

PRECIOUS SEED



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

INTERNATIONAL

And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east'

Zech. 14. 4

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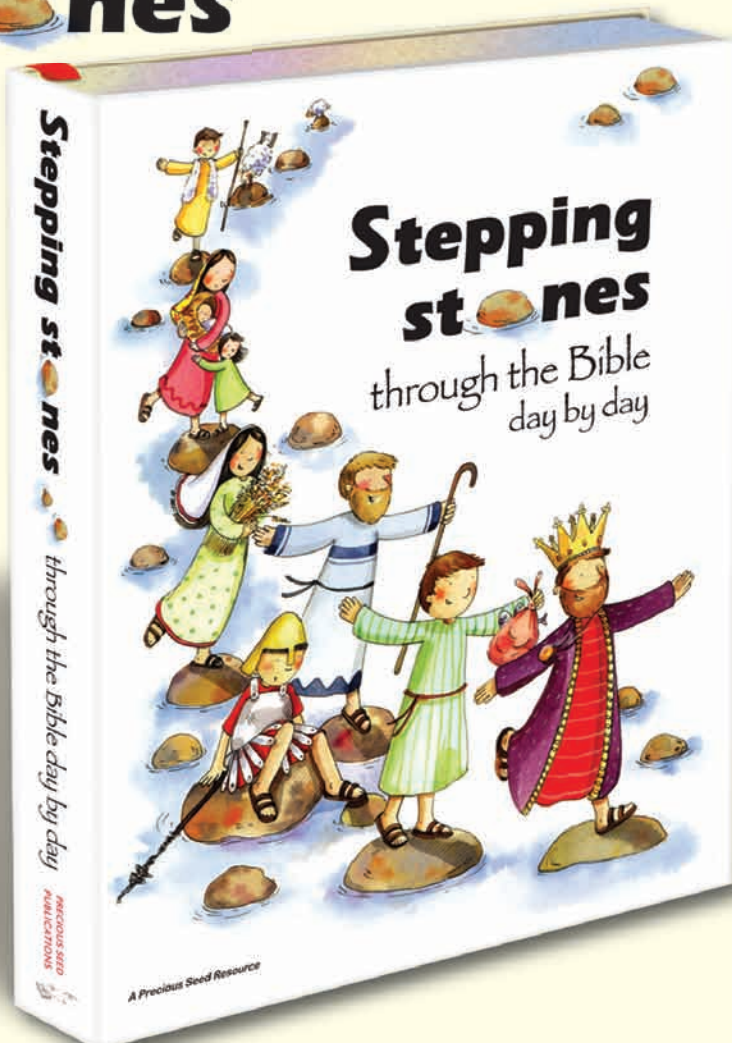
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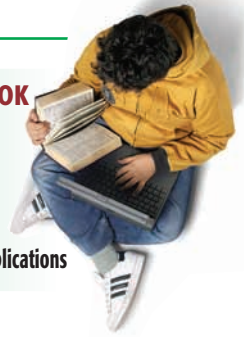
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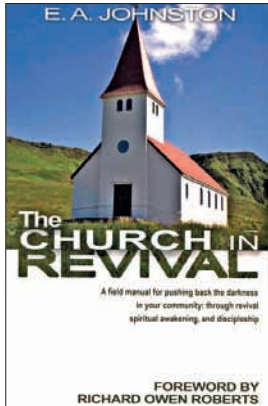
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Book Reviews

By **JOHN BENNETT** and **JOHN SCARBROOK**

Books are available from the publishers shown (or from John Ritchie in the UK or Gospel Folio Press in N. America), and **NOT** from Precious Seed Publications



The Church in Revival E. A. Johnston

Paperback, 182 pp, Gospel Folio Press, 304 Killaly St. West, Port Colborne, ON. L3K 6A6, Canada. Price \$12.99. ISBN 978-1-897117-82-8.

This is a well-written and well-presented book. It is good to note that scripture references are generally set out in full. There is emphasis given to the importance of the prayer meeting, the discipling of believers, giving to missionaries and humility, amongst other matters. This is commendable. However, the book falls short on a number of counts.

The front cover states 'a field manual for pushing back the darkness in your community'. What is implied by 'manual' is not clear as the book is like most of its kind, though one chapter is entitled, 'How to do . . .'. But is this what a local church is called to do? Are crime reduction, the stability of the family in our society, part of a church's mandate?

Some statements are not scripturally accurate. For instance, we read of 'the Church in America'. There is some blurring of the distinction between God's people and the nation, 'We as a nation, as a Church, have grieved the heart of God'. What grieves the Lord in regard to the ungodly and the godly is quite different. This statement is also a generalization and this reviewer feels the writer uses too many, including some that are unwise, especially in chapter 2.

In the author's consideration of revival he applies promises given to Israel to the 'church' today, in particular the promise found in 2 Chronicles chapter 7 verse 14, where the deduction drawn is that our nation can be healed. He also examines the reign of Josiah. The Passover is largely ignored and there is little if any application to a local church in terms of worship, the Lord's Supper and obedience to God's word. He also writes of following 'the biblical pattern in church planting' and gives practical advice, including, 'How you perform the ordinances of baptism and communion should depend on your sending church's practice'. Are we to assume that the biblical pattern and the practice of any particular church are the same?

This book left me with the feeling that it could have been more helpful.

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



William Tyndale. England's greatest Bible translator Brian H. Edwards

Paperback, 128pp. Published by Day One Publications, Ryelands Road, Leominster, HR6 8NZ. Price £10.00. ISBN 978-1-84625-160-3

The size of this little book masks its worth. In its 'Travel with' series, Day One Publications have provided another very valuable volume, an introduction to William Tyndale's life and work. His sterling efforts lie behind our KJV New Testament and much of the Old Testament and resulted in the publication of the first translation of the New Testament from the Greek text into English in 1525.

Its impact has been immeasurable both on the life of this land and on the whole world. Melvyn Bragg is not exaggerating when he describes it as 'the most influential book there has ever been in the history of language, English or any other'.

The greatness of Tyndale's work must be assessed not only on its scholarship but also against the circumstances under which he completed his task. Opposed by many of the church leaders of his day and even by King Henry VIII, he nevertheless overcame all obstacles in order to make possible his dream that 'ere many years I will cause that a boy that driveth a plough shall know more of the Scriptures than thou (a friar) dost'. His earthly reward was martyrdom in 1536.

This book is very easy to read and takes the reader through Tyndale's life and work at an impressive pace. It is well-researched and succeeds in creating the atmosphere in which Tyndale worked. We feel the ignorance, immorality and superstition which allowed a corrupt church to wield so much power and acquire so much wealth. The author has very skilfully woven into his account such characters as Wolsey, Thomas More, Erasmus, Luther and others who had an impact – for good or ill – on Tyndale's efforts.

The text is supported by more than 150 colour photographs, outline maps and drawings, together with an invaluable time chart (hence the price). It will appeal to a wide readership, not least to younger people who may not have realized as yet the debt which we owe, individually and as a nation, to this faithful scholar.

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



Visit the Sick Brian Croft

Paperback, 92pp. Published by Day One Publications, Ryelands Road, Leominster, HR6 8NZ. Price £5.00. ISBN 978-1-84625-143-6.

Brian Croft is senior pastor in a Baptist church in Louisville, Kentucky, and has had some twelve years' experience in pastoral ministry. No one will doubt the importance of the subject which he seeks to address in this book. He defines his aim as being 'to instruct and to motivate pastors, church leaders, and other care-giving Christians through the counsel of the heroes of church history, to recapture the practice of visiting the sick'.

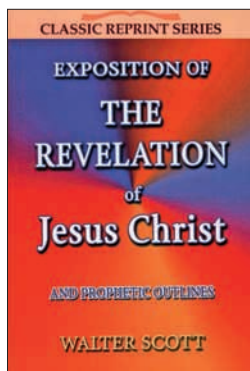
The book consists of five chapters covering Biblical, Theological, Pastoral, and Practical Considerations, together with a Conclusion. There is no doubting the author's sincerity as he tackles a very wide-ranging subject. There is much to commend. In his first chapter, the author sets out to establish a

scriptural basis for visiting those who are sick. The next chapter, 'Theological Considerations', focuses on evangelistic opportunities afforded to those who undertake this ministry and gives advice on how to go about this task. He encourages the use of scripture and what he describes as 'praying the gospel'.

Inevitably, there are difficulties in trying to deal with such a broad subject within the compass of a relatively small book. One might have wished that more space had been available to consider the visiting of believers who are ill and to note the encouragement to the visitor from hearing the testimony of saints on their sick-bed. Secondly, the limitations of space mean that the author has had to use scripture quotations as proof-texts rather than to consider them in context, something which tends to give an impression of superficiality. In fairness to the author, he is only too aware of this constraint imposed on him. Overall, though, this is a book which will provoke us to love and to good works.

No reader should miss Appendix 4, a ten-page quotation from the writings of J. C. Ryle.

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



Exposition of The Revelation of Jesus Christ and Prophetic Outlines

Walter Scott

Paperback, 466 pp. Published by John Ritchie Ltd., 40 Beansburn, Kilmarnock, Scotland, KA3 1RH. Price £10. 99, ISBN 978-1-904064-58-9.

The publishers are to be thanked for re-issuing Walter Scott's classic work on Revelation, thus making it available to another generation. Although in some minor ways this commentary may be showing its age, nevertheless its clarity, its depth, the stimulus to further study, and its capacity to generate devotional thought give it a claim to a place on the bookshelves of all believers.

From a pre-millennial rapture stance, the author demonstrates a clear understanding of the message of Revelation, which enables him to offer his readers the results of his learning and meditation in words that are trenchant and edifying. Moreover, Scott has a lively capacity to provoke his readers to search

the scriptures 'to see if these things are so'. To these qualities must be added his commitment to an accurate text and to a faithful handling of that text. All in all, this book is a model of expository writing.

One example may be sufficient to illustrate the style of this work. On the first two verses of chapter 19 there are, in quick succession, comments on God's dealings with all His creatures in truth and righteousness 'whether in grace or judgement'; there is a comment on the text, comparing the KJV and RV translations and referring to the original text; a reference to the true church being hid in heaven until the harlot has been destroyed: then follows a remark on the four 'Hallelujahs' in verses 1-6, noting the absence of that word in the rest of the New Testament and its occurrences in the last five Psalms, and suggesting that 'in their united character (these) express the millennial praise of Israel'. In the space of a few sentences, the reader has been alerted to matters doctrinal, devotional, textual, and dispensational.

Given the subject matter of this book, no one will agree with everything Scott writes, but no one who reads this book can fail to be enriched by it.

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



Simon Peter: Challenging Times Helen Clark

Paperback, 112 pp. Day One, Ryelands Road, Leominster, England HR6 8NZ. Price £5; ISBN 978-1846251573.

This book is one of two that chart the life of Peter from a fisherman of Galilee to Spirit-inspired preacher and fisher of men. It is written with young people, probably teenagers, in mind, presenting events in the life of Peter as they are recorded in the Gospels and Acts. Apart from the discussion of scripture there is also simple application, often linked to the writer's experience, and points for thought as each chapter is concluded.

Conscious that there is so little biblical material written for this specific audience, there are reasons why this book might be welcomed. However, its weakness in certain doctrinal points detracts from its overall usefulness. Clark leaves us without guidance on the continuation of miraculous spiritual gifts, her stance on the rapture of believers prior to the tribulation, or the public participation of women in teaching. These are serious issues where the young and impressionable should be clearly taught what the scriptures indicate. This is a book that could be used only with discernment.



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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

'Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body', Phil. 3. 21.

As we get older we become more aware of the frailty of this mortal vessel in which we dwell. It may be the aches and pains associated with abnormal physical exertion. It may be that we struggle with injury or disease and their debilitating effects. It may be that the march of time takes its toll and the things we once took for granted are now a major issue. Whatever the cause, there are constant reminders of our 'body of humiliation' JND.

For those coping with the pain and debilitating effects of disease the results of the fall are all too evident. We are led to appreciate the devastating consequences of one act of disobedience. What a lesson for all of us to help us see sin from the divine viewpoint. But a realization that sin has ruined the perfect creation of God brings no comfort to the hurting and sorrowing saint. Though we can look forward to a time when 'God shall wipe away all tears . . . and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain', Rev. 21. 4, this does not provide complete comfort for the present.

How many have sat in the darkness and despair of their painful plight and asked the question, 'Why?' or, more personally, 'Why me?'. At such times of despondency, a clear exposition of scripture does not spring to mind. The brain does not function as it should. For loved ones looking on there is a deep sense of impotence. We don't know what to do and, even less, what to say. However, let us remind ourselves of the experiences of some in scripture.

I am reminded of Elijah as he fled from the threat-laden rant of the wicked Jezebel who had sworn to kill him. In the loneliness of the wilderness, sitting under a juniper tree, he cries, 'It is enough . . . take away my life', 1 Kgs. 19. 4. Yet in his despair, at the lowest ebb of his experience, 'there came a voice unto him', v. 13. The God of the powerful drought, of the miraculous provision and of the fire of Carmel, draws near in 'a sound of gentle stillness', v. 12 margin. Elijah's experience brought him to despair but also to a deeper appreciation of his God.

Can we identify with the suffering of righteous, God-fearing Job? Have we ever felt as he felt when he said, 'I cry unto thee, and thou dost not hear me', Job 31. 20, or when, in desperation, he cried, 'Oh that one would hear me . . . that the Almighty would answer me!'. We would search in vain for God's answer to the question, 'Why me?'. However, as with Elijah, Job's experience of his God was deepened. Whereas he could once say, 'I have heard of thee', his experience was 'now mine eye seeth thee', Job 42. 5. May our appreciation of 'the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort', 2 Cor. 1. 3, deepen as He draws near to each of our hearts!

In this issue there is a variety of material which we hope will be a blessing to the Lord's people. Two series are concluding – that of Graham Hobbs and Shawn Abigail. Two series are continuing – that of Jim Cochrane and John Scarsbrook. There is also a continuation of the practical ministry on marriage and the short series on the Kingdom. Our prayerful desire is that we might continue to present a scripturally consistent yet relevant magazine for the people of God.

JOHN BENNETT Ministry Articles Editor



FUNDAMENTAL STEPS TO

2 WE'RE GETTING MARRIED

How wonderful it is when a young couple who have committed their lives to Jesus Christ as Lord experience His guidance in bringing them together into a relationship that has marriage in mind.

Although very much in love, and that is as it should be, they realize that being in love is not enough to prepare them for marriage. They still need the Lord's help at this very important stage of their lives.

Sadly, it seems, that sometimes a great deal of preparation, attention to detail, time and expense is committed to the actual wedding day without too much thought being given to the marriage itself. It is possible that Christian parents can be guilty of concentrating on the wrong things when their sons or daughters are getting married. Let us be mindful of the principle of stewardship. It is often the case that simple, straightforward weddings are by far the happiest occasions. It is people, not material things, that make for happy times.

So, whilst making preparations for the wedding day, the couple will also realize that preparing for marriage is the truly important thing. Once again, help is needed and help is available, firstly, in the word of God, and secondly, amongst His people.

Purity

God requires that His people maintain sexual purity. Sexual intercourse is to be enjoyed exclusively within the marriage relationship and any sexual activity outside of marriage is described either as 'fornication' amongst single people, or 'adultery' if engaged in by married people.

It is one thing for a single Christian to maintain sexual purity but it is just as important for a couple in a relationship contemplating marriage to continue to maintain that purity. It is very tempting for a couple to decide that there is no harm in anticipating the forthcoming marriage by engaging in sexual activity prior to the wedding day. This

temptation becomes even stronger when the couple announce their engagement. The couple need to be aware of this increasing temptation and take steps to avoid it in every way possible.

Ground Rules

It may not be easy, but it is essential that the engaged couple should be able to talk to each other freely and without embarrassment about these intimate matters. After all, each is seeking out of love for the other to behave in a way that will enhance their unique relationship. Each has a desire to give themselves to the other as an expression of their deep love and life-long commitment. And this is when the intensity of moral pressures increases!

With this in mind, it is essential that ground rules are agreed so that as the relationship continues to develop and, at times when emotions are running high, sexual desires are controlled. These ground rules should cover such subjects as to how far physical contact with each other should go without causing temptation to sin; whether or not they should spend time alone in a home situation; or go on holiday together without companions, etc.

Scripture pictures a man leaving the parental home to marry and set up a new home and takes for granted that the woman will likewise leave the authority of her father's house to be in subjection to her husband in their new home. Today's society is very different. Many young men and women leave the parental home and become independent individuals living on their own for the purpose of further education or employment. This leaves young people as free agents in the period between leaving home and marriage, leading to a whole new range of temptations.

Spirituality

It has been important to have daily devotional times with the Lord as single individuals and now is the time to develop a joint spiritual life in

By
**JOHN
SALISBURY**
Northampton,
England





WARDS VITAL DECISIONS

... HELP AND ADVICE PLEASE

preparation for family devotions as a married couple. Reading the scriptures and praying together, whenever possible, will add a spiritual dimension by bringing the Lord into every aspect of the relationship.

How important to discuss, with the help of the Lord and the scriptures, spiritual matters generally, and issues relating to the engaged couple specifically. Which assembly will they join? What are their gifts and how will they, as a married couple, be able to build into the local assembly? How committed to God's work will they be? What if they hear God calling them to 'full-time' service? What about a family? Will the wife be a full-time home-maker or will she pursue a career? Now is the time to develop a clear, united view of these important matters.

Understanding

In the reading of relevant scriptures together an understanding of the respective roles of husband and wife will be gained, with the husband as head and leader, and the wife as subject and responder. This will challenge the young man. Can he assume spiritual leadership of his future wife? Can he lay down his life for her, as Christ for the church? The young woman will also ask herself, is she prepared to be subject to this man? Does she respect him as her spiritual leader? Will he encourage her to grow spiritually?

Practical Issues

Scripture deals with the practical issues of life as well as the spiritual. It teaches that a man should be able to provide for his own. Therefore the question must be asked, can the young man assume economic care for his future wife, and possibly a family? In these days when the wife is frequently a higher earner than the husband, how will they manage their finances? Will they buy or rent a home? Will one of them move in if they obtain a home prior to the wedding day? What about the moral temptations that will bring, and the ground rules that will need to be discussed? Equally, what a great

opportunity they will have to witness to unbelieving friends and colleagues who will expect both to move in and live as man and wife prior to marriage! Who will take responsibility for household finances? Will they buy goods on credit schemes or save up and buy once they can afford them? All these practical matters, and many more, are important and should be agreed upon at this stage, otherwise financial and practical matters can come later as a surprise and have a damaging effect to the marriage.

Mentoring

There is no substitute for experience in life and a young couple will be well advised to seek the counsel of godly older believers. Scripture teaches the importance of one generation teaching another. Moses was told to 'encourage' Joshua, Deut. 3. 28. Paul committed truth to Timothy, and expected him to pass it on to others, 2 Tim. 2. 2. Older sisters are expected to teach the young women about domestic matters, Titus 2. 3-5.

The young couple must decide who will be a suitable brother to conduct their marriage ceremony, and will need to approach him about this. It may be that they have already confided in such a person regarding their relationship and spent time with him in prayer from time to time as they have sought the Lord's guidance and help in their relationship and marriage plans. This is the role of elders in any local assembly but it may be that the couple feel confident with someone else, especially if they have shown an interest and been a help to them previously. The brother will no doubt discuss the wording of the vows that will be taken in the presence of the Lord, and also the implications of Christian marriage. This brother and his wife will probably be very happy to spend time with them on a number of occasions so that they may pass on the benefit of their experiences, and mistakes, and generally provide spiritual guidance regarding marriage and family life.

The friendship and advice of young

married couples will also be invaluable, as they have recently encountered the decisions, problems and experiences that the young couple are facing and their information will be up to date.

