

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

Precious SEED

INTERNATIONAL



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—Elijah—
—Elijah—

וְעִלְיָהוּ כַּמֶּלֶךְ
וְעִלְיָהוּ כַּמֶּלֶךְ

FEBRUARY 2014

VOLUME 69 / NUMBER 1

And Elijah . . .
said, 'How long
halt ye between
two opinions? If
the Lord be God,
follow him',
1 Kgs. 18. 21.

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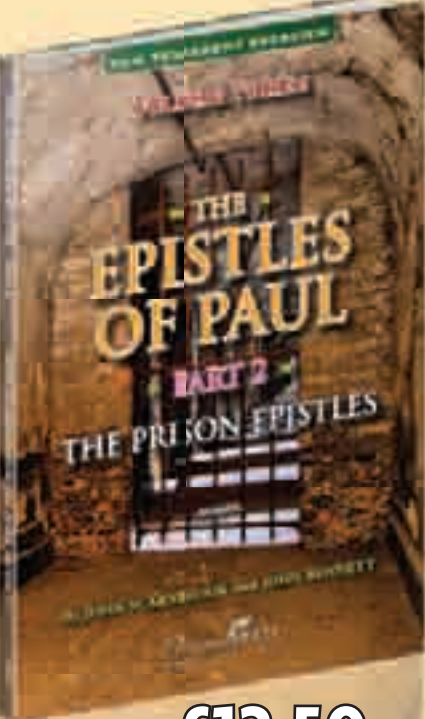
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important spiritual matters for you

COVER STORY

The big issue?

This issue of 'Faith Matters' has been written by a number of individuals who are bible believing Christians and would like to bring to your attention some really important issues.

Most of us would agree that our society and world is grappling with major issues many of which seem quite insurmountable. Financially most of the world's major economies are fighting to maintain stability. In terms of morality, while many may feel that they have won the liberty to live as they choose, we are facing many social and emotional problems as a result of this. Medically the world is stretched as it attempts to maintain healthy communities and to find answers to remedy major diseases. The problems are limitless, and yet the human race with all its cleverness and ingenuity continues to look for and provide answers.

As you read through this issue you will see that we are addressing the greatest problem that the human race faces i.e. sin and death. Life experience matches 'for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God', Rom. 3: 23. No one's perfect I hear you say, and you are right, but have you ever considered why? As you read these articles (if you can access a bible it would be useful to check what



it says for yourself) you will not only see

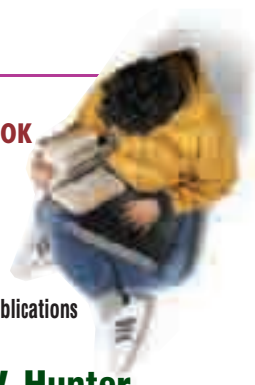
answers to why we are imperfect but you will be asked to consider what God has done to rectify the problem of our guilt and sin. The solution is stated in simple words 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners', 1. Tim. 1.15.

Some of the articles might be a little strange to you. For instance we have a piece on 'loving your enemies'. This was something that Jesus taught that is most unnatural and yet as you read it I hope that you will see that He (Jesus) is the prime example of how to do this as he loved us and died for us when we had no time for him, indeed we could be described effectively as His enemies. We also have an interesting story of how a man became a Christian; I think you will find his story makes for interesting reading.

There are a couple of other articles but I'll leave you to explore them for yourself. If you find this booklet a help to you or if you have any questions please contact me at stepcar61@me.com. If I can help I would be happy to do so.

Stephen G Baker Liverpool

"The problems are limitless and yet the human race with all its cleverness and ingenuity continues to look for and provide answers."



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



A Lonely Path of Discipleship: A biography of George W. Hunter, pioneering missionary in remotest China B. V. Henry

Hardback, 260 pages. Published by Chapter Two, Fountain House, Conduit Mews, London. ISBN 978-1-853072-44-4.

George Hunter's life [1861-1946] is traced from early years. Apart from one furlough, he spent 57 years in Chinese Turkestan, modern Xinjiang, a primarily Muslim area. Most of that time he served alone, though there was one fellow worker who spent eight years with him – Percy Mather.¹ Based in Urumchi, he evangelized, going from village to village, and also did a lot of translation; it was a rather routine and monotonous life, requiring endurance and commitment. 'Hunter laboured – ploughing and sowing year after year, in biting frost and ferocious heat – in a land of deserts interspersed with oases, of high and unbroken mountain ranges and of grassy trackless steppes, everywhere he went

(often on horseback) he distributed booklets and sold Gospels and New Testaments to the few individuals among the untouched tribes who could read . . . contacting them in their wilderness tents and in caves in the mountains'.

The author, having served the Lord in different countries, especially amongst Muslims, has sought not only to describe Hunter's life and service but also to teach from it. He makes wise reflections, judiciously incorporated into the narrative, with sound scriptural observations: for example, on disappointments in the path of discipleship, on the importance of intercession, on marriage to be of the Lord.

This is a scholarly, serious work, well researched. It is historically informative and very interesting: there is a detailed analysis of the region from early times through the period of Nestorian missionary work on to the times of Genghis Khan and the days of the Silk Road. Then, through the Imperial age of the 19th century with its opium wars, on to the present Communist age. It is a well presented book. Amongst other matters, there is a clear map, an aid to spelling and pronunciation, an extensive bibliography, photographs, including one of Hunter in national dress and of a statue of Mao Zedong in Kashgar; an appendix on Nestorianism, and an index. It is accurately translated from the original Norwegian.

Here is a thoughtful book to motivate readers to determined service: highly recommended.

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

Endnote: 1 Mather's biography entitled *The Making of a Pioneer* is written by Mildred Cable and Francesca French, (Hodder & Stoughton, 1936). It is well worth reading, as are other books by these Christian ladies; for example, *Ambassadors for Christ, Through Jade Gate, The Gobi Desert, Something Happened*, etc.



A Faith that endures Brian Croft

Paperback, 112pp. Published by Day One Publications, Ryelands Road, Leominster, HR6 8NZ. Price £5.00. ISBN 978-1-84625-292-1.

This is another of the Day One 'Reflections' series, and is sub-titled 'Meditations on Hebrews 11', although in the closing chapters of the book attention is given to the Saviour's endurance of the cross in Hebrews 12 and the exhortation to the elders in Hebrews 13, which is entitled 'Implications for endurance in pastoral ministry'.

In his 'Introduction' the author suggests very helpfully that the basic message of the book of Hebrews centres upon the theme of 'endurance', and that it is clear from the Epistle that what produces such endurance is occupation with the supremacy and glory of Christ. Faith is seen to rest in a Person and not a creed, the true believer is one who 'holds fast to Christ through struggles and hardships until the end', and BRIAN CROFT, rightly, views the Epistle as being written to encourage its readers to continue in the faith. The 'Preface'

is followed by seven chapters exploring the theme of faith's endurance, beginning with Abel, Enoch, and Noah. The Christian is presented as one who must expect to suffer for the Lord's sake and in those sufferings Christ is magnified in the life of each believer as he depends upon the Lord for comfort and strength.

The consideration of the men and women of faith in Hebrews 11 is limited to key events in the life of each one, and only as they illustrate faith's endurance, so that only one chapter is devoted to the lives of Abel, Enoch and Noah, and another to the lives of Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. However, the author effectively traces his main proposition through the seven chapters, and, while the book is by no means exhaustive, it nevertheless provides the reader with suggestive subject matter for further profitable study of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

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



What's up with Worship? Gary McBride

Paperback, 60pp. Published by Gospel Folio Press, 304 Killaly Street West, Port Colborne, Ontario, L3K 6A6, Canada. ISBN 978-1-927521-35-9.

In relatively few pages the author has picked up on a much neglected subject and focused our minds on a matter of paramount importance. As the author stresses in his conclusion, 'What is being lost is a sense of worship as the believer's highest priority'.

In six fairly short chapters the book covers: 'The Lord's Supper and Worship'; 'The Principles of Worship'; 'The Lord's Table and Worship'; 'The Practice of Worship'; 'The Priority of Worship'; and 'The Production of Worship'. What is particularly helpful in the author's handling of his subject is his ability to deal with what has scriptural warrant and guidance, and what has not. Too often discussion about worship has centred around form and structure yet, as MCBRIDE states, 'There may be the singing of hymns, reading of the Word, and praying, but all with no concept of what worship entails'.

