

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 ark rested in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, upon the mountains of Ararat'

Gen. 8. 4

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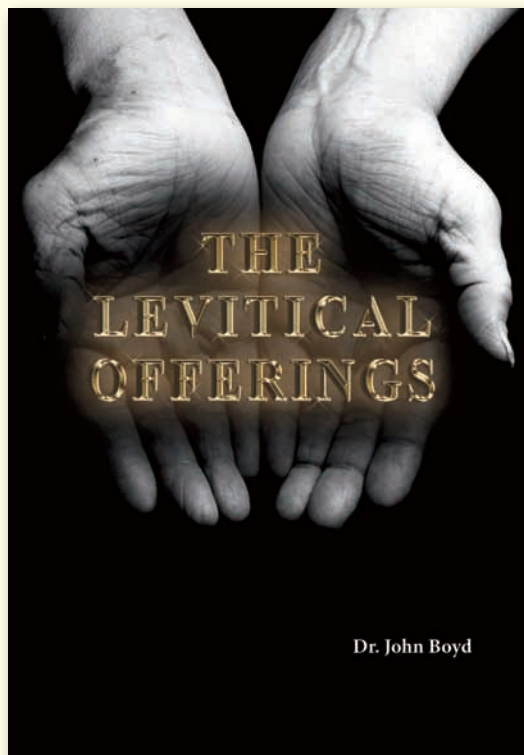
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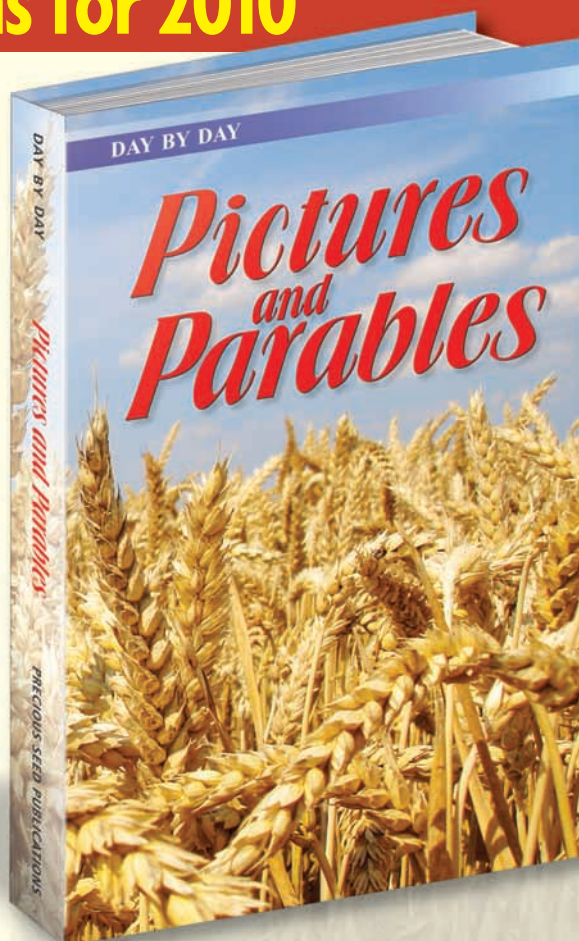
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Dr. John Boyd



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.

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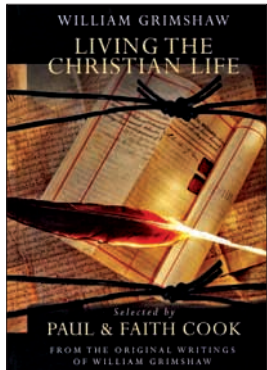
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Book Reviews

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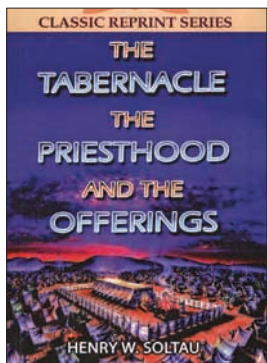
William Grimshaw – Living the Christian Life Paul and Faith Cook
Hardback, 90pp. Published by Evangelical Press, Grange Close, Faverdale North, Darlington, DL3 0PH, UK. Price £7.95. ISBN 978-0-85234-691-4.

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and Faith Cook have put together a brief account of Grimshaw's life and work, together with some pithy quotes from his unpublished writings as the main content of the book.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

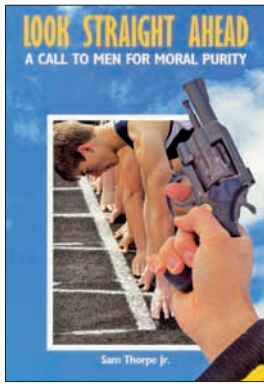
This is an interesting little book. It is a testimony to a man of tireless energy used of God to bring many to faith in Christ and to transform communities by the power of the gospel. But it is also a collection of material that gives us a glimpse of Grimshaw's great love for God, encouraging us to live 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 Tabernacle, the Priesthood and the Offerings Henry Soltau
Paperback. Published by John Ritchie Ltd., 40 Beansburn, Kilmarnock, Scotland KA3 1RL. Price £5.99. ISBN 978 1 904064 55 8.

This book is part of Ritchie's *Classic Reprint Series* of publications and, as the title suggests, is split into three sections. The first section, which considers the Tabernacle, concentrates upon the structure itself, meditating upon such matters as the curtains, the coverings, and the court, among others. The vessels of the Tabernacle were the subject of a separate volume. The second section, covering the priesthood is most detailed, particularly in respect to the typical significance of the jewels that formed the priest's breastplate. The final section is not a standard consideration of the offerings but gives space to reflect upon a variety of subjects such as the Day of Atonement, the sprinkling of the blood upon the mercy seat, and the scapegoat.

Being a classic, the reader should not expect light reading. This is a book to be read alongside the scriptures, to which it makes many references. This reviewer first obtained a copy of this work over thirty years ago but only came to appreciate its value when studying the book of Exodus in some detail. It was then that the author's comprehensive consideration proved its worth. There may be lighter treatments of this area of typical study but none will be as fruitful or as satisfying as Soltau.



Look Straight Ahead - A Call to Men for Moral Purity Sam Thorpe, Jr.

Paperback, 164 pages. Everyday Publications, 310 Killaly Street West, Port Colborne, Ontario, L3K 6A6 Canada. ISBN 978-0-88873-464-8.

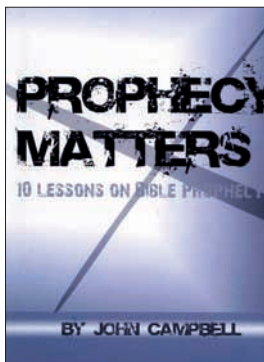
This is a scripturally-based and balanced consideration of the temptations to sexual sin in Western society. It is a book of pastoral ministry for *men* and its aims are: to prevent men from falling into sexual sin; to counsel those who are to some extent caught up in it; and, to counsel elders who may find themselves having to deal with it. The introduction is straight to the point and highlights this growing problem amongst believers, in particular exposure to pornography, which is clearly defined and examined. The writer argues that this is one of Satan's main weapons today. Is it true that it is almost impossible not to see something we would rather not each day of our lives, if not through the media (the focus of the book) then in actual life. The very real dangers are sensitively discussed. The book considers various issues in the context of the family, society and the local assembly. Issues addressed include: marital infidelity; controlling

the mind; the matter of one's conscience; our insensitivity to what is actually shocking; loving one's wife; the importance of a plurality of male leadership in a local assembly; the discipling of young men; the need for expository teaching of scripture; the pastoral responsibility of elders. Each issue is handled well with scripture permeating each one, much of it quoted. There is a variety of material: statistical evidence; specific, practical advice; well-chosen, real life examples, including one in detail; visual aids; and biblical study tasks.

A consideration of one chapter may indicate the character of the book. Chapter 3 is entitled 'Love in Action' and is subdivided into four sections: evaluate your love; steps to victory over pornography; the fruit of an undisciplined mind; where will the world take you? Section 3 contains practical suggestions for combating temptation, e.g., a card with the words of Philippians chapter verse. 8 and a photo of one's family placed on one's computer monitor. The third section has seven scripture references, all quoted, plus four interspersed paragraphs of comment. The conclusion to the chapter has a bold rectangular block with a capitalized headline, two exhortations and five scripture references to look up. This is a book to read and ponder.

Regrettably, one adverse comment is necessary, but only one. The writer states that Christ forgives us 'unconditionally' and 'He forgives us regardless of our attitude to Him'. This is very misleading.

[Our thanks to Bryan Charles, Appledore, Devon, UK for this review]



Prophecy Matters John Campbell

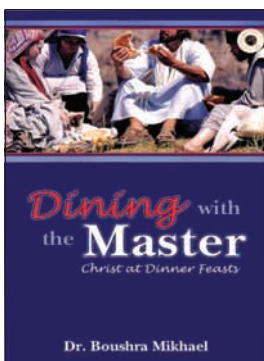
Paperback, 52 pages, Published by and available from the author, 5 Craigie View, Perth, PH2 0DP, UK. Price £2.00.

The author of this helpful little book defines his purpose as being 'not to provide an in-depth exposition of future events', but rather 'to whet the appetite of the readers to start their own research on this subject'. He is equally clear in affirming that the only reliable source of information on prophetic matters is the Bible and in declaring that the real purpose of such study is not to fill our heads with cold academic knowledge but to warm our hearts toward the Lord. Within this framework, he has provided a sane and succinct summary of future events, based solely on what is revealed in Holy Scripture. He takes his readers in an orderly manner through the essentials of prophetic events, beginning with the Lord's coming (he distinguishes clearly between the Rapture and the Lord's public manifestation) and moving steadily on to

cover the marriage of the Lamb, the Tribulation and the Millennium. The last chapter covers the judgements. Each of the ten chapters ends with a page of questions. The author's style is delightfully simple, straightforward and jargon-free. He is not dogmatic, acknowledging that, in his opinion, 'no one person knows it all with certainty'. He never goes beyond what scripture states. The result is a book which has many uses. It may confidently be given to young believers without fear that they will be overwhelmed with detail; it may be used in group Bible study; it also has potential as a tool in evangelism, particularly with members of those sects which seek to spread confusion on matters prophetic.

Written from the right motives and for the right purpose, this book fills a gap in current provision at a price which all can afford.

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



Dining with the Master Dr. Boushra Mikhael

Paperback, 102pp. Published by Gospel Folio Press, 304 Killaly Street West, Port Colborne, Ontario, L3K 6A6, Canada. Price £5.99 ISBN 978 1 897117 84 2.

As Roy Hill writes in his Foreword, 'This delightful little book deals with the Gospel records of the Saviour at breakfast, lunch, dinner and even at a wedding feast'. Within that span of meals, Dr. Mikhael covers Matthew's house, the house of Simon the Pharisee, the first supper at Bethany, the house of Zacchaeus, Bethany again, and the Upper Room, before concluding with the meal beside the sea of Galilee in John chapter 21. In relation to the topic chosen, this is an unusual book, this reviewer being unaware of anything similar. Although the book is largely devotional in character, the writer has not avoided the issues surrounding some of the passages. For example, the events in the house at Bethany as recorded in John chapter 12 have to be reconciled with the seemingly parallel passages in Matthew and Mark's gospels.

Dr. Mikhael considers the various views before stating his own and his reasons for holding that view. As the writer concludes each chapter, he presents us with a summary of the major points covered and seeks to apply any practical lessons that are present. In this way he seeks to maximise the value of the material dealt with. This is a book that will warm the heart, challenge the soul, and provide answers to difficult issues that surround some of the events considered.



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

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EDITORIAL

'As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee', Josh. 1. 5.

The daunting prospect that faced Joshua was how to succeed a man of the calibre of Moses.

Moses was a man of **experience** having spent forty years in the palace of Pharaoh, forty years in the wilderness tending sheep and forty years leading the people of God. Moses was the man who had asked of God, 'Shew me thy glory', Exod. 33. 18, and, as a consequence, had seen the back parts of God. How could Joshua measure up to a man like that?

Moses was a man of **energy**. It is said of him that 'his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated', Deut. 34. 7. He may have been 120 years old; he may have led the people of God for forty years through their wilderness experience; yet, his strength was unabated.

Moses was a man of **equity**. He was the man whom God had used to record the Law. He had been the one responsible for delivering that Law to the people and ensuring it was kept. The responsibility and burden of maintaining what God required was his. The duty of administering the people and passing judgement upon their matters was his, Exod. 18. 13.

Moses was a man of **esteem**. It is worth counting the references to 'Moses, the servant of the Lord' in the book of Joshua alone. Moses may have passed off the scene, but the memory of him lingers on and he is held in the highest respect. He was a mighty man of God, 2 Chron. 30. 16. He it was who stood before Pharaoh. He led the people out of Egypt, through the Red Sea and through the wilderness. It was Moses who interceded on behalf of the stiff-necked people as they wandered in the wilderness as a consequence of their unbelief.

It is one thing to work alongside a man like Moses, it is quite another to have to assume his mantle and leadership. I wonder how many times we have thought that a particular job looked so easy, until we have to do it for ourselves and suddenly appreciate the aspects of it that we chose not to see!

In what little time remains before the Lord returns for His church, many of us may be drawn into roles we never envisaged fulfilling. As those who once carried responsibility and shepherd care amongst the people of God are taken from us, it behoves us all to be concerned about how the gaps will be filled. May the Lord exercise us to pray and have hearts receptive to the voice of God, in case He would have us to do such a work for Him.

The prospect for Joshua was daunting but the provision of God was dynamic. How could he cross the Jordan without Moses? How could he face the fortress of Jericho? The answer is given, 'I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee'. Oh that we might avail ourselves of the presence and power of the Lord with us!

As we commence 2010 there is material in this latest magazine to guide, to encourage and to teach. Graham Hobbs, Shawn Abigail and Jim Cochrane continue their series. There is also some new intensely practical material on marriage and on restarting a children's work. It is our prayerful desire that the magazine might continue to be a blessing to all who read it as we commence this new phase of the Lord's work.

JOHN BENNETT Ministry Articles Editor



The All-Pervasiveness of the Subject

'To err is human: to forgive divine', ALEXANDER POPE. So runs the ancient maxim. Certainly, because we are members of a fallen race, we need constantly to be forgiven for numerous failures and sinful acts against others, and to forgive many who err against us. We all continually 'fall short of the glory of God', which is our ultimate standard of perfection, Rom. 3. 23. Therefore, much as we may sometimes wish to, we cannot avoid facing up to the issue of forgiveness. If we do attempt to evade it, our Christian lives and characters will be seriously damaged and rendered ineffective for God.

Its Sensitivity

Forgiveness is a very sensitive subject with most people, because it touches the deepest feelings of personal pride within us. But this is the very essence of Satan's original sin, which we have inherited from Adam. Only with God's help can we deal with it in our lives. He alone can prevent us becoming, perhaps unwittingly, the tools of the enemy of our souls.

Its Vital Importance in Local Assembly Life

All true Christians in any New Testament local assembly have necessarily repented of their sins and received God's forgiveness in Christ for salvation. But, although we delight to remember that God has forgiven us, so often we are too slow to forgive our fellow-brethren and sisters whenever they sin against us or our friends. This is a fatal inconsistency and one which leads to much damage both to our own spiritual lives and to the collective testimony of the assembly of which we are members. An unforgiving spirit within an assembly leads to smouldering resentments and underlying tensions, malicious gossip and criticism, strife and divisions, and perhaps the eventual closure of the testimony. Within us it causes callousness and guilt feelings because of unresolved and unconfessed sins, the grieving of the Holy Spirit, the quenching of His gracious and loving fruit in our lives, and even sometimes medical

FORGIVING BEC

By **MALCOLM C. DAVIS** Leeds, England

problems. Therefore, the matter of forgiveness demands our very careful consideration. After all, none of us has anything to be proud of before God, or even before our brethren and sisters. If it were not for the infinite grace of God in Christ we would be consigned to eternal punishment for our sins against Him, just like all the lost people around us.

Pride, taking the form of unwillingness to yield what we see as our rights, shows up the root of the problem, namely, putting ourselves first. Insensitivity to the feelings of others, or thoughtlessness, causes much distress. Sometimes we resent what we think are God's unjust dealings with us, and this affects our attitude towards others. But we should realize that while it is wrong to give offence, it is equally wrong and immature to take offence. For many so-called 'offences' are probably unintentional, and should be dismissed from our minds at once.

The Basis of All Forgiveness

God's own great love demonstrated to us at the cross of Christ is the only, and fully sufficient, basis of all forgiveness. There, the very God against whom we have sinned so grievously, bore, in the person of His incarnate Son the punishment for all our offences, and thus opened the way back to peace with Himself and with one another. Calvary is both a righteous and loving ground of forgiveness for time and eternity.

Prerequisites for Forgiveness

Because we are responsible creatures, God requires that those who desire to be forgiven should first confess and repent of their sins. This is a fundamental prerequisite of forgiveness. Equally important is a spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation in those who have been wronged. Only God's own love shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit can enable this. Remember how much God has forgiven us quite undeservedly. Prerequisite also are right attitudes of mind in us. Have we accepted all God's sovereign dealings with us as His right? Have we the selfless, humble mind of Christ which treats others as more important than ourselves and serves them? Have we a spirit of vigilant self-judgement that makes us aware of our own sinfulness? Have we a right view of our real nothingness before God and

The Inevitability of Offences occurring

In Luke chapter 17 verse 1, the Lord Jesus said, 'It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come!'. No doubt we have all experienced the feeling of being insulted, or slighted, if not badly wronged in some way. These things happen to us, and we cause them to happen to others, because of indwelling sin. Offences are caused by many kinds of wrong attitudes and actions. Probably our unruly tongues stir up most trouble. A bitter and unforgiving spirit can itself be a threat to assembly unity.





CAUSE FORGIVEN

others? Are we willing to listen to another person's point of view?

The Scriptural Way of Resolving Offences

Since offences will constantly occur, we need to know how to deal with them in a godly manner. Matthew chapter 18 verses 15-17 outlines the right way of resolving all those between Christians. There are to be three stages: first, a private and solitary approach by the offended party to the offender; secondly, if that fails to produce repentance, an approach with two or three Christian witnesses to the wrong done; thirdly, as a last resort, the reporting of the matter to the whole gathered local assembly with a view to disciplinary action thereafter. Note the reluctance to expose and spread the difficulty; also, the confinement of the problem within the local assembly, which can act as a court of law. According to 1 Corinthians chapter 6, Christians should never resort to lawsuits in the courts to resolve their disputes with their fellow-saints. However, if the cause of offence is a criminal matter, then we should not obstruct the due process of the law of the land. But most offences are of a less serious nature, such as insult or breach of trust.

God's Pattern for Forgiveness

To forgive means, firstly, to remit the punishment due to sinful conduct and to deliver the sinner from the penalty rightly imposed; secondly, to remove completely the cause of offence. 'Such remission is based upon the vicarious and propitiatory sacrifice of Christ', W. E. VINE. Another word used for 'forgiveness' means 'to bestow a favour unconditionally as an act of grace'. The latter word is used in Ephesians chapter 4 verse 32, where believers are exhorted to forgive one another, 'even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you'. It is also used in Colossians, 'Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye', 3. 13. Often we are slower

to forgive an offender than God is, although in His infinite grace He has forgiven us so much. Whenever there is repentance, God reciprocates with super-abundant mercy; and so should we – ungrudgingly.

Our Responsibility to Avoid Giving Offence

Paul's constant aim was 'to have a conscience void of offence toward God, and . . . men', Acts 24. 16; 'Giving no offence in anything, that the ministry be not blamed', 2 Cor. 6. 3. Likewise, he exhorts fellow-believers to be 'without offence till the day of Christ', Phil. 1. 10, and to 'Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God', 1 Cor. 10. 32. The main principle, he says, is, 'If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men', Rom. 12. 18. Whilst this may not always be possible, the fault should never be ours.

The Christian Reaction to Offences

Serious offences caused by our fellow-believers cannot just be ignored; they must be dealt with in a godly manner according to the scriptural procedure. Yet, even with offenders who are unrepentant, we should always keep the door open for restoration to fellowship again. But if we are wronged by unbelievers, we ought to be prepared to 'turn the other cheek' to them, to love our enemies, and to pray for those who persecute us. If we are suffering because we are Christians, we are exhorted to bear the reproach of Christ, our still rejected Lord. He said that the world would hate us, because

it hated Him; the servant is not above his Lord. We should accept persecution with joy and thanksgiving, and overcome evil with good, believing that vengeance belongs to God alone to execute in His own time and way. A forgiving attitude towards our persecutors will speak louder to them than retaliation, and can lead to their repentance and conversion. Remember how God forgave us and transformed our lives, and trust that He will do the same for them too. Finally, concerning many minor offences, 1 Peter chapter 4 verse 8 points us to 'a more excellent way', 'And above all things have fervent love for one another, for love will cover a multitude of sins' NKJV. So, before reacting hastily, ask these three questions: 'Is this matter true?'; 'Am I being kind?'; and 'Is this action really necessary?'

