

A MAGAZINE TO ENCOURAGE THE STUDY OF THE SCRIPTURES,  
THE PRACTICE OF NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH PRINCIPLES  
AND INTEREST IN GOSPEL WORK

# Precious SEED

INTERNATIONAL



**'Then cometh Jesus  
from Galilee to  
Jordan unto John, to  
be baptized of him',  
Matt. 3. 13.**

**MAY 2013**

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**Precious Seed International**

**Faith Matters 3** Will be available in July and you can order your copies with, or without, overprinting your local details on page 12. The articles on this occasion are by: Johnny Black, Paul McCauley, Stephen Grant, Larry Price and Jeremy Singer

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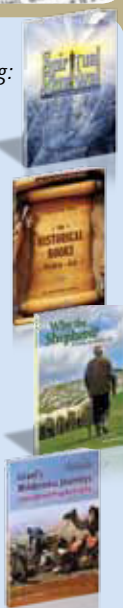
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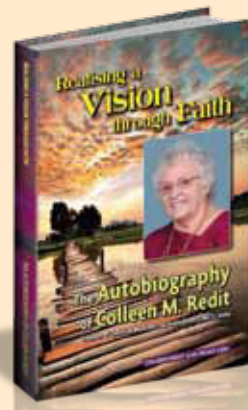


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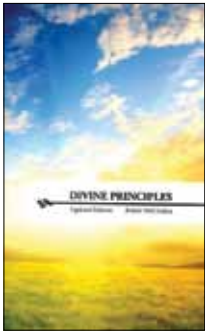
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# Book Reviews

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

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



## **Divine Principles** R. McClurkin

Paperback. 156 pages. Published by Gospel Folio Press, 304 Killaly St. West, Port Colborne, ON L3K 6A6, Canada. ISBN: 978-1-926765-15-0.

This book focuses on the truth and practice of the local church as taught in scripture. The articles, in separate chapters, are fairly short, in the main comprising of three to seven sections and dealing with a particular issue, such as 'Gathering in the Name', 'Worship', and 'Discipline in the House of God.' Two or three verses from hymns are quoted in each chapter. Most of the teaching would be acceptable to readers of this magazine. However, as the articles are short, there is little explanation on occasions. For example, some may disagree with: the assertion that Hebrews chapter 6 verse 4 refers to 'the believer's initial experience of receiving Christ; the identifying of

the Lord's table and the Lord's supper; and that seeing 'through a glass darkly' in 1 Corinthians chapter 13 refers to the Old Testament.

The writer seeks to declare truth and confront error. In dealing with some issues, the writing becomes quite impassioned. Some of the issues denounced are: 'confederacy' – current at the time of writing presumably, 1968-70 – resulting in gifted men, committed to assembly truth, being debarred from them 'upon the ground of what assemblies they have visited'; the separation of old and young; 'misfits', men who in full-time ministry yet lack 'commitment to assembly principles' or who have 'no desire to pioneer with the gospel'; and also 'interdenominationalism'.

The writing comes across as short addresses, delivered forthrightly and instructively. The author admonishes and exhorts. Short sentences are the norm. It is a 'punchy' style. Memorable sayings include: 'The spirit of religious adventure has become most popular'; 'A woman can either break or make a man'; 'Truth usually lies between extremes'. The writer was an evangelist from Northern Ireland who laboured for many years in North America. This book comprises a series of articles he wrote for an 'assembly magazine'. Partly on that account it is probably more suited to readers with that provenance. Proof reading could be better: blatant misspellings include 'proinciples' on the frontispiece and 'Brethern' on the back cover. Punctuation is at times strangely inappropriate – though this may be the style of the writer.

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



## **Henry Moorhouse; The English Evangelist** John Macpherson

Paperback, 150 pp. Published by Gospel Folio Press, 304 Killaly St. West, Port Colborne, ON. L3K 6A6, Canada. ISBN: 978-1-926765-32-7.

This is a reprint of a biography written in the 1880's, shortly after Moorhouse's death at the early age of 40 years.

The writer presents his material under various headings, such as, 'Conversion', 'Work in England and Wales', 'Work in America', 'Bible teaching', 'Bible Spreading', 'Last days'. A good feature of the book is the extracts from Moorhouse's letters and messages, which feature in a number of sections; for example, we have details of a message on 'the precious blood of Christ', given in New York. It is a slim volume, so the chapter on England and Wales, for instance, occupies only eleven pages. Moorhouse's use of Bible-carriages is interesting, but

little space is devoted to it; the same is true of people converted under his preaching. There is a lack of information generally; we learn very little about Moorhouse's wife, family and home, for example.

The writer does insert into the record of his subject's life moral and spiritual lessons and observations, and also exhorts his readers in a didactic way. There are not just odd sentences, 'Often a good candle burns but dimly at first', but also paragraphs, such as those on conscience and alcohol, 'the solace of strong drink' is that 'with which the devil mocks a soul fevered in its sins' and three paragraphs on the potential dangers and 'charm' of 'lay preaching', which is 'without smell of the midnight lamp, without starch of system'. In such paragraphs there is no explicit reference to Moorhouse and this tends to remove the limelight from him. These are the kind of comments one might expect to hear in ministry on a Bible character.

The opening sentence raises the question – 'Is the life of Henry Moorhouse worth recording?' Yes it is, and this is an interesting book which does give an inspiring picture of the life of the evangelist, but as I read it I did think at times, 'O for more of Moorhouse, and a little less of Macpherson'!

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



## Travel with John Blanchard Brian H. Edwards

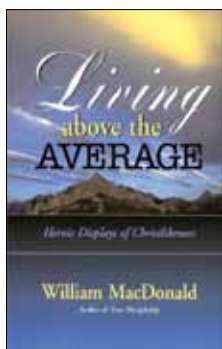
Paperback, 128pp. Published by Day One Publications, Ryelands Road, Leominster, HR6 8NZ, UK. Price: £10.00 ISBN 978-1-84625-161-0.

*Travel with John Blanchard* is a book which combines a biography of Blanchard's life and a travel guide to sites of special interest throughout his life. These include Guernsey (his birthplace) and various places where he has lived and served over the years, including Weston-super-Mare (the place of his first full-time appointment), Croydon and Banstead (Surrey).

The biography of Blanchard's life certainly makes compelling reading. He initially attended Holy Trinity Church in St. Peter Port (Guernsey) and was saved at the age of 22 during a gospel campaign led by Canadian evangelist Paul Cantelon in 1954. In subsequent years Blanchard served as the South-West Union Evangelist of the National Young Life Campaign (1962), joined the staff of the Movement for Worldwide Evangelism (1965) and founded Christian Ministries (1980). The author, BRIAN EDWARDS, clearly communicates Blanchard's passion for evangelism and defending the Christian faith, a passion which has led him to 'every corner' of the United Kingdom and many places worldwide. Another major theme of the book is Blanchard's written ministry. He is perhaps best known as a Christian apologetics author, with over twenty-five books in print. Some of these, such as *Right with God* and *Ultimate Questions*, have an evangelistic theme and have been instrumental in bringing many to faith in Christ. Others (for example, *Does God Believe in Atheists?*) are more apologetics based, aimed at strengthening the faith of many.

Christian biographies are often fascinating to read and this is no exception. Any who has read some of Blanchard's writings will find this book interesting, although there is much historical detail in the early chapters, and it is a shame that more examples of Blanchard's well-known 'sharp mind', 'wit' and 'immaculate ability with words' were not included. Despite this, it is a pleasure to read of the way in which God has used, and continues to use, Blanchard in His service, even though the travel guide notes will not be of much use to many.

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



## Living above the Average W. Macdonald

Paperback, 150 pp. Published by Gospel Folio Press, 304 Killaly St. West, Port Colborne, ON., L3K 6A6, Canada. ISBN 188270176-3.

This is a collection of brief anecdotes of various believers, plus a couple of potted autobiographies.

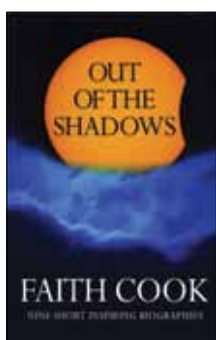
The latter are of Eric Liddell and Robert Cleaver Chapman, of around 2000 words each. Most of the former, of around 400-550 words, are Americans and many were unknown to this reviewer; for example, Faulkner, Akeman, Nichols, Oscar Cubas. We are given only the forenames of a few. More well-known ones perhaps include Darby, Ironside, Aylward and Suso.

The writer aims to challenge us, to provoke us to love and good works and the anecdotes are meant to illustrate 'heroic displays of Christlikeness'. They are usually descriptions of specific incidents in

a believer's life, such as forgiving a converted Nazi guard, not retaliating when spat on, and declining to recite an anti-Christian poem in class at school.

Carefully chosen verses of scripture are incorporated into some of the anecdotes. The writer adds some direct comments, usually a crisp exhortation at the end of each anecdote, either a sentence or paragraph or two. For example, we read, 'It takes backbone to be true to Jesus when all the world seems to be against you. Edith Vail was one of those who had what it takes', and 'If our behaviour doesn't rise above the way the world acts, it will never make an impact on those who are perishing'. Regrettably the copy I had contained quite a number of pages with faint print/text.

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



## Out of the Shadows Faith Cook

Paperback. 156 pages. Published by EP Books, Faverdale North, Darlington, DL3 0PH, England. ISBN: 978-0-852347-49-2.

This is another interesting book from Faith Cook. *Out of the Shadows* is a collection of nine short biographies of men and women who sought to do a work for God in their lives.

It is a testimony to the writer's skill that she captures something of the character of her various subjects. The deep affection the writer felt for her friend Patricia St. John is as evident as the deep melancholy in the life of Michael Bruce. The carefully selected portions of his poetry convey something of the times and conditions in which the latter lived. Equally, one of the eccentricities of Lorenzo Dow is captured in the account of his marriage proposal to Peggy, the woman who was to

become his wife. In it he said, 'she must be prepared not to stand in the way of his calling. She must expect to see him for only one month in a year'. In 21<sup>st</sup> Century society such a proposal would be greeted with derision, yet what a mighty work for God was wrought by this devoted couple!

Although, of necessity, each biography is brief, the writer makes the lives of her subjects both interesting and instructive. Whilst we will not agree with the writer's doctrinal position or that of all the people of whom she writes, this should not be allowed to detract from a book which shows what God can do with lives consecrated to His service.

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# Editorial

‘Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled’, Heb. 12. 15

The writer of Hebrews had deep desires for the believers to whom he wrote. They faced difficulties because of their background. They were Jewish believers but many amongst their kin were not. These believers faced opposition for their movement away from the Jewish rituals to the true faith in Christ. Sadly, they also faced some whose profession of Christ was merely intellectual. Their attack was not open hostility and opposition but something far more subtle. There was within them a ‘root of bitterness’, an essential element that would ultimately manifest their lack of salvation. However, as we know, until some shoot begins to grow from the root, we are unaware that the root exists. Even if we have found the root, the nature of the plant that will grow from it is largely unknown.

With a comprehensive network of communication it is possible to get to know information immediately. Indeed, some have picked up their mobile phones to film some event and beam it around the world as it happens. Whether it is the old fashioned phone call, the text message, the email, the tweet, or the Facebook entry, we can inform the world of our friends and contacts at the press of a button. Sadly, this ability to circulate ideas, opinions, and events has a serious implication. That ‘root of bitterness’ can manifest itself much more widely now than ever! The word of mouth, or the bearing of tales, has developed a whole new dimension! What would have been a relatively small local matter can become national and international in seconds.

The wise man wrote, ‘Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth’, Prov. 26. 20. In 2013 we have the potential to defile the mind and heart of so many believers by means of our sophisticated electronic communications. How important, rather, to ‘look diligently’ and seek to preserve believers from that which is false, from that which springs from bitterness, and to develop in them the features commensurate with a work of the grace of God. Elders have a responsibility to guard and nurture the young, but we each have a responsibility. Paul wrote to Timothy of the dangers of a pursuit of riches, ‘But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness’, 1 Tim. 6. 11. The exhortation of what to follow is good advice in a wider context, and particularly relevant for today!

We trust that there will be material in this present magazine which will promote the spiritual health of every believer. There is something practical, something devotional, and something instructional. We trust that there might be something for you!



In previous articles in this prophetic series the subject of the certainty of Israel's future restoration and its part in God's prophetic programme has been dealt with. In this article the primary purpose is to look at the national repentance and conversion of Israel, how it will take place, who will be involved, and why it will happen.

### The Programme – or how it will happen

A cursory reading of the history of the nation of Israel in the Old Testament will reveal an often repeating pattern of rest, then rebellion, retribution, repentance, and, finally, restoration. This is illustrated in the figure below.

This is particularly evident in the times of Joshua and the Judges. For example, in Joshua's day the people had rest, but soon after his death rebellion quickly set in, followed by divine retribution through attacks by their enemies, and then a cry of repentance from the people. God's means of restoring the people was to raise up a deliverer (a judge) who would then give them rest. However, soon after his death the cycle would begin again, until God raised up a new deliverer for the people.

The same pattern can also be seen in the life of Joseph and his brothers. Following their rebellion and rejection of Joseph, there was a period of testing during the drought when things reached such a point that

# Israel's Repentance

they had to seek the help of God's appointed deliverer. Their restoration depended on their repentance and acceptance of help from Joseph's hand.

It is not difficult to see that God was putting on record the blueprint for how Israel would be restored in the future. They are currently in a state of rebellion, a state which began at the end of the Old Testament after the revival under Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. It reached its zenith with the crucifixion of Christ and the persecution of the early church, and continues to this day in their rejection of the gospel. As Paul writes, 'As concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sakes', Rom. 11. 28.

Although there have been varying degrees of divine retribution over the past 2000 years, such as the destruction of the Temple in AD 70 and the anti-Semitic persecution over many centuries, it is only the beginning. The seven-year tribulation period, known as 'Jacob's trouble', will bring a period of retribution upon the nation as it has never known before. The purpose, however, is not to wipe them out of existence but, as the cycle suggests, to bring them to a state of repentance, with the ultimate goal of restoration and rest. This rest will be enjoyed throughout the millennium, and throughout the

eternal state. Israel will finally be restored to never roam and rebel again, and will finally live up to its name and be a prince with God.

A study of the seven feasts of Jehovah, Lev. 23, shows a similar pattern. It is generally accepted that the feasts give an outline of God's prophetic programme. The first four feasts take us from the cross (the Passover) to the day of Pentecost (feast of weeks), and

By  
**SCOTT  
DUNN**  
Perth,  
Australia

are linked with the beginning of the harvest around April to early May in our calendar. Quite clearly these have been fulfilled and we are currently in the intervening period when the harvest is being gathered.

At the end of this period there were three feasts linked together: feast of trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the feast of tabernacles.

As far as Israel is concerned the feast of trumpets represents a regathering of the nation. Ezekiel suggests that the purpose of the regathering is to judge Israel, 'I will bring you out from the people and will gather you out of the countries wherein ye are scattered, with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out . . . and I will purge out from among you the rebels, and them that transgress against me', Ezek. 20. 34, 38. These events typify the tribulation period, and show us that the judgement that will fall is not just intended for the Gentile nations but for Israel as well.

The next feast after the feast of trumpets was the Day of Atonement. It followed soon after and represented a national day of repentance for the nation. The tribulation period will accomplish the goal of bringing the nation to its knees so that it will cry out for deliverance. In answer to their cry God shall send a Deliverer and, as Paul wrote in Romans chapter 11 verse 26, 'And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob'. The sight of the risen Christ will bring about recognition that they, as a nation, had wrongly crucified the Messiah, and the words of Isaiah will

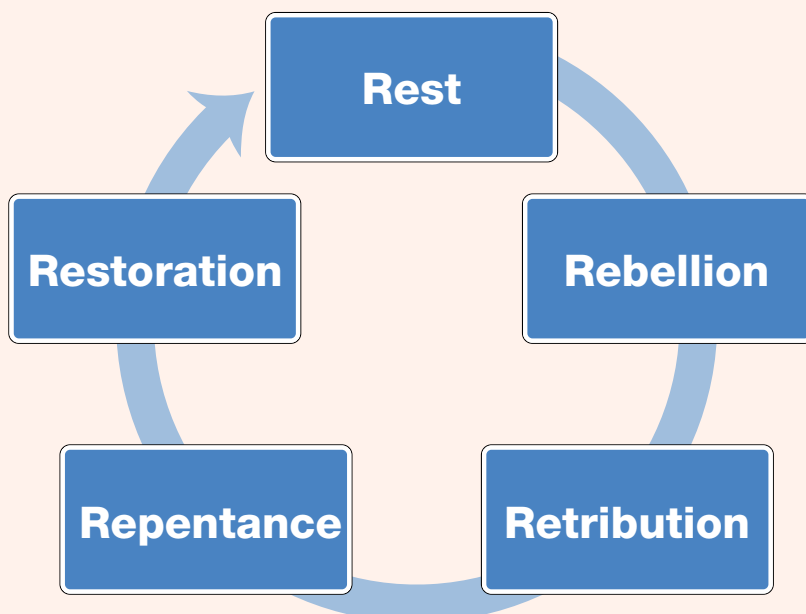


Figure adapted from IRVING L. JENSEN, *Jensen's Survey of the Old Testament*.

# and Conversion



ring in their minds, 'He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed', Isa. 53. 5. Following on from their restoration they will enjoy a period of rest, which will be the fulfilment of the feast of tabernacles.

Therefore, it is apparent from a study of Israel's past that God is not finished with them. Their rebellion is not the end. God always intended them to enjoy His rest and, through retribution and repentance, they will eventually come into God's eternal blessing.

## The Pardon – or the nature of God's forgiveness

As has already been suggested, Israel's deliverance has both physical and spiritual components. They will be delivered out of the hand of the enemy, and they will be saved from their sins. In Romans chapter 11, Paul makes it clear that the salvation that Israel will experience will be of a similar nature to that enjoyed by believers in this present age. Just as Gentiles are currently experiencing the mercy of God on the basis of faith, so too will Israel when their sins are taken away, Rom. 11. 27, 30, 31.

The forgiveness of their sins is linked to a covenant that God made with the nation. Just as His covenants with Abraham regarding the land, Gen. 15, and David with regards to the throne, 2 Sam. 7, were unconditional, so too was the covenant that He made regarding their forgiveness. It is likely that the covenant that Paul refers to is the new covenant, as stated in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, where God promises to bless the nation spiritually through the work of the Holy Spirit. Although we Gentiles are beneficiaries of these spiritual blessings now, we must remember that this covenant was made with the houses of Israel and Judah, Jer. 31. 31, and God intends to keep it, despite the present rebellion of the



nation. In that day the law will be written in their hearts, they will know God, and once more they shall be His people and He shall be their God, Jer. 31. 33.

## The People – or who will be involved?

As we have seen from Romans chapter 11 verse 26, Paul states that *all Israel* shall be saved. Two immediate questions arise from the verse: who is 'Israel', and how many are included within the word 'all'. In the context of the chapter, it seems clear that when Paul refers to Israel he is referring to the physical nation itself. He constantly contrasts Israel with the Gentiles so he must be referring to the physical descendants of Abraham rather than the spiritual sons of Abraham, which can, at times, include Gentiles, in Paul's use of the term.

The word 'all' is used in the chapter in contrast to the term 'remnant'. In the first half of chapter 11, Paul reminds his readers that for many years God preserved a small faithful remnant of believers. It was true in Elijah's day; it was true in Paul's day, and it will be true even during the tribulation period when many will pledge allegiance to the antichrist. This, in itself, raises a question: why has God preserved a remnant for all these years and not allowed the nation to be obliterated by its enemies? The obvious answer is that He must have a future purpose for them. The 'all' in verse 26 must, at least, mean the majority, as opposed to the small remnant that is currently being saved. Further, as all that oppose Christ will be dealt with at His coming, the 'all' may also be taken literally, as only believers in

the nation will be left to enter into the kingdom after Christ returns to earth.

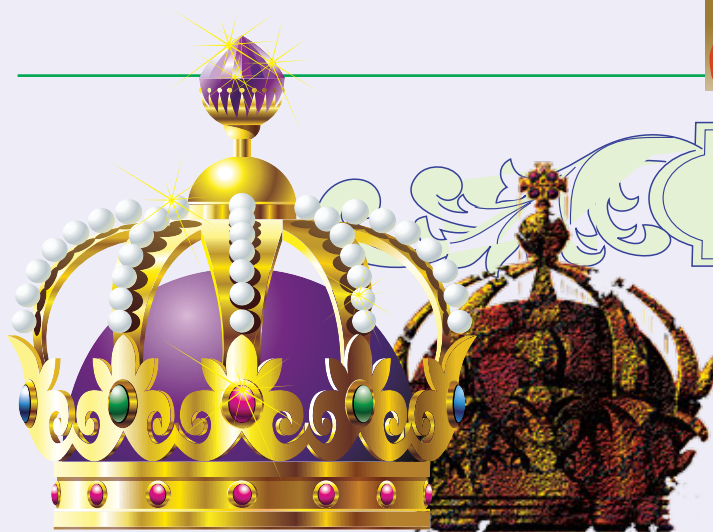
## The Purpose – or why it will happen

There are many reasons why God will ensure the national conversion of Israel. Firstly, it is in keeping with His character. He made promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and He will not break these, Rom. 11. 27. This is not only an essential truth for Israel but for us as well because if God could break His promises in the Old Testament what guarantee have we that He will not break His promises with us?

