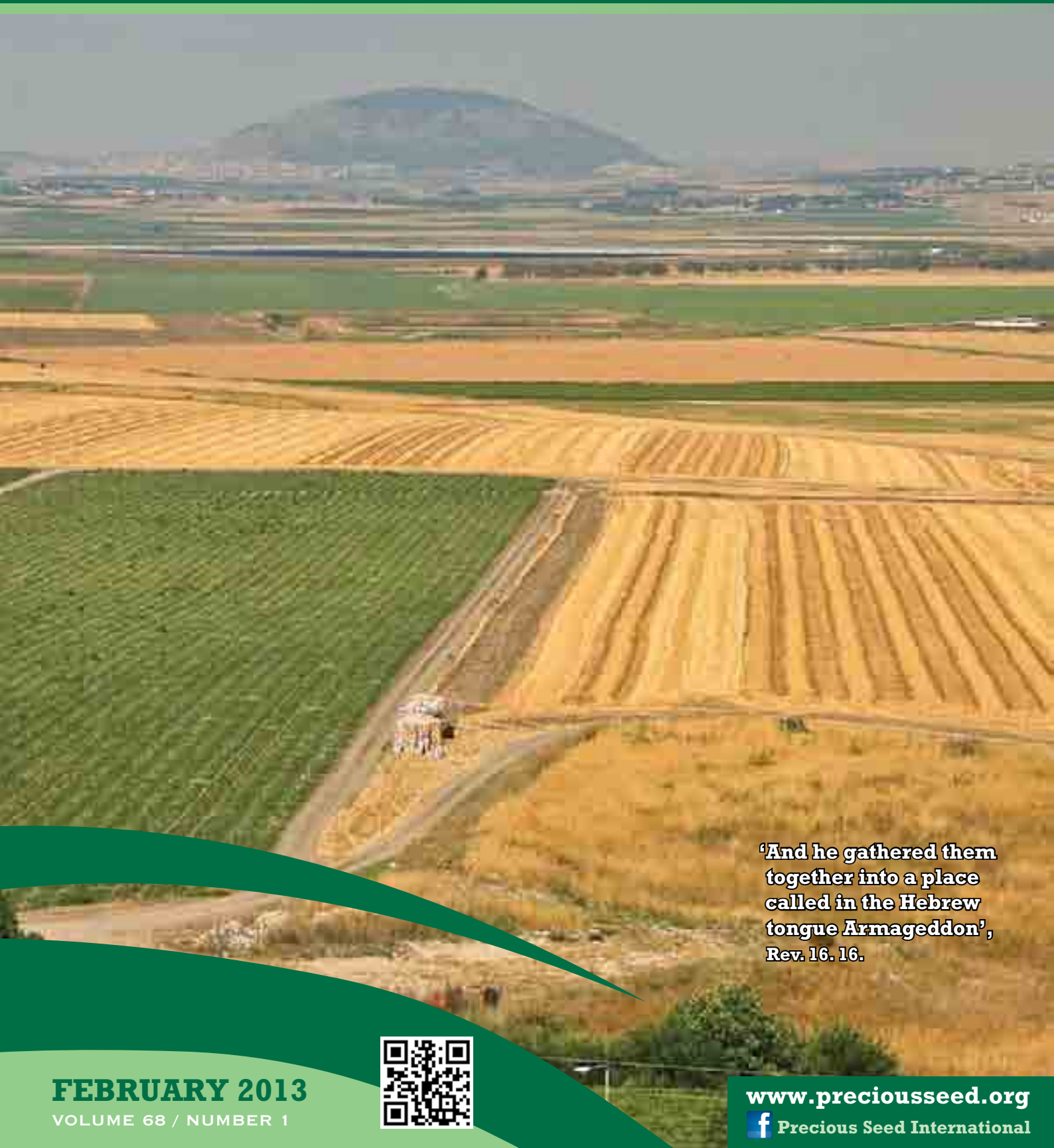


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**'And he gathered them
together into a place
called in the Hebrew
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Book Reviews

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

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A Glimmer of Light - Studies in the Book of Lamentations Paul Young

Paperback, 309pp. £10.00. Published by Authorhouse UK Ltd., 500 Avebury Boulevard, Milton Keynes, MK9 2BE, UK. ISBN 978-1-4520-1686-3. Available from the author at 31 Fairmeadows, Cwmfelin, Maesteg, Mid Glam., CF34 9JL.

The Book of Lamentations is, in Paul Young's own words, 'one of the neglected books of the Bible. It is not often the substance for preaching in the modern church . . . Yet it has powerful relevance for God's people in contemporary society'.

The material in this book was used by the author in ministry in his local church, and subsequently formed the basis of a series of programmes broadcast by Trans World Radio. All this has clearly had an impact on the book, both on its structure and the level at which it is pitched. Its twenty-nine chapters are of even length, and its content appears to be aimed at an audience whose spiritual understanding and experience may vary widely. While this

book is deceptively simple in style, and easy to read, the author has addressed some of the most solemn subjects in a manner which no one can misunderstand.

The author recognizes that Lamentations is an expression of the reaction of God's earthly people to His discipline administered through the armies of Nebuchadnezzar, when, in 586 BC, the southern kingdom had departed so far from God's revealed will that there was 'no remedy'. The book takes the reader at a steady pace through the biblical text. Because of its intended radio audience, it is not surprising that the author has chosen to concentrate on the practical lessons which are to be found in this section of scripture, underlining basic but essential truths relating to disobedience and its inevitable consequences. Some themes include: the need for repentance; God's mercy to those who do repent ('There is nothing capricious about the nature and actions of God' – quoting R. K. HARRISON); true hope for the future, but on God's terms.

While there is, of necessity, some repetition – something readily acknowledged by the author – the lessons which he draws from the text are timeless. They serve as a 'reality check' for any believer who may need reminding that the lessons taught to Judah through their experiences are 'written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world are come'.

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



This Jesus Harold S. Paisley

Paperback, 86pp. Published by Gospel Folio Press, 304 Killaly St. W., Port Colborne, ON L3K 6A6. Price: £6.99 ISBN 978-1926765-20-4.

This Jesus is a study of some of the more prominent names and titles of the Lord Jesus. These include Emmanuel, Jesus, Christ Jesus, The Lord Jesus Christ and The Son of Man, to name a few. The final section of the book also considers the title Alpha and Omega where the author proceeds to briefly reflect on a name or title of the Lord Jesus under every letter of the alphabet (e.g., 'A' – Author, 'B' – Beloved).

Although these are by no means detailed expositions, PAISLEY lays down the primary principles with regard to each name or title, thus providing plenty to provoke the mind to thought and further meditation. In this regard, the primary purpose of the book - to move hearts 'to praise the Father and the Son by the Holy Spirit's power' - has been met.

Given the brevity of most chapters it is not surprising that some of the author's comments are not further expanded. This is disappointing, as some are most interesting! For example, it is suggested that the 'two men' of Acts chapter 1 verses 9-11 were in fact Enoch and Elijah, rather than angels, as commonly believed. PAISLEY states, 'It would seem that being man, the most likely to speak of His coming in like manner, were two men'. Furthermore, it is stated that the phrase 'filled with wisdom' concerning the childhood of the Lord Jesus, Luke 2. 40, is explained by the fact that 'He increased in His appreciation of all things He had created'.

Overall, the book is a most useful introduction to the clear distinctions scripture places on the similar, yet different, names and titles of the Lord Jesus, e.g., Jesus Christ and Christ Jesus. The book is very easy to read, and, due to the short chapters/sections, can also be read at different times without disturbing the flow of thought. As there is much to provoke to further study concerning the glories of our Lord and Saviour, this book is most interesting.

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



The Messiah and the Covenants of Israel Bryan W. Sheldon

Paperback, 181pp. Published by Gospel Folio Press, 304 Killaly St. West, Port Colborne, ON, Canada L3K 6A6. Available in UK from John Ritchie Ltd. Price £7.99, ISBN 978-192-676-5105.

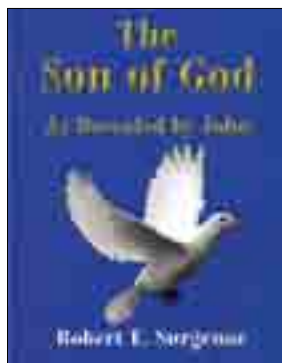
In the introduction the author asserts that 'One of the great foundation blocks of a healthy relationship between God and humankind is His righteousness' and, because God is righteous, 'He says what He means and means what He says' at no time needing to 'reverse or cancel His promises', something the writer suggests 'is especially true in regard to the utterances of the Lord that have covenant status'.

The opening chapter demonstrates that central to a right understanding of the covenants is a recognition that God is working all things out for His own glory, and only as we appreciate that can we place into perspective the different economies employed by God in His dealings with men.

Five covenants are considered: the Abrahamic; Mosaic; Land; Davidic; and New Covenant, two chapters being devoted to each. A particular focus of these chapters is the way in which the latter four covenants relate to the initial Abrahamic covenant. Six chapters are then devoted to a consideration of the Messiah and the covenants, and that only through Him can each one have its fulfilment. The book concludes with three chapters considering the relationship of the church to the New and Abrahamic covenants with a clear affirmation that the church has not replaced Israel in regard to the outworking of divine purpose.

There is a misprint at the very beginning in that all quotations are said to be from the 'King James Version unless otherwise stated'. In reality they are taken from the 'New King James Version'. The reviewer is very unhappy with the writer's choice of language in connection with the Incarnation, describing it as 'God being made in man's image', and also felt that some comments regarding the New Covenant and its relation to Jew and Gentile in the present age (pg. 140) were somewhat misleading. But despite those few reservations this is a most interesting and helpful book and the author has to be commended for taking up a subject that is, sadly, frequently neglected today. It is well worth the modest price.

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



The Son of God, as Revealed by John Robert E. Surgenor

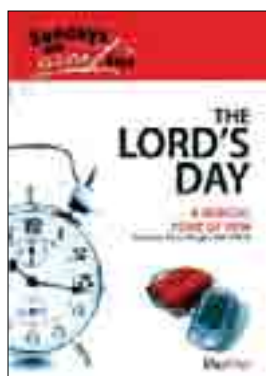
Paperback, 240 pp. Published by Gospel Folio Press, 304 Killaly St. West, Port Colborne, ON, L3K 6A6, Canada. ISBN 978-1-926765-34-1.

Given all the books which have been written about the Gospel of John, is there room for yet another? ROBERT SURGENOR's publisher thinks there is, and tells the reader that this work 'presents things that have never been considered by many. It is thought-provoking, stimulating, Christ-honouring, and presents a fresh view of the book of John'. The author tells us that, although he had read this Gospel many times before, yet in reading prayerfully and more carefully for this publication, things never seen before surfaced before him. His task therefore has been to convey to his readers these new insights.

The author begins by setting down twenty-two questions which, in effect, act as signposts to what is to follow. Although the book moves steadily through this Gospel, the seventeen chapters which form the main part of this work are not tied to the Gospel's chapter divisions, but address themes – for example, 'The Deity of Christ'; 'Christ's Movements and Miracles'; 'Christ's Power over Death'. Exposition there undoubtedly is, but the strength of this work lies in the author's readiness to explore the spiritual significance of a verse, a word, or an action, moving the reader on from understanding to devotion. Typical of this is a comment on the anointing of Jesus' feet by Mary, 'Furthermore, I have been informed that, when a person's body is anointed with spikenard, the fragrance of that precious ointment lingers on the skin for ten days. It was less than ten days before Jesus was crucified'. The implication is clear; the soldiers who crucified the Lord would smell the odour of the spikenard.

Those who are acquainted with SURGENOR's other writings will know that he is decided in his views, and forthright in expressing them. And so it is here. Written with clarity, this book will stimulate the reader to further study, and will fulfil the author's stated aim, which is to glorify our Lord Jesus Christ.

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



The Lord's Day – A Medical Point of View

Professor Verna Wright

Paperback, 17pp, Published by Day One Publications, Ryelands Road, Leominster, HR6 8NZ. ISBN 978-1846252-39-6.

"Hurry, Worry, Bury" is the epitaph for many people in this century'. So begins this pamphlet as it examines the implications of 21st Century life on the physical, mental, and spiritual welfare of the population.

While many will not agree with PROFESSOR WRIGHT's view that the law in relation to the Sabbath must now be applied to the Lord's Day, this is a booklet that deals ably with the need to set aside a day of rest in each of our busy schedules. As he concludes, 'From a medical point of view, one day set apart for rest and worship is best for man physically, mentally and spiritually'.

Contents

Book Reviews

Inside Front Cover

Armageddon and the Judgement of the Living Nations 2

By MICHAEL BROWNE

Uzziah 4

By KEN TOTTON

Christian Hospitality 6

By JOHN CAMPBELL

The Glory of God

– Part Two 8

By GARY McBRIDE

Working with Senior Citizens 10

By THE EDITOR

Unveiled – The History of the Kingdom of Heaven

– Part Four 12

By JOHN GRIFFITHS

A Word for Today 14

By BRIAN CLATWORTHY

The First Epistle of John Pull-Out

– Part Five

By KEN TOTTON

The Work in Moldova iv

YPS Pull-Out

What is his name? 15

By ERIC G. PARMENTER

Studies in the Life of Elijah

– Part One 16

By JEREMY GIBSON

Philippians: The Joy and

Suffering of the Furtherance

of the Gospel – Part Thirteen 18

By KEITH KEYSER

Worshipping God 20

By RANDAL AMOS

The Sovereignty of God

over Animals 22

By KEITH KEYSER

Samuel Prideaux Tregelles,

Bible Scholar 24

By BRIAN CLATWORTHY

Reports 26

By SANDY JACK

Views from the News

..... Inside Back Cover

By SANDY JACK

Question Time Outside Back Cover

By RICHARD COLLINGS

Editorial

‘To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God’, Eph. 3. 10.

We said in our last editorial that ‘it is appropriate that from every assembly there should be a gospel witness’. It is good to know that there is still an enthusiasm in the gospel amongst us, and a continuing desire to reach the lost. However, it is also good to take stock and consider whether there is something that we can do that we are not doing that might enable sinners to be reached and blessed by the gospel. When was the last time you saw the Lord at work in conviction and salvation?

We know, of course, that salvation is not the end but the beginning. As those early converts in the Acts of the Apostles showed, ‘they that gladly received his word were baptized’, 2. 41. There are places where the truth of baptism is seldom taught. We don’t see the baptistery opened as often as previous generations did. As a consequence, the truth surrounding baptism does not get taught as often as it should. This is an essential element of teaching and practice that was commanded by the Lord Himself, Matt. 28. 19. How important it is to ensure that young Christians appreciate the early steps of true discipleship!

There was one other particular instruction that the Lord gave to His disciples, ‘This do in remembrance of me’, Luke 22. 19. We rightly rejoice when a soul is saved. It is a reason to rejoice! It is a thrill to see a believer who wishes to be baptized because they see it as something that they can do to witness to others and to please the Lord. I wonder if we appreciate the joy that we bring to the heart of God when we gather with His people to worship Him. Do we attach appropriate importance to this most sacred privilege as to all the activities in the gospel? Shouldn’t this simple act of remembrance in the breaking of the bread and the drinking of the cup be paramount? As our verse indicates, what a display to the wondering gaze of the principalities and powers to see the word of God obeyed and His people bowed in adoring worship!

One of the original aims of this magazine was to ‘encourage . . . the practice of New Testament Church Principles’. It saddens many believers to see the practice of church principles disappearing, and the pursuit of ‘mission’ overriding the desire to disciple converts in the fullest sense of the word. Let us not forget our responsibilities Godward – that He might see displayed in His own ‘the manifold wisdom of God’. May the Lord be pleased to use this and similar magazines to the furtherance of His work in the building up of local assemblies, and for the encouragement of His people!

ARMAGEDDON AND THE

The storm is gathering and threatening on God's prophetic horizon. Already the prophesied apostasy of the end times of the church age is gathering strength. Anti-Christian attitudes and rejection of moral restraints are evident from governments, down through the social institutions of Western nations. Humanism, atheism, false religions, and idolatry are accepted while the Christian faith is increasingly rejected. Escalating social and spiritual darkness is evidence that we are in the end times and the rapture of the church is imminent. The storm we speak of is that time of universal divine judgement and retributive wrath against an apostate Israel and satanically deceived anti-God Gentile world powers, described by the Lord in Matt. 24. 21 as 'great tribulation', and which follows the removal of the church.

The Tribulation is prophetically Daniel's 70th week of years, Dan. 9. 27, a time period of seven years. A seven year firm covenant is established between apostate Israel and the head of the revived ancient Roman empire 'the Prince (Ruler) that shall come' who is Antichrist. This covenant will be abrogated by the Prince halfway through the covenant week. He will then turn and instigate an intense persecution for the last three-and-a-half years against the Jewish nation. This is the period described as the Great Tribulation. The climactic events of this Tribulation period are the battle of Armageddon and the public second advent of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Armageddon

The passage dealing with the description of this subject is Revelation chapter 16 verses 12-16, and the outpouring of the sixth judgement vial upon the great river Euphrates. Armageddon, v. 16, or, in Hebrew, Har-Magedon (Mountain

of Megiddo), was a city about 40 km south-west of the southern tip of the Sea of Galilee, on the western end of the Valley of Jezreel. Famous in Old Testament history, this valley has been the site of many battles over the centuries. Barak defeated the Canaanites there, Judg. 4, and Gideon the Midianites, Judg. 6, and it was here the Philistines slew King Saul.

It is this valley, twelve miles wide by fourteen miles long, where 'the kings of the earth and of the whole world', Rev. 16. 14, will assemble for the final drive to destroy Jerusalem, defeat the Messiah, and wipe out the Jewish nation (see Psalm 2). No battle will actually be fought at Armageddon; it is the central assembling point for the kings that come from the east or sun-rising to meet with the western armies under Antichrist, for the last great 'battle of that great day of God Almighty', v. 14.

The 'kings of the east', v. 12, for whom the drying-up of the Euphrates at the outpouring of the sixth vial will make it easier for them to rendezvous with allied Antichrist forces in the west, have been identified with the 200 million army of Revelation chapter 9 verse 16. Some have taken this vast force to be the oriental hordes of China, together with Japan and India. However, plain comparisons with other sections of Revelation will not allow for this. The 'two hundred million' of Revelation chapter 9 belong to the earlier trumpet judgements, whereas 'the kings of the east' are in the vial judgements period. Then again, the 200 million in chapter 9 are seen as denizens of hell, horrific demon-like supernatural creatures and not men. Similarly, the direction 'east' in scripture invariably refers to areas immediately east of the river Euphrates – and as Antichrist's capital is Babylon, would here indicate it is Mesopotamian kings that are in view.

This final conflict, while commonly called 'the Battle of Armageddon',

is, in reality, not a single battle but rather an extended war campaign. In verse 14 'battle' is the Greek word *polemos*, and both Robertson and Vincent in their Word Studies translate it as war or campaign. The word used for a single battle or fight is *mache* (see James chapter 4 verse 1 where both words are used). The command for the Armageddon campaign to commence comes from the unholy and counterfeit trinity of verse 13, the dragon (Satan), the beast (Antichrist), and the false prophet (Antichrist's executive officer). They are described as 'the spirits of demons', v. 14, who work miracles and deceive the nations into war with God Almighty.