MALCOLM DAVIS was saved in 1951 in Colchester, Essex, baptized in 1956, and, with his wife Ruth, has been in fellowship with the saints at Harehills Gospel Hall in Leeds since 1980. A retired academic librarian, he worked in Cambridge in the 1970's on Hebrew Bible manuscripts, and has written several reference catalogues as a result. He has written a number of articles for *Precious Seed International* as well as other assembly magazines.





FUNDAMENTAL STEPS TO

1 CONSIDERING MARRIAGE

It is God's will, generally, that men and women should marry and have children, thus making the family unit the foundation of human society. It would be normal, therefore, for young Christians to desire marriage and to have as a priority on their prayer agendas the matter of being guided to the person of God's choice.

Not all young Christians feel the same, however, and the Lord Jesus in Matthew chapter 19 verses 11-12 gave three reasons for remaining single. Firstly, there is a genetic reason – some are 'born' eunuchs, that is, it not being in their nature to marry. Then, there is a physical reason – some are 'made' eunuchs, either by accident, incident or illness. There are also those who, for a spiritual reason, 'have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake'. This might be in order to serve the Lord single-mindedly, like the apostle Paul, or it may be simply because the right man or woman has not been found. The Lord implies that such are special people who serve Him at great personal cost, 'All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given', Matt. 19: 11.

The years spent as a single person are important! They are the years when young Christians should concentrate on developing a personal relationship with the Lord and seek His help in developing the gift imparted by the Holy Spirit as they commit themselves to involvement in the Lord's work. This is a unique opportunity to 'attend upon the Lord without distraction', 1 Cor. 7: 35.

Feeling the need for a spouse is natural, but finding the man or woman of God's choice is a deeply spiritual experience! After all, the choice of a husband or wife comes second only to salvation in the ranking of important decisions we make in life. So then, how do we go about it?

Principles

First Corinthians chapter 7 verse 39 speaks of marriage 'in the Lord'. This

would involve two people who, as individuals, have made Jesus Christ the Lord of their lives and who have both prayed much that He would so order their circumstances that they might be introduced to the man or woman of His choice. This having taken place, and after a period of courtship, they then commence married life together knowing that the Lord is the One who brought them together. It is most important too that He remains the Lord in their individual lives as well as their joint life as a married couple. This is marriage 'in the Lord'. What a difference compared to the ways of the world!

What has been termed 'recreational dating' is a modern phenomenon of the Western world whereby young people of the world engage in dating simply for the pleasure to be found in satisfying the lusts of the flesh. Any young person reading this article will be only too aware of peer pressure at school, college, university, or the workplace to engage in sexual immorality by 'sleeping around' for pleasure. Even what may be called today 'steady' relationships have little or no thought of marriage as the end result, short-term sexual gratification being the main object.

Young Christians should be aware that the word of God teaches that all sexual activity outside the marriage bond is sin. We must take care to ensure that the ways of the world do not affect our viewpoint. The usual reasoning goes like this: what harm can there be in dating a young person of the opposite sex with an open mind, to see how things go? Surely, even if it doesn't work out, they can move on, having learned from the experience, and look for someone else? Sooner or later they will find someone who 'feels right for them' and then they can get serious and talk about the future together! Such ideas are foreign to the word of God and the ways of God! We need to appreciate that untold harm is caused by such a casual attitude to this major decision in life. Every failed relationship will leave its scars. Someone, generally



WARDS VITAL DECISIONS

E – HOW CAN I BE SURE?

the person who thought this was for real, gets badly hurt. Instead of joy, happiness and security, they experience heartbreak and tears! Every time young persons engage in this dating culture and become emotionally involved, they give a part of themselves to the other party which can sometimes never be retrieved. In kindness to one another, this is a serious error to be avoided at all costs. So then, how should a young person go about finding a man or woman? Simply by following biblical guidelines:

Practice

Timing. Some practical considerations need to be taken into account. For instance, if a young person is going to university for a number of years, with the prospect of having to pay back a student loan at the end of it, how likely is it that such a person is going to be able to consider marriage with all its financial implications in the near future? Perhaps young persons should consider before the Lord whether He would have them pursue a career of this nature, and by doing so put marriage to the back of their minds for some years, or whether they should pursue another avenue of work that would enable them to enter marriage much earlier and raise a family for God. It is worth remembering that there can be no higher honour than seeking to raise a family for God and that He places great value on home-makers.

Company. Mixing with the right company is important. A spiritual man or woman will be found only in places where spiritual Christians circulate! There are many opportunities for young Christians to meet others of like mind. In the activities of the local assembly, at conferences, young people's weekends, in activities on the mission field, etc. How important to make use of them!

Lifestyle. Sending out the right signals is important. Commitment to the local assembly, and perhaps to the wider sphere of service for God, would be important characteristics, particularly if the young person looking on has an interest in serving the Lord in a 'full-

time' capacity. Similarly, how we dress may be a guide to a person's spirituality. Provocative dressing and the latest outrageous hairstyles are not going to attract spiritual young people. A flirtatious temperament is not indicative of spirituality. It would be better to look for those who show a commitment to the Lord and to the work of the assembly.

Attraction. Don't forget that God wants us to fall in love! This is not just a calculated choosing of someone we think ticks all the right boxes! If God is in the thing, the spiritual young man or woman will fall in love with the man or woman of His choice and a wonderful married life will follow, provided they both continue to walk with the Lord; an experience well worth waiting for as we seek God's guidance in these matters. Marriage in the Lord will not be disappointing and it will most certainly be the most fulfilling!

Prayer

Prayer is the most powerful tool at our disposal! But to be answered, prayer must be in line with God's will. Only after having followed these guidelines can young Christians really come to the Father and ask Him to overrule in their lives for their blessing and His glory. The persons who do so must 'ask in faith, nothing wavering', Jas. 1. 6, knowing that they ask of the God who gives 'liberally', holding nothing back.

Patience

Praying and planning should not go together, in the sense that we should not pray to our Father in heaven about a matter and then proceed to make plans that will ensure that we receive the answer that we desire. And yet how often we pray about something, then go off and try to bring about an answer to our own prayer!

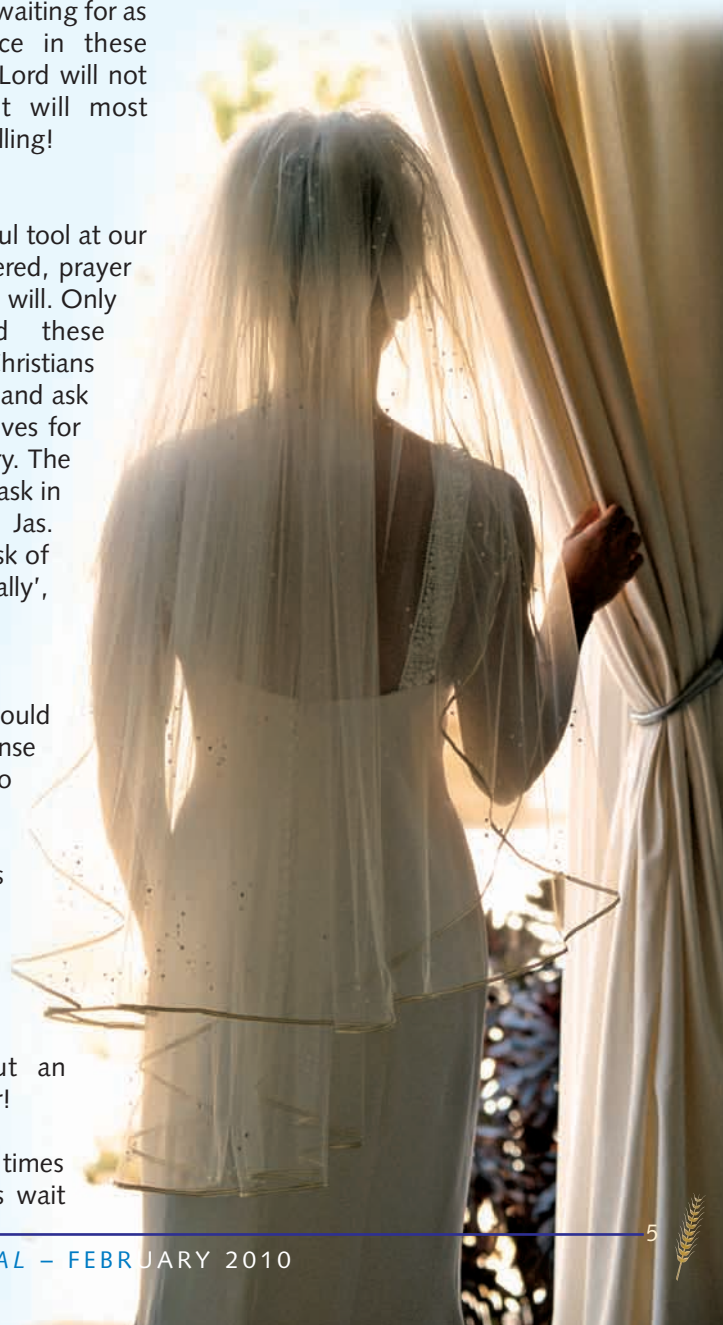
Waiting times are testing times and God often makes us wait

before revealing His will for us. This is particularly difficult for young Christians, who will want immediate answers to heartfelt prayers. Men of God in the Bible failed spectacularly because they couldn't wait God's time. Abram failed with regard to the promise of a son and Ishmael appeared on the scene; Moses thought he was going to redeem Israel when he slew the Egyptian, but he was forty years ahead of God's timing!

Nothing is impossible with our God. He seeks only our blessing and is willing to guide in these important matters if we will allow Him to do so.

To be continued

JOHN SALISBURY has served as an elder in the Spencer Bridge Road assembly, Northampton, England, for many years, supported by his wife, Wendy. Retired from business, he is active in ministry in the UK. He has two married sons and seven grandchildren.





The Mysteries of the

A literal approach to Bible prophecy demands that a certain and glorious future remains for the nation of Israel and this prospect, as revealed in the Old Testament prophets, is indissolubly linked to the coming of Messiah to establish a world-wide kingdom. Israel will then be re-united, spiritually restored to Jehovah and re-gathered to her beloved homeland. This theological stance refutes the viewpoint that these Old Testament predictions are now fulfilled spiritually in the church which, it is claimed, has now become Israel. The literal method of interpretation contends that the church stands unique in God's programme for this world and that during the church period God's prophetic timetable has, in a sense, been paused.

The Kingdom parables stand as one of the greatest challenges to this literal interpretation of Bible prophecy. They have stretched the minds of generations of Bible students, sparked heated debate, and left many Christians feeling perplexed and uncertain as to their true meaning. What exactly is the Kingdom of God in Matthew chapter 13 and how does it relate to other mentions in the Bible, especially the Gospels? As with any other Bible study thread, we cannot study these parables in isolation, cut off from all other mentions of this concept in the Bible. Rather, we must view them in the context of scripture as a whole. To achieve this we will begin by explaining what the Kingdom of God is, firstly in the Old Testament, then in the New Testament Gospel records with the exception of the

parables of the mysteries of the Kingdom of God. We will then show, from the Epistles, how Christian believers fit into God's Kingdom programme. And having done these things, we will attempt to analyze the parables of the mysteries of the Kingdom of God, in their immediate context, and in relation to the scriptures as a whole.

What is the Kingdom of God?

The Kingdom of God, put very simply, is the sphere of God's rule, where He holds sovereign control. In the Bible, the Kingdom of God appears to divide into two main phases: universal and mediatorial, 'the first referring to the extent of the rule, the latter to the method of rule'.¹ In the eternal state, universal and mediatorial aspects of the Kingdom of God will be one. God's Kingdom is 'everlasting', Ps. 145. 13, having neither beginning nor end, and 'over all', Ps. 103. 19, without boundary – this is the universal aspect. The mediatorial aspect of the Kingdom of God is a more complex issue. It has been defined as: '(a) the rule of God through a divinely chosen representative who not only speaks and acts for God but also represents the people before God; (b) a rule which has especial reference to the earth; and (c) having as its mediatorial ruler one who is always a member of the human race'.² I suggest two additional features: (d) God's immediate presence; and (e) Israel the nation playing a central role – this seems to be the case as the biblical record unfolds.

When God gave Adam authority over creation He showed that it was His intention to rule this world through a human mediator, Gen. 1. 26. Adam forfeited this position of dominion and, ever since, God has been working in human history towards His initial objective of ruling this world through a

man. After the flood – divine judgement on a world filled with unrestrained wickedness – God promised that He would never again destroy the world with a flood of waters; this covenant was signalled by a rainbow, Gen. 9. 11. Hand-in-hand with this promise was the introduction of human government, designed to restrain evil, Gen. 9. 6; cf. Rom. 13. 1-4. The patriarchal period saw Hebrew men of faith ruling authoritatively over their households, God's chosen line of humanity, as divinely appointed mediators. However, it was not until the children of Israel, as a nation, were delivered from Egyptian bondage and arrived at Mount Sinai that God's mediatorial Kingdom in the Old Testament was finally

established, Moses acting as God's ruling mediator. Although Moses is not specifically described as a monarch, he held a kingly position, 'The same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer', Acts 7. 35. God promised Israel, 'Ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation', Exod. 19. 6. It is significant that the first mention of God reigning in the Bible is in the song of Moses, immediately following Israel's deliverance from Egypt, anticipating their final settlement in the Promised Land, 'The Lord shall reign for ever and ever', Exod. 15. 18. From this time, right through the period of the kings, God ruled in the nation through mediators, God Himself being Israel's King, 1 Sam. 8. 7; cf. Zeph. 3. 15. And this mediatorial Kingdom continued until, after centuries of relentless idolatry, God's glory reluctantly departed eastward from Jerusalem over the Mount of Olives, Ezek. 11. 23, God then transferring political supremacy to the Gentiles, Hos. 3. 4. The mediatorial Kingdom was withdrawn. This is the past.

The Old Testament prophets foresaw a future aspect to the mediatorial Kingdom. It will again have its administrative centre in Jerusalem, Isa. 24. 23; Micah 4. 8, commence at a definite point in time, Dan. 2. 44 and, this time, be governed by God's

By
**JEREMY
GIBSON**
Derby,
England



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beloved Son, Ps. 2. 6, 7. God's universal supremacy as King over all the earth has always been closely linked to power and glory, 1 Chr. 29. 11. The future mediatorial Kingdom is no exception. It too will be characterized by the combined glory of Father and Son, Matt. 26. 27; Luke. 9. 26 and exhibitions of divine power, Mark 9. 1. This power will transform the earth's climate and agricultural capacity, Isa. 30. 23-26; Ezek. 47. 1-12; Joel 2. 21-26; Zech. 14. 8; bring about geographical changes, Isa. 2. 1, 2; annihilate all insurrection, Ps. 2. 9; generate international peace between nations, Isa. 2. 3, 4; and the animal kingdom, Isa. 11. 6-9; eradicate illness, Isa. 35. 5, 6; and, in so doing, extend the average life-span, Isa. 65. 20-22. God will again rule this world through a human mediator and dwell among His people – all in the Person of Messiah, Dan. 7. 13, 14.

Sadly, the tabernacle of David fell into disrepair, Acts 15. 16. Israel was scattered, Deut. 28. 64, and heaven was silent. Nevertheless, God's promises of a new dawn, when the mediatorial Kingdom of God would be re-established on this earth under the benevolent and powerful reign of Messiah, still held true. And, in Israel, a godly remnant still looked expectantly for Messiah's coming, Mark 15. 43; Luke 2. 38; 23. 51. God finally broke 400 years of silence by giving further promises of Messiah, the setting up of His Kingdom and His forerunner, John the Baptist, who came in the spirit and power of Elijah, Mal. 4. 5, 6; Matt. 11. 14; 17. 12.

The Kingdom of God in the Gospels

The expressions 'Kingdom of God' and 'Kingdom of Heaven' appear to be synonymous. For instance, in the prophecy of Daniel, in relation to God setting up an everlasting Kingdom, God is called the God of heaven, 'In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom,

which shall never be destroyed . . . and it shall stand for ever', Dan. 2. 44. When Matthew records the Lord Jesus preaching 'the kingdom of heaven', Matthew chapter 4 verse 17 is another example, for Mark refers to it as 'the kingdom of God', Mark 1. 14. Other expressions also seem to refer to the future millennial kingdom, 'Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father', Matt. 13. 43. 'The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity', Matt. 13. 41. In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, the Kingdom of God and Christ are equivalent terms, Eph. 5. 5. These different phrases are not at variance, but rather complement each other, adding richly to our understanding of the Kingdom of God.

John the Baptist burst on to the scene with a message of repentance in light of an imminent Kingdom, Matt. 3. 1, 2. Although he did no miracles, John 10. 41, his *preaching* captivated the hearts of fellow-Israelites, filling them with hope. He was a voice crying in the wilderness, 'Prepare ye the way of the Lord', Isa. 40. 3. The Lord Jesus and His apostles continued to preach 'the Kingdom of God', Matt. 4. 17; Mark. 1. 14, 15; Luke 4. 43; 8. 1. Their preaching was largely restricted to Israelites, Matt. 10. 7, and accompanied by powerful messianic confirmatory miracles, Matt. 4. 23; 9. 35; Luke 8. 1; 9. 2, 11; 10. 9. The Kingdom was never explained. It could mean only one thing. The mediatorial Kingdom, as predicted in the Old Testament prophets, was at hand in the beginning of Christ's ministry, though

not so at the end, Luke 19. 11. Why the change? Although the crowds enthused, with time opposition raised its ugly head, so it could be said, 'The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force', Matt. 11. 12, 'and every man presseth into it', Luke 16. 16. The religious leaders blasphemously attributed Christ's works to Satan's power, Matt. 12. 24; Mark 3. 22. His own kinsmen accused Him of madness, Mark 3. 23, and it was not long before 'many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with Him', John 6. 66. The nation's inevitable rejection of Messiah necessitated a postponement of the setting up of the visible Kingdom of God, something not clearly revealed in the Old Testament. The Saviour warned, 'The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation [a repentant generation of Israelites] bringing forth the fruits thereof', Matt. 21. 43; cf. Rom. 11. 15, 25. If Israel had received the Lord Jesus as their Messiah, John the Baptist, who came in Elijah's spirit and power, Luke 1. 17, would have fulfilled the Old Testament prophecy concerning him, Mal. 4. 5, 6; Matt. 11. 14; 17. 12, and the Kingdom would have been set up. Instead, Israel mistreated both John and Christ, thus necessitating another forerunner – Elijah himself – and a second coming of the King.

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To be continued

JEREMY GIBSON resides in Derby and is in fellowship at The Meeting Room, Curzon Street. He is active in ministry and the gospel, particularly in his own locality. He is married to Dorothy and has three young daughters. He is a doctor.



The gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ holds the answer to the momentous problems facing mankind today. In spite of this, the good news encounters opposition wherever it is proclaimed. The Adversary, Satan, blinds men's minds against it, 2 Cor. 4. 4, the world system allures people away from it, 1 John 2. 15-17, and the flesh rebels against its claims, Gal. 4. 29; 5. 17. The Lord Jesus foretold this sobering situation, saying, 'If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep your's also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me', John 15. 18-21.

Paul taught the same principle to his converts, affirming that 'all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution', 2 Tim. 3. 12; see also Acts 14. 22. Elsewhere, he told his 'child in the faith', Timothy, to 'endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ', 2 Tim. 2. 3. John puts it succinctly, 'Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you', 1 John 3. 13. Of course, the apostles were not 'armchair theologians' who lacked the knowledge of the affairs of real life. They suffered for their identification with Christ and His gospel. For example, Paul's experience of persecution and hardship for the progress of the glad tidings is clearly set forth in his Epistle to the Philippians. What is more, this encouraging letter demonstrates the unassailable joy that the believer possesses in Christ, in spite of the difficulties that serving Him brings.