The involvement of the parents of the young couple must not be underestimated either. It is so important to maintain good relationships with them, whether they are believers or not. The parents are passing through a difficult phase in their lives as they contemplate seeing a son or daughter leave their influence and set up an independent family unit with their spouse. Unbelieving parents can offer practical help and advice and, although they don't understand the lifestyle of their believing child, they watch carefully, and the way in which the young couple involve them will affect their attitude towards Christianity and may well be a stepping stone to leading them to Christ. Believing parents should have shown through the years, by example, what a Christian marriage is all about. They should also be able to offer helpful advice and prayerful support without being interfering or overbearing, remembering that they can also have an adverse affect on the couple by so doing.

Resources

There are many good resources available and elders should be able to provide young couples contemplating marriage with such information. They will probably suggest that the couple go through a marriage course with either themselves or another suitable godly couple.

There are CDs, DVDs, books and courses available which are biblically based and very thorough in their content. Elders will need to give guidance as to which will be most appropriate, taking into account the young couple's circumstances and backgrounds. These will, of course, supplement the reading and teaching of the scriptures and earnest prayer for God's guidance and help for the young couple contemplating marriage in the Lord.

JOHN SALISBURY has served as an elder in the Spencer Bridge 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.





Nahum was called to prophesy God's awful vengeance upon Nineveh and the Assyrian king who had presumed to reproach and blaspheme the Lord. However, his message also contains encouragement for God's people, for in His wrath, He remembers mercy and shows kindness to His people.

The prophet and his times

We are told very little about Nahum. He was from a town called Elkosh, which has never been identified. Some think it may have been near the New Testament city of Capernaum, which means 'the Village of Nahum' or somewhere near the present Iraqi city of Mosul, across the Tigris from Nineveh's ruins. In this latter case his family could have been among the tribes deported by the king of Assyria in the days of King Hoshea, 2 Kgs. 17.

We are not told at what period he exercised his prophetic ministry, but it seems appropriate to place him about the time of King Hezekiah, when Jerusalem was being threatened by the Assyrians. In the days of King Josiah, Zephaniah also prophesied the total destruction of Nineveh. From history we know that Nineveh was utterly destroyed by a coalition of Medes and Babylonians around 612 BC.

The judgement of God

Nahum's prophecy is called a 'burden', a solemn utterance or sentence of judgement, concerning Nineveh. The Assyrians were always an arrogant, boastful and cruel people. Their king's general threatened Jerusalem, 'Shall I not, as I have done unto Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols?' Isa. 10. 11. They did not understand that the living God is totally different from the idol gods of the nations. 'And my hand hath found as a nest the riches of the people: and as one gathereth eggs that are forsaken, have I gathered all the earth: and there was none that moved the wing, or that opened the mouth or chirped', Isa. 10. 14 RV. They assumed Jerusalem would fall into their hands just as easily as other peoples and cities had. 'Behold, thou hast heard what the kings of Assyria

THE LORD IS

have done to all lands by destroying them utterly; and shalt thou be delivered?' Isa. 37. 11. Memorial pillars unearthed from the site of Nineveh include an inscription claiming Sennacherib to be 'the king of the universe'. God took notice and dismissed these blusterings, 'Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed? and against whom hast thou exalted thy voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high? even against the Holy One of Israel. By thy servants hast thou reproached the Lord', Isa. 37. 23, 24.

By
JIM VOISEY
Cardiff,
Wales

In the three chapters of this book, Nahum prophesies the coming judgement. When the Lord comes forth in vengeance, even the great eternal mountains quake, 1. 5. Nineveh may hastily prepare for a siege within its strong walls, muster its forces, deploy its chariots, man its ramparts ('keep the munition'), but it will all be to no avail. Nineveh is portrayed as a disreputable woman – Huzzab – exposed to shame and ridicule, and led away, 2. 7.

Nineveh had had its day. Now it was to be a city of blood. The prophet describes what will happen. The sights and sounds of defeat, the clatter of the enemy's chariots and horses, the terrible shining weapons, and 'there is a multitude of slain, and a great number of carcasses; and there is none end of their corpses; they stumble upon their corpses', 3. 3. The king and the city were become vile, that is contemptible and shamed and worthless, their gates were wide open unto their enemies. Human power and vanity cannot stand before this awful judgement from the Lord.

The princes of Nineveh, concerning whom their king had boasted that 'they were altogether kings', and the military governors ('captains') were nowhere to be seen. Now it is Nineveh's turn for her young children to be dashed in pieces in the streets, and her prominent citizens bound and led away in chains. They would reap the whirlwind, 3. 10, 17; Isa. 10. 8, and all the nations would rejoice at its

ignominious end. Nineveh is a type of the world's political power, wealth and cruelty. The judgement of our world has yet to come, but come it will, cf. 3. 19; John 3. 36; Acts 17. 31; 1 Thess. 1. 10; 2 Pet. 3. 7-10.

The goodness of the Lord

This book contains encouragement for God's people of all generations, 'The Lord is good and doest good'; 'The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord'. The Lord is faithful to His creation. Since time immemorial He has kept His promise, 'While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease', Gen. 8. 22. Paul spoke to the men of Lystra of the God who 'left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness', Acts 14. 17. 'The eyes of all wait upon thee: and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing', Ps. 145. 15, 16. 'Who provideth for the raven his food?' the Lord asked Job, Job 38. 41.

God is good. Hence, when He gave His laws to Israel, He required that they too should do good to others. He stooped to concern Himself with the lot of the fatherless child, the widow, and the stranger. He gave them specific instructions about their treatment of the old, and the deaf and the blind, sometimes laying special emphasis upon their doing these things, because it was His will. This is His commandment. Even concerns about overburdened and straying animals, or birds' nests, are enshrined in the law. Such things are not too insignificant or trivial so far as God is concerned. We depend upon the goodness of the Lord throughout our lives. For the psalmist David, the Lord was his light, his strength, his confidence and his help.

How utterly different the Lord is from the idol gods of men! Truly, God was good unto Israel, 'Out of heaven he





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made thee to hear his voice, that he might instruct thee', Deut. 4. 36, and, 'What nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them . . . that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law?' Deut. 4. 7-8. 'O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness', Ps. 107. 8.

A secure refuge

He is a stronghold – literally a 'rock', being an image of firmness, strength, and security. This is a spiritual fastness to which we may flee wherever we are, and in whatever circumstances we are. David often spoke of the Lord in this way when he was having his problems and facing his adversaries, cf. Pss. 27. 5; 59. 16; 62. 6-8; 144. 1,

trouble', 'Be not afraid of the words that thou hast heard', Isa. 37. 6. 'The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous runneth into it and is safe', Prov. 18. 10.

The Lord Jesus prayed for His disciples that they should be kept 'from the evil' of the world which would hate them, John 17. 15. We will never appeal in vain to the Lord whatever problem we face. He does hear and He will answer. It may be in ways we do not expect, but it will always be for our good and the working out of all God's sovereign purposes. 'How unsearchable are God's judgments, and his ways past finding out', Rom. 11. 33. But we have to learn, and be ready to trust Him.

The Lord cares for us

The Lord knows us, and this implies He also cares for us.

the Lord who spoke unto her, Thou God seest me', Gen. 16. 13. On another occasion when God intervened in her life God heard the voice of her son and opened her eyes to see the needed water. She was just a servant girl to Sarah; she was not in the line of the Lord's promises to Abram, but He had heard her affliction. The Lord's tenderness made up for her mistress' harshness, Gen. 21. 17, 19.

The Lord led Abraham's servant to the house of his master's brethren, where the divine purposes concerning Rebekah would be made plain. 'The Lord God', he said, 'led me in the right way to take my master's brother's daughter unto his son', Gen. 24. 48. The mighty God still works out His purposes through men.

The Lord sees and blesses 'the way of the righteous', Ps. 1. 6. The Lord Jesus knew Nathaniel, and surprised him by his notice of him. He cares for those who are hungry and thirsty, troubled and distressed. For those who are in captivity and the darkness of despair, and He saves them. He cares for those who have behaved foolishly and are self-afflicted because of it. He cares for those who experience the ups and downs of life, its storms, perils and dangers, He knows and makes all our human needs His concern. In any time of trial we should remember He cares for us, 1 Pet. 5. 7.

Although he was called to preach a heavy message of judgement, Nahum reassures his people, and we too find encouragement and blessing today in his words about the goodness of God, His absolute reliability in every time of need, and His abiding concern and care for us. Those glad tidings of joy that Nahum included in his prophecy are also ours. 'Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings', 1. 15. 'O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him', Ps. 34. 8. Even though our friends may inadvertently confound our hopes like Job's did, the Lord never will. 'They trusted in thee and were not confounded', Ps. 22. 5.

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2. The Lord stands by us, and strengthens us in the day of trouble. He stood with David, and with Paul when he and his fellow passengers were endangered in the sea, and when he was obliged to stand before Nero to answer for his life, Acts 27. 23; 2 Tim. 4. 17.

We are not promised an easy life, free from everyday cares, dangers and difficulties. The Lord was with Joseph, even when he was sold into slavery and put into prison. The Lord reassured King Hezekiah in his 'day of

The idol-gods of the nations could not see, hear or speak, 'Who has formed a god, or molten a graven image that is profitable for nothing?' Isa. 44. 10. They had to be carried, 'a burden to the weary'. The Lord sees us in all our human experiences. He is concerned about us, whether poor or rich in this world, or whether we occupy an important position or none at all. A remarkable instance of God knowing and caring for an apparently insignificant person is seen when He sent the angel to Hagar, and told her what she should do, 'And she called the name of





The interpretation of passages relating to prophecy is a topic liable to generate differences of opinion amongst believers. The views expressed in this article are not those commonly taught or necessarily held by all committee members but they are included here to encourage us all to search the scriptures to see whether these things be so. **Editor**

The Mysteries of the

Christ's transfiguration was a miniature preview of the **coming** Kingdom, Matt. 16. 28; Mark 9. 1; Luke 9. 27, a kingdom whose character is not of this world, John 18. 36, which is linked to power and glory, Matt. 6. 13, and which will see illness eradicated, Isa. 35. 1-6. The Kingdom of God was said to have come unto, Matt. 12. 28; Luke 11. 20, or been 'in the midst of' the Pharisees, 17. 21 JND, only in the sense that the King was among them, performing miracles that anticipated the coming Kingdom. Although specific signs will herald the coming of the Kingdom of God, 21. 31, its suddenness will take men by surprise, 17. 20. Answering the prayers of persecuted saints, Matt. 6. 10, the heavenly Bridegroom will come suddenly in His Kingdom and rule over the house of Jacob, Matt. 25. 1; Luke 1. 32, 33; 23. 42; then the will of God shall 'be done in earth, as it is in heaven', Matt. 6. 10; then again Christ will eat of the Passover and drink of the fruit of the vine, Matt. 26. 29; Mark 14. 25; Luke 22. 16, 18.

It will be a happy thing to sit down and eat bread in the Kingdom of God, 14. 15, so much so that participation in its future blessings is likened to attending a wedding feast, Matt. 22. 1-14, and the Lord Jesus Christ said even the least in the Kingdom of God would be greater than John the Baptist, 11. 11; Luke 7. 28. Entrance into this Kingdom is possible only through the new birth, John 3. 5, for those whose righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees, Matt. 5. 20, who do the will of God the Father, Matt. 7. 21, and are humble, like little children, Matt. 18. 3; 19. 14; Mark 10. 14, 15; Luke 18. 16, 17. It is to be inherited by the poor in spirit, and those persecuted for righteousness' sake, Matt. 5. 3, 10; Luke 6. 20. It is exceptionally difficult for rich people

to enter the Kingdom of God, though not impossible, Matt. 19. 23, 24; Mark 10. 23-25; Luke 18. 24, 25. And, entering the Kingdom is of such importance that it should take priority over everything else in life, Matt. 6. 33; 19. 12; Luke 9. 62; 12. 31, no matter what the cost, Mark 9. 47. It is possible to be near the Kingdom in understanding and never enter, 12. 34. Gentiles, as well as Jews, Matt. 8. 11; Luke 13. 29, will populate the future Kingdom of God, even converted harlots will be there, Matt. 23. 31. But the Pharisees, who not only refused to go in but prevented others from doing so, and other unsaved Israelites – referred to here as the children of the Kingdom – will be cast out into outer darkness, 8. 12; 21. 31; 23. 13; Luke 13. 28. Because of Israel's rejection of Messiah, the Kingdom of God will only fully be entered into after the judgement of the living nations at the end of the tribulation, Matt. 25. 34.

No matter what price people have to pay by way of personal sacrifice, there will be more than ample remuneration in the Kingdom of God, Matt. 19. 27-20. 16; Luke 12. 32; 18. 29, faithfulness prior to its establishment being greatly rewarded, Matt. 18. 23; 25. 14. The Lord's disciples will fill administrative roles, 16. 19; Luke 22. 29, 30, those who do and teach God's commandments will be considered great, Matt. 5. 19, true greatness in the Kingdom of God being dependent on humility, 18. 4.

How do Christians fit into God's Kingdom Programme?

The Kingdom of God – mediatorial, not universal aspect – is presently in abeyance. The Bible never states that the Kingdom of God is now established. Do not confuse the church, the body of Christ, or Christendom – an unbiblical expression – with that glorious future Kingdom which will be established under Messiah's benevolent rule.

Christ does rule in the church, but not as King. He is the head, the bridegroom, the chief corner stone, but not King of the church. How do the New Testament epistles – that portion of the Bible particularly relevant to the church – place Christian believers in relation to the Kingdom of God? Many of their references are quite clear. The Kingdom of God is going to be inherited in the future and does not apply to the present church age, 1 Cor. 6. 9, 10; 15. 50; Gal. 5. 21; Eph. 5. 5; Jas. 2. 5. The meaning of other references is less obvious, Rom. 14. 17; 1 Cor. 4. 20; Col. 4. 11; 1 Thess. 2. 12, at least one seeming to put Christians

presently in that Kingdom, Col. 1. 13. One way of reconciling this verse with all others looked at so far is by regarding this 'action . . . as *de jure* rather than *de facto*'.¹ Christian believers, as far as God's eternal counsel is concerned, are as good as in that future messianic Kingdom, just as our glorification is so certain that God views it as an already accomplished fact, Rom. 8. 30. During this era God is saving individuals and preparing the *ekklesia*, Christ's bride, who will co-reign with Christ in the future Kingdom. Therefore, it is incumbent upon Christian believers to live in the good of their glorious future.

Matthew Chapter 13

A standard approach to Matthew chapter 13 goes something like this. When Israel's leaders accused the Lord Jesus of demon possession the inevitability of the nation's rejection of their Messiah became apparent. Because of this the Lord Jesus began to teach a new form of the Kingdom of God: the Kingdom of God in mystery form – not a visible worldwide kingdom, but God's rule in the hearts of believers in the present age, the church, extending into the tribulation prior to the setting up of the millennium kingdom – the technical term applied to this stretch of time being the interregnum. This

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Kingdom of God (2)

view has commendable elements. It sees these parables in the context of Israel's rejection of their Messiah; neither does it rule out a future for the nation of Israel.

However, significant problems arise with this interpretation of Matthew chapter 13. Its conclusion that the Kingdom of God must now have a completely different manifestation (mystery form) from its meaning everywhere else in scripture is alarming. After all, one of the most important principles of Bible interpretation is never to build doctrines which are at variance with the general tenor of scripture on the basis of isolated passages which are difficult to understand. Wherever possible, retain a consistent approach to Bible interpretation. But Matthew chapter 13 is teaching mysteries about the Kingdom of God although a Bible mystery is not actually something mysterious but rather truth 'which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit', Eph. 3. 5. And even the Old Testament predicted the giving of new revelation through parables, Matt. 13. 35; Ps. 78. 2. That is to say, a Bible mystery is the provision of fresh revelation from God. These parables do not present a 'mystery form' of the Kingdom of God but simply throw further light on the Old Testament's teaching on the Kingdom of God, particularly in view of its postponement due to Israel's rejection of their Messiah. This approach to these parables seems to be confirmed by the Saviour's closing words on the subject, 'Every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new [fresh revelation] and old [Old Testament teaching on the subject]', Matt. 13. 52. For a complete picture of the

Kingdom of God both Old and New Testament teaching is required; the Lord's teaching here cannot be studied in isolation.

There are more difficulties with the traditional viewpoint. Nowhere else does scripture merge the church and tribulation periods, constantly keeping them distinct; neither does the Bible



anywhere else refer to the church (*ekklesia*; the body of Christ) being the Kingdom (*basileia*). As we have already mentioned, the church is always considered something unique in the plan of God. Furthermore, if the Kingdom of God is now the sphere where God rules over people's hearts, there is actually nothing new in this at all, for God has always ruled in the hearts of His people. Inevitably, we would have to regard Abraham as being in this Kingdom of God, Adam its first member and, taking this route, we suddenly find ourselves but a step

away from a purely allegorical interpretation of scripture, the church replacing Israel. It may be said that the Kingdom of God in the parables represents God ruling in a sphere of profession, for example, present-day Christendom. But this idea of Christendom, though perhaps convenient for what we see today, is not a concept that is taught in the word of God at all. The Bible always maintains a clear distinction between believers and unbelievers, as different as light is to darkness. It is highly unlikely that this idea would be taught in total isolation in these parables.

Consider how these parables end: the Son of man coming to establish His Kingdom just after an irreversible removal of the wicked, the godly shining forth in the kingdom of their Father. For Christ to suddenly switch the meaning of the Kingdom of God which He had been preaching – a literal Kingdom for Israel – to an inward spiritual kingdom and then once again switch back to its original meaning at the end of these parables would be utterly confusing, even for the disciples to whom it was meant to teach truth. And what about the teaching in these parables that there can be no separation of the wicked from the righteous till the end. This is simply not true if applied to the church period because the rapture will divide the righteous from the wicked. And if the Kingdom of God, as predicted in these parables, has now been established in the church as a spiritual kingdom, why did the Lord Jesus teach near the end of His ministry that the kingdom would not immediately appear, Luke 19. 11?

Reference

- 1 McClain A. J. *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Winona Lake, Indiana: BMH Books, 1974), p.435.

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I would like to address what I believe is a very real and present danger that I have only recently observed, but one that can easily rob us of our Christian vitality.

In Matthew chapter 5 verses 13-16, Jesus is speaking to His followers, 'You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavour, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven' NKJV.

When I was younger my sphere of influence was much smaller than it is today. What I said, what I did and who I purported to be had an influence on relatively few family members, friends and immediate classmates. Today, you can Google my name from anywhere in the world; you can do it from your i-phone right now and see that, for example, I recently appeared at a City Commission meeting and even read a transcript of exactly what I said there. Today, we have 'YouTube', 'Twitter', and 'Facebook'. 'A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden'.

Increasingly, our 'life style testimonies' cannot be hidden. Like it or not, intend it or not, we 'sit upon a hill'. Unintended 'appearances' may betray our real selves, or our 'intended purpose', but those 'appearances' none the less are often open to full public scrutiny, and so, as believers, it should be important to us to avoid 'all appearance of evil', 1 Thess. 5. 22. If, as Jesus said, we are the purifying 'salt of the earth', and our salt has lost its effectiveness, because unbelievers discount our testimony, then what of our usefulness to the Lord?

Recently, I was faced with a very unpleasant reality as I went 'on' Facebook and checked out a 'friend's' home page. On Facebook, a 'friend' is

Do you use Facebo

someone you have mutually agreed to share entries with. This 'friend', from another area, has hundreds of other 'friends' from all around, who, in their turn, have hundreds of 'friends' themselves. So, the network that I have exposure to, even with very few Facebook 'friends' myself, is expansive. Many in this network I identified as believers, some as 'prominent' believers.

Sadly, I was amazed to view many of the photos and read many of the comments from other Christians that I knew that were available to me on my 'friend's' homepage. I was saddened that my 'friends' had posted these on their own home page. When people gather, or call one another on the phone, or 'Twitter', or blog, they generally speak of things that they care about, that interest them, that excite them. I was seeing comments and photos about things that biblically should have been 'abandoned' by any believer as a 'babe in Christ', 2 Cor. 5. 17, but many of these folks are known to be more mature believers. I was observing the portrayal of worldly life styles that Paul commanded us to forsake, cf. Titus 2. 11-14.