GARY MCBRIDE provides much food for thought. His handling of the essential difference between the Lord's Table and the Lord's Supper is fundamental to his treatise, and of particular value. As he writes, 'Those who love much will want to spend time at the Lord's Table learning from their blessed Saviour. Worship will flow from this time spent with Him'. This is a book that should stimulate heart-searching as to what we bring to God.



A tender plant from the dry ground Timothy Cross

Paperback, 144pp. Published by Day One Publications, Ryelands Road, Leominster, HR6 8NZ, UK. Price £5.00. ISBN 978-1-84625-314-0.

This book is part of the Day One 'Reflections' series and is sub-titled 'A vision from Isaiah of the crucified Jesus'. In twenty short chapters the writer seeks to gather up the leading themes of Isaiah chapter 53. From the Preface we learn that the author writes as one who believes 'Isaiah 53 directs us to the heart of Biblical revelation as it directs us to the Cross of Christ and the Christ of the Cross'. Later, in a chapter which clearly displays the essential deity of the Lord, he asserts, 'A right view of Christ is impossible apart from a supernatural operation of the Holy Spirit in the human heart and mind revealing His true identity to us'. Employing an alliterative style, the title to each chapter begins with the letter 'S' and covers subjects such as the suffering, sorrow, silence and sovereignty of the Saviour. Considerable use is made of biblical quotations which helpfully direct the reader's attention to corresponding passages in the word of God, and each of the chapters concludes with 'Points to reflect on', covering both doctrinal and practical matters.

This book certainly provides a useful introduction to leading themes in Isaiah chapter 53, and there is much about it that one could commend. However, readers should be aware that it is written from a 'Reformed' viewpoint and although not directly developed, it is evident from a number of remarks that the writer believes Christ died only for the elect!

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



C. H. Spurgeon's forgotten prayer meeting addresses

Hardback, 291pp., Day One Publications, Ryelands Road, Leominster, HR6 8NZ, UK. ISBN 978-1-846-25-238-9.

Here are nearly forty addresses and in keeping with Spurgeon's many sermons they are invariably well-structured and straightforward. They are sub-divided under headings: for example, on 'We have seen the Lord', John 20. 25. We have an introduction, followed by what they saw, how we may see Him, and what will be the result of that. In an address especially for young converts, he speaks of a coin on which you cannot see the date clearly, 'If you cannot exactly tell when and where you were converted do not be troubled about the matter if you can discern the image of Jesus stamped upon you'. This is followed by the ring, the taste, biting, weight, and metal of the coin. We have doctrinal and practical teaching in happy balance.

Many of the messages here (twenty-two of them) are brief addresses prior to a prayer meeting, but they are also well thought out and are a real stimulus to prayer, refreshing to the soul, and full of exhortation. How easy it is to read these messages – they are a model of excellent communication. Spurgeon is heart-warming and down to earth, pungent at times. He uses analogies and illustrations from everyday life: the print of feet in the sand; a lady crossing the street in London; a miller at work in Spring time. He uses telling imagery: e.g., 'If the Master really gets the rust off us, it will not be surprising if the file has to be very often used'. Succinct, pithy sentences are another characteristic: e.g., 'To God there's music in a groan and beauty in a tear'. Sometimes there is an imaginative approach – a traveller, called 'A Sinner', visits a house, the house of Justice, where inquiry is made of his name and from which he is rudely rejected; he then visits a second house, the house of Mercy, where again his name is inquired about but this time he is warmly welcomed and invited in.

He addresses the old, young, rich, poor, husbands, wives, etc., directly, developing points specifically for their benefit. He is not afraid to denounce error, though this is occasional: infant sprinkling is a superstition; the union of church and state is spiritual adultery. He speaks from the heart. There is much joy here, typified by the title of one address, 'Spiritual Springtime'. Again and again whilst reading these messages I simply wrote in the margin the word 'delightful'.

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

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Question Time Inside Back Cover

By RICHARD COLLINGS

Editorial

'In whom we have . . . the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace', Eph. 1. 7.

I wonder whether those of us brought up in Christian homes really appreciate the significance of these words. Having the inestimable privilege of godly parents, and an environment where the excesses of a sinful life were never known, our appreciation of the extent of divine forgiveness has been somewhat blunted.

Whilst talking to a fellow believer who had been involved in a prison ministry, he spoke of sitting over a coffee with an inmate. The inmate in question would probably spend the majority of his life behind bars. Having committed a multiple murder, involving some who were children, he realized that he was unlikely to be released. Even if he was, he spoke of the fact that he did not expect that his family, friends, or the wider society would, or could, ever forgive him for what he had done. His guilt, and the stain of his sin, would remain.

However, as a consequence of the gospel being preached in the prison that inmate had come to know the Saviour. The remarkable salvation of that man had brought a whole new perspective to our verse. Forgiveness! The record of the crime will remain etched in people's minds. Society may not forgive, but God forgives. Moreover, the scripture states, 'their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more', Heb. 8. 12. As part of human weakness, we forget, although some trigger may bring events back to our minds. God, in His sovereign power, chooses not to remember!

When the apostle wrote the words that form our verse, he did so as one who regarded himself as the chief of sinners, 1 Tim. 1. 15. He had been responsible for crimes against Christians, persecuting some to death. Whilst that burden weighed heavily upon him, he was deeply aware of God's forgiveness. Like the woman of Luke chapter 7, of whom it could be said, 'Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much', v. 47, God's forgiveness determined Paul's devotion to the will and purpose of God. What of us?

But as we ponder the contrast between human and divine forgiveness, let us also appreciate what the wonder of divine forgiveness tells us about our God. His forgiveness is 'according to the riches of his grace'. How much God is able and willing to forgive is an indicator of the riches of divine grace! Like the child who paddles in the shallows of the vast ocean, can we ever begin to appreciate the vastness of divine grace that provided such comprehensive forgiveness to guilty sinners?

In this magazine we try again to provide material about the character of our God. May we all seek to immerse ourselves in these things that we might profit withal!

The final rebellion and the great white throne

Introduction

By the time the events recorded in Revelation chapter 20 verses 7-15 take place over 7000 years of history will have expired since Adam was placed in the Garden of Eden. Throughout those millennia God has tested mankind under a series of dispensations with one constant outcome. The human heart has proved itself to be 'deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked', Jer. 17. 9.

Politicians and idealists of every persuasion are convinced that if the social, educational, and financial conditions of people can be raised to satisfactory levels it will nullify all the underlying causes of greed, unrest, and injustice prevalent in society today. Vast resources of time and money are being launched into projects to achieve these naive goals, but all will be fruitless, for the problem is rooted within man and not in his environment or personal situation.

The privileges of the millennial kingdom

The clearest proof of what has just been stated is to reflect on the prevailing circumstances throughout the 1000 years leading up to verses 7-8 of our reading. This planet and its inhabitants had enjoyed the most benign conditions. Disease had been minimised, death was exceptional, and the reign of the King had been characterized by righteousness, equity and justice. Food had been plentiful, with harvests so vast that, as Amos prophesied, 'the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed; the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt', Amos 9. 13. War, the scourge of all nations, had been eradicated; swords had been beaten into plowshares, and spears into pruninghooks, as the rule of the Prince of Peace reached

By **RICHARD COLLINGS** Caerphilly, Wales

out 'from the river unto the ends of the earth,' Ps. 72. 8.

Even the animal kingdom had reverted to the halcyon days of Eden. Isaiah, peering down the centuries wrote, 'The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox', Isa. 11. 6-7.

In addition to the foregoing, Satan, the principle cause of evil, had been incarcerated in the abyss. Unable to deceive the people, they had lived without his wicked influence stimulating them to rebel against the gracious edicts of Christ. Thus, it had been for the past millennium, and things could not have been more congenial for man to be content and live in perpetual tranquillity.

The final rebellion

Sadly, Jeremiah's summation of the human heart is once more demonstrated to be true. As soon as Satan is released from his exile in the bottomless pit, he moves to the four corners of the earth and is able to dupe an innumerable army to rise in direct opposition to Christ. Throughout the kingdom age everyone had to comply with the rules of the King but, in many instances, this was feigned allegiance for, during those 1000 years, children had been born who had never been born again. As time progressed the amount of unbelievers living on earth would have increased until, numerically, they were like the sand of the sea.