Secondly, it will be for the benefit of Israel and the nations around. God's primary purpose for Israel was that she would be His servant nation. The nations around should have come to know Jehovah through what they saw in Israel. Instead, the opposite happened and Israel became like the nations around them, taking on their practices and idols, and losing their distinctiveness. For this reason God had to set them aside. But after they are restored to their rightful place as God's servant nation and the head of the nations, there will be untold blessings for the world at large. Paul foresees this when he compares the present blessing that Gentiles enjoy, despite Israel's current failure, with the blessings that will be enjoyed when Israel are restored. He says it will be like life from the dead for the world, Rom. 11. 15.

Finally, the restoration of Israel, like the conversion of any soul, is ultimately for the glory of God, and His Son, Jesus Christ. God will bring the nation to the same point that every believer is brought to when they will recognize that they are without strength, need a Saviour, and are entirely cast upon God's grace and mercy. You could almost hear them singing in a day to come, 'To God be the glory, great things He has done', cp. Rom. 11. 33-36.

**SCOTT DUNN** was in fellowship in the assembly at Wallingford, England, before returning to his native Australia. He is now in fellowship with the believers at Balcatta Gospel Hall, Perth, Australia. This is his first article for *Precious Seed International*.



# JOTHAM &

By **KEN TOTTON** Cambridge, England (*Unless otherwise stated*)

## Ahaz

(read 2 Kings chapter 16; 2 Chronicles chapter 28; Isaiah chapter 7)

## Jotham

(read 2 Chronicles chapter 27)

How refreshing to read of a king who 'did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord', and consequently enjoyed God's blessing, 2 Chr. 27. 2, 6! Jotham's success was the result of *deliberate* spiritual resolve, cp. Prov. 4. 23.

In many ways he continued the good work that his father Uzziah had carried out in strengthening defences and waging war against enemies. This shows the power of godly parental example. At the same time, he learned from Uzziah's costly trespass, and its judgement, v. 2. As Paul instructed Timothy, disciplining sinning leaders will have a wholesome effect upon others, 'As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear', 1 Tim. 5. 20 ESV.

Whilst Jotham was a good king, we read, 'But still the people acted corruptly', 2 Chr. 27. 2; 'However the high places were not removed; the people still sacrificed and burned incense on the high places', 2 Kgs. 15. 35. In addition to the idolatry, the prophets expose the deeper moral corruption of Judah, Isa. 1. 5; Mic. 1. 5. The people enjoyed the benefits of godly rule yet worshipped and behaved as they saw fit. There was a major gap between the convictions of the leadership and those led. In our day, it is all too easy for members of assemblies to benefit from the spirituality of a few godly souls, whilst living on a far lower spiritual plane.

Following his father, Jotham was a builder, constructing extensively on the temple mount at Jerusalem, 2 Chr. 27. 3. Likewise, those who teach the word are builders, and need to take heed to the foundation on which they build, and the quality of the construction, 1 Cor. 3. 11-13. He was also concerned to strengthen Judah against enemy incursion, by building forts and towers, v. 4. In the same spirit, Paul exhorted that watch be kept continually against destructive intruders, Acts 20. 28-31; Phil. 3. 2-3.

The accession of a new king was often seen as an opportunity for revolt by vassal states as they tested the mettle of the incoming monarch. Jotham was therefore concerned to subdue the old enemy, Ammon, by exacting tribute. There is a clear hint, however, that this did not continue beyond the third year, 2 Chr. 27. 5. We can never afford to relax our constant fight against the world, the flesh, and the devil!

Ahaz, son of Jotham, was a thoroughly bad king. His record has the unhappy distinction of being devoid of any redeeming features. We are ominously told that 'he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel', and following verses sketch the depths to which he descended, even sacrificing his own sons. It was during his reign that the underlying godlessness of the people noted earlier, 2 Chr. 27. 2, was given full expression, with nothing to arrest the apostasy. A key word in this chapter that describes the attitude of Ahaz is 'unfaithful', vv. 19, 22, 'trespassing' KJV. He acted treacherously against the Lord and encouraged his people to do the same. The practice of 'the abominations of the nations whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel' would result, in time, in Judah's expulsion from the land – the exile in Babylon.

## Enemy incursions

Exactly as Moses predicted, Deut. 28. 25, the Lord brought judgement on Judah by giving them into the hands of Rezin and Pekah, kings respectively of Syria and the northern kingdom, Israel. Apparently they wanted Ahaz to join their anti-Assyrian alliance. When God's people behave faithlessly, He acts in discipline. In fact, history had repeated itself. Just as God used Judah to punish Israel in the days of Abijah, 2 Chr. 13. 4-18, so now roles were reversed, for God is no respecter of persons. The men of Israel took a large number of captives with the intention of enslaving them, as well as the spoils of battle, 28. 8. However, they overstepped the mark as the instruments of God's punishment of Judah, v. 9, cp. Zech. 1. 15.

Yet, it is just at this point that a most remarkable episode takes place, unique in Chronicles. Oded, a prophet in Samaria, rebuked the returning soldiers, warning that they had incurred God's wrath by enslaving their 'brethren', 2 Chr. 28. 8, 11. Whilst the Chronicler has no time for the kings of Israel, he recognizes the *people* of the north as brothers. Thus, both Israel and Judah stood alike guilty and under the wrath of God. Courageously, several chiefs of Ephraim engaged the triumphant warriors, and confronted them with the enormity of their guilt, v. 14.

Godly sorrow leads to repentance, and repentance shows itself in appropriate actions, 2 Cor. 7. 10; Matt. 3. 8. So the hapless men of Judah were clothed, shod, supplied, anointed, and the needy transported. We may recall the story of the 'Good Samaritan', Luke 10. 29-39, and savour the many instructive parallels!

# AHAZ

*stated, all scripture quotations are from New King James Version)*

## Isaiah's interventions disregarded

The behaviour of Ahaz is all the more culpable because he acted in defiance of the ministry of Isaiah. How dreadful the portion of those who persistently sin against the light of God's word, Prov. 29. 1! Isaiah appealed to both king and people not to seek from Assyria. Meeting Ahaz 'at the end of the aqueduct from the upper pool, on the highway to the Fuller's Field', he bade him have no fear of 'these two stubs of smoking firebrands', Rezin and Pekah, for, like dying torches, they would speedily be extinguished, Isa. 7. 3-4. If he would not believe this he would not be established, v. 9. Failing to win the young king's confidence, Isaiah was sent a second time, with the offer of any sign Ahaz chose to ask, to authenticate God's word. In nauseating false piety the king answered, 'I will not ask, nor will I test the Lord!' vv. 10-12. Instead, ambassadors were dispatched to the Assyrian king to buy his favour, 2 Kgs. 16. 8; 2 Chr. 28. 16. So Ahaz is castigated for seeking help from the ungodly rather than waiting upon God, Isa. 7. 13-25. Yet Isaiah, in reply to Ahaz, gave the glorious prophecy of Immanuel, v. 14. How marvellous the grace and faithfulness of God!

Predictably, the high-risk plan back-fired. The Assyrian king afflicted him, instead of strengthening him, and the faithless Ahaz raided the house of the Lord to pay the heavy tribute demanded, 2 Chr. 28. 20, 21. How sad when erring saints under pressure instinctively turn to worldly resources. By contrast the psalmist recorded, 'In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord', Ps. 77. 2.

## Desecration of the temple

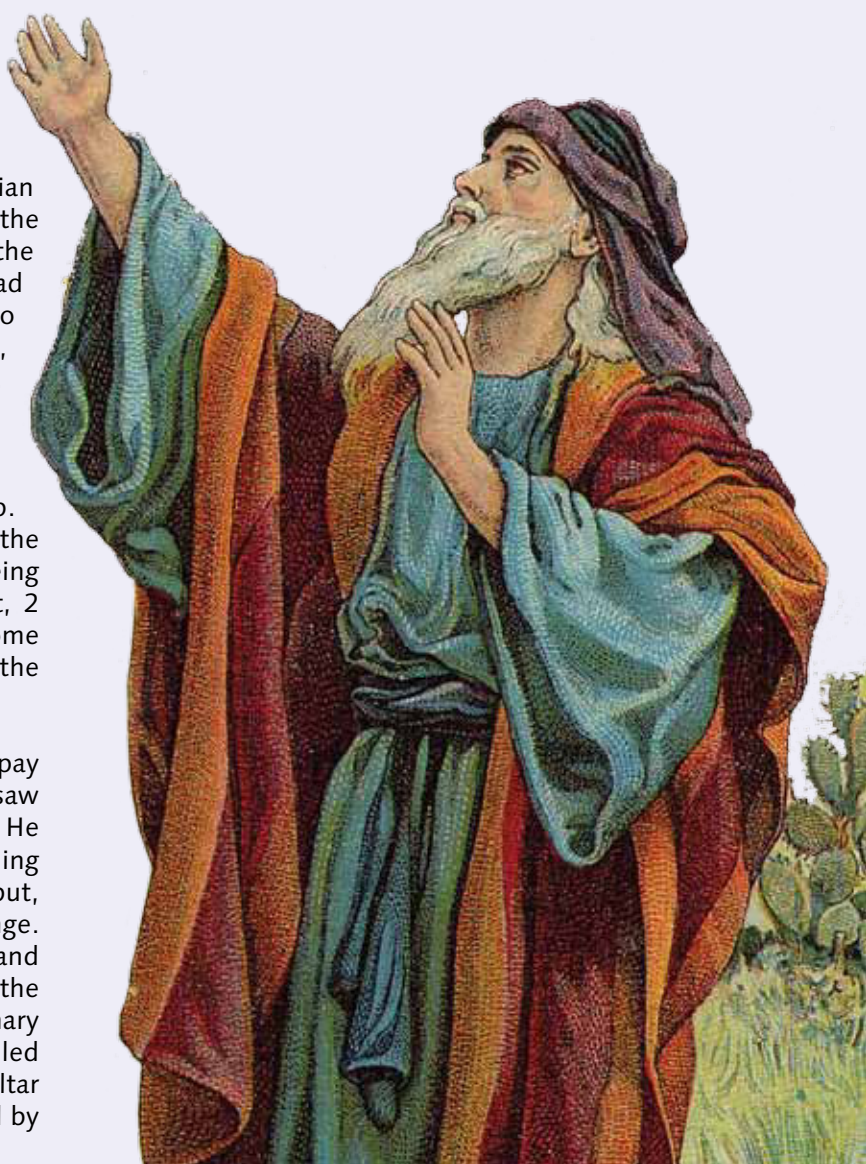
The king removed the ten lavers of Solomon from the ornamental bases on which they had stood, cp. 1 Kgs. 7. 27-39, and also the molten sea from the twelve brazen bulls which supported it, the sea being placed instead upon a raised platform or pavement, 2 Kgs. 16. 17. Presumably the metal removed went some way towards paying the heavy tribute placed upon the kingdom.

In 732 BC Ahaz was summoned to Damascus to pay homage to Tiglath-pileser, 2 Kgs. 16. 10. There he saw an altar, the design of which greatly appealed to him. He had a copy of it placed in the temple court. Returning to Jerusalem, the king sacrificed at the new altar, but, not satisfied with its position, gave orders for a change. He wanted the brazen altar moved to the north, and the new altar to be placed in line with it in front of the temple. Orders were further given that the customary sacrifices should be offered on the new altar, now called 'the great altar', while the king reserved the brazen altar for himself 'to inquire by', i.e., divination as practised by pagan rulers, 2 Kgs. 16. 15.

When rulers persist in godlessness it can seem that the very stars in their courses fight against them, Judg. 5. 20. Yet, 'that king Ahaz', 2 Chr. 28. 22, had still further depths of folly and wantonness to plumb. Defeated by the Syrians, he succumbed to the philosophy 'if you can't beat them, join them', and in desperation he sacrificed to the gods of the victorious Syrians, with ruinous consequences. He cut in pieces the sacred vessels of the house of God, 2 Kgs. 16. 17, and shut the doors of the house of God. Eventually, the Babylonians would destroy the temple and carry off its vessels, but how despicable that a Davidic king, responsible for shepherding his people, should bar God's flock from it! How grave, too, the injuries to the cause of Christ perpetrated within Christendom, where false teaching and paganism has often distanced souls from God, rather than drawn them near to Him!

Interestingly, in the story of Jotham, the Chronicler briefly notes the idolatry of the people, 2 Chr. 27. 2. By contrast, at the death of Ahaz their consensus was that he did not merit a tomb among the kings, 28. 27. Mercifully, amidst all the idolatry and faithlessness, the faith of Judah had not been wholly extinguished. Indeed, one of Judah's brightest eras was about to dawn.

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Previous articles dealt with the glory of God that was displayed to Moses, Isaiah, and Ezekiel. These Theophanies, or Christophanies, were displays of God's Person and attributes. The revelation of God's glory resulted in worship, and affected the work these three men did for God and their witness to the people. In Isaiah and Ezekiel the vision is of the pre-incarnate Christ, and the glory He had with the Father.

The incarnate Christ also displayed His glory. In the synoptic Gospels, glory is associated with the birth of Christ and with His future appearance. In John, however, the incarnate Word is seen in all His glory. There is a revelation of His past, present, and prospective glory. These aspects are associated with the Person, power, passion, and present position of the Lord Jesus.

### The glory of His Person

In chapter 1 verse 14 of his Gospel, John saw a display of glory when viewing the Lord Jesus, the eternal Word made flesh. This could be a reference to the transfiguration and the radiance seen on that occasion. In the context, however, it would seem that the reference is to His Person and character, full of grace and truth.

In chapter 1 verse 18 the Son, who resides in the Father's bosom, revealed the invisible God. This is similar to the truth of Hebrews chapter 1 verses 1-4 where God has revealed Himself, 'in *his* Son', or, more literally, 'in Son'. That is, the Son is more than a messenger, like the prophets; He is the message. He is 'the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person', v. 3.

John's account of the incarnation is summed up in four words, 'the Word became flesh', 1. 14. The Lord Jesus 'tabernacled' with man, and, like the Old Testament tabernacle, God's glory was resident in Him. John could say that the glory of the Only begotten, the One and only of the Father, was made visible. It was the glory of His Person, what J. G. BELLETT called, the 'The Moral Glory of the Lord Jesus Christ'. This glory shone in all that He did and was displayed in grace and truth.

# The Glory of

By **GARY McBRIDE**

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*[Unless otherwise stated, all quotations are taken from the NKJ version of the scriptures].*

The Lord Jesus was the embodiment of grace. In the Gospels grace is associated with the Person of Christ, it speaks of His character. According to Titus chapter 2 verse 11, grace was revealed on earth in the Person of Christ; the epiphany of 'grace . . . that brings . . . salvation to all men'. His lips were full of grace so that His speech was gracious. There was an overflow, or abundance of, grace – super-abounding grace, John 1. 16.

It was this display of grace in touching the lives of others that led the crowd to say, 'He has done all things well', Mark 7. 37. Peter said of Him, 'nor was deceit found in his mouth', 1 Peter 2. 22. It is amazing to think that the Lord Jesus never had to retract a word, or apologize for saying the wrong thing. It was true of Him, that His speech was always with grace, Col. 4. 6.

The Lord Jesus was also truth in the flesh. As the eternal Word, God manifest in the flesh, He could say, 'I am the truth', John 14. 6. God's word is truth, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth, and the Lord Jesus is truth. Truth, by its very nature, is absolute and exclusive. It must contain the idea of truthfulness which is seen in the character, conduct, and conversation of the Lord Jesus. The

glory of His person was in full display while He walked on earth.

### The glory of His power

In John chapter 2 verse 11, it is His works, or power, that manifested His glory. This is the first of seven signs in John's Gospel, miracles performed before His death on the cross. This sign demonstrated His power to transform from the inside, to replace emptiness with joy. The six water-pots were there for religious purposes, the outward but ritualistic manifestation of righteousness. These pots were empty, much like the Jewish religion that was devoid of reality. The Lord Jesus did an inner unseen work that transformed water into wine.

There are encounters with six individuals in John's Gospel that could be represented by these empty pots. All six found that their religious life was empty, lacking reality, and with no joy. These encounters can be grouped in three couplets. Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman both found that the Lord Jesus had the answer to the longing of their souls. They were seeking for something that would satisfy.

In John chapter 4 verses 46-53 it is the nobleman's son and, in chapter 5 verses 1-15 it is the man with the infirmity by the pool, Bethesda. The nobleman and the infirmed man both faced hopeless situations that their religious beliefs could not remedy.



# God (3)

Their lives changed when they met the Lord Jesus.

The blind man of John chapter 9 and Lazarus in chapter 11 are both in need, both beyond hope and past help. The blind man received sight, and Lazarus was made alive. In the case of Lazarus the situation was 'for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it', 11. 4. In all of these lives the work was unseen, from the inside out; wholeness, satisfaction, and joy were the results.

The servant's part in the miracle in John chapter 2 was to do what He said unto them. They poured in the water but had no power to cause the inner transformation. So it is today, believers share the gospel, pouring it into empty vessels by the preaching of the word, the inner unseen work is done by the Lord, and is to His glory. Every soul that is saved is a miracle of grace through faith, so no one could boast; all is to the glory of God.

## The glory of His passion

This aspect of His glory is introduced in John chapter 12 verses 27-28, and is seen again in chapter 13 verses 31-32. In response to the request of the Greeks to see Jesus, the Lord said, 'The hour is come that the Son of Man should be glorified', 12. 23. Up to this point in His ministry the Lord Jesus had said, the hour is not yet come, or 'My time has not yet

fully come', 7. 8.

In John chapter 12 verse 28 His prayer is for the glory of the Father's name, and the response from heaven is that this has and will happen. In the context the cross is in view, as the Lord Jesus talks of a grain of wheat falling into the ground and dying. In chapter 13 it is the cross as well as the resurrection and ascension that are presented. It is also the subject of the Lord's prayer, 'Father the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You', 17. 1.

The glory of the cross, first and foremost, is that the Father's will was accomplished. Beyond that, His attributes were displayed, mercy and truth met, and righteousness and peace kissed each other. The love of the Father is fully seen at the cross in that He gave His only Son as a sacrifice for us.

The cross is also to the glory of the Lord Jesus, in redemption, and in renown. At the cross He was the sacrificial Lamb, the substitutionary offering, and the Shepherd who died for the sake of the flock. At the cross He defeated Satan's power over death and freed us from the bondage of fear, He satisfied the just demands of God, and He paid the price for our sins.

The Father glorified the Son in the cross, and, ever since, His people have given Him glory because of His love for us, and the redemption found in Him. Through all of eternity, worship and glory will be given to the Lamb who was slain.

## The glory of His position

John chapter 17 verse 1 is a further request of the Lord Jesus with regard

to the glory of the cross. In verse 5 the request has to do with restoration of His former glory, in view of His finished work on earth. This is the positional glory of the Lord Jesus. He is given an exalted place, 'seated *Him* at His right hand in the heavenly *places* far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come', Eph. 1. 20, 21.

The Lord Jesus is now at the right hand of the Majesty on high. He is over all things, Head of the church; He has a more excellent name than the angels, a name which is above every name. He is the Great High Priest, He is the Chief Shepherd, and He is the heavenly Bridegroom.

A fitting illustration of the acquired glories of Christ can be found in David's life and his conquest of Goliath, 1 Sam. 17. In verse 25 the three rewards are listed that would be given to one who could kill the giant. He would be enriched with great riches, the King's daughter would become his wife, and his family would be free of taxes. David conquered the giant and, in time, these all came true for him. He took the enemy's sword and armour to his own tent, and made a show of his triumph openly. He was also praised by the people and exalted to the head of the army by Saul. The nation was freed from the bondage of the fear of death. He went ultimately from a shepherd to a sovereign, from obscurity to renown, and from rejection to reigning.

As great as these honours were they pale in comparison to what happened to the Lord Jesus, David's greater Son. The Lord Jesus has been enriched, a bride is being gathered for Him, and all who have a relationship with Him by faith, are free in Him. This is the One presented as being 'crowned with glory and honour', Heb. 2. 9. The very one who tasted death for every man is now exalted to the highest place.

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In a previous article we looked at working with Senior Citizens through a regular gospel tea meeting. This article seeks to explore other ways in which this growing group of people can be reached with the gospel.

### The personal touch

Working with senior citizens can be quite a difficult activity. By the nature of the group you are working with, there can be changes in personnel. Some become ill; some become housebound; some die. These pose on-going challenges to the continuation of the work, but also offer opportunities. Building up a short profile of people with whom you have made contact can provide fruitful opportunities.