It is as though there is a 'parallel universe' to the reality of this present life in operation here, and people, even believers, pass freely back and forth between the two. Apparently, these believers that I was seeing and reading

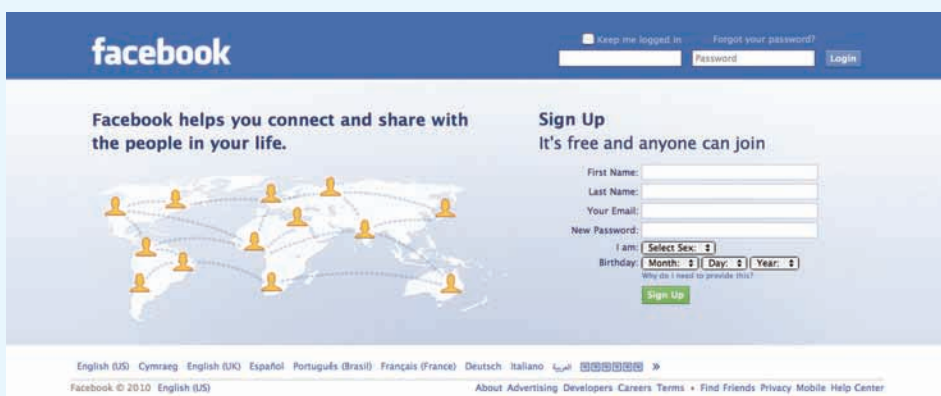
about are 'acting out' a different 'life style' in this internet 'parallel universe' than the one they purport in person. Unfortunately, and intentionally or not, I fear it is in this 'e-world' where the 'light' they are projecting shines the brightest, and reaches out the farthest. And it did not appear to be a reflection of the 'Light' that our Lord was referring to when He said, 'You are the light of the world'. I fear, rather, it is of those things that in

Ephesians chapter 5 Paul bids us avoid, but rather walk as 'children of light'.

Paul's words to the early church at Corinth have never been truer: 'Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tablets of stone, but in fleshy tablets of the heart', 2 Cor. 3. 2-3.

I know there are many justifications that may be offered for one's words and photos posted on the internet. There are youthful indiscretions; innocent, if indiscreet, moments, etc. I understand that each believer lives his life with the degree of piety that he understands the living Lord expects of him. I know that we have liberty in Christ Jesus. But I also know that wherever it is, we each lay down a footprint, a map or a theme that tells our life's story. If our internet postings and comments are of our family, the message in either 'universe' is that we love our family, and family is important to us. I had to conclude from some of the themes of the Facebook postings

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ok?



that I had become privy to, that there are believers that I know and love in the Lord whose 'parallel universe' is of 'old things' that have not passed away, and behold, all things have sadly not become 'new'. These were not expressions of lives now being lived for the Saviour.

I am writing this article for two reasons. Firstly, because I was deeply saddened to face the reality that for some I love and care about in the Lord, I believe their effectiveness for the Lord has been compromised. Thankfully, as believers, we know that this is not irreversible. Our God is a forgiving God and we have all grown in our faith as we confront those sins that so easily beset us and gain the victory. My prayer is that all of our 'lights' will always reflect the 'true Light of the World'. Pray with me to that end. Secondly, because, as believers we desire a good testimony, we need to be on guard as to what we say, and who we 'say' we are, privately and publicly. This applies in the family, with unbelieving friends, at a public venue with thousands of others, and even in e-mails and on the internet. We are called to be a light that a lost soul can use to be guided to the safety of a harbour in Jesus Christ, not upon the rocks of worldliness. We are sitting upon a hill, and our Lord expects our beacon to be a reflection of 'the Light of the World', not a glow of worldliness.

Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, take this as I intend it, for our mutual growth and encouragement in the Lord. In these times when our 'life's message' can be broadcast around the globe, be vigilant; live circumspectly as we are admonished to do in Ephesians chapter 5. May each of our lives so shine before our family, our friends, our assembly, our co-workers, our acquaintances, and on our web pages, that all may see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven.

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Garments for Aaron

To describe these garments as 'holy garments' was to indicate that they were set apart for the sole use of the high priest in the performance of his role in the presence of God. Although the fact that they were holy was not because of the materials or construction specifically, they were more than the simple priestly garments afforded for priestly work.

They were holy because holiness characterizes the God into whose presence the high priest was to enter in the Tabernacle, Lev. 11. 44-45; 19. 2; 20. 26; 21. 8; 1 Pet. 1. 16. It was essential that the priest was appropriately attired. He could not enter as he wanted but only as God wanted. The donning of 'holy garments' outwardly was designed to make the wearer conscious of the inward state of heart necessary for the God into whose presence he was about to enter. To do so foolishly was to court judgement and destruction.

In a similar way we cannot function as priests in the presence of God without being in a fit state of heart – having the righteousness of saints, but also having no unconfessed sin to break the fellowship and communion befitting priestly work.

They were set apart for a distinct use. When Aaron was adorned as the high priest he was visibly set apart for all to see – his separation was real. Leviticus chapter 8 verse 5 tells us that 'Moses said unto the congregation, "This is the thing which the Lord commanded to be done"'. How important for us to be holy in an external sense as well as in an internal sense. Can others see by our manner of life, and, perhaps, even our dress and demeanour, that we are different?

It is remarkable that these garments should be intended for the family, 'Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazer and Ithamar, Aaron's sons', v. 1. Yet, two members of the family, Nadab and Abihu, would later rebel and perish. In the purposes of God Nadab and Abihu would have succeeded to the position of high priest had it not been for that seed of rebellion in their heart. There is a testimony here to the fact that God's sovereignty does not override man's free will – God does not elect men to judgement and condemnation.



[Extracted from *Day by Day – Paradise to the Promised Land* published by Precious Seed Publications]



The gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ unites believers in a common life and mission. Evangelization and service for the Saviour are endeavours which the Bible well describes as spiritual warfare, Eph. 6. 10-18. Paul wrote to his beloved converts in Philippi in order to ensure their ongoing participation in these important, but difficult tasks. In addition to external opposition, their effectiveness for the Lord was impaired by internal problems – most notably their lack of unity, Phil. 2. 2-3; 4. 2.

Rather than begin his letter with a stinging rebuke, the apostle commences with an introductory paragraph that establishes both his love for the Philippian Christians and the Lord's high purpose for them. He also wisely presents his well-known co-labourer and himself with humility, describing themselves as 'slaves' ESV margin, or 'bondservants of Christ Jesus', 1. 1 NAS. One commentator elucidates the first-century believers' understanding of the word, 'Although in the Old Testament the term "slave" sometimes appears as a title of honour to indicate the special relationship of great heroes like Moses, Joshua, and David to God . . . in the Graeco-Roman context of Paul and his Philippian readers, it would have had unmistakable overtones of humility and submission. Paul's readers would probably have understood the term as Paul used it here to refer to people conscripted into the service of Christ instead of into service to sin'.¹ The modern evangelical preoccupation with clerical titles and human-conferred credentials stands in stark contrast to Paul's unrelenting desire to exalt Christ and abase himself. Like the Master, Paul girds himself with the slave's towel and crouches low to wash the erring Christians' feet.

Most translations reverse the KJV's order of 'Jesus Christ' to 'Christ

Philippians: The Joy and Suffering

Chapter 1: The Gospel's Progress amidst Opposition and Suffering

Section 1: Verses 1-11

Introduction: Greetings, Thankfulness, and God's Work in the Saints' Lives

Jesus', for example, JND, ASV, NASB, ESV. W. E. VINE explains the differing emphasis in this word order, "'Christ Jesus' describes the Exalted One who emptied Himself (2. 5), and testifies to His preexistence; 'Jesus Christ' describes the despised and rejected One who was afterwards glorified (2. 11), and testifies to His resurrection. 'Christ Jesus' suggests His grace, 'Jesus Christ' suggests His glory'.² DONALD CARSON adds, 'that life [of the Philippians] was *in Christ Jesus*. This phrase, or its equivalent, appears many times in this letter, indicating that Christ is the very environment of the Christian's life. Believers live and move within the orbit of His will, His grace, His presence'.³

God's View of Christians

In contrast to the unpretentious terminology that he applies to his colleague and himself, Paul refers to the Philippians' divinely-bestowed high position as 'saints', v. 1 – a term literally meaning 'holy ones', 'separated ones', or 'set apart ones'. To many people this word conjures up images of pious medieval portraiture: intrepid, super-spiritual men and women who shunned worldly comforts, performed miracles, and were adorned with glowing halos twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Instead of being restricted to a select class of over-achieving Christians, the term is applied to all believers, even those who demonstrate failings and struggles of various kinds, for example, the notoriously imperfect Corinthians, 1 Cor. 1. 2. Theologically, it emphasizes the reality of the believer's spiritual

position in Christ. God has set apart Christians from this fallen, condemned world in order to be like His Son and serve Him in holiness in this scene of His rejection. Of course, their position and practice were somewhat divergent. Problems existed which the apostle would address later in the epistle, but first he prepares the ground for their correction by reminding them of their exalted calling, position and destiny as saints.

At the outset of the letter, Paul also greets certain responsible members of the congregation, namely, 'the bishops and deacons'. The former term is better translated 'overseer', and refers to the shepherds – always plural in New Testament churches – who are also described as 'elders', Acts 20. 17, 28. The latter word means 'a servant' and can refer to identifiable people within the assembly with duties in the practical and material realm. Some Bible students suggest that these two groups are singled out in a veiled rebuke. I find nothing in the text to support this hypothesis. Although this opening greeting is unique in the Pauline epistles, it does not necessarily follow that the overseers and deacons were doing anything amiss. It may be that he was merely sending salutations to those taking a leading role, with whom he had forged special bonds of love in past times.

Grace and Peace: Christian Realities

In verse 2 Paul greets the Philippians in his habitual way, employing the Graeco-Roman

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ring of the Furtherance of the Gospel Part Two

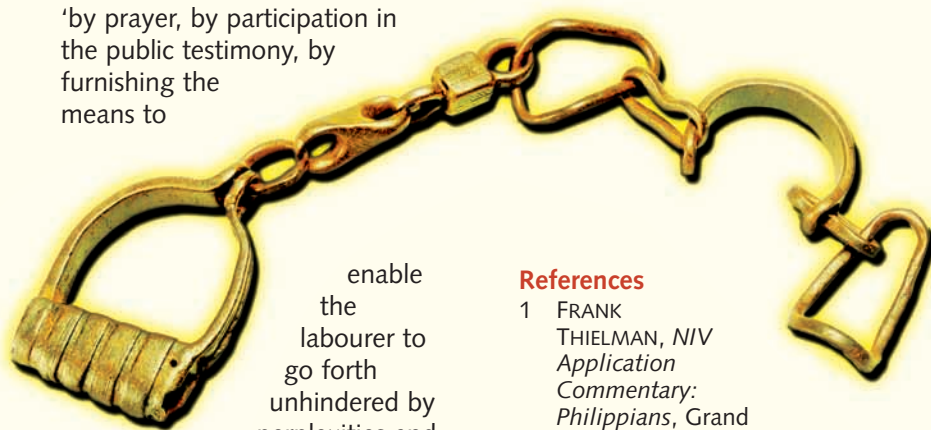
('grace') and Hebrew ('peace') salutations. Because of their theological meaning in the light of Christ's reconciling work, these mundane greetings are elevated to greater heights than anyone could have previously imagined. God's grace in giving His Son to be a propitiation for the sins of the world and the positional and practical peace that are received by those who believe the gospel are forever linked with these simple opening words. They are mere platitudes to the world – not much more than eloquent wishful thinking; to Christians, however, grace and peace are everyday realities through the Lord's work in their lives. Of course, they are not just from the apostle. They are also 'from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ', v. 2 – a reference to the deity and divine co-equality of the Son. As VINE remarks, 'This order of the Name of the Lord Jesus with that of God as the joint source of grace and peace is evidence that the former shared with the latter in the divine nature'.⁴

Love and Prayers between the Saints

The apostle's genuine affection for them is evidenced when he speaks of his memories and the resulting prayers for them in verse 3, 'I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy'. First of all, he was grateful to God for these fellow saints who had showed him kindness during his past sojourn in Philippi. The depth of love between Paul and the brethren in Philippi is evidenced once again in verse 8, where he speaks of 'longing after' them; this word means 'deeply desire'.⁵ Secondly, he regularly supplicated the Lord on their behalf. The substance of his prayers for them is not detailed until verses 9-11. Thirdly, his thoughts of them

consisted of unalloyed joy. He did not harbour ill thoughts towards them, nor did he lament anything untoward in his past experience with them. These positive feelings towards the Philippian believers stemmed from their 'fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now', v. 5. H. A. IRNSIDE delineated the ways in which one may partner in the glad tidings, such as:

'by prayer, by participation in the public testimony, by furnishing the means to



enable the labourer to go forth unhindered by perplexities and anxieties as to

necessary means to carry on his work. Every servant of Christ going forth for the Name's sake, "taking nothing of the Gentiles," should be entirely cast upon the Lord for his support. On the other hand, it should be esteemed a privilege on the part of those abiding at home, to help them by ministering in temporal things; and such ministry will never be forgotten by Him who has said, "Whosoever receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward".⁶

From the beginning of his labours among them, they provided him with support in different ways. Lydia opened her home to the missionary band, Acts 16. 15, and, after they had been unjustly beaten and imprisoned, the converted jailor dressed their wounds and fed them, v. 34. Upon their release from incarceration, they visited the

fledgling assembly in order to comfort them, v. 40. The bond between church-planter and planted church was cemented in affliction and continued to elicit love from the apostle's heart. It was apparently further strengthened by their ongoing support of Paul and his fellow missionaries through their prayers, gifts, and other evangelizing acts.

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The Independent Safeguarding Authority Vetting and Barring Scheme

By **STEPHEN GILLHAM** West Moors, England

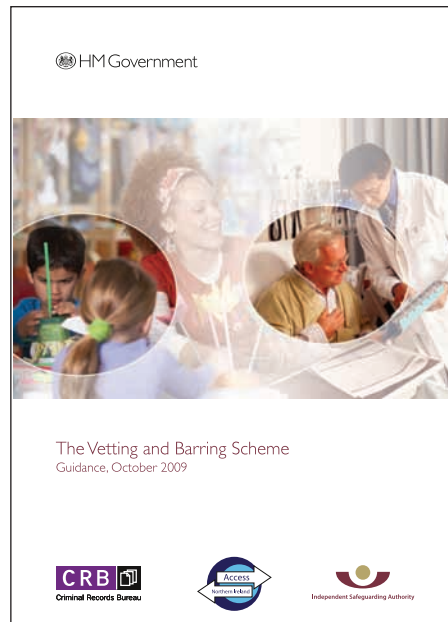
Reaching out to children and young people has always been a priority in the assemblies, not only because we know that this is the Lord's command, but also because so many have come to the Lord in their youth. We do recognize that 'a child saved is a life saved'.

During our thirty-six years of involvement in full-time work for the Lord amongst children and young people things have changed so much. No longer are we in a position to fill our cars with children and bring them to a meeting; no longer can we publicize our meetings with a loud-speaker on a housing estate and assume that virtually all the children on the estate would come to a special meeting; no longer can we assume that everyone who wants to help is necessarily suitable or doing so for the right motives.

Society, culture, and also good practice have changed considerably. In 2003 the Government introduced the Criminal Records Bureau Disclosure system, requiring anyone who is actively involved, regularly, with children to go through a disclosure process to ensure that they were not on any police register or had a criminal record for any inappropriate activity. Good practice has ensured that children's and youth workers, and those involved in residential weekends, camps, etc., have applied for a Criminal Records Bureau Disclosure, normally through their own church. Those who are involved in the planning of these Disclosures have recognized that this is not a fool-proof system and it is possible that folks have been given a Disclosure even though they could have been involved in some child abuse, because they have never been charged or sentenced for that offence, or that information held by one authority is not available to another group.

This became obvious after the Soham Enquiry and it became clear that the person involved had a CRB Disclosure but information about his criminal record had not been transferred from one authority to another. Because of this, the Government has launched the Independent Safeguarding Authority (Vetting and Barring Scheme) which became law in October 2009.

One of the problems with the CRB Disclosure system was the advice from the Criminal Records Bureau that someone should have a CRB Disclosure for every activity they were involved in, maybe as a nurse, teacher, a church worker, and also if they were involved in a residential activity. This has put a great strain on the CRB System. The purpose of the new ISA system is that once someone has been cleared and put onto a list they will be given a sixteen digit number and if they are prepared to give that to any person or group that they are working with, with their full name and date of birth, that group can check that they are on the list. This should reduce the amount of paperwork considerably.



The current situation is that the new CRB forms will be available in April 2010 and anyone filling in those forms will also have to commit themselves to the Vetting and Barring Scheme. It is not clear at this stage when they will be given their clearance but by November the scheme will be fully operational. The Government is talking about 11,000,000 people needing to go through the scheme. However, they are saying that as long as someone has a current CRB, that is, not more than three/four years old this will be sufficient for the time being. When that expires they will have to go through the Vetting and Barring Scheme, so that by 2015 anyone who works in close contact with children or young people will have to be registered with the ISA and there will be fines for groups who employ volunteers

who are not listed. Anybody guilty of an offence against children will be automatically removed from the list and unable to work with children, unless they are re-instated after an appeal process.

The current advice is that CRB's should be applied for when there are new people involved, or if CRB'S expire, and as the Scheme comes fully into operation they will be given their sixteen digit number from the ISA Vetting and Barring Scheme. At present it is not a legal requirement, for all those who work regularly with children, to have a CRB Disclosure. However, good practice and the good testimony of a church means that it should be a requirement and parents would expect that. By 2015, no one wanting to help in regular work with children, who is not on the ISA list, will be allowed to be involved.

Finally, good practice would ensure in an assembly where there is a work amongst children and young people, there would be in place a Child Protection Policy, and key helpers have not only have a current CRB Disclosure but also have received some basic training in Child Protection.

This does take away from our purpose and focus in our outreach to children as we seek to bring them to the Lord and to help them grow in the Christian faith. However, we have to recognize that in the sick society we live in there are individuals who could weave their way into churches and be guilty of acts of abuse. We have to safeguard those for whom we are responsible.

Good information and guidance is available from the Churches' Child Protection Advisory Service (CCPAS) via their website www.ccpas.co.uk. There is also the ISA website: www.isa-gov.org.uk

This does pose a lot of work and increasing responsibility to all those who seek to reach children with good, secure, procedures. Those not involved in work with children and young people do well to pray much for our nation's children and all those who seek to reach them for the Lord.

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VETTING AND BARRING – THE SCOTTISH PERSPECTIVE

By **ALAN SUMMERS** Mayfield, Scotland

The regime described in the preceding article by our brother Gillham is based on the Protection of Vulnerable Groups Act 2006. It is important to appreciate that the 2006 Act applies only to England and Wales. It has no application to Scotland and limited application to Northern Ireland. The following comments are restricted to the Scottish system.

The Scottish system of child protection is presently governed by the Protection of Children (Scotland) Act 2003. It enables background checks to be done on those whose employment brings them into contact with children. The voluntary sector is also regulated and it is for this reason that work with children by churches is caught by the Act. However, in my opinion the system is not really designed to deal with Sunday School and children's work of the sort provided by the assemblies.

Many of those that work with children in Scotland obtain their disclosure through the Central Registered Body (CRB) which provides a free disclosure service to those who work in the voluntary sector. The

application forms provided include declarations at the rear which require the signatory to state that he is 'likely to ask exempted questions' under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974, or is 'likely to countersign applications under the Police Act 1997'. 'Exempted questions' under the 1974 Act and applications under the 1997 Act are designed to find out whether a potential recruit/volunteer has any criminal convictions. The Police Act provides a mechanism for permitting employers to make background checks with the police to ensure the suitability of the applicant.