Interestingly, Satan goes to the four

points of the planet, farthest from the divine centre at Jerusalem, to enlist his deluded cohorts. Maybe these discontents had moved to the remote regions of the kingdom to be as far away as possible from the administrative centre of Christ's rule, and it was there Satan finds no shortage of those willing to enlist in his malevolent cause.

This rebellion is summarily crushed, not by means of a militarily, or numerically, superior army but by fire coming down from God out of heaven and devouring all opposition. Sinners are burned to death and Satan is cast alive into the lake of fire and brimstone never again to be released; his eternal doom is settled. Thus, man's final act of rebellion against God is brought to an end; now he must face the consequences of every personal act of disobedience as all unbelievers are summoned to appear before the great white throne.

The great white throne judgement

These five verses must be the most solemn in the whole of scripture; it is man's final assize, from which there is only one verdict and one sentence. The only people that appear here are the guilty unrepentant of all ages and, having spurned the mercy of God, they will be eternally condemned to His judgement.

The judge

Although many translations change 'God' to 'the throne' there must be someone sat upon that throne and, as all judgement has been committed unto the Son, the identification of the judge is clear – it is the Son of God. At His first advent He came to seek and to save. He had not come to condemn the world but that the world through Him might be saved, and to all who would take His yoke upon them He offered rest to their souls.

In their hatred and mockery, men had plucked the hair from His cheeks and spat in His face, they beat Him



great white throne judgement

so severely about the head that His appearance was marred more than any man. Now the tables are totally reversed. Such is the terror of the Judge that earth, the solar system, and the myriads of galaxies flee into oblivion as inanimate creation acknowledges His ineffable majesty. What John is referring to here is the same event referred to by Peter in his Second Epistle chapter 3 verses 10 and 12.

The judged

Two terms are used to describe those who are being judged. They are described in relation to their **physical** state – they are dead. When the final rebellion is crushed every sinner on the planet is destroyed, there is not one left alive. However, others who appear at this throne have been dead for thousands of years, for it relates to the dead of all ages. When these people died, their bodies were separated from their souls. Now the sea and the graves yield up the bodies, and Hades gives up the souls so that once more soul and body are united.

Then they are described relative to their **social** standing, for they are called 'great and small'. Whilst men place great emphasis on wealth and class distinction, God does not, for heaven's estimation of mankind is based on a totally different set of values to those of earth. During their lifetime, many of those who were 'great' would have disdained those who were 'small', but now they are on the same footing. All are guilty. The poverty of the poor and the status of the great are no longer of any relevance.

It is interesting to note that John says that these people 'stand before God' – on what were they standing? In the previous verse we are informed that the earth and the heaven had fled away so those being judged are actually standing on nothing, how terrifying! Many of these sinners once strutted around, often mocking God and swaggering in their self importance – now they are suspended solely by the power of the Judge on the throne.

The judgement

All too frequently we hear about miscarriages of justice. Guilty people are cleared on a technicality whilst others receive sentences that are either unduly lenient or excessively severe. However, man's greatest act of legal malpractice and of judicial corruption was meted out to our blessed Lord for, at His religious trials before the High Priests and His civil trials before Pilate and Herod, He was falsely accused, pronounced guiltless, and then condemned to death.

Now time has rolled its course and mankind is summoned to appear at this assize. No longer are humans in control; helpless they appear before the Son of God and, although they deprived Him of justice, He will ensure that their sentence is equitable. Sentence is passed on all who appear before the great white throne for two reasons: firstly, the presence of records in 'the books', and, secondly, the absence of a record in 'the book'.

The books refer to the details of every sinner's life lived here on earth; as seen by the all pervading eye of God, nothing is glossed over and nothing is exaggerated. Evil motives, blatant iniquities, secret transgressions, and every form of personal disobedience will be uncontested. No one will be able to challenge the validity of these details for the Judge who opens the books is 'the Lord, the righteous judge', 2 Tim. 4. 8. The purpose of these books is not to establish their guilt but the degree of judgement they will face eternally.

Having affirmed their guilt through the record within the books, further proof of their meriting judgement is endorsed by the absence of their names from the book of life. 'This book of life is the register of all those from creation who have received life through Christ. The works of these

sinners have made it plain that there was no evidence of divine life; this register confirms that they never had divine life. The search over ("not found" suggests a search) and the name missing, nothing remains but the execution of the sentence and the sinner is cast into the lake of fire'.¹

Conclusion

That no one is predestined by God to suffer this eternal judgement is clear from a number of scriptures, not least of which is the fact that it is described as 'the second death'. The Epistle to the Hebrews teaches that man is appointed to die once² and hence no one is predestined by God to endure the second death. All who are cast into the lake of fire will be there because their sins had not been forgiven, and because of their rejection of divine mercy obtainable through the very One who passes sentence upon them.

With humble thanksgiving we bow in adoring wonder knowing that we who belong to Christ will never face this terrifying judgement. Well might we sing the words of AUGUSTUS TOPLADY, 'The terrors of law and of God with me can have nothing to do; My Saviour's obedience and blood hide all my transgressions from view'.

Endnotes

- 1 ALLEN, J., *Revelation*, in *What the Bible Teaches*, John Ritchie.
- 2 Heb. 9. 27.

RICHARD COLLINGS is a member of the Precious Seed Trust. He provides the answers to the Question and Answer page.





HEZEKIAH

THE DEVOTED KING ⁽³⁾

THE SUPERNATURAL YEARS AFTER RECOVERY – from 39 to 54 years of age

By **JOHN GRIFFITHS** Port Talbot, Wales

His Sign

Ahaz rejected the sign offered by the Lord, Isa. 7. 11, but his son Hezekiah requested a sign.¹ Therefore The Lord 'brought the shadow ten degrees backward by which it had gone down in the dial of Ahaz', 2 Kgs. 20. 11. Did God reverse the planet's cycle? Did time go backwards? It seems fantastic but God prolonged the hours of daylight for nearly twenty-four hours for Israel to defeat their enemy!² Contrast this with Matthew chapter 12 verse 39. God gives signs to Joshua, Gideon and Hezekiah, but **not** to apostate Israel.

His Psalm

Isa. 38. 10-20.

Only two psalms are found outside the Psalter: one in Habakkuk 3, and the other here.³ His psalm is in two parts:

Hezekiah's Great Grief, vv. 10-14, with four metaphors of his perplexity – tent; weaver; lion; birds.

Hezekiah 's Great Gratitude, vv. 15-20, with three declarations of his purpose – 'I shall go softly' (or humbly); 'the father to the children shall make known thy truth'; 'praise thee as I do this day'.

Hezekiah uses his experience to teach the people about the Lord and His ways through Hebrew poetry, and God puts us through experiences that we might be of help to others in similar circumstances.⁴

His Sin

'But Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him; for his heart was lifted up . . .

notwithstanding Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart', 2 Chr. 32. 25, 26. cp. Rom. 12. 3.

Babylon heard of his miraculous recovery and the sundial regressing ten degrees, as well as being aware of the 'victory' over Assyria. Doubtless, they were seeking an alliance with Hezekiah. The letters and gifts from the king served their purpose. Flattered by their attention, he let pride get the better of him and offered his visitors the grand tour. They assessed his wealth and military prowess in order to gain an ally against Assyria. Isaiah roundly condemns him for his actions, prophesying that Babylon would take Judah into captivity. This occurred 100 years later. Hezekiah's self-humbling and subjection to God's word meant that the prophecy would not be fulfilled in his lifetime. 'Good is the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken . . . for there shall be peace and truth in my days', Isa. 39. 8.

Pride is one of the sins that God hates. When overcome by sin let us take a leaf out of Hezekiah's book . . . self-judgement and subjection to God's word. We must beware lest we sin when God tests us. Hezekiah's lapse is described thus, 'God left him, to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart', 2 Chr. 32. 31. How do we respond to trial and testing?

His Songs

Isa. 38. 20; Prov. 25. 1.

This was the golden literary age in Judah. Hezekiah writes psalms and songs for use in the temple. He sets up a group of spiritual men who

are literary scholars to copy out the proverbs of Solomon. It is believed that they may well have engaged in similar work on the books of Genesis through to 2 Kings. They carry the royal seal of Hezekiah apparently.⁵

His Sepulchre

'And they buried him in the chiefest of the sepulchres of the sons of David', 2 Chr. 32. 33.