### Prayer

Illness amongst older people can often be more debilitating and take longer to recover from, but it is also an opportunity for prayer. An

# WORKING WITH S

example was given of believers from an assembly that were approached by the daughter of an attendee at the Senior Citizens' Tea. In conveying the news that her mother was seriously ill with cancer, she asked the believers if they would pray. What an opportunity! The fact that the elderly lady made a partial recovery has proved a testimony to the family. It has also allowed the believers to demonstrate the love of God through their actions.

### Visitation

There is opportunity for visitation. Such matters have to be approached with due care and sensitivity, but they can make a significant impact. Provided they are able to receive a visitor, calling to see someone who is ill can help to break down barriers to the gospel, and demonstrate the reality of the message.

Equally, nothing is more effective to a family than the care of the Christians who visit and, perhaps, bring something simple for the sufferer. However, it must also be appreciated that such things are time consuming and what was planned as a short visit may turn out to be longer than anticipated! Many older people living alone become lonely, and a visitor provides a welcome relief.

When someone misses one of the regular teas, there is the opportunity to take a sample of what was provided to their house. The individual may not be able to attend on the particular occasion, but will be encouraged to attend again if they know that their presence is missed and the church actually cares. One of the greatest forms of advertising for this kind of work is word of mouth. Living in the community, to see, stop and chat to those you

see at the gospel teas is a benefit because those you are trying to reach see you as a friend.

### Death

Sometimes, sadly, one of those attending the Senior Citizens' work dies. How important to ensure that such a person heard the gospel preached, saw the message lived out amongst the Christians, and had the opportunity of salvation! We can do no more for the person who has died, but it may be possible to do something for those that survive. Their friends and relatives may not know who we are, but a simple attendance at a funeral service as a mark of respect can often provide further opportunities, at a time when hearts are only too aware of the brevity of life. With sensitivity and care, favourable impressions can be made. One lady attended a gospel meeting on the Sunday following her friend's death because the believers attended the funeral of that friend.

Sometimes there may be the request from the family to take the funeral of their deceased relative. Such requests can bring all sorts of issues to resolve, but they also offer opportunities for the demonstration of the love of God as well as the preaching of the gospel.

Paul stated, 'I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some', 1 Cor. 9. 22. It is worth asking, am I?

### The Service in the Residential Centre

Anyone working with children, either in schools, or children's work, will be all too familiar with the break-up of marriages and families. Many children now have to split their time between each parent, and weekends or parts of weekends are occupied with visiting the parent with whom they no longer live. But the break-up of family life is also having a detrimental effect upon older people. The time when a large number of family members lived within a short distance of each other has almost disappeared.





# SENIOR CITIZENS (2)

In place of a network of family care for older citizens, there has arisen the residential care home. But this, in turn, opens up opportunities to visit these centres as part of the outreach activities of the local church. Such care homes would seek to provide activities and 'entertainment' for their residents, and often a personal visit to the manager of a local care home can provide opportunities to visit the home and speak to the residents. They see this as the provision of a 'spiritual dimension' to the care of their residents. We see it as an opportunity to present the gospel, either in song, or in a short message.

Whilst the time available may be limited, both in terms of when, and how long, such opportunities can be most fruitful. Apart from the residents themselves, it is possible to build up a relationship with carers, and managers who work in the home. Similarly, some residents may well have visitors and they see what you do, and may hear what you have to say. Such relationships can provide further opportunities for the distribution of gospel calendars and literature. There could also be those more agile residents who are prepared to come from the home to one of your Senior Citizens' services.

The practical issues that arise may be summarized as follows:

## Consistency

Care Homes appreciate something that is regular and planned rather than something which appears *ad hoc*. It is worth thinking about what frequency of visit can be made when the greatest number of church members are available to support it. Every week can be a demanding schedule for even the larger companies of believers. It is easier to schedule a specific Sunday in the month as a date when you visit a particular home. It may be that visits at certain times of year would be more appropriate – e.g., Easter or Christmas. Whatever pattern is decided upon must be adhered to as far as possible if a good testimony is to be maintained.

## Flexibility/Adaptability

Whilst the managers may prefer a structured pattern of visitation, the residents require a greater degree of flexibility. Older people do not like to be rushed, but so often they are not ready when the time arrives. Similarly, starting promptly may not always be possible, depending upon what residents have been doing beforehand.

Those who already have a programme of visitation to residential homes have noticed that the people they are seeking to speak to often suffer with memory issues, or, for some, dementia. There are those residents who will welcome a service which sticks to a particular format for a fixed time. The changing nature of the audience demands a degree of adaptability on the part of the person leading.

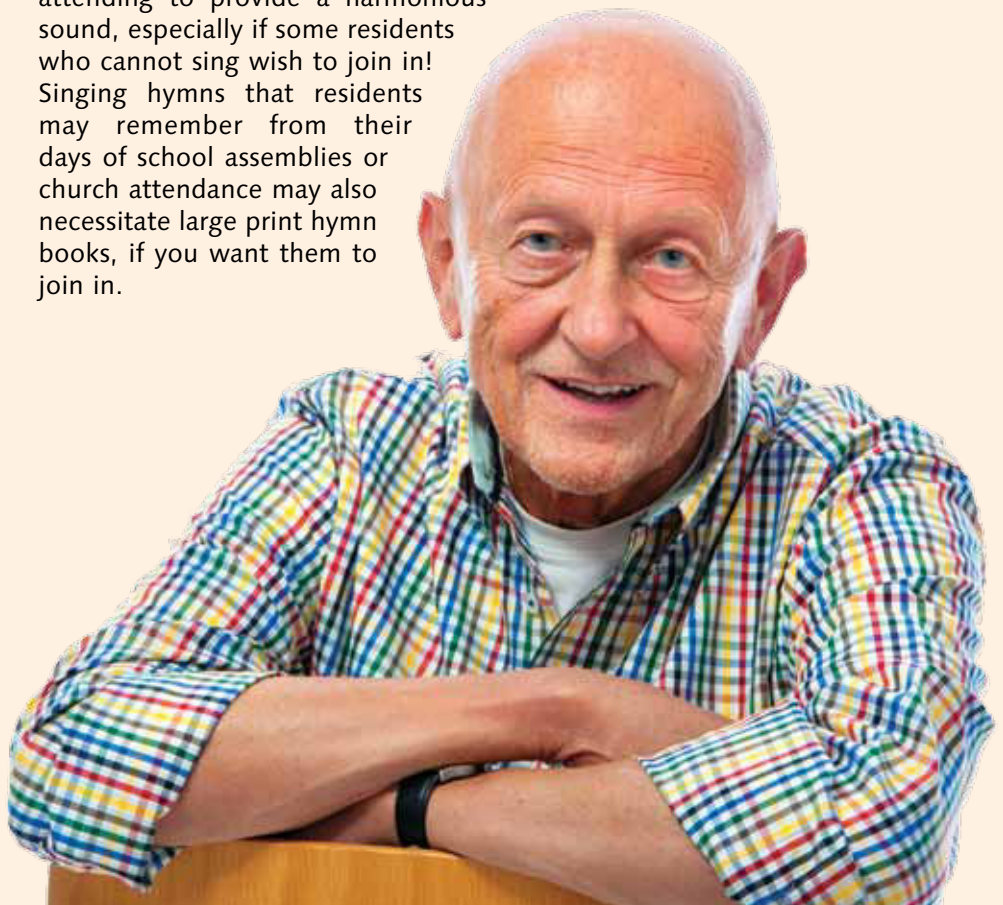
## Numbers/Time

It needs to be borne in mind that singing in a residential care home may be without musical accompaniment. It needs a reasonable number of people attending to provide a harmonious sound, especially if some residents who cannot sing wish to join in! Singing hymns that residents may remember from their days of school assemblies or church attendance may also necessitate large print hymn books, if you want them to join in.

Many older people will not concentrate for a long period of time, if opportunity for a short gospel message is given, it needs to be simple and to fit the time available.

In conclusion, it is worth reminding ourselves of the words of the Lord Jesus, 'Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature', Mark 16. 15. Too often we interpret this as a call to the mission field of a distant country. There is a mission field in our own communities and, at the moment, many opportunities are available, particularly in this area of older people in society. We can be guilty of complacently organizing a regular gospel meeting which no one attends, when there are opportunities of reaching lost sinners that we are ignoring because of a lack of vision. We hope these articles might challenge all our hearts to do what we can, whilst we can. Only the Lord of the harvest will know what fruit has been generated for His glory!

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 John Coltman (Winhill) and Bob Wheatley (Higham Ferrers) for their input to this article.





## Distinctions due to gift

God loves variety. We see so many examples in creation: whether it's the amazing number of species of animals, birds, insects, or plants on this planet, or the huge number of different types of galaxies with their billions of stars, where 'one star differeth from another star in glory', 1 Cor. 15. 41.

It is the same in the spiritual realm, and particularly in the local assembly, where there are varieties of gifts, administrations, and operations.<sup>1</sup>

God believes in both diversity and equality. As regards our moral and spiritual state, we were all equally 'dead in trespasses and sins', Eph. 2. 1; we all needed to exercise 'like precious faith', 2 Pet. 1. 1, to obtain, by grace, all spiritual blessings. No believer gets more, none gets less, of these.

But God then gives to each a gift.<sup>2</sup> There is a diverse range of gifts that He grants, so that the variety of tasks He wants undertaken can be done. This becomes clear from the 'gift passages' in Romans chapter 12, 1 Corinthians chapter 12 (where many are 'sign gifts' and not permanent for the whole of the church age), and Ephesians chapter 4. These are given respectively by the Father, the Holy Spirit, and our Lord. All three Persons of the Trinity are involved – just as They were in our salvation. There is also diversity in the way the same gifts can be expressed, as different measures of faith are given to each believer.<sup>3</sup>

One great practical consequence of this is that we should seek to develop the gift God has given us, and not try to imitate another of the Lord's servants. We should recognize that God does not expect us to do what he has not given us the enablement to do. We should not copy another servant's 'style' realizing that God does not want clones in His assemblies, but individuals

# DISTINCTION

working together in unity yet with diversity. This also means we do not play one off against another, but value the contribution that each brings to the collective service of God. In 1 Corinthians chapter 12 verse 12 Paul demands that we never despise another member's role in the assembly because everyone and the function they fulfil is needed.

Another vitally important consequence of the scriptural insistence on variety in God's assembly is the unacceptability of any form of 'one man ministry'. No one person can ever be singled out and described as 'the pastor', 'the minister', or 'the teaching elder' of an assembly. No such term is ever used in the New Testament, for the pattern clearly is one of plurality in both government and public service of every kind.<sup>4</sup> An assembly needs to allow for the expression of all the gifts that God has given to it. So it is imperative that any arrangements for meetings do not shut out vital gift

By  
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that God has given. I remember well the ministry of a brother who would rarely be heard speaking at the arranged ministry meeting for the usual 45 to 50 minutes, but in ten minutes or so at an open ministry session you'd get teaching from him that would lift your heart to heaven and give you an encouragement that you could go in the strength of for many days!

## Distinctions due to gender

Let me take you back to when I was at Primary School. One of my teachers for a couple of years was Miss Boggs. She was a good teacher who taught the class well, had a good sense of humour, and was firm but fair. I listened to her teaching the usual subjects for 9 to 10 year olds, including the telling of Bible stories with relevant explanations. Mondays to Fridays I heard her teach. Then I saw her again at the weekends, on a Sunday morning at the Breaking of Bread meeting in the Gospel Hall my parents took me too – but there I never heard her speak a word! She sang the hymns with everyone else, but never prayed audibly, taught, read from the Bible, or even gave out a hymn. Miss Boggs was silent! What a contrast to what she was like at school! So I learned at a young age the difference between the ordering of things in the world, in contrast to God's assembly.

But is it still right in the 21st century for capable, spiritual, and responsible women not to be allowed to take part in church gatherings? Let me answer the question by referring to the Baptist pastor, Steve Chalke, who has recently shocked the evangelical





# S IN SERVICE

world by coming out in favour of same-sex relationships. In his attempt to justify this stance, which so clearly is contrary to scripture, he describes, in an article available on his Oasis website, how many churches have accepted women in leadership, and public teaching roles. He writes:

'There are several New Testament texts that are very clear about the role of women in Christian communities. 1 Timothy 2:11-15 says: "I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner." The text appeals to Genesis 2 and the very nature of creation as its source of authority for the silence and submission of women . . . In 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, Paul writes: "Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. If they want to enquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church." . . . in 1 Tim 3, where it is noted that women can fulfill this 'secondary' role (v. 11), the qualifications for the post of overseer/elder (vv. 1-7) are very male indeed! **The absolute and universal character of the Epistles' instructions about women is not easy to escape**'. (My emphasis)

Mr. Chalke continues, 'The vast majority of Christians now recognise that women can, and should, teach and lead. So, how have we got there when, on the face of it, the New Testament prohibits it?'

He supplies the answer to his question, "'It's cultural", we say'. Now Mr Chalke's purpose is to use the way people in Christendom have avoided the clear teaching of the Bible in relation to the role of women to justify, along with other arguments, his newly declared stance on same-sex relationships.

In the course of doing this he very helpfully affirms the clarity of scripture about the silent role of women and how it is based on creation. There is also a clear indication in what he writes that plain scripture has been wilfully set aside in favour of current cultural practice in the world. But it is the fact that God's order in the creation of man and woman is the basis of the teaching about roles in the church that means that irrespective of the culture believers are living in, God's rules about the distinctive responsibilities of men and women apply throughout the church age. It is also the case, of course, that the wickedness of same-sex relationships is the same today as it has ever been, as sexual relations, too, are based on creation principles.



Now the Bible never hints that women are inferior or less able than men, because they are not. It is simply that God has assigned different roles to the different genders. It must, of course, be strongly stated that while women have to be in silence in an assembly gathering, the men have a positive responsibility to take part audibly. In the matters of prayer and thanksgiving this is incumbent on all the male members, not only those recognized as having some type of speaking gift. Younger men should be particularly encouraged so that they get used to it early, but it's never too late to begin, if any have not been doing so!

## Distinctions due to God's sovereignty

It is God who has decided what our gender and gift should be. So, we must submit to how God has made us and gifted us, and fulfil the roles assigned to us by Him with humility and zeal. We should avoid the stress that comes from trying to do what God has never intended us to do, and therefore hasn't gifted us for, as well as the complacency or laziness that leaves God's gift and purpose for us unrealized. There should never be any envying of others, neither any pride of ourselves, as all that we are, or have, comes from the Lord. Let us not neglect the gift God has given us but stir it up, and use it to His glory and for the blessing of others.

## Endnotes

- 1 1 Cor. 12. 4-6.
- 2 1 Pet. 4. 10.
- 3 Rom. 12. 3.
- 4 See, for example, Acts 13. 1; Phil. 1. 1.

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## The Problem of Chronic Illness

Chronic illnesses are health conditions that either have symptoms on a constant basis or flare up episodically. These include: diabetes, heart disease, pulmonary problems, hypertension, mental disorders, stroke, cancer, arthritis, AIDS, and obesity. Eighty percent of older adults have at least one chronic condition, and 50% have at least two.<sup>1</sup> Chronic illness is currently the main cause of both death and disability in the USA.<sup>2</sup> Medical science has made tremendous progress in ameliorating the physical effects of many of these diseases; however, they still can be a challenge to our spiritual, mental, and emotional health.

Chronic illnesses can lead to anxiety about future suffering, incapacity, and helpless dependence on others. It can force changes in lifestyle, how and where your time is spent, and how your independence and financial liberties may be affected. Cherished activities may need to be sacrificed or curtailed. Your life may need restructuring to adapt to new physical limitations, special needs, and new financial constraints, as funds are redirected to what can be expensive medications and treatment services.

The need for emotional endurance becomes paramount. Continued stress, anxiety, and sadness over time can produce depression. Depression should be addressed promptly. The highest risk for depression is during the first two years. Depression often leads to poor eating habits, lack of exercise, and inconsistent hygiene, and can lead to new or worsened symptoms, as well as accelerating one's death. Thus, it may complicate your recovery from a chronic illness, and worsen your overall physical condition.<sup>3</sup>

Coping with the spiritual, mental, and emotional challenges of a chronic illness requires an approach that is realistic, but also positive. Adapting to your condition, or feeling good about the future, may seem impossible, at first, but it can be done. Christ, the supreme example, focused on the joy that was set before Him, Heb. 12. 2. Our Lord gives us all we need to cope, regardless of the situation. Our ability to apply it to our lives will vary from believer to believer. A Christian psychologist, or a spiritual elder, or a good friend, all of whom are hopefully knowledgeable in the scriptures, can sometimes assist. By coping successfully, you can comply

# Coping w Debili Illnes

more fully with your treatment programme, and achieve some sense of fulfilment in your life.

It is at this point of need that we would first take note of the timeless example *par excellence*, our Lord Jesus Christ. By virtue of His tremendous sufferings that spanned an eternity within a few hours, He is eminently qualified to guide us through the process. We will consider Him from the Garden of Gethsemane to when He said, 'Into thy hands I commend my spirit'.

First, we notice His overall demeanour. He always stayed connected to others.<sup>4</sup> Stay connected



# ith tating

**S** By **Dr. JOHN THROPAY**  
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to others, no matter how deep the suffering! He focused his attention on essential items that were needed for Himself, and others, in the midst of his suffering. Psychologists, independently of the Bible, give recommendations for coping that are in concert with what Christ did. Christ's actions are an excellent example as to how one can defeat depression, and continue to be fulfilled as a person, even in the face of death. Christ used His pathway of sufferings as an opportunity to serve others, and to glorify God; He never took it as a personal threat. To follow Christ's example in this regard, do something for others. Volunteering for a worthy cause can be a great experience. It also can help you forget about your own problems, and increase your Christ-esteem.

**'Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done', Luke 22. 42**

The prelude to our Lord's sufferings was His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. His total acceptance before God of what awaited Him enabled him to glorify God in His sufferings. For us it would be an adjustment of attitude spiritually, emotionally, and psychologically. The glorious grace of God for sinful men could be revealed by Christ in a timeless way after His complete acceptance of whatever pain He would have to endure. In our sufferings, the grace of God that we share from Him with others will glorify Him in the hearts of others long after our death.

It is only after the Garden experience, with an adjustment in our attitude, that we can progress through the seven glorious steps of growth through suffering in imitation of our Lord. The first three sayings of Christ reflect His care for others; the

last four sayings reflect His personal needs and desires, both physical and spiritual. We will consider them in their traditional harmonized order. Our sufferings are but for a short time; Christ's sufferings for an eternity were compressed into an unfathomable six hours.

**'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do', Luke 23. 34.**

Forgive others, keep your heart open like a child's, Matt. 18. 2! Don't play the 'blame game', or take things personally. Understand the reality of the situation while at the same time avoiding jealousy, or envy. In our distress, we may become short-tempered. By the grace of God, forgive everyone, and everything. Paul could say, 'Thy grace is sufficient for me'. Christ said, 'Forgive them for they know not what they do'. Severe pain can cause stress and can make us short-tempered. Spiritual Christians, and great servants of the Lord, can become complainers, cranky, and intolerant of certain persons, and of their painful situation. Unfortunately, the persons that they hurt the most may be their caregivers, who are doing their best to mollify their sufferings.

Tell others not to worry about you, 'Faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory', Eph. 3. 13. Sufferings lead to glory! Paul was willing to simply suffer for Christ and to give the reward of his glory-sufferings to those who were concerned about him. Paul's writings never changed in character during his final years of pain, rejection, and abandonment by his brethren, 2 Tim. 1. 15; and, of course, Christ's character was never changed because of suffering, rejection, or abandonment. Forgiveness will bring a sweet savour of victory in the midst of your sufferings.

The wounded soldiers returning victoriously were surrounded by sweet-smelling incense upon their return from the battle front, 2 Cor. 2. 14. Those who could not forgive are likened to the victims of war, who followed behind in chains in their awful odours of festering battle wounds. They also could smell the sweet savour of incense that accompanied the victors, but they were unable to rise to the level of

those that could forgive in this Roman cultural picture that Paul gives us, 2 Cor. 2. 15.

**'Truly, I say to you, Today you will be with me in Paradise', Luke 23. 43 ESV.**

Bless others! Stay connected to others in a positive way. Speak well of others, Rom. 12. 14, pray for their spiritual growth. Be generous to others with God's graciousness. Thank everyone that assists you with words of encouragement and grace. Let your sufferings be a source of blessings for others. While you are bedbound or severely limited, you can be the quiet and secret instrument of God to motivate others to greater living for God, Heb. 10. 25. You can stimulate the development of their gifts by sharing God's grace with them. Share with them some of the great promises of God that you have experienced personally. Give them the promises of God with confidence, and the true assurance of your faith in God. Give them a phone call with a word of encouragement, or send them a card.