These forms are used by assemblies to disclose their Sunday School teachers or Children's Meeting workers. I do not believe, however, that the forms are suitable. I have yet to hear of any assembly which asked 'exempted questions' or could truthfully say that they were 'likely' to apply to the police for a background check on one of their workers. Usually, those who work with children in the assemblies are so well known that there is no need for an interview process, far less a background check.¹ Some might say that it is 'possible' that they might have to ask these questions but I don't think anyone could say it was 'likely'. I would guess that these forms are signed because no one has the faintest idea what an 'exempted question' is or what sections 113 and 115 of the Police Act 1997 are about. This is hardly surprising since the form makes no attempt to explain the meaning of the declaration although it goes on to say, 'Warning: it is a criminal offence to make an untrue statement to help obtain a disclosure certificate'.

To my knowledge the CRB does not reject applications from the assemblies, however, that is probably because of ignorance of the way assemblies function. Thus, while disclosure has valuable 'PR' advantages, and can be used to



Protection of Vulnerable Groups (Scotland) Act 2007

2007 asp 14

Explanatory Notes have been produced to assist in the understanding of this Act and are available separately

reassure parents, I do not think the present regime can be used by the assemblies.

The law will shortly be changed. The Protection of Vulnerable Groups (Scotland) Act 2007 has been given royal assent. The Scottish Government website presently predicts that it will be late 2010 before it comes into force. It remains to be seen whether the new regime will cure some of the problems identified above. The greater and more general risk is that assembly work will be subject to ever increasing regulation by Government. The scope for conflict between Government committed to an equality agenda and traditional Christian values is amply attested by the present debate over the Equality Bill.

References

- 1 When the author last looked, the disclosure form in use by the CRB was also inaccurate in that it contained reference to sections 113 and 115 of the Police Act 1997. Both these sections were repealed on 6 April 2006 and have been replaced. It would be a simple matter to update the form.

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PROTECTION OF CHILDREN (SCOTLAND) ACT 2003

GUIDANCE FOR ORGANISATIONS





In this fourth and final article we shall look at the remaining pair of signs, recorded by John in his Gospel, commonly known as: the feeding of the five thousand, John 6. 1-14; and walking on the water, John 6. 16-21. These two signs demonstrate the transcendent abilities of the Lord Jesus Christ. They certainly far exceed human powers and abilities. The scenarios depicted further illustrate the poverty of Israel's condition, her inability to supply the people's needs or to control the natural elements of the universe.

FEEDING OF THE 5,000

– John 6. 1-14

This is the only sign recorded in all four Gospels and is perhaps the best-loved and most well-known. Most of us will be aware that the total number of people was more like 15,000, when women and children are included!

A great crowd had followed the Lord Jesus – not because He was the Son of God, but because they had witnessed the signs and miracles He had performed for disadvantaged people. However, a faith founded on miracles is never as pleasing to God as a faith founded on His word alone! Everything God says is true and cannot possibly be false, otherwise we make God a liar! That should be enough for anyone. Jesus did not object to the presence of the crowd, even though it had disturbed His rest and the time He had intended to spend with His disciples (a lesson for us, too?). Rather, He perceived their hunger. The Creator of the universe knows that a hungry stomach has no ears. This is something that teachers, preachers, and conference speakers should note.

Philip could not cope with the problem posed to him by the Lord. How could all those folk be fed? Translated into modern quantities and minimum wages, he suggested that a thousand large loaves would be insufficient to give everyone a little! But Jesus knew what He would do – He always does, even in the seemingly impossible predicaments of human life!

Much delightful comment has been passed regarding the boy's willingness to part with his five barley loaves and two small fish. We cannot but reiterate that it was not much, but he was willing to give

Signs, Wonders and Miracles

(4) TRANSCENDENT ABILITIES

By **GRAHAM HOBBS** Bognor Regis, England

it to the Master and little proves to be much when God is in it!

The Lord enlisted the disciples' help in organizing the crowd and distributing the food – they could not multiply it, but they could serve it. If we do what we can do, the Lord will do what we cannot do. It was Spring-time when He blessed the bread, But Harvest when He brake!

All the people ate well – as much as they wanted! The Lord was also concerned about the crumbs left over. Twelve baskets full were collected (one by each of the disciples? – no shirkers?). Everything that Jesus provides is precious, so, in our present 'throw-away' society, we, His people, should set an example by not squandering what He has given us. What happened to the twelve baskets full? We are not told, but the Lord did say on another occasion, in a different context, 'The poor always ye have with you', John 12. 8.

This incident adds weight to David's simple, yet profound, statement, 'The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want', Ps. 23. 1, and exemplifies Paul's eulogy, 'Him that is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think', Eph. 3. 20.

WALKING ON THE SEA

– John 6. 16-21

The Lord knows the importance of having a break and told His disciples, 'Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while', Mark 6. 31. Do we remember to do this in the midst of what is often a frenetic programme for some? Just as David was made to 'lie down in green pastures', Ps. 23. 2, so Jesus here made, constrained, His disciples to get into the boat without Him, and to head for Bethsaida and Capernaum on the far shore of Lake Galilee.

Being caught in the sudden, unexpected, boisterous storm was not the result of an act of folly on the disciples' part, but was in explicit obedience to the Master's command. The way of His will was the way of the storm! Doing God's will and walking in God's way do not guarantee a smooth passage in life, nor does the occurrence of problems necessarily

indicate that we have done something wrong. Even some believers can be critically unkind to others when injurious things happen – a bit after the style of Job's 'comforters'!

Although He was some distance from His disciples, Jesus was fully aware of what was happening to them. So He walked to them on the water. Jesus thus proved His own deity, 'He (God) alone stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea', Job 9. 8 NIV. It was as easy for the Lord Jesus to walk on the sea as it is for you and me to walk on the pavement! The storm-tossed sea was the pavement for the victorious steps of the unique Son of God. The disciples thought they saw a ghost coming towards them. 'They . . . cried out: for they all saw him and were troubled. And immediately He talked with them, and saith unto them, Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid', Mark 6. 49-50. Two things happened straightaway – the wind died down and they reached their destination.

When we receive the Lord Jesus into our lives, He transforms our situation. He does not remove the problems, but brings those that threaten to inundate us under control. He is the Creator of the universe, Lord of the elements and Master of the uncontrollable. Well might we utilize the words of EDWARD HOPPER, who wrote:

Jesus, Saviour, pilot me, Over life's
tempestuous sea;
Unknown waves before me roll, Hiding
rock and treacherous shoal.
Chart and compass come from Thee;
Jesus, Saviour, pilot me.

As a mother stills her child, Thou canst
hush the ocean wild;
Boisterous waves obey Thy will,
When Thou sayest to them, 'Be still'!
Wondrous Sovereign of the sea,
Jesus, Saviour, pilot me.

GRAHAM HOBBS was a retired training manager and in fellowship with the assembly in Bognor Regis. His written and oral ministry was appreciated in England and he also regularly visited Albania where he was involved in Bible teaching and evangelism. He was called home on the 19th February 2010 and we are grateful to him for his contributions to *Precious Seed International* in the past.

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)

5

The Parable of the Workers in Vineyard, Matt. 20. 1-15, Part 2.

We concluded the previous article by considering the grumble and protest registered against the vineyard owner by those workers who had laboured for a whole day. The basis of their complaint was that they had been paid no more than those who had laboured for only one hour.

EXPOSITION (continued)

Verse 13. 'He answered one of them': it is worth noting that, like the twelve disciples, the workers who had begun at six o'clock in the morning had a spokesman. 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong', the vineyard owner insisted, where the word translated 'friend' signifies rather 'companion', 'associate', 'comrade'.¹ The word differs from that used, for example, by our Lord to describe Lazarus in John 11, 'Lazarus our friend sleeps'.²

In reply, the vineyard owner (here spoken of as 'the housemaster', literally) appealed to the sum specified in the contract. 'I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius?' It has been well said, 'Their complaint . . . was patiently heard by the master; yet he did not take back his decision. For having agreed to work for a denarius, the men could not legally demand more, nor complain if others received more'.³ He 'reminds them of the agreement which they had all accepted, and which he had fully kept'.⁴ In effect, the owner was saying, 'You ask for what you deserve, and that I have given you. You appeal for justice, and by justice shall your mouth be shut'.⁴

Verse 14. 'Take what is yours', the master added, suggesting that those who were paid last had either refused to accept the single denarius or had handed it back. And again we must stress that a denarius was a very fair – even a generous – day's wage for a vineyard worker. This vineyard owner was certainly not being tight-fisted or stingy. The fact he chose to give proportionately more to other workers simply demonstrated his liberality and open-handedness. Essentially the man was saying, 'To you I am fair and just; to them I am generous and good'.

Verse 15. 'Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things?' This links back to the owner's words in verse 14; 'Take what is yours and go your way'. His point was simple, 'The denarius which you earned is now yours. You are free to use it as you will. I do not presume to tell you what you may do with it. But, equally, I am free to do as I will with those things which belong to me'. And it is important to note that the master insisted that his money and possessions

were his 'own', not as an excuse for greed and self-indulgence, but as justification for his generosity.⁶

'Is your eye evil, because I am good?' Note the deliberate play on the words 'evil' and 'good'.⁷ As I understand it, biblically to have 'an evil eye' signifies, not so much (as is often said), to be envious,⁸ as to be covetous and grudging. We can easily capture the flavour of the word from the following scriptures, 'Beware lest there be a wicked thought in your heart, saying, "The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand", and *your eye be evil* against your poor brother and you give him nothing';⁹ 'A man with an *evil eye* hastens after riches';¹⁰ and, by way of contrast, 'He who has a generous eye (literally, 'a *good eye*') will be blessed, for he gives of his bread to the poor'.¹¹ Somebody with an 'eye' which is 'evil' is therefore covetous, selfish, greedy and ungenerous¹².

Verse 16. 'So', Jesus concludes, 'The last will be first, and the first last'.¹³ There you have it! Having listened to the Lord's parable, we now understand who are meant by the 'first' and the 'last', and are therefore in a position to interpret the sayings of chapter 19 verse 30 and chapter 20 verse 16.¹⁴

We know that those who began first and who were paid last (that is, the 'first' who became 'last') in reality fared the worst. For their reward was proportionately smaller than the reward of those who began last but who were paid first (that is, the 'last' who became 'first').

Those who began 'first' were the bargainers of verse 2. We recall that the owner 'agreed' their wage with them before sending them into the vineyard. This group were of a mercenary spirit and a calculating frame of mind, as is evident from both their 'agreeing' the terms of their employment at the beginning and their complaining about their earnings at the end. These were the men who worked only because they had a clearly defined contract – the men who wanted to know in advance what they would get for the service they rendered.

Those who began 'last' were the trusting souls of verse 7. We recall that the owner simply 'said' to them. This group were the men who were prepared to trust entirely to his goodness. These were the men who simply got on with the work, willing to leave the question of any reward entirely to the master.

And, as we have seen, with 'the first' group the vineyard owner showed himself just, but with 'the last' group he showed himself generous. And so the bargainers ended up last in the queue where effectively the greater rewards were handed out first.

From our Lord's saying, therefore, as explained by His

parable, we detect a gentle (but firm) rebuke of Peter's question back in chapter 19 verse 27. The twelve had wanted to know the fine detail of what they would receive as a result of their sacrifice and service for Christ. And, by means of His saying and parable, the Lord pointed out to them that this wasn't a spiritually healthy question.

This is why the whole section begins with the 'But' of chapter 19 verse 30. For Peter's question, 'What shall we have?' put the relation between the Lord and His servants on an altogether wrong footing. It exposed a wrong attitude to their service for the Master, and His saying and parable were intended to nip this 'evil in the bud'.¹⁵

He made it clear that those who are prepared to labour for the sake of the work and for the sake of Him who called them to it – to get on with serving Him for higher and better motives – will benefit most. For, in His eyes, a little done in the spirit of love, devotion and trust is better by far than much done in the spirit of the hireling, even if His servant is concerned with the benefit to be gained in the next world rather than in the present world.

THE APPLICATION

Service for the Lord Jesus is always a privilege. There is nothing higher.

The New Testament writers James and Jude were our Lord's brothers according to the flesh.¹⁶ It is most striking therefore that, in the epistles which bear their names, neither James nor Jude staked any claim to a special earthly relationship to Jesus. They were both content to be known simply as His servants, 'James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ', and 'Jude, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James'.¹⁷

The same high estimation of the Lord's service is evident in the Old Testament. When Tattenai, the governor of the Persian province west of the Euphrates River, asked the Jews to provide him with their Temple building permit and with the names of the chief men responsible for the rebuilding of the Temple, the only answer he received to this second request was, 'We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth'.¹⁸ To such men there was no more to be said. They carried no higher title for the simple reason that there was no higher service.

Yet, because sometimes the way is hard, the difficulties are great and the obstacles many, God graciously promises His people rewards for their encouragement.

'My beloved brethren', Paul wrote, 'be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord'.¹⁹ 'God is not unjust', the writer to the Hebrews assured his suffering readers, 'to forget your work and labour of love which you have shown toward His name'.²⁰ Addressing elders, the apostle Peter

exhorted, 'Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown²¹ of glory that does not fade away'.²² And, for his part, the apostle John recorded the words of the Lord Jesus, 'Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown²³ of life . . . Behold, I am coming quickly, and my reward is with me'.²⁴

Yes, it is wonderfully true that, in effect, the Lord still encourages His servants in the same words as Azariah the prophet once addressed to King Asa, 'Be strong and do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded'.²⁵

But the fault of the apostles on whose behalf Peter spoke lay in that they had focussed their minds on the detail – the fine-print – of their reward. And there was a very real danger that reward had ceased to be an encouragement in their service and had become the motive and mainspring of their service. It has been well said that, 'God called us to play the game, not to keep the score'.²⁶

Although writing in the context of the judgement seat of Christ, the apostle Paul made it clear that it was the love of Christ and not the prospect of reward which constrained him.²⁷ And, whereas it is undoubtedly true that 'the fundamental thought here must be that of Christ's love for us', which 'sets in motion such behaviour as Paul's',²⁸ that very love surely evoked Paul's love for Him. And even though, as we have seen above,²⁹ Peter encouraged elders to 'shepherd' the Lord's flock³⁰ by giving them the assurance of an unfading crown of glory when 'the Chief Shepherd' appears, he had learnt long since, from the 'Chief Shepherd' Himself, that ultimately it was love for Him, the Lord Jesus, which was to motivate and inspire men to 'shepherd' His sheep.³¹

THE SEQUEL

Following the parable (sandwiched between the two versions of our Lord's sayings about the 'first' and the 'last'), the Saviour proceeded (in verses 17 to 19) to foretell His passion. Although this was His third prediction of His forthcoming passion, it was the first time He revealed the mode of His death – namely by crucifixion.³²

It was 'then', we read, that 'the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Him with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from Him'.³³

According to chapter 27, 'the mother of Zebedee's sons' was one of those present when the Lord was crucified, 'Many women who followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to Him, were there looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's sons'.³⁴ It is clear from the parallel account in Mark's Gospel that this lady's name was

'Salome'; 'There were also women looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the Less and of Joses, and Salome, who also followed Him and ministered to Him when He was in Galilee'.³⁵ A comparison of these references with the list of the women who 'stood by the cross of Jesus' in John's Gospel suggests strongly she was the sister of Mary the mother of Jesus, 'Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene'.³⁶

It is most likely therefore that, humanly speaking, 'the mother of Zebedee's sons' was our Lord's aunt and that they ('James and John', according to Mark chapter 10³⁷) were His cousins.³⁸

Salome's request was simple, 'Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on your right hand and the other on the left, in your kingdom'.³⁹ Salome had come, we note, 'with her sons',⁴⁰ and, according to Mark's account of this incident, James and John approached Jesus with the same request.⁴¹ Clearly, all three asked the great favour; in Mark's Gospel the sons are in the foreground; in Matthew's the mother.⁴²

James and John coveted specially reserved seats in our Lord's kingdom. They wanted His assurance that, in His 'glory', they would sit, one on His right hand, and one on His left.⁴³

What they had in mind can be illustrated from the account which Josephus gives of the court of King Saul, 'The king . . . came to supper; and . . . there sat by him his son Jonathan on his right hand, and Abner, the captain of his host, on the other hand'.⁴⁴ And I note that, not only was Jonathan Saul's son, but Abner was Saul's cousin.⁴⁵ That is, Saul had allocated the chief places in his kingdom to members of his immediate family. A little later, David had followed suit, allocating positions of prominence to his nephews Joab and Abishai.⁴⁶ Salome and her sons could therefore point to good historical precedent for what they sought.

It is evident that all three had not only failed to register the significance of the Lord's third prediction of His passion but had completely missed the point of our Lord's saying and parable.

For there can be no doubt that James and John had in their minds the Saviour's earlier promise that they – along with the other apostles – would one day 'sit' on thrones 'in the regeneration'.⁴⁷ But the brothers weren't satisfied with the prospect of sitting on just any 'thrones' then; they wanted to 'sit' on His right hand and on His left hand, in the places of special honour.

It seems clear that, in their eyes at the time, the Lord Jesus was 'going up to Jerusalem',⁴⁸ not to suffer, but to be enthroned and crowned King. And they therefore made their play now for the most important seats in His administration.

But little did they realize that, in less than two weeks' time, Jerusalem would hold for Him, not a royal crown, but a crown of thorns! And little did they realize that those who would then be at His 'right hand' and His 'left hand' would not be sitting on two thrones on either side of His; they would be hanging on two crosses, 'crucified with Him, one on the right and another on the left'.⁴⁹ And, indeed, 'the mother of Zebedee's sons', who now requested that our Lord 'command' that her sons be granted places at His right hand and His left, would then be there to witness the sight.⁵⁰ Did she remember, do you think, her ill-advised request?⁵¹

It is only too evident that, by referring back to our Lord's earlier pledge about sitting on thrones in His Kingdom, neither Salome nor her sons had really heard, still less understood, the parable of the Workers in the Vineyard. And the key issue as we conclude our study is, 'Have we?'

May we, in response to the Saviour's unbounded love for us, love Him and express that love in serving Him faithfully and fervently.

Footnotes

- 1 See W. E. VINE, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, article 'FRIEND. 2. *hetairos*'.
- 2 John 11. 11. 'Matthew is the only New Testament writer to use *etairov*. He does so three times (Matt. 20. 13; 22. 12; 26. 50), and always in the form of an address . . . It always denotes a mutually binding relation between the speaker and the hearer which the latter has disregarded and scorned', K. H. RENGSTORF, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, article *etairov*. "'Friend" is commonly a word . . . from a superior to an inferior', R. C. TRENCH, *Notes on the Parables of our Lord*, page 188. 'In each case' there is 'the implication of a distinct relationship in which there is generosity on the one part and abuse of it on the other', GEOFFREY W. BROMILEY, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament - Abridged in One Volume*, article *hetairos*. We should note, in particular, that this word was not (as was the word in John chapter 11 verse 11) a term of affection, endearment or intimacy. When, therefore, the Lord Jesus addressed Judas by this word, He was not being insincere.
- 3 H. B. SWETE, *Parables of the Kingdom*, page 100.
- 4 C. L. MITTON, *The Expository Times*, Vol. 77, No. 10, page 307.
- 5 Some have compared and contrasted a similar parable (including several more-or-less identical phrases) recorded in the Jewish Talmud in connection with the eulogy given at the funeral of a distinguished young Hebrew scholar, 'To what can Rabbi Abun bar Hiyya be likened? To a king who hired many workers; and there was one worker who was exceptionally productive in his work. What did the king do? . . . In the evening the workers came to receive their wages and he gave him his total wages with them. The workers complained and said, we were toiling the entire day and this one did toil only for two hours and he gave him his total wages with us! The king told them, This one produced in two hours more than what you produced all day long. So Rabbi Abun produced in Torah in twenty-eight years what an outstanding student cannot learn in an hundred years'. [This is HEINRICH WALTER GUGGENHEIMER's translation of the Zeraim Tractate Berakhot in his scholarly work *The Jerusalem Talmud*, published by Walter de Gruyter in 2006, pages 243-244.] This Talmud parable is cited, among others, by JOHN LIGHTFOOT, *A Commentary on*

the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica on Matthew 20. 1; R. C. TRENCH, *ibid.*, page 183 footnote 1, and JEREMIAS, *Rediscovering the Parables*, page 138. But there is a striking contrast between the words which our Lord put into the mouth of the vineyard owner and the application of the Talmud parable. There is no suggestion whatever in our Lord's parable that the late-starters worked any harder than those who had toiled all day. The rabbinic parable has nothing therefore to teach us about the meaning of our Lord's parable.