The political account adds 'and all his might'; the priestly record appends 'and his goodness'; the prophet Isaiah concludes with, 'For there shall be peace and truth in my days'.

Despite some serious mistakes in appeasing Assyria and welcoming the Babylonian ambassadors, each account concludes with a favourable obituary. Here is a good king of Judah whose heart was right before God, he began well and ended well.

He loved his God and was beloved of his people, 'and all Judah and . . . Jerusalem did him honour at his death', 2 Chr. 32. 33. How might our obituary read?

Endnotes

- 1 What shall be the sign that the Lord will heal me? 2 Kgs. 20. 8.
- 2 Josh. 10. 12-14.
- 3 2 Samuel chapter 22 verses 2-51 is almost identical with Psalm 18.
- 4 2 Cor. 1. 4.
- 5 See J. SIDLOW-BAXTER's *Explore the Book*, Vol. 2; p. 147. DR. JOHN LIGHTFOOT and DR. THIRTLE independently put forward the view that Psalms 120-134 are the songs of Isaiah chapter 38 verse 20. They are 'songs of degrees', or steps. The only biblical reference to 'degrees' is in the account of Hezekiah and his father's sundial. There are fifteen psalms of degrees corresponding to the fifteen years extension granted to Hezekiah. Ten are 'anonymous' relating to the ten degrees by which the sundial regressed. The central song is attributed to Solomon and four to David: fifteen in all. See also: *The Companion Bible*, App. 67, p. 97; *Mark These Men*, J. SIDLOW-BAXTER pp. 121-134; *Explore the Book*, J. SIDLOW-BAXTER Vol. 2, pp. 146ff; *Exploring the Psalms*, DR. J. PHILLIPS Vol. 5, pp. 8ff; *Old Testament Problems*, DR. JAMES W. THIRTLE 1907. *Old Testament Chronology*, DR. JOHN LIGHTFOOT 1602-1675.

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The Equality Act 2010

By **DAVID SIMMS** Hurst, England

Most assembly trustees, and individuals, are now familiar with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), but there seems to be less appreciation that most of the provisions in the DDA have now been replaced by The Equality Act 2010 (the Act), which came into force on 1st October 2010, and has to be complied with. (The Act does not apply in Northern Ireland).

The Act bans unfair treatment at work, and makes it unlawful to discriminate against, harass, or victimise a person when providing a service (which includes the provision of goods or facilities) or when exercising a public function. There are nine 'protected characteristics' (set out in Chapter 1 of the Act) and these are: disability, age, gender reassignment, pregnancy or maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion and belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

There is real concern over the possible impact of the Act on biblical teaching and practices. However, it is not the intention of this article to deal with anything other than the first protected characteristic above, namely *disability*, to seek to provide some guidance on what additional responsibilities arise under the Act.

There is a wider responsibility

The Act places duties on 'service providers', which includes churches and trusts, and the premises used by them in connection with 'church' activities. The Act is about making activities accessible to everyone, and covers many forms of disability.

There is a wider definition of the term 'disability'

A person is 'disabled' under the Act if they have a physical or mental impairment that has 'substantial' (meaning more than minor or trivial) or 'long term' (meaning twelve months or more) negative effect on their ability to do normal daily activities. Some forms of disability are obvious, such as mobility impairment (wheelchair users), physical (severe arthritis), or facial disfigurement, but some will be hidden (diabetes, epilepsy, mental health). It is important that thought is

given to the spectrum of impairments or disabilities. However, what may not be immediately appreciated is that those with cancer, HIV, or Multiple Sclerosis, and some other intermittent or progressive conditions, automatically meet the disability definition under the Act, from the moment of diagnosis, and are to be treated as 'disabled'.

There is a responsibility to consider the wider forms of disability

The Act is about more than making premises available for wheelchair users. There is the requirement to consider all the many forms of disability, including, hearing and visual impairment, reduced mobility, manual dexterity, and learning disability. 'Service providers' are to take reasonable steps to change practices or procedures that make it unreasonably difficult for a disabled person to make use of the facilities and premises. This would include considering the physical access to all areas of the premises, the use of WC's, notice boards, car parks and grounds, etc. This might include either removing or altering any physical feature which is acting as a barrier to the disabled person, or providing a reasonable means of avoiding it. A 'physical feature' can include: the design or construction of the building, an approach to, or exit from the building; fixtures, fittings and furniture; or any other physical element. Thought should be given to wall, floor and ceiling colours. If the walls, doors and floors are of a very similar colour or texture, those with visual impairment may find it difficult to differentiate between, for example, a wall and a door.

A practical recommendation

It is suggested that compliance with the Act should be reviewed as part of the annual trustees and/or assembly leadership. Such a review could assess:

- What 'services' are provided and how they are provided?
- What are the barriers to people wishing to use those services?
- What do disabled persons (as



defined by the Act) in the congregation or local community feel would best respond to their needs?

A list of priorities for action could be compiled, if required. Lack of funds is not a defence against the scope of the Act, in the same way that it was not a defence for non-compliance with the DDA.

A practical question

'Can an assembly control who it lets its premises to? Does the Equality Act mean it could be forced to let its buildings to groups, or those of other beliefs, it would not wish to be associated with?'

It is suggested that an assembly can insist that no activities, related to other religions or beliefs, take place in the buildings it controls; and it can resist letting its buildings to be used by particular people or groups on the grounds of their sexual orientation. However, to be immune from the Act, it is likely that the assembly or trust would need to show that it does not normally hire out its premises for payment. It is, perhaps, not unusual for an assembly with large premises to be approached by a smaller Christian fellowship to use their premises for a wedding, baptism, or conference. Such a 'letting' would not create a precedent for the use of the premises by any, or all. If, however, the assembly regularly lets out its surplus space on a commercial basis then it probably cannot discriminate against certain groups, or activities. Churches have been known to be caught out on this, so it is a real danger.

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In 2 Timothy chapter 2 verse 2 the apostle Paul sets out a pattern for the progression and maintenance of the truth of scripture for succeeding generations. The 'things which (Timothy) had learned' would not only be the fundamental doctrines concerning the purposes of God and the person and work of Christ, but also the orderly functioning of New Testament churches as they were formed and established.

With regard to order and development within each church or assembly, a number of features are made very clear in the apostolic writings. It is evident that, although there was a knowledge of and fellowship between the various companies of believers,¹ each individual church was intended to be responsible before the Lord for their behaviour, their spiritual progress, and their obedience to divine principles. No precedent is found in the New Testament for any local assembly to censure, or exert undue influence, on any other company of the Lord's people who are seeking to follow the New Testament pattern. Each church is made up of individuals, often from a wide diversity of background and influence, which inevitably leads to a variety of views in certain matters. Thankfully, we are not meant to be clones, or cast in some rigid mould to sit, as one brother expressed it, 'like crows on a wire'! The local church should be a vibrant, energetic, active place to be, exciting even! And this is where the importance and influence of godly elders should be seen.

DEVELOPING AN ELDERSHIP

If, in any group of believers, the multiplicity of opinions and ideas was unharnessed and allowed free rein, chaos and division would ensue! That is why the Spirit of God in His wisdom, knowing the vagaries of human nature, has gifted and fitted men to be shepherds of the flock, teachers of the Lord's people, guides to show the pathway, and providers of suitable spiritual food to meet the needs of all, to ensure that each individual feels valued, a part of the whole, an integral member, essential to the well-being of the assembly.