Gold, Politics and Geographic Advantage

Philippi was an important city in the Roman province of Macedonia. Founded by Greeks in the sixth century BC, as Krenides ('Springs'), it eventually was wrested from the Thracians and renamed Philippi in 356

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BC by Philip II of Macedon – famous for being Alexander the Great's father. Thanks to gold mines in the vicinity, in those days it was a 'boomtown'. It was also strategically located about ten miles away from the Aegean Sea. Macedonian control eventually gave way to the Romans, who incorporated Macedonia and its holdings into their advancing empire in 148 BC. It was located along the prominent highway, the Via Egnatia. By that time, gold was no longer prevalent and the population dwindled. Nevertheless, world events again revitalized Philippi after Julius Caesar's assassins, Brutus and Cassius, were defeated outside the city by Octavian (later known as Augustus) and Antony. By 27 BC it was declared a Roman colony, meaning that its residents enjoyed the rights and privileges of Roman citizens.¹ One writer describes the city's affinity for the imperial capital in these words, 'In every way the colony was a reproduction of Rome. The city of Philippi was laid out in the same patterns as Rome, and style and architecture were copied extensively. The coins produced in the city bore Roman inscriptions. The local magistrates liked to term themselves *praetores (strategoi)*, in the Roman manner. The Latin language was used and its citizens adorned themselves in Roman dress. In every way Philippi was a "little Rome" when Paul first traversed its streets. Although it was not the general capital of the province (Thessalonica was), Philippi was a leading city and the first station of the Via Egnatia, which Rome built to link its eastern territories with the Empire. This road ran directly through the middle of the city and divided it into a lower and upper city. The lower city contained the agora and library while the upper city situated on the side of the mountain was the location of many of the temples'.²

In short, it was a cosmopolitan place, which was an ideal base for establishing a gospel beachhead in Europe.

An Inauspicious Beginning

At the commencement of his second

missionary journey, Paul was overtly forbidden by the Spirit to preach in Asia Minor; instead, he was called to evangelize Macedonia, Acts 16. 6-10. When the missionary party arrived in Philippi, it did not appear to be a fortuitous place to begin a new work for God. After all, the apostle's normal approach consisted of going to the local synagogue, making contacts among fellow-Jews, Gentile proselytes, and 'God-fearers' (one step below a proselyte). Philippi seems not to have met the rabbinic requirement for a Jewish house of worship, however, for it does not appear that there

were ten Jewish men residing in the city. Accordingly, upon arriving they made their way to a place where Jews were known to gather for prayer. There they encountered some devout women. Despite the initial lack of a formal congregation, Paul and Silas preached to these dear souls, resulting in the conversion of a Thyatiran businesswoman named Lydia, and her household, Acts 16. 14-15.

The next victory in the gospel was drawn from the world of the occult. A certain enslaved fortune-teller, who derived her 'second sight' through demon possession, daily accosted the missionaries with her misleading cries. In response, Paul cast the unclean spirit out of her, thereby depriving some local businessmen of their lucrative 'property'. Consequently, they did what any opportunistic, aggrieved entrepreneur would do: they took the heralds of the gospel to court. Like the high priests and Sanhedrin before them, they denounced the Christians as dangerous threats to peace and Roman law. These charges were taken quite seriously and resulted in the preachers' imprisonment, Acts 16. 16-24.

Rather than hindering the gospel, this turn of events actually led to one of the most dramatic conversions in the New Testament. Under these difficult circumstances, Paul and Silas displayed a remarkably resilient attitude, praying and singing within their cell. The stocks held their feet, but their ebullient spirits could not be restrained. With hearts full of His love,

By

**KEITH
KEYSER**

Gilbertville,
Pennsylvania,
USA



Bringing the Furtherance of the Gospel Part One

their voices were profitably employed in communion with their Lord. Astonishment must have seized their fellow-inmates, for when an earthquake opened the prison's doors and loosed the prisoners' bonds, no one fled, vv. 26-28. Clearly, God was at work within this place of confinement. This uncommon turn of events terrified and transfixed the jailer. He and his family believed in the Lord Jesus Christ that very night! Between Lydia's household and the unnamed warden, a fledgling assembly was established. Amidst the harsh treatment of the business and legal communities, the gospel produced fruit for God's glory (Paul refers to this 'shameful' treatment in 1 Thessalonians chapter 2 verse 2). It was a indication of what was to come in his later written ministry to the Philippians.

A Postal Bible School for serving the Lord

At the time of the writing of Philippians, Paul was once more in prison. Opinion is divided over the location of his incarceration – Rome, Ephesus, and Caesarea being the suggested possibilities. Regardless of the location, like before, his imprisonment failed to stop the gospel. On the contrary, Philippians makes it clear that Paul possessed a jail-proof joy that transcended trials due to the knowledge of God's incontrovertible purposes, Phil. 1. 6; 4. 4.

Paul could not go to Philippi to preach, so he took up his pen in order to exhort them. Chiefly, on his heart was their unity in Christ, leading to participation in the furtherance of the gospel. He notes their fellowship in the gospel and refers to his great affection for them, 1. 3-11. Nonetheless, their assistance in the ministry was imperiled by a lack of unity within the assembly, which seemed to stem from self-centred behaviour among the believers. Therefore, the apostle devotes a large portion of the book to exhorting them to be more unified, selfless, and Christ-like, 1. 27; 2. 1-11; 4. 1-3.

Outlining Philippians

General Outline

- Chapter 1: The Gospel's Progress against Opposition and Suffering
- Chapter 2: The Gospel's Selfless Proponents
- Chapter 3: The Gospel's Selfish Enemies and their Defeat
- Chapter 4: The Gospel's Uniting and Providing Power

Detailed Outline

- 1. 1-11: Introduction
- 1. 12-26: Paul's imprisonment and its effect on the gospel
- 1. 27-2. 5: Exhortation to live worthy of the gospel amidst suffering and to embrace the mind of Christ
- 2. 6-11: Christ's selfless example
- 2. 12-16: Exhortation to work out their salvation and live consistent with it



- 2. 17-18: Paul's selfless example
- 2. 19-24: Timothy's selfless example
- 2. 25-30: Epaphroditus' selfless example
- 3. 1-2: Answering self-seeking false teachers
- 3. 3-14: Paul's past, present and future regarding righteousness
- 3. 15-21: Exhortation to a godly walk in view of Christ's second coming and the resurrection of their bodies
- 4. 1-9: Exhortation to unity among the saints
- 4. 10-19: Thanksgiving for their financial gift
- 4. 20-23: Closing salutations

Other Prominent Themes of the Book

Philippians repeatedly mentions joy, but it is far removed from erroneous human conceptions of pleasure. This epistle's joy emanates from God's goodness,

love and power. As one writer says, 'It is the joy that comes from complete dedication to the will of Christ which brings about a willingness to even go to the point of death for the sake of the gospel'.³ The book also has much to say about 'the mind', 1. 27; 2. 2, 3, 5; 3. 15, 16, 19; 4. 2, 7. Thankfulness is also an important topic, 1. 3; 4. 6, 10. The third chapter focuses on the important subject of true and false righteousness, but the positive aspects of that subject also appear elsewhere, 1. 11. Likewise, discernment and fellowship run through the epistle like underlying threads, 1. 5, 9-10; 2. 1. In order to effectively serve the Lord for the advancement of His gospel, the saints need to grasp these important concepts which are so essential for the Christian life.

Almost two millennia after it was written, Philippians continues to challenge, encourage and comfort believers in various circumstances of life. The apostle's temporary hardship produced a letter which is being used by the Holy Spirit to edify the saints and advance the glad tidings of Christ. It contains beautiful promises of God's material and spiritual provision for His people, as well as reminders of the Lord's incomparable condescension and sacrifice. It refuses to succumb to melancholy sentiment or discouragement; instead advocating joy in the midst of trials. Most importantly, it views the events of life through the spiritually enlightening lens of being in Christ.

References

- 1 For a good overview of Philippi's history see Herbert W. Bateman IV, 'Were The Opponents at Philippi Necessarily Jewish?'. (1998). *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Volume 155 (155:40-43).
- 2 James L. Blevins, 'Introduction to Philippians', *Review and Expositor*, Volume 77 (1980; vnp.77.3:312).
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To be continued

KEITH KEYSER is a commended full-time worker and is in fellowship in the assembly meeting at Gilbertsville, Pennsylvania. He ministers throughout North America and spent some time in Spain. He has also written material for other assembly magazines. He is married with two young children.





It is rather unfortunate that on most occasions when thought is given to the life of Jephthah, interest is confined to opinion regarding the fate of his daughter! Chapters have been written and much inconclusive speculation undertaken to try to determine from the record of scripture just what took place at Mizpeh following the defeat of the children of Ammon. Yet, lessons will be missed if we give only passing acknowledgement to other details of Jephthah's life.

The forty-five years which followed the murderous exploits of Abimelech were relatively calm and peaceful under the administrations of Tola and Jair. Tola is on record as a defender or deliverer of Israel. A man of Issachar whose family character is mentioned in the nation's genealogies, 'valiant men of might in their generations', 1 Chr. 7. 2. He dwelt and died in the same town, consistent and content, a worthy ruler of his people.

Jair, the judge who undertook responsibility following the death of Tola, was a man of Gilead. This mountainous region to the east of the Jordan was also home to Jephthah, and would later produce the prophet Elijah, all men of calibre and authority whom God could use. The brief record of Jair shows us a man of wealth and influence. Each of his thirty sons had their own transport and their own city and his name lived on after his passing, Judg. 10. 4.

The remaining verses of chapter 10 have a familiar ring as we read, 'The children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord', v. 6. On this occasion, however, the Spirit of God takes time to explain in some detail the nature and the consequences of their rebellion, before a deliverer is raised up. The nation had embraced the gods of seven nations, suggesting a complete departure. The appropriate retribution followed, with the nation suffering oppression for some eighteen years from the Philistines on the west, and the children of Ammon on the east. Eventually, the cry for relief is heard by the Lord as in former times, but now it seems that the divine patience is exhausted. Instead of raising up a liberator, the Lord gives them a

THE DAYS WHEN THE JEPHTHAH A Man of

history lesson and reminds them of the seven-fold deliverance He had brought about for their blessing, vv. 11-12. In view of the Lord's previous responses to their cries, the statement which followed must have brought the nation up with a collective jolt! 'Ye have forsaken me . . . I will deliver you no more . . . the gods which ye have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation', vv. 13-14. It is a serious matter to presume upon the longsuffering of God, yet such is His character that their pleas and prayers touched His heart, and in verse 16 we read that 'his soul was grieved for the misery of Israel'; what a gracious God we have! We recall the words of the prophet Jeremiah in very trying circumstances, 'It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness', Lam. 3. 22-23.

The Ammonites remained as the main oppressor, descendants of Lot, ever a picture in scripture of the threat posed by the flesh; a danger to us all. One major casualty, when the flesh is allowed to dominate, is spiritual leadership. This was acknowledged by 'the people and princes of Gilead', v. 18, and their thoughts turned to Jephthah.

Jephthah was a Gileadite, one of their own. Already known as 'a mighty man of valour', Jephthah had been judged and condemned by his family over a matter in which he was entirely innocent, the immorality of his parents. The hypocrisy involved in the actions of his brothers is stunning! When we consider the debased and corrupt behaviour associated with the many gods which Israel had served in their recent past, Jephthah's conception was commonplace by comparison. Nevertheless he had been cast out of the family home. In exile, Jephthah's reputation was formed, as, together with his band of mercenary followers, he became

notorious. So much so that when the need for a leader became imperative the elders of Gilead abandoned the high moral ground they once occupied and, because it was expedient for them to compromise, they called for Jephthah. There is no doubt that Jephthah was as much a deliverer prepared by God as others had been. Nevertheless, there are aspects of his

character which were forged on the anvil of his own harsh experience. Jephthah had known rejection. Now he desired more than just acceptance, he sought position and authority over those who had despised him. Scripture reminds us that 'pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall', Prov. 16. 18. Before Jephthah's course was run he would have to confess to being brought 'very low', Judg. 11. 35.

Granted his request, Jephthah turned his attention to the Ammonites. It is encouraging to notice his acknowledgement that any victory would be wholly attributable to the Lord, v. 9, and that all his plans were made subject to divine approval, v. 11. But first, before a sword is unsheathed, he sends messengers to speak with the Ammonites in order, in the words of a secular phrase, to 'give peace a chance'. A dialogue followed between the two opposing parties, in which the king of the children of Ammon sought to justify his actions by appealing to history, and what he perceived to be Israel's territorial aggression some three hundred years previously! The response of Jephthah's envoy proved that Ammon's claim was based upon a false premise. In Deuteronomy chapter 2, Moses clearly stated God's prohibition as far as the Ammonites were concerned, 'I will not give thee of the land of the children of Ammon any possession; because I have given it unto the children of Lot', v. 19; the land which Israel possessed was taken from the Amorites, a pagan Canaanite nation under the

By
**JOHN
SCARBROOK**
Killamarsh,
England



JUDGES RULED PART 7

Contradictions

judgement of God.

As we have already seen, Ammon has lessons to teach us concerning that which the epistles speak of as 'the flesh', that part of our being, inherited from Adam, which constantly lusts 'against the Spirit', and wars 'against the soul', Gal. 5. 17; 1 Pet. 2. 11. Ammon's intention was to take control of that which had been given to Israel for an inheritance. We have an adversary who persistently goads the believer to yield to his promptings through the flesh, in order that we lose our enjoyment of the inheritance which God's grace has brought us into.

It is at this point, when the ambassadors of Jephthah have been rejected, that we read the third of seven occasions in the book of Judges when 'the Spirit of the Lord came upon' certain individuals. In a later day, the prophet Isaiah appreciated the significance and the timing of God's interventions as he wrote, 'When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him', Isa. 59. 19. The battle now became inevitable, but before the opposing armies are joined, Jephthah utters the words for which he is best remembered, Judg. 11. 30. The promise that if the Lord would give him the victory, then whatsoever came forth from the doors of his house to meet him, would be offered up as a burnt offering. It may well have been that he wanted to display his zeal or show his commitment, but whatever the motive, it was a rash statement, a foolish vow and totally unnecessary. It must be said that there seems to be an element of the flesh in such a promise! Yet, his desire to maybe appear super-spiritual would have serious and lasting consequences for him. Scripture makes it abundantly clear that we are to make no 'provision for the flesh', Rom. 13. 14. Perhaps Jephthah's

efforts to negotiate with Ammon had left their mark, as indeed any attempt to accommodate the flesh will affect the believer's ability to make sound judgements.

The manner in which Jephthah's vow was framed apparently allows more for the possibility of a person meeting him rather than any animal suitable for sacrifice! Could it be that Jephthah, who knew his Bible, had God's dealings with Abraham and the offering up of Isaac in mind? Jephthah recognized that the end result on that occasion was a life spared, the promise of a blessing and



a multiplied seed. But Jephthah was no Abraham and, in the absence of guidance from the Lord, in the carrying out of his vow by whatever means, he ended any hope of establishing a family line.

The battle against Ammon was won, 'the Lord delivered them into his hands', Judg. 11. 32. But the elation of Jephthah's victorious return to Mizpeh is soon extinguished by his grief at the meeting of his only daughter. The story is well documented, but two commendable resolutions are worthy of note. First,

the determination of Jephthah to carry out his vow, having opened his mouth to the Lord, he would not retract his words. Secondly, the courageous stance of his daughter, 'Do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth'.

What followed has been the subject of much debate without any convincing conclusion. Words have been analyzed, customs considered, the character of deity questioned, and still the two main possibilities remain. Did Jephthah offer up his daughter as a human sacrifice? Or did she remain under a vow of lifelong chastity, thus ending Jephthah's hopes for future generations? A concise and comprehensive presentation of the different viewpoints can be found in *Judges* by C. T. LACEY in *What the Bible Teaches* series, published by John Ritchie Ltd. Suffice it to say that the Bible's only comments are that Jephthah 'did with her according to his vow which he had vowed', Judg. 11. 39; and his name is recorded among the faithful, Heb. 11. 32.

The victory over Ammon was soon overshadowed as the Northern tribes descended into a brief but bitter civil war. The catalyst for this conflict, as on a previous occasion, Judg. 8. 1, was the complaint of Ephraim that they had been overlooked in the call to arms. It would seem that Ephraim was not particularly looking for a fight, but Jephthah, the man prepared to negotiate peace with the children of Ammon, turned rapaciously upon his brethren! Not only did he 'smite them' but cut off at the fords of Jordan those who escaped and slew 'forty and two thousand' of them. These unfortunate ones failed 'the Shibboleth test' and it cost them their lives. How often have we made a brother 'an offender for a word', Isa. 29. 21, and condemned him out of hand? For a further six years Jephthah judged Israel and in passing away was buried in his native mountains in Gilead.

JOHN SCARBROOK is Secretary to the Precious Seed Trust.





Maintaining the Rights and Interests of David's

BASED ON THE EARLY CHAPTERS OF 1 KINGS

By **BRYAN**

In critical and difficult times loyalties are tested, motives surface and leadership is needed. This is true in both assembly life and family life. A believer's first loyalty should be to the Lord, and His will and interests should come first. Crises happened on a number of occasions in the history of Israel. Such a crisis occurred when David's life was ebbing and his designated successor, Solomon, was waiting in the wings for his coronation.

But a conspiracy was brewing. We have three men who were a serious threat to the heir to David's throne: Adonijah, one of David's sons, spurred on by selfish ambition; Joab and Abiathar, motivated by self-interest. These show themselves to be false leaders. We also have three men who sought to maintain the rights and interests of Solomon; Nathan, Zadok, and Benaiah, who play a crucial part in the events at this critical time and who are shown to be true leaders.

ADONIJAH attempts to seize power by means of a coup. He has himself crowned in the company of an inner circle and key national figures, 1 Kgs. 1. 5-8. His character belies his name, 'my Lord is Jehovah'. He is marked by particular sins:

self-centredness: 'I will be king'. He wants power for himself.

self-will: 'I will be king'. He wants his will to prevail, in disregard and defiance of God's will.

self-exaltation: 'I will be king'. He exalts himself; he wants to be somebody, to be as high in others' esteem as he is in his own.

These characteristics are found in those who want prominence and status, who would promote themselves. We see the same thing in Absalom when he rebels. Hushai acting on David's behalf appeals to Absalom's pride and ego as he seeks to thwart his conspiracy and rebellion; he suggests that 'all Israel be . . . gathered unto thee . . . as the sand . . . for multitude; and that thou go to battle in thine own person', 2 Sam. 17. 11. Absalom is clearly taken by the

idea. In the very same incident, Ahithophel's pride and self-centredness are seen as he gives his advice to Absalom. He is clearly acting on his own behalf. He says, 'Let me . . . I will arise . . . I will . . . I will . . . I will bring', 2 Sam. 17. 2-3. Sadly, this spirit can be found in any one of us. Diotrephes exhibited such a spirit; we read, 'who (Diotrephes) likes to put himself first', 3 John 9 Amplified.

JOAB AND ABIATHAR were loyal to David when Absalom rebelled. Now they follow Adonijah rather than Solomon. Would it be unkind to say, at least where Joab is concerned, that his motive on both occasions was to a large extent **self-interest**?

Here is man who likes being leader in the army. When his position is threatened he acts to preserve it, if necessary by killing rivals, 1 Kgs. 2. 5. The second chapter of Philippians shows that the sin of self-interest is not uncommon amongst God's people: 'all look after their own interests', v. 21 RSV. We are here to serve *His* interests.

Who, then, will remain true to David? We shall find such amongst those not invited to the usurper's enthronement party, those whose loyalties were clearly elsewhere, 1 Kgs. 1. 7-8.

NATHAN THE PROPHET'S concern in life is very different from that of the rebels: the mind and will of God and its communication and implementation are his concern. Here, he acts to thwart the usurper and so ensure God's will is done, that is, the enthronement of Solomon, 1 Kgs. 1. 9-11. We observe his promptness. He wastes no time in gaining admittance to David to acquaint him with the facts of the case: this is seen in the words, 'He (Adonijah) is gone down this day', 1 Kgs. 1. 25. The coronation of Solomon is effected later that day. Delay and procrastination are perils we cannot afford. When obedience is required, action is needed, danger threatens. Nathan's actions are paralleled by Phinehas' when he took a spear and summarily put to death an Israelite man with his Midianite woman, thereby seeking to cleanse the camp of the Lord's people, Num. 25. 6-

8; by Paul's who, at the very commencement of his letters to the Corinthian assembly and to the assemblies of Galatia, went straight to the point of critical issues involving the rights and interests of the Lord, 'It hath been declared unto me . . . that there are contentions among you', 1 Cor. 1. 11ff; 'I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him who called you . . . unto another gospel', Gal. 1. 6ff. We observe also Nathan's focus on the future. He was a man who took a long-term view, who looked to the needs of God's people of future generations. This is seen some hundreds of years later when we read of Hezekiah's restoration of temple worship, which is done according to 'the commandment of . . . Nathan', 2 Chr. 29. 25-27. Nathan had written down instructions as he had received them from the Lord. Corporate worship has never been a 'do your own thing', but commandments and guidance were in place then, as today, as we can see from apostolic teaching, cf. 1 Cor. 11. 23; 14. 37, for instance.

