too, we see the Messianic purposes of God. Human government has failed, but we know that there is One who is worthy of governmental rule. Indeed, as Isaiah chapter 9 verses 6 and 7 tell us, 'Unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder . . . of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end'. Where man failed, Messiah would succeed magnificently. As for man, he might complain that God has scattered the nations, so God will begin to deal with a single people and nation in the dispensation of promise.

To be continued

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People spend their lives seeking happiness and lasting peace. They spend time, energy and money in this relentless search. They may find a limited and temporary happiness in enjoying 'the pleasures of sin for a season', Heb. 11. 25, but then restless dissatisfaction sets in and the search for happiness begins again. They try one thing after another and those who live to old age ultimately experience sadness, disillusionment and despair.

All the unhappiness in the world, the physical pain, mental anguish, misery and worry people experience and suffer; the deceit, trouble and insecurity; calamities, wars, terrorism and violence on the streets; problems in economies and in human organisations, and the troubles in families and the lives of individuals, have one root and common cause, and that is sin. Sin is lawlessness, 1 John 3. 4 RV: it is doing what one wants to do, regardless of the will of God. The word of God tells us that we are all sinners by nature and in practice, Rom. 3. 23. Sin has affected the whole creation, Rom. 8. 22.

The lives and experiences of men and women which are recorded for us in the word of God show that sin and sadness always go together and that holiness, righteousness, peace and happiness also go together. Happiness will not be achieved when sought for as an end in itself, but it is a result of knowing and obeying God. In the Psalms, the Holy Spirit tells us about those things that cause a man to be happy. We read in Psalm 144 verse 15, 'Happy is that people, whose God is the Lord'.

Blessed is the Man

'Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered . . . the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity', Ps. 32. 1, 2.

The word translated 'blessed' in Psalm 32, and in the other psalms we shall look at, is plural, and the Holy Spirit is telling us of the 'blessednesses' or 'happinesses' of the man who has been saved and does the will of God. The man who is truly blessed is the man who has been saved, that is, his sins have been forgiven by God, Ps. 32. 1, 2; Rom. 4. 6-8. This man knows that forgiveness is not earned by doing good works but is by grace through God-given faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, Eph. 2. 8, 9. He has 'peace with God', Rom. 5. 1, and can enjoy the 'peace of God' in his heart, Phil. 4. 7. This man believes that 'God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish,

By **CLIFF JONES** Cardiff, Wales

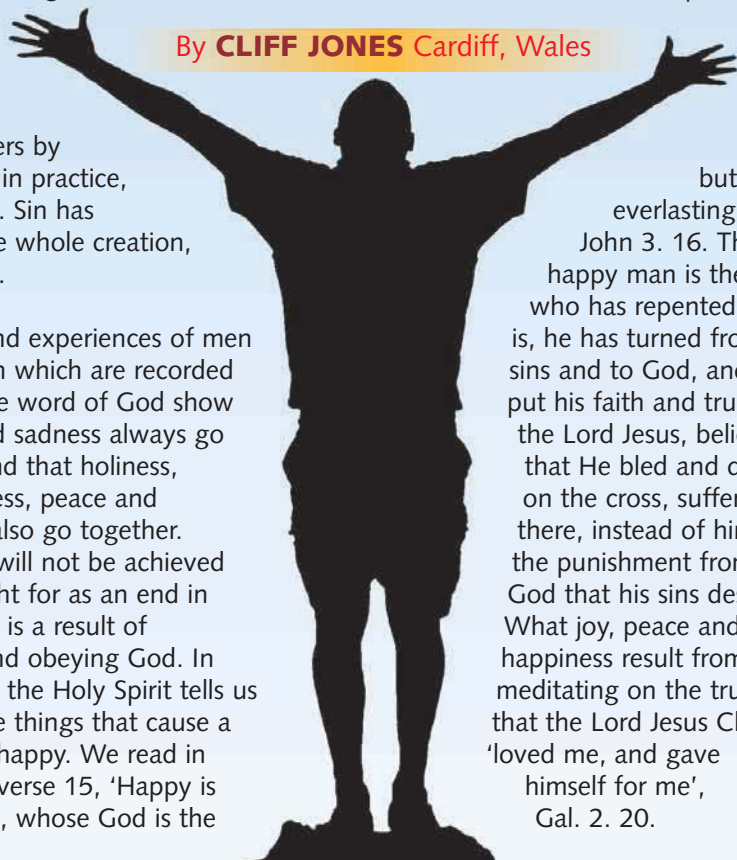
but have everlasting life', John 3. 16. The happy man is the man who has repented, that is, he has turned from his sins and to God, and has put his faith and trust in the Lord Jesus, believing that He bled and died on the cross, suffering there, instead of him, the punishment from God that his sins deserve. What joy, peace and happiness result from meditating on the truth that the Lord Jesus Christ 'loved me, and gave himself for me', Gal. 2. 20.

'Blessed is the man that trusteth in thee', Ps. 84. 12.

How blessed and happy is the man who trusts fully in God at all times. This man will be blessed and kept, 1 Pet. 1. 3-5, as he passes through this present life, seeking to obey and serve God. He will be blessed, strengthened and guided by God, Ps. 84. 5, knowing that, in eternity, he will be with God in heaven, 1 Thess. 4. 16, 17. True lasting happiness and satisfaction are found only by the man 'that maketh the Lord his trust', Ps. 40. 4. The man who trusts in the Lord knows that His promises are true and that He is always to be relied upon, Mal. 3. 6. This man experiences happiness, for 'blessed is the man that trusteth in him', Ps. 34. 8.

'Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly', Ps. 1. 1.

Many books have been written on how to be happy, and a great deal of money is spent on advertising products and services which, it is claimed, will make people happy. In many instances, people are being led to seek material solutions to what are, in reality, deep-seated spiritual problems. In Psalm 1, the Holy Spirit sets before us the way of happiness and the way of unhappiness. The man who has been saved and, by the enabling power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, 1 Cor. 6. 19, does the will of God, is the blessed or happy man. The first two verses of Psalm 1 tell us what such a man does and does not do. In verse 1 we learn that the blessed man, the happy man, 'walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly'. He does not get his counsel from the world nor let the world's way of thinking and its priorities determine the way he thinks and lives. He does not stand 'in the way of sinners'. He leads a life which is separated from the world and to God, 2 Cor. 6. 17. There are places not to frequent and activities not to get involved in, for 'the friendship of the world is enmity with God', Jas. 4. 4.



We are told, 'Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind', Rom. 12. 2. The gradual settling down into sin depicted in verse 1, walking, standing, leads ultimately to sitting 'in the seat of the scornful'. The blessed man does not make jokes about sin, holiness, righteousness, death or the judgement to come. He is not irreverent in his use of scripture nor speaks lightly of heaven or hell.

In verse 2 we learn that the blessed man delights to study and meditate on the word of God. A believer should meditate on the scriptures under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, 2 Tim. 2. 15, so that he might receive guidance, Ps. 119. 105, and grow spiritually, 1 Pet. 2. 2. Meditating on, and obeying, the teaching found in the word of God will lead to peace and happiness. Getting his counsel from the scriptures will cause a believer to think and behave as God would have him to think and behave. As a man 'thinketh in his heart, so is he', Prov. 23. 7, and 'out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh', Matt. 12. 34. Thoughts precede words and actions, and form habits and character. The blessed, happy man who loves and obeys God will bring forth the fruit of the Spirit which is 'love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance', Gal. 5. 22, 23.

There was only one man, the Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten, eternal, beloved Son of God, who was entirely righteous, holy, sinless and undefiled. He was perfectly obedient to His Father's will, Phil. 2. 8, and always pleased Him, John 8. 29; Matt. 3. 17; 17. 5. He was the truly blessed and happy man of Psalm 1 verses 1-2, but became the forsaken man of Psalm 22 verse 1 so that the foolish, sinful man of Psalm 14 verse 1 might become the blessed, happy man of Psalm 32 verses 1-2.

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A WORD FOR TODAY

(**Logomachía**, as, é), *word-battle, dispute about words*

(**Lógos**, **lógou**, **lógó**) *speaking, assertion, declaration, speech, word*

(**Lógche**, es, é), *spear, lance*

In this new feature we will look at a number of selected Greek/Hebrew words found in the Bible. We will trace their historical development and then describe their meaning and usage in the scriptures. To avoid this being seen simply as an academic exercise, each article will conclude with a word of encouragement, comfort or challenge. Our intention is not only to educate the mind, but to affect the heart and ultimately the lives of God's people, thereby enabling them to see the value of these words for today.

What better word then to start with than the Greek word *lógos*?

At its basic level, the word *lógos* was used by the ancient Greeks to indicate the vocal sounds of communication. Men communicated through words and expressed their ideas through the medium of both the spoken and written word. Predominantly, however, *lógos* became a term adopted by Greek philosophers to explain their understanding of how the world was created. To the Greek mind, *lógos* was an effective cause, a creative or impersonal force through which everything came into existence. The *lógos* controlled the planets and the seasons, so preventing chaos in the universe. But these men were groping in the dark and had no real spiritual discernment. Their philosophy was empty deceit – see Col. 2. 8.

In the Greek Old Testament (Septuagint) *lógos* translated the Hebrew word *dobor*, confirming that God's word could be relied upon, as in Psalm 33 verses 6 and 9, and could not be thwarted, as in Psalm 147 verse 15. Such texts reveal that God's *lógos* not only imparted truth, but was an active force in the world.

Lógos occurs in the New Testament in both a technical and non-technical sense. In its non-technical sense, it was commonly used throughout the Greco-Roman world of the New Testament period for 'word' or 'saying', both spoken and written. Generally in the New Testament both senses are found as evident in the phrase, 'word of the kingdom', Matt. 13. 19, of the sower sowing the 'word', Mark 4. 14, specifically of the 'word of God', Luke 8. 11 or in respect of the gracious words (sayings) of Christ Himself, Luke 4. 22. ABBOTT-SMITH indicates, that *lógos* was not used just to describe a word in a grammatical sense of a mere name, but a word as embodying a concept or idea, as in Matthew chapter 8 verse 8 (say 'the word') or in 1 Corinthians chapter 14 verse 9 (an intelligible 'message'). It could also mean 'reckoning' in a monetary context as in the phrase, 'I compare accounts, make a reckoning, Matt. 18. 23f; 25. 19.

The apostle Paul uses it in a similar vein in Romans chapter 14 verse 12 and in Philippians chapter 4 verses 15 and 17, with reference to judgement. *Lógos* had a variety of meanings each dependent on the company that the word kept. So it was not a new word coined by New Testament writers, but was already heavily imbued with a cultural and philosophical backdrop.

We now turn to the technical use of the word *lógos*. When John uses this term in the 'Prologue' to his Gospel, John 1. 1-18, there would have been the inevitable danger of his readership thinking of the past connection with Greek philosophy. But ironically, as Leon Morris points out, 'The Greeks thought of the gods as detached from the world, as regarding its struggles and heartaches, and joys and fears, with serene divine lack of feeling. John's *lógos* does not show us a God who is *serenely detached*, but a God who is *passionately involved*'. Thus, through the Spirit of God, John disclaims the errors of Greek philosophy, and emphatically proclaims that the pre-existent *lógos* – who had brought all things into being and continued to sustain the universe, Col. 1. 16-17, had in truth become man, John 1. 14. God had entered human experience and thereby becomes the most *important lógos* for today! Who could fathom the depth of this glorious mystery that God in all His essential being, John 1. 1, limits Himself to a human body to redeem fallen humanity, Phil. 2. 2-8.

The fact that God has finally spoken in His Word means that believers today are tasked with communicating good news to a lost world. This will inevitably challenge us, not only in terms of how we should communicate, but our own personal relationship with the incarnate Word. We will need to personally

- L**isten to the Word of God, Matt 13. 20; Acts 13. 7-44, which will then lead us to
- O**bey the Word of God, 1 Sam: 15. 22; Rom 6. 17, and in so doing we will see the
- G**lory of God in the face of the incarnate Word of God, 2 Cor 4. 6, and seek to
- O**ffer to Him all that we are, Rom. 12. 1; 2 Tim. 4. 6, so that we are found worthy to
- S**uffer for His name - the *lógos* of God, Acts 5. 41. How appropriate then that John should use this term for our Lord Jesus Christ who so embodied the word of God in His life, Matt. 4. 4, being the Word of God incarnate, 1 John 1. 1-2.