In the early days of Christian witness, as souls were saved and companies of believers were formed in various localities, there was an evident need for teaching, encouragement (often in the face of persecution), pastoral care, and a means of maintaining scriptural order and stability. This was achieved as the apostles, or their designated representatives, as in the case of Titus, under the guidance of the Spirit of God, appointed or ordained those in each church who manifested the qualities later outlined in 1 Timothy chapter 3, and Titus chapter 1.² These men were called elders, in recognition of their spiritual maturity and moral authority. On other occasions they are referred to as overseers; a designation which emphasizes the work engaged in, rather than the man undertaking the responsibility.³ The suggestion of appointing, or ordaining, does not involve some formal ecclesiastical ritual, but simply 'to indicate with the hand'. It is important also to note that elders are

invariably spoken of in the plural.⁴

As the apostles passed away, it was necessary that order within the churches was maintained. In anticipation of this, the apostle Paul, when meeting with the elders from the church at Ephesus, reminded them that it was the Holy Spirit who had made them overseers;⁵ this

action on the part of deity was, and remains, the primary requirement for those who would lead, feed, and teach the people of God. Essential too is the desire in a man's heart to give of his time and energy, using Spirit-given gifts, to serve as a shepherd to the flock; in 1 Timothy 3, verse 1, Paul acknowledges with approval such a desire. This aspiration would not be as a result of selfish ambition, nor a craving for some position of authority, but as placed in the heart by the Spirit of God. At this point, and indeed for some time following, this may be known only to the Lord and the individual involved.

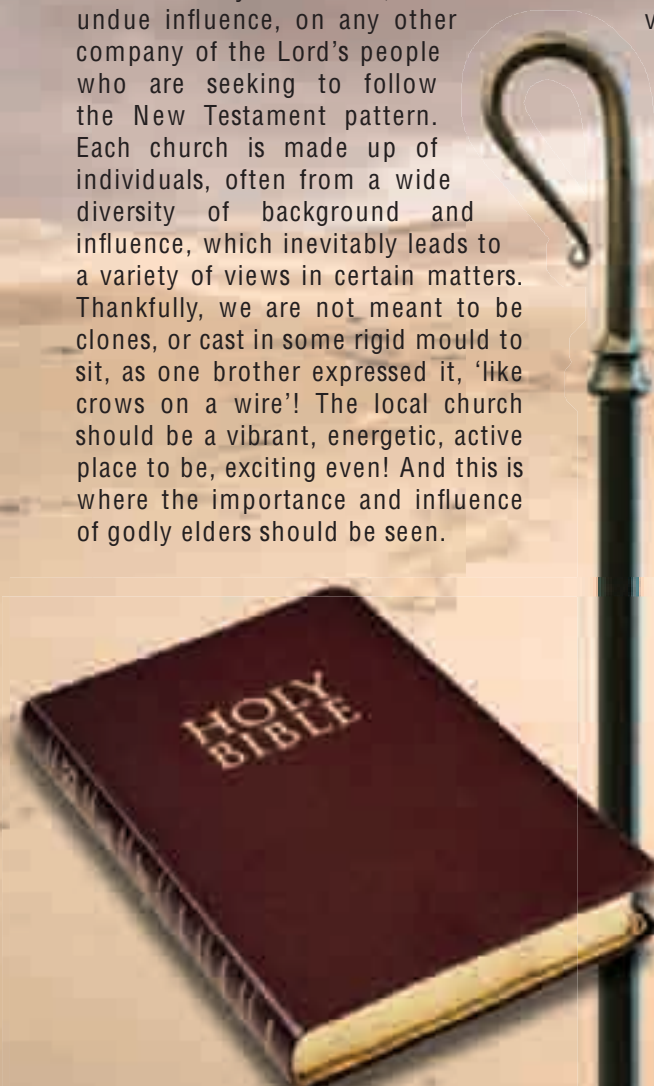
As the work of the Spirit in his heart begins to develop, he will give diligence to fulfil the qualities as outlined in 1 Timothy chapter 3, and Titus chapter 1. These involve his home life, his church life, and his conduct before unbelievers, 'them that are without'. As these heart exercises continue, the elders, and, most importantly, the whole company, will perceive a man of moral authority, of evident maturity, and of good testimony.

Those already recognized as overseers will observe the manner in which other brethren conduct themselves among the people of God. They will look for evidence of loyalty to the various activities of the assembly, both in their presence and their prayers – a willingness to exhort, encourage and teach other believers, publicly as opportunity is given, or privately as need arises. Observant elders will

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ND RENEWING

know if others in the church have confidence in a particular brother, if they seek his advice and value his wisdom. The qualification 'apt to teach', given in 1 Timothy chapter 3 verse 2, does not necessarily carry with it the idea of an ability to preach or teach in a public sphere. Rather, it is an ability to understand and apply the word of God reliably and appropriately in the manner required; a similar thought is presented in Titus chapter 1 verse 9, 'Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers'.

The man who would lead and feed the flock of God must, of necessity, have the character of a shepherd, not a sheepdog! An inflexible, intransigent approach will not win the hearts, or gain the confidence, of the saints. That does not mean that he will compromise to accommodate, but, like the priest of old, he must be able to 'have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way', Heb. 5. 2. There will be times when from a tender heart he will 'weep with them that weep', Rom 12. 15. He will 'be gentle unto all . . . patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves', 2 Tim. 2. 24-25. He must, however, be prepared to resist false doctrine with firmness, and, if occasion arises, he must not avoid the application of scriptural principles and practice in discipline.

Those who 'watch for the souls' in a company of believers soon realize that there are times when it can seem a thankless task! Popularity can be at a premium! Evaluations have to be made for the good of the church, which, on occasion, may not meet with the approval of all. Overseers must take the lead in endeavouring to maintain the unity forged by the Spirit, in the bonding power of peace and embrace any dissenting members in their decisions.

We can learn lessons from men like Moses and David, who in their time kept, led, and fed the flock entrusted to their charge. Perhaps the best Old Testament example of shepherd care,

however, is found in Jacob. Returning from Padan-aram, having been overtaken by the pursuing Laban, Jacob gave an account of his work as a shepherd. He spoke of his care for both old and young, male and female, his keen sense of loss for those damaged or taken from the flock by wild beasts, the days of drought, the bitter sleepless nights, and the uncertainty of reward or gratitude from Laban. Old Testament history provides pertinent lessons for those who would shepherd New Testament flocks!

Sadly, it is the case in our day that many assemblies of the Lord's people are small in numbers, and the elders are advanced in years. There is no immediate opportunity for such to pass on the burden of responsibility to younger men and, since there is no retirement age in service for the Master, they press on, faithfully seeking to maintain a testimony and a witness; we salute them! In other cases, however, there are

younger men with gift and ability who should be given opportunity and encouragement by discerning elders. Often, it is only when given responsibility that individuals blossom and begin to show the potential and the commitment latent within. The possibility is that older brethren may hold on tenaciously to every aspect of the work both spiritual and practical, leaving a vacuum when they are called home. Returning to the introductory words of this article, 'things learned' should be 'committed to faithful men', who in turn would 'be able to teach others also. Thus the succession will continue until the Lord returns and calls His people to meet Him in the air.

Endnotes

- 1 E.g., Rom. 15. 26; Col. 4. 15-16; 1 Thess. 1. 7.
- 2 Examples of this are: Acts 14. 23; Titus 1. 5.
- 3 Acts 20. 28; 1 Peter 5. 2.
- 4 E.g., Acts 14. 23; 15. 2; 20. 17; Phil. 1. 1 (in the KJV 'bishops', better, 'overseers').
- 5 Acts 20. 28.

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Introduction

On the eve of His crucifixion, just prior to leaving the upper room for His solitary vigil in Gethsemane, the Lord Jesus issued a commandment to His disciples to do something for each other. In addition, He earnestly requested them to do something for Him. Nearly six weeks later, on the day of His ascension, Jesus commissioned those same Galilean men to do something for people everywhere.

The commandment was that they love one another; the commission was that they expressed God's love to the world through the preaching of the gospel, and the request was that they demonstrated their love for Him in the Breaking of Bread. This commandment is permanent, the commission continues until the end of the age, and the request was for a specific season, having a definite cessation point.

The season

It was never the Lord's intention that the Breaking of Bread be continued indefinitely; it was designed to cover the interval between the descents of two divine persons, the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and the descent of the Lord to the air to 'receive from the world His own'. Put another way, it covers the period of the physical absence of our Saviour. This was not conveyed to the disciples in the upper room, but was revealed by the ascended Lord directly to the apostle Paul several years later, 'For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you . . . for as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come', 1 Cor. 11. 23-26.

When the Lord was with the disciples they needed nothing symbolic to remind them of Him; neither will we when He returns, for we shall see Him and be with Him. However, at present He is out of sight, and, therefore, in order that we may continually appreciate Him and what He has done, He requested that we should perpetuate the Breaking of Bread. Whilst it has often been remarked that the Lord Jesus said 'this do in remembrance of me', i.e., He made no reference to our forgetting, most of us recognize the variability of our affections, and acknowledge we have

AN OVERVIEW OF T

By **RICHARD COLLINGS** Caerphilly, Wales

the potential to forget Him, just like the chief butler did to Joseph.