The campaign of Armageddon extends the whole length of the land of Israel and further. The armies assemble in the Valley of Jezreel, v. 16; Joel 3. 9-14, then is included the destruction of Babylon under the vial judgements, Rev. 17. 1-2; ch. 18; then Jerusalem is surrounded and partially destroyed, Zech. 14. 1-2; the battle flows south into Edom and Antichrist's hordes assault Bozrah and are annihilated there, Isa. 63. 1-6. The final drama is then played out again in Jerusalem when the sign of the Son of Man appears in the heavens, Matt. 24. 30, and Messiah comes with power and great glory. He rescues His people, engages the Beast and all his dismayed armies, thundering from the heavens seated upon a white horse and the armies of heaven with Him. There is a terrible slaughter, the Beast and False Prophet are taken and cast alive into the lake of fire, Rev. 19. 11-21. The Messiah has returned victorious to take up the reins of worldwide government and plant His standard in Jerusalem, Ps. 2. 7-8; Ps. 48. 2.

There is a parenthetical statement in verse 15 addressed by God to the remnant of faithful believers living at that time. It is a word of encouragement and hope indicating

By
**MICHAEL
BROWNE**

Bath,
England

JUDGEMENT OF THE LIVING NATIONS

He will soon return but without warning 'as a thief', so let them watch and keep the faith. In verse 16 'he' KJV refers to God who overrules the plans of Antichrist and reveals that it is He who really gathers the nations into this final confrontation to destroy Satan's power, and all human rebellion and pride once and for all.

The Judgement of the Living Nations – (Matt. 25. 31- 46)

The time of this judgement is immediately post-Tribulation and prior to the inauguration of the Messianic Kingdom.

The judgement upon the remnant of Israel surviving after the Tribulation persecution, has already taken place. Ezekiel describes this judgement in his prophecy, 20. 34-38. Jehovah will gather Israel for solemn judgement 'into the wilderness of the people' (very probably the Sinai Peninsula on the borders of the land); they have passed under His 'rod' and the rebels 'purged out' and banished from the land in judgement, who had been traitors and accepted Antichrist. The saved remnant are brought into the 'bond of the covenant' and enter Messiah's kingdom. This is paralleled in Matthew chapter 25 verses 1-30, where again Israel are judged prior to the judgement of the Gentile nations. It is a judgement based on preparedness to welcome the Messiah, v. 11-13; service and responsibility for talents received, v. 23-30 – with final irrevocable eternal judgement in outer darkness for those whose works reveal they are plainly unsaved, v. 30.

Now, verse 31 follows with the judgement on the gathered living Gentile nations when the Son of Man (His millennial title) Himself sits upon the throne of His glory and commences this awesome inquest.

Though the world population will have been decimated by the slaughter and fearsome

disasters of the recent Tribulation period, a multitude of Gentiles still survive, and this is the company now gathered for judgement. This judgement is described in two passages of scripture – one in the Old and the other in the New Testament.

Firstly, in Joel chapter 3 verses 1-3 where Joel assigns the time of this judgement to be when the Lord restores Israel to their land, and the place as the valley of Jehoshaphat, 'For, behold, in those days, and in that time, when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem, I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel'. This valley appears to be, appropriately, the very place where the campaign of Armageddon ended, and the basis for the judgement is the treatment of the Jewish people!

The second passage is Matthew chapter 25 verses 31-46, where also the Lord pleads on behalf of His 'brethren', and the basis of judgement is the same, how these Gentile nations treated His 'brethren' the Jews during the Tribulation holocaust – whether they were pro- or anti-Semitic. He

separates them as 'sheep' or 'goats'. The pro-Semitic sheep on the right hand – the place of honour and approbation – the anti-Semitic goats on the left – the place of dishonour and contempt in this instance.

The outcome of this judgement is their eternal destiny. For those 'sheep' Gentiles who fed, clothed, visited and cared for the hated and persecuted Jews during the Tribulation, 'life eternal' and 'inheritance of the kingdom', v. 34, 46. For the 'goat' Gentiles who failed to care for the Jews 'everlasting punishment and fire', v. 41, 46. We must see here in the sheep evidence of salvation through accepting by faith the gospel of the kingdom offered them by the fiery Jewish evangelists, the 144,000 sealed from the twelve tribes of Israel in Revelation chapter 7, and whom they cared for after conversion. These sheep Gentiles are called 'righteous', v. 37, therefore are clearly saved, and by their works reveal their faith, Jas. 2. 17-18. The goats refused the message proclaimed by the Jews and took part in Antichrist's continuing persecution and killing spree against them. In so doing they manifest their unbelief and hatred of the Jews and merit the summary execution of judgement against them, v. 41.

The sheep then enter into the messianic kingdom under the headship and priesthood of restored Israel, Deut. 28. 13; Isa. 61. 6. In that day there will be only believers left upon the earth, all unbelievers have been judged and banished. 'And the Lord shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one', Zech. 14. 9.



MICHAEL BROWNE is in fellowship at Manvers Hall assembly in Bath, England, where he serves as an elder. In 1959 he and his wife Grace were commended for missionary service in Hong Kong where they worked until 1972 when they returned to the UK for their children's further education. Since then Michael has made regular visits year by year to Eastern Europe and India, and periodic visits to the Far East.



Uzziah's name means 'Jehovah is my strength' and his naming points to worthy spiritual ambitions for the child – a lesson to all God-fearing parents. So, in the phrase 'marvellously helped till he became strong', the Chronicler makes a word-play on his other name, Azariah ('Jehovah is my help'). For the purposes of this paper, it is convenient to focus on the account of Uzziah's reign given in 2 Chronicles chapter 26, cp. 2 Kgs. 15. 1-7.

He is the third of three kings who made a good beginning, but met a sad end: Joash, Ahaziah, and Uzziah. We need grace from God so to progress in godliness that we will be able to say at the end with Paul, 'I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith', 2 Tim. 4. 7.

Early Promise, vv. 1-5

Uzziah came to the throne of Judah at the tender age of sixteen, a popular choice, 2 Chr. 26. 1. The first five verses of the chapter summarize some of the most significant aspects of his early reign. In reckoning his fifty-two years (791 to 740 BC), we must allow for extensive co-regencies at either end of it. Prosperity and *strength* were the hallmarks of his rule, for God *helped* him, vv. 7, 13, 15. The lesson for us is that progress in our spiritual life is never accidental; rather, 'he set himself to seek God'. As with Joash and Jehoiada, Uzziah had an able spiritual guide in the godly Zechariah. The psalmist could say, 'I am a companion of all who fear You, and of those who keep Your precepts', Ps. 119. 63. The phrase 'as long as he sought the Lord, God made him to prosper', v. 5, reminds us that godliness must be a *constant pursuit*, not a fund of spiritual capital which, once accumulated will, allow us to sit back and coast. It also hints at later tragedy.



By **KEN TOTTON**

Cambridge, England

(Unless otherwise stated, all scripture quotations are from the New King James Version)



In the cryptic statement 'he built Elath', v. 2,¹ we see just how enterprising Uzziah was. This is the Red Sea port of Elath, 2 Kgs. 14. 22, which he liberated from the Edomites. That it was a gateway to international trade, especially the East, points to the far-sighted strategic thinking of the king. There are times when assemblies need to have their thinking and horizons enlarged to better fulfil their responsibilities in the gospel, cp. John 17. 18.

Great Prosperity, vv. 6-15

Uzziah was a man of many talents, and this positive period of his life is highlighted by the catchword 'strong', vv. 8, 15. First, with respect to foreign affairs, there are clear echoes of Solomon's prowess and achievements when we read that he subjugated the Philistines, Arabians, Mehunims, and Ammonites. Hence, it is asserted that 'he became exceedingly strong', cp. v. 15. No doubt he benefitted from the dormant state of the Assyrian empire, something that would change markedly towards the end of his reign with the rise of the expansionist Tiglath-pileser III (744-727 BC).

In spiritual experience there are perennial enemies to be engaged with, no less real because they require warfare in the spiritual realm where, as in the case of Uzziah, our strength is to be found in God alone, Eph. 6. 10-16; 2 Cor. 10. 4.

However, good leaders must not simply wage war against enemies; he was equally careful to strengthen the home defences, 2 Chr. 26. 9, 15. He realized what a treasure Judah possessed in the land that had been given to them as a sacred trust from God, and therefore had extensive interests in farming and viticulture, v. 10. Military success abroad needed to be matched by strengthening the home defences and ensuring that the people's food supply was secure. Accordingly he built towers to defend Jerusalem, strengthening the city's defences at the weakest points. Beyond the city, in the hill country and the plain, he provided water for his herds and towers for their protection from raiders. A number of his key officers are named, lest we should think from the narrative that all this was accomplished single-handedly.

In this phase of Uzziah's reign we see the blessings of a shepherd-king ruling in the best traditions of David and Solomon. The lessons for leadership today are plain. Strong in the Lord, he sought to strengthen his people, cp. 2 Tim. 2. 1f. He wanted them to be well defended and fed, and we can see a parallel in Paul's concerns as he took his leave of the church at Ephesus, Acts 20. 27-32. Moreover, he was concerned to



foster an environment in which others could serve effectively and realize their individual callings, whether they were sailors, soldiers, farmers, or defenders. Similarly, Paul wrote to the Ephesians, 'And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, Eph. 4. 11-12 ESV. The important point is that these vital gifts do not monopolize the church's ministry, but rather nurture and enable others so that they in turn can exercise their gifts for the edification of all. No wonder Uzziah's fame spread abroad! How we need such far-sighted leaders today!

Disastrous Pride and Punishment, vv. 16-23

It has often been observed that a person's strength can also become a weakness. In the case of Uzziah, in his strength and resultant fame, he succumbed to pride. 'Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall', Prov. 16. 18.

Rulers, both ancient and modern, frequently get to feel so elevated that they begin to think that the laws governing 'ordinary mortals' somehow no longer apply to them. Napoleon once said, 'I am not an ordinary man, and the laws of morals and of custom were never made for me'². So Uzziah, in his folly, took a censer to offer incense on the golden altar.

What possessed him to do such a thing? Could it be that buoyed up by success at home and growing recognition abroad, he wished, like Egypt's kings, to make himself high priest, and so embody all civil and religious power? Such an aspiration was common enough among the kings of the ancient world. In the church era, what disaster and apostasy has been brought about by sheer lust for power, in blatant

rejection of the servant mindset to which we are called by the Lord and His apostles, Mark 10. 42-45! All of us, no matter how gifted, need to humbly recognize with Paul that all endowments and blessings come from God, 1 Cor. 4. 7. It would have been well with Uzziah if he had remembered the message of his names, that he was powerful precisely *because* of the Lord's help.

Whatever the trigger for Uzziah's recklessness, eighty courageous priests led by Azariah immediately confronted him with the heinous nature of his intrusion into the priestly office. He reacted angrily, and, in resisting, was stricken with leprosy. Realizing that God had judged him, he hurried out of the sacred precincts. His fall was catastrophic, reducing his life to a leper's existence, dwelling apart in an 'isolated house', according to the provisions of the law for lepers, Lev. 13. 46. Far from adding priestly responsibilities to his responsibilities, he lost the executive role and this passed to his son, Jotham, v. 21. Even in death he forfeited burial in the royal tombs, instead he was buried in an adjacent field 'which belonged to the kings'. The Chronicler thus clarifies the shorter death notice given in 2 Kings.

Perhaps, to some minds, God's judgement seems severe. There is, however, a solemn biblical principle that those nearest to God are held most responsible for their actions, Luke 12. 47-48; Jas. 3. 1. A Davidic king represented God to men; a priest represented men to God. God intended that these offices be kept distinct, awaiting

the time when the Messiah, Jesus Christ, would combine them, Zech. 6. 13. Uzziah was judged because he was God's representative on the throne. Moreover, he should have known the seriousness of his intrusion from the earlier fate that befell Jeroboam the northern king, 1 Kgs. 12. 28 - 13. 5. God judged Jeroboam's impiety, even though it involved his improvised sanctuary; therefore, how much more serious Uzziah's trespass in the temple proper!

There are solemn lessons here. Let none of us ever think ourselves to be above the word of God. Rather, let us be content with humbly fulfilling the role God has sovereignly allotted us in His grace, Col. 4. 17. Uzziah's tragedy remains a beacon of warning concerning the peril of being disqualified, even after rendering sterling service, 1 Cor. 9. 27.

The call of Isaiah came in the year that King Uzziah died, Isa. 6. 1, and, for him, the shattering fate of the leper king powerfully symbolized the spiritual plight of his nation, v. 5. Amidst the harrowing circumstances of the king's demise, Isaiah gained a vision of a greater and eternal King to whom all earthly monarchs must bow. A promising son of David had fallen, but God's steadfast promises to David's house would not ultimately fail, Isa. 6. 1, 13.

Endnotes

- 1 This is a port on the Gulf of Aqaba, identified with the modern resort of Eilat.
- 2 G A CHADWICK, *The Book of Exodus, Expositors Bible*, 1890, pg. 86, quoting the *Memoirs of Mme de Rémusat*.

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A careful examination will show that the word for 'hospitality' in Romans chapter 12 verse 13 is the same word translated as 'entertaining strangers', Heb. 13. 2. W. E. VINE states that hospitality means the love of strangers. This point will become very important as we pursue our study.

We normally show hospitality toward those who can reciprocate it toward us. This is missing the mark completely as the teaching of the Lord shows, 'When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours; lest they bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind and thou shalt be blessed, for they cannot recompense thee', Luke 14. 12-14. Job could rejoice because 'the stranger did not lodge in the street, but I opened my doors to the traveller', Job 31. 32. The Lord taught his disciples 'I was hungry, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger and ye took me in', Matt. 25. 35. Do we fully understand how many lonely and needy people there are around who would appreciate hospitality? Students struggling on a budget! People who have lost their partner and are tired of their own company! New converts who come from a family where the precious name of the Lord Jesus is blasphemed!

There is an interesting verse in Matthew chapter 10 verse 41 that we seldom hear in ministry, 'He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward'. You may feel so inferior to someone who is a great servant of the Lord. You may feel that your reward will be so much less than theirs. But this verse is teaching that if you show hospitality to that servant, in the capacity of a servant of the Lord, you will receive the same reward as he does. That is 'receiving a prophet's reward'!

Christian Hospitality

Sadly, the practice of Christian hospitality is diminishing in many parts of the world. Many of the Lord's people find it easier and more appealing to pay a visit to a local restaurant, even on a Lord's Day. Almost all centres of population today can offer a wide range of cuisine to appeal to our individual palate. We can choose from Chinese, Japanese, Italian, French, American, and, maybe, even British. Some of us even come over as experts in reading the exotic menus on offer! The cost does not appear to be a major hurdle either.

Personally, I feel we are going down the wrong route entirely. Try to imagine the early New Testament believers in an atmosphere like this. Listen to Paul, 'Have ye not houses to eat and to drink in', 1 Cor. 11. 22. I am well aware of the context in which he says these words but it does show that the apostle believed that our homes should be the focal point for Christian fellowship.

In Romans chapter 12 verse 9, we are encouraged 'to let love be without dissimulation'. Paul wants our love to God to be without hypocrisy. In verses 9-13 he lists nine different ways in which we can test the sincerity of our love to God. The final test is mentioned in verse 13, 'given to hospitality'. Isn't it surprising to find that God places hospitality on such a high level? 'Given' is an interesting word which is very often translated 'pursue or follow after', cp. Phil. 3. 12, 14; 1 Tim. 6. 11; and Heb. 12. 14. So, when we are told to follow after or pursue opportunities to show hospitality, it means more than just a casual invite. We should not look on hospitality as a duty or a routine that we are called to fulfil because it is expected of us. We should count it a privilege to pursue and look out for opportunities to show hospitality, as a test and proof of the sincerity of our love to God.

The New Testament highlights certain areas where hospitality should be shown:

Overseers

Paul lists the features that should mark overseers, Titus 1. 6-9. One of the criteria is 'a lover of hospitality', v. 8. Again, in 1 Timothy chapter 3, he tells us things which 'must' be true of overseers, 'given to hospitality, apt to teach', v. 2. These two phrases juxtaposed indicate the reason



hospitality

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why overseers should have an open home. It is not to impress by the standard of food but rather to have an opportunity to provide spiritual nourishment. The teaching referred to in these verses is not necessarily public teaching in the assembly gatherings but something much more relaxed in the privacy of the overseer's home. Some of us will be eternally grateful for overseers who used their homes in this way to encourage younger believers. These men were not publicly gifted but they were 'apt to teach'.

There is just one word of warning. In Acts chapter 20 verse 20, Paul taught both 'publicly and from house to house'. But what Paul taught publicly was the very same as what he taught from house to house. Sadly, this is not always the case today. Can I appeal to our overseeing brethren to rise to the challenge of opening their homes, not for small talk or to criticise others but to teach the word of God?

Sisters who are described as 'widows indeed', 1 Tim. 5. 5

In verse 10 we read of such as those who 'have lodged strangers' and have 'washed the saints' feet'. This, of course, is referring not to a literal washing of the saints' feet but to the spiritual refreshment provided by these sisters who have an open home in which they showed hospitality. What a contrast with the women mentioned in verse 13 who are described as 'idlers', 'tattlers', and 'busybodies'! In a sense, the homes we live in are not our own. We have them on trust from the Lord and they should be used in His service.

All believers, Heb. 13. 2

'Be not forgetful to entertain strangers' is a call to every child of God. The Hebrew writer goes on to tell us that 'thereby some have

entertained angels unawares'. This provides the clue that the writer is thinking of the experiences of Abraham and Lot in Genesis chapters 18 and 19. But notice the difference between the two stories:

In Chapter 18 verses 4 and 5, Abraham offered the strangers that he would 'fetch a little water and a morsel of bread', but, by the time we get to verse 8, it is more like a sumptuous feast.

In Chapter 19 verse 3, Lot offered the strangers a 'feast', but it turned out to be pretty plain fare of 'unleavened bread'.

In Chapter 18 verse 5, when Abraham offered his hospitality, the angels accepted gladly, and said 'so do as thou hast said'.

In Chapter 19 verse 2, when Lot offered his hospitality, the angels were reluctant to accept. They said, 'Nay, but we will abide in the street all night'. The lesson for us is that we must earn the moral right to 'entertain strangers' in our homes.

There is a great recompense when we open our homes to provide hospitality. That was the time when Abraham received the promise of Isaac's birth, Gen. 18. 9, 10. It was also the time when Abraham received the revelation of God's plans for Sodom, Gen. 18. 23-33. Think of how Rahab was rewarded for inviting the strangers into her home in Jericho, Josh. 6. 25. Think of the two who received the 'stranger' into their home in Emmaus, Luke 24. 13-32.

So the message comes to us loud and clear – it is most rewarding to have an open home. If you are one of those who have stopped showing hospitality for a long time or someone who has never done it, let me encourage you to get involved with this noble service.

Peter adds his testimony, 'use hospitality, one to another without grudging', 1 Pet. 4. 9. Is Peter writing these words from personal experience? Think of the house in Capernaum, Mark 1. 21-33, and what measure of resentment there might have been when Peter saw 'all

the city gathered at the door', v. 33! There would have been considerable inconvenience on that occasion!

In Mark chapter 2 verses 1-12, there is another home scene in Capernaum. We don't know whose home it was but the roof was torn up to allow a sick man to get in front of the Lord. Sometimes we get a little irritated when the carpets get damaged or someone spills coffee over the chairs! However, Peter says, 'Use hospitality one to another without grudging', 1 Pet. 4. 9. 'Without grudging' suddenly takes on a new meaning!

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The Glory of

In the last article the revelation of God's glory to Moses was in view. Moses was hidden in the cleft of the rock and he saw a display, and heard a declaration. There was the visual and the verbal expression of God's appearance and attributes. The result of this vision affected Moses and his worship of God as well as his witness to the world. He 'bowed his head to the earth, and worshipped', Exod. 34. 8. Later, when he stood before the nation, his face shone as a result of his time in God's presence.

In this article, the scenes in view are in Isaiah chapter 6 and Ezekiel chapter 1. Both of these noteworthy prophets started their particular ministries with a vision of God's glory. They both had difficult, if not impossible, tasks yet were undoubtedly sustained by the reality of God's glory.