For further reading/study

Introductory

Moulton, Harold K. *The Challenge of the Concordance – Some New Testament Words Studied in Depth.*
Vine, W. E. *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words.*

Advanced

Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature.*
Brown, Colin. *Dictionary of New Testament Theology.*
Kittel, G. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament.*
Silva, Moisés, *Biblical Words and their Meaning – An Introduction to Lexical Semantics.*



THE SHACK

Should I read it? Would I enjoy it?

By **DANIEL RUDGE** Bracknell, England

Many will have heard of, if not read, a Christian fiction book called *The Shack*. The book has enjoyed huge recent popularity. It has topped the *USA Today* and *New York Times* bestsellers lists and remained the number one bestseller on the latter for thirty-three straight weeks. As of July 2009, over five million copies were in print with proposed translations into over thirty-five different languages.

EUGENE PETERSON, a well-known name in evangelical circles in the USA, has stated that 'this book has the potential to do for our generation what John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* did for his. It's that good!' I beg to differ. *Pilgrim's Progress* was a book faithfully built upon the sound foundation and teaching of the word of God. *The Shack* is not. In fact it hints at, and, in places, explicitly teaches doctrines that are contrary to scripture.

The author, WILLIAM PAUL YOUNG, was born in Canada and raised among a tribe by his missionary parents in New Guinea. He is married to Kim and they have six children.

Undoubtedly, the book is brilliantly written. YOUNG is able to paint beautiful pictures in the mind's eye whilst engendering a sense of pace as the book moves from one event to the next. The plot of the book is simple and compelling; a meeting face to face with God at *The Shack*. The story follows Mackenzie Allen Philips, a family man, married to Nan and father of five children. Not only did Mack experience a troubled childhood, but, tragically, his youngest daughter Missy is abducted during a family holiday. The evidence that she has been brutally murdered later appears in a deserted shack, four years later to be the meeting place between Mack and God. Here, Mack wrestles to understand the painful events that have littered his life, for which he blames God. At this point I should offer a warning. As compelling and engaging as the book might be, it contains many serious doctrinal

inaccuracies which must be rejected. Some of the more salient errors concern:

THE REVELATION OF GOD. The revelation of God in *The Shack* is a great shock to Mack. God the Father is referred to as 'Papa' and is represented as a 'large, beaming African-American woman'. The Lord Jesus is represented as a Middle Eastern man 'dressed like a labourer, complete with tool belt and gloves' and the Holy Spirit as a 'small, distinctively Asian woman'. Some would call this blasphemous.

Scripture clearly teaches that there is one God. He is three distinct (not separate) Persons in one divine nature, Matt. 3. 16-17, 28. 19. No man has seen God at any time. God is Spirit; only Christ has a physical body and only He is the revelation of God's Person and character, John 1. 18.

THE NATURE OF GOD. There is an overemphasis of God's attributes of love, mercy and grace at great cost to His holiness, righteousness and justice. This is a gross misrepresentation. For example, at one point 'Papa' states 'I don't need to punish people for sin. Sin

is its own punishment'. One of the most serious errors propagated by the book is the error of co-incarnation and co-crucifixion (the false teaching that the whole trinity became incarnate and was crucified). Young further suggests that Christ was not forsaken at Calvary but merely 'felt' as if this was the case.

God is holy and must punish sin, Ezek. 18. 2. Only Christ became incarnate, not the whole trinity, John 1. 14. Likewise, Calvary certainly cost God everything, but it was only Christ who suffered for our sins, 1 Pet. 3. 18.

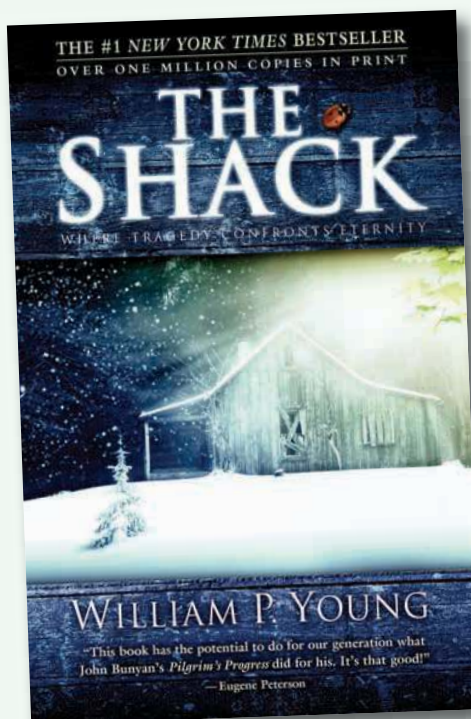
THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE. YOUNG promotes personal experience over the scriptures. He clearly suggests that 'the solutions to life's basic problems come from extra-biblical experience, not from scripture. Non-biblical voices are given precedence over the voice of God in scripture', NORMAN GEISLER. The author's lack of respect for the scriptures is evidenced throughout.

Such lack of respect for the word of God is certain to lead to error, 2 Tim. 4. 4, and denies the relevance, power and guidance the word of God provides for believers today, 2 Tim. 3. 16-17; Rom. 15. 4.

THE WAY OF SALVATION. The book overemphasizes the grace and love of God and limits His justice. This leads to the propagation of universal reconciliation, the doctrine that all will eventually find salvation in Christ. JAMES B. DEYOUNG has written at length on this subject, clearly showing that this damaging false doctrine seems to be at the heart of the whole novel. His paper, *At the Back of The Shack, A Torrent of Universalism* is freely available on the internet.

In conclusion, I would not recommend this book to any believer, far less a believer young in the faith. There is great danger contained in the subtlety with which this book propagates error. As CHUCK COLSON has stated, the reasons to 'stay out of *The Shack*' far outweigh any merit the book may exhibit.

DANIEL RUDGE is in fellowship in the assembly at the Gospel Hall, Netherton, Bracknell. He is married with two young children and teaches at a secondary school in Reading. He is actively involved in the assembly and the surrounding area in preaching and Bible teaching.





SIGNS, WONDERS AND MIRACLES – STUDIES OF THE MIRACLES

STUDY 2. MATTERS OF LIFE AND DEATH

By **GRAHAM HOBBS** Bognor Regis, England

Unless otherwise stated quotations are from the English Standard Version (ESV)

In our first article of this series (*PSI* vol. 64 no.1, February 2009) focusing on the signs of John's Gospel we observed that of the three Greek words (*dumamis*, power; *teras*, wonders; and *semeion*, signs) used in the Gospels to describe the wondrous deeds of the Lord Jesus, John predominantly employs *semeion*, meaning sign. He thus indicates the significance, or teaching intended, of those acts that underline Christ's deity. We also noted that the eight signs included by John are recorded and arranged in the form of an introversion, i.e., the first corresponds with the eighth, the second with the seventh, etc., thus making four pairs.

In this second article we look at the second and the seventh of these signs and discover that they are linked by matters of life and death. The official's son was *at the point of death*, John 4. 47, while Lazarus *had been dead four days*, John 11. 39. Death speaks of the destitution of Israel's national life, but in God's eternal purposes there will be a 'resurrection'. Ezekiel chapter 37 verses 1-14 tells of a valley of dry bones, on which God will breathe to make those dry bones live. Note also Hosea chapter 13 verse 14, 'I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death'. In these two signs Christ clearly demonstrates His authority over 'the king of terrors', Job 18. 14.

At the point of death, John 4. 46-54

The official's son in this incident had reached the point of no return – the point of death. Human resources had failed to effect a cure and, humanly speaking, there was no hope! In scripture, death is described as an enemy – it will be the last of our enemies to be destroyed. By nature we are dead in trespasses and sins, Eph. 2. 1. In reality, ours is a living death – we are alive physically, but dead spiritually; alive to the things in the world around us, the temporal things of time and sense, but dead to God Himself and the things of God, the unseen, eternal things.

It is said that death is the great leveller. Some people may live much longer or shorter than others, but whatever they have achieved or may achieve, sooner or later everyone must die. Sir Winston Churchill, in his radio tribute to King George VI said, 'During these last months the King walked with death, as if death were a companion, an acquaintance whom he recognized and did not fear. In the end death came as a friend and after a happy day . . . he fell asleep, as every man who strives to fear God and nothing else in the world may do'.



On the other hand, Napoleon Bonaparte said, 'I die before my time; and my body will be given back to earth to become the food of worms. Such is the fate that awaits the great Napoleon!' May our sentiments rather be those of Job, 'I know that my Redeemer lives . . . and after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God', Job 19. 25-26.

Distance is no problem to the Lord Jesus. He just spoke the word in Capernaum and it took immediate effect in Cana, some fifteen miles away. He can still deal with the deadly plague of sin wherever and whenever. Do we have a close relative about whom we should be telling the Lord of life?

Dead four days, John 11. 1-46; 12. 1-2

If it was *almost too late* for the official's son, then it certainly seemed *far too late* for Lazarus – he had been dead for four days.

Is death, separation or annihilation? We need to ask a further question, 'What is man?' Unlike other creatures, man was created in the image of God, in God's likeness. What does that mean? God is Spirit and He has given man a 'spirit-nature'. Scripture distinguishes for us that man is much more than a physical body, rather he is a tri-partite being, 1 Thess. 5. 22-23.

Body with which he is world-conscious
Soul with which he is self-conscious
Spirit with which (potentially) he is God-conscious

The body will die, but the soul and spirit are indestructible. To Solomon it was revealed that God 'has put eternity into man's heart', Eccles. 3. 11. God created man for eternity and made him in the image of His own immortality, with the potential to live forever. Although He gave man almost unlimited choice of action, He stipulated one prohibition, Gen. 2. 17, 'Of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou dost not eat of it, for in the day of thine eating of it – dying thou dost die' YLT. Man's physical and spiritual death were thus envisaged! We know that man disobeyed God and suffered the consequences, so he started to die *physically*, an irreversible process; and immediately he died *spiritually* – fellowship with God was severed. Although he remained a human being, every part of him was alienated or separated from God, but he was not annihilated.

When Lazarus died physically, his soul and spirit were separated from his body – his body was separated from his relatives and friends. That physical state is an illustration of spiritual reality. Sin has cut us off from spiritual relationship with God and Christ. We have already

S IN JOHN'S GOSPEL D DEATH

noted the tragic distinction made in Ephesians chapter 2 verse 1. We need to be 'made . . . alive together with Christ', Eph. 2. 5.

Martha and Mary expressed their thought that it was too late to do anything about Lazarus' death, even for Jesus, John 11. 21, 32. But He took the opportunity to state that He is the very embodiment of resurrection and life, vv. 25-26. His breach of orthodoxy and His authoritative command, vv. 39, 43, led directly to Lazarus' astonishing resurrection, though sadly, only to die again later. What of Jesus' claim, 'Everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die', v. 26? The obvious thought would be that true believers, still alive when He comes again, will never die physically. But there is also the possible connotation that true believers will never die spiritually.

The words of CHARLES WESLEY still ring true today.

*He speaks and, listening to His voice,
New life the dead receive,
The mournful, broken hearts rejoice,
The humble poor believe.*

We do well to kindly remind unsaved friends, contacts and relatives that though death is a biological event, it also has a theological meaning. Death is not the end; it is separation, not annihilation. People may be dead and buried, but they are not dead and gone. From the least to the greatest, all will rise. Multitudes 'who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt, Dan. 12. 2; cf. also John 5. 28-29. Jesus Himself clearly indicated that there is life beyond the grave, to be spent in one of only two eternal destinies, see Luke 16. 19-31. May people be warned and prepared for that awesome future.

To be continued

GRAHAM HOBBS is a retired training manager and is now in fellowship with the assembly in Bognor Regis. His written and oral ministry is appreciated in England and he also regularly visits Albania where he is involved in Bible teaching and evangelism.