- 6 'The labourers who were engaged last show nothing to warrant a claim to a full day's wages; that they receive it is entirely due to the goodness of their employer', JEREMIAS, *ibid.*, page 139. The vineyard owner's words, 'Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things?' are 'used to excuse not selfishness, but generosity', C. L. MITTON, *ibid.*, Vol. 77, No. 10, page 308.
- 7 Sadly, this point is obscured by the NIV, NASB and the ESV, along with many other translations and paraphrases.
- 8 Still less does it refer, as the unbelieving world around sometimes takes it to refer, to any supposed power of causing harm to somebody by simply looking at him or her.
- 9 Deut. 15. 9.
- 10 Prov. 28. 22.
- 11 Prov. 22. 9.
- 12 The Jewish Mishnah says, 'The person with a good eye gave the fortieth part of the first fruit of the heaven offering for the maintaining of the priests, while the person with the evil eye gave only a sixtieth' (Terumoth 4:3), and that 'he that gives, but wants a monopoly on giving and does not want others to be able to give too is considered to have an evil eye' (Avot 5:15). Again it is clear that the 'good eye' means someone who is a generous giver and the 'bad eye' means someone who is stingy.
- 13 The earliest manuscripts omit the sentence 'For many are called, but few are chosen'. The addition of these words by some later copyist – as in the text underlying the KJV and NKJV – serves only to cloud the meaning of the parable. It is most likely that the sentence was added by a scribe familiar with the close of the Parable of the Marriage of the King's Son, to which the sentence is a fitting conclusion, Matt. 22. 14; compare 'many are called' there with 'sent out his servants to call those who were invited', Matt. 22. 3.
- 14 'The meaning is not: the last as the first, and the first as the last, all treated alike. True, all get the same sum; at least the last and first do, nothing being said of those between; but the point of the parable is not that the reward is the same', A. B. BRUCE, *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, on Matthew chapter 20 verse 16.
- 15 See R. C. TRENCH, *ibid.*, pages 173-174.
- 16 See Mark 6. 3; John 7. 5; Acts 1. 14; 1 Cor. 9. 5; 15. 7; Gal. 1. 19. In all probability 'the brothers of the Lord' were the natural sons of the marriage of Joseph and Mary, born of Mary sometime later than our Lord; see C. F. HOGG and W. E. VINE, *Galatians*, on Galatians 1. 19; JOHN EADIE, *Commentary on the Greek Text of Galatians*; and J. B. MAYOR, 'Brethren of the Lord' in *Hasting's Dictionary of the Bible*. 'This refers to Mary's other children', G. D. FEE, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, page 403. This understanding stands in contrast to the view that they were the children of Joseph 'by a former wife'; expressed, for example, by J. B. LIGHTFOOT in his dissertation 'The Brethren of the Lord', appended to his commentary on *Galatians*.
- 17 Jas. 1. 1; Jude 1.
- 18 Ezra 5. 6-11.
- 19 1 Cor. 15. 58.
- 20 Heb. 6. 10; cf. Heb. 10. 34; 13. 3-4.
- 21 This word 'crown' signifies the victor's wreath or garland of the Greek games, and not the kingly,

diadem-type of crown.

- 22 1 Pet. 5. 1-4.
- 23 See note 19 above.
- 24 Rev. 2. 10; 22. 12.
- 25 2 Chron. 15. 7.
- 26 VANCE HAVNER, quoted by WARREN WIERSBE, *Be courageous*, page 38.
- 27 2 Cor. 5. 14; cf. v. 10. 'The fundamental thought here must be that of Christ's love for us', which 'sets in motion such behaviour as Paul's', C. K. BARRETT, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, page 169.
- 28 C. K. BARRETT, *ibid.*
- 29 1 Pet. 5. 1-4.
- 30 Compare Paul's, 'Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God', Acts 20. 28.
- 31 John 21. 16, where the word translated 'feed' (KJV) and 'tend' (NKJV) is the very same word as that translated 'shepherd' in 1 Pet. 5. 2 (NKJV). In effect, the Lord Jesus was saying to Peter, 'if you love me, love my sheep'. And in the full knowledge of the apostle's genuine love and affection for Him, 'the very thing Christ loves most on this earth He trusts to this man', J. N. DARBY, *Collected Writings*, volume 26, page 291.
- 32 Compare Matt. 16. 21-23; 17. 22-23.
- 33 Matt. 20. 20. Compare the 'then' (*tóte*) which introduced Peter's question, Matt. 19. 27.
- 34 Matt. 27. 55-56.
- 35 Mark 15. 40-41.
- 36 John 19. 25.
- 37 Mark 10. 35.
- 38 This close earthly relationship would explain, in part at least, why it was that our Lord later committed the care of His mother to John, John 19. 26-27. (One reason He bypassed His brothers according to the flesh may have been because they did not at that point 'believe in Him', John 7. 5, coming to faith only consequent on His resurrection, Acts 1. 14; 1 Cor. 9. 5; 15. 7.) These circumstances may also help explain why Salome was not present with Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses to witness the burial of our Lord's body, Mark 15. 47 – whereas she was present both at the cross itself, Mark 15. 40, and when the women came to anoint our Lord's body with spices on the first day of the week, Mark 16. 1. It is at least possible that Salome left the scene of the crucifixion 'that hour' along with John and our Lord's mother, John 19. 27, and stayed with her sister for the remainder of that day.
- 39 Matt. 20. 21.
- 40 Matt. 20. 20.
- 41 Mark 10. 35-37.
- 42 It is quite possible that James and John had enlisted the help of their mother because they thought this would increase their chances of having their request granted in that she was Jesus' aunt.
- 43 Mark 10. 37.
- 44 FLAVIUS JOSEPHUS, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book VI, Chapter XI, paragraph 9.
- 45 1 Sam. 9. 1; 14. 50-51.
- 46 1 Chron. 2. 16-17 with 2 Sam. 8. 16; 18. 2. David was the youngest of Jesse's seven sons and quite likely many years younger than his sister, Zeruiah, Jesse's daughter. The sons of Zeruiah, David's nephews, may well therefore have been near his own age.
- 47 Matt. 19. 28.
- 48 Matt. 20. 17.
- 49 Matt. 27. 38.
- 50 Matt. 27. 56; John 19. 25.
- 51 This is one of the very few occasions when the Lord Jesus refused to grant a request made to Him; cf. Matt. 16. 1, 4; Mark 5. 18-19.



A HISTORY OF BROOKLANDS, BELFAST, NORTHERN IRELAND

In 1967 the brethren in Dundonald Gospel Hall agreed that ground should be obtained in the fast-growing housing estates of Brooklands and Ballybeen for the erection of a building for gospel outreach. The following two years were spent negotiating with the Northern Ireland Housing Trust. They were not kindly disposed to the request but eventually agreed to provide 2.5 acres of waste ground on the fringe of the Brooklands Estate which the assembly then purchased. A wooden hall with a capacity for one hundred people was built.

Between 1969 and 1972, commencing with a very small number, there was a gradual build-up of workers and activities. A prayer meeting, Sunday School, children's meetings, and a youth work were established, followed by a Sunday evening gospel meeting and a monthly Woman's Gospel Hour. A big emphasis was placed on camp work, both senior and junior, with combined numbers of up to 200. The Isle of Man, Scotland, Republic of Ireland, and Wales were used as venues. Many found the Saviour at these camps. As the work progressed more believers from the area began to enquire about the work and some with similar convictions and vision joined the group. The main concentration, however, was on youth outreach. This was in the era of 'coffee bars' and on Friday nights a full hall vibrated with voices of teenagers from the estates. The gospel began to have its effect and in one's and two's these young folk were coming to Christ, trusting Him for salvation. During this time there were two special missions arranged in the Community Centre. The Lord really worked and night by night young folk who were hearing the gospel for the first time were brought under conviction and many of them professed faith.

All this was taking place at the heart of 'The Troubles'. The estates were in turmoil through paramilitary activity. There was a great sense of fear, accentuated by the Province 'shut down' caused by the Ulster Worker's strike. This brought down the Stormont Government and initiated Direct Rule

from London. On one Sunday evening during the gospel meeting a bomb exploded in a factory across the road from the hall. The blast went right over the building without damaging it but shattered windows in the houses a few hundred yards away. By this time there were over thirty committed workers and the assembly at Dundonald agreed that it was time to establish a permanent Fellowship at Brooklands. The first Breaking of Bread was held in April 1972.

During the 1970s and 1980s the assembly grew to 170 in number. The majority of the members had no assembly background and this provided exciting but stressful times as New Testament church principles were taught. Mainly as a result of the stand taken on the principles detailed in 1 Corinthians chapters 11 and 14, some began to drift away, though others were added, and eventually numbers settled at between eighty and a hundred. In the early days the baptistry was used on a regular basis, however, in recent years it has been opened on fewer occasions, but the assembly is grateful to God for tokens of blessing. From the commencement of the assembly a ministry meeting was convened after the Lord's Supper. In the more recent times a Coffee Break has been introduced and has proved a valuable time for fellowship. The regular teaching of the word to the whole assembly week by week continues to build up the believers in the faith.

Over the years the assembly has had a deep interest and involvement in missionary outreach overseas and it has been challenging and rewarding to commend several young folk to the work of the Lord. These included a sister who worked with the Child

Evangelism Fellowship for over thirty years. She was commended to work in Romania and other former Soviet Union republics. Others have been commended to work with the Wycliffe Bible Translators where assignments included developing an alphabet and grammar structure in the Ivory Coast, and translating and publishing the New Testament in the Kyuou language. Others were commended to work in France and the Republic of Ireland. The most recent commendation is for a young sister as a trainee to the Wycliffe Translators. It is hoped that she will be involved in translation work in West Africa.

The work in Romania has been particularly close to the believers' hearts and has resulted in the establishment of a small Bible School to provide in-depth teaching to leaders and potential leaders. In the last five years the emphasis of the work has changed to an involvement with Roma Gypsy communities. This is a very difficult and challenging work but is beginning to produce fruit for the kingdom of God.

In November 2009 the assembly celebrated its 40th anniversary with a weekend of fellowship and ministry of the word. Brother David Gooding gave the ministry – he was a great encouragement and support in the early days of the work and provided much help in the teaching of new converts and the strengthening of the fledgling work.

The main focus of the gospel outreach at present is a strong Mums and Toddlers, a Drop-In and a new monthly activity called 'The Link'. Mothers from the Mums and Toddlers attend and we are beginning to see some fruit.



Brooklands Gospel Centre





To this point we have examined five dispensations; innocence, conscience, human government, promise and law. Each dispensation was a stewardship. In each dispensation God set a test of obedience before His people, and in each dispensation His people failed. God Himself is faithful, but the fault lies with the people. This is the pattern we have seen in the first five dispensations, and we will see it again in the dispensation of grace and the dispensation of the millennium.

At this present time, we are in the dispensation of grace. We freely acknowledge that God has demonstrated grace in every dispensation. From the clothing of Adam and Eve with animal skins to the prologue of the Ten Commandments in, 'I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage', Exod. 20. 2 – God has always shown grace. But grace is the special distinguishing characteristic of God's present dealings with mankind. In a new and special way, grace has been demonstrated through Christ's coming, John 1. 17.

In this dispensation of grace, God again places a test before mankind. This test is explained in many passages, cf. Rom. 5. 15-19; Acts 16. 31; and John 3. 18, but CHARLES RYRIE summarizes our dispensational responsibility well when he said, 'Under grace the responsibility on man is to accept the gift of righteousness

Dispensation

that God freely offers to all', *Dispensationalism*.

In this dispensation, the grace of God has appeared in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, and accepting that grace is the test that God places before mankind. It would seem that this is the easiest dispensation of all. No more do we need to ponder the dictates of the conscience. No more do we need to concern ourselves that God is working through only one man or one nation. No more do we need to follow 613 commandments, fearful that we have kept all the commandments except one. The fullest expression of God's love is in front of us, and God's messianic purpose has been given a name, 'Jesus'.

So how does mankind respond? In this dispensation, it is not just representatives of mankind that are responding. In this dispensation it is all mankind that is responding to the test, each nation and each individual. So how does mankind respond? 'Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I

have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God', Gal. 5. 19-21. God holds out the Lord Jesus Christ to a needy world and, after considering this offer, mankind says to God, 'I love the pleasures of sin more than I love your Son'. And thus this dispensation must inevitably end in an act of God's judgement.

By
**SHAWN
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Ottawa,
Canada

What is this act of judgement? Some people think the act of judgement is the condemnation of the sinner into the Lake of Fire, but this would be confusing eternal condemnation with the disobedience of a specific dispensation. The righteous who have sought God by faith have always been rewarded in every dispensation, and the unrighteous who refuse God's gracious forgiveness have been punished in every dispensation. So it is unwise to think of eternal destruction as being a dispensational judgement. However, the Bible does record a period of terrible judgement on all mankind at the end of the church age, often referred to as the Tribulation. This is the subject of the majority of the book of Revelation, and from the beginning of Revelation chapter 4 to the end of Revelation chapter 19 we read about this judgement. And so God unleashes a judgement on





nationalism

PART FOUR

mankind who have failed to follow Jesus Christ, and this dispensation too comes to an end.

The Tribulation is not a separate dispensation, but it is the logical judgement on a world that has rejected Christ, and the culmination of the dispensation of grace. Mankind has failed once again. The test of obedience is as simple as having a relationship with God and, even in this mankind has failed. But even now, mankind will attempt self-justification, and one can hear the voices crying out against God for His judgement. 'But we lived in a world of injustice. We lived in a world of struggle. We didn't have time to think about religion!' Maybe some will argue that it was too much for rational creatures to believe in a supernatural being they couldn't see. And so God will institute one last dispensation in which all mankind will see Christ and experience His righteous rule, and this is called the dispensation of the millennium.

The Millennium is a literal 1000-year period of time when the Lord Jesus Christ will rule on earth, and is described most clearly in Revelation chapter 20. During the dispensation of the Millennium Christ will rule visibly on earth. Mankind will experience a truly righteous government in every country on earth, and the condition for dispensational obedience will be to obey the governmental rule of Christ.

There are also many passages in the Old Testament that describe this Millennium. It will be a time of peace, Mic. 4. 2-4; Zech. 9. 10. It will be a time of longevity, Isa. 65. 20. It will be a time in which mankind will have a full and rich knowledge of the Lord, Jer. 31. 31-34, not only by experience but also by a deep personal understanding, Heb. 8. 11. The conditions under which men live will be very different from that which is experienced. There will be harmony in the natural world, Isa. 11. 6-8, and an abundance of food, Jer. 31. 12-14. Although many of the blessings of the Millennium are for Israel, Gentiles will also be blessed, Isa. 19. 23-25. There will also be a rebuilt

Jewish temple, Ezekiel chapters 40 to 46, and a renewal of the animal sacrifices, Ezek. 45. 17.

Some people have difficulty with the prospect of a renewal of the animal sacrifices. They will argue that since Christ's work of salvation is complete there is no need to have animal sacrifices in a future day. Unfortunately this argument confuses dispensational obedience with salvation, and proceeds from the assumption that people were saved by offering animal sacrifices in Old Testament times. Salvation has been by grace through faith in all dispensations.

One would think that under such perfect conditions, the hearts of all men would respond in obedience to God. But this dispensation will also come to an end. Revelation chapter 20 verses 7-10 shows Christ's governmental rule on earth coming to an end in a great rebellion, and in the destruction of the rebels. Even in a perfect world, even with perfect knowledge of what is expected, man fails the test. And so the final dispensation will come to an end, human history as we know it will come to an end, and the final judgement at the Great White Throne will be conducted. There will be a new heaven and a new earth, and the righteous will enter the eternal state.

When this point is reached, man's attempts at self-justification will be ended. In each of the dispensations, God revealed Himself. In each of the dispensations, God gave man a chance. In each of the dispensations, under different circumstances, God tested man. And in each of the dispensations, man failed. So man must confess that God is just, God is righteous, God's plans are perfect, and God, and God alone, gets the glory. So the great unifying plan of God across the course of history reaches its culmination.

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How important is the Assembly?

By **DONALD NORBIE**
Greeley, Colorado, USA

Many 'evangelical Christians' view the local church as an option in their lives. You may choose to go or not. It is not a necessity in your life. It is said, 'I can read my Bible at home and pray. I can worship God when camping or hiking. I can hear a preacher on the radio if I wish. I do not need the church in my life'.

In contrast, the Bible emphasizes the importance of the local church. In writing to Timothy, Paul describes it as 'the house of God which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth', 1 Tim. 3. 15 NKJV. This is a lofty description of the assembly, emphasizing its importance. It is also called 'the temple of God' in which the Holy Spirit dwells, 1 Cor. 3. 16-18. It is God's house. It is a temple and should be marked by purity and holiness, a place of worship.

Believers are exhorted to be faithful in attendance at the meetings for teaching, fellowship, the Lord's Supper and prayer, Acts 2. 42; Heb. 10. 25. All four of these activities were part of the weekly meetings of the early church. These meetings will nurture one's spiritual growth and maturity. The assembly is vital for one to develop spiritual gift and usefulness to God. Godly men will shepherd and keep one from straying from God's truth.

Your loyalty to the assembly will reflect your loyalty to Christ. Does your life centre in the work of your local church? Or do other things come first: business, family, pleasure, sports? Do other pursuits have a priority in your life so that you miss meetings frequently?

Let us be loyal and whole-hearted in our devotion to our assembly family. In doing this we will be loyal to Christ Himself. And then all other things will have their rightful place in life.

DONALD NORBIE is in fellowship with the assembly in Greeley, Colorado, and is a commended full-time worker. A regular contributor to *Precious Seed International* and other assembly magazines his ministry is widely appreciated throughout N. America and the UK.



Commitment without passion leads to drudgery, a formal, but joyless, experience. There are men and women who hold responsible positions in local churches who give no evidence of enthusiasm as they fulfil their duties. There have been cases of individuals commended to Christian work at home and abroad who, disillusioned by the hard realities of their task, would never go back on their commitment but continue on, sometimes for years, empty of vision and purpose. Commitment without passion becomes a prison of unhappiness and disillusionment.

By
J. R. COCHRANE
Abbotsford, BC,
Canada

Where does the drive come from that motivates a Christian to keep running year after year, often in times of trial, of sorrow and even of danger?

Paul is in jail, lonely, and on the eve of his martyrdom, possibly with only limited knowledge of what is happening in Asia and unable to go and see for himself. He writes to Timothy, saying, 'You know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me', 2 Tim. 1. 15. Yet, with all the uncertainty, the isolation and the lack of information, he passionately keeps running!

What keeps the Christian moving forward? Are we being pushed ahead or are we being drawn forward? Is it an obligation to keep going or is it a joy to keep running? Are we being propelled or are we being attracted?

Paul shares with his friends in Philippi what inspired him to go on faithfully, even joyfully, in the face of tremendous obstacles. The apostle sets as the

Paul, the Runner Part IV TRUE

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

highest priority his true passion for Christ. He emphatically and joyfully writes in verses 8 to 10, 'That I may gain Christ (that I may) be found in Him (Christ)' and 'that I may know Him (that is, Christ)'. No one was pushing Paul, rather, he was running at his best towards Christ.