The setting

Each of the synoptic gospel writers supply ample evidence to show that the inauguration of the Lord's Supper took place on the night Judas Iscariot kissed Jesus, and identified Him to the mob that had come to arrest Him. However, it is in Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians where the setting is dramatically and explicitly stated, 'The Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread', 1 Cor. 11. 23. While Judas was outside, plotting with those who hated Him, the Lord was inside expressing His love for us. While Judas was outside plotting to see what he could *get*, the Lord was inside talking about what He would *give* – His body and His blood.

JOHN MORRISON captures this point in his hymn,

'Twas on that night,
when doomed to know,
The eager rage of every foe,
That night in which he was
betrayed,
The Saviour of the world took bread'.

Perhaps this point is emphasized in the First Epistle to the Corinthians to expose the appalling behaviour displayed by many of them as they

came together (supposedly) to eat the Lord's Supper. Against the backdrop of the solemnity of its institution, many of the Corinthians were participating in the remembrance of the Lord in a careless and self-centred manner.

The symbols

Each account we have of the inauguration of the Lord's Supper states clearly that the symbols to be used are bread and a cup, the cup being used by way of metonymy for its contents which, as Matthew and Mark indicate, was the fruit of the vine. HORATIUS BONAR captures these requirements very succinctly in the words, 'Only bread and only wine, yet to faith the solemn sign'. Whilst wine in Bible times was red, Prov. 23. 31, and the bread used in the upper room was unleavened, nowhere in the New Testament are we given any instructions as to the kind of bread or the kind of wine we should use.

As we think of these two symbols, we need to avoid reading into them more than the Lord intended. We know that bread is the product of wheat being ground in the mill to produce flour, and the flour is then placed in the oven to endure the heat of the flame. We also know that wine is the product of grapes being plucked and crushed so that their juices flow to be matured into wine, but these processes are essential for bread and wine to be made. At the





THE LORD'S SUPPER

Lord's Supper the bread and cup do not symbolize how the Lord was made flesh and blood – the focus is not on his coming in but on His going out, His 'departure', Luke 9. 31 JND. Furthermore, neither the bread nor the wine has any intrinsic relevance. The Lord selected two very ordinary and inexpensive commodities that were readily available, and conferred upon them a symbolic relevance that far transcends their actual worth. The true cost of the bread and the cup does not relate to their monetary value but to what they represent

So we have the two symbols, bread and wine, and on that point I recall something that JACK HUNTER taught many years ago. He said that the first time we read of 'bread' in the Bible it is associated with a curse. In Genesis chapter 3 God said to Adam, 'In the sweat of your face shall you eat bread', v. 19 NKJV. The first time we read of 'wine' in the Bible it is also associated with a curse. The sad incident is recorded for us in Genesis chapter 9, where we learn that Noah planted a vineyard and drank of its wine. The consequence of his drunkenness was an appalling sin resulting in Canaan being cursed.

However, the first time we read of 'bread and wine' together in the Bible is in Genesis chapter 14, and it is not associated with a curse but with blessing. Abram had just returned from battle, having slaughtered the kings, and Melchizedek went to meet him bringing bread and wine. His first words to Abram were, 'Blessed be Abram of the most high God'. As we meet Sunday by Sunday, how thankful we should be that we are not under a curse but are those who have been blessed by God.

The significance of the bread

Matthew and Mark inform us that when the Lord Jesus took the bread and had blessed it He said, 'This is my body'; Luke adds 'which is given for you'. In 1 Corinthians chapter 11, Paul states 'which is broken for you'. Although there is some debate as to whether the word 'broken' should be included in the text, we know that no bone of the Saviour was broken.

What Jesus was teaching the disciples was that the bread was a symbol of His body, His body sacrificially, voluntarily, and vicariously yielded up in death. The focus isn't on the fact that He lived in a body and went about doing good but that the body in which He lived was given sacrificially for us on the cross. You and I have a body in order that we might be capable of living, for without a body we would not have existed. Jesus took a body that He might be capable of dying. How amazing – He, the source of all life, was going to die.

It is significant to note that in Matthew and Mark's accounts the Lord Jesus 'blessed' the bread but in Luke and First Corinthians the Lord Jesus gave thanks for it. J. HEADING in his commentary on Matthew teaches that, in blessing, the Lord's thoughts were directed to the bread, in giving thanks His thoughts were directed to God. Thankfully, the actual words the Saviour used are not recorded in the Bible; had they been set down there would be the distinct possibility of quoting them week by week in a mechanical fashion rather than with real heartfelt appreciation.

How amazing to think that the Lord Jesus gave thanks for something that was going to symbolize His body willingly offered in death! Truly, we should take the bread with thankfulness, for He took our place and bore our sins in His own body on the tree; therefore, our hearts should overflow with gratitude. Through that which the bread symbolizes we have been wonderfully blessed, but for Him the bread symbolized suffering and death.

The significance of the cup

The four writers referred to above all record that the cup symbolizes the blood of the Lord Jesus, but they also provide additional information. Matthew states, 'This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins', 26. 28. Not only are persons in view but also sins, so Matthew emphasizes the trespass offering aspect of the Lord's death. Mark's account reads, 'This



is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many', 14. 24. No reference is made in Mark to sins; rather his focus is on people in general, 'for many', so he presents to us the sin offering aspect of the Lord's death. Luke's record is similar to Mark, except that the blood is shed for specific people, hence the Saviour says 'for you'.

Another point to observe is that in Matthew and Mark's account of the Lord's Supper the blood is mentioned before there is any reference to the new testament, e.g., Matthew says, 'This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins', 26. 28. Luke in his Gospel, and Paul in Corinthians, mention the 'new testament' first, then the blood – 'This cup is the new testament in my blood', Luke 22. 20. Maybe the reason for this change is that Matthew and Mark emphasize the *basis* for all that we shall enjoy – hence the blood is mentioned first. In Luke and 1 Corinthians chapter 11 the emphasis focuses on the *blessings* that are ours, hence the New Testament (or covenant) is mentioned first.

Conclusion

To engage in the Lord's Supper is an inestimable privilege but it carries a solemn responsibility. The latter section of 1 Corinthians chapter 11 shows the seriousness of participating in a careless manner and thus it behoves us all to examine ourselves and having done so to then remember the Lord in the beauty of holiness.

'For the bread and for the wine,
For the pledge that seals Him
mine
For the words of love divine
We give thee thanks, O Lord'.
[HORATIUS BONAR]

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Philippians: The Joy and Suffering of the Furtherance of the Gospel [17]

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



Chapter 4, verses 21-23: Closing Blessings and Salutations

Paul was a worshipper, and his frequent ascriptions of praise towards the Lord flowed from his Christocentric way of thinking. As he closes this joyful letter, he concentrates on God and His grace afresh, leaving the reader a delightful savour to contemplate with relish. To the apostle every problem in the Epistle to the Philippians is soluble by looking to Christ. MARTIN notes the positional significance of the doxology in the letter, saying:

“The doxology flows from the joy of the whole Epistle”, says Bengel, i.e. it is Paul’s fitting response to all the things which cause him joy in his prison experience. The liturgical *Amen*, lit. “confirmed”, derived from a Hebrew verb “to be firm”, underlies the truth of the doxology, as the writer and reader associate themselves with the confession and own it as valid and true for themselves’.¹

As we close this book in holy scripture, we add our Amen as well.