Though Isaiah's vision is six chapters into the book, this is a recounting of the event. The record is given here because it explains Isaiah's call and commission to the work. This vision is also notable in that the Lord Jesus refers to this occasion, 'These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory and spoke of Him', John 12. 41. This is a glimpse of the Lord Jesus and His pre-incarnate glory, the same glory of which He spoke in His prayer, 'the glory I had with you before the world was', John 17. 5.

God's glory is displayed in this scene by sights and sounds. The preeminent sight is 'the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up', Isa. 6. 1. The earthly throne has been vacated with the death of Uzziah, but the throne in heaven is occupied by the sovereign Lord. His train, or His robe, fills the temple.

Seraphs hovered above the throne. The more familiar Hebrew word *seraphim* indicated there were at least two of them. The word 'seraphs' means 'burning ones', and is the same word used for the fire in the sin and the trespass offerings. It is also found in Numbers chapter 21 verse 8 for the serpent on the pole, i.e., 'fiery' as in fiery serpent. F. C. JENNINGS, in his *Studies in Isaiah*, points out that it is literally 'make thee a seraph – a burning one'.

The seraphs' function was to proclaim and protect the holiness of God. The covering of the face and the feet with their wings is not explained, but suggests reverence and humility. Using the other two to fly may speak of their readiness and willingness to respond.

Equally noticeable was their proclamation which was so loud and forceful that it shook the foundations of the heavenly temple. The threefold awe-inspiring words, 'holy, holy, holy', are ascribed to 'the Lord of hosts', and declare that 'the whole earth is full of His glory'. It seems that these two statements were given in the form of a pronouncement and a refrain. One seraph cried out 'holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts', and then the other responded, 'the whole earth is full of His glory'.

The Psalmist reminds us that 'in His temple everyone says, "Glory"', or, the KJV renders 'doth everyone speak of his glory', Ps. 29. 9. God's glory is not only the conversation of heaven but is also clearly seen here as the whole earth is full of His glory. How true are the words of ISAAC WATTS:

'Lord how Thy wonders are displayed,
where'er I turn my eye,
If I survey the ground I tread or gaze

upon the sky.'

Another line of the same hymn says: 'There's not a plant or flower below but makes Thy glories known'.

After looking up to this magnificent revelation Isaiah looks within himself. He sees his own lack of holiness and recognizes he has unclean lips. He knew that he had seen the King, the Lord in all His glory, and was humbled, and in awe at the thought of what had just transpired.

The Lord's response was to cleanse Isaiah with a coal from off the altar, likely it is the brazen altar that answers to the cleansing in view. After this there was a call, 'Whom shall I send and who will go for us?' Isaiah indicates his willingness to go and is given his commission.

His commission was to 'go and tell this people'. It seemed straight forward – but the Lord added that the people would not listen. What a difficult task, to be sent but also to be told that the people would not be responsive! The Lord looked down the years and indicated that ultimately a tenth of the people, (the same amount as a tithe) would be for Him from out of the nation.

The glimpse of glory brought Isaiah to a place of confession, cleansing, calling, and commission. It touched his will, as he bowed in humility and submitted to God's will for his life. It affected his work as he performed what, at times, must have been a very discouraging ministry. Isaiah first looked upward, then he looked inward, and finally his attention was outward to a needy world. Certainly this is a good progression for us to follow today.

Ezekiel's vision and commission are

God (2)

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[Unless otherwise stated, all quotations are taken from the New King James Version of the scriptures]

found in the first two chapters of his book. In summarizing all he had seen, Ezekiel said, 'this was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord', Ezek. 1. 28. He uses a series of similes to describe what otherwise would be unrecognizable to us.

This vision begins in verse 4 with a whirlwind coming out of the north. The storm was an ominous sign that judgement was coming on Israel out of the north. But, within this raging storm, Ezekiel sees the evidence of God's sovereign control and intervention in the affairs of men. This scene reveals the omnipresence and the omniscience of God. He is fully aware and orchestrating this judgement. History truly is His story.

Though there was turbulence coming in Ezekiel's world, he looked up, and everything above the storm spoke of stability. Above the living creatures, the firmament, or canopy, was described as 'the colour of an awesome crystal, stretched out over their heads', v. 22. Finally, above the canopy was the 'likeness of a throne', which was occupied by 'a likeness of the appearance of a man high above it', v. 26.

The impression that Ezekiel receives is that the scene is one of brightness, of brilliance. This display of the Lord's glory was spectacular in colour and appearance. Ezekiel's attention is drawn toward something that appeared to him to be fire and what was like 'the appearance of a rainbow in a cloud on a rainy day', v. 28.

Typically, throughout scripture fire speaks of God's justice and holiness. Ezekiel sees the One of whom it could be said, 'thy God is a consuming fire'. This reminds us of the burning holiness of God. However, along

with this, the rainbow is a sign of God's grace. God's throne is a throne of government, but it is also a throne of grace.

Ezekiel had several other glimpses of God's glory. One took place on a wide level plain, 'the glory of the Lord stood there, like the glory I saw by the river Chebar', Ezek. 3. 23. Another happened when he was in his own house; he saw a variation of what took place in chapter 1. This time there was no reference to the rainbow and the accompanying suggestion of grace. He could report, 'behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there like the vision I saw in the plain', 8. 4.

In chapters 10 and 11, Ezekiel sees the glory of the Lord in association with the temple and the city of Jerusalem. The glory is seen leaving the temple, and, then, at the east gate of the temple. Finally, it is seen on the mountain on the east side of the city, the Mount of Olives. This is a journey reminiscent of the Lord Jesus as He left the temple, the city, and finally ascended from the same place on the Mount of Olives.

Ezekiel does not see that glory again until later in the book, when he says, 'the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east', Ezek. 43. 2. He goes on to say, 'the glory of the Lord came into the temple by way of the gate that faces toward the east. The Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of the Lord filled the temple', 43. 4, 5. This anticipates the return of the Lord Jesus to the Mount of Olives and His entrance into the city and finally the temple.

The theme of God's glory permeates the book and stands as bookends

for all that transpires in between. It is this display of God's glory that allows Ezekiel, and us who read this text, to make sense of all the judgements that are uttered in this book. The events are not arbitrary, but under God's control, and with the goal of His glory.

Ezekiel's response to the vision in chapter 1 verse 28 and in chapter 3 verse 23 was to fall on his face. His posture spoke of humility, and of worship. As a precursor to his commission, he gets a glimpse of the government and glory of God. His response is to worship! From that posture, the Spirit of God picks him up and gives him a mission. Worship, once again, precedes work and witness for the Lord. This vision of glory would strengthen and sustain Ezekiel in a very difficult ministry.

What do these servants of God teach us today?

- A glimpse of God's glory should precede our work for God.
- Worship is the starting point, and, then, as in the case of Moses, our witness for the Lord will be effective.
- Isaiah and Ezekiel teach us that from the same starting point we should be able to persevere in difficult times and with a daunting task.

It must start with a desire like that of Moses who said, 'please show me Your glory', Exod. 33. 18. It must continue in the word of God, where believers behold 'as in a mirror the glory of the Lord', 2 Cor. 3. 18.

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The psalmist wrote, 'The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away', Ps. 90. 10. Whilst this is an obvious reference to the brevity of life it is particularly pertinent to the group of people with which this article is concerned. Humanly speaking, those in their seventies and eighties are nearer to death than those that are younger. Our task of evangelizing older people is perhaps more urgent than our activities with this group would suggest.

'In December 2009 the Office for National Statistics reported that the proportion of the UK population aged under 16 had dropped from 25% in 1971 to 19% in 2008. At the same time, the proportion aged 65 and over had risen to 16% compared to 13% in 1971. This trend is projected to continue. By 2031, 22% of the population will be aged 65 and over compared to 18% aged 16 or younger'.¹ Looking around many assemblies in the UK they are reflecting these profiling figures.

For many assemblies the declining numbers in fellowship coupled with the increasing age of members makes the continuation of a children's work difficult to sustain. Some have questioned the validity of a Sunday evening Gospel Meeting when no one from the community has attended in years.

These are just some of the factors that have led many churches to set up a regular work amongst Senior Citizens as part of their outreach activities. As the assembly may be made up of those over 50 it also provides an opportunity to invite those of their own generation along to a special meeting arranged for people of a similar age. However, if we have not thought about such a work, what do we need to do?

The Senior Citizens' Tea

1. Find a suitable day/time

We might assume Sunday to be the best day, but others find Saturday a fruitful opportunity to get people into

Working with Senior

the hall. It is important to explore what is best for those we are trying to reach and organize such meetings appropriately. Some have found that family commitments of those you are trying to reach can often conflict with the use of a Sunday. Alternatively, Easter and Christmas can be useful times to arrange a special tea.

2. Advertising

How to get the invitations out to the people can present a difficulty. Some have prepared their own flyers to take around homes. Those towns that have complexes of bungalows and flats which can be accessed to give out invitations may make the task of delivery easier for a small company of believers.

However, it is helpful to think about what methods can be used legitimately. The local newsagents, or small supermarkets, may offer free advertising in their shop window, particularly if they know that what you are 'offering' is a 'free event'. Similarly, some local newspapers offer free advertising space for such things in their column of 'diary dates'. Many churches have provided mobile phone numbers inviting readers to phone to 'book places' at the tea – always an encouragement if people think that places are limited!

One assembly has also been proactive in inviting members of other churches. The motive is not one of inter-denominational activity but, as the contributor put it, many people who attend church regularly are not saved. They need the gospel as much as anyone else!

Many assemblies have found the combination of a gospel meeting with a meal to follow a very good way of encouraging folks to come. It is a way of engaging in conversation and establishing links with senior citizens. As they get to know you and to appreciate the kindness that you show them, people begin to 'open up' and offer information which can be brought before the assembly for prayer. We should not underestimate the significance of a listening ear and

a caring heart! Equally, making known the gospel meeting each Sunday can ensure that those who come to the tea also come to the usual gospel meeting.

Whilst the teas that we offer are free, many of those who attend feel that they should contribute something. We may make no charge but it is important to be sensitive in order that our refusal to accept their kindness does not cause upset.

3. Transport

It is easy to assume that people will find their own way to the hall but some offer of transport is often desirable, bearing in mind that some older people find it difficult to get into the back of a car that has only two doors. Vehicle insurance ought to be checked too, to ensure that what you are doing doesn't conflict with the terms of your policy.

Some towns have a community transport facility and such organizations can supply minibuses and drivers to collect people. Obviously there will be a charge but, if numbers necessitate it, this may be a useful option to explore.

4. Access

Ease of access to the venue is essential. Some halls have steps and problems with ramp access and this could present problems in getting elderly folk into the hall. We must also consider those who may wish to come but require wheelchair access, halls should have addressed these matters under the Disability Discrimination Act regulations but, in some cases, this is not straightforward.²

The alternative might be to consider a venue elsewhere. Some bungalow and sheltered accommodation complexes have community centres as part of their facilities which will avoid the issue of accessibility.

5. Kitchen facilities

If you are intending to provide a meal as part of the outreach activity then proper kitchen facilities are essential. Certain foods will need to be kept



Citizens (1)

at an appropriate temperature. Refrigerators need to be big enough to store the food until it is ready to be served. Meat products are particularly prone to deteriorate in higher temperature environments. Ideally, it would be beneficial for some to attend a Food Hygiene course to ensure that such matters are properly covered.

Wherever possible it is important to be sensitive to the special dietary needs of people, as this is a further demonstration of our care for and interest in them. Adding that special touch of a favourite item of food can make a considerable impact on the person who attends and they can become your 'ambassadors' in inviting others!

6. Equipment

Working with senior citizens means we have to be properly equipped. Some form of amplification for the speaker is desirable. A mobile microphone linked to the hall's loop system is one option but alternatives may be better, especially if those attending do not wear hearing aids but still need the sound to be amplified!

If some of the hymns that those attending may remember from their childhood or school days are going to be sung, it will be necessary to have sufficient hymn books in large print. Senior Citizens Songbooks are available and some flexibility in copyright is also available for those who might wish to provide their own limited mix of traditional hymns in large print for this specific work.³

7. Contacts and visitation

A point of contact can be most useful so, if possible, provide a phone number that people can ring to request transport. Equally, it can enable you to develop a list of names, addresses, and phone numbers of the people who come and ensure that any further invitations can be personalized. There is nothing better than a personal invitation delivered by phone, or hand, to encourage someone to return to the meeting.

8. Presentation

Working with people unfamiliar with our expectations in relation to a 'gospel meeting' is interesting! They do not always sit quietly until we are ready to start. They meet someone they have not seen for a while and are prone to start a conversation. It is important to have a speaker with an understanding of the audience and the issues of life that they face. Similarly, the speaker needs to be prepared for things out of the ordinary – for example, if they ask what they intend to be a rhetorical question, they should expect an answer!

Whilst we might expect some older people to remember Bible stories and texts from their childhood, education, or church attendance, it is important to keep the gospel message simple. Having sinners who need a Saviour present in our meeting helps to refocus our preaching to meet the need of the moment!

Some assemblies have made good use of other aspects of gospel witness; for example, the use of personal testimonies of salvation can help to make the gospel and its effects personal and real. However, it is important to strike the right balance between the claims of the message and the means we use to bring sinners into contact with that message.

Endnotes

- 1 Source: <http://www.igd.com/index.asp?id=1&fid=1&sid=17&tid=0&folid=0&cid=100>
- 2 We hope to print an article on some of the issues of Health and Safety and Risk Assessment in a later issue of the magazine.
- 3 More information on this and similar matters relating to hymn copyright can be found at: <http://www.ccli.co.uk/>

This article has been compiled by the editor in consultation with a number of brethren who have contributed their experiences and ideas. The editor expresses particular thanks to Mark Bennett (Kirkby), George Clamp (Hemsworth), and Bob Wheatley (Higham Ferrers) for their input to this article.





UNVEILED - THE HISTORY OF THE KINGDOM

(iii) THE PARABLES OF THE COMPOSITION OF THE KINGDOM, vv.44-50 By

Parable No. 5 The Treasure, v. 44 – Israel (a believing remnant)

This is the first parable told exclusively to the disciples in the house. The house may be representative of the nation of Israel. The disciples represent a believing remnant of Israel. The believing remnant is a constituent part of the interim kingdom both before and after the church era. In addition, 'Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace', Rom. 11. 5. The passage quoted proves that even in the church era there is a believing remnant of Israel.

This parable is told to the disciples in private, the multitudes having been dismissed, v. 36.

The Symbolism

The church is never described as 'treasure' in the Bible. It is Israel that is identified as 'treasure'. 'Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a *peculiar treasure* unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine', Exod. 19. 5. When Peter uses similar imagery of the church he substitutes 'a peculiar people' for 'a peculiar treasure', 1 Pet. 2. 9.

'For the Lord hath chosen Jacob for himself, and Israel for *his peculiar treasure*', Ps. 135. 4. 'And they shall be mine . . . in that day when I make up my jewels', or '*special treasure*', Mal. 3. 17.

As to Israel being 'hid' in the field, i.e., the world, we know that ten tribes went into captivity to Assyria and two tribes to Babylon. The return that took place in stages involved a sizeable remnant from Babylon. Many chose to remain where they settled. Effectively, Israel was scattered among the Gentile nations.

When Messiah came to His own people, the population

of Palestine was predominantly of the two tribes referred to collectively as 'Judah'. They rejected Him at His first advent, just as Moses had been rejected when he first presented himself to the people centuries earlier. Nevertheless, notwithstanding their rejection, He sought them and secured them by purchasing the whole 'field' in which Israel was hidden.

The Seeker

If we are to maintain consistency of interpretation in this series of parables then the 'man' has to be the Son of Man.

The Sacrifice

'Goeth and selleth all that He hath and buyeth that field'.

The ownership of this world lay in the hands of the Creator. Satan appeared to usurp this authority. He took the Lord, during the temptation, to a high mountain. On offer were 'all the kingdoms of the world'. The price: bow down and worship me – Satan. The kingdoms of the world become the 'kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ' only as a result of Calvary. This is borne out in Revelation chapter 5 when Christ takes the title deeds of earth out of the Father's hand. Satan does not challenge for them,

for Christ takes them by right, in His character as 'a Lamb as it had been slain'. The world belongs to Christ by creation and by purchase.

He has not redeemed the field but he has purchased it, and at what great price! He 'emptied himself' and He 'gave himself' in order to buy the field and claim the treasure for Himself, 2 Cor. 5. 19; Col. 1. 20; 1 John 2. 2.

The joy is associated, not with the sacrifice He made but with the pleasure of obtaining what He had set His heart on – the treasure.

Similarly, but in a wider context, we read, 'Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God', Heb. 12. 2.

The Surprise

'He hideth'. Israel was 'hid' once again from AD70 to 1948, both nationally and politically. Indeed, she still remains hidden in the graveyard of the nations but will be resurrected metaphorically as depicted by Ezekiel in his writing about the Valley of Dry Bones, chapter 37. The division of the Nation from the days of Jeroboam and Rehoboam will also be healed. Ezekiel envisages the sceptres of Judah and Ephraim being joined together. Her festival of trumpets and Day of atonement will find the Nation recovered, redeemed and restored to the Lord and to the Land.

Israel has a brilliant future; she is the Lord's special treasure out of all the nations of the earth.

The parable of the treasure presents God's viewpoint of the kingdom of heaven incorporating a believing remnant of the Jewish nation.



Parable No 5	The Treasure	Israel (a believing remnant)
Parable No 6	The Pearl	The Church
Parable No 7	The Dragnet	Tribulation Saints

Parable No. 6 The Pearl, vv. 45-46 – The Church

If the treasure was hidden in the field, the pearl was found in the sea. The sea probably hints at the Gentile nations, Acts 15. 14.

The man, albeit a merchantman, I suggest represents the Lord Jesus Christ in His humanity. If the emphasis in the previous parable was upon the treasure, in this one the stress is upon the merchantman.

How He Searched!

He does not search for individual sinners here, as in 'the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost', Luke 19. 10. Rather, the search is for an outstanding pearl; 'Christ also loved the church', Eph. 5. 25. Here, the multiplicity of believers is seen in a single pearl, the church of the dispensation.

How He Succeeded!

'Found one pearl of great price'.

The pearl never appears on the page of Old Testament writings. The margin of Job chapter 28 verse 18 indicates that 'pearls' should read 'crystals'. Pearls were never of value to the Jews. The Assyrians (Gentiles) were among the first to recognize the worth of pearls. In the New Testament the pearl is mentioned only in the books of Matthew, 1 Timothy and Revelation. In the singular it occurs

only twice; here and in Revelation chapter 21 verse 21. In both these cases the context is the church.

A sovereign would take a precious pearl and mount it in his crown above his forehead or he would have it mounted in a brooch and pin it over his heart. Whether brow or bosom, the purpose was display; to show it off. The pearl of the church is close to the heart of Christ and will be displayed to a wondering universe as the recipient of 'the exceeding riches of his grace' in a future day.

The pearl is the product of a living creature, the oyster, and is linked with the sea. The church is the product of the living Christ and is linked with the Gentiles. The pearl is the product of the suffering of that living creature. Sand or grit enters the shell causing pain and suffering. The church is the product of the suffering of the living Christ even unto death. The pearl is formed when the suffering oyster covers the irritant with layer upon layer of nacre. This takes place unrecognized by the human eye. The church is built up generation upon generation, largely unnoticed by the world at large. The unity of the pearl distinguishes it from other precious gems. These are found in the earth and increase in

attractiveness and value when they are cut and polished. Not so the pearl. The church is a living organism wondrous in its unity – its beauty and value cannot be enhanced by human hand.

The church will be presented to Christ as a chaste virgin, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. Being one pearl of great price emphasizes its rarity, beauty and exclusivity. The church is the nearest and dearest of all companies in the affections of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the only one of its kind.