**'Woman, behold your son ... behold your mother', John 19. 26-27 ESV.**

Arrange for the practical necessities of life for those who are around you. Express your wishes for the care of loved ones, and the disposal of items that may have special intrinsic meaning for those around you. Set all of your material things in order so that they do not become a burden to others. Simplify your needs to conform to the constraints of the situation materially, 2 Tim. 4. 13. Withdraw from your traditional participation in certain activities when unable, but continue to give suggestions and to encourage others to carry on despite your absence. If you are facing death, formalize your wishes promptly and legally, while you are still of a sound mind.

**'My God, My God, why have you forsaken me', Matt. 27. 46 and Mark 15. 34 ESV.**

Meditate on God's ways. Remember His ways of redemption, via our repentance and faith and self-sacrificing obedience to Him. Recount the many scriptural connections of tribulation and glory, and how they are intertwined. Ask why,



seek His wisdom, pray for spiritual understanding. Read the book of Job, Paul's listing of his tribulations,<sup>5</sup> David's psalms when he recovers from his battle wounds.<sup>6</sup> Write down your words of confession, your considerations for the poor whom Christ has chosen,<sup>7</sup> the greatness of God's grace, our promises of God's love to us, and of ours to him. Try to write your experiences with God in a story form, or in a poetic form, to ventilate your moments of intense pain in His presence or with sympathetic loved ones; this will give strength to others when they should suffer. Read about the experiences of sufferings of other brethren. Speak to others who are suffering, and share the consolations of Christ together. In a group setting, consider sharing your personal experiences of God's grace with others.

### **'I thirst', John 19. 28.**

Express your physical needs. Don't forget to take care of yourself. The people observing and caring for you will do their best to alleviate your sufferings. Don't be too proud to acknowledge your weaknesses and temporal needs. Humbly accept

their assistance, even when their efforts to mollify your suffering may seem meagre against the backdrop of your intense pain, grief, and disappointment. Don't insist on your own independence, but humbly acknowledge and accept their assistance. Don't be vain, but use a walker, or a wheelchair, or other aids, as necessary.

### **'It is finished', John 19. 30.**

'It is finished' is a single Greek word that was used in a commercial sense to complete a transaction, and, in a military judgement execution sense, before the general would have the condemned beheaded. It was also used to mean the end of a matter. The apostle Paul said, 'I have finished the course'. Accept the final judgement of God in the situation. Conclude the meditations; express some understanding of your sufferings. 'It is finished' reveals that Christ understood why He was forsaken. Review the wisdom and knowledge that we have garnered from our meditations day by day in the presence of His patient love.

### **'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit', Luke 23. 46 ESV.**

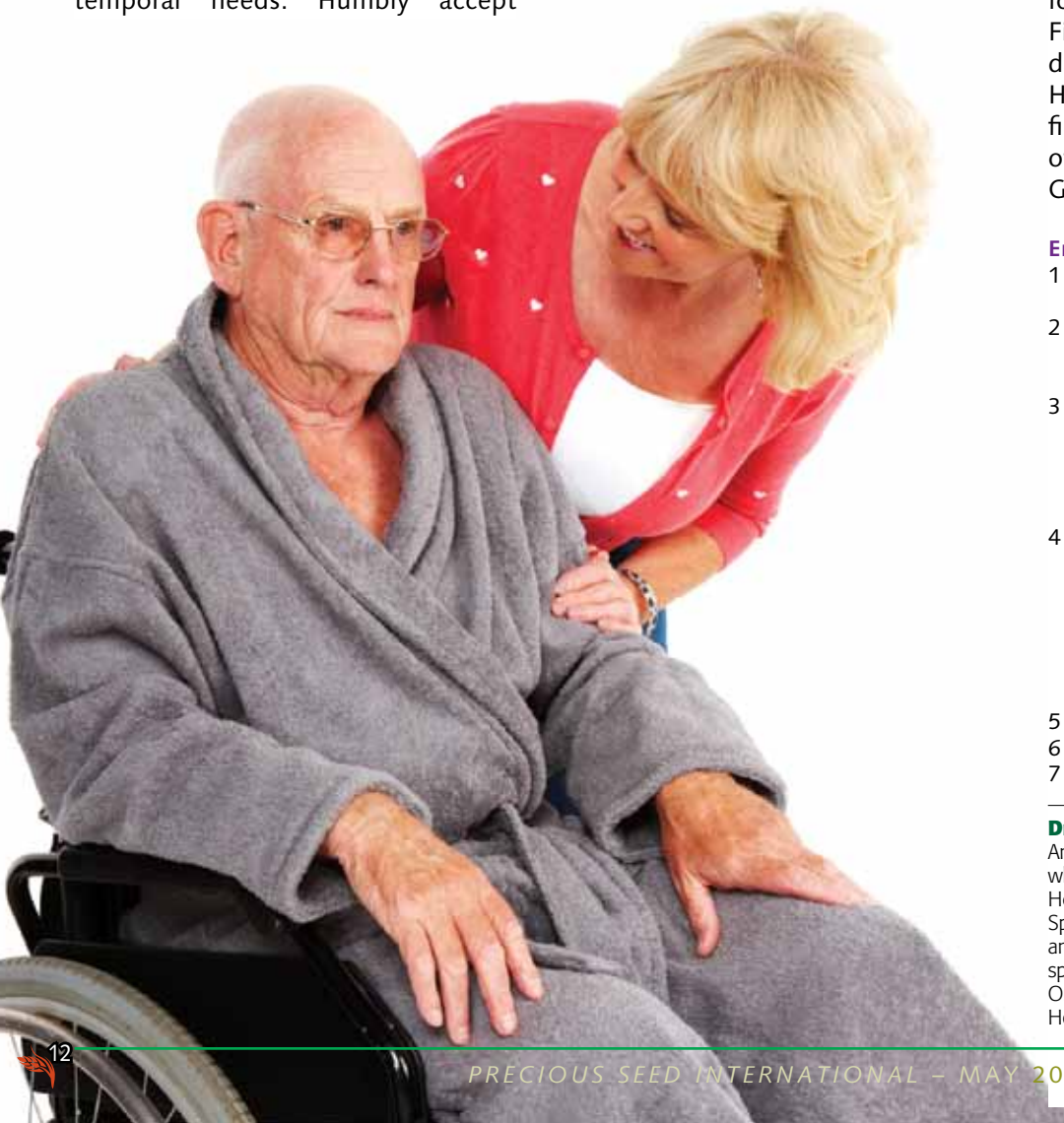
Despite His sufferings, Christ's most fulfilling moments were in the darkest hours of anguish. Despite Paul's tribulations, rejection by his brethren and execution by Nero before him, he could say with joy, 'I have finished my course', 2 Tim 4. 7. Our most fulfilling moments can be in our most difficult times. We will see His face!

To cope with our chronic illnesses, we should have an attitude adjustment time with God each day and read just as needed during the day. Set reasonable goals for ourselves. Forgive daily, and start with a clean slate towards all who are around us. Bless and encourage those that we come into contact with during the day. Attend to the material necessities of life within our means. Ask hard questions of our loving Father during the day, and allow Him to reveal Himself to us daily in a special way. Humbly admit our needs to others who care for us; comply with our medical treatment programme. Fulfil the reasonable goals that we have set for the day, in the will of the Lord. Finally conclude the day, and give the day back to the Lord in its entirety for His eternal purposes in glory. In the final analysis it is only His assessment of our actions that really matters. To God be the glory!

### **Endnotes**

- 1 Statistics for USA from the Center for Disease Control (CDC), 2009.
- 2 Heart disease, cancer, and stroke account for more than 50% of all deaths each year in the USA, CDC, 2009.
- 3 Heart disease patients are at the highest risk. Heart attack survivors who enter into a major depression are three to four times more likely to die within six months.
- 4 He requested the company of His disciples in the Garden, Matt. 26. 37. He spoke to the women on the way to the cross, Luke 23. 28. He expressed Himself seven times on the cross, and even spoke to the malefactors, Luke 23. 43.
- 5 2 Cor. 11. 23-33; 2 Cor. 12. 7.
- 6 For example, Ps. 41.
- 7 Jas 2. 5.

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# THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

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

7

## 1 John chapter 5

Cycle 3, 'The revelation of the love of God', began by identifying love as fundamental to the Christian life, 4. 7, something that brings assurance to the believer. John brought out the *nature* of the love of God, 4. 7-16a, and then went on to describe its *effects* in our experience, vv. 16b-21. The first section of chapter 5 relates loving God to loving God's children. At the same time, there is a subtle shift of focus to *faith* and its content.<sup>1</sup>

### Victory enabled by faith, love, and obedience, 5. 1-5

John traces the various activities of love to its source in God. Faith in God must go hand in hand with a love for God and His people, 5. 1. Love is not a mere emotion, but demonstrates itself practically in glad obedience to God's commandments, vv. 2, 3. John has had much to say in this letter about the world system in its opposition to the Christian, and here we learn that faith in Jesus the Son of God is the secret of victory over the world, vv. 4, 5.

**Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, v. 1.** By his reference to 'Whoever . . . everyone', i.e., any believer, John rebukes the exclusiveness of those false teachers who made out that they were the only ones who were right.<sup>2</sup> Faith in Jesus as the Christ,<sup>3</sup> is a sign of being born again, as is the practice of love, 4. 7.

### And everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him.

'Him who begot' is the Father. Those truly born again have a love for all the dear children begotten by God, who therefore possess the same divine nature.

**By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments, v. 2.** This verse gives the converse of chapter 4 verses 20, 21. Fellowship with God and believers must go together, 1. 3, 7. How do we know our love is genuine? It is, if we love God and have a concern to be obedient, to **do (RV) his commandments**.

**Verse 3** True love of God is evidenced in that we **keep His commandments**. This is not hard and difficult, nor is it a matter of penal servitude, for **His commandments are not burdensome**. Through the new birth the believer has a capacity to 'delight in the law of God according to the inward man', Rom. 7. 22, indeed God writes His laws on our hearts! Heb. 8. 10; He creates in us a *desire* to obey.<sup>4</sup>

**For whatever is born of God overcomes the world, v. 4.** John's use of the neuter term '**whatever**' rather than 'whoever' puts the focus on the power of the *new nature* in the believer. In each cycle,<sup>5</sup> John has characterized the world in its opposition to the believer: here the emphasis is on the opposition of the world to *keeping the commandments of God*. To

keep God's commandments will be unpopular and difficult, because the entire world system is hostile to His principles and commandments. We observe this throughout human society – its values, literature, and media. Yet victory is assured, indeed the very existence of **our faith** in Jesus the Son of God points to a victory **that has overcome the world**. Note the *past tense* in this statement; in every case of conversion a decisive victory *has already been won*; the conquering Son of God liberates the soul from Satan's clutches, Luke 11. 21-22; John 12. 31. But there is also necessarily a corresponding ongoing 'overcoming' in the life of each genuine believer, vv. 4a, 5, where the *present tense* is to be noted. Once again it is the characteristic of the normal life of the believer that he overcomes<sup>6</sup> the world; he does not *persist* in sin.<sup>7</sup>

**Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? v. 5.** Christian faith is not woolly and ill-defined, as some people talk about 'faith' in general terms today. Rather, it is highly specific: Jesus is the Son of God. This is distinctive, irreducible, and exclusive – it is what makes a person a Christian, cp. Acts 4. 12. It is also precisely what John's opponents were denying – the permanent identity of the man Jesus as the eternal Son of God. The tense here confirms the thought in the previous paragraph, i.e., who is he that overcomes the world? He that *continues to believe* that Jesus is the Son of God.

**Three witnesses: the ground of assurance, 5. 6-12.** Sceptics often misrepresent biblical faith as 'blind' faith, as though it were an irrational leap into the unknown. The following section, verses 6 to 12, shows that this is simply not so. The keyword in this section is 'witness'/'testimony', and shows that faith in Christ is not irrational, but absolutely well-founded and firmly *evidence-based*. The evidence comprises three witnesses, the Spirit, the water and the blood, vv. 6-9. Complementing these is the internal, subjective, yet no less real, witness of the Spirit in the heart of every believer, vv. 10-12. John is careful to tie this latter witness to the great historical fact of the gospel.

**This is He who came by water and blood – Jesus Christ, v. 6.** These words have given rise to a variety of interpretations.<sup>8</sup> Most likely they are a reference to the Lord's baptism at Jordan ('water') and His death at Calvary ('blood'). Indeed, the former pointed forward to the latter, Matt. 3. 15; 20. 22. Although sinless Himself, our Lord identified with the penitent at Jordan as the pledge of His ultimate identification with sinners at the cross, Isa. 53. 12. But why is John so emphatic: **not only by (the) water, but by<sup>9</sup> (the) water and (the) blood?** It seems that there were those (such as Cerinthus) who were teaching that the divine Christ descended upon the man Jesus at His baptism, but abandoned Him prior to the cross, thus ensuring His demise. Against this destructive heresy John affirms that the cross is central to the mission of Jesus Christ – He came *by blood*, i.e., it was the incarnate Son of God who died on the cross. There can be no salvation for those who reject this.

**And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth.** This can be literally rendered, 'the Spirit is the witnessing One'. In addition to the two great historical events that bear witness to Jesus as the Messiah (His baptism, and His death), John highlights the witness of the Holy Spirit, precisely the role predicted by the Lord Jesus, John 15. 26-27. Here the present tense points to the Spirit's gracious activity of interpreting the saving significance of the Saviour's death. He it is who by the scriptures confirms the truth of the gospel in our hearts.

There are compelling reasons why verse 7 should be regarded as a late addition and not part of the text of the original letter. See Endnote for further details.<sup>10</sup>

**And there are three that bear witness the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one, v. 8.** These three witnesses 'are continually delivering their testimony', A. PLUMMER. All three point to the deity of Christ, and 'to one act of God in Christ for man's salvation', L. MORRIS. 'A threefold cord is not quickly broken', Eccles. 4. 12. The Spirit was prominent in marking out Christ at His baptism, descending upon Him as a dove, John 1. 32f. At Calvary, John himself bears most careful eyewitness testimony to the blood and water flowing from the Saviour's pierced side, 19. 34-37, and highlighting two Old Testament prophecies that were thus fulfilled, Exod. 12. 46; Zech. 12. 10.

**If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater, v. 9.** If we accept man's testimony (which generally we do), how much more should we unreservedly accept the word of the God who cannot lie? This is essentially the same argument that Jesus used in His controversy with the Pharisees, John 8. 17, 18. **For this is the witness of God which He has testified of His Son.** The deity of Christ, the 'Son of God' has been spelled out by the Evangelists, with particular emphasis on this by John, and also by Mark, Mark 1. 1; 15. 39. The perfect tense ('has testified') that John uses reflects God's *permanent* witness to His Son. We see this in Old Testament prophecy, the Gospel records, and supremely in Christ's resurrection and enthronement.

**He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself, v. 10.** By accepting the witness of God, as we believe *on*<sup>11</sup> the Son of God we find that the Spirit makes the record real in our experience. It is no longer second-hand or a mere report. As the Samaritans could say, 'Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world', John 4. 42.

**He who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son.** John spells out the implications of *unbelief* in typically uncompromising terms, cp. 1. 10. Such a person has no confidence in God or the record He has given us concerning His Son. Once again there is no possibility of 'sitting on the fence', there is no middle way.

**And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son, v. 11.** What a

gift God has given to those who believe on the Son! Eternal life is literally the 'life of the age to come' to be enjoyed by all who will experience the resurrection of life, John 5. 29. Yet the fact that God has given it to us means that we who believe on Christ and are thereby 'in His Son' *already* possess it as God's amazing gift!

**He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life, v. 12.** John's contrasting statements are rarely exact verbal opposites. Here we have a solemn extension of thought emphasizing the eternal *loss* of the unbeliever: He who is rejected is no less than the 'Son of God',<sup>12</sup> cp. John 3. 36; Heb. 6. 6; 10. 29.

**Epilogue – Certainties of Christian belief, 5. 13-21.** Just as the Letter opened with four verses which form the Prologue and introduce the theme, eternal life, this section rounds off the letter with final assurances and a very sharp reminder.<sup>13</sup> Assurance of eternal life and brotherly love stimulates boldness in prayer. Then John notes three great certainties which believers 'know'. He thus picks up the favourite 'knowledge' emphasis of the Gnostics, but insists that the ordinary believer, not the false teacher, has the authentic knowledge of God in Christ that matters most. The letter comes to its climax with the glory of eternal life and the true God experienced in Christ. All substitutes are to be shunned.

Assurance of eternal life, v. 13.  
Confidence in prayer, vv. 14-17.  
Three things that are known, vv. 18-20.  
Conclusion and warning, vv. 20-21.

**These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, v. 13.** In referring to 'these things' John looks back to the entire contents of his letter. His key pastoral aim has been to bring assurance of eternal life to believers who had, no doubt, been shaken and perplexed by the teaching of his opponents. He is reviewing what he has written and is about to summarize and emphasize some final points. The first matter to be assured about is that the saints already possess eternal life in Christ – they need no addition or 'further revelation'.<sup>14</sup>

**Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us, v. 14.** Assurance of salvation should lead to boldness in pleading on behalf of others, 'this is the boldness which we have toward him' RV. This is the fourth and final mention of 'boldness'. We have already encountered this attitude in relation to the Lord's coming, 2. 28; 4. 17, and also in respect of prayer, 3. 21, 22. 'Our conversation with God is to be uninhibited, open and relaxed, yet not without reverence and submission', D. JACKMAN. Loving concern for our brothers and sisters will move us to intercessory prayer. To 'hear' in this sense means that God immediately hears and grants our petition,<sup>15</sup> see John 9. 31; 11. 41, 42. Nevertheless, the wisdom of God may delay the fulfilment in our experience. Asking '**anything**' is surely a great encouragement to the widest possible scope for our prayers; on the other hand, '**according to His will**' puts a gracious

limit on 'anything', and directs us back to the will of God as revealed in scripture. His will is always for our good and blessing.

**And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him, v. 15.** We have here an echo of the words of Jesus in the Upper Room, 'And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son', John 14. 13.

**If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that, v. 16. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not leading to death, v. 17.**

These verses have given rise to much debate, and sometimes anxiety, as to what exactly John had in mind. A full discussion would be outside the scope of this short commentary,<sup>16</sup> but some guiding observations can be stated:

1. 'Life' and 'death' in John's writings normally have reference to *eternal* life and *eternal* death, not merely physical life<sup>17</sup> and death.
2. According to scripture all sin tends in the direction of death, that is, separation from God, Rom. 6. 23; Jas. 1. 15, yet curiously a distinction is made here between (literally) 'sinning'<sup>18</sup> not leading to death', and 'sinning leading to death'. I hold that John here makes a solemn final reference (as throughout the letter) to his opponents who deny the reality of the incarnation, and consequently the value of the work of Christ. So doing, they exclude themselves from eternal life and guarantee themselves judgement, and eternal death; they are thus 'sinning leading to (eternal) death'.
3. The 'brother' for whom prayer is offered by the saints is engaged in some known sin. Yet his fellow Christians in faith expect that through prayer God will bring him to conviction, grant repentance, 2 Tim. 2. 25, and through confession he will be restored to the full enjoyment of fellowship with God and His people, 1 John 1. 9. This is my understanding of, '**He will give him life**'; the sinning brother had forfeited not the possession, but the *enjoyment*, of the life of fellowship with God.
4. John does not encourage, but does not actually forbid, prayer for those who are 'sinning unto death'. Note, however, that, significantly, he does not speak of a *brother* sinning unto death.
5. James supplies an interesting and relevant parallel at the end of his letter, 'Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins', Jas. 5. 19-20.

To summarize, John finally states three things that 'we know', 1 John 5. 18-20a:

**We know that whoever is born of God does not sin, v. 18.** John reasserts that a true Christian cannot be a habitual sinner.<sup>19</sup> It is a summary of the vital teaching presented earlier, 3. 4-9.

**But he who has been born of God keeps himself,**

**and the wicked one does not touch him.** Given the power and wiles of the devil, **the wicked one**, we might well fear that sin could overwhelm us, but we have an all-powerful Protector – the Son of God, '**he who was born of God**'<sup>20</sup> (Christ) **protects him**' ESV. NKJV reads as though it is up to the believer to protect himself,<sup>21</sup> but it is much more in keeping with scripture (and encouraging!) to understand our Protector as Christ, both directly and through His intercession, John 17. 12, 15; Heb. 7. 25. Satan may threaten and oppose, but he can get no hold on the believer who is safely guarded by Christ, John 10. 28, cp. Job 1. 12.

**We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one, v. 19.** The second vital piece of knowledge is personal. Throughout the letter John has supplied a whole series of tests of genuineness. If the true features of the family of God, i.e., obedience, love, and perseverance, are in evidence, believers can have assurance that they are '**of God**' – He is the Source of their life. While the wicked one (the devil) cannot gain so much as a hold on the believer, v. 18, he has no such difficulty with the world, for it lies utterly helpless in his embrace. The world's freedom is a total illusion, the cruel deception of a tyrant. Once again, the line of separation between the children of God and those of the devil is crystal clear.