As a result of Nathan's actions the conspiracy of the usurper crumbled.

ZADOK the PRIEST is loyal to David and is the one who actually has the privilege and responsibility of anointing Solomon as king. He acts in his priestly capacity using the oil from the golden lamp. Zadok exalts David's son and heir, 1 Kgs. 1. 38-39. In the coronation, he throws the spotlight fully and exclusively on to Solomon. He ensures that Solomon is centre stage. He orchestrates his acclamation. How important that the Lord Jesus is exalted as Lord personally, 'He must increase'. How equally important that He is exalted Head of each local assembly. Zadok also exalts God, and is self-effacing. This is seen when Solomon gives thanks to God subsequent to the dream that God gave him at the outset of his reign, 1 Kgs. 3. 5, 15. Solomon goes to the tabernacle to offer burnt and peace offerings. Zadok is not mentioned; but he is there, quietly doing his job, not drawing attention to himself, 'I must decrease'. This is true worship. So Peter speaks of himself as a 'fellow-elder', 1 Pet. 5. 1; whilst Paul

's Son and Heir

CHARLES Appledore, Devon, England

tells the assembly at Corinth to think of Apollos and himself as 'servants' (Gk. *diakonos*). The supreme self-effacement is that of the Lord Jesus Himself, as shown in Philippians chapter 2. As a result of Zadok's actions the rightful heir is crowned.

BENAIAH the son of Jehoida is another man who is loyal to the king and his concern is to serve David's son. He is a man who rejoices in David's son being honoured; indeed, he desires that he may be honoured more than David and that his kingdom be greater, and he tells David so, 1 Kgs. 1. 36-37! Can we honour the Son of David, the Son of God too much, too highly? The Lord Jesus is worthy of all honour, to be honoured above all and by all. In honouring the Lord Jesus, we honour the Father, John 5. 23. In the early days of his reign, Solomon gives Benaiah the task of executing Adonijah, Shimei and Joab, all of whom are unrighteous men and threats to his kingdom. In the case of Joab, however, he clings to the horns of the altar and refuses to move. Responsibly, Benaiah returns to Solomon, gives him an accurate picture and awaits confirmation or otherwise of Solomon's instruction, 1 Kgs. 2. 29-31. So, he carries out Solomon's instructions reliably and faithfully. He wants to ensure he does nothing that may not be his lord's will. Paul's advice in Ephesians chapter 5 verses 15-17 is exemplified in Benaiah who walked circumspectly and wisely; he does so in the matters referred to above, but also another instance is noted in David's honours list, when he killed a lion in a pit on a snowy day, observantly noting footprints going into, but not coming from, the pit, 2 Sam. 23. 20.

As a result of Benaiah's actions the king's reign is established.

These last three men all sought to maintain the rights and interests of David's son. So should we.

BRYAN CHARLES, together with his wife Margaret, lives in Westward Ho!, North Devon. They meet in a local assembly in Appledore. He has recently retired, having been a teacher in Derbyshire, Cornwall and Co. Durham, before moving to his last post in Bideford in 1990.

NEVER

Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall', 2 Pet. 1. 10.

On three historic occasions in Peter's life he used the word 'never'. And on each occasion the Lord had to rebuke him because he had got it wrong.

In Matthew chapter 26 Peter boasted, 'Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I **never** be offended', v. 33. Earlier, when many were turning away from following Christ, he had declared, 'Thou hast the words of eternal life', John 6. 68. Peter believed the Lord was right about everything – except at this one point. Peter just knew that he would never deny the Lord! The

Lord's rebuke was as tender as it was certain: 'Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice', v. 34. And of course it was true. Peter had to learn that spiritual conflicts are not won by stubborn hearts and rusty swords. The enemy will have to be resisted 'stedfast in the faith', 1 Pet. 5. 9.

Earlier that evening in the Upper Room, Peter had felt very awkward as He watched his Lord washing feet. When the Master moved the basin toward Peter, he had responded, 'Thou shalt **never** wash my feet', John 13. 8. Again we hear the Lord's gracious corrective: 'If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me'. The one-time bath of regeneration is key for a relationship in Christ; but the regular application of the word from the basin of sanctification is essential for fellowship with Christ.

After the ascension, Peter began proclaiming the gospel to the lost sheep of Israel. But one afternoon, from a housetop on the Mediterranean coast, he observed a divine object lesson – a tarpaulin holding animals of various kinds – and heard the Lord command him to eat. 'But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have **never** eaten any thing that is common or unclean', Acts 10. 14. Once more the Lord explained why Peter's 'never' was wrong. As they spoke, Gentiles were at the door, eagerly seeking a messenger to bring the gospel to them.

This time, however, Peter had it right. 'If ye do these things, ye shall **never** fall', 2 Pet. 1. 10. The character traits of the kingdom, vv. 5-7, if added into our faith, will herald a triumphant entrance into it on that day.

Extracted from *Day by Day Bible Promises* published by Precious Seed Publications





Restarting a work amongst children

(Part 1)

By **MICHAEL BUCKERIDGE** Grantham, England

How we got started

We went where the children were.

We used the Ayrshire Bible Exhibition as our 'launch-pad'. This gave us the opportunity to make contact with schools, and some agreed to come, and, through them, the children.

When the Exhibition had left we had something immediate and special to invite them to – a Holiday Bible Club the following week.

This holiday activity provided us with something to which we could invite those children with whom we had made contact. We held other regular specials, including 'Christmas Parties' and summer barbeques, to give the children something different to look forward to and as an opportunity to meet the families.

Issues to resolve

Choosing a time for a weekly meeting?

Every time will have its pros and cons. If we remember that ultimately it is the Lord who will bring the children along we can spend the time we use arguing about the best time for the meeting for

praying that the Lord will send some along. Don't be afraid to be different in your choice of day and time. We chose Saturday morning because due to work commitments that was the only time that I could guarantee to be there each week. More recently the opportunity to have it after school from 4:30-5:30 p.m., has arisen and the Lord has seen fit to bless this change with an increase in numbers. Practically, the time is going to be when the helpers can, humanly speaking, guarantee to be there, so set the time, pray and advertise.

What can we do to attract the children?

I'm no expert with modern technology so I don't do anything spectacular. An overhead projector, whiteboards, flashcard books and flannel-graph are about the limit of my capabilities. Quizzes are always something they enjoy so we have a variety of them and do one or two each week. We have a points reward scheme where once a term the children can exchange the points for various 'goodies' in a 'shop'.



Editor's Note: The assemblies at Grantham and Mansfield, like many others, found difficulties in maintaining a once thriving children's work. As numbers declined, the work needed reappraising to see what might be done to reach the young with the gospel. These two articles are intended to give impetus to those who want to recommence or rebuild an assembly children's work.

We do some craft activities now and again and the occasional colouring or other activity, but depending on the numbers coming and the help available this may not be practical. It should be remembered that the atmosphere of the occa-

sion and the interest that we show in the children is far more likely to result in them coming along than anything fancy we do – after all, can we really compete with the entertainments of the world? One of the biggest encouragements I had was when a girl who struggles at school came along by herself to our family service and said simply, 'I like this church'. She felt welcome and safe with people who would accept her for what she was and I think this is what is most likely to keep the children coming back.

Is it just the children's meeting?

No. I include in the children's work visiting schools and our monthly family service as they are ministries which have children at the heart of them. After the Exhibition there was a need to hand out prizes and this provided an excellent opportunity to maintain the contact that we had made. Almost as an afterthought we asked if they would like us to return to tell a story at another school assembly resulting, over time, in us being able to speak to around 1,300 children regularly. If at all possible, this is a great thing to do as you have the children there as a captive and usually interested audience. The family service affords the opportunity for the children to bring their parents along, so building relationships with them.



MICHAEL BUCKERIDGE is in fellowship at the Bethesda assembly, Grantham, England. He is married to Emma and they have two small children. He is a self-employed book-keeper.

THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF SOME OF OUR LORD'S PARABLES

By **MALCOLM HORLOCK** Cardiff, Wales

(UNLESS OTHERWISE STATED, ALL QUOTATIONS OF SCRIPTURE ARE FROM THE NEW KING JAMES VERSION)

4

The Parable of the Workers in Vineyard. Matthew 20. 1-15. Part 1.

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT (continued)

As I understand it, by means of the Parable of the Workers in Vineyard the Lord raises with us the issue of *our motives* for serving Him.

At the outset, we need to consider the structure of the passage. The first, and all-important, point to note is that the parable is wedged between two similar versions of the same saying: on the one hand, 'many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first', Matt. 19. 30, and, on the other hand, in reverse order, 'the last shall be first, and the first last', Matt. 20. 16. Clearly these two sayings are meant to function as the bookends of the parable.

The second point to note is that the parable opens with the word 'for', Matt. 20. 1, and is immediately followed by the word 'so', v. 16. These verbal links tell us plainly that the purpose of the parable is to explain, to illustrate, and to amplify the saying.¹ Consequently, any satisfactory interpretation of the parable must harmonize with the saying, and any satisfactory interpretation of the saying must harmonize with the parable. All suggested interpretations of either the parable or the saying which fail this test must be rejected.

The third point to note is that the first saying ('many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first') itself begins with the word 'But', Matt. 19. 30.² That is, in some way this saying must stand in contrast to what is said previously; namely in verses 28-29. Reading back further, we discover that the whole section from verse 28 on is anchored in Peter's statement and question of verse 27, 'We have left all and followed you. Therefore what shall we have?' We conclude therefore that verses 28-29 form one answer to Peter's question and that the passage from chapter 19 verse 30 down to chapter 20 verse 16 forms another – a contrasting – answer. But, reading back still further, we find that Peter's question itself arises out of a previous incident, recorded in verses 16 to 26 of chapter 19.

That incident concerns an exemplary rich young man who had approached Jesus with a question about obtaining eternal life. This exceptional young man knew in his heart that more was required than mere outward conformity to the law; hence his, 'What do I still lack?'³ The Lord knew the young man's heart, that riches held the supreme place there. And so He put His finger on the dominant love and idol⁴ in the young man's life.⁵

He told the rich ruler⁶ to forsake his wealth – 'go, sell what you have and give to the poor . . . and come, follow me', Matt. 19. 21. But, faced with this two-fold demand (in effect, to 'forsake' and to 'follow'), the young man's brow clouded over⁷ and he went away sorrowful, v. 22. The price was too high for him.

Turning to His disciples, the Lord informed them how difficult it is for those who are rich to enter God's kingdom, v. 23. He illustrated His point by reference to the natural impossibility of the (to them) largest familiar animal (the camel) entering through the smallest familiar hole (the eye of a needle). 'It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle', He said, 'than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God', v. 24.⁸ The disciples were astounded. Were not riches, they may well have questioned in their minds, themselves an evidence of God's blessing and favour?⁹ 'Who then can be saved?' they wanted to know, v. 25. Looking at them, Jesus declared, 'With men this is impossible ('this cannot be'), but with God all things are possible ('all things can be')', v. 26.

It was at this point that Peter spoke up, to claim that they (the twelve) had complied with both of the conditions which the Lord had laid down for the young ruler, 'Then Peter answered and said to Him, Behold, we have left all and followed you', v. 27 literally. We note: (i) it is said that Peter 'answered', in all likelihood indicating that he was replying to what Jesus had just said; and (ii) the 'we' is emphatic in each of the synoptic Gospels.¹⁰ 'We', the apostle was saying, 'have done precisely what the young man was not prepared to'. And then came the tell-tale question; literally, 'What then shall we (emphatic) have?'

What, we may ask, was in the minds of the disciples? Clearly, we need to relate Peter's question to the popular understanding of 'Messiahship', and to the disciples' own expectation of the manifested kingdom of God. Alas, at this point, their eyes were closed to all else except the imminent advent of a physical, temporal and earthly kingdom. Only a moment or so before the Lord had promised that those who 'forsook' all and 'followed' Him would 'have treasure in heaven', v. 21. We can take it that the disciples' eyes had lit up at those words. Their appetite had been well and truly whetted. For, beyond any dispute, they had certainly fulfilled all the conditions. And they were now eager to hear more details of their reward. In effect, they wanted the Lord to put some flesh on the bones!

As we have noted above, and as often, Peter was simply the spokesman of the apostolic band. Hence the repeated 'we' of verse 27, together with the way in which the Lord addressed 'them' as 'you' (plural) in verse 28. And we must grant that the sacrifices which

these men had made were far from negligible. We are told, for instance, that the author of this gospel had risen up from his custom-booth and left behind him his spacious house – a house large enough to accommodate ‘many’ tax-collectors and outcasts for a farewell meal.¹¹ For their part, Peter and Andrew had left their fishing nets,¹² and James and John had left their boat, their father and the hired servants.¹³ And of each it is said that they had then ‘followed’ Jesus.

It is lovely to observe that our Lord first answered the disciples in the spirit in which they had asked, giving a straight answer of the very sort they had hoped for, vv. 28-29. Reversing the order expressed by Peter in verse 27, the Saviour spoke first, in verse 28, of those who had ‘followed’, and second, in verse 29, of those who had ‘left’. The twelve would each have a throne, v. 28, and ‘everyone’ who left anything for His sake would receive a hundredfold recompense, v. 29.¹⁴

Speaking of the apostles themselves, Jesus said they would be allocated special places of authority and responsibility (‘thrones . . . judging’) in the Messianic kingdom at the time of Israel’s and the earth’s ‘regeneration’.

Speaking of ‘everyone who has left’, He focused, not on recompense to be received in the coming kingdom, but on recompense to be received in the present life.¹⁵ The Lord listed in pairs the order in which His followers would be willing to leave their families: ‘brothers or sisters, or father or mother, or wife¹⁶ or children’. And all these He enclosed between ‘houses’ and ‘lands’, in all probability because ‘great possessions’ had proved the key issue for the young man in verse 22. God would, the Lord taught, compensate all such sacrifices by increased spiritual relationships and possessions in what we now know to be a world-wide circle of fellowship. And so, what men might reckon to be a sacrifice was in reality an investment. God would not be their debtor!¹⁷

And they would, Jesus finished, ‘inherit eternal life’. And with these words, the section has come full circle. For they clearly link back to the rich young ruler’s question in verse 16, ‘What good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?’ Indeed, Luke closes his account of the incident at this point,¹⁸ as a story complete in itself: wholehearted commitment to Christ brings eternal life.

In his Gospel, Mark concludes his account of the young man’s encounter with Jesus and our Lord’s subsequent teaching to His disciples with His words, ‘But many who are first will be last; and the last first’.¹⁹ And there the saying hangs, so to speak, in mid-air – with no parable to help explain its proper significance.

We are indebted to Matthew alone (under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, of course) for recording our Lord’s explanation of the meaning of the saying.

And so to the parable itself.

EXPOSITION

It hardly needs to be said that *the main point and purpose of the parable is tied up with the manner in which the wages of the vineyard workers were paid at the end of the day*. ‘When evening had come’, reads verse 8, ‘the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, “Call the labourers and give them their wages, beginning with the last to the first”’ – where the words ‘last’ and ‘first’ become all-important, and where ‘the first’ quite literally becomes ‘the last’ and ‘the last’ quite literally becomes ‘the first’.

The procedure followed in verse 8 therefore provides the key to the meaning of our Lord’s enigmatic saying. But for us to grasp that meaning we need first to listen to the Saviour as He tells the whole of His parable.

Verse 1. Vineyards were plentiful in Judea and during the time of the grape harvest in particular workers were in great demand. ‘The vintage and the pressing had to be finished before the onset of the rainy season’.²⁰ Consequently, to be certain of securing his requisite workforce, the ‘landowner’²¹ felt obliged to get down to the market-place²² early – which market-place served among other things as the local Unemployment Office (now titled Jobcentre Plus).²³

‘Early in the morning’: presumably, that is, when the Jewish day started at 6 a.m.

Verse 2. Here we meet one of the key words of the parable, ‘agreed’, which will play a most important part in verse 13. This word ‘agreed’ translates the Greek word from which we derive the English word ‘symphony’. That is, the owner of the vineyard so-to-speak ‘harmonized’ and ‘was in accord’ with the first group of labourers. He and they entered into a binding agreement, everything being conducted in the most business-like manner. There was a contract with very clear terms, specifying both a stipulated sum and a stipulated period; ‘a denarius a day’.

It is important to note that ‘a denarius’ was a most decent – even a generous – wage for a vineyard worker.²⁴ This vineyard owner was certainly not out to short-change or to exploit the men who worked for the whole day.

Verses 3-5a. Reckoning from the commencement of the day at 6 a.m., ‘the third hour’ was 9 a.m. It was ‘about that time that the vineyard owner returned to the market-place, where he observed ‘others standing idle’ – the word ‘idle’²⁵ indicating only that they were inactive and, as yet, unemployed.

It is important to note that the arrangement which the owner made with these men is very different to that he had made with the first group of labourers. On this occasion there is no precise contract. In this case we read only of the vineyard owner’s undertaking to give these men what was deemed to be ‘right’ (equitable, that is). Such an arrangement demanded from the workers no small measure of trust in the man’s fair dealing and honesty. But for these workers his rather

vague undertaking was sufficient, and on the strength of it 'they went'.

Verse 5b. The actions of 9 a.m. were repeated at 12 noon and at 3 p.m. It is likely that each of the workers employed on all three occasions understood the vineyard owner's 'whatever is right I will give you' to mean that, in due course, they should receive the appropriate proportion of a full day's wage. But we note that, strictly speaking, none of these men had any legitimate cause for complaint (still less, any legal redress or comeback) if, in the event, he chose to pay them much less.²⁶

Verses 6-7. At about 5 p.m. the vineyard owner returned to the market-place. 'Are there not', Jesus once asked, 'twelve hours in the day?'²⁷ And indeed, a full working day, including breaks, consisted of twelve hours. So by 'the eleventh hour' the day was coming to its close. Hence the owner's question in verse 6 (literally), 'Why do you stand here *all the day* idle?'

That the men had remained in the market-place for almost the entire day showed just how desperately they wanted work. But, as they explained, 'No one hired us'.

This time the owner's response differs significantly even from what he had said to those employed at 9 a.m., at 12 noon, and at 3 p.m. On this occasion, all he said was, 'You also go into the vineyard'.²⁸ This time, there was no mention made of any wage or reward.

The 5 o'clock labourers therefore set about their work in simple reliance on the vineyard-owner's good nature. They were content to depend entirely on his character. Lacking any promise of recompense, they had no legal comeback, even if, in the event, the man chose to pay them nothing at all.

Verse 8. The time of recompense brought two great surprises. First, there was the *order* of the payments, and, second, there was the *size* of the payments.

'When evening had come'. The owner of the vineyard acted strictly in accord with God's law, 'The wages of him who is hired shall not remain with you all night until morning'²⁹ – the rationale for which command was later explained, 'You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy . . . each day you shall give him his wages, and not let the sun go down on it, for he is poor and has set his heart on it; lest he cry out against you to the Lord, and it be sin to you'.³⁰

'His steward' was the man who administered his affairs for him; the senior servant responsible for running the household and supervising the other servants.

The first surprise came with the specified order of payments; 'beginning with the last to the first'. This then was very much a case of 'last come, first served'! And here lies a desperately important part of the story.

For here are created the two categories which control all that follows, and which serve to explain our Lord's words at the close, 'So the last will be first, and the first last'. Note the later identification of the early morning team as 'the first', v. 10, the identification of the 5 o'clock team as 'these last', v. 12, and the description of one of the 5 o'clock team as 'this last', v. 14.

We are left in no doubt, therefore, about the identity of the two key groups. Indeed, it is clear that the meaning of the parable focuses entirely on just these two groups; those who commenced work at 9 a.m., 12 noon and 3 p.m. are simply scenery in the story.