The Eternal Christ

Part 5 The Future of Christ

By **J. E. TODD** Chesterfield, England

He is coming to rule over the nations

When the Son of God came into this world at His first advent He suffered the humiliation of rejection, 'He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not', John 1. 10. But at His second advent, 'When the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ', 2 Thess. 1, 7-8. The One who came in humility as the Lamb of God, John 1. 29, will return in power as the King of kings and Lord of lords, Rev. 19. 16.

The Old Testament prophets looked forward to the day when the rejected One will reign over all the earth. 'Thou art my Son. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel', Ps. 2. 7-9; 'Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him', Ps. 72. 11; 'And the Lord shall be king over all the earth', Zechariah 14. 9. 'The Son of man . . . And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that people, nations, and languages, shall serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed', Dan. 7. 13-14. The universal reign of the Lord Jesus Christ will be of peace and prosperity, 'In his days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth', Ps. 72. 7.

The New Testament prophet, the apostle John, also foresaw the day when 'The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever', Rev. 11. 15. But as far as this old earth is concerned His reign will last only a thousand years, 'Christ shall reign a thousand years', Rev. 20. 6.

He is coming to reign forever over the new creation

'And I saw a new heaven and a new

earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away', Rev. 21. 1. After Christ's thousand year reign over this earth has ended, when the old earth has passed away, then will dawn God's new creation.

This present creation has been ruined by human sin. When God looks down on the earth this is what He sees, 'And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the Lord that he had made man upon the earth, and it grieved him at his heart', Gen. 6. 5-6; 'And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth', Gen. 6. 12. As then, so now, and ever be, 'The nations went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them', Rev. 20. 8-9. But God has promised a new creation, 'Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness', 2 Pet. 3. 13.

The new heaven and the new earth will be the dwelling place of God and His people for eternity. 'He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God', Rev. 21. 3. The Lord Jesus Christ will reign over the new earth, sharing the very throne of God, 'the throne of God and of the Lamb', 22. 3. With the Father He will receive the worship of that new creation, 'And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it', 21. 22.

'Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever', Heb. 13. 8.

JOHN TODD has contributed articles to assembly magazines since 1986. He was evacuated from London 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.



THE SEVEN GREAT WORDS OF GALATIANS PART 2

(References from the Revised Version)

By **DREW CRAIG** Belfast, N. Ireland

As we have seen, the seven great word themes of Paul's letter to the Galatians open up the whole of this epistle to us. They are as follows:

Revelation: 1. 12, 16; 2. 2.

Liberation: 2. 4; 5. 1-13.

Justification: 2. 16.

Crucifixion: 2. 20; 5. 24; 6. 14

Unification: 3. 28.

Transformation: 4. 19.

Identification: 6. 17.

We now continue our studies with word number 5: *unification*.

Unification

'Ye are all one (man) in Christ Jesus', 3. 28. Jew, Gentile; bond, free; male and female are listed. This does not do away with nationality or gender. Rather, it puts all categories of believers on the same basis and on the same level; equally one in Christ. This is an indissoluble union; it can never be ruptured or annulled. The hymnwriter has caught the true meaning, 'Once in Christ, in Christ for ever, thus the eternal covenant stands'.

In John chapter 10 verses 27-28, the Good Shepherd announces the terms for being one of His sheep, 'I give unto them eternal life and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one'. The uniqueness of this unity He expresses and emphasizes further to His disciples, 'If any man love me he will keep my word: and my Father will love him and we will come unto him and make our abode with him', John 14. 23. The same apostle in the introduction to his first letter links this to the idea of fellowship, partnership or communion, 'That which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you also, that ye also may have fellowship with us; yea and our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. In His intercessory prayer, we realize what the continuing unity of His

own meant to Him. While they could never be separated as to their position in Him, there could be a disruption in fellowship and that could be only of benefit to 'the evil one' hence the prayer's intensity, 'Holy Father, keep them in thy name, which thou hast given me, that they may be one even as we are', John 17. 11.

Transformation

'My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you', 1 John 4. 19. This is the high water mark of Christian living. It is a blessed fact to be *in* Christ, but to have Christ *formed in* us is quite another matter. W. E. VINE in his *Dictionary of New Testament Words* explains, 'This refers not to the external and transient, but to the inward and real . . . it expresses the necessity of a change in character and conduct to correspond with inward spiritual condition, so that there may be moral conformity to Christ'. It is important to note the word 'until'. The apostle does not say 'might'. He is confident that this transformation can take place, but at the cost of his continued intervention and intercession in spiritual birth pains. It entails anxiety, labour and wrestling in prayer for them. This begs the question, 'Who is doing this for us now?' Many of us have had spiritual mentors, those who have watched for our souls, Heb. 13. 17. Perhaps this goes some way in finding an answer. But we know, too that 'the Spirit himself maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God', Rom. 6. 23-27.

Identification

'I bear branded on my body the marks of Jesus', John 6. 17. It seems best to take this text literally and to see these as physical scars, the evidence of vicious thrashings at the hands of the enemies of his Lord. Acts chapter 16 verse 23 refers to 'many stripes'; 2 Corinthians chapter 6 verse 5, 'in stripes'; and in chapter 11 verse 25, 'thrice was I beaten with rods'.

As in this first century so the persecution of those who identify themselves as believers in the One true God and His Son Jesus Christ continues with unrelenting fury. This is an area of Christian profession with which we who live in freedom should feel very uncomfortable. 2 Timothy chapter 2 verse 12 tells us plainly that 'if we suffer (endure), we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us'. I often ask myself, 'Is God partial?' In other words, why have some places in our world, notably in what we call 'the West', been spared physical and psychological persecutions while for millions of other believers in many lands it has been and is still their common lot? If we consider carefully and prayerfully the present condition of our so called free world we can only conclude that there are dark clouds on the horizon. Restrictions on Christian teaching and testimony are now gaining a frightening momentum. The intensity of evil and sheer godlessness is bound soon to reap a harvest of judgement. A correct reference is often made to the imminent return of the Lord Jesus for His church; is it possible that before He gives the 'shout' we, too, here in free and favoured countries, may have to face an onslaught of suffering shame for His name? Something I think we should ponder! Running well; who did hinder you that you should not obey the truth'.

*'Must I be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease,
While others fought to win the prize
and sailed through stormy seas?'*

DREW CRAIG has for the past 35 years been in the assembly formed in Brooklands, Dundonald, Belfast, which commenced as an outreach from the Gospel Hall in Dundonald. Drew has been occupied with preaching, teaching and shepherding in the assembly. In 1984, whilst it was still under communist rule, he visited Romania. In the subsequent years has visited on average once per year to encourage assemblies in various parts of the country.



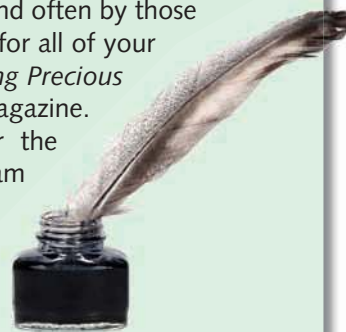
REPORTS REPORTS REPORTS

GOSPEL WORK AND OTHER ACTIVITIES

Compiled by STEPHEN BAKER

It does not seem four and half years since I took on the responsibility for the 'Reports Section' of this magazine. I have to say that despite the need to push people at times for reports (due to their natural/spiritual shyness and reluctance to tell what the Lord has been doing in their area) I have thoroughly enjoyed working on this area of the magazine. I have read firsthand how the Lord is raising up men and women to reach out with the gospel and have been so encouraged to discover souls being saved and assemblies clearly motivated to spread the good news of salvation. I want to take this opportunity to thank each of the contributors for sending me regular reports of the Lord's work. I am very conscious that I have been only the compiler; the hard work was done on the ground and often by those who passed the information to me – many thanks for all of your help and hard work. I am off now to edit the *Young Precious Seed* section from the February 2010 issue of the magazine. Sandy Jack of Eastbourne will be looking after the 'Reports' and the 'Views from the News' and I am sure that he will value the help of anyone who is willing to type up a report and to send it to him.

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find any of their literature amongst the rubbish from fast-food stalls and other similar stalls.

One of the believers went to the Council Offices the next morning and discussed the situation. He was informed that the local bye-laws forbade the distribution of literature on Council land. His response to the council was that various organisations were doing this and the assembly had specified that they would be doing it on the Application Form which had subsequently been approved by the Council. Later that day, we received another visit from the Officer who said we could distribute literature but only within a one metre radius of the marquee front!

While considering this the local saints realized that the bye-laws only applied to the site and not to the pavement from which the site was accessed. They therefore continued their distribution at the entry and exit points on the pavement. One brother and his wife also decided that they would also approach hotels along the seafront, which are booked solid with would-be spectators, and ask them if some of the scripture cards could be left on their display tables for their guests to pick up for free. They were slightly concerned about how this suggestion would be received as some of the proprietors were people of other faiths, but they need not have worried. The



ENGLAND

MIDLANDS AND SOUTH

Eastbourne – 'The Airbourne Air Show'

'Airbourne' is a four-day air show which takes place every each year on the seafront at Eastbourne. Many thousands of people, both local and worldwide, descend on the seafront to watch the aerial acrobatics which include a performance from the famous 'Red Arrows', many fly-pasts, including The Battle of Britain fleet, and various stunts such as wing-walking.

There are also many stalls and static displays on the lawns bordering the beach.

Five years ago due to the driving force of the late Philip Prior, the assembly in Eastbourne decided to hire and pitch a small marquee at Airbourne with the aim of distributing Christian literature. The literature included tracts and some excellent postcard and credit card-sized items produced by Nathan Griffiths featuring pictures of the Red Arrows and other aircraft, a challenging thought on the front and a suitable scripture verse on the back.

This work continued for two years with no problems apart from the requirement imposed by the town council (on whose land the marquee was pitched) that we had to compile a Health and Safety Assessment and a Fire Safety Assessment.

On the third year, the Council Officer overseeing the event visited the marquee and demanded that, under threat of closure, the distribution of literature to people visiting the air show stop immediately as this caused a litter problem! That evening, the local believers surveyed the site and did not



The Red Arrows at the Eastbourne Air Show





hotel owners freely gave permission and remarked favourably on the quality of the cards.

As the fourth year approached, the assembly decided in the light of the restrictions, the friction generated by the Council, the cost of hiring the marquee and the pitch that it was not cost-effective to continued to be represented at the event. In the week before the Show, the same couple took the scripture cards to the same hotels as the year before and were greeted with open arms!. The cards had proved so popular with guests that they wanted to know where to get extra when the piles were gone. Twice the numbers of cards as they had bedrooms were allocated and supplies were replenished halfway through the Air show. The distribution was also extended to the smaller hotels and guesthouses in the area.

This is the fifth year of the assembly's involvement in the Air Show and the same approach has been adopted with the same enthusiastic response. Some of the hotel staff also collect the cards for their children or send them to relatives. Another tentative initiative was to place some scripture cards in Rest Homes and Nursing Homes. When visiting one of the residents, the believers were amazed to learn that the organized activity that day had been to send 'Marine Hall postcards' to their relatives worldwide! These cards are also given out on the street by various members of the assembly during the Air Show. 'We find that we are being chased by children who are queueing up to ensure they have 'the complete set'! The local saints are amazed at what the Lord has done. Truly, He has made the wrath of the Council to praise Him! We were enabled to give out over 8000 of these cards and God alone knows how far they have travelled and in how many homes they are now displayed.



Sea King helicopter



ENGLAND

DEVON & CORNWALL

REPORT ON GOSPEL WORK DEVON AND CORNWALL

The Annual Camp at Fowey, Cornwall

There was an increase in the number of campers attending this year's Assemblies Youth Camp at Fowey in Cornwall. The camp has been held annually for over thirty-five years using the schools in the town of Fowey as a residential centre for the week's gospel outreach. The camp has always been the responsibility of the assembly in **St. Austell** and remains one of this assembly's yearly outreach efforts among young people.

The week was a great encouragement to us as young people, mostly from Devon and Cornwall, sat to listen to the messages faithfully delivered by Mark Lacey from Bath. This camp brings together a number of promising young people helpers from the Thames Valley area who for a number of years have given up their holidays to come down to support the work as tent officers. Another interesting aspect of the camp is the number of parents who live locally, regularly dropping in to spend time watching the activities and listening to the gospel message.