**And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, v. 20.** This verse highlights the dignity and greatness of the One who came – the Son of God. He has come in the flesh, a reference to the incarnation and its ongoing, 4. 2, and 'through water and blood', 5. 6. One of His many gifts to us is '**understanding**' – a faculty of spiritual understanding or perception, just as we have an anointing, 2. 27. Thus blessed, we need not worry about missing out on the claimed 'insights' of false teachers such as the Gnostics.

**That we may know Him who is true.** We could have no knowledge of God, were it not for the revelation that Christ has brought us, John 1. 18.

**We are in Him who is true (the Father), in His Son Jesus Christ.** This marks a new statement emphasizing our knowledge of the true God and His Son in contrast to the idols that John is about to warn against. To abide in the Father is to abide in the Son. Sophisticated teachers might claim to have arrived at some special relationship with the Father, but if it involved denial of the Son's permanent entry into humanity, or His sacrificial death, they and their claims were thereby exposed as false. By contrast, in response to love expressed in obedience, both Father and Son will come to dwell with the believer, John 14. 23.

**This is the true God and eternal life.** The letter opened with life eternal embodied in the eternal Son. Now it closes with a most important statement of the deity of Christ. What God is, He is.<sup>22</sup>

**Little children, keep yourselves from idols, v. 21.** John's final loving appeal to his 'little children' is 'guard yourselves from (the) idols'. The Son of God will keep them from the wicked one, v. 18, but

here is the other side of the coin – they must guard *themselves* from idols. The letter is full of contrasts,<sup>23</sup> and here is the final and most vital one, the living and eternal God, fully disclosed in His incarnate Son, contrasted with all false concepts of God. John's readers would hardly need warning against material images of false gods and goddesses, though no doubt these abounded at Ephesus; more likely he has in mind the false ideas and heretical concepts of God which were being promoted to the saints to whom he wrote, and which he has been at pains to expose.

In our day we must remain faithful to the unique and awe-inspiring revelation of God in Christ, irrespective of the cost and pressure from pluralism and secularism. On a personal level, we must be on our guard against anything and everything that rivals God for our heart's affection, and ruthlessly dethrone it. We must also recognize that God is supremely glorious, and if we dare to reconstruct for ourselves a comfortable, comprehensible 'God' according to our limited understanding of Him, that too is to misrepresent His Person, in fact an idol of our own feeble creation, cf. Matt. 11. 27.

### Endnotes

- 1 The final reference to 'love' occurs in verse 3, whereas 'believe' occurs only 3 times in the rest of the letter, 3. 23; 4. 1, 16, but 6 times in verses 1-13. It occurs 98 times in John's Gospel; the noun 'faith' occurs only in 5. 4, and never in the Gospel. The dominance of the verb over the noun form suggests that John is much more concerned about the vital *activity of believing* on the Son of God, than in 'faith' considered as an abstract matter.
- 2 See notes in *Introduction*, Section 4, 'Occasion and Purpose'
- 3 A. PLUMMER: 'To believe that Jesus is the Christ is to believe that One who was known as a man fulfilled a known and Divine commission; that He who was born and was crucified is the Anointed, the Messiah of Israel, the Saviour of the world. To believe this is to accept both the Old and New Testaments; it is to believe that Jesus is that He claimed to be, One who is equal with the Father, and as such demands of every believer the absolute surrender of self to Him'.
- 4 If this is no longer true in experience, it could indicate that we have allowed our love to grow cold, or perhaps unconfessed sin has robbed us of the enjoyment of fellowship with the Lord, cp. 1 John 2. 1, 2.
- 5 See, in turn, (1) the *seductiveness* of the world, 2. 15-17; (2) the *demonic origin* of the world, 3. 10-13.
- 6 The term *overcomer* (or 'conqueror') is frequent in John's writings. Christ Himself is the supreme Overcomer, John 16. 33, Rev. 5. 5. In Revelation chapters 2 and 3 there are several references to the 'overcomer' in the messages to the churches, 2. 7, 11, 17, 26; 3. 5, 12, 21. The question is often posed, 'Is every true believer an "overcomer"?' The simple answer is yes. Note carefully the contrast between the believer and the lost, '*He who overcomes* shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death', Rev. 21. 7-8. So in this sense, believers *by definition* are overcomers; deliverance from eternal doom is not secured by our works. That said, however, it is also true that the world is to be overcome on a daily basis, and here there will be differences in consistency and attainment, but the believer persists, on the basis of his faith in Jesus as the *Son of God*.
- 7 This is not to say that a believer cannot be beset by sin, Rom. 7. 21; Heb. 12. 1. It does however mean that he can never be complacent towards sin, or comfortable in its practice.

- 8 For various interpretations, see J. R. W. STOTT, *The Letters of John*, pp. 179-181.
- 9 There is here a change of Greek preposition from *dia* to *en* = 'in'. *En* marks 'the element or sphere in which the thing is done', A. PLUMMER. See also, 'He shall come into the holy place *in* a young bullock' (i.e., with one), Lev. 16. 3 LXX; '*in* blood not his own', Heb. 9. 25. The Lord's baptism in water is thus closely tied to the baptism of blood at Calvary.
- 10 J. N. DARBY *New Translation* footnote: 'To avoid any mistake, I add, in a note, what I have omitted in the text as having , as is well known, no real manuscript authority, [in heaven, the Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth,] and inserted by some here without adequate warrant'. The words are found in only a few very late manuscripts, none earlier than the 14<sup>th</sup> century. For a concise account of the evidence see F. F. BRUCE, *The Epistles of John*, pp. 129, 130; B. M. METZGER, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, pp. 715-717.
- 11 To 'believe on' is a favourite expression of John's, both in the Gospel (34 times) and this letter. It means far more than accepting that facts are true. It means 'moving towards and resting on'; it is to *depend* on, *rely* on, *commit oneself unreservedly* to, the Lord Jesus. It is the essence of salvation.
- 12 A. PLUMMER aptly comments, 'Those who possess Him know that He is the Son of God; those who do not, need to be reminded whose Son it is that they reject'.
- 13 It is interesting to note that structurally chapter 21 serves the same 'epilogue' function in John's Gospel, which also has a 'Prologue', 1. 1-18. There are other points of structural similarity between the Gospel and this Letter. For example, some have observed that Christ's testimony in the world, John 1-12 corresponds to 'God is light'; His ministry to believers, John 13-17, and His passion and resurrection, John 18-20, declare that 'God is love'.
- 14 There is considerable Greek manuscript variation in the remainder of verse 13 and it is most likely that the words 'and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God' are to be omitted, see NKJV margin, ESV. For further discussion see B. M. METZGER, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*.
- 15 'Constantly we hear God addressed as "the hearer and answerer of prayer", a mere useless and vulgar pleonasm [unnecessary word], for the Scripture idea of God's hearing prayer is just his answering it – "O thou that hearest prayer unto thee shall all flesh come"', C. H. SPURGEON, *Lectures to my Students*, quoted in F. F. BRUCE, *The Epistles of John*, pp. 123, 124.
- 16 See helpful discussions in F. F. BRUCE, D. JACKMAN, and J. R. W. STOTT.
- 17 Instances where physical death was inflicted in the early church as punishment for conspicuous sins, Acts 5. 1-11; 1 Cor. 5. 5; 11. 30, do not form convincing parallels to our text.
- 18 Interpreters hence draw attention to a *state of sinning* rather than an isolated sinful action.
- 19 One might wonder at this statement, following immediately on the case of a brother sinning, vv. 16, 17. The latter refers to a possible but exceptional situation, cp. 2. 1, 2; on the other hand, the statement of verse 18 denotes the habitual practice of sin.
- 20 There is a difference here in the term 'born of God'. The Greek uses the aorist participle (*gennetheis*), which expresses a once-for-all fact. 'It refers to the One who was always born of God, outside of time, and who is therefore the eternal Son', D. JACKMAN.
- 21 The reading 'him' ESV, NKJV margin is to be preferred to 'himself' NKJV, on the basis of manuscript authority, and supports the interpretation adopted. Cp. NEB, 'it is the Son of God who keeps him safe'.
- 22 That the 'True God' here has reference to Christ is suggested by (1) Christ is the last mentioned subject (2) The Father has already been called the 'True One' twice in the previous verse (3) Christ is referred to as the 'Life' both in John's Gospel and in this Letter.
- 23 For example, light and darkness, love and hatred; God and the world, truth and error.



## A BRIEF HISTORY OF HOLBURN GOSPEL HALL, ABERDEEN

The assembly at Holburn Gospel Hall has been meeting in its current premises since 1928 and today numbers around fifty in fellowship. The assembly, however, traces its roots back to the latter part of the 19th century and some remarkable work which was done by brethren from a variety of evangelical backgrounds – one of the more notable being a preacher from the North-East Coastal Mission named Donald Ross who saw a great work done in the area.

Following the 1859 revival in the North East of Scotland, local groups of Christians had begun to meet, but since much of this work was done by an evangelical core from the Free Church of Scotland believers seemed unsure of their ecclesiastical position. By 1870 however two particular groups meeting in Aberdeen had discovered the truth of the weekly breaking of bread and having 'found' each other determined to come together, and so was born the first assembly in Aberdeen. They met in a small chapel in Gallowgate. In a very short space of time those premises became too small and in 1873 the assembly moved to new premises in St. Paul Street.

The assembly currently meeting in Holburn Gospel Hall traces its roots back to this development and is today the main trunk of the tree which sprung from these early beginnings in St. Paul Street.

During the next fifteen years or so, in view of the general expansion of Aberdeen and the lack of public transport on Sundays, a number of satellite assemblies were established – all in happy fellowship with St. Paul Street and generally all came together for Sunday afternoon ministry. By 1901 there were five assemblies in existence – St. Paul Street, Footdee, Windsor Place (the beginnings of the current Hebron Hall), Woodside and Torry. *Aberdeen Journals* published an article in April 1901 identifying these five assemblies and publishing numbers present as 479. Numbers remaining in St. Paul Street at that time were 164.

In 1920, the premises in St. Paul Street was sold, and the believers had to find alternative accommodation and for a period of time they met in the Aberdeen Music Hall. In 1928, the old Holburn Free Church building became available for rent and the assembly moved there that same year, ultimately purchasing the building in 1948.

Little is known about development of Holburn assembly during the 1930's and 1940's since those who would remember these days are in the glory. However, from around 1950 through to the 1980's numbers settled at around 110 and the assembly continued to grow spiritually. During that time, the assembly continued in its evangelistic outreach on a number of fronts and developed its strong Bible teaching ethos. A feature of this period of time was the many joint activities which took place in association with the other assemblies in the city – events included gospel campaigns, very large teaching conventions, missionary conferences and open-air outreach. Saints recall the missionary conferences in the McClymont Hall and the Stan Ford gospel campaign in the YMCA with many being saved. Many of the brethren in the assembly also helped support the Gospel Van which provided regular weekly help to the smaller assemblies in Aberdeenshire and elsewhere.

In terms of Holburn's own outreach and activities two issues are worthy of note. Firstly, there was a very strong work centred on the Sunday School and children's outreach. Double-deck buses were required to ship Sunday school pupils in from the Kincorth and Garthdee areas of the city and a children's meeting was begun in these early days in the Kincorth suburb – a work which continues to this day. Secondly, the assembly has always had a deep interest in missionary work and in the early 1940's a missionary class was commenced by the sisters and that work also continues to the present day.



The early 1980's brought changes with some moving to other assemblies in the town and others coming into the area from elsewhere – the net effect of these changes was a reduction in the number in fellowship to around ninety. During the final years of the 20th century and the early years of this century numbers have gradually decreased – the result of an ageing population and others moving away for work and other reasons, and today, the assembly has around fifty in fellowship. A number of new initiatives have been tried over the last twenty years or so with a measure of success – for example, pensioner meetings, coffee mornings, Christianity Explored programmes and gospel teas. From these activities a number continue to attend the gatherings and some committing their lives to Christ. While Sunday School numbers have significantly reduced, the existing children's work in Kincorth continues and a new outreach was commenced over ten years ago in another suburb of the city – Kingswells – and this work has continued with a regular attendance of around twenty.

Though numbers are less than they were, there is a good mix of ages within the assembly and there are a number of families with growing children many of whom have trusted the saviour and are now in fellowship contributing well to the activities of the assembly. There is a good level of gift both in terms of Bible teaching, gospel preaching, door-to-door work and children's and young people's activities, and a good percentage of the Bible teaching and gospel outreach is handled by local brethren.

So the work which began in the late 1870's continues by God's grace. The assembly is very active in gospel outreach which is focused on children's meetings, regular gospel meetings, Christianity Explored programmes, regular summer outreach meetings in a local park, regular literature distribution and billboard posting. Bible teaching is focused on consecutive programmes on Sunday morning, regular two-weekly young people's Bible Class and activities and weekly conversational bible readings. The sisters continue with their monthly missionary programme.

Please pray that the Lord will continue to bless the ongoing activities in His name.

**Please visit the assembly website at [www.holburn.org](http://www.holburn.org)**



# Philippians: The Joy and Suffering of the Fur

Having dealt with the disagreement between two prominent sisters in the Philippian assembly, Paul next turns to exhortations that transcend their difficulty and apply to the entire congregation. Prayer is essential to live the joyful life amid persecutions and problems. The Christian life is an ethical one, and virtues that even the world recognizes as salutary must be cultivated by believers.

## Gentleness in Keeping with the Lord's Nearness

Thielman succinctly defines the structure of the passage:

'The short, pithy, and rhetorically sophisticated admonitions of verses 4-9 flow from four theological sources: The Lord is near, God is sovereign and merciful, the world belongs to God, and those who live in the world can only be fully obedient to God by following his revelation of himself in the gospel. The first two principles are bound closely together and dominate verses 5-7; the second two are also tightly linked and stand beneath verses 8-9'.<sup>1</sup>

The first admonition concerns their display of 'moderation', a word with a wide variety of meaning that is hard to translate into English. HENDRIKSEN describes the richness of the term:

'One may substitute any of the following: forbearance, yieldedness, geniality, kindness, gentleness, sweet reasonableness, considerateness, charitableness, mildness, magnanimity, generosity. All of these qualities are combined in the adjective-noun that is used in the original. Taken together they show the real meaning . . . The lesson which Paul teaches is that true blessedness cannot be obtained by the person who rigorously insists on whatever he regards as his just due. The Christian is the man who reasons that it is far better to *suffer* wrong

## Chapter 4 verses 5-7:

# EXHORTATION

than to *inflict* wrong (1 Cor. 6:7). Sweet reasonableness is an essential ingredient of true happiness. Now such big-heartedness, such forbearance, the patient willingness to yield wherever yielding is possible without violating any real principle, must be shown *to all*, not only to fellow-believers. This Christian magnanimity probably stands in very close connection with the comfort which the Christian derives from the coming of the Lord, which coming has already been mentioned (Phil. 3:20, 21) and is about to be mentioned once more (4:5b, 'the Lord is at hand'). The idea seems to be: since Christ's coming is near, when all the promises made to God's people will become realities, believers, in spite of being persecuted, can certainly afford to be mild and charitable in their relation to others'.<sup>2</sup>

Another Greek authority adds, 'Fairmindedness, the attitude of a man who is charitable towards men's faults and merciful in his judgment of their failings because he takes their whole situation into his reckoning'. Perhaps "graciousness" is the best English equivalent; and, in the context here, it is to be the spirit of willingness to yield under trial which will show itself in a refusal to retaliate when attacked'.<sup>3</sup> EADIE agrees in these words:

'It is not gentleness as an innate feeling, but as the result of self-restraint . . . It does not insist on what is its due; it does not stand on etiquette or right, but it descends and complies. It is opposed to that rigour which never bends nor deviates, and which, as it gives the last farthing, uniformly exacts it. It is not facile pliability – a reed in the breeze – but that generous and indulgent feeling that knows what is its right, but recedes from it, is conscious of what is merited, but does not contend for

strict proportion. It is, in short, that grace which was defective in one or other, or both of the women, who are charged by the apostle to be of one mind in the Lord. For slow to take offence, it is swift to forgive it. Let a misunderstanding arise, and no false delicacy will prevent it from taking the first step towards reconciliation or adjustment of opinion. And truly such an element of character well becomes a man who expects a Saviour in whom this feeling was so predominant'.<sup>4</sup>

By

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## Living in Light of Christ's Nearness

Clearly, Christians must put others first, even in the face of unreasonable attitudes or provocative behaviour on the part of their adversaries. Having an attitude that is both joyous and gentle is made easier when one remembers that 'the Lord is at hand' – or as others render it, 'the Lord is near' JND and NASB. Some Bible students hold that this refers to the Lord's ongoing spiritual presence in the assembly. Others maintain that it is a reference to the Lord's coming. While both are certainly true, I find the latter interpretation more consistent with the context of Philippians chapter 3 verses 20-21 and the opening section of chapter 4. Passages like 1 John chapter 3 verses 1-2 also show the lifestyle impact that the Lord's return is to have on saints. ASH plausibly takes safe ground when he writes, 'It is possible that we have here an intentional double meaning. The Lord who was near to care and help could also return at any time'.<sup>5</sup>

Given the persecution that the Philippians faced, Phil. 1. 28-29, it is not surprising that they would worry. Yet Paul tells them, 'Be careful for nothing', v. 6, thereby urging them to forsake anxiety. One writer observes the difficulty of this 'admonition that touches the quick of every person'.<sup>6</sup> But this instruction was no groundless platitude, but rather a



# Therance of the Gospel

## Part Fourteen

# ON PRAYER

tangible benefit of their relationship to Christ. They may 'be anxious for nothing' NKJV, because they may take everything to God in prayer. The word translated 'be careful' does not mean ignorance or indifference, as BARNES explains, '[it] does not mean that we are to exercise no *care* about worldly matters—no care to preserve our property, or to provide for our families (comp. 1 Tim. 5:8); but that there is to be such confidence in God as to free the mind from anxiety, and such a sense of dependence on him as to keep it calm'.<sup>7</sup>

When prayer is seen in that fashion, then it is not glib to say that anxiety is an attempt to carry the burden of the present and the future oneself; prayer is yielding it to and leaving it in the safe hands of God'.<sup>8</sup>

Verse 6 comprehensively describes this activity as 'prayer' – which is a general term including the ideas of fellowship and worship; 'supplication' – meaning bringing specific needs before the Almighty and asking Him to act on our behalf; 'with thanksgiving' – being grateful for who God is, what He has done in the past, not to mention our present and future.

Of course, the phrase 'let your requests be made known to God' does not undermine His omniscience. Just as a father delights to hear his child say he is hungry at supper time and wants fish and chips (his favourite food, as the parents are well-aware), so our Father in heaven knows our needs and supplies them according to His perfect will.

As HOLE writes, 'though there are a thousand and one matters in our lives that we could hardly present to God in prayer as being directly connected with the

Name and interests of Christ, yet we have full liberty to present them to God, and indeed are bidden to do so. As we do so we may be in the enjoyment of the peace of God. We may be anxious as to *nothing*, because prayerful as to *everything*, and thankful for *anything*'.<sup>9</sup>

### Peace, Peace in this World of Sin

The result of this dedication to prayer is a practical enjoyment of peace that transcends human understanding and worrying circumstances for it is divinely bestowed – it is explicitly called 'the peace of God', v. 7. What

is more, this peace is said to 'keep' – meaning 'guard' NKJV, ESV, JND, etc. – the hearts of the praying Christians. The answer for anxiety also includes the instructions of verses 8-9, as WIERSBE cogently notes, 'If we are to conquer worry and experience the secure mind, we must meet the conditions that God has laid down. There are three: right praying (Phil. 4:6-7), right thinking (Phil. 4:8), and right living (Phil. 4:9)'.<sup>10</sup> This is real New Testament Christianity. Believers possess a resource of unfailing strength and comfort in petitioning the throne of grace, Heb. 4. 14-16. God's peace garrisons them against external opposition and internal fears, 2 Cor. 7. 5.<sup>10</sup>

### Endnotes

- 1 FRANK THIELMAN, *The NIV Application Commentary: Philippians*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995, pg. 223.
- 2 WILLIAM HENDRIKSEN, *Exposition of Philippians*. New Testament Commentary, Vol. 5. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1962, pp. 193f. [Italics original.]
- 3 RALPH P. MARTIN, *Philippians: An Introduction and Commentary*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, Vol. 11. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987, pg. 174. The beginning quote is by I. H. Marshall.
- 4 JOHN EADIE, *Commentary on the Greek Text on the Epistle of Paul to the Philippians*. New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1859, pg. 248.
- 5 ANTHONY L. ASH, *The College Press NIV Commentary: Philippians*. College Press Publishing Co., 2000, pg. 56.
- 6 MAXIE D. DUNHAM, *The Preacher's Commentary Series, Volume 31: Galatians / Ephesians / Philippians / Colossians / Philemon*. ed. LLOYD J. OGILVIE. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1982, pg. 308.
- 7 ALBERT BARNES, *Notes on the New Testament: Ephesians, Philippians & Colossians*. London: Blackie & Son, 1884-1885, pg. 214.
- 8 DUNHAM, pp. 309-310.
- 9 F. B. HOLE, *Philippians*. Electronic ed., accessed here: [http://biblecentre.org/commentaries/fbh\\_54-philippians.htm#Philippians%204](http://biblecentre.org/commentaries/fbh_54-philippians.htm#Philippians%204) Accessed on 28/11/11.
- 10 WARREN WIERSBE, *Be Joyful: Philippians*. 1974; electronic ed. (Quickverse, 2006).