Greetings to all

After a brief doxology, in keeping with ancient style, Paul closes his letter to the Philippians with salutations towards every saint in that assembly. Noted commentator CHARLES ERDMAN points out the slight ambiguity of the Greek syntax in verse 21, ‘The phrase “in Christ” appears to be united here with the word “salute” rather than with the word “saint”. Either connection would give a satisfactory meaning. The latter would make the salutation equivalent to, “Remember me to all my fellow Christians”. The former would imply, “Extend my greetings in Christ to every believer”’.² Either way, his words are in keeping with his viewpoint from one’s position in Christ, as well as the high calling

of His people; they are the saints – set apart ones who belong to the Lord Himself. Speaking of this Christ-centred thinking, MOTYER points out:

‘But the key to it all is *in Christ Jesus*. He mediates to us all the benefits and blessings of God. More than that, he is himself the sum of all the blessings, for the preposition is not “through” but “in”. He is not a channel along which they flow, but a place in which they are deposited. It is finally because of Christ that Paul is contented, and it is Christ whom he offers to us as the means and guarantee of our contentment. For Paul, the person who possesses Christ possesses all’.³

A band of brothers

Paul was no lone wolf, as is borne out in verse 21, ‘The brethren which are with me greet you’. He customarily worked with others. Throughout his ministry he mentored younger men like Timothy, Titus, Luke, and others, Acts 20. 4. Even the Philippians’ own messenger, Epaphroditus, had tarried in Rome to assist the imprisoned apostle, Phil. 2. 25.

In chapter 1 Paul spoke of the multiple evangelistic opportunities that his incarceration provided, 1. 12-13. Truly, his bonds brought more people into the church, for he says next, ‘All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar’s household’, 4. 22. Although this probably refers to servants or soldiers assigned to work in the emperor’s home, it still shows the astonishing spread of the glad tidings. At the beginning of the book of Acts there was a comparatively small number of Christians in the world. Now just a few decades later

there were believers in the presence of Caesar himself! Such is the power and wisdom of the omnipotent and loving God. He can penetrate any stronghold in this world with His good news.

Amazing, ever-present grace

It is appropriate that the epistle closes with renewed reference to the Lord’s grace, v. 23. His goodness and divine generosity will continue with the Philippian saints. Every section of this letter is permeated by grace. Rather than rail against his preaching rivals, he chose to rejoice in their subject; ‘Christ is preached’, he exulted, 1. 18! When he could have berated them for their developing disunity, he instead lifted their minds to think of Christ’s unparalleled attitude that resulted in unequalled humility and subsequent glorification, 2. 5-11. Even his attack on serious false teaching breathes forth grace rather than bitterness – he says in effect, ‘Reject the error and strive for Christ and His upward calling’, 3. 10-14. Finally, in chapter 4, his rebuke and correction for the disagreeing servants is ever so brief; much more space is devoted to joy, peace and the other graces that believers enjoy in Christ. The climactic final section offers gratitude to the saints, but puts the real thankfulness and attention squarely where it belongs, upon the living God Himself.

Endnotes

- 1 RALPH P. MARTIN, *Philippians: An Introduction and Commentary*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1987, pg. 189.
- 2 C. R. ERDMAN, *Philippians*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977, pg. 152.
- 3 J. A. MOTYER, *The Message of Philippians*. Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984, pg. 221.

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THE PRIESTHOOD (1)

By **JOHN HALL** Harrogate, England

One of the great wonders of scripture is that our God has made each and every one of us a kingdom of priests unto Himself in order that we might worship, and magnify His great and glorious name. Like so many of the themes in scripture, the subject of the priesthood, especially that of the Great High Priest, is inexhaustible. The more we look at this subject, and in particular the robes that the High Priest wore, the more we see of the beauty and grandeur of our Great High Priest.

There are three terms that occur throughout the scriptures relative to the priesthood: priests; High Priest, and Great High Priest. We can learn simple lessons from these.

The Priests

They were all members of the tribe of Levi, and their only claim to the priesthood was that they were 'sons'. Consequently, there was no limit on the number of priests; it was based entirely on the size of the family, and their function was to minister in holy things. The spiritual application is that we are a 'royal priesthood', because we are sons! 'And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father', Gal. 4. 6. Tremendous to think that we also belong to an 'unlimited' host, as every truly bornagain believer is a holy priest. Therefore, it is our privilege and responsibility to do service in holy things for our Great High Priest.

The High Priest

Aaron was the first to be appointed to this office. He was then succeeded by his son, and so it continued down through the generations. History would indicate that from Aaron to the times of Christ there were approximately eighty who held this position. Each and every



one would be different in nature, and in character. The only reason for change was death, Heb. 7. 23. Consequently, a changing priesthood meant an imperfect priesthood, and an inconsistent priesthood. Hence the great need for:

The Great High Priest

There is One and only One great High Priest, the man Christ Jesus! We know that He did not come out of the Aaronic order, nor was He from the priestly tribe of Levi. He was from the kingly tribe of Judah. The scriptures tell us that our Great High Priest received His commission direct from the Father, 'The Lord hath sworn and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek', Ps. 110. 4.

Melchizedek, that mysterious man who came to Abram after his battle with ungodly kings, was titled King of Salem. This God-appointed priest was a man of whom the scriptures record no trace of His birth, no earthly record of his parents, and no record of his death. Hence, God uses Melchizedek to illustrate the point of a never ending priesthood, to which He appointed our Saviour who is without 'beginning of days, nor end of life'. So it is that our Saviour did not inherit His priesthood by earthly succession; He continues forever, praise God! Consequently,

He supersedes all others, because of His endless life, and His changeless ministry. Yesterday, today and forever, He is the same; He changes not.

A question which has puzzled many is 'how and when was Melchizedek appointed to be a priest of the most High God?' Careful study of the scriptures will reveal that God always had His priests, long before the inauguration of the Aaronic priesthood. God is a God of order, and we will see that this function is a God-given, and God-directed, progressive service which develops

in accordance with His mind and will. We note that, in the beginning, every man was his own priest, e.g., Adam, Noah, Abram, etc. However, in Exodus chapter 12, at the time of the great deliverance from Egypt, we see the head of each house officiating as a priest on behalf of all these who were in the house. The head of the house offered an acceptable sacrifice unto God in order that God could bless them. Then, in a further development, God, in the wilderness, selects the tribe of Levi in preference to the other tribes, and appoints them to act in priestly service unto Him. Out from the tribe of Levi one man is chosen to be the High Priest, and so succession of the human line begins, passing from father to son down through the ages, until we come to the days of Caiaphas when the earthly priesthood is ended by the work and worth of Christ on the cross. After His atoning death on the cross, He passed through the veil, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on High, and took upon Himself the ministry of intercession on behalf of His people.

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The question is posed, 'Art thou greater than our father Abraham, which is dead?' John 8. 53. Unequivocally, Luke states of Christ, 'He shall be great'. He is our great High Priest, the great King, the great Shepherd and the great God and our Saviour, Jesus Christ. He is personally great in goodness and beauty, and He proffers great love and a 'so great salvation'.

Let us consider Christ, a greater than Abraham.

Abraham and his Frequency of Mention

There are about 300 references to Abram/Abraham in the concordance. Fourteen out of fifty chapters of Genesis record his history. Twelve verses out of forty in Hebrews 11 speak of his faith. Stephen allocates seven verses in Acts chapter 7 to this man.

But Christ is greater even in the space devoted to Him: 'Christ in all the scriptures'. John would go further in stating, 'And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen', John 21. 25. Who can compare with Him?



A GREATER T

Abraham and his Faith

Paul in Romans, James in his Epistle, and the writer of Hebrews all make much of Abraham's faith. It is truly impressive, given his background, that he believed God, obeyed His commands, and trusted His promises, Gen. 12. 1-3.

Yet, of Christ we read, 'the author and finisher of our faith', Heb. 12. 2, literally, the Pioneer and Perfecter of faith. Abraham could never claim such a distinction. Christ is unique. Psalm 16 begins, 'Preserve me, O God: for in thee do I put my trust'. 'He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him. But thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me **hope** when I was upon my mother's breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly', Ps. 22. 8-10 (here **hope** means **trust**).

His enemies confirmed Christ's faith with the use of a Hebrew word for 'trusted', which occurs only here in the Bible, and indicates rolling the burden wholly and completely upon the Lord, Matt. 27. 43.

The nine-fold fruit of the Spirit is seen in all its fullness in Christ and includes faith. The

absolute dependence of Christ upon His Father during His earthy life of thirty-three years as a man and a bondservant is remarkable. Not even in the wilderness amidst wild beasts, having fasted forty days, could Satan cause our blessed Lord to act independently of His Father. What faith!

By

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It was, of course, in the exercise of faith that Abraham occasionally failed. He could not trust God in a famine and went down to Egypt. He could not wait God's time for the promised seed to be born and with Sarah's co-operation took Hagar and produced Ishmael and not Isaac!