After a week enjoying the lovely beaches and seeing the various centres of interest in the area, the opportunity is always taken on the last day (Friday) to spend the afternoon in the town of Fowey. An open-air meeting is held on the Town Quay. This takes the form of some singing and then a gospel message. The area is flooded with holidaymakers at this time of the year and so is an excellent form of outreach. The believers who run the camp are pleasantly surprised by the interest shown by the visitors (believers and unbelievers) in the camp and its purpose.

Holiday Bible Club, St. Austell

The assembly in **St. Austell** has for many years held a Holiday Bible Club (HBC) in the Hall the week before the schools return for the autumn term.

Fowey harbour



The aim is to establish fresh contacts as well as reconnecting with old ones before the re-start of the youth/ children's activities.

This year HBC was held in the local Junior School hall due to the demolition and rebuilding of the Gospel Hall. The weekly children's After School Club has been held here since the old Hall went out of use in May. This resulted in seeing greater numbers than ever before with over thirty coming each day. The assembly does the two-hour sessions with its own personnel and the help of a number of the children's parents who stay for the whole session. This year's theme was 'Joseph' and the days quickly passed in a flurry of singing, quizzes, games and craft activities and at the end they had a full contact address book for the restart of the youth programme later in September.

The new meeting place for the assembly on the original site is beginning to take shape and is on schedule for a completion date of April/May 2010, DV. While meeting temporarily in the W.I. Hall down the road from the old Hall, the assembly has been blessed to see several coming into fellowship and other individuals attending the meetings who haven't done so previously. Recently, two middle-aged men made professions of faith in Christ and this greatly encouraged the local saints as they have seen the hand of the Lord with them despite the upheaval of the rebuilding project and all the associated issues.

Beach Missions in Cornwall and Devon

Annually, for many years now certain beach towns are visited and evangelized by teams of believers for several weeks during the peak holiday season. These teams often enjoy the



PHOTO: Scripture Union

Perranporth Beach Mission in action

hospitality offered by the assemblies in these towns. They, in return, boost the work of such assemblies as this solid group of devoted young men and women help with the meetings on the Lord's Day.

These teams always have to apply to the local authorities for permission to use the beaches for the two or three sessions they run each day. These are great opportunities to evangelize parents and children on holiday. At **Lyme Regis** this year they received a letter from the Town Council stating that they were regarded as being an important part of the town's offering to those who come there on holiday and as a valued part of this they were very welcome every year. This was music to their ears and God was thanked for what must be an unusually warm response from the a Local Authority. The team reported having over seventy at their 'Family Night' on the Thursday and that numbers had been very good throughout the three-week effort with evidence of blessing.

There have also been teams at **St. Ives**, where the assembly at **Barnoon** has fellowship in the work, and again a team at **Polzeath** in Cornwall. These teams work all through the holiday period and after much sowing the need now is to pray for the reaping!



The assembly in **Bromborough** had the Lancashire Gospel Tent for four weeks of adult and three weeks of children's outreach meetings during June 2009. Ian Jackson and Ian Campbell were the evangelists. This was the seventh time the Tent had been to Bromborough

over the last fifteen years. The Tent complemented a wide range of outreach activities through the year. Existing contacts were consolidated and new contacts made. Prior to June special monthly prayer meetings were held and six thousand tracts and invitations were distributed in the village during May. The adults' and children's meetings were supplemented with weekly coffee mornings, afternoon teas, door-to-door visitation and about fifteen visits to local schools. All these were successful in getting new contacts. Excellent support was given from neighbouring assemblies throughout the month. Unsaved were present at every meeting, mainly brought through personal invitation and contacts.

A number of believers from local evangelical groups showed real interest in the truth being taught. There was great joy during the campaign with the news that two children were saved. Both are from Christian homes and will therefore continue to receive encouragement in spiritual things in the family circle. The Lord helped both His servants in the clear and powerful presentation of the gospel. The assembly was greatly encouraged by the campaign.



West Scotland

For several years the assembly in **Bridge of Weir** has used the village Gala Week as a means of reaching the town with the gospel. Many hundreds of visitors came to the stand again this June and received gospel literature and an invitation to attend a family night in the village hall. This was a children's meeting with a message for children and adults. More than eighty local people came, most for the first time, and heard a clear presentation of the gospel.

During the summer months, the assembly in **Gourock** holds its gospel service in the public park where there is a bandstand and plenty of seating available. Some people sit in the adjoining gardens, some bring their children into the play area within the bandstand and some others saunter by, all hearing the gospel. Some helpful



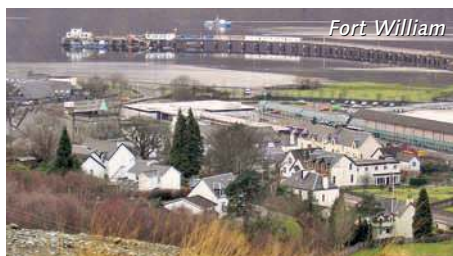
conversations have been held. So far this summer the weather has caused only one cancellation. In addition to this, door-to-door visitation takes place through-out the town and in the neighbouring village of **Inverkip**. Tracts were also distributed at the local Highland Games, and this year at the European Pipe Band Competition. George Forbes and Ian Mathers continue visitation work over a wider area, including the villages round about and then across the River Clyde to the Island of Bute. They also do some distribution in the Cowal peninsula. Prayer fellowship would be much appreciated for these forms of outreach.

Gospel Tent Work

Dan Gillies has again made good use of his tent over the summer months. In **Inchture**, Tayside. Stuart McGahie of the **Tayport** assembly helped with these meetings as the gospel was presented for two weeks at the end of June. The response was very encouraging. Twenty-five children regularly attended the children's meetings along with some parents, and local unsaved folks were present at all the adult meetings with as many as ten in on certain evenings. Prayer is requested for blessing on this effort which was the first in the area for about twenty-five years. Please pray especially for two teenage girls who came every night and showed a deeper than usual interest.

In **Thornhill**, Dumfriesshire, in July, Aaron Colgan of N. Ireland shared meetings with Dan Gillies as they worked in fellowship with the assembly at Kirkconnel. Only a few



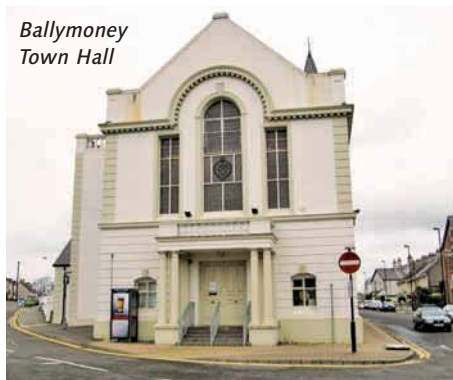


unsaved people came and sadly even some who had showed an interest last year showed no concern this year. Some older boys came to the children's meeting and showed a good interest in the gospel. A man from Sanquhar who was terminally ill professed salvation following visits to him, and he bore a clear testimony to his family before he went to be with the Lord shortly afterwards. Next it was **Inverlochy**, near Fort William, to an excellent site in the centre of the village where hundreds daily read the large banner (Acts 16. 31) alongside the tent. Around twenty different people came in; parents attended the children's meeting nightly, many doors were knocked and a lot of literature was distributed.

Finally, in August at **Edzell Woods** near Luthermuir children and parents attended meetings morning by morning for a week, with Brian Chalmers sharing in the work.



Please pray for gospel meetings which were held in **Ballymoney** Town Hall from Tuesday the 29th September 2009 till Friday the 23rd of October 2009. The gospel preachers were were Wesley Martin and John Fleck. Please pray that the Lord will bless this second venture where meetings have been held in an independent venue that many souls will seek the Lord and know His great salvation.



Treboeth Gospel Hall, Swansea

The assembly in **Treboeth** had a real thrill at the end of May this year when they saw seven young people being baptized. It had been quite a few years since there had been any baptisms in **Treboeth** and the event was marked not only by joy but a distinct recognition that the Lord had answered prayer. The work among young people has gone on faithfully week by week and so the time of reaping was a real blessing. Many friends and families attended which was a great form of testimony and despite the hall being full everyone witnessed the baptisms as they were projected on to a large screen. Please add your praise to that of the saints in **Treboeth** for what the Lord has done.



Indian brethren Conference

The second conference of Indian brethren was held at Sneaton Castle, Whitby, Yorkshire for four days at the end of August 2009. The first such conference for Indian believers, mainly from Kerala, now living in the UK, was held in 2007. Its success encouraged the committee to arrange this second one. It was attended by around one hundred and twenty brothers and sisters from assemblies throughout the UK. A time of instruction, encouragement, fellowship and blessing was enjoyed by all. The ministry was in both in English and in Malayalam. The theme of the ministry sessions was 'Prepare to meet thy God' with addresses on the expectation of the Lord's Return and how believers should live in the light of that. The Bible Readings were on Church Doctrine and Practice. The speakers were: Roy Hill, Bristol, UK; Alexander Kurian, Dallas, USA; and V. P. Poullose, Kerala, India. Brothers Kurian and Poullose also had meetings in various assemblies in England, N. Ireland and Dublin during their visit.



The following is a report from Paul and Sue Williams of the work in which they are involved in Romania.

Consecutive Bible teaching

The intensive Bible studies each Saturday in different regions of Romania (Bacau, Ploiesti and Vaslui) run from September to the end of May. During recent months studies have been held on Mondays in Calimanesti assembly on the book of Nehemiah, and Campina assembly on the New Testament, with brethren from six assemblies. The studies on the 1st and 3rd Tuesdays in Sebes Assembly, Alba, for believers from seven assemblies proved most helpful and these studies recommenced in September 2009. Most Wednesdays Paul has had profitable studies in assemblies in the county of Prahova: Varbilau, Moara Noua, Cocosesti and Popesti. On alternate Lord's Day afternoons (16.00 to 18.30) a Bible study has been conducted in Berteau, Prahova, for three local assemblies. Recently we enjoyed a weekend of meetings in the city of Craiova (S. W. Romania). On the Saturday Paul had a regional youth conference on 'The eternal state and its present day application for young believers'. One hundred and eighty young people listened attentively to this important subject. On the Lord's Day we had two meetings in the large Craiova assembly (three hundred and fifty believers) and during the afternoon Paul visited Filiassi assembly. During April Paul was in Sighet (on the Romanian/Ukrainian border) for four days of studies in Nehemiah 1-6, and the life of Elijah (five hours each day!). Visits were made to three assemblies in the county of Satu Mare: Potau, Satu Mare and Medies Ariet (twenty-three



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

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT (continued)

We concluded the previous article by noting that in the preceding context our Lord had spoken of the possibility of the disciple causing offence (i) to unbelievers, Matt. 17. 24-27, (ii) to fellow-believers, Matt. 18. 1-6, and (iii) to himself, Matt. 18. 8-9, and had then outlined the route to be followed if the disciple happened to be the one who had been caused offence, Matt. 18. 15-18.

On the face of it, therefore, the subject of 'offences' has been fully covered. But clearly not to Peter's satisfaction!

Matthew 18. 21. 'Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?"'

Peter considered it was not sufficient that the Lord required him to do all he could to reclaim (and, by implication, to forgive) a brother who had wronged him. Evidently, he felt it necessary that he be given a ruling as to how many times he was expected to forgive the offending brother.

As I understand it, given the two requests which lie at the heart of the Lord's story ('have patience with me' in verses 26 and 29), both the Lord and Peter assumed throughout the repentance of the offending party. This would be consistent with our Lord's later teaching concerning offences committed in a single day: 'If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and *if he repents*, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, *saying, "I repent"*, you shall forgive him'.¹

In all likelihood, when suggesting 'seven times', Peter was confident that, if anything, he erred on the generous side. For his 'offer' went far beyond the oral teaching of the Jewish Rabbis. Their standard seems clear; you are required to forgive only three times.