How He Secured it!

At infinite cost to Himself, the Lord paid the price upon Calvary to secure the church as His eternal complement. We are, wonder of all wonders, the complement of Him that filleth all in all! What a price He paid! What a privilege conveyed!



Parable No. 7 The Dragnet, vv. 47-50 – Tribulation Saints

The Medium – 'the sea'.

The fishing takes place not in rivers or lakes but in the sea, again, the hint of a Gentile context. This leads us to believe that the 'catch' is predominantly, if not exclusively, Gentile in character.

The Means – 'a net' i.e., dragnet.

A dragnet is that which envelops the catch and is used to draw the catch ashore. It represents the results of the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom.

During the Tribulation, the message preached is the gospel of the kingdom, Matt. 24. 14. The preachers will likely be the 144,000 Jewish males, Rev. 7. 4-8; 14. 1-5. The gospel of the kingdom was first preached by the disciples who declared, 'the kingdom of heaven is at hand'. The message heralded the presence of the King and the setting up of the Messianic kingdom during the millennium. When the King was rejected the kingdom was deferred, this period is sometimes called the interregnum. The parables of Matthew chapter 13 describe an

interim form of the kingdom during the interregnum. In contrast to the millennium, it is not a publicly manifested display but the kingdom in mystery. Where the church appears to be simultaneous with the kingdom, it is the gospel of the grace of God which is preached. The gospel of the kingdom will be resumed following the rapture of the church to glory. Believers of the church era are both members of the body of Christ, the church of the dispensation, **and** subjects of the kingdom of which Christ is King. The church and the kingdom are



distinct entities, however, and should not be confused.¹

As the treasure relates to the believing remnant of Israel and the pearl relates to the mainly Gentile composition of the church, so the dragnet illustrates the degree of blessing resulting from the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom during the Tribulation. This is the subject of Revelation chapter 7 verses 9-17, where mainly Gentile believers are seen to be the fruit of the work of the 144,000 sealed ones. The dragnet includes profession, for the good and bad, just and wicked are contrasted.

The Mixture

The net is full. The catch is separated on the basis of whether they are good or bad; just or wicked. The good are gathered into vessels; the bad are cast away. Just as in the parable of the mustard seed, so here we see the net is full due to the mixture of genuine and professors.

The Messenger-Angels

The angels come forth to separate

the good and the bad. They then sever the bad. The time note is 'at the end of the world', better the 'consummation of the age', when the Lord returns in company with His angels, Jude 14, 15, 'to execute judgement upon all that are ungodly'. A similar task for angels follows in the parable of the wheat and the tares which covers the whole period of this phase of the kingdom. The dragnet covers the period of the Tribulation. Both finish at the same point.

The linking of angels with judgement is to be found at the judgement of the living nations, Matt. 25. 31-33, and at the harvest and vintage judgements Rev. 14. 14-20. The angels are God's agents in assisting the judicial process following Christ's second advent, just prior to the inauguration of the messianic kingdom on earth.

The Misery

Those who were 'cast away' are now 'cast into' the furnace

of fire. What a contrast between the furnace of fire that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego experienced and this one! They knew the presence and preservation of the Son of God who was with them in the furnace. They escaped unscathed.

In the parable, the wicked are alienated from the Son of God. Their furnace is not one of temporary but eternal duration. They know what it is to be abandoned by God in a realm of darkness and unutterable loneliness. Their punishment produces 'wailing and gnashing of teeth'. What interminable misery!



(iii) THE PARABLE OF THE CONSTRAINT OF THE KINGDOM

Parable No. 8 The Householder, vv. 51-52

Greater Revelation, v. 51

The Lord has discoursed on the parables of the kingdom of heaven. Mysteries have been revealed that were unheard of previously. The disciples are the privileged recipients of revelations which could never have been envisaged.

The Lord now quizzes them, 'Have ye understood all these things'? Note,

not simply have you heard all these things but have you *understood* them. Israel in response to the giving of the law chorused, 'All that the Lord hath spoken we will do', Exod. 19. 8. They then proceeded to break the law. In response to their comprehension of the parables, the disciples chorus, 'Yea, Lord'. We can only hope that their understanding of these momentous truths was clearer than their grasp of the Lord's teaching about His death and resurrection!

The response, 'Yea, Lord', occurs seven times in the New Testament and will repay study.

Greater Obligation, v. 52

Greater light brings with it greater responsibility. The new order of scribes instructed in this teaching about the kingdom, should be able to draw on the treasure store of spiritual truth in order to teach others these staggering unveilings

given by the Saviour. They should be able to appreciate Old Testament prophecies concerning the future millennial kingdom **and** draw on the new teachings of Christ regarding the current aspect of the kingdom.

The challenge to us is do we understand all these things? Are we capable of delving into the storehouse of scripture to teach others? Do we accept the principle that the greater the revelation of God from His word, the greater our obligation to do as the Lord instructed the disciples?

Can we say, in all honesty, 'Yes Lord, we understand'?

Endnotes

- 1 Passages identifying present-day believers with the kingdom are: Rom. 14. 17; 1 Cor. 4. 20; Col. 1. 13; 4. 11; Rev. 1. 9.

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1 John chapter 4

Children of God: Test – the Person of Christ, 4. 1-6

This section completes the second cycle of the letter, in which John issues a clear call for discernment. Christians must not be gullible, accepting without question every teaching and teacher who comes along. Even if a person seems highly gifted, we must enquire what spirit is motivating him. He may even demonstrate mysterious powers, but there is a crucial distinction to be drawn between the *supernatural* and the *divine*.¹ Satan can produce 'lying wonders', 2 Thess. 2. 9; supernatural indeed, but certainly not divine! In chapter 3, the central issue in relation to the family is *origin* – the origin of the child of God, and the origin of the man of the world. This final section keeps the focus on the origin of the spirits animating the prophets and teachers, thus the true are 'from God', vv. 1, 2, 4 ESV; the false teachers are 'not from God', vv. 3, 6 ESV.²

Warning: false prophets active in the world

1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

Test: their doctrine of Christ

2 By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, 3 and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.

Resource: the divine Indwelling

4 You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. 5 They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them. 6 We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, v. 1. John continues his loving appeal, this time emphasizing that the Christian needs to be marked by wariness, especially in relation to teaching. We must not be naive, even when faced with miracles. Some might think it unspiritual to 'test the spirits', but the New Testament directs, 'Test all things; hold fast what is good', 1 Thess. 5. 21. The reason is that **many false prophets have gone out into the world**. 'Prophets' suggests that they present their teachings as new revelations. The Holy Spirit graciously invites us to test Him; He welcomes our examination of His ministry, and has nothing to fear!

How are ordinary believers to identify what is wholesome, deriving from the Spirit of God? Here is the test we should apply:³ **Every spirit⁴ that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God.** The focus is on the reality of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. False teachers speculated that the man Jesus had somehow become temporarily linked to 'the Christ' – considered to be some spirit being. But deity and humanity have become forever united in Jesus Christ. So the test for the prophets is clear: ask them whether Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. This test exposes the heresies of Docetism and Cerinthus.

Verse 3. For good measure, John also states the negative, for there can be no room for ambiguity on this vital matter. Those who deny the true and *permanent* humanity of Jesus⁵ are displaying the spirit of Antichrist. In chapter 3 verse 10 such people were exposed by their *conduct*, here it is their *spiritual claims* that identify them.

There is no need for discouragement, however, for the believer enjoys the indwelling of the Spirit of God. Further, teachers of error can be identified by *the type of people who listen to them*. To the men and women of the world, the ideas of sceptics seem completely reasonable because they are influenced by the same spirit, **they speak as of the world, and the world hears them**. How readily people who reject the true gospel flock to hear perversions of it! **We are of God.** John writes as an *apostle*, carrying the authority of Christ Himself, Matt. 10. 40. **He who knows God hears us.** The genuine believer will always treasure the teaching of the apostles, the very foundation of the church, Eph. 2. 20.

So, just as Cycle 1 ended with warnings against *antichrists*, Cycle 2 here closes with the exposure of the *spirit* of Antichrist.

Cycle 3 - Revelation of the love of God, 4. 7 – 5. 1

The third Cycle of the letter is again concerned with revelation, this time the surpassing revelation of *the love of God*. John first identifies the source of love in God, vv. 7-13. He gives us a doctrinal test, 4. 15. Up to this point in the Letter, love has been presented as a duty based on the example of Christ, 3. 16, but now we find a deeper motive – to love is to express God's *nature*.

Love of God: its Source, 4. 7-13

God is invisible, 4. 12, so how can human beings get to know what God is like? The answer is that God dwells in all believers, and as a result of that indwelling we love. Thus, the nature of the unseen God can be seen in the lives of Christians.

John begins with an exhortation to love, v. 7, and identifies the source of love in God. Verses 9 and 10 spell out the supreme revelation of the love of God in the mission and sacrifice of the Son of God. Verse 11 repeats the exhortation, and verses 12 and 13 explain what really is happening when we love one another.

7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9 In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us. 13 By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.

Love is of ('from' ESV) God. Note the great emphasis on **God** in these verses; John traces all displays of love by believers to the prior and perfect love of God. God is here identified as the inexhaustible resource of love. **Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God** means that we are equipped to love by the new birth, and sharing the very nature of God. And if, at times, we find it difficult to love some people, we acknowledge our deficiency and gladly remember that God delights to pour out His love in our hearts, Rom. 5. 5, and indeed love others *through* us. Recall that 'love' is not mere natural fondness, such as an unbeliever might feel towards a friend. The exercise of love is not an 'optional extra' for the Christian, for **he who does not love does not know God, for God is love.**

In this (i.e., what follows) **the love of God was manifested toward us, v. 9.** The love of God has been made visible and real in history by the mission of the Son: **God has sent His only begotten Son into the world.** The initiative is entirely God's, not confined to a prophetic message, but God has sent His own one and only Son, His Beloved, cp. Mark 12. 6. The verb 'has sent' beautifully underscores the *continuing* love of God's heart towards a perishing world. The wonderful objective is **that we might live through Him.** Yet, difficulties and challenges confronted that mission. We did not love God; our sins posed an impassable barrier to acceptance by the God who is holy. The greatness of God's love is seen in (1) the One who loved – God (2) the uniqueness of the One sent – His Son (3) the purpose of the mission, and (4) the vast sacrificial cost of achieving it.

In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins, v. 10. God's love is first and spontaneous. We discover here the infinite cost to God in loving us. Christ experienced bitter

dereliction in suffering the wrath of God, in order that God could righteously enter into fellowship with us, cp. Rom. 3. 24-26.

Beloved, v. 11. This is the sixth and final time this term is used. What John has been describing is no mere motivational talk, it carries for us the weightiest obligations:⁶ **if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.** We might well doubt our ability to respond worthily to such mighty love, but happily the following verses point to the sublime reality of God indwelling us by His Spirit. Verses 12 and 13 explain what is really happening when we love one another.

No one has seen (beheld RV) God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, v. 12. The God, whom no one by gazing or contemplating has ever seen, is permanently resident in those who love. The thought of permanence – 'abiding' – is prominent in verses 12 to 16.

Moreover, **His love has been perfected in us.** 'Perfected' in this context means that God's distinctive love, vv. 8-9, has now reached its goal, come to *full growth* and expression in *our* hearts and towards others – a most significant result.⁷

By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit, v. 13. The instinct imparted by the Spirit to love one another, is how we know that we are abiding in Him. Our union with God is two-way: we in Him and He in us, sealed by the gift of His Spirit, cp. 3. 24b; Rev. 3. 20.

Love of God: Test

14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Saviour of the world. 15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. 16 And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.

Love of God: its perfecting in us

17 Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. 18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. 19 We love Him because He first loved us.

Love of God: Test – love for the children of God

20 If someone says, 'I love God', and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? 21 And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.

Verse 14 shows how the result in verse 13 has come about: **we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Saviour of the world.** In contrast to the statement of verse 12, John

has come to see (or *behold*, contemplate) what the invisible God is like, ultimately at Calvary, as expressed by the apostle Paul in Galatians chapter 2, verse 20; therefore, it is the focus of his witness. But the blessing is not limited to apostolic eyewitnesses, for **whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God**. But it is not enough to know these things, one must believe and *confess* Christ as Saviour and Son of God, cp. Rom. 10. 9. Thus, verses 14-16 contain a vital test, this time doctrinal: false teachers were denying Christ's Sonship and Saviourhood.

And we have known and believed the love that God has for us, v. 16. 'Sound faith is intelligent, sound knowledge is believing', PLUMMER. Jesus prayed, 'that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them', John 17. 26; here is its glorious answer. **God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God** (add 'abides' ESV) **in him**. John repeats the great statement 'God is love',⁸ cp. v. 8, and puts impressive emphasis on His *abiding* union with us.

Love of God: its perfecting in us, 4. 17-19

Love has been perfected among us in this, v. 17: John goes on to specify the purpose and result of our love: **that we may have boldness in the day of judgment**. The maturing of God's love in us instils confidence in the believer in view of the coming day of judgement.⁹ The believer who knows the reality of the love of God has no need to fear the approach of that day, but 'shall not come into judgment', John 5. 24. How can we be so bold? **Because as He (Christ) is, so are we in this world**. As He is the risen Son of God, so we too are God's beloved children. God sees us in association with Christ, accepted in the Beloved One, cp. Eph. 1. 6. **There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear**. Fear¹⁰ and love exclude each other: the more of the one, the less of the other. There is a reverential fear (or 'awe') of God which is entirely appropriate, 1 Pet. 1. 17, but not the unnerving fear referred to here. Peace of mind, rather than fear and torment, should mark the Christian, **because fear involves torment**. Love moves us towards others in a spirit of self-sacrifice; fear holds us back in uncertainty and self-preservation: **he who fears has not been made perfect in love**.

We love¹¹ because He first loved us, v. 19. Our love, whether to God or man, is possible only because of His prior love to us. Indeed, our love owes its very *origin* to God, v. 7. If we withhold love to our fellows for fear that it may not be returned, we can be emboldened by remembering that God's love to us knew no such restriction!¹²

Love of God: (Social test) love for the children of God, 4. 20-21

Verse 20. The exercise of love towards our brothers provides a robust social test of Christian profession:

If someone¹³ says, 'I love God', and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? The brother **whom he has seen** is there before his very eyes, perhaps in a state of visible need: to refuse compassion and tenderness to him completely contradicts profession. Sadly, eloquent expressions of devotion to God have been known to coexist with remarkably unloving attitudes towards His people, something which we may be sure He will not overlook, cp. Acts 9. 2-4!

And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also, v. 21. John clinches his argument for the exercise of brotherly¹⁴ love: it is a matter of obedience to God's binding commandment, reaffirmed by our Lord, John 13. 34. In the Old Testament, love to God and love to one's fellow man were two sides of the same coin, Deut. 6. 5; Lev. 19. 18; cp. Luke 10. 27.

Endnotes

- ¹ 'To equate the supernatural with the divine is folly, a grievous error', G. G. FINDLAY.
- ² This is a further pointed example of opposites, see Chapter 1 endnote 12.
- ³ It is necessarily a *doctrinal* test because it tests a *message*.
- ⁴ Spirit' means here one in whom a spirit is manifest or embodied, hence one actuated by a spirit, either divine or demoniacal, J. THAYER.
- ⁵ The shorter form of the text is to be preferred here, 'and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already' ESV.
- ⁶ In addition to 4. 11, John identifies the following obligations: 'He who says he abides in Him *ought* himself also to walk just as He walked', 2. 6; 'By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also *ought* to lay down our lives for the brethren', 3. 16; 'We therefore *ought* to receive such, that we may become fellow workers for the truth', 3 John 8.
- ⁷ This does not mean that we will always *feel* loving; we surely know in practice that we don't love as we ought! The old corrupt nature in the believer is sadly capable of all manner of negative feelings towards others. But John maintains that the very *fact* that we have the impulse to love one another is an objective proof of the fruition of God's love in our experience.
- ⁸ This is not to be misconstrued that God is *only* love, and used to dismiss the reality that He is also a God of justice and holiness. Rather, we see the full extent and depth of His love in that it is fully compatible with, and comprehends, all other aspects of His nature.
- ⁹ For the term 'day of judgment', see Matt. 10. 15; 11. 22, 24; 12. 36; 2 Pet. 2. 9; 3. 7.
- ¹⁰ This type of fear is not to be confused with the wholesome fear of God commended frequently in scripture, Deut. 10. 12; 1 Pet. 1. 17; 2. 17, 18; 3. 2, 15. It should be noted that the English word 'fear' has undergone change over the centuries, and its significance is more restricted in modern usage than in the seventeenth century. 'Reverence' would often be a closer modern equivalent when describing the proper attitude to God.
- ¹¹ 'Him' is to be omitted on textual grounds, see e.g., ESV, RSV, as unduly narrowing the scope. 'It is a later addition of scribes or editors who felt that an explicit object was necessary', F. F. BRUCE.
- ¹² As Augustine (4th Cent.) described Christ's love for His church, 'He loved her foul, that He might make her fair'.
- ¹³ Cp. 'if a man say', see 1 John 1. 6, 8, 10; 2. 4, 6, 9.
- ¹⁴ Love of fellow Christians does not of course exhaust the Christian's obligation to love! Paul wrote, 'Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us *do good to all* [my italics], especially to those who are of the household of faith', Gal 6. 10. In response to a lawyer's question, 'And who is my neighbour?', Christ's parable of the Good Samaritan teaches that our love should embrace all those who stand in need of assistance, Luke 10. 30-37.



THE WORK IN MOLDOVA By MATTHEW HILLIER

Moldova is situated between Ukraine and Romania. It was part of the Soviet Union before gaining independence in 1992. It has a population of around 3.6 million and is often considered to be one of the poorest countries in Europe. The official language is Romanian.

Beginnings

In 2000 we began to make regular visits to Moldova with several Romanian brethren who were working with the assemblies there. At that time there were about fifteen assemblies spread throughout the country. Most were located in villages in rural areas. The Lord gave the opportunity to preach and teach at these assemblies, and also to help practically with some of the needs of His people. Around the same time we started a Bible Course work in Romania. Through the distribution of calendars, and invitations in letterboxes, prisons and many other places, people were invited to receive a Bible and basic Bible Correspondence Course.

Move to Moldova

By 2007 the Bible Course work - known as the Postal Bible School - in Moldova had grown to the point that it was difficult for us to continue to run the work from Romania. Some local Christians in Moldova agreed to become involved and in late 2007 we moved our office to Moldova. The Postal Bible School now has about 1,400 active participants. The office is located in the village of Zirnesti. New participants are added each month. In addition to marking the courses and answering questions workers regularly visit the villages where participants are located to meet with them in person. We continue to work on the translation of a number of books into the Romanian, Russian, and Armenian languages. These include a number of helpful teaching books by William MacDonald, booklets like *Christ in the vessel* by C. H. Mackintosh, and gospel material, such as gospel calendars.

Work in Zirnesti

In 2010 the Lord enabled us to buy a house and land in the village of Zirnesti to establish a base for the work in Moldova. In 2011 a dormitory building, with thirty beds, was constructed to provide additional accommodation for visitors who come to help with ministries, such as children's camps, the soup kitchen, or with construction work. We have

been regularly encouraged by teams from Australia, Spain, and Romania. In 2011 the first Summer Children's Camp was held in Zirnesti. Around 200 children attended, most from non-Christian families. During the 2012 camps it was encouraging to see an increase in the number of children attending.

In July 2012 gospel meetings were held in the village. Invitations were distributed to each resident of the village and on the first Saturday around sixty people attended. The following week the number increased to around eighty. There is much openness among people to discuss spiritual matters, and some started asking for more regular meetings.