Another commentator adds:

'His offer of prayer is not an easy solution; no magic formula here, no bedtime or morning rote repetition of words that we have labeled prayer. He is talking about the serious business of bringing our lives before God, examining our dependence upon God, placing our lives in God's hands to be used, remembering and celebrating what God has already done, confessing our needs and dedicating our gifts, committing ourselves and all that we are to make our common cause God's kingdom, not our own kingdom.

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## Introduction

This article briefly surveys the role of angels in supporting the sovereign purposes of God. The 'sovereignty' of God means that He is absolute in His decrees and actions and is accountable to no one. In the midst of a world of rebellion, this truth is deeply comforting to the believer. Scripture often designates God as 'Jehovah of hosts', alluding to the innumerable hosts of mighty angels at His direction.<sup>1</sup> In Old Testament times, as the armies of Judah dwindled, in line with diminishing national fortunes, this was a great solace to the godly. What God has promised, He can, and will bring to pass.

## The Constitution of Angels

First, we discern God's sovereignty in relation to the nature and constitution of angels. Angels are each *directly created* by God, hence their frequent designation 'sons of God'.<sup>2</sup> However, unlike mankind they are not a race, for they do not reproduce. Yet they can appear as men, interact with humans, and indeed eat food, Gen. 18. 8.

The Hebrew word *malak* and the Greek *angelos* alike point to one of their basic functions – messenger.

In addition, a great variety of terms are used to refer to these mysterious spirit beings: holy ones (sometimes rendered 'saints' KJV), seraphim, cherubim, spirits, thrones, dominions, principalities, powers, rulers, watchers.

A. W. PINK has a helpful comment highlighting the sovereignty of God in respect of their hierarchical orders, 'Consider the angelic hosts. Surely we shall find uniformity here. But no; there, as elsewhere, the same sovereign pleasure of the Creator is displayed. Some are higher in rank than others; some are more powerful than others; some are nearer to God than others. Scripture reveals a definite and well-defined gradation in the angelic orders. From arch-angel, past seraphim and cherubim, we come to "principalities and powers" (Eph. 3. 10), and from principalities and powers to "rulers" (Eph. 6. 12), and then to the angels themselves . . . Again we ask, Why

this inequality, this difference in rank and order? And all we can say is "Our God is in the heavens, He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased" (Ps. 115. 3)'.

In a primeval revolt, probably associated with the fall of Satan himself, multitudes of angels rebelled and fell irretrievably. By contrast, holy angels are designated 'elect', reflecting their preservation, 1 Tim. 5. 21. As such, they constitute a heavenly council, 1 Kgs. 22. 19-23; they stand in close relationship to God.<sup>3</sup>

The following sections consider some of the more important activities of angels in the furtherance of God's purposes.

## Serving

According to Hebrews chapter 1 verse 14 RV, angels are 'all ministering spirits, sent forth to do service for the sake of them that shall inherit salvation'. The psalmist celebrates their obedience in this capacity, 'Bless the Lord, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word. Bless ye the Lord, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure', Ps. 103. 20-21.

Angels do not select, opt into, or back out of assignments! On the contrary they are versatile and fully at the disposal of God. For example, 'one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues . . . talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife', Rev. 21. 9.

# ANGEL

## and the Sovereign of God

By **KEN TO** Cambridge,



Moreover, if the conduct of the seraphim is indicative, their joyful service is mixed with deep reverence and worship, Isa. 6. 3, and they sing to the praise of the mighty Creator.<sup>4</sup>

## Communicating

There can be nothing more important than doing God's will, 'Thy will be done, as it is in heaven', Matt. 6. 10. It is, therefore, most fitting that, amidst the awe-inspiring scenes of Sinai, the transmission of God's law to Israel was 'ordained through angels by the hand of a mediator', Gal. 3. 19. In contrast to the gospel first announced by the Son of God, the law was 'the word spoken through angels', Heb. 2. 2 RV.<sup>5</sup> At Sinai Israel entered into a formal covenant with God, with associated blessings and penalties. Whilst Moses officiated on the side of Israel, angels functioned on the divine side.

## Executing judgement

Throughout scripture, angels are seen as the executors of God's selective judgements. We might think of the destruction of Sodom, Gen. 19. 13; the Egyptian firstborn on Passover night, Exod. 12. 23; the Israelite rebels in the wilderness, 1 Cor. 10. 10; Israel under David, 2 Sam. 24. 16; Sennacherib's proud Assyrian army, 2 Kgs. 19. 35; or Herod for his impiety, Acts 12. 23. In every instance the judgement is delivered with unerring accuracy and lethal effect. Especially in the book of Revelation, we see the central role played by angels in the forthcoming trumpet and vial judgements on unrepentant 'earth-



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dweller', see especially Revelation chapters 8 and 16.

### Safeguarding believers

Earlier, reference was made to the service angels perform on behalf of the people of God, Heb. 1. 14. Believers matter to God – He *guards* His people as the apple of His eye. Angelic ministry is often seen in relation to the patriarchs.<sup>6</sup> Later, we see an angel's tenderness in attending to the physically and spiritually exhausted Elijah, 1 Kgs. 19. 5f. When Elisha was in Dothan, surrounded by Syrian hosts, and his servant cried, 'Alas! how shall we do?', the Lord opened his eyes to see the mountain full of chariots and horses of fire round about, 2 Kgs. 6. 15, 17. Amidst oppression in the alien environment of Babylon, Daniel was saved by God's angel in the lions' den, Dan. 6. 22.

Then, in the days of the early church we see how the risen and sovereign Lord sent His angel at critical moments – undoing prison doors, directing evangelists, and reassuring Paul the apostle.<sup>7</sup>

### Ministering to the Son of God

Angelic ministry in relation to the Lord Jesus may be regarded as a special case of the general protection and vindication just considered, and reveals how comprehensively God's determinate counsel was fulfilled. Thus, angels are seen in the annunciation both to Mary and Joseph, the directions to the shepherds, the praises of the heavenly hosts, and the preservation of the infant Christ.<sup>8</sup>

Following the temptations in the wilderness, they 'ministered' unto their Creator, Matt. 4. 11. What our Lord steadfastly refused under satanic temptation, the Father amply provided, Ps. 91. 11-12. Again, amidst the gloom and anguish of Gethsemane 'there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him', Luke 22. 43. Yet for our eternal salvation, and in spite of the fact that more than twelve legions of angels were at His disposal, He chose to suffer alone, enduring the awful stroke of divine justice. Angels feature prominently in the accounts of the resurrection, attesting the vindication of the Crucified One, 'Behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it . . . He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay', Matt. 28. 2, 6. The action of the angel shows the comprehensive power of God in the face of all human and infernal powers; the stone is rolled away not to let the Lord out, but rather to admit the witnesses of the empty tomb.

### Agents of God's sovereignty in history

At several points in the book of Daniel we find intriguing disclosures of the role of angelic hosts in relation to world rulers. Michael the archangel is represented as Israel's champion against her accuser Satan, Dan. 12. 1. More generally, Daniel chapter 10 unfolds the mysterious truth that there are evil patron-angels in the spirit world, answering to the proud and defiant leaders of kingdoms in the political world, the 'prince of Persia' and the 'prince of Grecia' standing in antagonism to Michael. How good to rest assured that 'the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will'! God decrees in relation to the dominion of His Son, 'I will overturn, overturn, overturn . . . until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him', Ezek. 21. 27.

### Conclusion

The consideration of angels reminds us that God's merciful purposes cannot be thwarted, His power is

unlimited, and His providential care of His people is incessant. For our part, as servants of God frequently marked by failure and unworthiness, we can learn much from the example of angels: their prompt and unquestioning obedience; their unceasing worship; their staunch refusal of human adulation. Yet by infinite grace we are destined for greater glory, responsibility, and intimacy with God<sup>9</sup> – 'which things the angels desire to look into'.

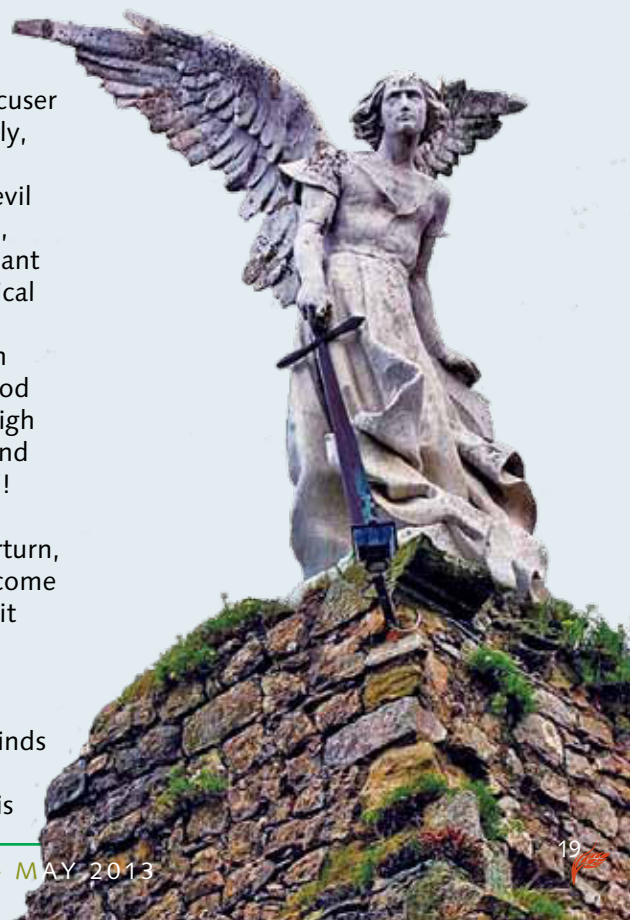
### Further reading

J. B. CURRIE, *Angels – a Biblical Survey*, Ritchie, 1999.  
W. R. LEWIS, 'Angels', in *The Faith, a Symposium of Bible Doctrine*, F. A. Tatford (Ed.), Pickering & Inglis, 1952, pp. 245-256.

### Endnotes

- 1 1 Sam. 17. 45; Ps. 24. 10. As the 'host of heaven' designated the heavenly bodies, Gen 2. 1, and heavenly beings, 1 Kgs. 22. 19, the title came to signify Jehovah as the ruler of all heavenly powers, the supreme Sovereign of the universe.
- 2 Job 1. 6; 2. 1; 38. 7.
- 3 Matt. 18. 10; 24. 36
- 4 Ps. 148. 2; Job 38. 7.
- 5 cp. Acts 7. 53
- 6 Gen. 19. 15; 28. 12; 32. 1.
- 7 Acts 5. 19; 12. 7; Acts 8. 26; 27. 23
- 8 Luke 1; 2; Matt. 1. 20.
- 9 1 Cor. 6. 3; Eph. 3. 10; 5. 29-30; Heb. 2. 5-11; 1 Pet. 1. 12c.

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In the face of grave danger Elijah's boldness knew no bounds. He fearlessly confronted King Ahab, charging him with the twin crimes of forsaking 'the commandments of the Lord' and shamelessly following 'Baalim', v. 18. Elijah then ordered the angry ruler to gather all Israel to Mount Carmel, including 850 false prophets, v. 19. Such courage was displayed 'after many days' of waiting patiently upon God. Finally, after three-and-a-half years Elijah received God's authoritative word to act: 'Go, shew thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth', v. 1. Even the details of Elijah's conflict with the prophets of Baal were given to him, v. 36. He would not delay, but 'struck while the iron was hot', v. 2. Appreciating the greatness of God, Elijah referred to Him as the living Lord of hosts, the One to whom angelic armies render unquestioning obedience. If we want the same spiritual courage as that of Elijah the formula remains unchanged. We, too, need to abide God's time, for 'he that believeth shall not make haste', Isa. 28. 16. Since delay diminishes ardour, we must obey promptly the word of God which arms us for spiritual conflict,<sup>1</sup> and is the sole authority for the life of the man of God.<sup>2</sup> Neither can we fear man 'whose breath is in his nostrils', 2. 22; rather, 'sanctify the Lord of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread', 8. 13. Put simply, be in awe of God.

The meeting with Obadiah was another major contributor to Elijah's strength before King Ahab. Gifted and diligent, Obadiah, like Joseph in Egypt and Daniel in Babylon, had excelled in the court of an ungodly monarch,<sup>3</sup> while keeping his fear of God fresh, 1 Kgs. 18. 3. He used his position to save the lives of God's prophets, vv. 4, 13, and his spiritual perception remained undimmed, for Obadiah recognized Elijah immediately, humbly falling 'on his face' before him, v. 7. And so, for Elijah's encouragement, before he faced King Ahab, he found himself in the presence of another godly man. Fellowship with other believers is so important that the writer to the Hebrews exhorted, 'Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves

# Studies in the life of Mount Carmel 1 Kings, chapter 18



together', Heb. 10. 24, 25. Before Abram faced the king of Sodom he first met Melchizedek, Gen. 14. 18-20. Jonathan 'strengthened [David's] hand in God', 1 Sam. 23. 16. And, as Paul approached Rome, he was met by other brethren, 'whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage', Acts 28. 15. Christian fellowship augments our own spiritual courage, for as 'iron sharpeneth iron, so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend', Prov. 27. 17.

Ahab's godlessness seems to grow as the story unfolds. As a weak husband, he permitted his wife to slay the Lord's prophets, 1 Kgs. 18. 4. In contrast to a true spiritual leader, Ahab was more interested in the wellbeing of his livestock than his people, v. 5. Despite Obadiah's faithful service over many years, Ahab would have slain him for the slightest offence, v. 9. And even after three-and-a-half years of drought Ahab remained recalcitrant. He continued to hunt down Elijah, v. 10. He persisted in blaming Elijah for Israel's trouble, v. 17, and refused to accept that the root cause of Israel's problems was his own idolatry, v. 18. Ahab's idolatry was so bad that its influence continued for at least another two hundred years.<sup>4</sup>

'There was to be a public contest between the forces of good and evil'.<sup>5</sup> Elijah, Obadiah and seven thousand others may not have bowed to Baal, 1 Kgs. 19. 18, but the rest of the nation had acquiesced to Ahab's vigorous promotion of Baal worship and were undecided whether Jehovah or Baal was Israel's true God. The people were silenced at Elijah's challenge, 'How long halt ye between two opinions', 18. 21. But such indecision was about to be dealt a cutting blow,

with representatives of the entire nation watching on. Since 'no man can serve two masters', Matt. 6. 24, it is worth asking ourselves the same question. How long do we halt between two opinions? Do we put pleasure, business, or earthly possessions before Christ? The tension on Mount Carmel would have been palpable. Having arrested the attention of the nation, Jehovah would now declare Himself decisively to be Israel's true and living God. The public nature of the challenge anticipated a future confrontation that will take place in the valley area of Megiddo below, when Messiah will face 'the kings of the earth and of the whole world . . . [gathered] to the battle of that great day of God Almighty', Rev. 16. 14. This sudden public showdown prevented Baal's prophets from any trickery. While occultic practices thrive in the dark, God's truth welcomes the sharpest scrutiny and this is exactly what Elijah experienced as the eyes of the nation rested upon him.

The challenge by fire was appropriate, since Baal was supposed to be able to produce fire. But this pagan idol was powerless before the true God, who is 'a consuming fire', Heb. 12. 29. Baal's prophets were given every possible advantage. They outnumbered Elijah 450 to 1, they were allowed first choice of bullock, and they were given all day to call down fire from Baal, 1 Kgs. 18. 36. But in desperation they 'leaped upon the altar which was made', v. 26, 'cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them', v. 28 – a cruel practice forbidden in Israel, Deut. 14. 1. But the frenzied activities of Baal's prophets were in vain. Echoing heaven's laughter at the ungodly, Ps. 2. 4, Elijah mocked their futile

# ah (2)

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efforts: 'Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked', v. 27. But 'the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary', Isa. 40. 28. All false gods, including Baal, 'have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat', Ps. 115. 5-7.

At the time of the evening burnt offering, 1 Kgs. 18. 29,<sup>6</sup> the people approached Elijah's altar to witness the unleashing of Jehovah's power, v. 30. God sanctioned this one-off sacrifice on a high place away from Jerusalem<sup>7</sup> and permitted Elijah to lay the sacrifice and wood on the altar<sup>8</sup> because of the need to publicly declare Himself to be Israel's God. Jehovah made it clear that this sacrifice was not to be repeated, by completely destroying the altar. The never-to-be-repeated character of Elijah's sacrifice anticipated the cross when 'Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many', Heb. 9. 28. Furthermore, the fire falling on the bullock, rather than on sinful Israel, also prefigured the substitutionary function of Calvary, when the Lamb of God 'bare our sins in his own body on the tree', 1 Pet. 2. 24. Since all the priests had fled southward, 2 Chr. 11. 13, Elijah was merely fulfilling, not usurping their God-given role. And when he saturated his bullock with water rather than pouring on it a drink offering of 'half an hin of wine [which is flammable]', Num 15. 10, he only did this to enhance the display of God's power. Even the way in which Elijah constructed his altar is instructive. Although not

clearly stated, it is likely that Elijah built his altar with twelve whole stones in obedience to the law of God,<sup>9</sup> the twelve stones representing the twelve tribes of Israel and thus national unity, 1 Kgs. 18. 31.<sup>10</sup> And he built his altar in Jehovah's name, v. 32, praying that God would be honoured and Israel converted, vv. 36, 37.<sup>11</sup> This is how we should worship; obediently, in harmony with God's people and purely for the Lord's glory.

This almighty display of God's power convinced the people that 'the Lord, He is the God', v. 39. Even though Baal's prophets were slain, v. 40,<sup>12</sup> and the New Testament exposes false teachers as equally abhorrent to God,<sup>13</sup> Christians are exhorted to silence, not slay false teachers. Ahab's heart remained untouched. He still put personal comfort before the wellbeing of God's people, vv. 41, 42. In stark contrast, Elijah prayed, fully convinced that God would make good His words, vv. 43-45.<sup>14</sup> He prayed in faith, hearing a sound of abundance of rain before there was any, v. 1. He prayed humbly, casting 'himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees', v. 42. And he prayed expectantly, commanding his servant seven times over to 'go up now, look toward the sea', v. 43. Just as God began to answer Elijah's prayer with a small cloud (before the downpour), we should look out for answers to our prayers.

It was only when Israel had confessed the Lord to be God that the rain came, and it is only after Israel's future conversion that this world will feel the blessings of Christ's millennial rule.<sup>15</sup> Ahab might have moved quickly – any delay would have caused his chariot to become stuck in the muddy Jezreel valley<sup>16</sup> – but Ahab in his chariot was beaten by Elijah racing on foot, energized by God, his loins girded, v. 46. We too have a race to run. And in our race we are to gird up the loins of our minds, 1 Pet. 1. 13 – freeing them from unnecessary clutter – and 'lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and [let us] run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith', Heb. 12. 1, 2.

## Endnotes

- 1 Eph. 6. 14, 17.
- 2 2 Tim. 3. 16, 17.
- 3 See Prov. 22. 29.
- 4 See Mic. 6. 16.
- 5 PINK A. W., *The Life of Elijah*, Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, reprinted 1997, pg. 121.
- 6 See Exod. 29. 38-42; Num. 28. 3-8.
- 7 Jerusalem was the divinely appointed site of worship, Deut. 12. 1-28.
- 8 This was the prerogative of priests, Lev. 1. 7, 8.
- 9 See Exod. 20. 25, 26.
- 10 Compare Ezra 6. 17.
- 11 Compare Rom. 10. 1.
- 12 Compare Deut. 17. 2-7.
- 13 2 Pet. 2. 1; Jude 4.
- 14 Jas. 5. 18.
- 15 Rom. 11. 26.
- 16 Compare Judg. 4. 15; 5. 20, 21.

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# THE JEWS, THEIR LAND AND

**The Bible has a lot to say about God's dealings with the Jews and His purposes for them.**

## **A special people**

The Jews are a unique people because of their relationship to God. They are 'the apple of His eye', that is, the special object of His love and care. God holds men and nations to account for their dealings with His people, through whom all other nations are to be blessed. He will bless those who bless them, and curse those that curse them.<sup>1</sup>

Balaam was compelled to acknowledge that the Jews were different from all other nations. Throughout history they have always retained their own laws and way of life. Rahab recognized their special relationship with God, when she said, 'We have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you'. The remarkably perceptive words of Zeresh, the wife of Haman, the Jews' sworn enemy, who was already plotting their annihilation were a warning to him, and everyone else, 'If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews . . . thou shalt not prevail against him, but shall surely fall before him'.<sup>2</sup>

Modern science has established

that the Jews, Arabs, Palestinians, Syrians and Lebanese are brothers, all sharing the same genetic link, because they are all descendants of Abraham. This is confirmed in a paper published by the American Academy of Sciences, in May 2000. However, only the descendants of Abraham through the line of Isaac and Jacob are Jews, and heirs to the covenant relationship with God.