As far as our Lord's story went, presumably the vineyard owner wanted those who had been hired first to see how generous he was to those he had hired later. But this very detail was critically important to the lesson our Lord wanted to teach His disciples. For, had 'the first' been paid first, they would doubtless each have taken his denarius and disappeared out of the story. And even if 'the first' had stayed around to witness the payment of those who began their work later, they (the first) could have murmured then only that the other workers had been paid too much. In either case, the whole purpose and moral of the parable would have been lost.

Verses 9-10. It is at this point that the Lord introduces the second – and even bigger – surprise in store for His disciples. For 'the last' ('those . . . who were hired about the eleventh hour') received a whole denarius.

Why, the Lord's disciples may well have wondered, didn't those who had worked for only one twelfth of the day receive a 'pondion' – a coin with a value exactly one-twelfth of a denarius?³¹

Quite understandably, the 'first (the workers who had begun at six o'clock in the morning) . . . supposed that they would receive more'. We can almost see them while they stood waiting in the queue, rubbing their hands together, tapping their noses and whispering among themselves, 'Therefore what shall we have?' This was, of course, the very question which Peter had recently voiced on behalf of the twelve.³² That is, the early-morning team were thinking hard about what they were going to get for their service. Their minds were wholly occupied with the detail of their reward.

'But', someone might say, 'Fair's fair! Surely it was only reasonable for them to expect some productivity bonus. For, after all, they had done much more work, and had done most of this through the hardest time of the day'. On any score, it *seemed* that justice was very much on their side. And yet, when their turn came to be paid, they – to their dismay and disgust – received only a denarius.

Verse 11. Although, according to verse 8, it had been the 'steward' who actually handed out the wages, the vineyard owner himself had clearly remained in earshot. And it was against him personally that the men 'murmured' ('grumbled') – the tense³³ indicating

that their complaint was continued and prolonged. They were certainly not amused! Any more, I guess, than many of us would have been.

Verse 12. 'Us who have borne the burden and the heat of the day'. The word 'burden' describes oppressive, burdensome and wearisome toil.³⁴ These men had been exposed to the 'heat' of the sun, and, likely as not, of the sirocco; the sirocco being a scorching hot and dry wind which blew in from the desert at sunrise, referred to in scripture as 'a vehement east wind', and as the wind which comes 'up from the wilderness'.³⁵ We may well recall the words of Jacob to Laban, 'In the day the drought consumed me'.³⁶

By way of contrast, the first to be paid had had to contend with neither the sirocco nor the sun. Their work not only had extended for a much shorter period (namely, one-twelfth of the time), but had been far less strenuous and demanding, for they had benefited from the cool of the evening.

And there we leave our study, with the early morning team feeling pretty peeved about the treatment they had received. God willing, we shall consider the vineyard owner's response and its significance, together with the sequel to our Lord's parable, in the next issue.

To be continued

Footnotes

- 1 Technically, the 'for' is a conjunction and the 'so' is an adverb. But, though different forms of speech, both words serve equally to tie the parable to the saying.
- 2 Matt. 19. 30.
- 3 Matt. 19. 20.
- 4 The young ruler claimed to have kept those commandments which were 'man-ward', Matt. 19. 18-20 (cf. Exod. 20. 13-16; Lev. 19. 18). But, in effect, the Lord Jesus took him back to the very first commandment – which was 'God-ward'; namely, 'You shall have no other gods before me', Exod. 20. 3.
- 5 The Lord's demands were motivated by love for the young man, Mark 10. 21.
- 6 Luke 18. 18.
- 7 'His countenance fell at the saying', Mark 10. 22 RV.
- 8 When commenting on Matthew 19. 23-26, THOMAS AQUINAS (1225-1274) in his *Catena Aurea - Gospel of Matthew* attributes the following gloss to ANSELM OF CANTERBURY (1033-1109): 'It is explained . . . that at Jerusalem there was a certain gate, called, "The needle's eye", through which a camel could not pass, but on its bended knees, and after its burden had been taken off; and so the rich should not be able to pass along the narrow way that leads to life, till he had put off the burden of sin, and of riches, that is, ceasing to love them'. See <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/catena1.ii.xix.html>. Although this 'explanation' has appealed to many since, it has no sound basis. 'The idea that it ("The Needle's Eye") was simply a name for a small gate in Jerusalem is based on a gate from the medieval period and sheds no light on Jesus' teaching', *The IVP Bible Background Commentary* on Matthew 19. 23-26. 'The gate in Jerusalem known as "The Needle's Eye" was built during the middle ages and was not in existence in Jesus' day. Jesus was speaking rhetorically to point out that apart from God's intervention, salvation is impossible'; so reads the footnote to Mark 10. 25 in *The NET Bible*. The Jewish Babylonian Talmud speaks, in similar vein to our Lord, of an elephant passing through the eye of a needle to describe something which is impossible, 'Perhaps you are from Pumbeditha, he retorted, where they draw an elephant through the eye of a needle' (*Baba Mezi'a*, 38b), and 'A man is never shown in a dream a date palm of gold, or an elephant

- going through the eye of a needle' (*Berakoth*, 55b). But, although the Rabbis in Babylon would have been familiar with elephants, the same would not have been true of the people in Israel in our Lord's day. Our Lord therefore spoke in terms which they would have recognized; namely, of a 'camel'.
- 9 Certainly, at the outset of Israel's history, the Lord had promised that national prosperity and blessing would follow obedience; see, for example, Deuteronomy chapters 26-28.
- 10 Matt. 19. 27; Mark 10. 28; Luke 18. 28.
- 11 Matt. 9. 9-10.
- 12 Matt. 4. 20.
- 13 Matt. 4. 22; Mark 1. 20.
- 14 Some Greek manuscripts read 'manifold' (as in Luke 18. 30) rather than 'hundredfold' (as in Mark 10. 30). But the sense is unaffected.
- 15 Mark's parallel account reports the Lord's words as, 'There is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for my sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold *now in this time* – houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, *with persecutions* – and in the age to come, eternal life', Mark 10. 29-30.
- 16 Although several of the oldest Greek manuscripts omit 'wife' from the list here in Matthew 19 (as they do in Mark 10. 29), the inclusion of 'wife' is undisputed in Luke 18. 29.
- 17 I have traced back the saying 'God is no one's debtor' as far as THOMAS AQUINAS (1225-1274). The saying is found in his *Summa Theologica*, First Part of the Second Part, under Question 114.
- 18 Luke 18. 29.
- 19 Mark 10. 31.
- 20 JOACHIM JEREMIAS, *Rediscovering the Parables*, page 136.
- 21 Literally, 'housemaster'. He is one and the same, of course, as 'the owner (literally 'lord') of the vineyard' of verse 8.
- 22 Verse 3 makes it clear that it was to 'the market-place' that he went.
- 23 'The market-place was the equivalent of the labour exchange. A man came there first thing in the morning, carrying his tools, and waited until someone hired him'. WILLIAM BARCLAY, *The Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of Matthew*, volume 2, page 223.
- 24 See the comments on Luke 10. 35 in my exposition of the Parable of the Good Samaritan on the centre pages of *Precious Seed International*, Volume 64, Number 2, May 2009. Additionally, a denarius was the equivalent of the Greek 'drachma', which, according to the Jewish apocalyptic book of Tobit 5. 14, was paid as a daily wage. Note also: 'One of Caesar's scribes [a skilled workman] received one denarius per day', ARTHUR RUPPRECHT, *Christianity and the Slavery Question* at http://www.theologicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/bets/vol06/6-2_rupprecht.pdf. 'One denar per day was considered a good wage. The great Hillel did manual labour for half that sum', T. W. MANSON, *The Sayings of Jesus*, 219.
- 25 'Idle, ἀργος (α, negative, and ἐργον, "work")', W. E. VINE, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*.
- 26 It would have been no problem for the vineyard owner to have made payment of a *much* smaller sum than a whole denarius. One denarius was worth four sesterces, one sesterterius was worth four asses, one assarius was worth four quadrans and one quadrans was worth two lepta (the two 'mites of Mark 12. 42 and Luke 21. 2). That is, one denarius was worth 128 lepta.
- 27 John 11. 9.
- 28 The earliest manuscripts omit the clause 'and whatever is right you will receive'. The insertion of these words by some later copyist – as in the text underlying the KJV and NKJV – goes no small way to destroying the meaning of the parable. 'These words ('you go too') said this time with marked emphasis . . . The clause about payment . . . is obviously out of place in this case', A. B. BRUCE, *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, on Matthew 20 verse 7.
- 29 Lev. 19. 13b.
- 30 Deut. 24. 14-15.
- 31 'There is such a thing as a twelfth part of a denar. It was called a pondion', T. W. MANSON, *ibid.*, page 220. Similarly, in his commentary on Mark 12. 41, MATTHEW POOLE quotes from chapter 19 of JOHN LIGHTFOOT, *Temple Service*: 'each denarius made six meahs . . . the meah made two pondions'.
- 32 Matt. 19. 27.
- 33 Imperfect.
- 34 'Burdensome, grievous, oppressive', *Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon*, under *barov*.
- 35 Jonah 4. 8 and Hos. 13. 15 respectively.
- 36 Gen. 31. 40.



Restarting a work amongst children

(Part 2)

By **DAVID SCARSBROOK** Mansfield, England

The assembly in Mansfield had a children's work and had seen much blessing over many years through these activities. However, this work had declined and, eventually, had ceased.

After a period of about two years there was an exercise amongst the saints to restart this outreach and seek to present the Lord to both the children of believers in the assembly and to those living in the locality.

Before we Began

The lead up to the recommencement of the work took approximately six months and it was a frequent topic of prayer during this period. Indeed, in the weeks leading up to the commencement, the assembly held 'special' Saturday morning prayer meetings making the children's work the particular focus of prayer. It was a real encouragement and blessing to see saints who knew 'working with children' was not their specific area of gift, still keen to gather and support through prayer. Indeed, at Mansfield and in any other assembly, it is important that the work is seen as an 'assembly activity', not just the work of a few.

In the time before the activities with the children began other practical issues were addressed. A wide range of resources were prepared and a child protection policy was developed. In relation to child protection issues the help of the Churches Child Protection Advisory Service, CCPAS, was invaluable. They run a number of very useful 'courses', supply a draft child protection policy (which gave an excellent starting point for the writing of our own policy), administer the acquisition of Criminal Records Bureau, CRB, checks and provide a constant source of information and, if necessary,

advice. Invites were also delivered to all of the local homes and the head-teacher of a school very near the Hall also agreed to take several hundred invites and distribute them to pupils.



Getting Started

As a launch for the new weekly children's work we held a 'Holiday Bible Club'. In all invites that we send out we ensure it is clear that parents are most welcome to come with their children and during the Holiday Bible Club week both parents and children attended. In the lead up to this week, as a result of a lack of faith, I had two conflicting worries: either that very few children would come, or that we would be overrun with more than we could cope with! A sister from another assembly wisely pointed out that the Lord would send us just the right number and throughout the week we were full, but could manage.

What do we do?

There is nothing particularly 'different' about the activities we do. We sing choruses, teach the children Bible verses and work systematically through Bible stories. We have a quiz each week and, on occasions, have 'special' craft activities.

We make quite extensive use of 'modern technology' with all of our choruses, one or two quizzes and sometimes graphics to support the telling of the Bible story being displayed via PowerPoint and a data projector. To source images to use in these resources we found image bank websites such as 'shutterstock.com' to be extremely valuable and, being based in the United States, this site has a good number of 'Christian' images.

We always send children home with a colouring related to the Bible story of that week to complete and return. This acts as a reminder of the Bible story as well as an incentive to return. The colouring always has an appropriate Bible verse printed on it and so also acts as a way of getting the word of God into the children's homes. The colourings themselves can be found by doing an 'Image Search' on Google. Type in a few key words and the word 'colouring' (e.g., David Goliath colouring) and click 'search' and you will invariably manage to find an appropriate black and white image for the children to colour.

Finally . . .

During the children's work each week we benefit from the support of fellow saints who, whilst they do not feel it is their role to lead publicly, they faithfully attend and give invaluable support by setting up equipment, recording 'points' when children answer questions, keeping score in the quiz, handing out sweets, supporting the singing, taking a register and many other activities. In a work with children I would suggest that this support is vital.

DAVID SCARSBROOK is in fellowship at the Radford Street Gospel Hall, Mansfield, England. He is married to Rachel and they have three young children. He is a schoolteacher.



Dispensation

In our last article we saw the first three dispensations. These are usually referred to as innocence, conscience, and human government. In each of these dispensations God gave man a stewardship and placed a test before him. In each of these dispensations man failed and was judged. So, one stewardship is removed and another takes its place. The next dispensation is that of promise, or, as it is sometimes called, the dispensation of the patriarchs.

Abraham was the pre-eminent man in the dispensation of promise. As in the other dispensations, a test was laid before mankind. In this case, Abraham was told, 'Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee', Gen. 12. 1. Abraham was given the promise of the land. But Abraham failed this test of believing the promise almost right away, when he went down into Egypt. There are other promises made to Abraham, such as the promise of a son, in which he also failed. The descendents of Abraham, including Isaac, Jacob and Joseph all failed in regards to believing the promise that they would be given the land, and when they went down into Egypt because of the famine, repeating the first failure of Abraham, God judged the entire nation in the Egyptian captivity.

God spoke directly with Abraham. and gave him promises. God was building a great nation through Abraham. Yet, this dispensation is also characterized by failure, and so his stewardship is removed. But, once again, a challenge might be raised against God's justice; God was forming a nation, but it was a nation that had not been given laws. God spoke directly to Abraham, but how did the rest of mankind know the will of God? If man had a written code he would find obedience easier. Maybe, if God provided a set of

written laws, man would know exactly what he was to do and not to do. So the next dispensation was inaugurated, the dispensation of law.

In the dispensation of law, the pre-eminent man was Moses, for we are told, 'The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ', John 1. 17. Moses was born in the judgement of captivity, raised in the home of Pharaoh, and once again chose to live with the Israelites in their judgement. In the words of Hebrews chapter 11 verse 25, Moses was 'choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season'. And yet, God had something better in mind. Rather than having Moses partake in the judgement from the previous dispensation, God instituted a new dispensation of law.

Genesis and Exodus, up to the end of chapter 18, are essentially an historical record. Then, beginning with Exodus chapter 19, and extending through Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, we have a description of the Law of Moses. This Law of Moses is also referred to as the

By
**SHAWN
ABIGAIL**
Ottawa,
Canada

Levitical Law because it was administered by priests from the tribe of Levi. The Law covers a great deal of material. There are instructions on: the priesthood, including details on who may serve as a priest, the duties of a priest; the robes of the High Priest and the consecration of the priests; the building of the tabernacle, including all its furniture; and festivals, and sacrifices, and giving. There are restrictions on diet and instructions about the administration of justice. There are instructions about: the Sabbath Day; how people became unclean in God's sight including numerous examples; and what constitutes basic morality. There are instructions governing social interaction, including how to treat the poor and how to treat slaves. Finally, the Law also contained the best known code of conduct, the Ten Commandments. The Law covered just about



nationalism

PART THREE

every aspect of daily life for the Israelites – from what they ate and who they married, to how they planted and how they worshipped – in 613 commandments in the Law.

So the new stewardship began, and with it a test was placed before the Israelites – obey the Law. If the Israelites wanted to know what God expected of them it was written down. But what was the response of the people? Moses was up on Mount Sinai for forty days, and even before he started coming down the mountain, the people were in rebellion. We read of this in Exodus chapter 32 verse 1, 'And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him'.

So now, dispensationally speaking, a test was being placed before the Israelites. They were given 613 commandments in the Law and the test was that they should obey the Law. But they failed right away, and indeed the course of their history is one of failing to obey the Law. For their sins, they were punished by having to wander in the wilderness for forty years. After Moses and Joshua disappear from the scene, there are a series of oppressors and a series of judges raised up to deliver them. Under their kings, there are failures to obey God, and a series of judgements that God sends from the nations around them. Judgement is the message of Habakkuk. He describes the situation, 'Therefore the law is ignored and justice is never upheld. For the wicked surround the righteous; Therefore justice comes out perverted', 1. 4 NASB. Essentially, Habakkuk is asking the Lord, 'Why

don't you do something?' and the Lord replies, 'I am doing something Habakkuk. I'm raising up the Babylonians to destroy Israel'. And so the northern tribes went into the Babylonian captivity and the southern tribes went into the Assyrian captivity. Their captivity did solve the problem of idolatry. Having been brought face-to-face with a thoroughly idolatrous culture, when the Israelites returned from captivity they never again fell into idolatry. But they still couldn't keep the Law and so this dispensation needed to be brought to an end.

The end of this dispensation is predicted by the Lord Jesus Christ, 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!



Behold, your house is left unto you desolate', Matt. 23. 37-38. Dispensational scholars can debate when exactly this dispensation ended, but there can be no doubt that it had ended by the time of the destruction of the temple. In the year 70 AD, the Jewish temple was destroyed. It was completely burned. Even the stones were torn apart so that the soldiers could pry out the gold that had melted and run between the stones. This was in fulfilment of the prophecy of the Lord. Speaking of the temple, He said, 'Seest thou these great buildings? there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down', Mark 13. 2. All that was left of the original construction was the retaining wall that was built when the

temple mount was levelled off. None of the original temple remains, save the retaining wall that Jews still flock to in order to offer their prayers – the Wailing Wall.

As in the previous dispensations, fallen humanity will complain against the justice of God. Maybe the reality of having hundreds of laws to obey was just too much? Maybe what mankind needed was something simpler? Maybe, instead of rules, he needed a relationship? And so when Christ came, the one condition for obedience was faith in Christ, and that would inaugurate a new dispensation, the dispensation of grace.

But before examining the dispensation of grace, it is important to review the role and importance of the Old Testament Law. The Law was good, in that it was given by God. But the Law

was limited because it could not save. The Law was a means of condemnation, not justification. Israelites living under the Law before the incarnation were saved by faith when they brought their animal sacrifices. The Law served many purposes. It was a schoolmaster to bring people to Christ, Gal. 3. 24. It provided elementary teaching about Christ, Heb. 6. 1-2. It taught the Israelites that God is holy, Lev. 10. 3, and

the corollary lesson that man is sinful, Lev. 10. 10; Isa. 6. 5. It provided a specific transgression, Gal. 3. 19, and demonstrated the requirement of blood for forgiveness, Exod. 12. 13; 30. 10. Finally, it told God's people for all time that there is one God, Deut. 6. 4. The Law was useful. The Law was important. But the Law could not save. In every dispensation, salvation is by grace through faith.

To be continued

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





A common definition for knowledge is the accumulation of information, facts. Students accumulate information and facts for writing a thesis for a master's degree or for a dissertation for a doctoral degree. A great deal of time and effort are put into a project like this. However, this is not the meaning of 'knowledge' in Paul's mind in this verse.

Paul's concept of 'knowledge' is reflected in the participle 'knowing', a concept filled with commitment, love and joy. It is much more than just the accumulation of information - even Christian information. Paul is writing about a personal relationship with the Lord that is spontaneous, joyful, sincere. We do not doubt that Paul's use of 'knowledge' includes the mind, yet the emphasis falls primarily on the heart. 'Knowledge' as the ultimate value of life is knowing the Lord Jesus, knowing personally that Christ, the Messiah, is Jesus, or that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah.

There is a picture in the Old Testament that illustrates the wonder of this truth. It is seen in that beautiful moment when all the people helped in financing the building of the temple. The question was asked, 'Who then is willing to consecrate himself this day to the Lord?'. The answer is beautiful, for 'the leaders . . . the captains . . . with the officers over the king's work, offered willingly . . . Then the people rejoiced, for they had offered willingly, because with a loyal heart they had offered willingly to the Lord; and King David also rejoiced greatly'. The bountiful offerings received that day came from many individuals truly consecrated and committed to the Lord. With their hearts, that is, with all that they were, they joyfully gave their abundant offerings. No wonder King David also rejoiced.