In September 2012 the Lord enabled us to start gathering as an assembly in Zirnesti. The basement of the House of Culture is being used for the meetings. It is ideally located in the centre of the village. It can seat around eighty people comfortably, and we trust that many will continue to attend the gospel meetings held every Sunday evening at 5.00 p.m.

Provision of a building

In Moldova there are many spiritual and material needs. Our primary objective is to share the gospel. However, we have also seen the Lord open opportunities to help with some of the material needs of the people. For a number of years we have been distributing potatoes and firewood in the autumn to needy Christian families and the elderly to help them prepare for the winter. For many impoverished families this assistance is essential for their survival in the ice-cold winter months.

In February this year we started the Bethesda Soup Kitchen in Zirnesti, which provides around fifty elderly

people with a hot meal each day. Most have no one else to care for them. In the same month we heard that a five storey apartment block in Zirnesti was for sale. The asking price was more than twice what we were able to pay. However, we offered what we could afford and, to our amazement, the owner accepted our offer!

The building will be known as the Bethesda Christian Centre. In the building we plan to establish a medical clinic, a thirty-bed nursing home, a soup kitchen, and a coffee and bookshop. The building will also have other facilities, such as commercial kitchens (to provide meals for the soup kitchen, nursing homes, summer camps, etc.), rooms for children's meetings, English classes, and other outreach activities, a place where local Christians from across Moldova can come together for Bible study conferences, and accommodation for visitors, teams, and workers.

In preparation for these ministries there is much work to do on the building, and we look to the Lord to provide the labourers and materials. Since we have started sharing information about this project in various assemblies, we have been greatly encouraged by the number of medical professionals, builders, and other volunteers who have expressed a desire to come (short or long term) and give their time to serve at the Centre. We pray that the Centre will be a testimony to the Lord Jesus in Moldova. We also pray that it will lead to many new contacts for the gospel and see many added to the assembly. We would value your prayer for this work.

For further information on the work in Moldova and the development of the new centre visit the web site at www.cmiaid.org.



Gospel meeting in Zimesti





The history of Israel's northern kingdom was one of rapid spiritual deterioration, so that by the time Elijah spoke to King Ahab its sin had become deplorable. Immediately after the division of the nation into north and south, Jeroboam the son of Nebat introduced a counterfeit religious system in which golden calves acted as visible representations of Jehovah, 1 Kgs. 12. 25-33. Jeroboam was so bad that it was said to him, 'Thou . . . hast done evil above all that were before thee', 14. 8, 9. And, after Jeroboam, every northern king without exception was godless. Bloody violence broke out as forceful personalities vied for power, so that within fifty years of Jeroboam taking control of the northern kingdom Ahab sat on the throne, a member of its fourth ruling family.

Ahab's greatest sin was attempting to replace the worship of Jehovah with the worship of Baal, rearing 'up an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he had built in Samaria', 1 Kgs. 16. 32. Baal worship involved temple prostitution, and so, by introducing the worship of this pagan deity, Ahab degraded the nation morally as well as religiously. The record of Hiel rebuilding the cursed city of Jericho at terrible cost – '[laying] the foundation thereof in Abiram his firstborn, and [setting] up the gates thereof in his youngest son Segub', v. 34 – emphasized just how rotten the nation had become.

Several factors contributed to Israel's downward spiral into idolatry and immorality. Any nation or individual who deliberately abandons the true worship of God opens the flood-gates to every kind of error and apostasy. Jeroboam's introduction of a new way to worship Jehovah began this corrupting process. Secondly, the northern kings appear to have been captivated by outward beauty. While Jeroboam began to reign at the city of Shechem, he soon moved his capital to Tirzah, 1 Kgs. 14. 17, a city renowned for its beauty, S. of S. 6. 4. Baasah, 1 Kgs. 15. 33, Elah, 16. 8, Zimri, v. 15, and even Omri, in the early years of his reign, all ruled from Tirzah, v. 23. Thirdly,

Studies in the life of 'The Lord God of Israel liveth', 1 Kgs. 16. 29 - 17. 24

the constant friction between the northern and southern kingdoms, as well as the internal struggle for power, destabilized the spiritual life of the northern kingdom.¹ Fourthly, the northern kingdom made alliances with foreign powers, probably to promote trade. The biblical text makes a clear link between the marriage of Ahab to 'Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and . . . [him serving] Baal, and [worshipping] him', v. 31. Jezebel was a wicked woman who was addicted to witchcrafts,² and who stirred up Ahab to 'sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord', 21. 25. If Christians are to avoid such spiritual decline in their own lives they must do the very opposite of what the northern Israelite kingdom did. They must cling tenaciously to God's truth, 'walk by faith, not by sight', 2 Cor. 5. 7, maintain unity amongst believers, Eph. 4. 3, and avoid unequal yokes with the ungodly at all costs, 2 Cor. 6. 14.

God often allows men a free hand to pursue the pathway of sin. But He will eventually intervene. The powerful ministry of Elijah the prophet was God's intervention to call Israel back from its corruption. Elijah, whose name means 'God is Jehovah', proved to Israel, through his words and mighty miracles, that 'the Lord God of Israel liveth', 1 Kgs. 17. 1. When Elijah called down fire on Mount Carmel, he convinced the people that 'the Lord, he is the God', 18. 39. Elijah's miracles authenticated his message. It was when he had raised the widow's son to life that she exclaimed, 'Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth', 17. 24. His miracles also



exposed the folly of worshipping Baal, to whom was attributed the power to create fire, to produce rain and food, and to induce fertility and child bearing.³ The drought and famine, the fire from heaven, and the raising of the widow's son all showed that Baal was powerless when confronted by Jehovah, Israel's true God, see Jer. 14. 22. The drought exhibited God's outrage against Israel's sins, especially Baal worship,⁴ and fulfilled prior warnings to Israel for failure to 'observe to do all his commandments', Deut. 28. 15. There was also a spiritual significance to Elijah's miracles. For example, when God removed Elijah from public service for three-and-a-half years of drought, Luke 4. 25, God was essentially taking from Israel the opportunity to hear His words. And so, at the same time as the physical famine, there was a spiritual famine 'of hearing the words of the Lord', Amos 8. 11. Furthermore, Elijah's safe keeping by the brook Cherith, and then in the home of a Gentile widow while hunted by King Ahab, foreshadowed God's preservation of godly Jews during the tribulation, when they will be banned from trading and intensely persecuted, see Rev. 13. 16, 17. In those days God-fearing Gentiles will, at great personal risk, shelter godly Jews.⁵ The raising of the widow's son anticipated God's future resurrection of the nation to newness of life.⁶

Out of total obscurity Elijah appeared suddenly on the scene, his words striking 'the ungodly like lightning and flames of fire to avenge the honour of the Lord of Sabaoth'.⁷ But God had been preparing him for many years. Living in the rugged terrain of Gilead in Transjordan would have developed in Elijah a hardy disposition, equipping him to confront King Ahab. We too serve in a hostile scene, which

ah⁽¹⁾

By **JEREMY GIBSON**

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God can use to develop within us spiritual fortitude, 2 Tim. 2. 3. Having had his prayer life shaped by the law of God, which warned Israel that one of the consequences of disobedience would be drought,⁸ Elijah prayed earnestly.⁹ It is by engaging in private prayer that we can have true power in public. Elijah also spoke about the Lord God of Israel 'before whom I stand', 1 Kgs. 17. 1. This sense that God watched his every move would have been a great impetus to live a holy life, which would in turn have given Elijah lion-like courage.¹⁰

After this amazing display of boldness in confronting King Ahab, Elijah was immediately commanded to go to the brook Cherith, vv. 2-7. The seclusion of the brook served a number of vital functions. It separated Elijah from the surrounding moral depravity while protecting him from harm, see 18. 10. It allowed him to be alone with the Lord, as he prepared for his next important task, and it seriously tested Elijah's faith. Far from the limelight, Elijah now found himself dependent upon God for all his needs. Although ravens are highly intelligent birds, they feed on carrion and were deemed ceremonially unclean.¹¹ Nevertheless, in a wonderful display of His power over creation, God used ravens to provide food for His prophet every morning and evening. And God did this without any chance of detection, because no one would suspect or follow wild birds in their search for Elijah. Even the brook tested Elijah's faith, as each day it grew smaller. How often God guides His people one step at a time, providing sufficient without surplus, so engendering greater dependence on Him. It was only after the brook dried up that Elijah received fresh guidance from the Lord, vv. 7, 8. Elijah's safe keeping also ensured that the drought was long, because

if found sooner he could have been pressurized into praying for rain.

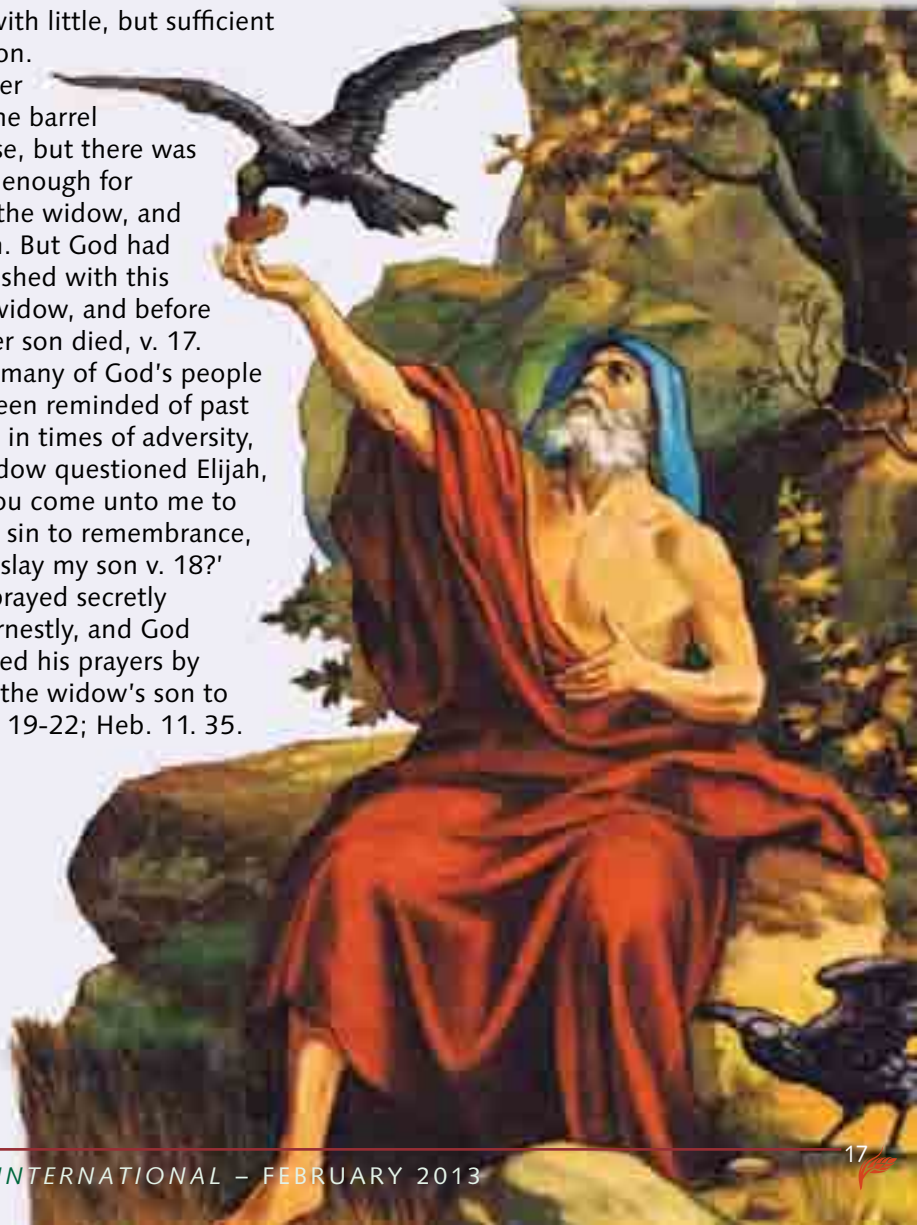
The name Zarephath comes from a root Hebrew word meaning 'refinement' (J. Strong). It was at Zarephath, a city in the region of Zidon, that God tested Elijah's faith still further, as well as that of the widow, because 'whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth', Heb. 12. 6. It was a test for Elijah even to go to Zarephath, for although it was situated in territory allotted to the tribe of Asher,¹² a tribe to which Moses promised oil,¹³ it was also from this area that Jezebel came and Baal worship had sprung up. Many widows were in Israel at that time but God directed Elijah to this Gentile widow who, despite living in extreme poverty, believed in the God of Israel, vv. 9, 10, 12.¹⁴ God tested the widow. Would she give 'up the certain for the uncertain, because she trusted the word of the Lord'?¹⁵ Before the provision kicked in she had to first give to God's servant, thus honouring God. But God showed His faithfulness again with little, but sufficient provision. He never filled the barrel or cruise, but there was always enough for Elijah, the widow, and her son. But God had not finished with this godly widow, and before long her son died, v. 17. Just as many of God's people have been reminded of past failures in times of adversity, this widow questioned Elijah, 'Art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son v. 18?' Elijah prayed secretly and earnestly, and God answered his prayers by raising the widow's son to life, vv. 19-22; Heb. 11. 35.

The miracle enhanced her faith which had been tried so severely, v. 24.

Endnotes

- 1 1 Kgs. 14. 30; 15. 16, 32.
- 2 2 Kgs. 9. 22.
- 3 Harris R. L., Archer G. L., Waltke B. K., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1980, pg. 120.
- 4 1 Kgs. 16. 33; 22. 53.
- 5 Matt. 25. 34-40.
- 6 Ezek. 37. 1-14.
- 7 Keil C. F., Delitzsch F., *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Hendrickson Publishers, reprinted 1996, 3 pg.162.
- 8 Lev. 26. 19; Deut. 11. 16, 17; 28. 23, 24.
- 9 Jas. 5. 17.
- 10 Prov. 28. 1.
- 11 Lev. 11. 15.
- 12 Josh. 19. 28.
- 13 Deut. 33. 24.
- 14 Luke 4. 25, 26.
- 15 Keil C. F., Delitzsch F., *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Hendrickson Publishers, reprinted 1996, 3, pg.167.

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The passage opens with 'wherefore' which refers the reader back to the last section of chapter 3. The coming exhortation towards two disagreeing sisters in the assembly is issued in the light of their heavenly citizenship, the coming of the Lord Jesus, and the glorious transformation that will fit Christians for eternally dwelling with God in the new heavens and new earth, Phil. 3. 20-21. The exhortation to Euodias and Syntyche, followed by related instructions on prayer and ethics, are rooted in the believer's identity as part of a community of saints actuated by Christ's resurrection power.

A Spoonful of Sugar

Before addressing the problem, Paul's pastoral heart overflows in love towards the Philippian saints; twice he calls them 'beloved', and also refers to them as his 'longed for brethren', v. 1. The first term is a cognate of the highest biblical word for love – *agape*; it is a strong affection emulating God's heart. One commentator describes it as 'a love that is deep-seated, self-sacrificing, thorough, intelligent, and purposeful, a love in which the entire personality takes part'.¹ The second descriptor he uses is a strong term, expressing heartfelt desire. As MOULE elaborates, 'The word occurs here only in the New Testament, but the cognate verb occurs 1. 6, 2. 26, and cognate nouns Rom. 15. 23; 2 Cor. 7. 7, 11. The address here is full of deep personal tenderness, and of longing desire to revisit Philippi'.² Finally, in language reminiscent of his description of the Thessalonian assembly, 1 Thess. 2. 19-20, he calls them his 'joy and crown'. Joy is a frequent theme in this letter, and one may easily see that the apostle's enjoyment is bound up with the Philippians' spiritual welfare. 'Crown' is the *stephanos* – the laurel wreath given to victorious athletes – as opposed to the *diadema* – the royal crown of monarchs. WITHERINGTON

Philippians: The Joy and Suffering

Chapter 4 verses 1-4: CLOSING EXHORTATION

III elucidates the scene well,

'In finishing this appeal, Paul twice calls the Philippians his beloved (*agapeto*), speaking of what they are to him now, but he also calls them his crown and joy, speaking of what they will be at the day of Christ's return. Paul envisions a grand celebration, perhaps like that at the end of the Olympic games, where the victors are given their wreaths and there is much rejoicing over what has been accomplished by those who have run and successfully finished their races'.³

These opening remarks demonstrate the deep love that Paul characteristically felt for other Christians – especially for those who were his children in the faith. His appeals and rebukes stem from his love for them in their mutual life in the Lord. Like his first exhortation in the book, Phil. 1. 27, he next exhorts them to 'so stand fast in the Lord', v. 1. In place of 'so' the *English Standard Version* renders it 'thus' and, clearer still, the *New American Standard Bible* has 'in this way'. In other words, they are to stand firm as they await the Lord's return. EADIE expands the thought, 'To stand, or stand fast, in the Lord, is neither to wander out of Him, or even to waver in connection with Him, but to remain immovable in fellowship with Him – to live in Him without pause – to walk in Him without digression – to love Him without rival – and serve Him without compromise'.⁴ MOULE adds, 'The Christian is never to stand still, as to growth and service; ever to stand fast, as to faith, hope, and love'.⁵

Helps the Medicine go down

The discord between two prominent

sisters in the assembly is implied, rather than explicitly stated. It is a serious problem nonetheless, as MOTYER pointedly observes, 'The division of Christians is the sin of fratricide'.⁶ Instead of dwelling on the unedifying details of the rupture, Paul attacks the root problem by prescribing this remedy, 'Be of the same mind in the Lord', v. 2. The antidote to discord among believers is having the Christ-like mind which is spoken of in chapter 2 verses 5-11. If they put their fellow Christian first

and abased themselves as the Lord did, then their differences would rapidly fade into oblivion. One writer asserts that 'Each is reminded of her true sphere in the Lord, and that all strife ends in submission to His will. This is the secret of harmony'.⁷ IRONSIDE passionately declares, 'Alas, that we so little realize this, and are often so insistent on what seems to us exceedingly important truth, when nothing vital is at stake, while a brother or sister equally honest and earnest may fail to see things as we see them; and, at the judgment-seat of Christ, it may be manifested that, after all, they, and not we, were right, or perhaps that both were wrong'.⁸

Even in identifying their problem, Paul keeps in mind their past service ('which laboured with me in the gospel', v. 2) and their future status ('whose names are written in the book of life'). Of course, this last phrase refers to all of the unnamed fellow labourers, as if to say, 'I won't enumerate them all in this letter, but the Lord knows them that are His, and being inscribed in His book of life is what ultimately matters', see Luke 10. 20. These two sisters are included in that number, whose salvation rests secure in Christ – as evidenced by the presence of their names in that book.



Bringing the Furtherance of the Gospel Part 13

SANTS: ON CHRISTIAN UNITY AND JOY

The apostle never loses sight of what they are in Christ; thus, he is able to speak the truth in love to them, and not grow impatient or overindulgent towards them. Their problem gives rise to an excellent display of the Christian life, so eloquently depicted in these words:

'[the passage] unfolds in one sentence after another the manifestation here below of the eternal life in all its holy loveliness. It invites Euodia, and Syntyche, and us with them, to the sight of what the believer is called to be, and may be, day by day, as he rejoices in the Lord, and recollects His presence, and tells Him everything as it comes, and so lives "in rest and quietness," deep in His peace; and finds his happy thoughts occupied not with the miseries of self-esteem and self-assertion, but with all that is pure and good, in the smile of the God of peace'.⁹

At least one other spiritual brother in the assembly is also enlisted to help them achieve this reconciliation, v. 2. Some Bible teachers hold that the Greek term translated 'yokefellow' is actually a proper name, 'Syzygus'. They contend that as in the case of Onesimus, Philem. 11, there is a word play on this brother's name. There seems to be little extrabiblical evidence for this name, however, and the KJV and most other reliable translations opt for translating it as a generic description of one of the apostle's co-workers. In any case, this 'true yokefellow' needed to help Euodias and Syntyche mend the rift between them. Truly, the ministry of bringing disagreeing saints into harmonious thinking in the Lord is a vitally important spiritual service to the well-being of the local assembly.