For example, according to the Babylonian Talmud, (a) Rabbi Jose ben Hanina said, 'One who asks pardon of his neighbour need do so no more than three times, as it is said', and (b) Rabbi

Jose ben Jahuda said, 'If a man commits a transgression, the first, second and third time he is forgiven, the fourth time he is not forgiven, as it is said, 'Thus says the Lord, For three transgressions of Israel, yea for four, I will not turn away their punishment'.²

Rabbi Jose ben Jahuda took his proof text from Amos chapter 2 verse 6. This was, in fact, one of eight occasions in chapters 1 and 2 when Amos used the same expression with respect to various nations.³ From these words of the herdsman-prophet Rabbi Jose ben Jahuda concluded that if the Lord was not prepared to spare men His anger if they committed an offence four times, then neither need he – or anyone else for that matter. Hence his ruling 'if a man commits a transgression . . . the fourth time he is not forgiven'. But our Rabbi friend, clearly not the brightest bulb on the chandelier of Bible interpreters, had entirely misunderstood the point; that the expression 'for three transgressions, yea for four' was never meant to be taken *literally* – that the expression indicated rather that the measure of the people's sins was full, and more than full.

But Peter had been in the Lord's company too long to expect to get away with only three times. So he doubled the Rabbinical standard of three, added one for good measure, and 'offered' a seven-fold forgiveness.

Verse 22. But, generous as Peter's 'offer' must have seemed to him, it was far from acceptable to the Saviour. 'Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven"'. By which our Lord did not mean, of course, that Peter should obtain a papyrus notepad and keep count – '487 . . . 488 . . . 489 . . . 490' – and that he was then at liberty to retaliate. Peter understood the Lord correctly. He clearly meant that Peter was to forgive times without number. Jesus' standard was not seven, nor 490 for that matter. His demand was for unlimited forgiveness.

It is likely that our Lord had in mind the words of Lamech, a descendant of Cain.⁴ This Lamech boasted to his wives that, if vengeance would have been exacted on Cain's behalf 'seven times', then on Lamech's behalf it would be exacted 'seventy times seven'. This is how the Greek Old Testament renders the words of Genesis chapter 4

verse 24, employing the very same expression as that used by the Lord Jesus in Matthew chapter 18.

Lamech was referring back to God's own words, 'Whoever kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold'.⁶ That is, this arrogant and blasphemous man was saying, 'If God once warned of a *sevenfold* vengeance on the killer of Cain, I hereby serve notice that I guarantee a *seventy times sevenfold* retribution on anyone who dares lift a hand against me'.

Certainly, it was the view of Tertullian (ca.160–ca.220 AD) that 'when Peter asked "whether a brother was to be forgiven seven times", He said, "Nay, rather seventy times seven", that He might remodel and improve the law by which in Genesis "vengeance over Cain" was reckoned "seven times, but over Lamech seventy times seven"'.⁷

I wholeheartedly endorse the claim, 'A definite allusion to the Genesis story is highly probable. Jesus pointedly sets against the natural man's craving for . . . revenge, the spiritual man's ambition to exercise the privilege of . . . forgiveness'.⁸

EXPOSITION

Verse 23. While Peter was doubtless still reeling from the Lord's demand for unlimited forgiveness, Jesus told the parable. Clearly, opening as it does with the word 'therefore', the parable's purpose was to illustrate our Lord's requirement for just that kind of forgiveness. 'Suppose', He asks in effect, 'that you do fulfil what to you is an outrageous demand, do you think that any number of offences committed against you can measure up to those which God has forgiven you?'⁹

Verse 24. An official was 'brought' to the king. And that word 'brought' stands in contrast to those occasions in verses 28 and 30 when Jesus said that the official 'went'. For here it is not said that he 'came' but that he was 'brought'. And small wonder. For this servant owed an immense, an astronomical debt. 'Ten thousand talents', Jesus said.

Frankly, it is impossible to express the sum with any degree of accuracy in present-day values. But it is clear that there was no way such a sum could represent a private debt owed by one individual to another. Ten thousand talents was rather the scale of transactions conducted between empires and kingdoms. Ten thousand talents was, for example, the sum with which Darius III sought to buy off Alexander the Great from entering Asia. It

was also the size of the indemnity (to be paid in 50 annual instalments) which Rome demanded of Hannibal of Carthage when a peace agreement was signed between them in 201 BC.¹⁰ And the fine which Rome imposed on Antiochus the Great at the Peace of Apamea in 188 BC, following Antiochus's defeat, was 15,000 talents, payable over 12 years.¹¹

To give some idea of the vastness of the sum, it appears that the combined annual tribute paid in the whole of Judea, Idumea, Samaria, Galilee and Perea was only 800 talents.¹²

One talent alone was the equivalent of 6,000 denarii. And Peter had earlier been present when the Lord had fed 'about five thousand men, besides women and children'.¹³ Just prior to feeding them, He had asked Philip, 'Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?' To which Philip had answered, 'Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little'.¹⁴

If, as a rough guide, we assume that two hundred denarii would have fed the 5,000 men, then 10,000 talents would have been sufficient to provide a meal for 1,500 million people; that is, well over a fifth of the world's population today.¹⁵

Peter's mouth must have dropped open at the suggestion that any one person – even if some high ranking official from the royal court – could ever owe such an enormous sum.

Verse 25. 'He was not able to pay', which was hardly surprising in the circumstances. The man was utterly bankrupt and, in accordance with both Roman and Jewish law, his lord ordered that he be sold, along with his family and all his possessions.¹⁶ Not that such a vast debt would be discharged by selling a single family into slavery. The very top price paid for a slave was about one talent, and slaves were usually sold for a tenth of a talent or less.

Verse 26. Again, not surprisingly, Jesus said, 'The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, "Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all"' – where the word 'all' is emphatic.

Peter's face must have been a picture! For it went without saying that such a man was hardly likely to be given a good job reference. And even if he did succeed in finding future employment, his problems were far from over. Based on another of our Lord's parables (that of 'The Workers in the Vineyard', Matt. 20. 1-15), a decent daily wage for an agricultural worker was one denarius.

Indeed, a denarius was also the daily pay of a common foot soldier in the Roman army.¹⁷ Even if we assume that the servant in our parable could earn a denarius a day, and that he was prepared to work every Sabbath and without any holidays, for him to pay off his entire debt would take 164,383 years, 6 months and 25 days!

The Lord's point was obvious. This was a debt which no man could ever hope to repay. I suspect that Peter roared with laughter at the whole idea. Why, the whole thing was ludicrous.

Verse 27. But, our Lord said in effect, the miserable servant was answered, indeed was answered super-abundantly above all he had any right to ask or think.¹⁸ He had requested the king to show him patience, but instead the king showed him compassion, giving him his freedom and extending him the most astonishing forgiveness.

'What a strange story', Peter may have thought, 'but at least it has a happy ending'. Ah, but wait, Peter; the Lord hasn't finished yet.

Verse 28. 'But', Jesus added, this same servant 'went out and found (seemingly having sought out) one of his fellow-servants who owed him a hundred denarii'.

And, contrary to the impression which many have as they read (and expound!) this parable, it is important to note that 100 denarii was far from being a trivial amount. After all, it amounted to over three months earnings for a vineyard worker.¹⁹ No doubt to Peter, as to Philip,²⁰ it was a considerable sum of money.

Jesus could have chosen a smaller amount if He had wished; for example, *ten* denarii – or *one* denarius. Indeed, He could have gone much smaller. There were 128 'mites' (*lepta*) in a single denarius!²¹ But our Lord chose to speak in terms of a small fortune, of three months wages.

I have no doubt He was making the point that offences between brethren, in themselves, are significant. They can be very hurtful. Such offences shrink in importance *only* when measured up against the sins of which we are guilty and which, in His grace, God has forgiven. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM (the 4th-century church father) expressed it well, 'Though you forgive seventy times seven, though you continually pardon your neighbour . . . as a drop of water to an endless sea, so much, or rather much more, does your love to man come short in comparison of the boundless goodness of God'.²²

But the forgiven servant seized his fellow-servant and began to throttle him.²³

Verse 29. The second servant pleaded for patience in words almost identical to those of the first servant.²⁴ Surely, the very words should have reminded the first servant of his own recently granted pardon.

Verse 30. 'He would not'. With the memory of the king's compassion and forgiveness still fresh in his mind, he had every incentive to grant an immediate and full pardon to his fellow-servant. But he (the first servant) wasn't willing to grant even an extension of time for him to repay that which he owed – which no doubt he could have been done within a relatively short period.

It appears that the first servant wasn't legally entitled to sell him into slavery to recoup such a relatively small debt. 'Even an inexpensive slave sold for five hundred denarii, and it was illegal to sell a man for a sum greater than his debt'.²⁵

In this case, the first servant 'threw him into prison till he should pay the debt'. I take it that, viewed simply in legal terms, what the first servant did was not technically wrong. He was within his 'rights' to act as he did. After all, the money was owed him. The law was on his side and doubtless any magistrate would have ruled in his favour.

True, but what he did *was* wrong. It was *morally* wrong, because he had been forgiven so much more. This was a case where that which could be said to be 'a right' was very much 'a wrong'!

I have no doubt that Jesus meant to shock and disgust Peter before He thrust home His point and said, in effect, with the prophet Nathan some thousand years before, 'You are the man'.²⁶ And just as the prophet Nathan first made King David angry with his story about the little lamb,²⁷ so I imagine Peter has long since stopped laughing and that he is now enraged over the first servant's action.

Verse 31. The other servants were 'very (exceedingly) grieved', Jesus said, over the action of this obnoxious character. They went therefore and 'told' ('made clear to', literally) their lord all that had happened.

Verse 32. Predictably, the king was not amused! 'Calling him forward' (literally), the king addressed the first servant sharply, 'You wicked servant'. The king had been prepared to excuse the man's incompetence or dishonesty, and to

forgive him 'all that debt' (the words our Lord emphasized by placing them first in His sentence), but not his heartlessness and unforgiving attitude.

Verse 33. Literally rendered, 'Should you not have had mercy on your fellow-servant, as I (emphatic) also had mercy on you?'

Verse 34. In his anger, the king had the wicked wretch cast into prison and his life made as miserable and as bitter as possible.

Verse 35. 'So', Jesus concluded, 'my heavenly Father also will do to you, if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses'. Not, of course, that God is in the business of cancelling the forgiveness of His true children. For in the Lord Jesus 'we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace'.²⁸

But we ignore at our peril the Lord's teaching about the way in which God deals with unforgiving people. And those who by trait of character and by persistent habit refuse to forgive others demonstrate that they themselves are total strangers to God's forgiveness. Whatever they may claim, they show that they know nothing of God's forgiveness. And God will not acknowledge as belonging to Him any who, by their unforgiving attitude and actions, show themselves to be devoid of compassion and mercy.

'If each of you, *from his heart*, does not forgive', the Lord said. That is, we must not forgive in word only, but genuinely and sincerely. Such forgiveness does not keep count. So we would never know if we did reach 490 times!

The Saviour is teaching that our acceptance of God's forgiveness imposes serious obligations on us. For, whether I knew it or not at the time, in seeking and accepting His forgiveness I implicitly pledged myself to extend forgiveness to all who wrong me and ask my forgiveness. As a Christian, to withhold my forgiveness from such is not an option open to me.

'Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you'.²⁹

Footnotes

- 1 Luke 17. 3-4.
- 2 These Rabbinical quotations come from the Soncino English Translation of the Babylonian Talmud, which can be found at <http://www.mediafire.com/?zjydkynwlbz>. The quotations come from Yoma 87a and 86b

respectively. A slightly different translation can be found at <http://www.sacred-texts.com/jud/t03/yom13.htm>, pages 139 and 137 respectively.