We go back to Paul's conversion experience outside Damascus. If Jesus is in the midst of the divine glory, He is the Messiah. It is in Christ Jesus that one truly meets God. We note again Paul's insight into what happened on that occasion. He wrote, 'Yes: the God who said, "Let light shine forth out of darkness", is the God who has shone in our hearts to illuminate them with the knowledge of His glory reflected in the face of Christ'.²

Paul, the Runner Part III (2)

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

TOTA

'The excellence of the knowle

What is the meaning of the phrase, 'the knowledge of Christ Jesus'? Scholars tell us that there are two possibilities. First, it can mean 'to be known by Christ' or, second, 'to know Christ'. 'To know Christ' is the preference of most scholars. To know the Lord Jesus is to know God. We are not surprised to know that COUNT ZINZENDORF (1700-1760), founder of the Moravian movement, wrote, 'I have one passion only: It is He! It is He!'.³

It is possible that the apostle on purpose uses this phrase, 'the knowledge of Christ Jesus', precisely because it can be understood in both senses. If so, then the 'excellence' of which he writes is both the truth that the Christian is known by the Lord Jesus and also that the Christian knows the Lord Jesus. This, then, becomes the overwhelming, extremely precious treasure that any human being could ever have. It is the treasure of knowing personally, that is, in his or her own experience, the Lord Jesus and, wonder of wonders, understanding that He knows each Christian personally. Paul is stating that there is nothing in human experience that can be compared to this astonishing reality. As one translation expresses Paul's thought, 'Nothing is as wonderful as knowing Christ Jesus My Lord'.⁴

The apostle expresses the wonder of this personal relationship with Christ by speaking of 'the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord'. Only here in all of his writings does the apostle use this term, 'my Lord'. First of all, it is a statement concerning the dignity of Christ's person. Again, the words of Thomas are relevant, for when he saw the Lord Jesus raised from the dead after a brutal Roman crucifixion, he exclaimed, 'My Lord and my God!'.⁵ Where else could the disciples place Jesus except within the mystery of the transcendent God?

The term 'Lord' is not a harsh title. It is evident that in our world there are

cruel, sham 'lords'. They will go to any extreme, including some who employ deceit and fraud to enrich themselves at the expense of those less fortunate, or others who employ reprehensible forms of torture and murder of innocent people to further their own agenda. In the case of Thomas and his fellow-disciples they were shaken to the core of their beings when they finally understood who Jesus was. And

By

J. R.

COCHRANE

Abbotsford, BC,
Canada

Paul's whole life evaporated in a moment when he saw the glory of God in the face of Jesus of Nazareth.

The 'Lord' that Thomas, Paul and other early Christians knew was the 'Lord' who in amazing grace came to their rescue and suffered for them. He is 'Jesus Christ the righteous (who) . . . Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world'.⁶ In the history of the world earthly 'lords' do not do this. In most cases they live off of those over whom they are 'lords'.

Jesus is authentically Lord, for having humbled Himself 'to the point of death, even the death of the cross . . . God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name', and, one way or another, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess 'that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father'.⁷ Because of what He did for us through His death, He is a life-giving Lord. Paul writes, 'So you will be saved (you will have life eternal), if you honestly say, "Jesus is Lord"'.⁸

Calling Christ Jesus 'my Lord', Paul confirms that his relationship with Christ Jesus was one of gratitude, obedience, love and loyalty. His commitment is total, for he knows that all that he is and will be for eternity springs out of the incredible grace and love of Christ Jesus. Writing to the Galatians he shares with them another deeply personal and perceptive insight into his thinking. He speaks of 'the Son of God, who loved me and gave



L COMMITMENT

dge of Christ Jesus my Lord'¹

Himself for me'.⁹ Is there any other way we can respond to the fact that His death was for each one of us personally, individually, but by joyfully recognizing that He is our Lord?

There was a personal cost involved for Paul because of his commitment to Christ and he does not shy away from sharing it with us. He states, 'For whom I have suffered the loss of all things'. This is the third time Paul mentions loss. If anyone thought he was just making a theoretical comment, this time he clarifies very carefully that he did suffer the loss of all things. The readers of this letter to the Philippians in the past and we in the present are left with no doubt that he really did lose all things for Christ. How did this happen? The news soon arrived in Jerusalem of Paul's conversion and that among his countrymen he was energetically, powerfully arguing that Jesus was the Christ. The religious leaders undoubtedly expressed their intense displeasure and hatred against Paul. There may have been a meeting of the religious hierarchy in Jerusalem, the same group that had empowered him to destroy the followers of the Lord Jesus. Without Paul being present, they may have formally stripped him of all the power and authority they had invested in him. More likely, Paul himself, in view of the glory of God so clearly displayed in Jesus, simply turned his back on all his former gains and walked away from them. In either case, he literally 'suffered the loss of all things'. Paul knew these were the things that had kept him from God. There is no complaint from Paul. He was glad to see the end of them.

The Lord Jesus writes to the church in Ephesus, saying, 'Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love'.¹⁰ What happened to the church in Ephesus? Were the members of the church captivated again by the glory of Ephesus? The truth is that the city was 'a crossroads of civilization'. They started well, for the term 'first love' indicates a true

commitment to the Lord Jesus. Yet the believers in Ephesus, while still loving Him, had lost their first passion. One writer comments, 'Loving devotion to Christ can be lost in the midst of active service, and certainly no amount of orthodoxy can make up for a failure. "First" love would suggest that they still loved, but with a quality and intensity unlike that of their initial love'.¹¹ They started the race well but as time went by they slacked off for the lack of total commitment.

What happened to Demas? Paul sadly comments, 'Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica'. Why did he go to Thessalonica? He was with Paul and Paul was on death row. Perhaps just to be with him was dangerous. Demas left Paul 'having loved this present world'.¹² Love for the Lord did not necessarily disappear, but it did wane and another love pulled at his heart. Commitment to Christ was no longer paramount in his life.

This can only happen to congregations like the Ephesian church or to individuals like Demas when they are unable to truly say with Paul, 'For to me, to live is Christ', when Christ no longer remains greater than anything the world can offer.

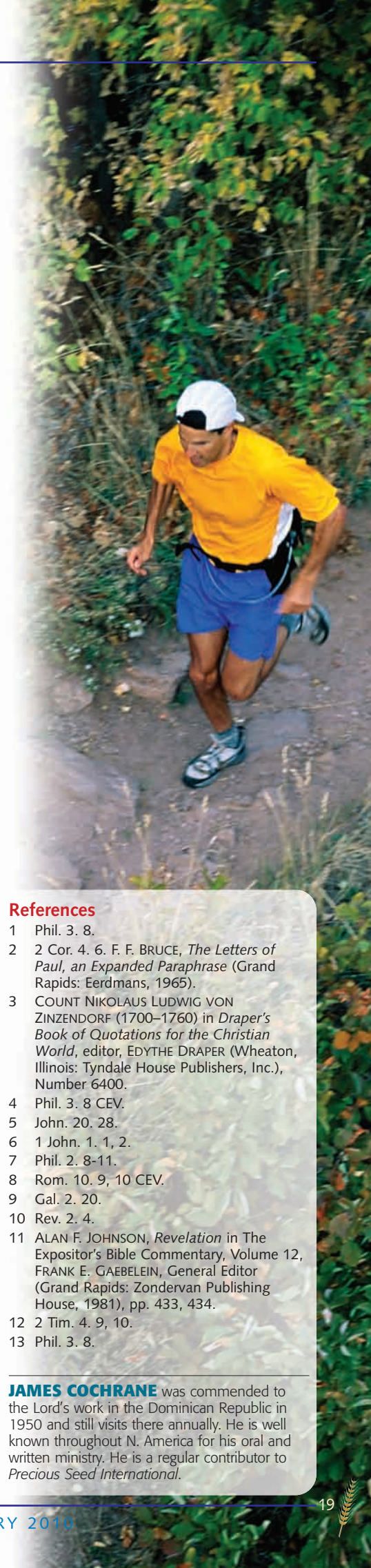
Paul's commitment to Christ revealed in Philippians chapter 3 makes it difficult to believe that what occurred in the church in Ephesus, or in the case of Demas in Rome, could ever have happened to Paul. He was not a super-Christian. He was a committed Christian. In his own words, Paul was wholly dedicated 'to the high privilege of knowing Christ Jesus as my Master, firsthand'. Through many adverse circumstances and near the end of his life, he still runs towards Christ, for he knows that 'the overwhelming preciousness, the surpassing worth and supreme advantage'¹³ for anyone in this life is to know Christ.

How deep, how real is our commitment to the Lord Jesus?

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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*.





Adorning the Doctrine



By **W. ROSS RAINEY** Dearborn, Michigan, USA

One of today's neglected New Testament passages is Titus chapter 2. The entire chapter demonstrates the intimate connection between creed and conduct, truth and life, belief and behaviour, speaking and showing, preaching and practising. It is a chapter which teaches all believers everywhere their sacred responsibility to 'adorn the doctrine of God, our Saviour, in all things', v. 10. The Greek word for 'adorn' was used of adorning with jewels. The word is derived from *kosmos*, meaning order, ornament, or adornment, and from it we get our English word 'cosmetic'. Here, then, we have a passage largely devoted to what we might call, 'Christian Cosmetics'.

Harry A. Ironside emphasized godliness as the leading theme in Paul's Letter to Titus – godliness in the church, ch. 1, in the home, ch. 2, and in the world, ch. 3. Sound, or healthy, teaching is one of the most important things in the Christian life, and without it practical godliness is not possible. Thus, in order that godliness might be manifested in the life of every believer, Titus was instructed to bring God's word to bear upon all

classes in the church and upon every condition in life. In addition to Titus himself, five groups in the church are in view.

The Older Men, v. 2.

What a blessing a man of mature years is who is temperate, serious-minded, not a clown, but having a sanctified sense of humour, self-controlled, and spiritually healthy in his personal faith, in his love to others, and in his patient endurance.

As Matthew Henry said, 'Old disciples of Christ must conduct themselves in everything agreeable to the Christian doctrine'.

The Older Women, v. 3.

Such were to behave reverently, in a manner suited to sound doctrine and in keeping with their New Testament priesthood. The New Testament word for priest is derived from the word for 'holiness'. They were not to be slanderers or slaves to wine, but teachers of what is good, a reference to what is expressed in verses 4 and 5. By example and exhortation they were to instruct the younger women.

During my forty-five years in the Lord's service, I owe an inestimable debt to the example, counsel, and encouragement of senior saints, beginning with my beloved father and mother.

The Younger Women, vv. 4-5.

It's noteworthy that the task of teaching the younger women was assigned to the older women, not to Titus. This is in keeping with the emphasis placed upon purity in the Pastoral Letters.

The young women were to be sober-minded, that is, sensible, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be prudent, pure, workers at home, that is homemakers or caring for the home, kind, and subject to their husbands. Why? 'That the word of God be not blasphemed', v. 5.

As E. W. ROGERS wrote, 'In our present day these exhortations are urgently needed, for modern looseness has brought the word of God into discredit. "If that's what your Bible teaches you I don't think much of your Bible", is the retort of the ungodly when they witness disordered domestic life on the part of professing Christians. The Bible gets the blame'.

The Younger Men, v. 6.

Sober-mindedness is the key instruction here. Youth must not be wasted, but put to good purpose for the glory of God. Young men need to be sensible and take life seriously, for life is not a picnic but a probation.

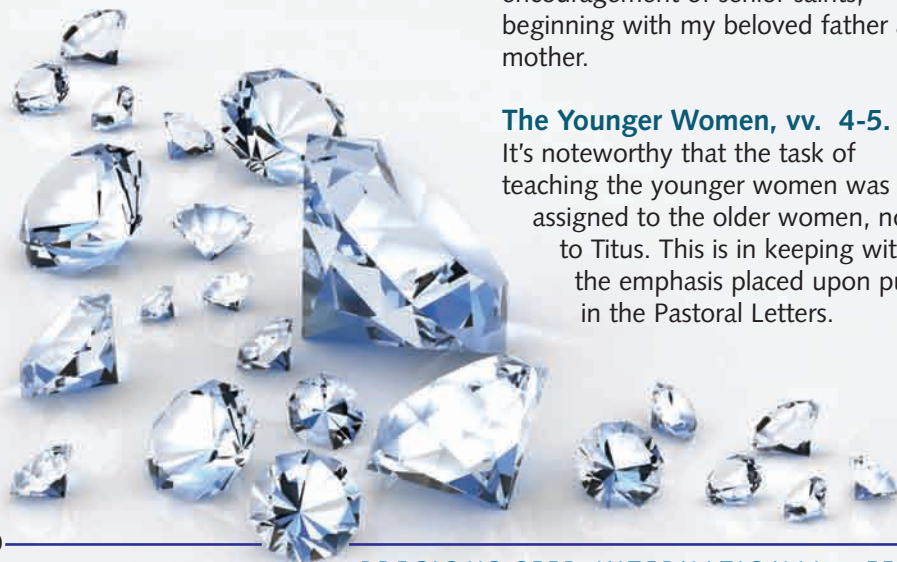
Slaves, vv. 9-10.

Christian slaves were instructed to be 'obedient', the same word as in verse 5, to their masters, cf. Col. 3. 22, to please them in all things, not to talk back, not to pilfer, but to demonstrate utmost loyalty, so that in all things they might adorn the teaching of God our Saviour.

In addition to these five groups there was, of course, Titus himself, vv. 1, 7-8. Not only was he to teach what was in keeping with 'sound doctrine', v. 1, but to practice what he preached. In his speaking he was to demonstrate purity, seriousness, and sincerity, giving a wholesome, unblameable message, so that an opponent might be put to shame, finding no legitimate cause to speak evil of him, vv. 7-8.

There is no doubt about it. The practical application of these guiding principles in Titus chapter 2 will enable us in our various spheres of service to genuinely 'adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour'.

W. ROSS RAINEY is in fellowship with the assembly in Dearborn, Michigan, and is a commended full-time worker of over fifty years. A former editor of *Food for the Flock* magazine, he is a contributor to other assembly publications and continues to minister throughout the USA and Canada.





A HISTORY OF FOREST HALL ASSEMBLY, NUTLEY, ENGLAND

Forest Hall in the village of Nutley is situated in beautiful countryside in the heart of the Ashdown Forest. It is known affectionally in the local area as 'The Chapel in the Woods'. The assembly first gathered to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ in 1897, thus witnessing in the village continuously for over 100 years.

Prior to the formation of this fellowship, many believers had been meeting at a mission hall on the other side of the village. Mr. Moorcock, with several other believers, left this fellowship in view of teaching concerning the 'second blessing experience'. Land was purchased for 10 shillings (50 pence in today's UK money) in 1893, a hall was constructed, and believers gathered on New Testament principles; and the testimony has been maintained to the present day.

Mr. Moorcock, a Fegan's boy (a well-known orphanage), originated from London and, despite some physical restrictions, he was not deterred from visiting the people of Nutley. He was responsible for most of the gospel meetings, with the assistance of Mr. Fred Hunniset. These meetings were well attended, in particular the young people's meetings.

Mr. Moorcock's son, Frederick, was killed in World War 1. At that time he was engaged to a godly sister called Miss Agnes Hooper. After Frederick's death she married Mr. Jack Hughes who took over much of the assembly responsibility from Mr. Moorcock after he moved to Eastbourne where he spent his later years.

With limited information available little is known about the assembly during the early 1930's but the work prospered and by the 1940's a very large Sunday School had evolved with many parents also attending, some walking long distances to get to the meetings. Under the spiritual influence of Mrs. Hughes the sisters were active among the womenfolk of the

village, encouraging them to attend the women's meetings. The meetings continued during the World War 2 with many villagers regularly attending. German prisoners of war, who were based locally, attended meetings conducted by Mr. Ransom Cooper, an able gospel preacher who was also fluent in German. Many of these prisoners came to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus at that time. Two in particular kept in touch with the believers in Nutley – Heinz Matting, who went back to the Eastern block, and Berthold Sauenbrey, who continued to meet with local believers in his home village of Lenbach in Germany.

Over the last fifty years a number of brethren have sought to maintain the testimony. Mr. Hughes, a Counties worker, shouldered much of the responsibility from 1950 until his homecall in 1989. Mr. A. E. Long, a well-known contributor to several assembly periodicals, including this one, was in fellowship until his homecall. Many other believers could be named but special mention should be made of Mr. Tom Dick and Mr. Eric Beadle, both heavily involved after the war. Mr. Edward (Ted) Chippington and his wife joined the fellowship in 1977 and Ted shouldered much of the responsibility until his homecall in 1998. These brethren have been

supported over the years by numbers of other believers many of whom are now in old age but still maintain their interest in and commitment to the work of the assembly. Some of these saints have been in fellowship for over sixty years. There are presently eight believers in full time fellowship.

During 2007, two weeks of gospel meetings were conducted by the believers themselves with help from nearby assemblies. In 2008 Mr. Jim Wishart from Northern Ireland conducted two further weeks of meetings when good interest was shown. Many homes were visited and further visits are planned. The assembly has a witness stand at the annual village fete in June each year where many contacts are made with both adults and children. This provides opportunity for distribution of tracts and other literature.

Building work has commenced on reconstruction of the kitchen and toilet facilities to bring them up to the standards required by current legislation.

With a long history, the assembly, though small, is still very active and we value the prayers of the Lord's people. This picture was taken when the assembly celebrated its sixth anniversary in 1903.





SIGNS, WONDERS AND MIRACLES – STUDIES OF THE MIRACLE

STUDY 3. LIFE'S DISABILITIES

By **GRAHAM HOBBS** Bognor Regis, England

Unless otherwise stated quotations are from the New King James Version (NKJV)

In this third article we continue to observe John's use of the word sign(s) in his Gospel to describe the wonderful works of the Lord Jesus. We noted that they are recorded to demonstrate Christ's deity and that their primary interpretation concerns His Messiahship in relation to Israel, though their application includes us today.

We saw how the eight signs are chronicled in pairs, in the form of an introversion, namely, the 1st and the 8th, the 2nd and the 7th, etc. On this occasion we shall look at the 3rd and the 6th signs and see that they are linked in dealing with two of life's disabilities. The paralytic, John 5. 1-18, and the man born blind, John 9. 1-41, were both hopeless cases from a human standpoint. They reflect the tragedy of the nation of Israel – living among the nations of the world, but completely non-functional as far as its prime calling was concerned, viz., to be a living witness to the one true God. In the coming bright, millennial day, when 'the Sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in his wings', Mal. 4. 2, Israel will be healed from her woeful disabilities to become a divine beacon to the nations.

The Paralytic, John 5. 1-18

We are not told the precise nature of the man's problem, who had been lying

close to the Pool of Bethesda; some may have wondered whether he had suffered it from birth – 38 years must certainly have seemed like it, longer than the total earthly years of Jesus! The Lord's later comment, 'Sin no more', v. 4, possibly indicates that sin may have had something to do with his condition. *Bethesda* means 'House of Mercy' (or 'Pity'), but there was seemingly insufficient to meet this man's need. AUGUSTINE suggested that the five porches (or colonnades) were thought to represent the Law of Moses (the Pentateuch) and to speak of the Law's inability to bring about healing.

Apparently, miraculous cures did take place from time to time, but this poor man was unable, personally, neither had he the right kind of friends available, to take advantage of the opportunities. He represents the plight of sinners today – unable to help, heal or save themselves, or enlist others to do so. Although desperately wanting to be healed, this man started 'to beat about the bush' when Jesus asked him the simple, direct question, Do you want to be healed? v.6. He began to explain the difficulties of his situation, when all that Jesus wanted was a one word answer! Are you saved? Do you want to be saved? The Lord awaits a straightforward answer, and He will do it. AUGUSTUS TOPLADY's words are apt and memorable:

*Not the labour of my hands
Could fulfil Thy law's demands;
Could my zeal no respite know
Could my tears for ever flow;
All for sin could not atone,
Thou must save and Thou alone.*

Jesus then went directly to the crux of the matter by telling the man to roll up his mat and walk off. The outcome was unmistakeable, a dramatic change was self-evident immediately and the man headed for the most appropriate place – the temple – to praise and thank God for what had happened to him. How good it is when converts give early and continuing

evidence of new birth!

The Man Born Blind, John 9. 1-41

It is always a crushing blow when someone loses their sight through accident, disease or simply old age. It is a greater tragedy when children are born with such a handicap: to have no visual perception of size, shape, colour or people, never to see the wonders of God's creation and to be constantly in danger of personal injury or death – that is extreme deprivation. But that man never knew what he was missing until he was given his sight!

Blindness is figurative of sin and David had to confess, 'I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me', Ps. 51. 5 NIV. People just do not know what they are missing, spiritually-speaking, until they are born again – unaware of future eternal loss and divine judgement, unaware of God's personal blessings in this life and in the life to come!

The Lord made it crystal clear that, in this instance, sin had played no part in this man's condition, either personally or by his parents, but rather that he might be the means of displaying the mighty works of God – a salutary lesson maybe, for folk who mistakenly attribute other people's illness or accident to wrong causes. However, we need to recognize that original sin is the ultimate cause of all of life's diseases, defects, disabilities and death.