Surprised by Joy

Amazingly, despite the problems in Philippi and his own imprisonment, Paul next commands them twice over to rejoice, v. 4. This notable imperative is grounded 'in the Lord' – only in Him can joy predominate amidst any circumstances, be they tragic, happy, or anything in between. The Lord is unchanging, Heb. 13. 8, and His steadfast loving-kindness is constant in every situation, Lam. 3. 22-24. Once more, EADIE captures the essence of verse 4,

'To rejoice in Him is to exult in Him, not as a dim abstraction, but as a living person – so near and so loving, so generous and so powerful, that the spirit ever turns to him in admiring grateful homage, covets His presence as its sunshine, and revels in fellowship with Him. Despondency is weakness, but joy is strength. Is it rash to say, in fine, that the churches of Christ are strangers by far too much to this repeated charge of the apostle – that the current ideas of Christ are too historic in their character, and want the freshness of a personal reality – that He is thought of more as a Being in remoteness and glory, far above and beyond the stars, than as a personal and sympathizing Saviour – that salvation is regarded more as a process a man thankfully submits to, than a continuous and happy union with Jesus – and that therefore, though Christians may run and are not weary, and may walk and are not faint, they seldom mount up with wings as eagles, and then, if they do, is not their flight brief and exhaustive?'¹⁰

Often, modern Christianity is blighted

by schism and interpersonal conflict. Too often there is a spirit of censoriousness among believers, rather than the righteous love that flowed through the irrepressible Paul. We would do well to get back to basics: namely, cultivating the Christlike mind that loves one's brethren in deed and rejoices in the Lord whatever the surrounding situation may be. If we do this, local assemblies will be shining testimonies of the love of God in Christ and the unity that prevails among saints who have their 'minds on things above', Col. 3. 2 NKJV.

Endnotes

- 1 WILLIAM HENDRIKSEN, *Exposition of Philippians*. New Testament Commentary, Vol. 5. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1962, pg. 189.
- 2 H. C. G. MOULE, *The Epistle to the Philippians, with Introduction and Notes*. The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1893, pg. 108.
- 3 BEN WITHERINGTON III, *Friendship & Finances In Philippi: The Letter Of Paul To The Philippians*. Valley Forge: Trinity International, 1994, pp. 102-103.
- 4 JOHN EADIE, *Commentary on the Greek Text in the Epistle of Paul to the Philippians*. New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1859, pg. 238.
- 5 H. C. G. MOULE, pg. 108.
- 6 J. ALEC MOTYER, *The Message of Philippians*. Downer's Grove, IL: IVP, 1984, pg. 200.
- 7 H. C. HEWLETT, *Philippians*, pdf., pg. 8.
- 8 H. A. IRONSIDE, *Notes on the Epistle to the Philippians*. Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1922, pp. 106-107.
- 9 H. C. G. MOULE, *Philippian Studies*. New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son, 1900, pg. 226f.
- 10 JOHN EADIE, pg. 244-245.

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When the Lord delivered Israel from Egyptian slavery the command to Pharaoh was, 'Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me'. There was a goal to freedom. It was not freedom to choose. Rather, it was a freedom from all restraint so they could have the ability to come unto God's presence with an acceptable offering for Him.

The Son of God expressed the Father's desire in the New Testament, 'But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him', John 4. 23.

A new way of worshipping was being introduced. First, the 'where' was changing from a specific mountain, where a holy building was, to those who in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord - the church, 1 Cor. 1. 2. Secondly, 'how' worshipping happens would be changing also. It would be from the senses (sensual) to the Spirit. In the old way one would find things like incense, priests, a choir, or praise teams that accompany worshipping. These are things that can be experienced by the senses and therefore regulated, like sight, sound and smell (too loud, too bright, too strong).

In 2 Chronicles chapter 7 we see Israel worshipping. The senses, not the spirit, were the focus of activation. Israel saw the fire come down from heaven as the glory filled the physical temple. Then 'with their faces to the ground upon the pavement . . . they worshipped and praised the Lord'. In praise, the selected Levitical singers 'sounded trumpets before them'. Also they 'offered *burnt* offerings, and the fat' ascended up with a sweet aroma.

Worshipping in the Spirit

New Testament worship that the Father now seeks occurs in the power of the Holy Spirit. He is given to every believer in Christ Jesus the Lord. The average Old Testament saint lacked the indwelling Spirit and needed outward symbols and stimuli. But things have changed from the head to the heart, from what senses could experience to what is supernaturally being produced deep

Worshipping

By **RANDAL AMOS** Rochester, New York, USA

inside. What matters now is being filled with the Spirit and 'singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord', Eph. 5. 18-21. The Spirit is unseen and intangible. One cannot manufacture, measure, market or manipulate the Spirit.

In scripture, to the surprise of some, 'worship' is not used as an adjective. It does not know of terms like 'worship leader', 'worship team', 'worship music', or even 'worship meeting'. It does not describe something smaller than its object - who is the Lord Himself. Also, though we might sincerely use 'worship' as a noun, the Lord does not present it in that way in His word. The common word for worship (Hebrew, *shachah* / Greek, *proskuneo*) is not a noun in scripture. It is not the recipient of something, like, 'this is exciting worship'. It is, rather, directed toward something, or someone - God!

'Worship' is a verb. It is not a thing that can be packaged or designed. It cannot be contained in one event. It is an action unto God (not unto our own likes). It involves glorifying God in thankfulness for who He is and what He has done.

Those who are worshipping usually are in the reverent position of bowing or falling down before Him in humiliation and appreciation. It can be that simple. The first mention of worshipping is Abraham, who 'bowed ['worshipped' is the Hebrew word] himself toward the ground', Gen. 18. 2.

In the heavenly throne room we see the twenty-four elders involved in worshipping five times. Each time they *fall down* before the Lord.¹ Interestingly, the one occasion singing and music (praise) is involved as we observe the twenty-four elders falling down the word 'worship' is omitted, Rev. 5. 8, 9. Curiously, much of what is called worship today, the opposite of falling down occurs: performers on a lifted up stage with people having

heads and hands raised high while being lavishly applauded.

Worshipping in the Truth

To the surprise of some, the New Testament Epistles that give explicit instruction to the church (Romans chapter 1 through to Revelation chapter 3), worship (Greek, *proskuneo*) is only mentioned once in a positive way in a church meeting. It is in 1 Corinthians chapter 14 verse 25. It concerns the worshipping of the *unlearned* or *unbeliever*, who visits a church meeting when an orderly plurality of gift is freely operating, with the women silent, according to the commandments of the Lord Jesus Christ, 1 Cor. 14. 37.

In Philippians chapter 3 verse 3 we worship, or serve (Greek, *latreuo*), in the spirit, in contrast to the flesh - the latter being outward visible rituals given to Old Testament Israel. Also, we are to present our bodies a living sacrifice which is our reasonable service (worship in some translations, Greek, *latreia*, always translated service in KJV), Rom. 12. 1.

The Lord also taught that worshipping is not only to be done in spirit but also in *truth*. If there is true worshipping, there must also be false worshipping. Not everything with the label 'worship' is acceptable to God. Thus, we learn of the sin of worshipping idols, Rev. 9. 20.

True worshipping is exclusively unto God alone

As the Lord told Satan, 'Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve'. As John was told, in the last chapter of the Bible, as he was about to bow down to an angel, 'do it not . . . worship God'.

Worshipping can be in vain when mixed with human traditions

The Lord Jesus said of the religion of His day, with all its public praise of God coming out of their mouths yet functioning by man-made rules, 'But

GOD

in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men', Matt. 15. 9.

Worshipping is not necessarily indicative of spirituality

King Saul sacrificed unto the Lord while disobeying the Lord's command. He was told that 'to obey is better than sacrifice'; this is what the Lord delights in, 1 Sam. 15. 22. The Lord then rejected his kingdom dynasty. Yet this rejected man still wanted to 'worship the Lord', of which Samuel the prophet was displeased.

How is Worship produced?

Some think there is a ministry that is to produce worship in God's people. Worship is viewed as a thing that can be regulated by man's talent and ability. Some believe you cannot worship God without electricity!

In scripture, music is mentioned only once as directly producing worshipping, and that is in Daniel chapter 3 when the pagans used it. At the sound of music, all must 'fall down and worship' Nebuchadnezzar's statue or image. This is not to say that singing and music don't have a place among God's people, but it would be more connected with praise, Ps. 69. 30. It should not be confused with worshipping.

It is revealing to see when different saints worshipped in scripture. They did not need to have a designed 'worship atmosphere' but it came from the heart in the most 'non-worship' environments.

- Abraham, when asked to make the ultimate heart-wrenching sacrifice of his only son of promise, said, 'I and the lad will go yonder and worship', Gen. 22. 5.
- Job, after receiving the tragic news of the loss of his servants, business goods and children, 'fell down upon the ground, and worshipped', Job 1. 20.
- David, upon the death of his little baby boy, 'came into the house of the Lord, and worshipped', 2 Sam. 12. 20.

- Jacob, as he was dying, 'worshipped, *leaning* upon the top of his staff', Heb. 11. 21.
- Ezra, upon reading the word of God from an outdoor pulpit to an oppressed remnant of people that 'bowed their heads, and worshipped the Lord with *their* faces to the ground', Neh. 8. 6.
- The unnamed servant of Abraham, when his prayer was answered in a far away Gentile land, 'worshipped the Lord, *bowing himself* to the earth', Gen. 24. 52.

We see the elders in Revelation worshipping the Lord for His creation and redemption, as well as His righteous judgements and right to rule. When one is occupied with the glory and grace of God the Father through His worthy Son, the Lord Jesus, in His ways, it is easy to see how worshipping Him would naturally flow.

Such an occupation is the Lord's Supper for the church, where the death of the Lord for us is the focus in remembrance of Him.² It is the Spirit that reveals the things of Christ to the New Testament believer, and glorifies the Lord Jesus. Therefore, if you have a people filled with the Spirit, you will have a people occupied with Jesus Christ the Lord.³

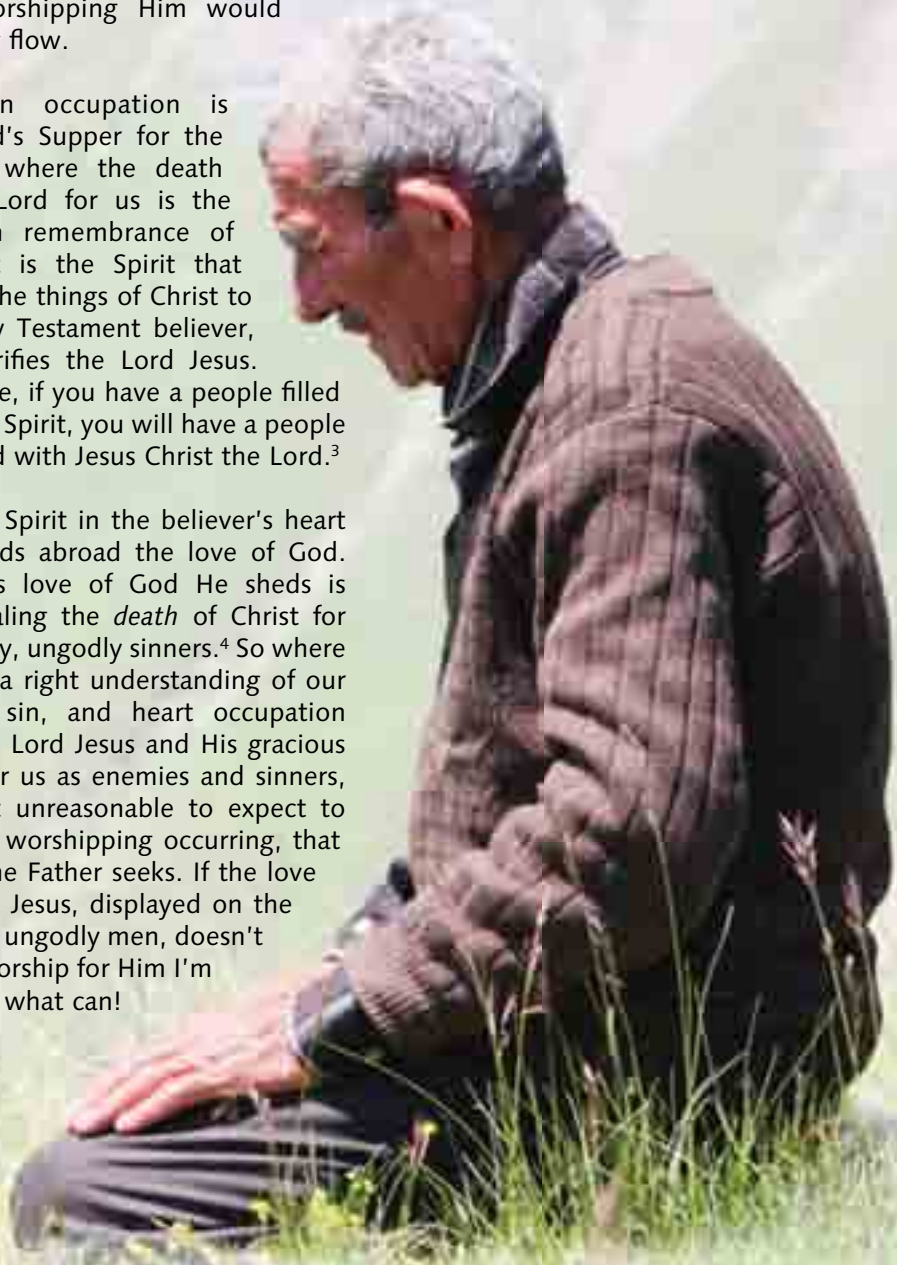
It is the Spirit in the believer's heart that sheds abroad the love of God. And this love of God He sheds is by revealing the *death* of Christ for unworthy, ungodly sinners.⁴ So where there is a right understanding of our ruin in sin, and heart occupation with the Lord Jesus and His gracious death for us as enemies and sinners, it is not unreasonable to expect to see true worshipping occurring, that which the Father seeks. If the love of Christ Jesus, displayed on the cross for ungodly men, doesn't evoke worship for Him I'm not sure what can!

May we bow low before the Creator, Redeemer, High Priest, Good Shepherd, Head, coming Sovereign King and righteous Judge. Then, give Him His due 'worth-ship' in these offices with heartfelt appreciation and obedient service.

Endnotes

- 1 See Revelation 4. 10; 5. 14; 7. 11; 11. 16; 19. 4.
- 2 1 Cor. 11. 23-26.
- 3 John 16. 13, 14.
- 4 Rom. 5. 5-8.

RANDAL AMOS has by the grace of God been answering the call to 'preach the word' for the past thirty years. He is commended by Linwood Gospel Chapel and Northgate Bible Chapel and is in fellowship in the assembly at Rochester, New York.





Animals have achieved unparalleled status in modern society. Although they have been venerated in various cultures since ancient times, Rom. 1. 23, the creatures have probably never enjoyed greater popularity than they currently do on the contemporary scene. Millionaires have bequeathed their wealth to pets, while those of humbler stations in life sometimes confer on their domesticated animals the position of family members. Meanwhile, the environmentalists lobby hard for all creatures to be afforded the same rights and protections as humans. Some ardent animal rights activists have devoted their entire lives to fighting for the maintenance and protection of reptiles, birds, mammals, and various other lower life forms. While it is true that animals are important, they are not of ultimate value – nor do they even equal mankind in worth. Only in appreciating their connection to the Almighty does one properly comprehend the place and purpose of animal life.

Made with significance

It is ironic that the modern mindset that elevates animals' importance also undermines their ultimate significance – indeed, the purpose of humans as well – for they mostly affirm that all life is the product of inanimate forces and matter coupled with chance. They see no guiding hand behind creation; nor do they perceive any future that is not tied to this world as it currently is. In so doing, they actually devalue all life by attributing it to mere cosmic accidents. If life is accidental, then assigning any value to animal or human life is completely arbitrary. Genocide, cannibalism, racism, total eradication of animal species – these are all permissible! Moreover, many of those who most ardently wish to see animal life protected have no problem with the abortion of human babies. It is a strange world indeed, when 'Save the whales' trumps 'Save the babies' as a slogan for human conduct! Yet the Bible clearly teaches that life is not accidental, but has significance, for it is made by the creator God, Gen. 1.

As the maker and sustainer of the

ALL CREATURES GREAT THE SOVEREIGNTY OF

universe, God has the right to determine the purpose and destiny of everything that exists. He assigns value to animals and humans, but the worth of each is different. Nevertheless, mankind and the beasts are linked in the divine scheme for this planet. Man is higher, for he is made in the image and likeness of God, Gen. 1. 26. Although he is placed over the animals, Ps. 8. 5-8, he is not independent of them. As God's representatives over the earth, Adam and his descendents are meant to be caretakers of this world and its resources (including the animals).

Sovereignty and Stewardship

Man was created with a custodial role in mind, Gen. 2. 5. The Garden of Eden was God's training school for man to learn how to 'work it and keep it', Gen. 2. 15 ESV, or 'to care for it and to maintain it' NET. Under divine tutelage, the lessons learned in the garden would prepare man to 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth', Gen. 1. 28 ESV. If man was to order planet earth after the divine will by making it flourish in keeping with all of its innate potential, then he must first be properly instructed. Above all, he must learn the fundamental principle of life; everything and everyone must obey the Lord God. This principle would later be articulated in a different way, 'man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live', Deut. 8. 3. In the garden this principle was put forth as a command not to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, Gen. 2. 16-17.

Nature red in tooth and claw

Unfortunately, Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command

regarding this tree, and for this act of rebellion were banished from the paradise that the Almighty made for them, Gen. 3. Because he was God's steward over the earth, Adam's fall had catastrophic consequences for the natural creation. Death became a new and unwelcome reality on the planet, Rom. 5. 12. The animals themselves became a threat to one another, as well as a danger to man, if not handled carefully. Additionally, animals' link to man's struggle with sin and its consequences also extended to the commencement of animal sacrifices as a picture of atonement, Gen 3. 21; 4. 4; Lev. 1-7. In subsequent centuries, God would unfold in type the great redemptive and propitiatory work of Christ by means of the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament era.

When mankind's sin and violence reached epic proportions, the animals shared in the corruption that mankind brought on the planet, and so perished in the Noahic flood, Gen. 6. 7; compare Zeph. 1. 2-3 where





AND SMALL GOD OVER ANIMALS

By **KEITH KEYSER**
Gilbertsville, Pennsylvania, USA

He once again threatens to wipe out animals because of man's wickedness. Yet, like their fallen custodians, animals found deliverance in the ark, Gen. 6. 19-21. In the postdiluvian world, men's relationship to the animal creation was reiterated and clarified:

'And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your hand are they delivered. Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things. But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat. And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man', Gen. 9. 1-5.

Thus, man could use animals for food, but must be careful in the matter of blood shedding; the Lord clearly did not

want things to devolve into the antediluvian maelstrom of violence and wanton blood-letting. Implicit in these instructions is the same principle since the beginning of creation:

1. Man is over the animals, not on par with them.
2. Humans must conscientiously administer animal resources.

His eye is on the sparrow

Even in this fallen world, God still oversees nature providentially for the maintenance of His animal creation. The 104th Psalm shares some lovely pictures of this aspect of the Lord's goodness, Ps. 104. 11-30. In speaking of God's fatherly care for people, the Lord Jesus mentions the natural creation, saying, 'Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?' Matt. 6. 26. In Matthew chapter 10 verse 29 He says, 'Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father'. This last verse prompted our late brother William MacDonald to quip, 'God attends the funeral of every sparrow'.¹ That whimsical comment well sums up the goodness, attention to detail, and providential care that the Creator shows for even the least esteemed creatures. In keeping with this ethos, the law contains many instructions stressing kind treatment for beasts, Deut. 25. 4. Indeed, treating such creatures well is a matter of right conduct, as it says in Proverbs chapter 12 verse 10, 'A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast: but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel'.