Paul's disappointments and frustrations are very real. Yet, as his earthly life is coming to an end, his attitude is one of anticipation and joy as he continues to run. He knows the best is yet ahead. He is not being propelled. He is being drawn towards Christ, for He is the Person who inspires him to continue running. He will soon see Christ in all His glory and he will be with Him forever.

At first glance, the phrase, 'that I may gain Christ', appears somewhat disconcerting. However, his former gains were not authentic, for they had kept him away from God. Eventually, he saw them for what they really were and he counted them as an absolute loss. Paul rejected the gains of self-righteousness and turned to the authentic gain of God's righteousness in Christ.

It is not that Paul turned towards the gains, the overwhelming blessings that Christ gives to those who follow Him. Paul turned to Christ Himself, knowing that, compared to Christ, all that the



world offers withers into total insignificance, the lustre completely vanishes, the power turns into utter weakness. He also

knew beyond a doubt that 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever', Heb. 13. 8. He was convinced that in view of Christ's unequalled glory, the world has absolutely nothing to offer. Having turned to Christ Himself, the apostle lived out in his life the teaching of the Lord Jesus who said, 'For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own life', Mark 8. 36.

What does it mean to gain Christ? As to the past, the gain of knowing Christ brought forgiveness. Paul had repented of his sinful past to the point at which he called himself the chief of sinners. As to the present, the gain is a continuing, growing friendship with the Lord Jesus. The disciples spent time with the Lord Jesus in all the ordinary, everyday activities of life. As a result, they were His companions. In very practical terms, to gain Christ is to be His friend and companion. As to the future, we note that gaining Christ is more than a precious experience in this present life. When someone makes a commitment to Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, that person is blessed beyond all measure – and forever!

While Paul expounds, perhaps more



PASSION

interesting personality who lived two thousand years ago. Perhaps, as some suggest, we should understand this remarkable phrase as follows, 'That I may know Him in the power of His resurrection'. He is with us individually and collectively.

The apostle then adds 'and the fellowship of His sufferings'. Does this mean that any suffering we endure now in the cause of Christ, we suffer in fellowship with Christ? There is no doubt that this is true. But there is another insight into the significance of this phrase. In Christ's resurrection, we witness the inauguration of a new order. However, the Christian lives now in two orders or creations at the same time. His body is part of the old creation. His spirit has been renewed and he is now part of the new creation. Paul declares that 'if anyone is in Christ, *he is a new creation*', 2 Cor. 5. 17.

Paul also talks of 'being conformed to His death'. The Christian lives in the tension between the old and the new creations. Each order or creation is governed by principles. Disorder and evil characterize the old order. Order and moral excellence shine in the new order, Gal. 5. 19-23. Every time a Christian makes a decision, he must choose which set of principles will govern his action. Paul was running in accordance with the principles of the new order.

We should note that even in that period when Paul was, so to speak, 'on death row', he never lost sight of the Lord's return. In that unsettled period, Paul wrote a letter to Titus in which he refers to 'the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ', Titus 2. 13.

Our passion for Christ is the impetus that keeps us running well. He is in the centre of the transcendent glory and He is waiting for us. God help us to run with true passion towards the One who loved us and gave Himself for us', Eph. 5. 2. It is only as we respond to that love, a love above all loves, that, with commitment and passion, we will run well, right to the finishing line.

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than anyone else, on the immeasurable blessings that come to each person who truly follows the Lord Jesus, we note again that the apostle is not obsessed with these eternal blessings. The blessings are not an end in themselves. Undoubtedly, Paul had already gained Christ. Yet he had not fully gained Him. He has a deep longing to be eternally 'found in Him'. The apostle is looking beyond this life. He sees beyond death to the Lord Jesus in glory.

As already noted, there is a tension in these phrases between the present and the future. Paul knows that he is facing death, yet he keeps running. His attitude towards death is unambiguous in his mind, for he expresses himself clearly, 'that I may . . . be found in Him'. The word 'found' may suggest the idea that if surprised by death, if death, from a human perspective, arrives unexpectedly, prematurely, there is a safe, eternal refuge found in Christ.

Paul now adds the beautiful thought, 'that I may know Him'. It does not matter how long we live, our earthly lives represent a very brief span in which we only begin to know Christ. We know of nothing greater than the honour and joy of knowing Christ as He really is. Paul is running towards that eternal moment when, as another apostle shares with us, 'We shall see Him as He is', 1 John 3. 2. In the meantime, the joy in the initial stage of knowing Him now is superior to anything the world may offer us.

Paul notes in another letter that in Christ 'are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge', Col. 2. 3. We are not talking of earthly treasures but rather of eternal realities which, because of their very nature, lie beyond our ability to fully understand at present. Yet we know that all that is valuable, precious, real, eternal and joyful will flow endlessly from Christ to His own.

Paul continues with reference to 'the power of His resurrection'. Christ is alive, gloriously alive! He is not just an

Precious Seed INTERNATIONAL MOVING ON

It is a great privilege and responsibility to take over the articles editorship of a magazine that has run for over 60 years and that has been blessed, as this magazine has, with a wealth of sound teaching



from men of God from this and previous generations. I am deeply aware of the expectations of the readership through those that have communicated with me and I wanted to take a little space to indicate some of the things that we would like to develop in future issues, as the Lord gives help.

I am indebted to my predecessor, Ken Rudge, for the practical and pastoral articles that have now become a valued section of the magazine. It would be my desire to continue these articles. As the pastoral series on marriage concludes in the next issue we have a range of other topics to consider, including one on the vital issue of elders. In the area of practical matters we have a range of imaginative ideas for gospel activity that might assist all of us in reaching the lost.

I am also keen to continue the detailed expository pages that form the 'pull-out' centre pages of the magazine. We owe a debt of gratitude to Malcolm Horlock for his valued contributions to this area and I am pleased to say that there is more to come.

Two areas that we intend to develop as regular features of the magazine are prophetic truths and the New Testament principles of gathering, or church truth. Both of these will be commencing in our next issue and I would extend my sincere thanks to those who have agreed to write for us as contributors to these much neglected areas.

The future of the magazine is dependent upon the continued support of the Lord and His people. We believe that there is a continuing need for sound and balanced teaching and we would ask you to join with us in prayer that the Lord might continue to bless this work for Him.



WHAT GOD HAS JOINED TOGETHER

By **BRYAN CHARLES** Appledore, Devon

Mother asks Jennifer, 'Who broke the china?' Jennifer replies that David and Peter did. She tells the truth. However, she does not say that Joan and Gail did so as well. She tells the truth, but not the whole truth; and mother is deceived. This misunderstanding may have wide repercussions. So with us in our understanding of scripture. We have to consider the whole truth in order to get the complete picture.

Let us consider **the character of God**. This is the foundation truth of all. In scripture we have revealed various attributes and characteristics of God. Some of these may appear contradictory, but they are in fact complementary. We must not emphasize some at the expense of others, else we have a false picture and may therefore misrepresent Him.

Set out below are some of these characteristics in a way that will demonstrate the point just made:

God is holy and He is love, 1 Pet. 1. 16; 1 John 4. 8;
God is righteous and He is merciful, Ps. 9. 4; 11. 7; 13. 5; 138. 2, 8;
God is a just God and a Saviour, Isa. 45. 21;
The Son incarnate was 'full of grace and truth', John 1. 14.

God cannot act contrary to Himself, to His own nature. He is unchangeable, 'I am who I am'. It is impossible for Him to act unrighteously; and equally impossible for Him to act unmercifully. He always is holy and always loving. He always remembers mercy in wrath, Hab. 3. 2.

The cross of the Lord Jesus illustrates these points very clearly. Simultaneously, it is an exhibition of the love of God and the righteousness of God. It is the greatest demonstration of God's grace and also His justice. The answer to the question as to why

Christ died must include all these aspects, otherwise we have only part of an explanation of it; we shall also have an unbalanced understanding.

Let us also consider **God acting in salvation**, another tremendously important truth. Again, we need to have a balanced understanding; one that sees and holds together both sides of the issue. In it we see what are often termed God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. Let us set forth a few relevant scriptures.

The Lord speaks of the Father's will and those who will be raised up at the last day in this way, 'Of *all* which he

and is then told what to do, Acts 16. 14; Acts 16. 30-31. In these instances we note each time God's sovereignty and man's responsibility.

Other relevant scriptures would include the Lord's words as He approached Jerusalem; He says, 'I would . . . you would not', Matt. 23. 37; and His comment to the Jewish leaders, 'you will not come to me that you might have life', John 5. 40.

If we emphasize one aspect and ignore or down play the other, we end up with what C. H. MACKINTOSH called 'one-sided theology'.

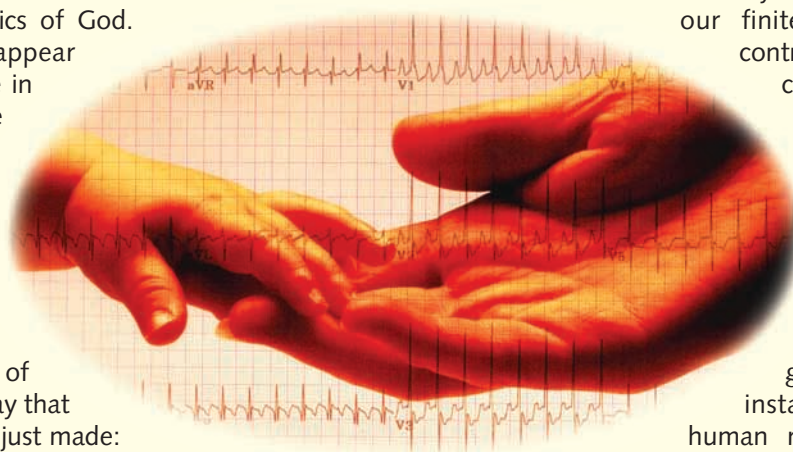
We may not be able to harmonize with our finite minds these seemingly contrary principles, but they are complementary and should be held together.

As a postscript, may I append two further comments. First, *non-scriptural* expressions may be *unscriptural*. We need to take care if we are going to use them: for instance, God's sovereignty, human responsibility, unconditional election, decision for Christ, irresistible grace. Secondly, the more we seek to expound these truths the more likely we are to *err* in the use of our words and expressions. What may seem true may not be so, as it may not be part of the whole picture. Systematic theologies often explore these issues at some length in a logical and analytical way. However, if they begin with God's holiness, His love may appear to be secondary, and vice versa. If they begin with God's sovereignty, the inevitable logic may result in an argument and conclusion that excludes man completely! On the other hand, if they begin with man's part in salvation, God may appear to be someone simply on our level, made in our image.

hath given me' and, 'Every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him', John 6. 39-40. Similar terms are used a few verses later, 'No man can come to me except the Father . . . draw him' and, 'Every man . . . that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father cometh to me', John 6. 44-45. We may also note the Father's giving and man's seeing and believing; the Father drawing and men learning and coming.

The same truth is seen in the types. The first bride of scripture, Eve, had no choice in the matter of a husband, but the second one, Rebekah, did, being asked, 'Wilt thou go with this man?' Gen. 2. 22; 24. 58.

As the gospel is taken to the Gentiles, we find that the first convert in Europe, Lydia, has her heart opened by the Lord, whilst the second one asks, 'What must I do to be saved?'



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 County Durham, before moving to his last post in Bideford in 1990.



Street Work

By **JIM McMASTER** Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England

Work among the homeless and addiction-ridden members of society is often frustrating and extremely difficult (and a work that few of us would perhaps contemplate). The Lord has, however, given some a real burden and gift for this kind of work and in this article brother Jim McMaster from Newcastle-upon-Tyne reflects on the development of the kind of work which he and his wife Janet have been involved in over the last few years

Following a period of frustration and disappointment in the mid 1990's the Lord caused me to seriously consider the manner in which I was seeking to bring the gospel to the people of our nation. Two things particularly troubled me. The first was a seeming lack of outcomes from a long established set of activities. Preaching predominantly to saints and empty seats while freedom existed to preach the gospel in the open streets seemed increasingly inappropriate. The second was that even those who did hear the message seemed to have real difficulty understanding it. At the same time a study of the life of Christ and in particular how He reached and touched the population of His day created in me a growing belief that things could be different. The Lord graciously brought me into contact with a brother who laboured late at night amongst the homeless population of one of our nation's largest cities. That meeting and a late night on the streets changed my life. To see the radiance of Christ displayed in the evidence of good works as a precursor to pouring the good news of the gospel into weary and yet receptive ears and hearts was a most enlightening experience. And so began our ministry of bringing the gospel to the homeless, addiction-ridden strand of society in Newcastle.

We began in a simple way with flasks of hot drinks and tracts and the Lord kindly brought us into contact with many who began to trust us enough

to talk about their situation and enable us to pour the gospel into their ears. In recent years we have established a weekly Soup Kitchen on Sunday evenings which means that we can reach increasing numbers of people in a more efficient manner. With the help and fellowship of a few local Christians we set up our pitch in a car park in the centre of Newcastle. Our kitchen is based around a small Good News Van which the Lord has recently provided. During our time on the street we are able to feed between forty and eighty people with a warm main meal, some dessert, and tea and coffee. From the van we are able to provide some necessities of life by way of sleeping bags, blankets, toiletries and some basic clothing to relieve immediate hardship. Over the years these things have provided wonderful opportunities not only to show the love of Christ in action but share the gospel in word and by way of suitable literature. We recognize however the importance of maintaining the right focus. It is so easy when dealing with people in such straightened circumstances to become so engrossed in the depths of their misery that we can lose sight of the real reason for making the contact. Our primary responsibility is to share the gospel and by showing the love of Christ in these practical ways to open hearts and minds to receive the word of the Lord. We therefore employ a variety of means to keep the gospel in the forefront of the work even when we are not able to engage in personal conversations. The van is covered with gospel texts; appropriate

literature is freely available, including 'easy to read' books of testimony, tracts, CD's and DVD's. Each of these aspects of the work allows opportunities to engage in conversation and bring the gospel with urgency and compassion. We strive constantly to avoid being overtaken by the material aspects of the work and to remember that many of our contacts could easily lose their lives through addiction or violence at any time.

A related ministry which has been opened up as a result of our street work is the opportunity to visit both a local prison and a number of bail hostels for Bible studies and one-to-one conversations.

The work at times is hard but over the years the Lord has encouraged us greatly. Frustrations abound but little can compare with seeing a soul rescued by the power of the gospel not only from sin but from the physical and emotional trauma which sin causes. We are not alone in this kind of work, however, and there are many believers in other areas who in an unsung way are involved in similar activity. Please pray for all those who are reaching out with the gospel in this way.





From the death of Jephthah to the birth of Samson, some twenty-five years of relative peace had passed by for the nation of Israel. During that time, God raised up three men in succession to administer justice in matters which affected His people; Ibzan, Elon and Abdon, all men of ability, but of whom only brief details are given. We have no reason to doubt, however, that their responsibilities were undertaken faithfully, and, whether their authority was local or national, the Spirit of God has placed their service on record without adverse comment.

Chapters 13-16 of the book of Judges are then taken up with the life and exploits of Samson. It would be perfectly legitimate to ask why more detail is given of his life than that of any other judge when we consider that Samson was certainly no role model. His birth was announced by a heavenly visitor, yet his path through life was marked by the 'desires of the flesh and of the mind'. He was given prodigious strength, yet at times showed profound weakness. So often his actions display selfish interests yet he is found among the faithful in Hebrews chapter 11. It is precisely because of these contradictions that the Spirit of God has taken time to record so much of Samson's life, because, 'these things . . . were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come', 1 Cor. 10. 11 RV. Since we are so prone to weakness, to selfishness and failure, the word of God has left no stone unturned to make sure that every warning and example, every instruction and encouragement are brought to our attention in order that we 'might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God', Col. 1. 10.

The record of Samson's life and death are like all other passages of scripture, in that, the more diligently we look, the more we find. Just a fairly superficial reading of these chapters will reveal details which teach us something of God's sovereignty in election and of the activity of the Holy Spirit in Old Testament times. We learn lessons regarding the principle and

THE DAYS WHEN THE SAMSON A MODEL

power of the flesh and of resisting or yielding to temptation. We cannot fail to see the warning notice concerning, on the one hand, the apparent pleasures of sin, which can only satisfy 'for a season', and the deceitfulness of sin that hardens the heart. Plainly displayed upon the surface of Samson's life is the danger of the unequal yoke, the challenge of a separated and sanctified life. And, running through these chapters, we see the hand of God in discipline upon the life of His servant.

By
**JOHN
SCARBROOK**
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England

Samson is one of a select number recorded in scripture whose birth was announced by an angelic or theophanic visitor. In this respect he stands alongside Ishmael, Isaac, John the Baptist and the Lord Himself, though, of course, comparison can be by way of contrast as well as by similarity.

Samson's family were of the tribe of Dan. A divided tribe, whose discontent with their allotted inheritance caused a number of them to search out more land further north to occupy, as recorded in Judges chapter 18. The main part of their inheritance was toward the south-west of the country between Ephraim and the Philistines' land. Samson lived his life in border country, always dubious territory for the people of God. There, the temptation is to try to accommodate both faithfulness to God and friendship with the world. For Samson the enticement to taste what seemed attractive was at times too strong, and his physical strength was compromised by a moral weakness.

The emergence of Samson is different from others who were raised up to deliver the people of God. On this occasion, although we read as so often before that 'the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord', yet even after forty years of subservience to the Philistine nation, there was neither cry of repentance nor plea for deliverance. It would seem that Israel had come to accept the dominion of

the Philistines, even to the extent of opposing Samson in his forays against them, Judg. 15. 11-13. But God in His goodness still raised him up as a potential deliverer to bring the people back to Himself.

Once more, as in times past, a sovereign God made fruitful a barren womb to bring blessing to the nation. A God-fearing couple, Manoah and his wife were given the responsibility of bringing up a child for God's glory. Instruction was given, primarily to the mother, regarding the Nazarite vow which should characterize Samson. Notice however, the question asked by his father Manoah, 'How shall we order the child, and how shall we do unto him?' It is essential to seek guidance and wisdom from God in bringing up a family, from very earliest years. Samson's birth was attended by the Lord's blessing, and, as he grew up, the Spirit of God began to direct his actions within the borders of his own people.

The opening phrase of chapter 14 sets the scene for much that is brought to our attention in the following chapters as we read that 'Samson went down'. On five further occasions we read similar words, indicating the moral direction which so often characterized his pathway. By way of contrast, there is only one significant downward movement recorded in the public ministry of the Lord Jesus, when He spoke of Himself as the 'bread which came down from heaven', John 6. 41; not here a moral comment on His earthly path, but an immeasurable journey of grace to meet our need! His walk below was in fact an upward progress, from the time of His baptism when He 'went up straightway out of the water', Matt. 3. 16, to the time when He was 'carried up into heaven', Luke 24. 51, there was nothing to tarnish the perfection of His pathway.

It is in connection with this first movement of Samson from Zorah to Timnath that we encounter a strange



JUDGES RULED PART 8

OF INCONSISTENCY – PART 1

dichotomy. On the one hand in verse 4 we see that his journey into Philistine territory was 'of the Lord', yet there appears to be much of self-will involved, and not a little of the flesh! We must never overlook or underestimate the sovereignty of God in all matters concerning both His own people and also men and nations of the world. God will bring about His purposes in His own ways and always in a manner consistent with His own character. This, however, does not absolve men from their responsibilities

toward God and this will be seen very clearly in God's dealings with Samson through these chapters.

The first thing we read of Samson as he entered Philistine land is that 'he saw a woman of Timnath', and the problems began! Sight is a wonderful blessing, but wrongly directed can lead to sin. It was 'the lust of the eyes' which first caused Eve to linger in the atmosphere of temptation. The wise man, giving instruction to his son in Proverbs chapter 4, makes it very

clear, 'Keep thy heart with all diligence . . . let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee . . . turn not to the right hand nor to the left'. On his return home, Samson demands of his parents that arrangements be made for the woman to become his wife, for, said he, 'She pleaseth me well', literally, 'She is right in my eyes'. There is evidence in this incident and in what follows to suggest that Samson may have been doted on by his parents. Understandable in a measure, since he was the son they never expected to have, but, nevertheless, having been given clear instruction on how to bring up the child, maybe they had not exercised as firm a hand as was needed.