The following scriptures make it clear that the giving of sight to the blind is a divine activity:

'So the Lord said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the Lord?"'
Exod. 4. 11.

'The Lord opens the eyes of the blind',
Ps. 146. 8.

'In that day the deaf shall hear the





S IN JOHN'S GOSPEL

words of the book, And the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity and out of darkness', Isa. 29. 18.

'Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened', Isa. 35. 5.

'I am the Lord . . . a light to the Gentiles, to open blind eyes', Isa. 42. 6-7.

Reading from Isaiah chapter 61 verses 1-2, Jesus Himself claimed that, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind'. It is also significant that there are more recorded miracles of sight-giving by the Lord than any other category of healing.

The fact that the Lord made clay and anointed the man's eyes with it reminds us that, 'the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being', Gen. 2. 7. So this **sign** could legitimately be construed as an **act of creation** – the creating of sight where there was none before.

The impact of that sign was formidable; many people could not believe it, while others would not believe it! A man born blind had received sight – it had never been heard of before. What an opportunity he had to give his personal testimony – without frills – 'Yes, it was me alright; he put clay on my eyes, I washed and do see; one thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see!'

Those of us who have received spiritual sight might well challenge ourselves as to whom we have witnessed concerning what the Lord has done for us and is willing and able to do for others. Remember, 'But as it is written, "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him". But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit', 1 Cor. 2. 9-10.

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 CHURCH: THE FIGURE OF THE FLOCK

Introduction

One of the great chapters of the Bible is John chapter 10. It presents the Lord Jesus Christ as the Shepherd in a five-fold light: He is the true Shepherd, vv. 1-6; the good Shepherd, vv. 7-11; the only Shepherd, vv. 12-16; the obedient Shepherd, vv. 17-18; and the faithful Shepherd, vv. 19-42. Still further, as the Head of the church, He is not only the good Shepherd but also the great Shepherd, Heb. 13. 20, and the chief Shepherd, 1 Pet. 5. 4.

Fold and Flock

The words of John chapter 10 verse 16 serve as the key to the entire chapter. The Lord Jesus said, 'And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd'. It should be noted that the word for 'fold' is translated 'flock' everywhere else in the New Testament, as it should be at the close of verse 16. At the beginning of verse 16, an entirely different word is used, which is correctly rendered 'fold' – 'other sheep I have which are not of this fold'.

The Saviour came into the world especially on behalf of Israel, but in this text He spoke of 'other sheep'. These 'other sheep' were the Gentiles who would believe on Him. They were not of Israel's fold, but His heart of love embraced them as well. The Lord spoke these words in anticipation of the church, wherein believing Jews and Gentiles would become one flock, with Christ as the Shepherd over the flock. Referring to John chapter 10 verse 16, HARRY A. IRONSIDE commented, 'You see, Judaism was a fold, a circumference without a centre, but Christianity is a flock, where we have a centre without a circumference. We have no wall about us, but we are gathered about Him, our good Shepherd'.¹

Others

There is a deep practical lesson in the word 'other' which tells us of our Saviour's love. In a desert place near Capernaum the people virtually pleaded with the Lord to stay, but He said to them, 'I must preach the kingdom of God to *other* cities also: for therefore am I sent', Luke 4. 43. Here, in John chapter 10 verse 16, He spoke of '*other* sheep', while in Matthew chapter 27 verse 42 the chief priests spoke the truth when they mockingly said of Christ on the cross, 'He saved *others*'.

To think Jesus died for me
Upon the cross of Calvary
Should move my selfish heart to pray,
'For others, Lord, I'll live each day.'

Conclusion

As a result of Christ's focus on others, the middle wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles has been broken down. Through faith in Christ we are one flock, one new man, and one body, John 10. 16; Eph. 2. 14-18.

References

¹ Harry A. Ironside, *Addresses on the Gospel of John*, p. 424.





Touched by Technology

The ministry of FBH International (Faith by Hearing)

All of our lives have been touched by technology. The various branches of technology have made vast amounts of information instantly available to us, improved our health, enabled us to travel farther, faster and more safely, and made communications around the world easier and more affordable. In the field of communications, technology has arguably made its greatest advances in recent years and for the vast majority of us use of that technology is an every-day occurrence. FBH International uses high-tech communications media to touch people around the world with the truth of God's word.

FBH International began life in 1951 as the 'Newfoundland Bible Hour', with a regular, localized radio broadcast. The influence of FBH has grown exponentially over the years and the emphasis today is on the development of international outreach. The current Executive Director, Ron Hughes, was commended to full-time service from Edmison Heights Bible Chapel in Peterborough, Ontario, Canada.

FBH's mission is to 'glorify God by communicating the gospel of the grace of God as expressed in the Bible by any personal or technological means'.

Radio and internet technology have the ability to go where people cannot go, rendering political and social boundaries ineffective. Messages sent by such means go at the speed of light, circling the globe in seconds. They reach many people at once making them efficient. They go privately and quietly which is particularly important in places where the good news of the gospel is not welcome. FBH's use of technology is not impersonal however – we speak to thousands of people each week on a one- to- one basis through correspondence, email, telephone, on-line comments and live call-in programmes. We interact with people who speak English, Russian, Ukrainian, Teluga, Portuguese, Albanian, Spanish, and standard Arabic.

Radio broadcasts are delivered from Cairo, Moscow, Mexico City and Nairobi.

India is perhaps the most fruitful of all the fields in which we work. Responses to both radio programmes and internet outreach are higher from India than from any other part of the world. Trans World Radio recently incorporated a phone number on the Teluga language programmes which enables listeners to call rather than write – the response has been enthusiastic. One caller records, 'We are indebted to you for broadcasting this life-changing programme and for making it possible for us to contact you by phone. We do not have a church in the village and no missionaries visit us because we live in such a remote part of the country. It is through your programme that we have been learning about God'.

The most rapidly growing aspect of the ministry is in the Spanish-speaking world. In 2007 we had only a single broadcast each week in Mexico City whereas today we have over sixty broadcasts each week.

The internet outreach attracts a large number of prayer requests. These are posted on our web sites and the individuals who make the requests are contacted to let them know that their requests have been taken seriously and have been communicated to our network of contacts.

The media ministries of FBH International touch people from different cultures, different countries and different faiths around the world every day. Some find us on international radio broadcasts and some on the internet and all who access our web sites are touched by technology. This technology, however, is only a means to an end. In finding us through modern media channels we rejoice that some find God and the salvation provided through the death of Christ.

For more information on FBH International visit the web site at **www.fbhinternational.com** and to interact with our on-line community visit the outreach web site at **www.talkontheway.org**

TECHNOLOGY



REPORTS REPORTS REPORTS

GOSPEL WORK AND OTHER ACTIVITIES Compiled by SANDY JACK



ENGLAND

Somerset

During the summer the assembly at **Coleford** extended the Gospel Hall building, virtually doubling the size of the meeting room and updating the toilet and disabled facilities. After the project finished in September, an Open Morning was held, which resulted in a steady stream of local residents coming in to see the new building. A creation display was used to get people thinking and many contacts were renewed. A well-attended children's mission was also conducted by Robert Plant which concluded with a Prize-giving and Family Service attended by over seventy people, the majority being outsiders. The new space is much better suited to the logistics of a serving a light tea after the family service! The improvements have also gone down well with the weekly Mums and Toddlers outreach, allowing lots more room for the children's playthings. The building will be well used for the other regular activities which include a weekly Ladies meeting, a fortnightly Friday Club for youngsters above ten years of age and the gospel meeting on Sunday evenings. It is the assembly's prayer that the new facilities will help the contact and outreach possibilities and that bridges will be built resulting in souls being won for the Lord Jesus.

Cornwall

At the request of the assemblies at **Truro** and **St. Austell** our brother Peter Brandon conducted two weeks of evangelistic and teaching meetings in the area.

His visit proved to be a season of tender and nourishing ministry to



Truro's Piazza

strengthen the hearts and hands of the small companies of saints. The believers were greatly encouraged to see a larger number come together for the conference meetings in Truro than have been seen for a number of years. There was a real sense of the Lord's presence and this continued in the two evening meetings that followed. Our brother gave much-needed counsel regarding recovery in a work for God and was able to strengthen the faith of two younger men needing help with assurance.

At St. Austell the work was more of a pastoral nature and the time spent with needy saints praying, reading and counselling. A visit to a Care Home and involvement in the evangelistic work of the assembly was a great encouragement to all. Several helpful conversations took place. A great deal of time was spent in prayer, particularly in the light of the rebuilding project for the new Hall to be completed in April 2010, DV.

Dorset

Last summer the assembly in **Lyme Regis** started a monthly coffee morning, on the Friday before their Sunday tea meetings. Quite a few local people who have lived in the area for decades, but never entered the premises, have been along, and the believers are praying that these will start attending on Sundays. A lady contacted as a result of door-knocking, researched the assembly website and called for in for coffee. She is a married mum in her thirties, with a two-year-old daughter for whom she is seeking a sound moral education!

Recent Sundays have seen the number of outsiders attending the gospel meeting exceeding the number in fellowship! Several have to be fetched and taken home, up to three miles away, and the saints are struggling to cope with the requests from other people who wish to come.

Sussex

The assembly at **Marine Hall, Eastbourne**, held a Young People's weekend in September. The subject for



the Bible Studies on the Saturday was 'The Charismatic Christian'. The day was comprised of a number of sessions covering the importance and significance of Pentecost, the nature of spiritual gifts, the place of sign gifts and ended with a Bible Reading on 1 Corinthians chapter 13. Ian Jackson conducted the studies and it was encouraging to see over fifty young people from as far away as Zurich, Northampton and Exeter so keen to get to grips with such an important area of truth. The assembly was also greatly encouraged, especially when so many young men contributed audibly in worship at the Breaking of Bread meeting the following morning. In October the assembly also held a Friday night meeting when Peter Atkinson from the Isle of Wight gave a talk illustrated with PowerPoint slides on 'The Sussex Martyrs'. There were again over fifty people in the Hall, many of whom had never been in before. Whilst it was good to be reminded of what people of a past generation gave for their faith, it was also a great opportunity for Peter as he reminded folk of the great price that was paid for freedom.

Nottinghamshire

Stephen Baker (Liverpool) held a second series of gospel meetings, entitled 'Discover the Truth', with the small company in **Kirkby-in-Ashfield** during October. The focus this year was, 'What does the future hold for you?' Assisted by the young men of the assembly who shared in the preaching, they held open-air meetings in the pedestrian shopping precinct most days, together with leaflet distribution and door-to-door





work. All 8,500 homes in the town had invitations and a verse from the word of God delivered to them. A number of those spoken to accepted a gospel message on CD, a copy of *Ultimate Questions* or a portion of the scriptures.

Although response by people of the town in attending the gospel meetings was limited, the assembly was encouraged by the support of local believers and the knowledge that a number had been reached with the gospel.

Northamptonshire

In August the assembly at **Spencer Bridge Road, Northampton**, held a Young People's weekend with Ian Rees. The subjects taken up were Marriage, Choosing a Partner, A Christian Marriage, Same-sex Relationships and Singleness.

London

At the end of September the believers meeting at **Clifton Hall, South Norwood**, London, had two weeks of special outreach in the gospel using the Bible Exhibition from the assembly at Hildenborough. The mornings were reserved for visits from schools while the afternoons and early evenings were



Clifton Hall, South Norwood

open for visits from the public at large. Although seven schools were informed of the exhibition only two responded and eight classes attended, six from the local Catholic school and two from a Church of England school, a total of over 200 children. During the week the saints stood outside the Hall and invited passers-by into the exhibition and almost 300 adults and a further 100 children came in. The exhibition was a tremendous opportunity to present the gospel and many people were personally witnessed to by this means. The folk who came in were drawn from a wide variety of people, some believers, a few Muslims, a Rastafarian, a vicar who was something of an expert on New Testament Greek

texts but totally ignorant of the teaching of the tabernacle, to mention but a few. In conjunction with the exhibition, gospel meetings were held from Thursday to Sunday each week, conducted by Peter Brandon. Although many folk promised to attend the meetings, sadly very few did. Of those who came one man made a profession of faith, and a lady who attends a Pentecostal church spoke of receiving the assurance of salvation. Please pray for these folk; the man has a lot of problems in his life and although he has been in contact with the assembly since the meetings it is proving difficult to have regular contact with him. The lady spoke of being unhappy in the Pentecostal church which she attends, complaining that many of the members seemed very shallow in their spiritual experience and lacking in reality. She was encouraged to read her Bible and find for herself the divine pattern of gathering and to seek by prayer where God would have her gather. The believers were greatly encouraged by these two incidents and give glory to God for the many excellent opportunities they had to speak of the Saviour

In October, the assembly in **Bermondsey Gospel Hall**, held the London Young People's Day with Mark Hill. They studied the Christian's walk in Ephesians.

Merseyside

Graham Swift of the Larkhill assembly continues to work among the homeless in **Liverpool City Centre**. A number of other believers give help from time to time, and between thirty and fifty people come in each week. A meal is provided and then they listen to a short gospel message. Please pray that they will live long enough to repent of their sin and believe the gospel as life for these people is very uncertain.



In early October there were meetings in **Fountain Hall, Woodside, Aberdeen**, Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays for two weeks. The original intention was to hire a room in or near the university and target students, with subjects advertised that might catch their attention. However,



all attempts to get a suitable venue proved fruitless, so the meetings were held in the Hall. The believing students worked very hard setting up a stall in the university and manning it at lunchtimes, and providing transport for any who wanted to attend at night. A few responded to the invitation, but much more encouraging was the response from people from around the Hall, with some attending who had never been inside the Hall before. One or two showed particular interest and we look to the Lord to save them.

The assembly in **Holburn Gospel Hall** had children's meetings during the first two weeks in September, with Gordon McCracken. This was a follow-up to a week with the Aberdeen Bible Exhibition. Some 300 children attended the exhibition from around twelve local primary schools. Over the two weeks around eighty-five children attended the meetings. The memory verse for the period was Romans chapter 6 verse 23. On the last evening almost all the children publicly and individually repeated the verse. A good number of parents attended the Prize-giving evening, most of whom would never have been in the Hall before. Gordon also spoke at fourteen school assemblies during the two weeks. The children all heard a clear gospel message each evening and prayer is requested that the word may have taken root in some young hearts.

Stephen Grant was at **Gardenstown** for two weeks of gospel meetings in October. The local assembly was greatly encouraged by the numbers who came in to support the meetings, from different assemblies, but mostly from different denominations in the village. We believe that impressions were made on these dear believers. Some unbelievers also attended each evening. The good seed has been sown, and we look to the Lord for the increase.



Lanarkshire

After a year of having no children's work the believers at **High Parks Gospel Hall, Hamilton**, arranged a week of children's meetings with Robert Plant. The Hall is situated right on the edge of an area of the town with many challenging social needs and many families who know nothing of the love of the Saviour. Over the week there were between ten and fourteen children who came in and it is the hope of the saints this will help build some contacts for the future. Our brother was also able to visit two schools in the area and take assemblies. The week of children's meetings was followed by a week of ministry on the book of Nehemiah by Paul Williams.



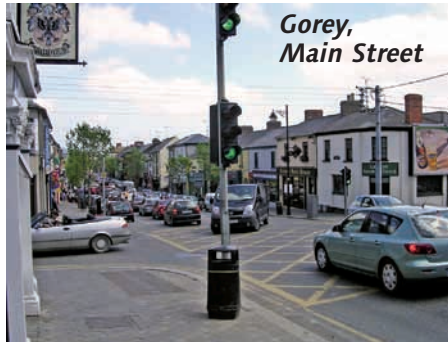
The assembly in Harryville, Ballymena, arranged children's meetings at the end of August which were held in a Community Hall in **Tullygarley**. Over 100 children came to the meetings and many adults as well. In **Ahoghill** the assembly had four weeks of gospel meetings concluding in October. A few local people came in and one man professed faith in Christ.

The assembly at Ballymagarrick also had gospel meetings in a portable hall at **Temple** during October and November. In **Glengormley**, John Rogers and Ivan Gordon had gospel meetings at the end of October. A local woman professed to be saved on the first night of the meetings. Brian Currie and Jack Palmer have been preaching the gospel in **Banbridge**.



County Wexford

Michael and Shirley McKillen were commended to the Lord's work by their assembly in Bangor, Co. Down, in 2003. They spent two years working alongside Noel and Liza McMeekin (Postal Bible School) in Co. Monaghan, Rep. of Ireland. During that time the Lord challenged them about the need to see new assemblies started in Ireland. In November 2005 they



moved to **Gorey, Co. Wexford**. This former market town in the south-east of Ireland has experienced rapid population growth in the last ten years, becoming a commuter town for Dublin; it has had relatively little evangelical input over the years.

Over the last four years the McKillens have engaged in various works in an effort to communicate the gospel – including literature distribution, schools' work, public meetings, and summer teams. An after-school children's Bible Club has been established. This has proved to be an excellent point of contact with many parents. As a result, and through friendships made at a local school, an evangelistic Bible study was established in their home. Through these studies several women have professed faith in Christ and others continue to show a keen interest. A Bible Study for believers was also started. The Lord has blessed these studies and numbers have grown from three or four people to about ten or twelve every Thursday evening.

In April 2008 a group of about ten believers began to meet informally every Sunday evening in Michael and Shirley's house, in order to provide regular fellowship and as a possible beginning of a new assembly. Initially these meetings presented an opportunity for fellowship and worship but after a few months a time of systematic Bible teaching was also introduced. They have enjoyed the reality of the Lord working amongst the group and have had the joy of baptizing several believers in recent times. Although progress is often painfully slow, these Sunday meetings have grown and strengthened over the months. Attendance can be very erratic, but numbers can reach up to eighteen adults and about ten children. As a result the Christians have been seeking a more suitable venue in which to meet. They now plan to rent a first-

floor premises in the middle of the town. It is intended, in the will of the Lord, that this move will coincide with the more 'formal' establishment of an assembly.

Please pray for help and wisdom as the truth of the church and discipleship is explained from the scriptures. Pray too for the spiritual growth of this infant assembly. Nearly all those attending are first-generation believers from a Roman Catholic background. For many, the scars of past sins are deep and the associated issues that arise are often very complex. Satan constantly seeks to undermine and destroy the work and the challenges are huge – but God is able. Pray that the Lord will be greatly glorified through His work in this corner of Ireland.



Cyprus

It was a great joy to witness the baptism of one of the **Logos** school students. Upon asking for baptism he was interviewed and could clearly tell of the day when a teacher challenged him about salvation. That day, after arriving home, he trusted the Lord as Saviour. The baptismal service took place on the sea shore with assembly members, students and friends gathered around, and many holiday-makers looking on. The baptism was conducted by Gary Love and a short message given. All returned to the Gospel Hall where a service was conducted at which Colin Clarke spoke on the meaning of baptism and afterwards, during refreshments, many asked questions about baptism.

At the school Graduation event the 'Barnabas Award', an award that goes to a student chosen for kindness and consideration to others, was awarded this year to a sixteen-year-old girl from Uzbekistan. Stirred by the truth of the gospel message she longs to have the peace and joy that she sees in the lives of her Christian friends, but she is a Muslim. She understands that for her to accept Christ means being totally rejected by her whole family. Please pray for this precious girl's salvation and for her family as well.

Botswana

The assembly in **Gaborone** has had





two weeks of gospel meetings at the Block 8 Hall, Gaborone West, and it was a joy to see quite a few unsaved come in. Some were old Sunday School students, some were neighbours from the area, and others were those that had been invited by the believers to come along. Some have heard the gospel over a very long time and haven't yet realized their need.



Gaborone

The Sunday School prize-giving season has also been a real encouragement – twelve prize-givings in all! It has been great to see the children receive New Testaments for saying quite a lot of verses. This year Clark Logan chose the passage on the salvation of the Philippian jailor and it was lovely to see children committing to memory such clear verses which point to a simple trust and belief. The saints do appreciate the privilege of the liberty they have in Botswana to bring God's word to children.

Moldova

The assembly which was in **Cahul** used to meet in a local music hall; however, the authorities have stopped them meeting there as they say it has been turned into a church. They are now meeting in the nearby village of **Roshu** but are continuing to look for suitable premises back in Cahul. Dear sister Natasha, who with her family under the Soviet regime suffered deportation to Siberia, and who was the first believer in the village, has gone to be with the Lord. Her funeral was a good opportunity for preaching the gospel. In September, four brothers from the UK visited and were a blessing. They helped in the work of the gospel. The believers have revisited a medical college and had a good time with the



Apartment block in Cahul, Moldova

students. About ten to fifteen young people came along, they were glad to see the Christians again. One of the believers was stopped by a girl in the street and she asked him if he recognized her. She was called Lilia; last year she wanted to commit suicide! She has given up college and is now married. She had many questions; praise the Lord that she is alive; but she needs salvation.