The peaceable kingdom

God's sovereignty over the animals is most clearly seen in connection with the Son of Man. As the Lord Jesus rode into Jerusalem for the final week of His

ministry, He did so on a colt the foal of an ass, Luke 19. 30. Not only did this fulfill Old Testament prophecy, Zech. 9. 9, it also demonstrated His control over the animal creation. This unbroken steed did not buck or try to throw Him off. Rather, Christ humbly rode into the city to present Himself to Israel once again, and the beast bore Him without complaint.

Only when the Lord Jesus returns at His second coming will nature be under the dominion of perfectly administering hands. Currently, man is at odds with the animal kingdom – desperately trying to manage fish, birds, and other creatures with only limited success. Yet, when the last Adam reigns from Jerusalem the earth will see all things – including the animals – put under His feet, Heb. 2. 8-9. During His millennial kingdom the natural order will be peaceable, as shown by the specific scene of wolves lying down with lambs, Isa. 65. 25. TENNYSON's well-known phrase 'nature red in tooth and claw' will be an obsolete relic of the past, as the universe beholds the King of kings making the earth to flourish according to all of its potential and all of the divine will.

It is evident that God considers animals to be important, for they are His creatures. They are valuable in benefitting mankind as well as in glorifying their Creator. Moreover, God has used them in interesting ways to do His bidding. He employed ravens to transport food to Elijah, 1 Kgs. 17. 6. When He wanted to defend Elisha, bears were used, 2 Kgs. 2. 24. To discipline his erring prophet and redirect him to Nineveh, He used a great fish, Jonah 1. 17. On another occasion, a donkey rebuked Balaam at the Lord's behest, 2 Pet. 2. 16. God can close lions' mouths, Dan. 6. 22, and can send a lion to kill, 1 Kgs. 13. 24. The sovereign Lord uses animals to accomplish His will for this planet!

Endnotes

- 1 The author heard this statement in one of brother MacDonald's messages in the mid-1990s.

KEITH KEYSER is a commended full-time worker and is in fellowship in the assembly meeting at Gilbertsville, Pennsylvania. He ministers throughout North America and spent some time in Spain.





This year marks the 200th anniversary of the birth of the biblical scholar S. P. Tregelles. He was born in Falmouth in Cornwall on 30 January 1813. His father was a merchant, and both his parents were Quakers, although there is no indication to suggest that he ever joined the Society of Friends.¹ From childhood he possessed almost a photographic memory, and, from the age of twelve, he spent three years at Falmouth Classical School, where he excelled in his studies. Since Quaker families did not believe in university education, Tregelles left his academic studies at the age of fifteen. Then, what may to us seem a somewhat curious decision, he found employment between 1828 and 1834 at the Neath Abbey Iron Works in South Wales, where he learnt a trade. There is evidence that Quakers from the Duchy of Cornwall were associated with the ancient ironworks at Cwmyfelin, Neath Abbey. A number of relatives of Tregelles, including the Foxe family, were engaged in a tin-smelting business at Par in Cornwall, so the link with South Wales is not in fact surprising.² One can see a parallel here between Tregelles and the apostle Paul. There is some doubt as to what he actually did at the ironworks, but according to D. RHYS PHILLIPS, he was there apprenticed as an engineer and assisted in lighting the morning fires for the craftsmen.³ During this period of manual labour, Tregelles also laboured in and mastered Hebrew, Chaldee, Greek and Welsh. From a number of local accounts, he regularly preached in Welsh in the Neath area, and was secretary of Neath Cymmrodorin, a literary society dedicated to the preservation of the Welsh language. He was a great friend of the Welsh poet Eben Fardd who taught him the rules of *cyngghanedd* – the basic concept in Welsh language poetry of sound-arrangement within one line, using stress, alliteration and rhyme. Tregelles would later put this skill to good use in his own hymn writing and poetry.⁴

Samuel Prideaux Tregelles

By **BRIAN CLATWORTHY**
Newton Abbot, England

Unhappy with his situation at Neath, and with his aptitude for academic study, Tregelles returned to Falmouth in 1835. At this time he supported himself by being a private tutor, but his main work lay before him. For over thirty years he dedicated himself to the study of biblical manuscripts. His conversion



to Christ seems to have taken place a few years earlier on a visit to Plymouth around 1832. According to HAROLD ROWDEN, 'Tregelles visited B. W. Newton, and was fascinated by his views on prophecy. He was converted through hearing Newton preach, and threw in his lot with the Brethren, to the great annoyance of members of his family who belonged to the Society of Friends'.⁵

Tregelles appears to have then lived in London after 1837, where he found employment with a firm of publishers. It was whilst in London that he took up biblical studies, and concentrated on producing a critical text of the Greek New

Testament. In this respect, he had already been involved earlier with GEORGE WIGRAM in the design of an exhaustive concordance for the Greek New Testament that would be of benefit to believers who possessed no Greek. His ability was also put to good use in making a major contribution to an Old Testament concordance, again edited and funded by WIGRAM. JOHATHAN BURNHAM states that, 'This activity enhanced the movement's scholarly reputation, and placed Tregelles at the forefront of biblical textual critics'.⁶ Such was Tregelles' knowledge that J. BROOKING ROWE once said that, 'He was able to shed light upon any topic that might be introduced; it was dangerous to ask him a question; doing so was like reaching to take a book and having the whole shelf-full precipitated upon your head'.⁷ But it was Tregelles' single ambition to produce his own unaided critical Greek text that marked him out as a scholar *par excellence*. He spent a considerable amount of time in Europe examining and collating Greek manuscripts, which included a detailed examination of Codex Vaticanus in Rome. According to one source, when examining manuscripts

in Rome, he was prevented from copying any of them other than what he could surreptitiously note on his fingernails! In 1857 he produced the first part of his Greek New Testament (the Gospels of Matthew and Mark), but, because of ill health, he was unable to produce the Greek text for Luke's and John's Gospels until 1861. By this time he had also examined Codex Sinaiticus, which was still in the possession of TISCHENDORF. Most of the other New Testament books were published by 1869, but, again, ill health prevented him from completing the whole of the New Testament. Others helped to complete this task and the final book, Revelation, was



Tregelles Biblical Scholar

made available in 1872. It has been suggested that Tregelles' collation and his edition of a Greek New Testament were remarkable achievements, and they paved the way for the Greek edition of WESTCOTT and HORT in 1881 and for the Revised Version of the English Bible in the same year.⁸ Some have also suggested that if Tregelles had been able to sit on the revisers committee of 1881, WESTCOTT AND HORT would have been prevented from outvoting SCRIVENER, and their so called 'Neutral Text' theory may never have got off the ground!⁹

In addition to his textual criticism, Tregelles wrote extensively on prophecy, and his reputation in this area seems to have been made following the publication of a book printed in Plymouth in 1836 entitled *Passages in the Book of Revelation Connected with the Old Testament Scripture*. He also received considerable acclaim from CHARLES SPURGEON for his book on Daniel, *Remarks on the Prophetic Visions of Daniel*.¹⁰

Tregelles married Sarah Anna Prideaux in 1839, and, apart from his visits to London and the Continent, he lived in Plymouth from 1846 to his death in 1875.¹¹ He was awarded the degree of LL.D. from St. Andrews University in 1850, and a civil-list pension in 1862 – starting at £100 and then rising to £200 per annum – for his outstanding work. Although he eventually left the assemblies, his contribution towards biblical scholarship was immense, and still remains of value today.¹² A modern transcription of Tregelles Greek New Testament and its corrected edition is held in digital form at Tyndale Hall. These can be accessed by logging on to the website www.tyndalehouse.com/tregelles. It is interesting to note that in assessing the value of Tregelles' Greek New Testament, this prestigious centre for biblical research states that 'The Greek New Testament of Tregelles remains valuable, despite its shortcomings. With his heavy emphasis

on evidence and dislike of speculation Tregelles provides a healthy counter-weight to some more speculative approaches found in the history of the textual criticism of the New Testament'.

Tregelles died in Plymouth in 1875 and is buried in the city. In an article in *The Western Morning News* (a paper then published in Plymouth) dated 17th January, 1957, the following is stated of Tregelles, 'Largely self-taught, personally modest and gentle-natured, Tregelles must rank as the most learned man ever to be associated with Plymouth; which was remarkable in the last century for producing several noted scholars in Divinity and Biblical literature, notably the celebrated deaf workhouse lad, John Kitto; Dr. R. F. Weymouth, best known for his *New Testament in Modern Speech*; and more recently the erudite Dr. Rendle Harris'. Perhaps Hebrews chapter 11 verse 38a is a fitting testament to this worthy scholar.

Endnotes

- 1 One Quaker link was that his cousin was the first wife of B. W. Newton.
- 2 'The History of the Vale of Neath' (Swansea 1925) by D. RHYD PHILLIPS.
- 3 The National Biography of Wales: Dictionary of Welsh Biography.
- 4 Perhaps the hymn that shows this Welsh influence on his literary style most is entitled, 'In Thee, O Lord, believing, we now have peace with God, Eternal life receiving, the purchase of thy blood'.
- 5 *The Origins of the Brethren* pg. 159/160. TIMOTHY STUNT (*From Awakening to Succession* pg. 295/296) suggests that Tregelles was first involved with the Plymouth meeting in 1835. This

may, however, simply mean that he enjoyed fellowship as a believer in the assembly in Plymouth three years after his conversion.

- 6 *A Story of Conflict – The Controversial Relationship between Benjamin Wills Newton and John Nelson Darby*, pg. 79.
- 7 BROOKING ROWE (*In Teachers of the Faith and the Future*, Ed by GEORGE H. FROMOW, pg. 31).
- 8 *Oxford DNB*.
- 9 See the comments of F. F. BRUCE at pg. 138 *et seq* in *History of the Bible in English*.
- 10 Tregelles is deservedly regarded as a great authority upon prophetic subjects'. SPURGEON (*Commenting and Commentaries*, pg. 130).
- 11 His large mansion in Portland Place, Plymouth, was later demolished following the expansion of Plymouth Technical College. Tregelles would, no doubt, have been more than pleased to make way for this seat of learning. A memorial tablet was unveiled outside Tregelles' house in 1914 by the Biblical scholar Dr. Rendle Harris.
- 12 There is some doubt as to where Tregelles' eventually ended up after leaving the assembly in Plymouth. Some suggest he became a Presbyterian, whilst others, including the biblical critic F. H. A. Scrivener, suggest he became a lay member of the Church of England, and worshipped at Charles Church – the bombed ruins of this church can still be seen in the city today. In all probability, Tregelles remained unattached – see f1 on pg. 28 *In Teachers of the Faith and the Future*, Ed by GEORGE H. FROMOW.



BRIAN CLATWORTHY is a member of the Precious Seed Trust.



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GOSPEL WORK AND OTHER ACTIVITIES Compiled by SANDY JACK



ENGLAND

Nottinghamshire

The assembly at **Kirkby-in-Ashfield** held its second Evangelism Day for 2012 on Saturday, 13th October. A number of young people from across the East Midlands gathered for a time of prayer before going out with the gospel.

The day started with person-to-person tracting in the town's precinct. Several hundred tracts were given out and good conversations were held with Ray, Anne (who claimed to be a pagan), Julez, and May. The believers were encouraged to notice that this time, in contrast to previous occasions, a number of people who were given literature actually stopped and read it. We pray that the word of God may work powerfully in the lives of those who read it and that the conversations may have left seeds of the gospel in the minds of those named.

In the afternoon the believers reached out to an area that hadn't been tracted for well over 25 years, and distributed God's word to about 750 homes. This was an area of the neighbouring town of Sutton-in-Ashfield. One particular encouragement came as a consequence of a group who walked up a long grassy farm track for the sake of one house. As a result, the woman, Linda, who lives in that house, walked 1.5 miles to the Hall for the gospel meeting. She stayed afterwards to talk for over seventy minutes and promised to come and bring her husband to the next meeting. Please pray for Linda and others contacted that there may be lasting fruit in the gospel.

Sussex

Having distributed calendars, tracts and invitations to their annual Carol Service in the locality of the hall, the

assembly at Marine Hall, Eastbourne, had the joy of seeing the hall filled to capacity, with many people from the locality attending. It was a particular joy, to have a number of young people attend from the local YMCA Outreach centre, all of whom stayed for tea and engaged in good conversations. Please pray that opportunities will continue to be given to the believers to develop these links with the gospel.



WALES

The believers who gather at the Gospel Hall in **Treboeth**, Swansea, were greatly encouraged over the weekend of 19-22 October, when they celebrated the 90th anniversary of the founding of the assembly.

The work started in 1922 when Mr. A. J. Chilcott of Barnstaple, held a tent mission in the village. A number were saved and desired to go on together, meeting for prayer and Bible study. Mr. Chilcott eventually procured a plot of land, and a corrugated iron building was erected at a cost of £397.4s. 3d. 'A. J.', as he was affectionately called, was a gifted evangelist and, over the years, many came to know the Lord through his preaching, and the witness of the assembly. After 43 years in the old hall, it was felt that a new one should be built. A draughtsman and a master builder in the fellowship oversaw the work, and all the other brethren did the labouring, with the occasional help of professionals.

Over a period of almost two years, the new hall was built over the old one, which was demolished a bit at a time to avoid cancelling any meetings. Only one meeting had to be cancelled when the final demolition took place. So, after 45 years, the assembly had a new meeting place, erected for a total cost of £6,200.

Forty-five years later, the assembly thought that it should celebrate the 90 years of the Lord's great faithfulness. The theme was, 'To God be the glory'. The saints collected together many photographs, old and more recent ones, and display boards were erected around the hall. On the Friday night, some young people from other assemblies came along, and it was encouraging to see fifty-five, mainly young people, sit attentively as brother Peter Brandon spoke to them. Afterwards a 12-year-old lad trusted the Lord, and a 15-year-old girl sought help for her Christian life.

Saturday was the main day, and, in the afternoon, many of the previous generations of young people came and had a great time reliving the days of their time in Sunday School, Youth meetings, and the many camps visited. After a buffet tea, Peter Davies gave a PowerPoint presentation on the history of the work from the start up to the present. It was estimated



Treboeth before (above) and after (below)





that 150 people attended. Some had to leave, but about 130 were able to stay for the final session when Peter Brandon, who has visited the assembly since 1964, gave the closing message for the day. On the Lord's Day at the gospel meeting there were a few unsaved present. A young man from Ghana was very moved and near to trusting the Lord. The final meeting was on the Monday, when a number from other assemblies joined. Peter Brandon gave a challenging word from John 21 on 'Barren Evangelism; Fruitful Evangelism; Preaching and Pastoring'. The whole weekend was truly blessed of the Lord and the assembly continues to look to Him for His blessing as they move forward in His will.



IRELAND

Co. Wexford

The assembly in **Gorey** report that evangelistic Bible studies continue to remain one of the greatest sources of encouragement. In March 2011, David, a student teacher who fellowships with them during the week, got into a conversation with another young teacher, Lisa, about the gospel. Although initially sceptical, she soon began to ask many questions. Eventually, she attended the Bible Study, and has since trusted the Lord. She is currently on a year out near Barcelona, and is progressing well spiritually but is in need of fellowship.

In September they started a Christianity Explored course on Tuesday nights, which has four or five seekers attending. Lori has clearly been touched by the gospel, as has Noreen, though both seem to be struggling in appreciating that salvation is by grace, having believed for years they needed to 'do their best'. Pray also for Warren and Rachel. It has been lovely to have Fiona and her daughter Caoimhe along too. Fiona had come to studies on and off over several years. Damien, her husband, got saved last year and, it is believed, Fiona has now trusted the Lord. She is involved in several



Outreach at the Ploughing Championships

other studies during the week, and a real change in her and her family has been evident. Over the past six months Damien has got friendly with a neighbour, Anthony. He said he had been watching the change in Damien's life, and wanted to know more about the Bible. Damien spoke with him often, and he has been attending a Bible study in Matthew's (Shanks) house. In November, he asked Damien, 'How do I become a Christian?', and it seems that Damien led him to the Lord. The change in his life has been remarkable. Pray for his wife, Helen, and their family.

After 40 years of summer Bible Clubs in Riverchapel, Matthew and Shirley Shanks have been able to start a weekly club in that area. Please pray that this will be a further bridge for the gospel into a very needy community.

This year's outreach at the Ploughing Championships was a great encouragement. Attendance at the three-day event was reported to be 187,000 with 1,300 exhibitor stands. The saints were presented with a wonderful opportunity to 'sow the seed', and the Lord gave tremendous help to do so. The shopping bags, used to distribute items, were severely delayed and did not arrive until the day before the show, at which point they needed packing with gospel CD's and picture texts. However, after some hard work, 18,500 of them were distributed over the three days. Hundreds of *Titanic* comic books and other leaflets, bookmarks, and fridge magnets, were given out as well as all our Acts 16:31 pencils and pens. Thirty-four believers from four

countries helped to staff the stand – the fellowship was amazing! Please pray that God will be glorified, and many individuals will be convicted of their sin and saved as a result of this outreach.



ROMANIA

Jonathan Kelso reports, 'What are you to do when a mother of seven children asks if you would consider 'adopting' (keeping) her new-born, one-month-old baby boy, simply because she cannot cope with this added burden of caring and providing for this recent addition to her family? What do you do when a girl in her early teens comes in desperation seeking shelter from a disruptive and abusive father; living in a little one-roomed house from which there is no privacy and no escape?

He has given her an option, which comes in the form of a 'marriage' arrangement to someone he knows. What does he gain by this arrangement? Simple - more money to buy beer, and one less mouth in the house to feed! The problem for this girl of almost fourteen years is that she is a Christian, and she wants to please her Heavenly Father'.

'As we get to know the people we work among, and hopefully earn their trust, we do have to respond to many very trying and emotionally draining circumstances. We need to

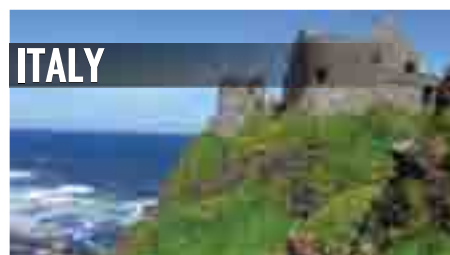


be able offer wise counsel to those who come to us for help and for advice; for some, we are all they have got. We have chosen to live close to where these people live, believing that to work among them we need to be close to where they are. It is important to preach, as we do from the scriptures, but it is also vital that our lives are a witness and a testimony every day'.

At the end of November Paul Williams held five days of Bible teaching in Saliste, for fifteen Gypsy men from five different locations. Each evening Paul and Jonathan travelled with the men to different villages for evangelism, which is something they love to be involved in. On the Wednesday evening they held a meeting in Gura Raului; it was packed. On the Thursday evening they were in Orlat, and again the meeting room was packed with people. Lae, a brother from Geoagiu, and Jonathan both spoke from the same verse in John chapter 3 verse 14, and, at the close, Simona, a



girl in her late teens, waited to speak with Andi and Jonathan. She told them that she wanted to follow God's way, and they had the joy of pointing her to the Saviour.