It seems very evident that whatever he had been taught regarding the Nazarite vow had not gripped his soul as it should. One by one the distinguishing marks are discarded until finally, as we shall discover later, instead of being a man marked out, separated and strong for His God, he becomes 'weak and . . . like any other man', 16. 17.

Against their better judgement, Samson's parents bowed to his demands and took their journey to Timnath. As he passed through the vineyards, Samson was confronted by a young lion. With extraordinary strength imparted by the Spirit of God, Samson slew the lion with his bare hands, and, apparently, carried on his journey as though nothing had happened, not even bothering to tell his parents!

This opposition may have been a warning from God to prevent him from fulfilling his selfish desires, cp. Amos 3. 8. But, then again, since the Lord had provided an opportunity for Samson to confront the Philistines, and the Spirit of God enabled him to overcome the lion, was this a tactic of the adversary to hinder Samson who was to become the Lord's scourge to afflict the Philistines? Whichever way we look at this, the lion's carcass later became the means whereby Samson could begin to challenge the supremacy of the oppressors and ultimately break off their yoke.

(To be continued)

JOHN SCARBROOK is the Secretary to the Precious Seed Trust





The God who is unchanging

By **KEN TOTTON**
Cambridge, England

All scripture quotations
are from NKJV unless
otherwise stated

It has been said that nowadays 'change is the only constant'. Whilst many scientific advances have benefitted humanity, many suffer stress stemming from the consequences of changes for the worse over which they have no control. At the level of morals, relativism has become a rampant philosophy, with erosion of absolutes, and confusion of right and wrong. How refreshing therefore to turn to scripture and consider the God of the absolute who is unchanging and unchangeable!

Unchanging in His nature

The Bible reveals God as eternally complete and perfect in Himself, above the limitations and constraints of nature and the universe, Ps. 90. 2. To Abraham He was known as 'the Lord, the *Eternal* God', Gen. 21. 33. To Moses at the bush, as 'I will be what I will be', Exod. 3. 14 ESV mg. – the tense denoting not simply self-existence, but also unchangeableness. Unlike fickle man, God does not change His nature, His will, or His plans, 'And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor relent. For He is not a man, that He should relent', 1 Sam. 15. 29.

Yet, despite the elevation of God above all limitation, He is not aloof. Rather, the Bible presents Him as engaged with His creation, and, in particular, man, 'for in Him we live and move and have our being', Acts 17. 28. In the Song of Moses, God is referred to several times as the 'Rock', a metaphor of unchangeableness, Deut. 32. 4, 13, 18, 30, 31. This implies that He is an unchangeable *refuge*, who grants a firm defence and a sure resort to His people, by virtue of His impregnable firmness.

Unchanging in His plans

His purposes are steadfast; His plans can never fail; He knows the end from the

beginning – what comfort this brings! 'Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the *immutability of His counsel*, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation', Heb. 6. 17, 18.

Unchanging in His covenants

Our unchanging God is perfectly dependable in relation to the commitments He enters into. Israel, in spite of their faithlessness, discovered God to be utterly loyal to His covenant obligations. To David and his dynasty God affirmed, 'My faithfulness and my *steadfast love* shall be with him', Ps. 89. 24 ESV. In the new covenant, and in explicit contrast to the terms of the old, God pledges eternal blessings on His people, where the significant recurring phrase 'I will . . .' makes clear that all the covenanted blessings are guaranteed by God Himself, Heb. 8. 9-12.

Objections to the doctrine

A difficulty arises over scriptures that seem to imply change on the part of God. For example, when the Ninevites repented we read, 'Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it', Jonah 3. 10. We must remember, however, that God's threatened judgements on evil are conditional: He looks for repentance, and His pardon and mercy on the penitent is fully consistent with His eternal nature to love and to bless. On the other hand, the unrepentant are afforded no ground

of hope that, at the last, the unchanging God will somehow overlook their sins.

Consequences for the believer

What glorious assurances flow from this doctrine! To Israel, God said, 'For I am the Lord, I do not change; Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob', Mal. 3. 6. Our God is absolutely reliable, dependable, and trustworthy at all times. The Father who pities His children is the source of 'every good gift and every perfect gift . . . the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning', Jas. 1. 17. Our Saviour, 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever', Heb. 13. 8. 'His help, His grace, His power, His guidance are permanently at His people's disposal; why then should they lose heart?' F. F. BRUCE, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. Moreover, all beneficiaries of God's constancy and grace enjoy total *security*, 'For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable', Rom. 11. 29.

We should note, however, that our unchanging God also *sets the standard* for His people's behaviour. Paul was accused by his opponents at Corinth of fickleness. On the contrary, his actions were absolutely consistent with the trustworthy character of the God revealed in the gospel, 2 Cor. 1. 17-24. We should be completely dependable, people of our word, Matt. 5. 37, stable persons from whom others can take their bearings, Phil. 3. 17, contrast Jude 13.

Trust in Him, ye saints, for ever,
He is faithful, changing never;
Neither force nor guile can sever
Those He loves from Him.

Thomas Kelly

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of Precious Seed Publications





REPORTS REPORTS REPORTS

GOSPEL WORK AND OTHER ACTIVITIES Compiled by SANDY JACK



ENGLAND

Norfolk

The Postal Bible School was introduced into the county of Norfolk in 1976 by David Dixon. Being a rural county it was believed that children with no access to a Sunday School would benefit from studying the scriptures in their own homes.

Since those early days the Lord has been gracious in maintaining this work and there are currently 150 students doing the lessons on a monthly, bi-monthly or quarterly basis. In recent years several adults have expressed an interest in following a Bible course and these have been provided with Manna, New Life and Gleaners lessons. This has resulted in over thirty adults currently being on the register. Students' ages range from 3 to 79. The work is not confined just to Norfolk but has branched out to reach people living in Suffolk and many other parts of the country.

In November a Family Day was held in Norwich to which students were invited giving them the opportunity to meet their teachers, play games, enjoy a tea and listen to a Bible story at the end. One hundred and five attended the day and certificates were given out to students who had completed lessons in the last year.

Gloucestershire

The assembly at **Hesters Way, Cheltenham** have been greatly encouraged in their witness and work for the Lord over the last three months in particular.

Since changing the day and the time of the *Bethany Kids Klub* and following



visits made by the leaders to parents and guardians of the children, the result has been a definite growth in numbers as well as in interest. With the enthusiasm of the children and help of a brother from Northern Ireland who has come to the assembly, it has been quite thrilling to note the way things are developing. They would value prayer for this work and for the families of the children.

The prize-giving for the *Bethany Kids Klub* took place in the Carol Service. This really boosted the number of outsiders at the Carol Service and Frank Lonney gave a simple, well explained gospel message. Many contacts were made and re-established with the visitors and they hope to see these people coming again soon to the Gospel Meeting on Sunday afternoons.

In October they had their Annual Conference with John Grant and Rutherford Rabey. An excellent number turned out on the day to hear Christ-exalting, challenging and instructive ministry. John Grant continued with some beautiful truth about Christ in John's Gospel which warmed the hearts of the saints. These meetings were also encouraging through the further fellowship of believers from surrounding counties.

The Saturday rallies in November and December were also encouraging with excellent ministry from Archie Carew and Frank Lonney.

A Missionary Conference was held in January with Brian Howden (Angola), Martin Baker (Eastern Europe), Wesley Downs (Manchester) and Harry Reid (Brazil) as the speakers.

2010 is the jubilee year of the testimony in the hall at Hesters Way, and they are looking to the Lord for His continued goodness to them as an assembly.

West Yorkshire

Over the past year the assembly at **Hemsworth Gospel Hall** have had a great time of outreach. Seven schools in the locality were visited with the Open

Air Mission Bible Exhibition spending all day in each school. During the day all the children in each school came into the exhibition where the gospel was shared by the assembly members. Around 1,500 children, teachers and helpers heard the gospel. This work was then followed up with regular visits to the school during the year by Robert Plant, from the Harrogate assembly, to take the school assemblies, on occasions visiting five schools in a day and reaching around 1,000 children and teachers. There were many opportunities to share the gospel and a good, working relationship with the schools has now developed. The same outreach in the schools is planned DV for 2010; please pray for this ongoing work.

At the other end of the age 'spectrum', on a number of Saturday afternoons throughout the year, the assembly have a full, sit down tea followed by a gospel meeting for the old folk of Hemsworth. This has proved to be a time of great blessing as numbers of unsaved have increased to around twenty or more. They always hear a good, sound gospel message preached by local brethren.

Hampshire

The Friday Night Young People's Meetings have recommenced in **Winchester**. This year's meetings are entitled, 'Tell me, when shall these things be?' A significant number of young people (and some older ones too!) attend regularly. This series is intended to help young people get an understanding of future events and God's prophetic timeline.

Somerset

For the first time since the Gospel Hall in Broadway, **Merriott** (between Yeovil and Ilminster), was built in 1849, the small assembly has seen someone baptized in the hall. Over forty people came to witness the man's confession of faith, including a number from the village. The assembly has also seen another man come to know Christ as Saviour. Both of these men are in their 30's. There are still others coming along who are not saved and much of the village has been given tracts and invitations to special gospel meetings.



As in past years, New Year in Scotland saw the opportunity for many of the believers to enjoy times of Bible teaching. A number of assemblies have their annual conference at this time of year and, despite the challenges with the weather this year, many of the saints were encouraged, refreshed and built up. Such events are a valuable part of assembly life and often provide a banquet of spiritual food and, no doubt, the risk of some spiritual indigestion, but how privileged the Lord's people are to have access to such rich teaching and times of fellowship in the word of God.

The assembly at High Parks Gospel Hall, **Hamilton**, enjoyed ministry from John Grant, Ian Lewis and Fraser Munro. In **Aberdeen** there were conference meetings in Victoria Gospel Hall and Fernilea Gospel Hall where Jabe Nicholson (USA) and Alistair Sinclair taught the scriptures. The assembly at **Kirkcaldy** held their annual conference with ministry from Sandy Foster, Ian Steele and Tom Wilson. The assembly at **New Stevenston** also held their annual conference on New Year's Day when the speakers were Craig Munro, David Gilliland and Alan Summers.



Other ministry conferences and meetings were held in **Auchinleck** (Ian Steele, Alan Summers, Andrew deVile), **Cowdenbeath** (Wesley Downs and Tom Wilson), **Larkhall** (Stephen Grant, Robert Cargill, Roy Marshall), **Innerleven** (David Gilliland, Colin Hutchison, Robert Revie), **Prestwick** (Gordon Dunbar, John Grant, Stuart MacDonald), and **Whitburn** (Stephen Arbuthnot, David Gilliland, Ian Lewis).

Fife

In December, Craig Munro and Jack Hay had the privilege of sharing



responsibility for a baptismal meeting at **Innerleven** Gospel Hall. Two ladies were baptized that evening; one of whom had professed to be saved at tent meetings in Craig's garden in **Crosshill** eighteen months ago, after hearing the gospel regularly at Innerleven. Sowers and reapers rejoiced together. It was an encouraging evening.

The South West

In November Jack Hay had an opportunity to be responsible for the Pause for Thought slot on the breakfast-time programme on West Sound. These short messages went out twice each morning, and feedback has been positive.

Perthshire

In the lead up to Christmas, the **Perth** assembly, had the opportunity to preach the gospel in three sheltered housing complexes, and on Christmas Eve, a gospel meeting was held at 11 p.m. in the new Gospel Hall.

There was also a gospel meeting held in the village of **Comrie** on Christmas Eve and in both places a good number of strangers heard the word of God.



County Down

Ian Campbell held a week of meetings in Bangor in a hotel on the theme of Creation and Evolution. A PowerPoint presentation was used to help illustrate the message and around one hundred attended each night, a good number of whom were unsaved.



County Limerick

In Ireland, despite the difficulties of

2009 (near economic collapse, high unemployment, banks being bailed out by the Government, major problems in the Catholic Church with four Bishops now resigned, and so many people losing their homes) the believers at **Newcastle West, County Limerick**, have experienced something of the greatness of God.

The children's work has seen steady growth. There is a very good group of children nearly all of whom come from unsaved families. They held a Christmas concert which went very well and the kids did a great job. Just over ninety attended, and six new families were in for the first time. It is their hope that these will come out to other meetings now that the ice has been broken. One family said they would like to send their son to the Friday night youth group. He came to the Easter Club last year, but is now too old for Kids Club. Apparently, he has a couple of friends that would probably come along as well. This will be a great help as currently the youth group is all girls.

EDGE is the Friday night youth group that started last year. (Experience and Discover God Every day). Six teenage girls come along each Friday night. They were all previously in the Kids Club, so it is good to see the continued contact with them.

Over Christmas a gospel calendar was delivered to each home in the town. The town is visited three times a year with gospel literature as well as door to door contact

A bi-weekly Bible study is starting, for the particular benefit of two of the men in the meeting who are showing signs of spiritual growth and participation in the meetings. The intention of these studies is to help in preparing messages. It is good to see the Lord raising up a couple of men that will be able to help in the teaching of the word.

In October, the assembly had a Fellowship Retreat. This was well received by everyone and all the assembly were able to attend. A camp site was rented near Cork, about one and a half hours from Newcastle West. William Burnett (Canada) took the ministry over the weekend with studies in the life of Daniel.

From there being no assembly just over



ten years ago, they now have outgrown their little assembly building, and are looking to the Lord to show the way forward. What a wonderful problem to have!

County Wexford

As the numbers attending the meetings have grown considerably, Michael and Shirley McKillen's semi-detached house in **Gorey**, which was being used for gatherings, has become too small and they have recently found rented accommodation in the town to have their meetings.

It was also a great joy, after much prayer and seeking the Lord's will, for the assembly to meet for the very first time in the town and 'Break Bread' together in obedience to the Lord's request. No doubt they all would value prayer that the Lord Jesus will be honoured and glorified in the progress of the testimony in Gorey.

Harry Reid recently revisited the villages of **Gort, Loughrea, Athleague and Roscommon**. It was very encouraging to hear how the Brazilians in those places had appreciated the calendars in their own language. In Athleague there is a large abattoir that employs a large number of Brazilian workers. Prayer would be valued that the 'Good Seed' will germinate in the hearts of the dear unsaved to the honour and glory of the Lord Jesus.



Armenia

During a visit by Wendel Webb, to the village of **Dvin**, a young widow lady of about 24 years of age was saved. Her name is Eveta and she has since been baptized. At that time a property became available in Dvin to purchase and after much discussion with the brethren in Yerevan and in Dvin took

place, it was decided that this property would be most suitable for the work. An offer was made and accepted by the vendor.

As the house is unfinished there is a lot of work to be done on it to make it fit for purpose, i.e., electric wiring, windows, floors have to be completed and much more. However, this work will commence in Spring, if the Lord will.

Wendell also had meetings in **Yerevan**, and the Lord's Day afternoon meeting in Dvin. It was a joy to be able to sit down with a young woman called Sona after the gospel meeting and having explained the way of salvation to her, to witness her accepting Christ as her Saviour. She too has since been baptized. This young woman is to become daughter-in-law to one of the first converts in the village, the schoolteacher called Allis who was saved in February 2006. She has a good testimony to the power of the gospel with her family and in the village, and has testified to seeing the Lord answer her prayers.

There is much prayer needed especially for relationships between brethren. Pray for the assembly in **Gyumri** and in **Yerevan**. At present there is not much fellowship between the two, and this is a great source of disappointment. Brother Dan Gilles from Scotland visited Armenia in October and the Lord blessed that visit. It was during his time there that the young ladies mentioned above obeyed the Lord in baptism.

Cyprus

In early February, Sandy McEachern, Canada, spoke at The Reason Retreat, a weekend with around thirty teenagers in Cyprus. Most of these teens have been saved in recent years through the outreach of Logos School, but do not come from Christian homes and have little support from their families. This was a great opportunity to be able to take them on a little

'getaway', provide them with good meals, fun games and excellent Bible teaching. There were some there who were not Christians, but who were interested enough to come and listen and bring their questions. Some Muslims, some atheists, some Orthodox; pray for salvation!

The theme verses were, 'Always be ready to give a defence to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you', 1 Pet. 3. 15 NKJV, and 'Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord', Isa. 1. 18 NKJV. Each of the four meetings began with some singing, then Sandy spoke for about forty minutes, followed by an open discussion for about half an hour.

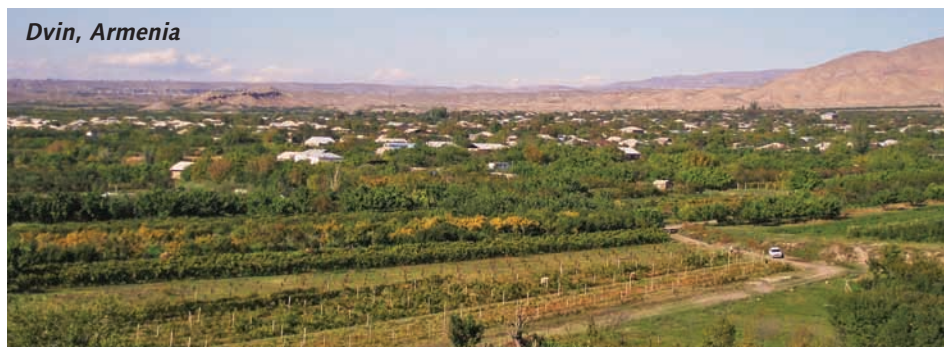
Alina, a 14-year old girl from Russia, was saved. Although Alina didn't meet the age limit for the retreat, she begged to be allowed to go along. She said that her atheist family was going through a difficult time, and she needed time with God. She was so nonchalant when she told the believers she got saved that it hardly registered, but seeing her joy at school, there is no mistaking the reality of her profession. Praise the Lord!

United States Of America

The biennial Rise Up Conference was held in the days between Christmas and New Year in **Dearborn, MI, USA**. Around 500 attended from all over N. America as well as a group from the Izumi assembly in Osaka, Japan.



The theme of the conference was 'Rise up and Choose'. The plenary session speakers were Alan Gamble, Scotland, and Roy Hill, England. Other sessions were taken by Bill Yuille and Willie Burnett, Canada, and Mike Attwood from USA. As well as these main sessions there were many seminars where the ministry was greatly appreciated. A large percentage of the attendees were under the age of 30 and the convenors were encouraged to see so many young people interested in studying the word. Many spoke of



Dvin, Armenia





blessing and guidance as a result of the conference.

Sri Lanka

About fifty miles east of the capital, Colombo, lies the district of Hatton. There is a growing assembly, accommodated in the home of an earnest servant of God called Sivakumar. In Mid-March 2009 when preaching on one of the tea plantations, he was set on by around twenty men and attacked with iron bars and a machete. On his release from the hospital after almost a week the police arrested him on a breach of the peace charge (preaching the gospel), and he spent the night in a tiny cell with five criminals. Our brethren were able to involve a politician who went to the police station and arranged his release, for which we give thanks to God.

There are other little groups of believers here and there, people who were contacted when they requested literature. They are now being instructed in New Testament truth, with the prayer that they will see the need to meet according to the biblical pattern. Just after Christmas they had the joy of witnessing eight being baptized in a stream at Hatton.



A tea estate in Hatton

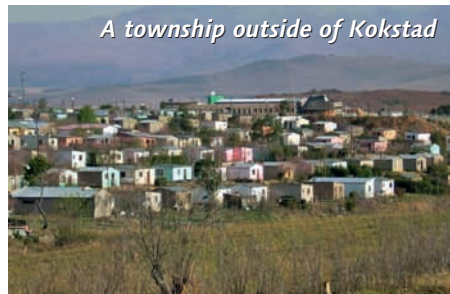
Moldova

About 8,000 calendars have been distributed by saints in and around **Cahul**. Some of the places where calendars have been handed out include the central Town Building. This is a place where many important people are located. The saints knock at the door and say that they have a gift for them and for their office and they gladly receive the calendars. Some have phoned and asked for more. The communists are receiving calendars as well.