The believers have also been to **Reni** in the south of Ukraine and distributed John 3.16 Seed Sowers texts and also visited another three villages not far from Roshu. One evening a teacher phoned and was interested in the gospel and another girl wrote; she is now doing Bible Study with us. They also have a Postal Bible School work with 430 students. This takes a lot of time to keep going.

Ukraine

Ukraine is the world's 44th-largest country and the biggest country in Europe. It is located in the very heart of Europe (with Europe's geographical centre near the town of Rakhiv, western Ukraine).

The assembly in **Lutsk** commenced in the spring of 2002 with twenty-one believers who had separated themselves from all religious denominations. Through consistent gospel preaching and repeated ministry of assembly truths, the Lord has blessed and numbers have grown. They have experienced, as all assemblies do, times of blessing and discouragement, hope and despair.

From Lutsk the gospel has moved out to surrounding villages and in three of these there are now believers who are in the Lutsk assembly. Every Lord's Day brother Timothy Sloan travels out to the furthest village, a round trip of ninety minutes, to bring nine saved and unsaved to the breaking of bread meeting at 10.00 a.m. Others travel to the assembly meetings by train and bus. Pray for this work as they go around villages door to door, into schools, hospitals, prisons and sanatoriums to preach the gospel.

In Lutsk the gospel has been preached in schools, apartments, hotel rooms, and old people's homes as well as the Hall itself. There is a little tract stand that is used on the streets and this is an



The town of Lutsk

ideal way to reach many. Since September 2008 both sides of a billboard in the centre of town have been rented and a new monthly scripture text is displayed. The activities of the assembly are well advertised; nothing is hidden; address, telephone numbers, times of meetings and a new website www.nta.lutsk.ua are on the billboard and on all literature published.

Over the years more than 200,000 gospel tracts and 60,000 Seed Sowers texts have been published, together with a number of books - *The Role of Women in a Local Church* (D. Gilliland), *Going on for God* (D. Hinton, D. Newell), *Autonomy and Authority* (Michael Browne) and *Reception to God's Assembly* (W. Bunting). Just recently 20,000 copies of *Who we are and what we Believe* have been printed and proved to be very beneficial.

The assembly also feeds approximately 100 children each day and looks after the needs of forty special needs children. The 100 children receive their hot meal after having a Bible lesson. As a result of this work, children have been saved and three eighteen-year-old girls have been baptized and two of them received into fellowship. One of these young sisters is now a teacher and is really dedicated to her work. Pray that the Lord will continue to bless in salvation.

Conference time in Lutsk has always been a time of blessing. Over the years various speakers have helped: Jim Baker, Stephen Baker, Harold Hatt, Ian Jackson, John Hall, Phil Coulson, John Prins, James Colledge and Michael Wilkie. This year they had seven people from Moldova, six from Slovakia, one from Serbia, thirty-three from the UK and over 120 from different parts of Ukraine. One man professed salvation, two believers were baptized and the ministry on 'Seven Principles from Acts 2' was very beneficial.



A WORD FOR TODAY

(hanaq) hang, strangle

(hesed) mercy, kindness, steadfast love, loving kindness

(hasah) refuge, security

'Here is love vast as the ocean,
Loving kindness as the flood,
When the Prince of Life, our ransom
Shed for us His precious blood'

Little did William Rees realize what an impact these words would have on future generations as his majestic hymn became the accredited love song of the 1904 Welsh Revival. His hymn reflects the important Old Testament theme of the loving kindness of God, exemplified in the Hebrew word *hesed*.

Hesed is variously translated in English as goodness KJV, love NIV, steadfast love ESV, and kindness JSB. In simple terms, it means loyalty, but when used in relation to God brings with it the idea of an unchanging love that can be utterly relied upon by those who are loved by God. It is therefore a relational term, and often expresses God's faithful and loving commitment to Israel. For example, in Exodus chapter 34 verses 6 and 7, which has been described as Israel's article of faith and as God's self-disclosure,¹ *hesed* is linked in verse 6(e) with the Hebrew word *emet* (English = trustworthiness). So, in effect, steadfast love and faithfulness are single attributes of God being dual elements of a unique quality. This is further developed in verse 7(a)-(b) where we are told that this is an ongoing disposition of God. This statement and that in verse 7(f)-(j) parallels Exodus chapter 20 verses 5 and 6, but reverses the order. ELLISON² translates lines 7(a) and (b) as 'keeping covenant love for thousands (of generations)', and suggests that this is the correct rabbinical interpretation, cf. Exod. 20. 6. There is an important difference to be noted though as in the later text *hesed* is unqualified, whereas it is qualified in the earlier text. Thus what is being emphasized in Exodus chapter 34 verse 7(a) and (b) is nothing less than God's unmerited grace towards His people. God's steadfast love lasts, in fact, to all generations, Deut. 7. 9. So this reveals to us a love that will never let us go and a God who is utterly dependable, and above all graciously open-handed towards His people. Therefore, what a great God we serve! No surprise, then, that 'the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases', Lam. 3. 22 ESV.

In the Greek Old Testament (Septuagint) *hesed* is generally translated by the Greek word *ēleos*, which can mean mercy or compassion. In the New Testament this word often speaks of the mercy of God, Matt. 9.13, which is a parallel of the *hesed* of God, Hos.6. 6.

Whilst *hesed* occurs over 200 times in the Old Testament,

it mainly arises in the Psalms where it again emphasizes the love and faithfulness of God towards His redeemed people.

In Psalm 85, the psalmist calls for the restoration of Israel to their own land and prays for the faithful character of God to act at the present time, vv. 1-3. Twice in this psalm, Israel calls upon God to exercise His steadfast love towards them so that they might be saved, vv. 7, 10. TATE³ translates 'steadfast love' in verse 7 as 'loyal-love', thus accentuating the plea of the psalmist. It is because the psalmist has grasped that God is faithful to His covenant with Israel that he has the courage to ask God to respond to his entreaty expecting a positive result, cp. Ps. 62. 12. Thus the dual elements of love and trustworthiness expressed in Exodus chapter 34 verses 6-7 underpin the psalmist's confidence in God.

By way of contrast, the psalmist in Psalm 86 is at pains to defend his personal integrity by protesting his innocence and seeking help and protection from God. There is a noticeable urgency in the supplication of the psalmist, and an imperative form of prayer directs the whole proceedings. Again, the psalm includes direct quotations taken from Exodus chapter 34 verse 6 relating to the attributes of God, vv. 5, 13, 15. Significantly, in verse 15, the psalmist turns the quotation around, Exod. 34. 6(c)-(e), and makes it a personal affirmation in his belief that God is more than able to assist him because of His love and faithfulness.

Finally, Psalm 136 repeats in every verse the many acts of *hesed* that Israel experienced in their history. The continuous refrain, 'His steadfast love is eternal' means that God will *always* keep faith with His people despite their unfaithfulness.

Thus *hesed* is one of those rich Hebrew words that help us to understand and explain the uniqueness of our God to a passing world marked by unfaithfulness. The blessings that we enjoy come directly to us as a result of His unchanging and steadfast love demonstrated in the death of Christ for us, Rom. 5. 8-11. Just as Israel reflected upon the mercy of God, let us too take time daily to praise Him for His loving kindness and tender mercy towards us His redeemed people, Heb. 13. 15.

For further reading/study

Introductory

Girdlestone, Robert B. *Synonyms of the Old Testament*.
Renn, Stephen D. (Ed.) *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*.

Advanced

Longman, Tremper III and Enns, Peter (Ed.): *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry and Writings (illustrated)*.
VanGemeren, Willem A. (Ed.): *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis (5 Volumes)*.

References

- 1 Ellison suggests that these verses contain eight statements that the rabbis list as the thirteen attributes of God.
- 2 Page 180, *Exodus*: Louisville; Westminster John Knox Press.
- 3 Page 364, *Psalms 51-100*; Word Biblical Commentary, Nashville.

More useful Sites to visit

All these sites have an assembly base, either provided and run by a fellow-believer in assembly fellowship or supported by a particular assembly or assembly work.

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

There are really two sites here. The one listed is the Bible Teaching Newsletter site of David Dunlap and is an extension of the Bluegrass Bible Fellowship web site. David's site contains details of his three books as well as audio and written files on a variety of topics. Some that might be of interest are: Impeccability: Was Christ able to Sin?; Eternal Security: Can a Believer lose His Salvation?; and, Measuring the Church: Is Bigger really Better?



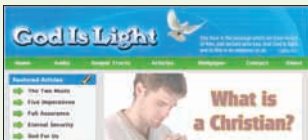
<http://www.brethrenonline.org/>

This is the site of Shawn Abigail. It contains: audio ministry files; articles on a range of subjects but particularly on dispensationalism, aspects of church truth and preaching; and home-schooling materials. For those who want a very helpful handling of the distinctive features and practices of a New Testament assembly there is a link to Shawn's sister site, 'Plymouth Brethren' FAQ. Some of the issues covered include: Why don't you like the name 'Brethren'?; What is a 'Brethren' church service like?; and What type of church government do the 'Brethren' have?



<http://www.godislight.org/index.htm>

This is quite a visually attractive site with a range of material that is worth browsing. Some of the content includes: audio files of gospel messages; personal testimonies; gospel tracts that can be ordered; biblical charts; articles on biblical subjects; and computer screen wallpapers. It also contains a list of many Gospel Halls in the USA and Canada.



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

If you want to find the name and address of an assembly in the UK or the Irish Republic then a visit to this site may prove helpful. It is worth bearing in mind that not all the information may be as up-to-date as possible and the list does not contain times of meetings. There are some telephone and email contact details but fuller information is only available in the *Assemblies Address Book*, published by Christian Year Publications and available from Ritchie Christian Media.



<http://www.assemblyyouth.net/>

As the front page of the site explains, it seeks to encourage young (and old) people in the things of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. It contains a monthly ministry magazine, a selection of recordings from recent ministry meetings, some testimonies photos and PowerPoint presentations and mp3 recordings from recent Bible study holidays.



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Views from the News

COMPILED BY SANDY JACK

HATE CRIME

A Norwich grandmother who objected to a gay march is accused of hate crime.

After witnessing a gay pride march, committed Christian Pauline Howe wrote to the Council to complain that the event had been allowed to go ahead. But instead of a simple acknowledgement, she received a letter warning her she might be guilty of a hate crime and that the matter had been passed to the police. Two officers later turned up at the frightened grandmother's home and lectured her about her choice of words before telling her she would not be prosecuted.



Source: *Daily Mail*, 26th October 2009.

HOME-SCHOOLING

On the BBC Radio 4's Sunday Programme of 18th October, a host said, 'Some evangelical parents need monitoring by the state because they may "intimidate" their children with ideas about God, sin and hell', and the Government's Schools Minister replied by saying this is part of the reason for conducting a review of the rules on home education.

The programme featured an item on the Government's controversial proposals for regulating parents who choose to educate their children at home. The show's host, Roger Bolton, spoke of 'authoritarian' evangelical fathers of 'Victorian periods' who threatened their children with theology. He was interviewing Schools Minister, Diana Johnson, and went on to say, 'some people will worry that this is possible now under home tuition'. He continued, 'And you would not be able to do anything about it because people would just say, "We're simply telling them what we believe"'. The Schools Minister replied, 'That's part of the reason why we have asked Graham Badman to do this review because at the moment we don't know what's happening'. She added that the Government wanted to make sure 'there is a process once a year to find out what is happening in the home in terms of the education'.



The Government wants education officials to have the right to interview home-schooled children without their parents being present.

Source: <http://www.christian.org.uk/news/bbc-slurs-evangelicals-in-home-school-debate/>

EASTER HOLIDAYS 'AXED BY COUNCILS'

Thousands of schools are dumping the old-fashioned Easter holiday in favour of a US-style 'Spring break', despite fears over a flight from Christian tradition.

Research by the *Daily Telegraph* shows schools in a third of local authorities have already moved to a standard year – creating a fixed two-week break irrespective of the Easter weekend.

Teachers and education officials insist the system is vital to help schools' long-term planning. They also claim the more regular holiday allows parents to plan trips and book time off work. But religious leaders criticized the move, saying tradition was being sacrificed 'for the sake of convenience'. It comes amid fears that many secondary schools are already scrapping daily Christian assemblies because they no longer fit with the demands of the school day. The current system, which has been in place since the 4th century, determines Easter by the first full moon after the spring equinox and means it can fall anywhere between March 22 and April 25. Last year saw the earliest Easter since 1913 when the holiday fell on March 23. It was claimed that it played havoc with the holiday plans of many families as some schools broke up on Good Friday while others waited until April to take time off.



Source: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/6173226/Easter-holidays-axed-by-councils.html>

Bits & Bobs

'Christians shouldn't keep faith private', says Gordon Brown

Britain remains a Christian country and believers should not privatize their faith, Prime Minister Gordon Brown has told a Christian radio station.

When challenged over claims that Christianity is becoming increasingly sidelined in the UK, Brown said it is 'impossible' to privatize faith because it underpins people's convictions about what makes a better society. 'I don't accept this idea of privatization', he said, adding that 'what people want to do is to make their views current'. Brown's comments will be received with skepticism by those who say recent laws have made it difficult for Christians to practice their beliefs openly. Christian nurses, doctors, teachers and care workers are among those who have faced problems at work because of their beliefs. Several Christian groups have warned that the Government's new Equality Bill could pose a further threat to their freedoms.

Brown, who was interviewed by Premier Christian Radio's Victoria Laurence, also responded to claims by the Archbishop of York that the Government's support for religious groups favoured Muslims.

Source: <http://www.christian.org.uk/news/christians-shouldnt-keep-faith-private-says-brown>

Philip Pullman book denies Jesus was Son of God

Philip Pullman, the children's author, is set to cause controversy with a new book denying that Jesus is the Son of God. Pullman has previously ruffled feathers in religious circles with the trilogy *His Dark Materials*, interpreted by some groups as being anti-Christian. The book, which is due to be published at Easter, argues that Paul came up with the 'story' that Jesus had a divine link. He says, 'By the time the Gospels were being written, Paul had already begun to transform the story of Jesus into something altogether new and extraordinary, and some of his version influenced what the Gospel writers put in theirs. Paul was a literary and imaginative genius of the first order who has probably had more influence on the history of the world than any other human being, Jesus certainly included'.

Source: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/booknews/6148702/Philip-Pullman-book-denies-Jesus-was-son-of-God.html>

PRECIOUS SEED COMMITTEE

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Treasurer:

HOWARD COLES

Pitcot Farm, Pitcot Lane, Stratton-on-the-Fosse,
Radstock BA3 4SX, UK

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1 Ivsyde Gardens, Killamarsh,
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Ministry – JOHN BENNETT

19 Alfreton Road, Pinxton, Nottingham NG16 6JZ

Reports and News – SANDY JACK

62 Kings Avenue, Eastbourne BN21 2PD

Histories, Services – IAN GRANT

2 Corse Wynd, Kingswell, Aberdeen AB15 8TP

YPS – STEPHEN BAKER

25 General Drive, West Derby, Liverpool L12 4ZB

Other Trust Members:

Brian Clatworthy – David Coles – Richard Collings
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All committee members can be contacted at
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FRONT COVER ILLUSTRATION

Mount Ararat is the highest mountain in Turkey, close to Iran and Armenia. It stands majestic, dominating the skyline of the Armenian capital, Yerevan. Its height of 5137 meters (16,854 ft.) means that it is glaciated and snow-capped all year round. It is supposed that this is the



very same mountain where the ark came to rest, Gen. 8. 4. Such is its height that although the waters decreased continually, it was nearly three months later before other mountain tops were seen. Noah, still in the ark, sent out a raven and then a dove. It was only the dove that returned, the second time with an olive leaf. After a period of turmoil the ark was at rest and the dove symbolized a period of peace was about to start. How ironic then, that today, Ararat, being in a Kurdish region, is in an area of unrest.

PRECIOUS SEED PICTOGRAM

New Testament Assemblies in South Asia, South East Asia and Australasia

India						2060
Papua New Guinea						460
South Korea						260
Australia						250
New Zealand						200
Philippines						170
Malaysia						150
Japan						120
Pakistan						100
Singapore						44
Thailand						17
Indonesia						10

Question Time

CONDUCTED BY RICHARD COLLINGS

QUESTION

What should be our attitude towards Jehovah's Witnesses?

ANSWER

In urban sprawl, leafy suburb or rural outback the devotees of the Watchtower organisation will be present – and active. Climate variations, language differences and cultural diversity are no barriers to these zealous propagators of 'another gospel'. Never less than two, but usually several more, they systematically move from house to house until an entire locality has been covered. Months later they will return and repeat the process.

As we observe these people moving around our neighbourhood what is our response and, more importantly, how do we react when they come to our door? Perhaps we deliberately avoid them or, failing that, we attempt to get rid of them as soon as possible. The Jehovah's Witnesses appear to have a profound grasp of the Bible and can quote scriptures from the Psalms to the Epistles and from other sections of the Old Testament with considerable ease. They seem to have a plausible counter-argument to whatever we say and this makes us feel apprehensive. Consequently, the less we have to do with them the better – so we steer clear of them.

However, there are many Christians who relish engaging with the Witnesses. They see it as a golden opportunity to tell them that they are members of a cult purveying the doctrines of hell. With considerable zeal, but with limited grace, they launch into these 'deceivers' and don't let up until the Witnesses retreat from the door. Whilst such Christians may be motivated by a desire to see these folk converted from the grip of the Watchtower teachings, they go about it the wrong way. The regrettable outcome is that an argument might be won, but an opportunity is lost.

It is disappointing to hear brethren boasting that the Jehovah's Witnesses won't come to their door in future. They draw pleasure from knowing that as a result of previous encounters with them, the Witnesses bypass their home and go to their neighbour's house. What is more grieving is to observe believers displaying a smug self-satisfaction derived from having put these heretics 'in their place'. Certainly, we don't want to be taken in by the false teachings of the Watchtower organisation, nor do we want to bid these door to door workers 'God speed'. However, there's another way we can respond to these people that's not stimulated by apprehension, neither is it confrontational.

Although we may view the Jehovah's Witnesses as cultist, pedalling damnable heresies and deceiving our neighbours, let's also see them from another perspective. As far as their souls are concerned these people are no different to what we were before God saved us – lost and needing to hear the gospel. This glorious, life-giving, emancipating message declares that 'God so loved the world' – a world that incorporates the several million Jehovah's Witnesses. So, when they arrive at our home let's accept it as a mission field that has volunteered to come to our doorstep.

We need to realize that the Witnesses who come to our houses are not so much the deceivers as the deceived. Through a systematic process of indoctrination they have been duped into believing that everything the Watchtower organisation tells them is not only right but is the only truth. If we attack and vilify them we play right into their hands because they have been taught that the godly will suffer persecution. As they walk away from our doors having been verbally assaulted, they genuinely believe that this is evidence that they are serving Jehovah. They are serving Him and being persecuted for it – just as the Bible says they would.

We hear much about gospel activity amongst alcoholics, the homeless, drug addicts and asylum seekers. Many churches devote considerable time and effort working with the youth or with the senior citizens in their area. Others focus on outreach to schools or utilize opportunities via Postal Bible Schools. Great compassion is shown trying to win these various souls for Christ, and rightly so. Therefore, why shouldn't we show the same zeal and compassion to another group that need God's salvation just as much – the Jehovah's Witnesses?

Many of us don't really know what the Watchtower organisation believes, what information we have might be anecdotal, assumed or outdated. Christians who have a burden to reach out to these people would do well to familiarize themselves with the basic tenets of their beliefs. To assist in this there are many helpful resources available in book form, and on the internet, that will provide information regarding the doctrines and practices of the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Rather than berating them let's be courteous and graciously present to them what God has done for us. They don't have a personal, vital, living relationship with God and have no experience of an indwelling Holy Spirit – we do, so let's tell them about it. After they leave, let's earnestly pray that the Spirit of God will take merciful dealings with them and bring them to repentance and faith.

In most facets of evangelism we have to get out to where the people are and seek to reach them. Evangelizing to Jehovah's Witnesses is so different – they come to us and stand at our doorstep! May we, being moved with a love for their souls and a longing for their eternal salvation, be witnesses to them!