- 3 Amos used the expression of Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, Judah and Israel; see Amos 1. 3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2. 1, 4, 6.
- 4 Lamech was the seventh in Adam's line through Cain, Gen. 4. 17-18, just as Enoch was the seventh through Seth, Gen. 5. 6-18; Jude 14.
- 5 To be distinguished from the father of Noah, Gen. 5. 28-31.
- 6 Gen. 4. 15.
- 7 Quoted from Tertullian's treatise *Concerning Prayer*, the end of paragraph 7.
- 8 W. F. Moulton, quoted in J. H. Moulton's *The Grammar of New Testament Greek*, page 98.
- 9 When Jesus said 'a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants', the word translated 'servants' is literally 'slaves'. But we mustn't be misled by the use of this word. Greek writers such as Herodotus and Xenophon often applied the description 'slave' to important officers of state. In this parable our Lord pictures high officials, required to render their ruler an account of the revenues they had received.
- 10 See <http://www.livius.org/ha-hd/hannibal/hannibal.html>.
- 11 Compare also 1 Chron. 29. 7; Esther 3. 9.
- 12 This tribute was paid to two of the sons of Herod the Great; two hundred talents to Philip and six hundred talents to Archelaus. See Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book XVII, Chapter XI, Section 4.
- 13 Matt. 14. 21.
- 14 John 6. 5-7.
- 15 At the end of May 2009, the earth's population was estimated to be towards 6,800 million.
- 16 See Exod. 22. 3; 2 Kgs. 4. 1.
- 17 Publius Cornelius Tacitus, *The Annals*, Book 1, 17.
- 18 See Eph 3. 20.
- 19 Matt. 20. 2.
- 20 John 6. 7.
- 21 There were two *lepta* in one *quadrans*, Mark 12. 42. A *quadrans* was a quarter of an *assarion*, which was one-sixteenth of a *denarius*. See Alan Millard, *Discoveries from Bible Times*, page 232.
- 22 Homily 61 on the Gospel of Matthew.
- 23 To choke him. This is the word translated 'drowned' in Mark 5 verse 13.
- 24 The majority of the oldest manuscripts omit the word 'all' in the expression 'I will pay you all'.
- 25 D. A. Carson, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, on Matthew 18. 28-31.
- 26 2 Sam. 12. 7.
- 27 2 Sam. 12. 5.
- 28 Eph. 1. 7.
- 29 Eph. 4. 31-32.

Inside this Issue

EDITED BY IAN REES

2009 – The Year of Darwin?

Page 1

Singing with Understanding

Page 6

'So, it's Goodbye from him ...'

Page 8

YPS

(Young Precious Seed)

is a supplement of *Precious Seed International* designed for those young in faith. Its purpose is to restate timeless truths from the word of God for a new generation of Christians and to kindle a biblical approach to current issues in the world in which we live.

YPS is published by *Precious Seed International*, P.O. Box 573, Fareham, UK, PO14 9FB, and is also available separately from the magazine.

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2009 - The Year of Darwin?

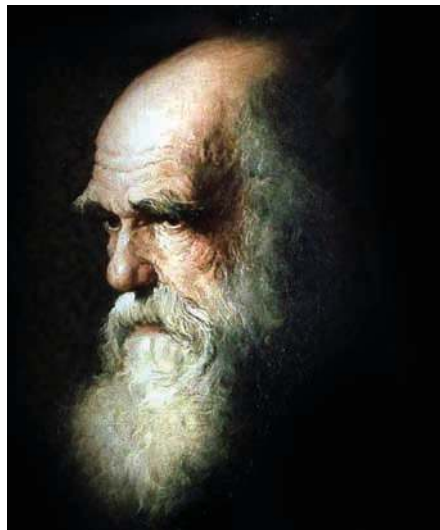
2009 has been called 'The Year of Darwin'. It is the 200th anniversary of his birth and the 150th anniversary of the publication of his hugely influential book *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* - a book greatly applauded by many and yet greatly regretted by not a few. This has been a significant year for promoting evolution even more than usual, with events organized all over the world in Darwin's memory. In the UK a £2 coin has been struck to mark it, on its reverse an image of Darwin facing a chimpanzee.

To many, this milestone marks more progress on the onward march of atheism. But believers in the Bible-based account of divine creation have nothing new to fear, in fact have nothing at all to fear. Our faith rests on the perfect revelation of the Creator God Himself, not the imperfect reasonings and biased proposals of man.

What kind of man was Darwin to have such a deep and lasting influence upon science and popular thinking? How did he reach those conclusions which are now taken for granted? Did he have any encounter with the Bible and Christianity? What about his family life and lifestyle? Here are some answers to these questions [1].

Family Background and Early Life

Charles Robert Darwin was born on 12th February 1809 in Shrewsbury, England, the second youngest of six children. His father Robert Darwin was a wealthy doctor, with a staunch



2009 – The Year of Darwin?

Unitarian religious background, as had his mother Susannah, the daughter of Josiah Wedgwood, the pioneer of the elegant blue and white Wedgwood pottery. As a baby Charles was 'baptized' in the Anglican church but attended the Unitarian chapel with his mother. His first school was run by a Unitarian preacher, but when he was eight his mother died, and thereafter he and his older brother Erasmus went to a local Anglican boarding school.

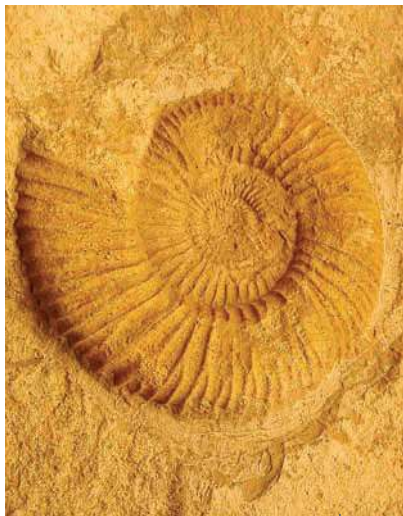
After his schooling, for a short time he was an assistant to his father who sent him to the University of Edinburgh to study medicine at the age of sixteen. But contact with human suffering and the sight of blood proved too much for him. He neglected his medical studies and side-stepped into taxidermy, botany and zoology during his second year. This annoyed his father immensely, who then sent him to Christ's College, Cambridge, to study for a BA degree, intending this to be a step towards 'the ministry' in the Church of England. However, his interest in

natural history developed further at Cambridge, influenced by Sedgwick, a geologist and Henslow, a botanist who believed that scientific work was 'natural theology'. William Paley's writings also impressed him, *Evidences of Christianity*, and *Natural Theology* which argued for design in nature and explained adaptation as God acting through laws of nature (which it is!). In his final examination in January 1831 he came tenth out of a pass list of 178.

The Famous Beagle Voyage

He spent the rest of 1831 doing field work in geology and biology, then in December, he found a place as a self-funded naturalist on *HMS Beagle* under the command of Robert Fitzroy, a strict man with fundamentalist religious beliefs. The voyage was to take two years charting the coast of South America, but it lasted for five years and circumnavigated the globe. Darwin was often badly seasick, for many days lying in his hammock eating only raisins. On board the *Beagle*, he would often quote the Bible as an authority on morality.

Observing the great variety of geological formations in different continents Darwin tried to reason how these came about by the effects of natural forces. He also observed many fossils and living creatures never seen before, sending many specimens back to England. At this time he read Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology* which described gradual geological change over immense periods of time. These observations and ideas set him thinking about a



new theory to account for the origin of different species which heretofore he had believed were the result of divine creation.

The *Beagle* returned to England in October 1836. By then, Darwin was a celebrity thanks to the specimens and reports he had sent home. He travelled and lectured widely, interacting with many other scientists. He developed his theory about *Transmutation of Species* (he did not call it evolution) and started to write seriously. Work on his famous book had begun, but aware of its controversial nature he hesitated repeatedly over publication. That would not be until 1859, but other things intervened.

Marriage and Later Life

The strain of overwork affected his health. Stomach problems and heart disease, worsened by stress, plagued him for the rest of his life. His doctors recommended spells of living in the country. One such spell with his Wedgwood relatives found him with a charming and intelligent lady called Emma, his cousin nine months his senior. Romance blossomed, and in January 1839 Charles Darwin married Emma Wedgwood in an Anglican/Unitarian ceremony. Emma held staunch Christian beliefs which she never abandoned. He had told her all about his new ideas on origins, by that time clearer in his mind. They candidly shared their differences, but Emma expressed her deep concerns that they might be separated after death because of this.

They lived at Downe, Kent, where

Charles Darwin died on 19th April 1882. He was given a state funeral and buried in Westminster Abbey. Sadly, there seems to be no truth in a story published in 1915 that he returned to Christianity and trusted Christ at the end of his life

they had ten children. Two of them died in infancy, and he was particularly distressed by the death of his 10-year old daughter Annie in 1851. By then he had abandoned any profession of Christianity and had stopped going to church.

Later in life he professed to be 'an agnostic' rather than an atheist denying the existence of God. But his upbringing, his belief in the truth of the Bible while at Cambridge, his quotations from scripture on board the *Beagle*, his church attendance in the early years of his marriage were all now far away. He adopted the position of denying all miracles and denying the factual and historical basis of the Gospels.

Charles Darwin died on 19th April 1882. He was given a state funeral and buried in Westminster Abbey. Sadly, there seems to be no truth in a story published in 1915 that he returned to Christianity and trusted Christ at the end of his life [2]. It is sad also that this story is still used by some to discredit evolution without checking the facts. Many other better reasons exist, the greatest being the Bible, the word of God.

2009 – The Year of Darwin?

The Origin of Species, 1859

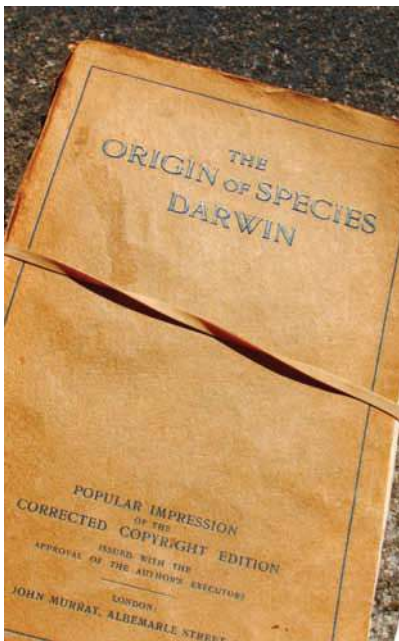
Darwin was forced to publish swiftly. In 1857 Alfred Wallace published a paper on the *Introduction of Species*. Seeing the similarities with Darwin's theory his friend Lyell urged him to establish precedence. On 18 June 1858, another paper by Wallace described natural selection. Shocked that he really had been forestalled, Darwin consulted Lyell. They quickly decided on a joint presentation of Darwin's work at the Linnean Society on 1 July. However, his youngest son of 18 months died of scarlet fever on 28 June and he was too distraught to attend.

On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or The Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life (its full title) was published on 22 November 1859. All 1,250 copies sold out at once. In the book, Darwin set out 'one long argument' with

observations, inferences and consideration of anticipated objections. He did not link man to animal ancestors in this book, afraid of its deeper implications, but in two more books published in 1871 and 1872 he clearly stated this link. His 1859 book has been called the most influential book ever published, although that accolade far more deservedly belongs to the Bible, and for far better reasons.

Reaction to it was mixed. Some scientists supported it enthusiastically, most notably Thomas Huxley, whose vigorous support earned him the title 'Darwin's bulldog'. But others had grave doubts [3]. The same was true within the Church of England - his Cambridge tutors Sedgwick [4] and Henslow dismissed the ideas, but the growing band of liberals interpreted natural selection as 'an instrument of God's design'. The process continues. In 2008, the Church of England issued an article saying that the 200th anniversary of his birth was a fitting time to apologize to him.⁵

Darwin never observed the transmutation (change) of species - this has never been observed because it does not happen! Species are permanent with fixed boundaries. What he did observe was adaptation within species in response to environmental conditions, a well-recognized process throughout nature. His bold, hypothetical jump was from 'microevolution' (observed) to 'general evolution' (imagined). Once he publicized this idea, others gladly seized upon it, and have used it



ever since to bolster atheism and materialism because that is what they prefer.

So is 2009 the Year of Darwin? – the man who gave mankind its true place as descended from primates and then from vague ancestors all the way back to nothing?

No, it is 2009 AD – **‘the year of our Lord’**. Year after year we remember the Son of God becoming man in order to redeem us, so that we might obtain the privileged place of the very sons of God, 1 John 3. 1. ‘His name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in Him’, Ps. 72. 17.