Alec Catchpole writes from Pozzuoli, Naples: 'The economic situation here continues to worsen as austerity measures, leading to cutbacks, leave many without work. Employers in the private sector are taking advantage of the uncertain job market by cutting wages, and taking for themselves the child benefit which the state gives to workers with children. Just last week another member of the church was made redundant, and the chances of him or others who are unemployed getting work are almost non-existent. For those made redundant, there is a short period of state benefits, but, after a few months, these finish, and for those who have never had legal employment (which is a lot of people) there is no help at all.

Due to the loving generosity of believers in the United Kingdom, we have been able to distribute food to Christians in need, which has been really appreciated by them. One family was in such financial difficulty

that they were reduced to sleeping in a car. We were able to help by paying their rent. Thankfully the father has found work in the north of Italy, so they should be alright for at least as long as his work lasts'.

'The economic gloom is also having an effect on the future of the church. Stefano is a very bright young man. He is finishing a degree in Philosophy at university and is an excellent preacher. His desire is to work and serve the Lord in the church, but the harsh reality for him, and the majority of the other young people, is that they will probably have to leave the city to find employment elsewhere. Laura has just finished a degree in the science of Tourism, so she too will be looking for work. Please do pray for them and others in the Neapolitan churches that have a really uncertain future'.

'On the brighter side, Angelo and Mena, a 40-year-old couple with teenage girls, have recently been converted and have asked for baptism. We really praise the Lord for such encouragements in the midst of a pretty bleak picture. Prayer would also be valued for Luigi and Raffaele, a father and his 19-year-old son. Raffaele started reading the Bible on his own, on seeing the contradictions between biblical Christianity and the Roman Catholic Church. He sought an alternative, so they have been coming along for a few weeks which is a real encouragement'.



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Magen (Shield, protection)

Megen (Gift)

One of the important features of heraldry is the graphic design of individual or family coats of arms, usually displayed on some form of shield. This decorative imagery goes back to at least medieval times when soldiers were identified in battle by the markings that were painted on their shields. Therefore, the shield became an important feature in battle, not simply to protect soldiers from the thrust of an enemy's attack, but also to ensure that in the melee, they could easily identify which side soldiers were fighting on. This sense of protection and identity is germane to the use of the Hebrew noun **magen**, which is the most frequent word used in the Old Testament for the common type of shield deployed by soldiers. The term 'buckler' is also used in some translations as an alternative rendering of the noun **magen**. The **magen** was a small, circular shield used in close combat, as contrasted with the larger shield known as a '**tsinnah**' which protected the whole body from assault. This larger shield was often used on attacks of city walls, but it was far less manoeuvrable than the **magen**, hence, in the case of Goliath, he needed assistance in carrying his shield (**tsinnah**), 1 Sam. 17. 7. The smaller shield was sometimes carried by archers, as, for example, Asa's valiant men, 2 Chr. 14. 8.

Shields were made of a variety of materials including wood, leather, and metal. Leather shields had to be oiled regularly to prevent them from deteriorating. In part of David's dirge in 2 Samuel chapter 1 verse 21, he reflects upon the death of Saul by reference to the fact that his shield would never again be rubbed with oil. Contrast this with the scene in Isaiah chapter 21 verse 5 where the normal activities of God's people, such as eating and drinking, are disrupted by invaders, hence the exhortation to oil or grease their shields to parry the attack. Other instances where the noun **magen** is used literally of a defensive weapon of war is found in the Song of Deborah in Judges chapter 5 verse 8 where Israel is rebuked for its sin of idolatry, reflected in its military complacency. True to his penchant for fine things, Solomon created shields made out of gold, 1 Kgs. 10. 17, which were highly prized as spoils of war, cp. 2 Sam. 8. 7, where his father David took the gold shields carried by Hadadezer's retinue, and brought them to Jerusalem.

But it is the metaphorical use of the noun **magen** that is most pronounced in the Old Testament, especially as it focuses on God Himself. In a remarkable passage in Genesis chapter 15, which Paul later uses by way of precedent against an imaginary critic in Romans chapter 4, God speaks to Abram through a vision, with the opening line, 'Fear not Abram, I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward'. Here God confirms to Abram that the promises that He would subsequently make to him were firmly grounded and secured in His protective power, cp. Ps. 84. 11. As Ryken, *et al*, write, 'This shield like protection is evidence of His faithfulness and enables His people to be confident, not afraid',¹ cp. Ps. 91. 1-5. This sense of God being the Protector and Saviour of His people, especially from their enemies, is represented extensively in the book of Psalms. In Psalm 3, the psalmist feels vulnerable to attack from his surrounding enemies. God, though, surrounds and protects

him as a shield, v. 3. Similarly, in Psalm 28, which is a psalm of individual lament, the psalmist outlines the case for God to destroy his enemies, but then adds a paean of praise, which includes a reference to God being his strength and his shield or shelter, v. 7a, cp. 2 Sam. 22. 3, 31; Prov. 30. 5. There are numerous other references of this kind in the Psalms, e.g., Ps. 5. 12; 18. 35; 59. 11. Brown states that the shield establishes a zone of safety and security, a fitting image for God's protective activity.² The shield is also used in an offensive mode, as in Psalm 35 verse 2, where God is exhorted by the psalmist to stand up and support His servant through taking hold of shield and buckler and spear. Overarching this metaphor is the related issue of finding a safe resting place under the aegis of God's shield, see Ps. 119. 114.

In the Septuagint (LXX) the word shield is normally translated by the Greek word **aspis**, which denoted a small round metal shield used for close combat, roughly corresponding to **magen**. Elsewhere, however, the LXX uses the Greek word **thyreos** to describe a long rectangular wooden Greek shield, which could be used as a barricade, or almost a portable wall during an attack, Ps. 34. 2 (LXX); 45. 10 (LXX).³ Paul's figurative use of this Greek word is confined to Ephesians chapter 6 verse 16 where he compares faith to a shield that believers must take up in order to hold their ground, and thereby extinguish the incendiary attacks of Satan, cp. Ps. 120. 4. As Simpson states, 'Supplied with this inviolable *aegis* the host of the redeemed possess the secret which overcomes the world (1 John 5. 4)'.⁴ In his first epistle, Peter uses similar language when he refers to believers 'who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time', 1 Pet. 1. 5 NIV. His use of the present participle stresses that believers are continually being shielded or guarded by God's power through the application of faith.

The English hymnist Edith Gilling Cherry, who suffered from polio from infancy and walked with the aid of crutches for most of her very short life, expressed this very sentiment throughout her most famous hymn, 'We rest on Thee our shield and our defender!' A line from this hymn was used by the writer Elisabeth Elliott as a title for her book *Through Gates of Splendour*, which records the lives of five American missionaries who were martyred for Christ by Auca Indians in the Ecuadorian jungle in 1956. Just as these men stepped out in faith believing that God was truly their shield and their defender, may we be similarly challenged to present the gospel to those who are in native darkness. Let us be courageous, irrespective of the strength of the enemy, and, like Hezekiah, assert that 'with us is the Lord our God to help us, and to fight our battles', 2 Chr. 32. 8.

For further reading/study

Introductory

Archaeological Study Bible – An Illustrated Walk through Biblical History and Culture.

Advanced

WILLIAM P. BROWN, *Seeing the Psalms – A Theology of Metaphor.*

Endnotes

- ¹ *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, pg. 785.
- ² *Seeing the Psalms – A Theology of Metaphor*, pg. 200.
- ³ The Romans called this shield the *scutum* (Latin), which they used very effectively in their complex battle formation known as the *testudo* where shields were packed tightly together to act as a screen against enemy missiles.
- ⁴ *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, pg. 149.

CHRISTOLOGY

I was talking to a friend after a meeting recently; we were discussing personal difficulties that occur in local churches from time to time. My friend and I agreed that if we all spent more time sharing with each other what we have learned about the Lord Jesus, then there would be far fewer problems. In this month's column, we review several online resources that help us discover truth about the Lord Jesus Christ.

First, a poem! John Newton (best known as the author of *Amazing Grace*) wrote a few verses about our consideration of Christ. The first stanza reads:

What think ye of Christ? is the test
To try both your state and your scheme;
You cannot be right in the rest,
Unless you think rightly of Him.

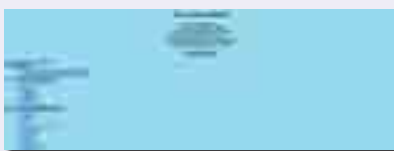
The full poem is at <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/what-think-ye-of-christ/>

Next, some books which are available online. *Assembly Testimony* magazine published a multi-author compilation of articles entitled *The Glory of the Son*, <http://www.assemblytestimony.org/?q=node/197>. The book deals in a generally chronological way with Christological doctrine in twelve articles, from *The Eternity of His Sonship* to *The Solemnity of His Judgments*. The articles are very helpful especially for those looking for a primer in this context.

A. M. HODGKIN follows through the words of the Lord Jesus on the Emmaus Road, 'In all the scriptures, the things concerning himself', Luke 24. 27, and briefly reviews the structure and theme of each book in the biblical canon with respect to its revelation of Christ. Her book is entitled *Christ in all the Scriptures*, and is available at http://www.thebookworm.com/amh_tc.htm.

J. G. BELLETT wrote in the mid-1800s. His writing style is slightly archaic, but most Christ-exalting. His short book on *The Moral Glory of the Lord Jesus Christ* makes an excellent Saturday night meditative read before a Lord's day morning. The full text is online at <http://www.stempublishing.com/authors/bellett/MORGLOR.html>.

Finally, some MP3 recordings. We have previously recommended Joe Skelly's tape library in this magazine. Many of his downloads are helpful. Particularly on the subject of devotion to Christ, I recommend the following two 20 minute messages: Robert McPheat on *The Face of Christ* at <http://www.jstl.org.uk/e107/download.php?view.141> and Jim Flanigan on *He is Precious* at <http://www.jstl.org.uk/e107/download.php?view.160>.



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Views from the News

COMPILED BY SANDY JACK

2011 Census Returns

- Now fewer than six in ten people say they are Christians
- Proportion of Christians in England and Wales down to 59.3 per cent
- Quarter of people say they do not follow any religion following the rise of aggressive atheism
- Number of Muslims up to 2.7 million, 4.8 per cent of the population

Christianity has declined sharply over the past decade, according to the census returns. Numbers who choose to call themselves Christians fell by more than four million. The collapse in belief in the religion which has been central to the history of the country for 1,500 years means that fewer than six out of ten, or 59 per cent, now describe themselves as Christian. A decade ago nearly three quarters, 72 per cent, did so. The diminishing number of Christians is mirrored by a rapid growth in those who profess no religious affiliation. A quarter of the population, 14.1 million, now say they have no religion, nearly double the 7.7 million who said the same thing in the 2001 census.

The growth religion in England and Wales is Islam, the census returns showed. Over a decade, numbers of Muslims have gone up from around 1.5 million to 2.7 million, and almost one in 20 of the population is now a Muslim. The lowest level of Christian belief is in London, where fewer than half the population, 48 per cent, now say they are Christian. Returns showed the most Christian district is Knowsley on Merseyside, where more than four out of ten say they are Christian. More than a third of people in the London borough of Tower Hamlets are Muslim. Norwich is the most Godless place in Britain, with 42.5 per cent of its population professing no religion. Around 177,000 people claim to be Jedi – the 'faith' made famous in the Star Wars films – though this number is down on the 2001 figure by more than a half. And 6,242 people subscribe to the Heavy Metal religion, set up in 2010 by the Rock music magazine, Metal Hammer. Other alternative religions included 56,620 Pagans, 39,061 Spiritualists, and 2,418 Scientologists

Source: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2246436/Census-2011-religion-data-reveal-4m-fewer-Christians-1-4-atheist.html>

Treat all churches as charities, MPs say

MPs have overwhelmingly voted in favour of treating all churches as charities, after a small Christian group was denied charitable status. Peter Bone, a Tory backbencher, launched his attempt to change the law after the Charity Commission gave charitable status to pagan groups, including druids, but denied it to a small church hall in Devon. Around 166 MPs were in support of Mr Bone's efforts to introduce a Bill on the issue, with just seven voting against. Mr Bone told the House of Commons that it is necessary to toughen up the law to protect other Christian groups, such as the Salvation Army, and even the Church of England. He said, 'The repercussions of such a ruling could have a disastrous effect on religious institutions and the excellent work they do in the charity sector. Is Judaism, the Catholic Church, or even the Church of England itself going to come under pressure to prove their public benefit?' The Tory MP will not actually succeed in getting the law changed unless the Government decides to back the idea at a later stage in its progress through the House of Commons. It comes after fifty-three MPs, including four members of the Government, wrote to *The Daily Telegraph* demanding that ministers take action.

Last month the Charity Commission cited a ruling that religion was not always for the public benefit when it denied the status to the Plymouth Brethren (Exclusive), which runs the church hall concerned. Describing it as 'an important test case', the MPs asked, 'Why have the Christian Brethren been singled out in this way? There should be an urgent review into how this decision was made and whether there was a level playing field'. The letter to the newspaper was organised by Rob Halfon, a Tory MP and member of the Commons public administration committee. Four ministerial aides – Paul Maynard, John Glen, David Burrowes, and Daniel Kawczynski, also signed it. The Plymouth Brethren's 16,000 believers try to remain apart from the outside world, and have been in a lengthy fight with the watchdog. A spokesman for the Charity Commission said, 'Public benefit is and always has been a requirement of charities advancing religion, as it is for all other charitable purposes'. He said that the case was best considered by a tribunal and that the commission was 'mindful' of the costs, which it tried to minimise.

Source: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/9756187/Treat-all-churches-as-charities-MPs-say.html>



Bits & Bobs

So, what is a Gene?



DNA is the famous molecule of heredity that carries the code of life – an altogether remarkable biopolymer (polynucleotide). As expected, the more research that is conducted on the DNA molecule, the more complexity it divulges.

Decades ago, when less was known about this amazing molecule, the definition of the unit called the gene was fairly cut and dried. For example, in 1980 evolutionist David Kirk stated in his college biology text, 'The units of heredity are invisible entities called genes, which specify the observable features of an organism'. Today, the gene is given molecular and non-molecular labels. Gerald Karp states, 'Our concept of the gene has undergone a remarkable evolution as biologists have learned more and more about the nature of inheritance'. It's hardly surprising, then, that someone has said, 'What a gene is depends on who you ask'. In the 21st century, the definition of a gene continues to become more convoluted, with the possibility that the word – like life – will remain a challenge to define.

Confusion over what exactly a gene is has been added to by discoveries made through ongoing investigations into the genome (the total genetic material within a cell or individual). Take, for example, an amazing genetic discovery called 'the Splicing Code', announced in 2010 by computer scientists and molecular biologists. A news release at the time declared, 'Researchers at the University of Toronto have discovered a fundamentally new view of how living cells use a limited number of genes to generate enormously complex organs such as the brain'.

This inner code has been painstakingly deciphered to the extent that molecular biologists can actually predict what happens during some phases of genetic regulation. The Human Genome Project revealed that man has but 20,000 genes that directly and indirectly regulate the system of our body, and 'the Splicing Code' directs when and how the genes and regulatory elements are to be assembled by a communication network. So far, scientists have found that 95 per cent of our genome has this amazing alternative splicing. The complexity arises when required combinations (who knows how many) must be assembled and then expressed. Is it any wonder that in addition to computer scientists and molecular biologists, cracking this 'Splicing Code' required other researchers proficient in vector calculus, code optimization, geometry, advanced algebra, probability theory, and information theory? This is the antithesis of the time and chance required by evolutionism

Regardless of how the gene is defined, logic shows it to be a product of planning, purpose, and special creation. With each new discovery, the complicated reality of the genome more clearly reflects the genius of its Maker.

<http://www.icr.org/article/so-what-gene/>

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Front Cover illustration:

THE PLAIN OF MEGIDDO. Photo: Kathy Winkler.
The ruins of the ancient city of Megiddo lie in the Carmel mountain range, approximately fifteen miles south of the modern Israeli port of Haifa. Historically, the city was located at the entrance to the pass between the oval-shaped Valley of Jezreel and the Plain of Sharon. Whoever held the city could exercise control over a wide expanse of land, including the land routes to Phoenicia and Damascus. These routes were important to the commercial life of the area and brought traders to the city from all parts of the known world. The city was therefore highly prized in antiquity, and historians suggest that more battles have been fought in this locality than anywhere else on earth. The strategic importance of this area was evident to Joshua when he killed the king of Megiddo during the conquest of the land, Josh. 12. 7, 12-21. Deborah and Barak triumphed by 'the waters

of Megiddo', Judg. 5. 19-20, when they defeated the army of Sisera. It was the place where Ahaziah died of his wounds, 2 Kgs. 9. 27 and Josiah was slain in battle, 2 Chr. 35. 20-24. But it is the ultimate battle of human history that marks this location out as unique. It will be on this ground that the battle of Armageddon will be fought, and only the timely intervention of the Lord Himself will save Israel from certain destruction, Rev. 16. 16; 19. 19-21.

Question Time

Conducted by

RICHARD COLLINGS

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

QUESTION

**Does the teaching of 1 Corinthians chapter 11
verses 2-16 apply only to assembly gatherings?**

ANSWER

From the outset of history it has been the intention of God that there should be order in His created universe, and the human race was not exempt from this design. As we look into the Old Testament we learn that the principle of headship was to be evident both in family and national life. In addition, the Old Testament is rich with symbolism. Under the old covenant much symbolic teaching can be found in the range of sacrifices that were offered, in the various garments worn by the priests and the high priest, and in the rituals associated with both the tabernacle and the temple.

Despite this wide-ranging imagery, the mention of the head covering relative to headship is not given in the Old Testament but in the New. On closer examination, we discover that the only reference to the head covering linked to this subject is found in 1 Corinthians and not in Colossians, where Christ is Head of the church which is His body. Most significantly, head coverings are not mentioned in Ephesians, where the headship of the husband is emphatically stated.

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians focuses on issues relating to local church matters, and chapter 11 falls within the section of the letter which deals with various aspects of church practice. It is not without relevance that the Spirit of God guided the apostle to set out the doctrine of the head covering in the same section as the teaching concerning the symbols of the bread and wine used in the Breaking of Bread meeting, a meeting that refers to the gathering of the local church.

As we read through the opening half of chapter 11, it becomes apparent that the only church which may have allowed sisters to attend the various meetings without a head covering was Corinth, probably the most immature and carnal church to whom the apostle wrote. In seeking to correct this error, Paul reminds them that if anyone had any contention with what he was teaching they were behaving contrary to apostolic doctrine, and the practices of all the other churches, v. 16. The point I am seeking to highlight here is that Paul makes no appeal to the godly practices of any family, even though elsewhere in the letter he refers to a family. Neither does he mention Priscilla and Aquila, a spiritual couple who lived in Corinth for some time.

In view of the foregoing, I believe that the only time a sister ought to have her head covered is in the various gatherings of the church. If a sister believes she should cover her head at all times of prayer, including personal or family prayer sessions, then she has the liberty to make such a choice. However, I do not consider that scripture requires this.

Whilst in many assemblies there is a rigorous adherence to ensuring that every sister wears a head covering in the meetings, there is often a lack of clear teaching given to explain the principles involved. The apostle presents three reasons why the sisters should have their heads covered and two reasons why the brethren should keep their heads uncovered. These reasons are not based on culture but on divine order (verses 3-6), creation order (verses 7-12), and natural order (verses 13-15).

It is essential that we not only comply with the instructions given by the apostle but that we appreciate the reasons behind those instructions. We also need to bear in mind that our obedience is being observed by onlookers hidden from our view, for, in verse 10, Paul informs us that the covered head of the sisters serves as an object lesson to angels. As in all things, Christ is the supreme example, for that reason we are told in verse 3 that 'the head of Christ is God'. As He willingly submitted to the authority of God so we also ought to be subject to the teaching set out in these verses under consideration.

Questions for this column should be addressed to info@preciousseed.org