This is everlasting, and unaffected by time and circumstances. Because of it, the Jews have been greatly blessed, and God revealed Himself to them when all the rest of mankind was stumbling in the darkness of heathenism, idolatry and mythology. Through the Jews alone has come to all the world the divinely inspired word of God, and the one and only Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. To the so-called 'cultivated and civilized ancient world' of antiquity, He was 'the unknown God'.<sup>3</sup>

The Jews have been persecuted throughout history, and sometimes even denied the rights given to their fellow citizens, but they have stubbornly clung on to their own religion, faith and way of life, never being assimilated completely into the majority population. They are distinct because they are special.

## **The unique status of the land and Jerusalem**

The Lord promised 'all the Land of Canaan' to Abraham and his descendants through Isaac and Jacob. It was to extend from the border with Egypt, the river or Brook of Egypt, now the Wady-el-Arish, to the River Euphrates. If we should be inclined to be sceptical of this today, we should remember that David had garrisons in Damascus, and Solomon's kingdom reached 'from the river Euphrates to the borders of Philistia and Egypt'. The land of Philistia, much of it now known as 'the Gaza Strip' is included within the borders of the Promised Land.<sup>4</sup>

The city of Jerusalem is also very special to the Jews. During their years in the wilderness, as they made their way to the Promised Land, the Lord constantly spoke to them of 'the place in the land' where He would put His name, and where His people would go to worship Him. This was subsequently identified as Jerusalem, 'the city of the great King' and 'the holy city'. It was, for Jews, the recognized 'place where men ought to worship'.<sup>5</sup>

At the present time Jews and Palestinians are equally determined to have this land,





# THEIR FUTURE

By **JIM VOISEY** Cardiff, Wales

(the Palestinians claiming ancient rights of occupation) and neither is prepared to give way. Attempts at compromises, involving the partitioning of the land, have all failed. It would not appear to be in the mind of God that this should ever happen. For their part, the Palestinians have invariably rejected all these overtures, holding out for their 'right' to have Jerusalem as their capital city, and demanding that all refugees be allowed to return to their original pre-1948 homes. These are impossible dreams. The land has been given to the Jews by irreversible divine mandate, they have re-established it as their homeland, and it will not be taken from them again.

When, by an act of divine judgement, the Jews were expelled from their land to go into captivity in Babylon, their enemies rejoiced over their downfall, joined in abuse against them and even took part in the destruction of Jerusalem. They should not have done so, and God's judgement was proclaimed against them by the prophet Obadiah, Obad. 10-15.

Men have never understood the position of the Jews in relation to God's purposes. Even as they were preparing to go into captivity, the

Lord assured them that they would return to their land; they would 'rise again', 'be brought into the light' and all their enemies would be ashamed. He also assured them that their long-promised Messiah would be born in the land, and specifically in Bethlehem. How impossible did such a promise look at the time.<sup>6</sup>

## The future of the Jews

Even in their exile, Jews prayed for, and longed for, their own land again. Solomon anticipated they would do so and instructs them how they should pray. Jeremiah prophesied how long their captivity would be, and Daniel always prayed towards Jerusalem, knowing that in God's time His people would be going back, so that all God's promises would be fulfilled.<sup>7</sup>

The Jews did return and the people occupying their land did all they could to frustrate, undermine and hinder them, but God watched over them, and they triumphed over their adversaries. But they still lived in fear, and so the returns under Zerubbabel and Ezra were a faint picture of the time yet to come, when Jerusalem, fully restored, will be 'a city of truth', and its bustling streets filled with people, old and young, all living without fear; that

has yet to come.<sup>8</sup> When our Lord returns to the earth, He will come first to Bethany and the Mount of Olives. Before that, there are hard times for Israel. Jerusalem will be besieged again, but the Lord will intervene, and destroy the besieging nations, perhaps as a consequence of something like a nuclear explosion.<sup>9</sup> The Lord is jealous over Jerusalem; He has chosen it, and He will defend it. There are wonderful times ahead for the Jews.<sup>10</sup>

## Endnotes

- 1 See Gen. 12. 2, 3; 22. 18; Deut. 32. 10; Zech. 2. 8.
- 2 See Num. 23. 9; Josh. 2. 9-11; Esther 3. 8; 6. 13; 8. 1.
- 3 Gen. 17. 7; John 4. 42; Acts 17. 23; Rom. 9. 4, 5.
- 4 Gen. 15. 18; 17. 8; Exod. 23. 31; Deut. 17. 8; 11. 24; Josh. 1. 4-6; 2 Sam. 8. 6; 1 Kgs. 4. 21; 2 Chr. 9. 26.
- 5 Deut. 12. 5, 11; 17. 8; 18. 6; 1 Kgs. 8. 29; 14. 21; 2 Chr. 7. 12, 16; Ps. 48. 2; Matt. 4. 5; 5. 35; John 4. 20.
- 6 Micah 5. 1, 2; 7. 7-17.
- 7 1 Kgs. 8. 33, 34, 46-53; Jer. 25. 1-11; 32. 15, 36-44; Dan. 6. 10; 9. 1, 2, 16-19.
- 8 Zech. 8. 1-8.
- 9 See Zech. 14. 12.
- 10 Isa. 31. 5; Zech. 12. 9; 14. 2-11.

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# EPAPHRAS A MAN OF PR

It is difficult to find men of prayer, especially in this busy, fast-moving age. Yet, in every period of man's hectic history, God has always had those who have spent much time in secret communion with Him, even to this very hour. Without such prayer warriors the church of Jesus Christ would be virtually powerless. If we but knew what we owe as believers to the ceaseless intercession of our Great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, coupled with the faithful intercession of men and women of God, surely we would be driven to our knees afresh in true praise and thankfulness to our Lord, and, at the same time, avail ourselves more often of the priceless privilege of prayer.

Epaphras was a man of prayer and though his Bible biography is brief, we are reminded of the fact that 'little is much when God is in it'. Two outstanding things characterize Epaphras:

## HIS FAITHFUL SERVICE

It is apparent that Epaphras was brought to know Christ as his Saviour and Lord sometime during the period of Paul's three years' ministry at Ephesus, Acts 20. 31. Following his conversion, he was called by God to take the gospel of Christ to the lost. This is the call and responsibility of every true believer. Engaging in the pioneer missionary work committed to him, Epaphras took the message of the gospel of God's grace to Colossae; then, sometime later, he visited the apostle Paul, who had been imprisoned at Rome. The favourable report which he brought to Paul was a source of joy and encouragement to the beloved apostle, and later he was sent back to Colossae bearing Paul's letter to the saints in that city.

The Holy Spirit's sterling commendation of Epaphras is both searching and challenging. First of all, from Philemon 23 he is seen to have been at one time a 'fellow-prisoner in Christ Jesus' with Paul himself. WILLIAM R. NICHOLSON has suggested that Epaphras and Aristarchus may have alternated as the apostle's fellow-prisoners, Epaphras being such while the letter to Philemon was written, and Aristarchus serving in the same capacity while Paul's letter to the Colossians

was written. Whatever the circumstances may have been, it was indeed an honour to have been linked with Paul as a fellow-prisoner in the Lord. Secondly, linking himself with the Colossian Christians, Paul refers to Epaphras as 'our dear fellow-servant', Col. 1. 7. Though such service was often toilsome, tiresome, and tearful, what a blessed relationship this was, something which Epaphras must have truly cherished. Thirdly, Paul refers to Epaphras not only as 'a faithful minister of Christ', but as 'a servant of Christ', Col. 4. 12. The words 'minister' and 'servant' have the same root, *doulos*, which means 'bondslave'; the same word is used of Christ, Phil. 2. 7. The keynote struck in Colossians chapter 1 verse 7 with regard to Epaphras' service, is that he was 'faithful'. How important this is, especially in a day when unfaithfulness abounds. How much steadfast service means in the sight of God! 'Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful', 1 Cor. 4. 2. Are you consistently faithful in reading God's word, in prayer, in upholding the person and work of Christ, witnessing, assembling yourself with the Lord's people, and in every other aspect of the Christian life?

As a part of Epaphras' faithful service he had brought back a true report of the Colossian saints' 'love in the Spirit', Col. 1. 8. His declaration regarding the spiritual health of these believers was not exaggerated, minimized, or self-centred. There are times when a big question mark might be placed over certain 'glowing reports' which are heard or read. Sadly, it is common to exalt man and his attainments, and preachers in particular need to be on their guard to 'tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth' when led to give any report, either spoken or written, concerning what God by His grace has wrought.

We come now to the second outstanding characteristic of Epaphras:

## HIS FERVENT SUPPLICATION

At least three significant things characterized Epaphras' prayer life.

### He was persistent

As the apostle Paul draws his letter to a close, he reveals the persistency and the faithfulness whereby Epaphras prays for the Colossian Christians, 'always labouring fervently for you in prayers', 4. 12. In other words, there was no letting up or letting down in his prayerful remembrance of them.<sup>1</sup>

### He was persevering

Epaphras prayed things through. Prayer was not a form, but a force in his life. As conveyed by the words, 'labouring fervently', which are but one word in the Greek text, he literally 'agonized' (*agonizomenos*, Gk.) in the presence of God, and this for others, 4. 12. How Christ-like this man was!<sup>2</sup> Paul uses the very same word in connection with his own prayers on behalf of the Colossian saints, 1. 29; 2. 1.



## He was particular

Epaphras did not pray sketchily, but specifically. General petitions will only bring general answers, but specific petitions will bring specific answers, coupled with the blessings which accompany such answers. Epaphras' particular petition on behalf of the Colossian believers may well be considered from a threefold standpoint. First of all, he prayed that they might 'stand'. How important it is for the people of God, individually and collectively, to both stand and take a stand.<sup>3</sup> Much of the moral chaos, confusion, and corruption in this present age is directly traceable to the fact that no stand is taken for what is right and righteous. Next, Epaphras prayed that the saints might be 'perfect', that is, 'mature' in spiritual life and growth. Much of the trouble and division which mars and marks God's people stems from spiritual immaturity. Finally, he prayed that they might be 'complete in all the will of God', that is, that they might be fully assured in all their associations with Him, of all that He has promised and certified through His word that He is to them, and of their union in Christ. These things we learn by means of our Lord's revealed will through the scriptures, and such a petition only serves to stress the importance of reading the word of God day by day, as well as meditating upon it.<sup>4</sup>

In Colossians chapter 4 verse 13 the apostle Paul attests to the 'zeal' of Epaphras in both service and prayer on behalf of the Colossian saints. Though the emphasis is primarily upon his prayer ministry, the word for 'zeal' also means 'labour', 'travail', 'pain', or 'anguish'. It is related that during one of D. L. Moody's Atlantic Ocean crossings a fire broke out in the hold of the ship. A friend is reported to have said to the famous evangelist, 'Mr. Moody, let us go to the other end of the ship and engage in prayer'. The heavenly-minded yet down-to-earth Moody replied, 'Not so, sir; we stand right here and pass buckets and pray hard all the time'.

Such reflects the spirit of Epaphras and his ministry, a man of God who may be looked upon as one of the Elijahs of the New Testament, cp. Jas. 5. 16. God grant that in these 'last days' the church of Jesus Christ might be blessed with many more prayer warriors such as Epaphras was in his day. Will you be one of them?

## Endnotes

- 1 See also 1 Sam. 12. 13; cf. Luke 18. 1; Rom. 12. 12; Eph. 6. 18; Col. 1. 3; 4. 2; 1 Thess. 5. 17; Jude 20.
- 2 See also Mark 10. 45; Luke 4. 43; 23. 35; John 10. 16.
- 3 cp. Acts 5. 20; 1 Cor. 16. 13; Gal. 5. 1; Eph. 6. 13-14; Phil. 1. 27; 4. 1.
- 4 cp. Col. 2. 2; Heb. 6. 11; 10. 22.

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## BIBLICAL MAPS

My four-year-old son often sits on my knee during our Sunday afternoon meeting. To enliven proceedings, he sometimes leafs through my Bible and stops at the maps section near the back. The splashes of colour seem to fascinate him; at least, the maps keep him quiet for a few minutes longer than usual!

Biblical maps can be helpful for mature Bible students too. For example, it is useful to appreciate the extent of various world empires as appointed by God, Acts 17. 26, or the distance covered by the tireless apostle Paul on his missionary journeys, 2 Cor. 11. 26. In this article we will review several Bible mapping resources available online.

<http://www.studylight.org/se/maps/> has a list of around 150 full-colour maps arranged by topic, in approximate chronological order. The maps can be downloaded as JPEG image files in a selection of sizes. The website explicitly states that the maps are 'freely available for personal download and use'.



<http://bible.org/maps#samples> features a smaller collection of maps. Most of these are black and white, traditional Bible maps such as the world of the Patriarchs, and tribes of Israel. However, there are also twelve satellite image maps, which aim to show the physical geography of the land of Israel. My favourite of these satellite maps shows the Sea of Galilee, ringed by green grassy hills with rugged rocky terrain to the north-west and south-east. The satellite images are generated from modern-day photos, but the biblical place names are superimposed.



<http://www.openbible.info/geo/> is a remarkable site based on geocoding technology. The compiler has identified every locatable place in the Bible text, and geocoded it (effectively computed its latitude and longitude). On the website, you can view a Google Earth image with red markers for Bible locations. It is possible to filter markers so that only places mentioned in a particular Bible book are displayed, or to view all the markers at once. Particularly interesting examples include Luke's two New Testament narratives.



Finally, Google street view technology allows you to walk down a road virtually in a web browser, provided that a Google camera car has previously driven down the same road. Street view is available for several modern-day cities in Israel, including Jerusalem. See <http://googleblog.blogspot.co.uk/2012/04/exploring-jerusalem-old-city-streets.html> for details.





# REPORTS REPORTS REPORTS

GOSPEL WORK AND OTHER ACTIVITIES Compiled by SANDY JACK



## ENGLAND

### Dorset

The believers from Bethany Chapel, **Lyme Regis** have been encouraged in seeing some confessions of faith from some of the elderly ladies who have been attending the services, and also in discovering some had trusted the Lord many years previously.

They have continued their doorstep conversations, and, as a result, a self-confessed backslider often attends the services. She has a very clear testimony and often brings others of her unsaved family, recently including her husband and teenage son, and is keen that they will be saved. Two young people have been baptized and received into fellowship, and an older couple have joined us from another assembly that closed.

At present, their building is somewhat restrictive, but they have planning permission for some changes, and an extension that will make it more versatile and user friendly.

### Sussex

The believers at Marine Hall, **Eastbourne**, had the joy of seeing the baptism of a lady who has been coming to the meetings for a number of years. As a result of one of the saints passing to her a copy of *Church Doctrine and Practice*, (PSI, edited by J. HEADING AND C. E. HOCKING), and her diligent reading of it, reconsidering the teaching of scripture, she asked for baptism and subsequently has been happily received into fellowship. This is the fifth believer whom the assembly have had the privilege to receive into fellowship in the last six months.

Contacts continue to be developed with a local YMCA youth outreach centre and one of the brethren has had some good conversations with both the young people and workers when he has 'dropped in' to some of their sessions.

### Cambridgeshire

During the February school half-term, Roseford Chapel, **Cambridge** held a children's holiday Bible club each morning from Monday to Thursday for five to eleven-year-olds. Invitations were delivered to children via the local schools,

who all accepted the literature. In spite of bitterly cold weather, attendance averaged twenty each day.

The theme for the week was 'Jesus the life changer', and included the parable of the lost sheep, the resurrection of Lazarus, and the cross and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Each morning began and ended with a time of prayer for the workers. Some mothers stayed each day and helped their children in the learning of memory verses, and several expressed an interest in the Sunday School and regular children's work.

Some twenty-two children and thirteen parents attended the Thursday evening prize-giving session. Please pray that the Lord will bless the work, and that contact with all those who attended will be maintained and the relationships forged with parents developed.



## SCOTLAND

The assembly in **Kennoway** held their annual Christmas Carol Service and were delighted to see 120 people present. In addition to the usual carol singing, the children who attend the 'Good News Club' performed a play that laid out the Christmas story, and this was followed by a message from Jonathan Blair

They have been encouraged in past months with the number of local people who have been coming along to the meetings. During the summer, believers attended the Kennoway Carnival, and then held their first Family Fun Day which saw over 200 people from the local community coming into the grounds of the hall. Following on from this an Olympic themed service was held which saw over fifty of the people who came to the fun day return to hear the gospel message explained clearly by Richard Smith.

The Lord has also blessed through an increasing interest in the children's work following on from these summer activities. Attendance at the 'Good News Club' has almost trebled and it has been thrilling to see so many children from the surrounding area come in and to see so many parents and carers of the children staying to

have a cup of tea/coffee and listen to what the children are being taught.



## IRELAND

The assembly in **Newcastle West** were able to secure a long-term lease on an old retail premises based in the town centre back in October. Following planning permission being granted, along with Fire and Disability Access Certificates, they were able to start the renovation work in mid-December. The Lord has graciously provided at every step of this process and since the beginning of January they been blessed with a number of believers who have travelled to help with the work.

When possession was taken of the building, it was one big open plan unit with an entrance hall. It has been possible to make room for two toilets, a kitchen, meeting room, and a room suitable for children's work and the fortnightly youth work, as well as storage facilities. They have been particularly encouraged to see the Lord working in salvation.

The opening of the new hall will be on Saturday 18th May, DV, at 5.30pm. The speaker is Willie Burnett from Oakville, Ontario, Canada.

Gerry and Nadina who own the tyre business beside the new hall, and live thirty minutes away from Newcastle West, started coming along to the gospel meeting at the beginning of January. They have two children who also attend Sunday School.

At the beginning of February, Andy Shanks started a Bible study at Gerry and Nadina's home. Each week the Bible Study has lasted anywhere from two-and-a-half to three hours as they just kept asking questions with a great openness to spiritual things. When Andy went along to one such study in mid-February, Gerry announced that he had been saved and Nadia explained she wasn't saved but hoped that she would be soon!! By the end of the month, she had taken that step of trusting the Lord and they have both been baptized in the new hall since. This is the first Irish married couple to have been saved locally. A great encouragement!



## OVERSEAS

### Namibia



David and Helen McKillen from Cape Town, South Africa have been praying for some time about an outreach trip to Namibia, and the way opened up at the end of 2012.

After a very busy December in which they packed and loaded almost 500,000 tracts and calendars for North West Zambia (via Paul and Eunice Poidevin and their new trailer), they loaded up 35,000 calendars for Botswana and Namibia.

Along with Dan and Stella Nguluka from the Maun assembly, they gave out over 10,000 Herero and English calendars, over 20,000 tracts and had many opportunities to present the gospel. It was not unusual to have an 'open-air meeting' in a filling station forecourt, with attendants and customers gathered around the Land Rover to hear the gospel message told out from the verses on the different calendars.

Please pray for the land of Namibia. Lying to the north and west of South Africa, easily accessible from Cape Town, with English the official language, it is a land of welcoming people with a ready ear for the gospel; yet it is a land with no assembly workers and no assembly testimony. David and Helen hope to visit again at the end of the year.

### Ukraine

Edmund and Agnes Johnston report, 'The last few years have been a journey



of "mountains and valleys, gains and losses". However, we are encouraged from the scriptures that "God is faithful". We are very thankful for the many opportunities there are to open the word of God and share the gospel with both young and old. We are involved with eight orphanages, gypsy camps, schools, and a rehabilitation centre. We visit many individuals, sharing the gospel with them and giving material help. The Euro 2012 football competition provided opportunity for the distribution of many gospel tracts, and during December we gave out 4,000 gospel calendars. The assembly in **Lviv** is now two-and-a-half years old and all of the members are first generation Christians. They show a willingness to learn more about assembly truth. We rejoice that two more believers were added to the company last year. In October, we enjoyed our second annual conference when our brother Dennis Williamson visited us for one week'.

### Mexico



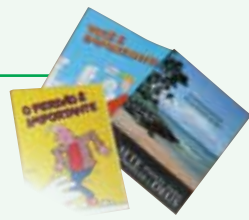
Timothy and Jenna Stevenson write, 'We have relocated to Merida, almost 2,000 kilometres south-east of our previous home in Guadalajara. Since moving, we have had a very encouraging visit to Cancun, helping with tract distribution and gospel tent meetings. In our own locality, as we distributed calendars, it was evident to us that people are sincerely searching for the truth. False doctrines abound; "angels of light" are propagating empty hopes while, at the same time, emptying the pockets of those already in poverty'.

'However, we know and are sure, that "God is able". We commenced gospel meetings last week in a believer's home, in the Mayan village of Paraiso. It is encouraging to see those who are interested attending each night. Remember Mexico, and us, in your prayers'.