Sarata Noua. This is a village about one hour from Cahul. About five years ago a girl called Corina wrote to the believers; she was fifteen years old and

the best pupil in her school. The believers decided to visit her school to distribute calendars and meet her and others who were interested in the gospel. They visited her parents who also heard the gospel. Corina is now in Chisinau the capital of Moldova as a student. Please pray for her, her village and the headmistress who received the saints well in the school. Durlesti, Caracui, Orac, Andrusul de Sus, Taraclia de Salcie, Brinza, Valeni and Costuleni are villages where there are some brethren who are faithful to the Lord.

South Africa



A township outside of Kokstad

In early November, Alan Madgwick visited the believers in **Flagstaff, Kokstad**. A good number were gathered together to remember the Lord. It was really hot in the hall, which has an iron roof and no ceiling. They had learnt of a group of believers in another district, who would like to join with them. These believers are from a place

where a new minister had arrived who was bringing in false doctrine and they wanted to leave. The brethren are going to meet with them and find out more. The saints at **Lusikisiki** had also arranged a baptismal service, where five people had asked to be baptized. It is always good to hear of believers seeking to follow the Lord's commands.

Gibraltar

In September and October, a series of meetings on prophetic subjects was held, by our brother John Griffiths from Treorchy, Wales. On the first night the subject was The Rapture. Stephen, the brother of the translator, was saved. He had dabbled with drugs and his wife is a Roman Catholic. He has been attending every meeting since and his wife has been along with him on one Lord's Day morning. She works in the evenings and cannot make it to the gospel meeting. Please make this a matter of prayer. The change in Stephen is incredible; he is drug-free, reading his Bible, attending all the meetings, witnessing at home and at work and reading Bible stories at bedtime to his five children.

The assembly of seven believers have put in a new kitchen and commenced building an extension for Sunday School work.



Gibraltar

Mark Hill has decided to resign from the Precious Seed Committee to concentrate his time in other areas of ministry. The Committee reluctantly accepts his decision and while thanking him for his work and time over the past few years on our behalf we wish him God's blessing in his future service for the Lord. We also thank his wife, Heather, for the supporting role she played in her foregoing the time he spent on Precious Seed work. We are grateful to them both.



Roy Hill, Chairman, Precious Seed Committee



A WORD FOR TODAY

(**paroútrúno**), arouse, incite, encourage

(**parousia**, as, è), presence, coming, advent

(**paropsis**, **idos**, è), side-dish, dish (vessel)

The Greek noun *parousia*, meaning presence or coming, is often misunderstood by Bible students.

One of the recognized dangers of studying a word by itself is that it expresses very little in terms of meaning. Words must always therefore be studied in context otherwise they cease to convey the ultimate intention of the writer. So always let context be your guide!

Secondly, the Bible was *not* written in English. An obvious point to make, but so many readers want to impute to the biblical text their own understanding of what a word means in English.

Where do we begin then in our pursuit of the correct meaning of the word *parousia*? Well, tracing the origin of a word and how it was used historically can help considerably in our understanding. Let's look first at the Greek Old Testament (LXX). Surprisingly, the word does not occur in the LXX, because in Hebrew there is no equivalent word for 'presence' or 'coming'. What does emerge from the Old Testament is the firm idea of the coming or literally the presence of God and judgement at the end times. This is frequently expressed in the language of a theophany as in Genesis chapter 18 where the appearance of God ultimately leads to judgement. Similarly, in Isaiah chapter 63 verse 4, the coming of the year of redemption is set in a prophetic framework. Occasionally, however, judgement is not in view as in 1 Samuel chapter 4 verses 6-7, where the coming of the ark is in fact the coming of God for deliverance. Perhaps the strongest text in support of this argument is Zechariah chapter 9 verses 9-10, where the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ is prophesied and literally fulfilled at His first advent, Matt. 21. 5; John 12. 12-15. Here the coming and presence of God is viewed as dispensing justice as well as salvation. Sadly, in time, to be rejected by His own people, John 1. 11, but Zechariah looks beyond the first advent to the second advent.

Since the word *parousia* was basically confined to Greek literature, we next explore its usage and meaning in that particular genre. We learn little about the word from classical Greek where it meant simply the presence or arrival of a person or something. It is the use of the word in the Ptolemaic¹ period that shaped its meaning and made it a synonym for the arrival or the visit of a king, or an emperor, or some other person in authority. For example, in 2 Maccabees chapter 8 verse 12, the word implies the advent or arrival of an army rather than simply it's coming.² DEISSMANN shows how thoroughly established the word was by the fact that it is used, for shortness, to denote the expenses usual in connection with the *parousia* of high officials.³ It was customary on

these occasions to mark the coming of the official by minting coins to celebrate the beginning of a new era, and erecting monuments to commemorate the event. JOSEPHUS records the *parousia* of Vespasian to Rome, and how its citizens came out to meet him.⁴ CHRYSOSTOM also had this idea in mind when he states that when a king drives into a city, those who are honourable go out to meet him.⁵

By
**BRIAN
CLATWORTHY**

Newton Abbot,
England

Thus *parousia* signifies far more than the English word 'coming'. Generally it meant that the person had literally arrived and was present, not that he was still coming. But it was also an established technical term for the arrival or advent of a very important person. Consequently, when the New Testament writers used *parousia* technically, they in effect challenged the cult of emperor worship, and as DONFRIED suggests 'could easily be understood as violating the decrees of Caesar in the most blatant manner'.⁶

We turn then to the New Testament, and find that the word *parousia* is used twenty-four times, principally, but not exclusively, by the apostle Paul. He uses it both generally and technically as illustrated by the following groupings:

Text	Context	Application
1 Cor. 16. 17 2 Cor. 7. 6 and 7 Phil. 1. 26 (4x)	The presence of various people brought comfort to Paul as did Paul to others. This is contrasted with the effect of Paul's absence (<i>ápousia</i>), Phil. 2. 12.	General
2 Cor. 10. 10 (1x)	According to his critics, Paul's appearance was weak	General
1 Cor. 15. 23 1 Thess. 2. 19; 3. 13; 4. 15; 5. 23 2 Thess. 2. 1 (6x)	Paul explains various aspects of the Lord's return.	Technical (Second Advent)
2 Thess. 2. 8 & 9 (2x)	Paul describes the manifestation of the Man of Sin	Technical (Advent of the lawless one)

The other eleven references to *parousia* are found in Matt. 24. 3, 27. 37, 39, and the general epistles, Jas. 5. 7, 8; 2 Pet. 1. 16; 3. 4, 12 and 1 John 2. 28. Apart from 2 Pet. 1. 16, which relates to the Transfiguration, the other texts are again applied technically to various aspects of the second advent.

What a glorious word *parousia* is then to those who believe! The return of Christ at the Rapture of the Church brings with it the certain knowledge that He will be present with His people forever.

What a comfort to those whose loved ones have died in Christ, and also to those who are alive at His *parousia*.

What a picture *parousia* conveys of our anticipated meeting with HIM in the air.

What a blessed hope *parousia* brings – even so come Lord Jesus!

For further reading/study

Introductory

Barclay, William, *New Testament Words*.

Deissmann, Adolf, *Light from the Ancient East*.

Advanced

Kubo, Sakae, *A Reader's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*.

Reference

1 Ptolemy controlled Egypt and Judea circa 305-198 BC.

2 This book is part of the literature of the Inter-Testament period.

3 *Light From the Ancient East*, N4 p.368.

4 War 7.4.1 (68-74).

5 Hom. 1 Thess. 8.

6 *The Imperial Cults of Thessalonica and Political Conflict in 1 Thessalonians*, p. 217.



GOSPEL SITES

In many cases it is proving increasingly difficult to get people to come to gospel meetings. This can be caused by a variety of factors from sheer indifference to outright antagonism. The sites listed below are included to try and encourage believers to think about using sites such as these as a means of getting the gospel to people in their homes, either by a note on a church notice board or a tract/leaflet that is distributed.

<http://www.scotlandneedsthegospel.org/home.html>

This web site has been developed by the believers at the Gospel Hall in Ballingry in Fife, Scotland. The site supports a number of outreach activities in Scotland, mainly in Fife. These include specially designed leaflets, which give details of the web site, a trailer poster situated on the side of the M90 motorway, and gospel meetings that are current in assemblies locally. Apart from the stunning pictures of Fife, the site also contains a blog and an opportunity for people to contact the believers for further information or literature. This is a simple but well-developed site.



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

This might not be a site as colourful and eye-catching as some but the content and approach is simple and easy to navigate. It contains a simple gospel message, links to passages of scripture, some with particular emphasis upon the gospel message, and a very helpful area dealing with 'What the bible says about . . .'. What is perhaps most commendable is that the site offers guidance on matters of witnessing, prayer and spiritual growth as the first steps in the life of the new Christian.



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

We have featured this web site before as it contains more than just the gospel. However, one of the elements that people may find helpful is its colourful and attractive opening page with a rolling feature of gospel messages that can be listened to.



<http://www.goodnewsnow.info/>

As its opening page states, 'This is a no-nonsense site for thinking people. Life can be tough, its challenges are real, and honest questions deserve honest answers'. This is a well-presented site with audio and video gospel messages, testimonies, and the offer of free resources including a booklet, CD, and John's Gospel.



For the distribution of portions of the Bible in different sizes and in different forms there are two web sites that might prove useful:

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

<http://www.lightandlifelit.org>



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| <input type="checkbox"/> Day by Day in the Psalms | @ | £7.50 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day by Day through the Old Testament | @ | £7.50 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day by Day through the New Testament | @ | £7.50 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The Minor Prophets | @ | £6.50 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Romans – Chapters 1-8 (Leckie) | @ | £5.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Treasury of Bible Doctrine | @ | £7.50 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Church Doctrine and Practice | @ | £7.50 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rise Up My Love (Hocking) | @ | £7.50 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prophetic Profile (Fyffe) | @ | £5.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Directory of New Testament Churches (Heading) | @ | £4.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> What About? Booklet 1 | @ | £1.00 |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Prison Letters (Davies) | @ | £5.50 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The Levitical Offerings (Boyd) | @ | £3.00 |

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

Name

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Views from the News

COMPILED BY SANDY JACK

Politicians and Faith Schools

It has emerged that Foreign Secretary David Miliband - an avowed atheist - sends his five-year-old son to a sought-after Church of England school, two miles from his home.

Mr. Miliband's American wife, Louise, apparently began attending the church attached to the school two years before their adopted son gained a place.

The Milibands are by no means the only politicians to exploit the religion card. No one doubts Tony Blair's or David Cameron's faith, but both shunned local establishments for their children in favour of distant church schools. When asked why he had snubbed fifteen schools closer to his London home, in favour of a tiny, prestigious church school, Mr Cameron explained he feared his six-year-old daughter might get 'a bit lost' in a large primary school.

Source: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-1246080/JULIA-LLEWELLYN-Why-I-despise-hypocritical-non-believers-colonise-faith-schools.html#ixzz0g4jdAUEn>



Runaway girl, 17, who converted from Islam to Christianity will be allowed to live away from Muslim parents

A runaway teenage girl who converted from Islam to Christianity has reached a court settlement that allows her to live away from her Muslim parents.

Rifqa Bary, 17, will stay in a foster home under state custody in Columbus, America, until she turns 18 in August. Bary ran away in July, saying she feared her father Mohamed would harm or kill her for leaving Islam. She fled to the Florida home of married pastors Blake and Beverly Lorenz, whom she had contacted on Facebook. After staying with them for two weeks, she was eventually moved into foster care.

Source: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/worldnews/article-1244745/Teenage-girl-converted-Islam-Christianity-fostered-away-Muslim-parents.html#ixzz0g4wDusiY>

MP says we should follow the Ten Commandments

Conservative MP Ann Widdecombe has declared that British society would be 'better' if we all followed the Ten Commandments. Miss Widdecombe said, 'What I'm saying is if today, with all the other advances - the modern technology and the medicine and all the great things that we've got - if today we still tried to follow the Ten Commandments we would be a better society'.

Miss Widdecombe, who converted to Roman Catholicism in 1993, made the comments during a television documentary called *Moses and the Law*, which is part of the Channel 4 series 'The Bible: A History'.

In her opening argument Miss Widdecombe blamed the nation's current social problems on society's disregard for the Ten Commandments. The Tory MP said that the nation's pursuit of material possessions is a mask for far deeper social problems such as marital breakdown, alcohol and drug abuse, sexual promiscuity, teenage pregnancies, and violent crime.

When she was asked if following the Ten Commandments would lead to religious intolerance, Miss Widdecombe replied, 'No it doesn't. I think they [other religions] are wrong. If you tell me you're a socialist, I will think you wrong. That doesn't mean I will prohibit you from proclaiming your socialism'.

'And that's what we've lost - we've lost the capacity to say, "you're wrong"'. I can't say somebody's wrong without being intolerant? Oh yes I can'.

Source: <http://www.christian.org.uk/news/mp-says-we-should-follow-the-ten-commandments/>



Bits & Bobs

Cohabitation in the 21st Century

A recent report published by the Jubilee Centre, Cambridge, and authored by Dr. John Hayward and Dr. Guy Brandon sheds some interesting light onto the idea that living together is a good basis for testing if a marriage would work.

Some of its key findings are:

Cohabitation is generally short-lived. Couples live together for a mean of three years, with almost a half separating before two years. More than half of all cohabitees who separate do so in less than two years.

Cohabitation is a less stable form of relationship today than it was fifteen years ago. Even then, cohabitation was markedly less stable than marriage.

The proportion of couples still cohabiting by the time their first child is sixteen has dropped more than five-fold over fourteen years.

Married couples are now more than ten times as likely to stay together until their child is sixteen.

Couples who live together before marriage are 60 per cent more likely to divorce within ten years of the start of their live-in relationship.

The full report is available free at http://www.jubilee-centre.org/uploaded/files/resource_344.pdf

What to teach your children in the garden

Photographs of dew drops on spider webs are favourite targets for nature photographers, because they resemble strings of pearls on fine jewellery. But did you know the reason dewdrops bead up so well on webs is due to the fine microstructure of the spider silk? A team of Chinese scientists studied this phenomenon and reported in *Nature* how it works.

Their description is almost as dazzling as the photos. Many biological surfaces in both the plant and animal kingdom possess unusual structural features at the micro- and nanometre-scale that controls their interaction with water and hence wettability. Anyone who has admired spider webs adorned with dew drops will appreciate that spider silk is also capable of efficiently collecting water from air. It is the structural detail - the pattern of alternating random and aligned nanofibrils - that collects the dew and channels it into drops. Imagine living out in the wild and having your water brought to you. Spiders don't need to look for water because the silk fibres that they spin are highly efficient at collecting it from moist air.

So, next time you are in the garden, here is something to reflect on with your child. We should never take simple things for granted. It's clear that the spider can teach humans their design principles, but who taught them to the spider?

Source: <http://www.creationsafaris.com/crev201002.htm#educ274>

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FRONT COVER ILLUSTRATION

The Mount of Olives is situated east of Jerusalem and looks over the Temple Mount at an elevation of 2652ft (808m). Today there are still olive trees growing upon its slopes some of which it is claimed date from New Testament times. Olivet is first mentioned in 2 Samuel chapter 15 verse 30, when David in grief and rejection, weeping as he went, ascended the Mount of Olives. Of course this is a foreshadow of the Lord Jesus who on the night of His betrayal ascended the Mount of Olives in grief and heaviness. In the garden of Gethsemane situated upon the



slopes, the Lord Jesus prayed those poignant words found in Matthew chapter 26 verse 39, 'Father, If it be possible let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will but as Thou wilt'. It is here we receive one of the greatest insights into the agony and suffering of the Lord Jesus during the time of His crucifixion. According to Zechariah chapter 14 verse 4, He is coming back to the Mount of Olives and this time there will be no rejection but a reign for a 1000 years!

PRECIOUS SEED PICTOGRAM

New Testament Assemblies in Europe

UK/Ireland	1150
Spain	250
Romania	680
Portugal	90
Poland	40
Italy	200
Holland	100
Germany	450
France	100
Belgium	50

Sources: CMML and IBCM.

Question Time

CONDUCTED BY **RICHARD COLLINGS**

QUESTION

How can I love some Christians when I don't even like them?

ANSWER

Our question contains two words which, in everyday conversation, are often used interchangeably but actually they are very distinct from each other. Not only are they distinct in meaning but they also derive from two different sources. To like is a human quality, but it is restricted in its extent to people or things which appeal to us in some way. In contrast to this human and limited attribute, love is a spiritual quality that derives from God – 'Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God', 1 John 4. 7, and it is unlimited for we 'ought to love one another', 1 John 4. 12.

Throughout His public ministry the Lord Jesus taught His disciples many things, but on the eve of His death He gave them a commandment that He described as being 'new'. He said, 'A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you', John 13. 34. In His statement the Lord gave an instruction 'love one another' and the standard to be aimed at 'as I have loved you'. Christ loved the disciples despite their foibles and unworthiness.

Whilst most of us may not be prepared to admit that we don't like every Christian we know, the reality is that we don't. It is also quite possible that we don't even like all the saints with whom we are in fellowship – and this ought not to surprise us. Church life brings people together that, naturally speaking, would have little or nothing in common. As we think of the composition of some New Testament churches we find slaves and masters in fellowship, Jews and Gentiles sitting together, rich and poor were alongside each other. The unifying bond between these disparate parties was God's salvation; they had become Christians. The challenge of Christianity isn't limited to us living harmoniously together or putting up with each other despite the miscellany of behaviour, outlook and culture that exists amongst us. The challenge is for us to love one another – that is even more demanding.

Although we may not know much about several of the disciples, we are given sufficient information for us to observe significant differences in their temperament and background. It was to that dissimilar band of men that the Lord said, 'By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another', John 13. 35 NKJV. Maybe this is one aspect of 'church life' we often fail to obey. We know that the word of God gives unequivocal teaching on head coverings for the sisters, the requirements for elders, instructions relating to the breaking of bread, etc. – and it is absolutely right that we seek to comply with all this teaching. However, how many fellowships have been blown apart because of a failure to manifest love one for another? How many saints have been permanently damaged through the carnal attitudes that have been directed at them by fellow believers?

So, how can we achieve this love for one another, even those who irritate us or those with whom we have little in common as far as everyday life is concerned? John was the disciple who really appreciated Christ's love and he supplies the answer to this issue. He wrote, 'We love him, because he first loved us', 1 John 4. 19, and frequently we meditate upon these words as we participate at the Lord's Supper. However, many translations omit the word 'him' and therefore the verse reads, 'We love because he first loved us'. The context of the latter part of that chapter doesn't focus on our love for Christ but primarily on love for our fellow Christians. John is teaching that God's love for us **enables** us to love one another.

In verses 9-11 of 1 John chapter 4, the apostle teaches that God's amazing love for us ought to motivate us to love our fellow Christians. Is it possible that our failure to display mutual love is rooted in a lack of appreciation of what we were and what God has done for us? In verse 12, we learn that God loved us for a purpose and that purpose was that we might love each other. When we do that, God's love achieves its purpose; His love is 'perfected in us'.

Our love should not be selective or exclusive; it ought not to be limited to those with whom we are in fellowship but be shown to all saints no matter where they gather. Although we may not feel free to engage in collective fellowship with believers who meet in other ways, we should love them none the less. We must avoid the error of upholding one form of church truth at the exclusion of another. We should defend New Testament principles relative to the local assembly but equally we should value the teaching relative to the church which is His body. After all, 'we are members of one another', Eph. 4. 25.

I recognize that it is much easier to write or speak about this love than it is to demonstrate it, and some of us may be conscious of deficiencies relative to showing it. However, let us seek to exude something of God's love which is classless, genderless, non-racist and non-sectarian.