References

1. Factual material from *Charles Darwin - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia* en.wikipedia.org
2. *Darwin's Deathbed Conversion — a Legend?*
www.answersingenesis.org
3. ‘I have also seldom read a scientific book which makes such wide-ranging conclusions with so few facts supporting them ... I regard this as somewhat of a high-handed hypothesis, because he argues using unproven possibilities, without even naming a single example of the origin of a particular species’, J. H. BLASIUS, director of the Duke's Natural History Museum, Germany, in 1859.
4. Sedgwick wrote to Darwin, ‘I have read your book with more pain than pleasure. Parts of it I admired greatly, parts I laughed at till my sides were sore; other parts I read with absolute sorrow because I think them utterly false and grievously mischievous’. Cited by H.

Enoch, *Evolution or Creation?*, Evangelical Press, p.145.

5. M. Brown, Director of Mission and Public Affairs (2008) wrote, ‘Charles Darwin: 200 years from your birth, the Church of England owes you an apology for misunderstanding you and, by getting our first reaction wrong, encouraging others to misunderstand you still’.

BERT CARGILL was a chemistry lecturer for over thirty years. He has contributed to the work of the St. Monans assembly ever since his conversion as a teenager and has written several books and articles on this and other subjects.



Singing with understanding

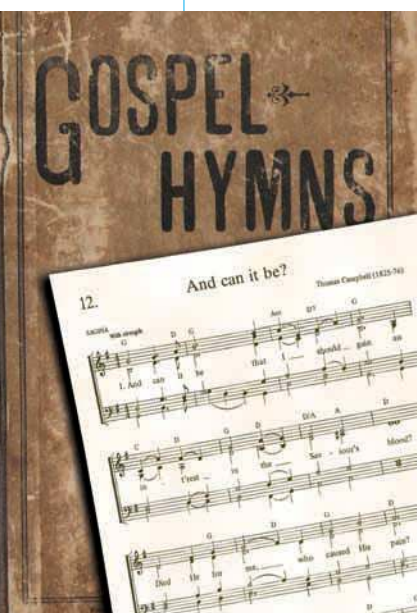
Singing plays a major part in Christian worship and experience. Right from the very beginning of the creation of this world there was singing: it is God Himself who tells us that, when He laid the foundations of the earth, 'The morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy', Job 38. 4-7. Heaven is a place of joy and it will be a place of singing, Rev. 5. 7-11; Rev. 14. 2-3; Rev. 15. 3. Even God Himself sings, we are told, for 'the Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing', Zeph. 3. 17.

The human heart and voice sing when they are happy and joyful. The very first mention of singing comes in Exodus chapter 15. God has just delivered His people in stunning and thoroughly unexpected circumstances. They have escaped what appeared to be certain annihilation and their enemies have been swept

away in the floods of the river. What is the result? For the first time in the Bible we read that men sang, 'Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea', 15. 1. This

singing expressed praise to God for His power and thanksgiving for His deliverance. So believers, in both Old and New Testaments, are encouraged to sing God's praises, 'O sing unto the Lord a new song; for he hath done marvel-lous things', Ps. 98. 1; 'Praise ye the Lord. Sing unto the Lord a new song, and his praise in the congregation of saints. Ps. 149.1; 'Sing unto the Lord, O ye saints of his, and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness', Ps. 30.4; 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord', Col. 3. 16.

Believers over the years have collected hymns and songs to enable them to sing together; that is one of the main purposes of the book of Psalms. It may very well be that the 'faithful sayings' of the Pastoral Epistles were snatches of hymns or songs that believers in New Testament days had learned to sing. But what songs or hymns should believers sing? Are only old hymns, that have stood the test of time, acceptable to sing? Is anything new worth singing? Is anything old still worth singing? On the one hand, mature believers enjoy singing old familiar hymns, and with very good reason, yet young believers, sadly, often find the words of such hymns old fashioned and don't appreciate them. Young believers, on the other hand, enjoy singing what's modern, what's fresh, what's new, yet older believers, sadly, often don't like modern hymns and songs and don't appreciate them. Yet surely we should be willing to accept both old and



new, provided the songs or hymns are well written, express soundly Christian faith and experience and are useful.

Many old hymns, it has to be said, were badly written, are dated in their expressions and dodgy in their theology; many new ones are also badly written, sloppy in their expressions and dodgy in theology. We need to use discernment in our choice of songs. The Bible does, after all, encourage us to think about what we are singing, and to use our brains as well as our tongues.

What is the point, for instance, in singing three verses of a song that says, 'The greatest thing in all my life is knowing You' if verse two says, 'The greatest thing in all my life is loving You' and verse three says, 'The greatest thing in all my life is serving You'? How can there be three 'greatest things'? It doesn't even make sense. What is the point of singing, often to those who are not saved, and don't know Bible stories anymore as people used to, 'Escape thou for thy life, tarry not in all the plain, nor behind thee look, no never, lest thou be consumed in pain'? What are they going to make of that? Many older Christians will not like an expression in a modern song that says the Lord 'took the fall and thought of me above all'. This is because, theologically speaking, the 'fall' is something that happened to Adam and Eve when sin came into the world, whereas the expression in the hymn is an American way of saying the Lord 'took the blame, the responsibility, for our sin'. There we are, you see. Modern songwriters are



By IAN REES

sloppy and dodgy. Yet I can remember growing up and hearing a brother regularly give out that lovely hymn 'And can it be that I should gain' by Charles Wesley. Yet without fail, the brother would read out disapprovingly the expression 'emptied Himself of all but love' and say this was error, for the Lord never emptied Himself of His divine nature. The phrase needs to be understood in the context of Philippians chapter 2 verse 7, where 'made himself of no reputation' can be translated 'emptied himself'. Did Wesley believe the Lord emptied Himself of His divine nature? Not at all, Wesley's other hymns are full of sublime expressions of the divinity of the Lord. Yet the hymn is still worth singing and no one would refuse to select it. The same can be said of a modern song that says the Lord Jesus, on the cross, 'became nothing'. Did He really become nothing? Was He not always the only begotten of the Father? Of course. Yet in the context of reputation, Phil. 2. 7 again, and in the context of suffering for sin, it can be said that He 'became nothing' as to reputation. The theology is no more dodgy than Wesley's.

Many Christian songs, both old and new, were written for individual

singing and are not suitable for congregations to sing together. The old song 'I come to the garden alone' is never selected for congregational use. It is a song, not a hymn. So, also, many new songs cannot be selected for Christian worship because they are not suitable. Styles of poetry and worship change. Christian hymns and songs these days seldom rhyme and they don't scan well either. Styles of music and tunes change too. Yet surely we should be willing to make careful selection of hymns and songs to sing publicly. Don't dismiss everything that's old merely because it is old, or everything new simply because it is new. Don't, on the other hand, sing everything old because it is old and everything new because it is new. Older believers enjoy singing the grand old hymns of the Christian faith and younger believers should learn to do the same. Young believers enjoy singing 'a new song' and older believers should learn to do the same. Whether we sing old or new, let us remember to lift our voices to God in heartfelt expressions of praise and thanksgiving, singing with the heart, but with the understanding also. As Paul says, 'I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also,' 1 Cor. 14. 15.

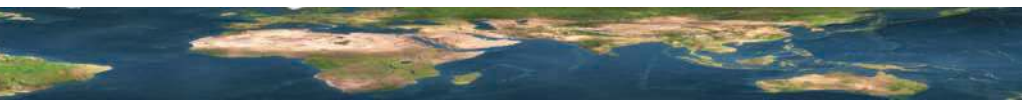
'So, it's Goodbye from him . . .'

This issue of *Young Precious Seed* brings us to the end of its sixth year. It was first introduced in 2003 and its aim was to deal with issues that young believers face, subjects upon which we all should have an opinion, and a biblical one at that, or subjects which are not normally preached on from the pulpit. On the ethical front, we have looked at what the Bible teaches about abortion, euthanasia, whether the death penalty for murderers is biblical or not, gambling, animal rights and homosexuality. We have looked at what a biblically-based local church looks like, how it should function, how we can join it and what should our responsibilities be in it. We have studied baptism and fellowship, the breaking of bread and we also looked at prayer by studying the Lord's Prayer. We have looked at what the Bible teaches about courtship and marriage, and whether it is all right to marry a non-Christian. We have also taken a good look at what the Bible teaches about God – what He looks like, where He lives, who made Him, what He knows and what He can do, whether He is ever unkind or unfair. We ran a series on how to study the Bible, and also a series on the wise sayings from the book of Proverbs and we looked into the mirror and saw some of the foolish attitudes we should not show in our lives. We also found some comfort from the word of God on how we can have assurance of salvation and *know* that we are soundly saved.

I have thoroughly enjoyed setting up and editing YPS over these six years, and also setting up youngpreciousseed.org with its special web-only content. However, it is time to move on and this issue, with an article on Charles Darwin, will be my last as editor. Stephen Baker is going to take over YPS and will bring a fresh look, a new vision and a different approach to it. I know you will continue to enjoy reading it, and recommending it to others. My responsibilities for a while will be on the editing of books for Precious Seed Publications. It is my hope that you will buy some of these books and find them useful to you. Happy reading!



Ian Rees



believers were baptized in this assembly recently and five people professed salvation). Recently, Paul was invited for a weekend of meetings in Dorohoi, N. E. Romania. On the Saturday he spoke at a regional youth conference to one hundred and twenty-five young people on the important subject of 'Evidences of the new birth in 1 John'.

Christian infant school

Prayer is valued for Sue and the two Christian teachers in the Strejnic Christian Infant School. There was a special Easter gospel meeting in Strejnic assembly with a very good number of unsaved in the hall packed with over three hundred and fifty people, including the local mayor. The infant school in Strejnic has progressed well during the last school year.

Literature work

The translation and checking of the first phase (nine of the seventeen modules) of the Sunday School and Bible Cclass teaching material has been completed. Printing is planned for August. These consecutive Bible lessons for children, teenagers and adults will be a great help from a gospel and Bible teaching point of view, meeting a real need here in Romania. Also, we are currently in the process of printing in Central Romania one hundred thousand John 3. 16 Seed Sowers texts.

Special gospel tent meetings

Last year the Lord wonderfully provided a one hundred and seventy-five seater tent for gospel work in Romania and it was used in the earthquake county of Vrancea, in villages where there are assemblies (Calimanesti, and in the town of Marasesti) or where there is no



assembly testimony (Haret, Padureni, Ciuslea and Doaga). At least twenty-five people professed salvation in these tent meetings, and over six thousand children and adults have listened with interest to the simple presentation of the gospel. As a result of these tent meetings regular children's meetings have started in Marasesti (two different locations) and Calimanesti. Also, in the village of Haret, a weekly Bible study has commenced with a number of interested persons. In the village of Ciuslea an older brother has bought some land with the intention of seeing an assembly planted.

Prayer is requested that the Lord will provide another tent for gospel work in Romania where there are many open doors and we are not able to meet the requests of the brethren in different counties; and also that a second-hand nine-seater mini-bus might be provided for this work. Please pray for further blessing. Romania is still fruitful ground for the gospel and souls continue to be saved to the glory of God in regular assembly meetings and in special gospel meetings. Also, in certain areas of the country, new assemblies are being planted.

A new magazine for believers

The Lord has burdened us to publish a Christian magazine for the family. There will be articles of a devotional and expository nature, plus articles for children and young people. The magazine has been distributed free to believers in the seven hundred assemblies in Romania, the Republic of Moldavia, Ukraine, Italy, Spain, Austria and London. Initially, the magazine will be printed every three months with a print run of twelve thousand five hundred copies. We are currently working on the next issue.



A Triple 'Thank You . . .'

As mentioned in my editorial in this issue of *PSI* three of our brethren who have served on the committee (Malcolm Horlock, Michael Jones and Robert Brown) are leaving the work at the end of this year. Malcolm and Michael have served on the committee for over 30 years each and have both contributed massively to the work over that time. Michael was Treasurer (and much more!) for very many years and Malcolm has of course, as well as serving on the Trust, used his gift in writing for the magazine and our books, including proof-reading the work of other contributors. We hope that he will continue to write for us. Robert looked after the storage and distribution of our books during the time that operation was situated in South Wales.

Precious Seed Trust and the readers of this magazine are grateful to them for all the time and energy they have expended in the pursuit of this work and I am glad that all three, together with Ken Rudge, will be available to us in an advisory capacity. As usual I would draw attention to the support each has received from his wife and for the sacrifice of time made by these sisters in the Lord as their menfolk have engaged in this ministry.