### Gibraltar

The saints in Gibraltar have had the joy of baptizing and receiving into fellowship a man who was saved during meetings held a few years ago with John Griffiths. The subject on the first evening of the meetings was the Rapture and as John was approaching the platform on the second evening, Steven caught him by the arm and told him that he had been saved the previous evening! He was given booklets on Christian growth, baptism, and the Lord's Supper to help his development. He devoured these and realized his next step was baptism but was not ready to take the step; he wanted to be absolutely sure that matters relating to his unconverted days had been put behind him. In January of this year he finally made up his mind to get baptized and seek fellowship in the Gibraltar assembly. His wife has been staunchly Roman Catholic but is now attending the meetings quite frequently. Please pray that she and their five children would be saved.

The baptism took place in the sea near Nelson's Bay on January 27th, 2013, shortly after 10am and Steven had chosen two hymns for the occasion: 'I'm not ashamed to own my Lord'; and 'There's a land that is fairer than day'. Some sang in Spanish others in English but in complete harmony. Although the assembly was only five strong, Steven's relatives turned out in force and about thirty saw Clive, Steven's brother both in the flesh and in the Lord, immerse Steven in the sea. It was truly a public witness! Denis Goodwin gave a word on baptism from Acts chapter 2 verses 41-42. The believers then made their way to the Hall for the morning meeting at 11am, where Steven was received into assembly fellowship - just forty-five minutes between his baptism and reception! He took part publicly for the first time that morning and there was hardly a dry eye in the place. The assembly has also been blessed by the return of Paco from his daughter's home in Kent. Paco was a founder member of the assembly but due to his age (95 years), and health problems had to leave Gibraltar for England, but is now back home. The assembly has seven in fellowship, currently, and they would value prayer and the fellowship of visiting believers. They are currently preparing for a gospel series with Alistair Bajel (Scotland) and Sammy Maze (NI).



# Spreading the Word in Portuguese

'To God be the glory, great things He hath done' This first line of the old hymn from the Sankey hymnbook would be one that Alf Poland would have used, had he been here today to see the results of a work for the Lord that he started way back in 1999.

Alf began to serve the Lord in Portugal in 1951. Originally from Dublin, he started to work on a radio program of 'Bible Messages' in 1956 beamed into Portugal from Tangier via Transworld Radio. In 1968, a new programme

started to send not just to Portugal but to the rest of the Portuguese-speaking world. The internet had indeed opened a new communication channel not now just to Portugal but to the rest of the world where the Portuguese language is spoken. At first a few requests were received, but as time went on the number grew.

During this time both Alf and Clella's health started to deteriorate. Help came in the form of Andrew Wood who assisted Alf with the technical side and he was later joined by Nigel and Eunice Foundling who with their knowledge of Portuguese, were able to deal with the many requests sent in to the website.

In June 2006, Clella was called home to be with the Lord, and Alf followed her in October of the same year. Their work, however, continues. The baton has passed into the hands of the Foundlings with fellow-workers Meg Crawford and Elaine Ferracini Cruz in Brazil where a new office now deals with the requests from there. Graham Poland (Alf's son) took charge of the Gospel Broadcasting in Portuguese Trust, but since the work is driven mainly from Southampton (Graham living in Barnstable, Devon) it was decided that the Trust should be transferred into the hands of new trustees drawn from assemblies in the south of England.

Nigel Foundling together with his wife Eunice from Millbrook Road East assembly, Southampton, took chairman and secretary roles respectively with John Lee (Bognor Regis) as treasurer, ably assisted by Philip Kimber (Four Marks) and Denis Butler (Newbury).

With the number of requests rising throughout July and on into September 2012 we give thanks to the Lord for what He is doing. In two weeks in July, over 2,500 requests for gospel literature were received and sent out from Brazil with others sent to Portugal and beyond.

Tracts sent out include

'You are important' and 'Pardon is important', together with 'Seven steps to know God'. CD messages are also requested which consist of messages recorded for the radio broadcast and re-worked versions for Brazilian listeners. New messages are also being developed and, with help from brethren in Brazil, will be recorded soon.

A letter is sent out with each request offering Bible correspondence courses - there are now over 100 people enrolled in these courses. Numbers have been saved as a result and the next challenge is to put them in touch with assembly full-time workers in their own regions to assist in establishing them in the faith and supporting their spiritual development.

So the work, by His grace, has continued from 1999 to the present day. Please pray that the Trustees and workers will be able to faithfully discharge their responsibilities. For those actively involved in answering and sending out responses to the many requests, Meg and Elaine in Brazil, Nigel and Eunice in Southampton, pray that they might have wisdom in answering and dealing with often difficult questions and requests for help, and to help lead to the Saviour those who want to know Him. Again, we say, 'To God be the glory, great things He hath done', and is continuing to do.

*For further information contact Nigel and Eunice Foundling at [Nigel\\_eunice@btinternet.com](mailto:Nigel_eunice@btinternet.com) or visit the Broadcasting in Portuguese website at [www.contosepontos.com](http://www.contosepontos.com)*



*Nigel and Eunice Foundling*

was established sent out from Lisbon together with a new postal address for the handling of responses - the assembly in Santa Catarina. The first week saw just over 150 responses to the programme.

Financed by offerings from the Lord's people, a trust was set up in Dublin to oversee the distribution of funds sent in for the express purpose of supporting the radio work. 'Gospel broadcasting in Portuguese' was its designated name, and it continues to this day with the same aims as those originally identified by the Trustees in the late 1950s, i.e., the desire to see souls saved, baptized and brought into church fellowship.

Over the years, the number of listeners dwindled, and Alf realized that the internet was becoming the new way of communication and, in 1999 therefore, he started what has become known as 'Contos e Pontos'. The original radio messages were digitally cleaned by Alf himself and then re-worked and put on the Internet, with offers of both gospel tracts and Bible courses. Having retired to Southampton with his wife Clella, it was from here that he started this work. Receiving requests, Alf and Clella



*Nigel and Eunice with Margaret Crawford and Elaine Ferracini-Cruz*

# A WORD FOR TODAY

καλο-ποιέω, -ῶ (**kalo-poiéo, -ô**)  
to do well, to act honourably  
καλός, -ή, -όν (**kalós, -é, -ón**)  
good, excellent, choice  
κάλυμμα, -τος, -το (**kálymma, -tos -tó**) a covering, veil

It is not uncommon today, when someone is asked the question 'How are you?' to hear the response 'Good, thanks'. What, of course, the respondent means is that they are well in terms of their overall health. Surprisingly, however, the English adjective 'good' has actually more to do with virtue or moral quality than it does with a person's general state of physical well-being. Thus, in theory, one could argue that the respondent is claiming a status for themselves, which may not necessarily be correct! Such are the peculiarities of the modern use of language, but in the Graeco-Roman world in which the New Testament was written, the Greek word *kalós*, meaning 'good' or 'beautiful', was used consistently to describe that which was attractive or virtuous. Or, as EDWARD SELWYN states about the use of *kalós* by the apostle Peter in his first letter, chapter 2 verse 12, 'kalós and not ágathós is the adjective used here, because it implies that the conduct in question not only is good, but also appears so. This point was of particular importance in a society which applied to the highest kind of human character the term *kalós kàgathós*, i.e., one whose intrinsic goodness is also beautiful in others' eyes.'<sup>1</sup>

This idea of a goodness that is seen and realized by others is reflected in the widespread use of the word in classical Greek where, according to WILLIAM BARCLAY, 'kalós is one of the noblest of words; and through all its history it never loses a certain splendour'.<sup>2</sup> This is evident in the writings of Greek philosophers such as Aristotle who divided the nobility (*kalón*) into the naturally beautiful and the morally beautiful. He then defines the *kalón* by order and suggests that they are the good in an absolute sense.<sup>3</sup> Plato also grappled with *kalós* and did not think that goodness was simply subjective or marginal, but that it was fundamental to all real explanation, and hence all understanding.<sup>4</sup> Even when we look later at the writings of individuals such as TACITUS, the Roman historian, we still find similar comments being made of the equivalent Latin term for *kalós*, '*honestus*'. In his work, entitled 'Histories', TACITUS narrates the lives of various Roman Emperors, and defines the word '*honestus*' as 'that quality which makes a man worthy of praise, even if you strip him of everything else'.<sup>5</sup> So, conceptually, *kalós* came to mean good in an absolute sense, or in the sense of morally good, being above reproach.

In the Septuagint (LXX), *kalós* is used to

By **BRIAN CLATWORTHY**  
Newton Abbot, England

translate a number of Hebrew words, to indicate that which is beautiful, intrinsically attractive, and morally good. We find the word used in the creation story when God declares that the light that He created was good, because it was an expression of His ordered beauty, Gen. 1. 4. In Genesis chapter 12 verse 14 the reference is to human beauty when the Egyptians admire Sarai's beauty, much to the discomfort of her husband Abram. Meeting the requirements of God in terms of personal conduct is viewed as not only pleasing to God, but as morally good in Micah chapter 6 verse 8, cp. Deut. 10. 12-13.

Moving into the New Testament we find that the adjective *kalós* occurs over one hundred times in a variety of differing contexts. Essentially, the word for the most part is used again with reference to that which is morally upright, beautiful, or excellent. It is a word that majors on the innate qualities of the noun that it is seeking to qualify. Here in the table below are just a few examples of the descriptive power of *kalós* in the New Testament:

The word *kalós* occurs twenty-four times

throughout the Pastoral Epistles, where Paul places a significant emphasis on the beauty and attractiveness of the Christian way of life. This life is underpinned by right behaviour and moral conduct. As WILLIAM MOUNCE writes, 'Paul is concerned not only that Christians believe the correct things but also that they behave properly'.<sup>6</sup> It has often been said that men read the lives of Christians more than they do the pages of the Bible. May our lives, therefore, be so transparent before men, 2 Cor. 3. 2, that we thereby beautify the doctrine of God our Saviour, Titus 2. 10, and encourage others to find Christ for themselves, Matt. 5. 16.

## For further reading/study

### Introductory

WILLIAM D. MOUNCE, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Bible Commentaries [Comments on *kalós*, 1 Tim. 1. 8], pp. 32-33.

### Advanced

I. H. MARSHALL, *The Pastoral Epistles*, International Critical Commentary [Excursus 6 – Goodness and Good Works in the Pastoral Epistles], pp. 227-231.

### Endnotes

- 1 *The First Epistle of Peter – The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes and Essays*, pg. 170.
- 2 *New Testament Words*, pg. 151.
- 3 *Rhetoric* 1364b 27.
- 4 J. ANNAS, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*, pg. 243.
- 5 *Histories* 4. 5.
- 6 *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Bible Commentaries, pg. 33.

CATEGORY	TEXT	DESCRIPTION
PEOPLE	John 10. 11	Our Lord describes Himself as the 'good' or 'noble' shepherd. He alone is morally good and free from any defects.
	Hebrews 10. 24	Believers are encouraged to stimulate one another to love, and right, or noble, conduct.
	James 2. 7	The name by which believers are called is described as 'noble' because it speaks of Christ Himself. This makes a direct impression on all those who come into contact with it.
CHARACTER	2 Corinthians 8. 21	Here the word <i>kalós</i> is used to emphasize the integrity required of the believer before both God and men. In the words of J. B. PHILLIPS, 'and we want to be absolutely above-board not only in the sight of God but in the eyes of men.' Cp. Rom. 12. 17.
	Galatians 6. 9	Paul tells the Galatians that they must not grow tired of doing good or what is right, for they were certain of reaping a future harvest.
	1 Thessalonians 5. 21	Important for believers to test everything, and retain only what is good or comely, cp. Phil. 4. 8.
OBJECTS	Matthew 13. 24	The good 'seed' that is sown into the ground is the word of God. It has the capability of producing an excellent harvest.
	Mark 9. 50	The reference to 'salt' being good, or excellent, highlights its intrinsic value and purifying quality.
	Luke 21. 5	The word here can mean beautiful, as it describes the 'stones' of the Temple In Jerusalem.

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# Views from the News

COMPILED BY SANDY JACK

## Christians mark David Livingstone's bicentenary

Christians have been remembering the Scottish missionary and explorer David Livingstone, as 19th March marked 200 years since his birth. A conference was held in Edinburgh to consider Dr. Livingstone's legacy. He was born in the Scottish town of Blantyre and went to Africa as a medical missionary in 1840.

**SLAVERY** He felt his mission was to reach new peoples in the interior of Africa and introduce them to Christianity, as well as free them from slavery. Dr. Livingstone returned to Britain in the late 1850s as a national hero, before returning to Africa. Much of his work as a missionary and doctor was in what is now Malawi.

**RESPECT** The Right Reverend James Tengatenga, Bishop of Southern Malawi, said Dr. Livingstone was different to other missionaries of his day because of the respect he showed for indigenous cultures and languages. He said that many Christians in Malawi trace their faith in some part back to the missionary. Bishop Tengatenga said the story of his church 'is not complete without giving David Livingstone a place or role in it'.

**FAITH** 'I can't tell the story of my faith without telling the story of David Livingstone', he said. The President of Malawi, Dr. Joyce Banda, came to visit the David Livingstone Centre in Blantyre as part of celebrations to mark the bicentenary of his birth. She also attended a church service with Scotland's First Minister Alex Salmond. (Look out for a full-page article in the November magazine on David Livingstone)

Source: [http://www.christian.org.uk/news/christians-mark-david-livingstones-bicentenary/?utm\\_source=feedburner&utm\\_medium=feed&utm\\_campaign=Feed%3A+christianinstitute+%28The+Christian+Institute%29](http://www.christian.org.uk/news/christians-mark-david-livingstones-bicentenary/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+christianinstitute+%28The+Christian+Institute%29)



## Britain ponders 'three-person embryos' to combat genetic diseases

If given the green light, British scientists would be the first to offer treatments letting babies be born with DNA from three people; their parents and a woman donor. The government is considering whether to propose legal changes that would allow radical new treatments for families at risk of incurable genetic diseases that involve the creation of so-called 'three-person embryos'. A national consultation released on Wednesday by the UK's fertility watchdog found public support for techniques that involve introducing DNA from a third person to embryos which could prevent mothers from passing on devastating diseases, such as muscular dystrophy, to their children. The treatment is controversial on several grounds, not least that the genetic modifications in the embryo pass down to all future generations. The techniques have never been tried in humans, but have worked in animal studies. The report from the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, which stressed a need for more research to establish the safety and efficiency of the procedures, will now be passed to ministers who must decide whether to seek parliamentary approval for the treatments.

Source: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/2013/mar/20/britain-three-person-embryos-genetic>



## Argentina's Kirchner takes Hugo Chavez a Bible

Cristina Kirchner, the Argentine president, took a Bible to cancer-stricken Venezuelan counterpart Hugo Chavez, a day after he missed the inauguration ceremony for his new term. Mrs. Kirchner said she would meet Raul Castro, the Cuban president, and his brother Fidel and said the Argentine Federation of Evangelical Churches gave her a cross and a Bible for Mr. Chavez. 'They were very warm. They prayed. I was delighted,' she said. 'I am bringing the book to my friend Hugo Chavez'.

Source: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/southamerica/venezuela/9797004/Argentinas-Kirchner-takes-Hugo-Chavez-a-Bible.html>



## Bits & Bobs

### Moles Can Smell in Stereo



Most people have heard of 'stereo sound', but not many may be familiar with 'stereo vision', which helps many mammals discern depth. Seeing and hearing in stereo helps creatures living above ground, but moles need different equipment.

Biologist Kenneth Catania of Vanderbilt University conducted three clever experiments to see if the blind eastern American mole used 'stereo smell'.

First, he built a chamber with trails that led outward from a central mole entry point, like a semicircle of wheel spokes. He placed a bit of earthworm, which moles love to eat, at the end of one of the trails and watched. On each trial, the mole first sniffed, moving its head back and forth, and then travelled straight to the food.

For the second experiment, Catania blocked the mole's left nostril. This skewed the creature's tracking accuracy consistently to the left. Similar results obtained when Catania blocked just the right nostril. Finally, Catania inserted tubes into both nostrils, but the tubes crossed so that each nostril accessed air that would usually enter the other nostril. This left the poor creature totally confused.

'It was amazing. [The moles] found the food in less than five seconds and went directly to the right food almost every time. They have a hyper-sensitive sense of smell,' Catania told Vanderbilt.

Stereo smell can only work if the nervous system can detect a difference in the strength of an odour entering each nostril. Considering the tiny distance between the nostrils, the precision and miniaturization of this biological chemical detector is mind-boggling.

Whether noticed or ignored, one can always detect the scent of the expert Designer behind any expert design. And these blind moles certainly emanate the fragrance of design.

Source: <http://www.icr.org/article/7302/>

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**Front Cover illustration:**

THE RIVER JORDAN. Photo: John Chesney.

Our picture shows the traditional baptismal site where John the Baptist is thought to have baptized Jesus in the Jordan River at the beginning of His public ministry. According to John's narrative, John the Baptist was actively baptizing converts in an area known as Bethabara beyond Jordan, John 1. 28. The Hebrew name refers to a fording place, and may well be identical to the place where Gideon called the men of Ephraim to seize the water sources flowing into the Jordan to cut off the retreat of the Midianites, Judg. 7. 24. But since the Patristic writer Origen identified the site as 'Bethany beyond Jordan', later commentators think that this may well have been the right location. In fact, the marginal readings of the KJV and RV adopt this view. This is probably also why John later refers to the home of Lazarus being at Bethany near Jerusalem to distinguish it from 'Bethany beyond Jordan', John 11. 18. Origen thought that 'Bethany beyond Jordan'

was an apt name for the baptism which prepared Christ for His ministry because it literally meant 'House of Separation'. Whatever view prevails, the baptism of our Lord brought immense pleasure to the heart of God His Father as He volubly identified Him as His beloved Son, Matt. 3. 17. The Spirit would then move Him into the wilderness where He would overcome testing, and confirm that He was, uniquely, the Son of God, Matt. 4. 1-11.

## Question Time

Conducted by

**RICHARD COLLINGS**

### QUESTION

**Is it wrong for a Christian to be cremated?**

### ANSWER

Before answering this question it has to be recognized that some Christians do not have any choice as to what happens to the body of a deceased loved one. This magazine is distributed to over one hundred countries and it is probable that in some of these places it is mandatory to cremate all deceased persons. Even in those lands where there is freedom to make a choice, the wishes of believers may be overruled by family members who do not share the same convictions. Therefore, it is with compassion and sensitivity I offer the following response to the question above.

The scriptures guide us in a number of ways, by direct precepts, by principles, and by particular practices. In relation to the issue of cremation, I am not aware of any specific scriptures that make a direct prohibition against this procedure; however, there is much guidance by way of principle and practice that causes me to believe that if we can make a choice then we should choose to bury our departed relatives.

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were all buried by their sons, and, at his death, Joseph was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt. Eventually, the bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel carried throughout their wilderness journey, were buried in the Promised Land as he had requested. When Moses died he was buried by God in a valley in the land of Moab, and when his successor Joshua died he was buried by the people in the border of his inheritance, in Timnath-heres. Samson was buried by his brothers; Samuel was buried by the Israelites in Ramah; David was buried in Bethlehem, and so was his son Solomon. Thus, whether we think of the patriarchs, the judges, or the kings, those who served God and honoured him were all buried, none were cremated.

Moving to the New Testament we read of the deaths of John the Baptist, of Lazarus, of the widow of Nain's son, and of Stephen. In the case of the son of the widow he was en route to the cemetery, but the others were all buried. In fact, we do not read of any Christian being cremated in the scriptures, even though the burning of dead bodies had been practised by the heathen for centuries. Digressing just slightly, there is a lovely expression used by Matthew as he describes the burial of John, 'And his disciples came, and took up the body, and buried it, and went and told Jesus', Matt. 14. 12.

With reverence we can contemplate the care and love that motivated Nicodemus and Joseph to retrieve the body of our Lord from the cross. Having removed the nails they gently embalm that sacred 'temple' in a hundred pounds weight of spices, and wrap it in a clean linen cloth, and then lay it in a new tomb, thereby fulfilling what had been written seven hundred years before by Isaiah that he would be with the rich in his death. Some years later, Paul declares to the Corinthians that 'Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried', 1 Cor. 15. 3-4. Further, in the same chapter, the apostle refers to the condition of the body of believers who have died, and in verses 42 to 44 he repeats a phrase four times to describe their burial stating, 'it is sown', not once does he state that 'it is burned'.

Uniquely, in creation man was made in the image and likeness of God, and these bodies of ours have been purchased by Him through the death of His Son; hence, Paul states, we are not our own. God has a personal interest in our bodies, and He will ensure that one day they will be changed. Cremation will not prevent God from implementing that change; after all, the first man was made from dust, but, based on numerous practices and the principles contained in the word of God, it is my mind that burial should be the choice for believers. However, let us rejoice in the knowledge that a cemetery is but a 'resting place'; it is not a permanent abode. We lay our loved ones to rest in the sure and certain hope of resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Questions for this column should be addressed to [info@preciousseed.org](mailto:info@preciousseed.org)