So, to all of you, on behalf of the Trustees and the readership I say, 'Thank you, and may the Lord continue to direct you and use you in other aspects of His service as the years go by'.

ROY HILL

Chairman, Precious Seed Trust



Audio Web Sites

Ever thought how you could make use of your time travelling to work? Those who spend lengthy hours commuting or travelling might benefit from accessing the vast range of recordings that can be downloaded from the web. Why not listen to the Bible, or some Bible teaching, and arrive at work spiritually refreshed and encouraged!

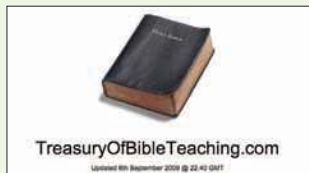
<http://www.audioscriptures.org>

There are many different readings of the scriptures available on CD and DVD. What makes this site of interest is the vast number of different language versions that are available through the site.



<http://treasuryofbibleteaching.com>

As this site is very much under development you will have to look around to find what you might want but you will find a wealth of teaching delivered in many locations in Scotland. It is being compiled by a number of brethren and is well worth a regular visit as material is uploaded.



<http://www.jstl.org.uk>

There are 10,085 tapes in Joe Skelly's catalogue so it would be difficult not to find something of interest to listen to. Downloads include messages for 'Younger Believers', messages in the gospel, material on assembly truth, character studies, as well as specific passages of scripture. To get the full benefit of the site you need to register as a member.



<http://www.voicesforchrist.org>

There are close to 36,000 messages available on this web site which makes it a remarkable resource. While you can browse through the catalogue, it may be quicker to use the search facility included in the site. Being American, the disadvantage of this site is that many of the speakers may not be known to some. Similarly, there are recordings of speakers whose interpretation of scripture may not always be orthodox in every aspect.



<http://audacity.sourceforge.net>

If you are concerned about transferring recordings between formats then this web site provides an easy to use program which will do most of the work for you. For example, to transfer an MP3 format file into one that will play on an older audio CD machine is straightforward. However, make sure that you have plenty of disk space available as audio files can be quite large – certainly much larger than MP3.



These are but a few of the many sites that can be accessed. Some church web sites have also developed the facility to download messages, whether gospel or ministry, and this might be another route to access material of spiritual profit and blessing.

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If you wish to order by e-mail – info@preciousseed.org – please be sure to give address details. **P&P is extra on all orders at £1 per book for UK orders. Overseas orders will be charged at cost.**

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Views from the News

COMPILED BY STEPHEN BAKER

CHRISTIAN PREACHER WINS RIGHT TO TAKE CASE TO EUROPEAN COURT OF JUSTICE

A Christian preacher has won the right to have his case referred to the European Court of Justice following an accusation that a state-supported radio station aimed at the Asian community discriminated against him because of his Christian beliefs and views.

Church of Scotland minister, Mahboob Masih, was a volunteer presenter on Awaz FM. His services were terminated after six years behind the microphone following a debate on air about the uniqueness of Christianity. This led to a phone-in discussion that angered the Muslim management of AWAZ, a community radio station. After being told he could no longer present the show as a result of the debate, the 37-year-old complained to an employment tribunal that he had lost his position for reasons related to religion or belief and was thus the victim of discrimination based on his faith as a Christian. The station denied discrimination, arguing that the tribunal has no powers to hear the case as Mr. Masih was not an employee.



In a ground-breaking decision, the case will be referred for a preliminary ruling to the European Court of Justice to decide if volunteers are protected by anti-discrimination legislation. If upheld, the consequences for employers in their dealings with volunteers who are open about their faith could be very significant.

AWAZ Radio is a Community Radio Station serving the Asian community in Glasgow. It is non-commercial and heavily supported by the state. In the radio show, Mr. Masih had spoken about the Christian view on the uniqueness of Christ and this was the first time that many Muslims in Glasgow would have heard about the Christian faith. Masih simply responded to questions raised by listeners and in response to a Muslim caller he clarified the religious difference between Christianity and Islam. It was a religious debate under free speech principles and no intemperate language was used.

Mr. Masih was required by the management to make a statement of apology for the handling of the broadcast, which he duly did, though he added a point expressing his belief in the importance of freedom of speech. After apologizing live on air, he was asked by the management to go to the mosque to make a further statement of apology. This, he felt, was inappropriate and on grounds of conscience did not accede to the request. He then wrote a letter to the radio station, stating that he believed he had done nothing wrong and that the request to apologize at the mosque was intimidatory. Masih has been supported throughout his case by the Christian Legal Centre who in turn instructed leading Human Rights barrister, Paul Diamond.

Employment Judge Raymond Williamson ruled on 26th August 2009 that the case should be referred to the European Court of Justice for a preliminary ruling on whether Masih's status as a volunteer was protected by anti-discrimination legislation. The judge said, 'I ask myself the question, "Can it be right that the respondent, a creature of statute, partly funded out of public funds and set up with the aim of promoting social cohesion, should be able to discriminate on religious grounds against the volunteer staff it is obliged to engage as a condition of its licence?"'

Masih said, 'This case shows the scandalous use of public monies to support unlawful acts under the guise of social cohesion. I do not believe any other religious group could have acted like AWAZ Radio. I am grateful to the British courts. The Pakistani Christian Community intends to protest to the Scottish Parliament to highlight discriminatory treatment of Christians.'

Source: CCFON 2nd September 2009

Bits & Bobs

Britain gets first atheist summer camp for children

An atheist alternative to Scout and Scripture Union camps is being subsidised by evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins. Twenty-four children took part in Camp Quest in Somerset in June. Samantha Stein, who led the camp, said the emphasis was on critical thinking. One activity was the Invisible Unicorn Challenge. Children were told it is believed that two unicorns inhabit the area but their task is to prove unicorns do not exist. 'We are not trying to bash religion, but it does encourage people to believe a lot of things for which there is no evidence', Ms. Stein explained. Since launching in the USA in 1996, Camp Quest's growth has been modest. It now operates camps at six sites there.



Sources: *Sunday Times* (28/6);
The Observer (28/6)

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[ment/faith/article6591231.ece](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/jun/28/atheism-camp-uk-richard-dawkins)

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/jun/28/atheism-camp-uk-richard-dawkins>

World's oldest Bible published online

Over 800 surviving pages of one of the world's most ancient Bibles have been published online. The 1,600-year-old Codex Sinaiticus has been digitally pieced together from scholarly libraries in the UK, Germany, Egypt and Russia. It is the first time the pages have been reunited in the 150 years since they were discovered in St. Catherine's monastery, Egypt, and made available to experts. After four years' work, the Codex – described as 'one of the world's greatest written treasures' – will have a global audience online. A translation alongside the virtual pages makes it available to a global public, while its availability creates unprecedented opportunities for scholarly collaboration around the world. A British Library exhibition telling the story of the book ran until early September.

Sources: *Daily Telegraph* (6/7);
Church of England Newspaper (10/7)

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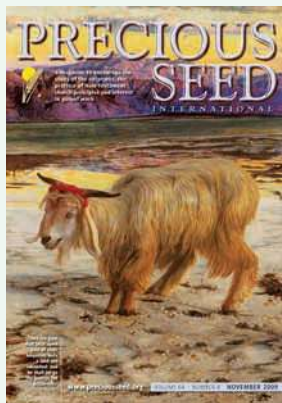
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*All committee members can be contacted at
info@preciousseed.org*

FRONT COVER ILLUSTRATION

The two goats of Leviticus 16 symbolize two different aspects of atonement: the first goat illustrates the character and holiness of God, and the second that which meets the need of the sinner as to the removal of his sins. Aaron's laying his hands on the head of the live goat, is a beautiful picture of the placing of the sins of the whole world on Christ, to be taken away forever, made good in the individual's experience by receiving Him as Saviour. The land uninhabited surely speaks of the unutterable desolation of Calvary.



PRECIOUS SEED PICTOGRAM

New Testament Assemblies in some African countries

Angola	1560
Chad	1000
Zambia	1000
Nigeria	420
Zaire	400
D R Congo	200
Tanzania	140
South Africa	110
Burundi	85
Ethiopia	66
Egypt	60
Kenya	50

Source: CMML Missionary Prayer Handbook 2009, et al

Question Time

CONDUCTED BY **RICHARD COLLINGS**

QUESTION

I don't know when I was saved – is my profession of salvation genuine?

ANSWER

Probably the majority of readers will find it difficult to relate to this question because the moment of their conversion is etched indelibly in their memory. It may seem inconceivable to them that someone can 'have passed from death unto life', 1 John 3. 14, and not know the date this miracle occurred.

Sadly, some, though thankfully only a minority, may have the temerity to suggest that such a person cannot be saved. In their opinion, the reality of conversion must be endorsed by stipulating a time when, and a place where, a profession was made. Whilst such a mindset may derive from a genuine desire to ensure that no one is resting on a false claim to conversion, it is going beyond what the word of God teaches. In addition, it has the potential to rob genuine believers of the assurance of salvation.

However, there will be some readers whose personal experience is akin to mine. Brought up in a Christian home, they were influenced by the word of God and sheltered from the allurements of the world from the outset of life. No 'dramatic' conversion took place and no radical change of behaviour was possible. To such, the need of being saved was accepted from the moment they first heard it. Despite their limited understanding, God's gracious provision of His Son as Saviour was imbibed without question. As a consequence 'getting saved' was perceived as a necessary event – but, humanly speaking it was far from being momentous.

Testimony meetings can be tremendously encouraging but there is a potential flip side to them. There would be very limited numbers attending a meeting to hear of the conversion of a child. However, if someone is converted who had sunk into the depths of profligacy or criminality we may be able to pack a hall to the rafters to hear their story! The atmosphere can be most moving, particularly if there is a sprinkling of tear-jerking anecdotes. The speaker will be able to transport the listeners to the very spot and the precise minute of their compliance with the message of salvation. Furthermore, they will be able to exult in the fact that through the emancipating power of the gospel their lives were revolutionized. For them, 'old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new', 2 Cor. 5. 17.

At such meetings there will be those who never had that remarkable kind of change – for by God's grace they never needed it! They hadn't lived a wanton existence but were saved as children. However, they may feel that as the change was not so spectacular either they are not saved or they are at best a second-rate convert. Plagued by doubts and uncertainties, which are fuelled by not knowing where or when they were saved, they go home and for the hundredth time they ask the Lord to save them. How sad and how unnecessary, and yet many of us can relate readily to this scenario. In addition, Satan can use this situation to intensify the feelings of insecurity, thereby depriving the child of God of the joy of their salvation.

In the mercy of God, there are some dramatic conversions and it thrills us to hear about them. Thankfully there are many 'ordinary' conversions too – and neither is superior or inferior to the other. Speaking in Belfast many years ago Albert Leckie described his conversion as follows, "as a child the Lord opened my heart as a flower opens its petals to the sun". In Acts chapter 16 we have the accounts of the salvation of Lydia and of the jailer from Philippi. Of Lydia it simply says 'whose heart the Lord opened', v. 14, but it took an earthquake to bring conviction to a hard-hearted jailer.

The word of God teaches that the reality of a profession can be assessed by many factors. James is most explicit; he stipulates that a claim to faith must be accompanied by appropriate works, James 2. 14-26. The apostle John states that an evidence of having eternal life is that we love all fellow Christians, 1 John 3. 14. In concluding the parable of the sower, the Lord refers to the seed that fell into good ground saying, 'But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience' Luke 8. 15.

Whilst no external change may be possible to anyone saved as a child, the subsequent lifestyle, particularly in adolescence and adulthood, should confirm that a former profession was a genuine work of God in their experience.

To any who have anxieties about this very real issue please put your mind at rest. Obviously there must have been a time when, and a place where, you first believed but it is not a requisite of salvation that you can recall either of them. What is certain is that the Lord knows the location and the timing of every conversion for 'the Lord knoweth them that are his' 2 Tim 2. 19. It is possible to be saved but not know when it happened. It is possible to be saved and not know where it happened. However, it is impossible to be saved but not know **how** it happened.