However, of Christ it is written, 'He shall not fail nor be discouraged', Isa. 42. 4. Abraham failed in his strongest point, faith; Christ never failed, having no strong or weak points. In Christ faith excels.

Abraham, the Friend of God

How unique is this title bestowed on Abraham and referred to on three occasions! It has been suggested that two features mark friendship: faithfulness and fellowship.

(i) **Faithfulness** - the fidelity of Abraham was never more greatly tested than when God asked him to offer Isaac as a burnt offering. Isaac was miraculously conceived and born when Abraham was 100 years old. In him were vested all God's covenant promises yet, Abraham is being asked to offer his only son Isaac, whom he loved. How incredible to read, 'And Abraham rose up early in the morning and saddled his ass', Gen. 22. 3! And again, 'I and the lad will go yonder and worship and come again to you', v. 5. There was no reluctance to obey the Lord. Indeed, he had such implicit faith in God that he believed God would raise Isaac from the dead, if this was necessary to fulfil His



HAN ABRAHAM

promises. Abraham's fidelity was born out of Abraham's faith, 'God will provide (*out of*) himself a (*the*) lamb for a burnt offering'.

Abraham is the first of ten people in our Bible described as faithful, the last being Antipas, 'my faithful martyr', Rev. 2. 13.

'But the Lord is faithful', 2 Thess. 3. 3. He is 'faithful and just to forgive us our sins'¹. He was 'the faithful witness'² during the years of his ministry on earth. He will be the faithful Warrior when He comes forth to engage His foes. Currently, He is a 'faithful high priest in things pertaining to God'³. His faithfulness not only extends towards us, but He was 'faithful to him that appointed him'. Our blessed Lord can never be accused of unfaithfulness, unlike the best of men, even Abraham! Undoubtedly, our Lord's greatest act of obedience to His Father was Calvary. No substitute was found for Him, as there was for Isaac. Christ was the substitute!

(ii) **Fellowship** - friendship includes fellowship. Abraham's fellowship with God is rightly acclaimed in scripture. In half of the fourteen chapters of Genesis that speak of Abraham, there is spiritual communion between God and His friend. God appears to Abraham on seven occasions. We read of Abraham's worship, the first use of the word in scripture. We learn of Abraham's intercession for Lot, and the cities of the plain. Though Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed Lot was delivered. We see God and two angels visiting Abraham's tent and taking lunch. What an unimaginable privilege!

Consider Christ's fellowship with His Father. Think of the nights spent in the mountains in communion with the Father. He did and said only those things that He had seen and heard in conversation with His God. 'I do always those things that please Him'.⁴ Isaiah's third servant song

records, 'The Lord God hath opened mine ear',⁵ and, 'The Lord God . . . he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned (*disciple*)', v 4. His prayer life is recorded for us particularly by Luke. Meditate on the loftiness of His High Priestly prayer in John chapter 17, or experience the agony of His prayer with strong crying and tears in Gethsemane. What an intercessor **He** was! 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do', Luke 23. 34. Three of the seven utterances at the cross were 'prayers'.

Abraham, the friend of God? Thank God 'there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother', Prov. 18. 24. 'Faithful are the wounds of a friend', Prov. 27. 6. Christ was called 'a friend of publicans and sinners', Matt. 11. 19. 'Henceforth, I call you not servants . . . but I have called you friends', John 15. 15. No wonder we sing, 'What a friend we have in Jesus'!

Abraham, the Father of Multitudes

Abraham was a patriarch, He is 'the father of multitudes', for such is the meaning of his name. He is the father or founder of the Hebrew race, the father of the faithful, and the father of us all. As the 'father of multitudes' he incorporates the descendants of Ishmael and Isaac. As the 'father of the circumcision' he is linked with the Jew. As the father of all them that believe, the line of faith is envisaged. As the father of us all, he includes even the Gentiles, who will come into blessing in the millennial reign of Christ. Nevertheless, Abraham could never lay claim to the title of Christ, 'Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, **the everlasting Father**, the Prince of Peace', Isa. 9. 6, or, perhaps more accurately, 'the Father of Eternity'! As a father, Abraham has his seeds. The most important of which is recorded in Galatians chapter 3 verse 16, 'And to thy seed which is

Christ'. Matthew's genealogy refers to Christ as 'the son of Abraham'.

Of any natural seed, Isaiah asked, 'And who shall declare his generation?' Cut off out of the land of the living, Christ had no natural seed. Christ's seed is spiritual. Consequent upon His trespass offering, 'He shall see his seed'. They are the 'many' who are justified. David takes this a step further when he declares, 'A seed shall serve him; it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation'. 'Instead of thy fathers shall be thy children whom thou mayest make princes in all the earth', Ps. 45. 16. Commenting on this verse A. G. CLARKE states 'It seems better to refer this verse to the King; the Hebrew pronouns are all masculine. Fruit of the Messiah's union with Israel; rulers established throughout the whole earth. Messiah's spiritual descendants will eclipse in greatness and glory His human progenitors. Men boast in their ancestry, Christ rejoices in His seed'.

Abraham and the Features of his Life

Non-biblical literature suggests Ur of the Chaldees was as advanced in Abraham's times as Egypt in Moses' day. Abraham would have lived not in a tent but a house. Here are some comparisons and contrasts with Christ:

Abram left a luxurious home for a pilgrim's tent. Christ left 'the ivory palaces' to become a homeless stranger.⁶

Abram left his 'country . . . kindred and his father's house', Gen. 12. 1-3. Christ left the splendour of heaven, the special relationship with the Father in glory, and His Father's house.

Abram was chosen of God for his mission, Neh. 9. 7. Christ was the chosen One for the mission God gave Him.

Abram had to take a long journey to a far-off land (Ur to Hebron). Christ left heaven for earth. He bypassed angels in His coming to planet earth.



Abram was redeemed by God, Isa. 29. 22.
Christ is Himself the Redeemer and never required redemption.

Abraham met with Melchisedek, the king-priest, 'made like unto the Son of God'.
Christ is the King-Priest after the order of Melchisedek. He is the Son of God.

Abraham received bread and wine at the hand of Melchisedek to strengthen him.
Christ took bread and wine and instituted the Lord's Supper, giving to His disciples.

Abraham was the beneficiary of God's promises but did not see their fulfilment.
Christ was the subject and theme of all God's promises and Bible prophecies, 2 Cor. 1. 20.

Abraham requested that God's covenant should be ratified, Gen. 15. 9-17.
Christ ratified the New Covenant at the cross when He shed His precious life's blood.

Abraham and his seed were flesh and blood but subject through fear of death to a lifetime of bondage.
Christ 'took part of the same', flesh and blood. 'He took on Himself not the nature of angels but the seed of Abraham, with a view to helping through his death upon Calvary. He dealt with Satan who was responsible for their lifetime of bondage', K. WUEST.

Abraham's greatest trial came at the end of his life – to surrender his son as an offering to God.
Christ's greatest trial came at the close of His earthly life – to surrender Himself as an offering, without spot, to God.

Abraham was buried in the cave of Machpelah, which means a place of two doors suggestive of death and resurrection.
Christ passed through death's door only to leave at the other opening as He rose from the dead. Hallelujah, what a Saviour!

Abraham provided the type.
Christ was the Antitype.



Abraham and the Pharisees

In John chapter 8 verses 51-59, the Pharisees claim that Abraham is their father and they his children. Christ contests their claim and plainly tells them, 'Ye are of your father the devil'. The Pharisees are incapable of raising their thinking from the natural to the spiritual plane.

Christ states, 'If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death', John 8. 51. The Pharisees cannot see beyond the fact that Abraham and the prophets have died and been buried. They have refuted Christ's argument, or so they think! Christ is the Son of God with authority over death. He is able to grant, not natural life only, but eternal life to the man who keeps His saying.

The Lord declares, 'Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad', v. 56. Still speaking in human and natural terms, they scorn such a claim. After all, this Jesus has not reached fifty years of age and Abraham lived two millennia before. But Christ is the Son of God. He is not limited to time, like mortal men, He is part of eternity: the pre-existent and eternally existent One. Hence, the claim, 'Before Abraham was, I am'. The

ever-present, immutable Son of God: before John the Baptist, before Abraham, and before the world was!

Abraham recognized in this 'son of Abraham', the Seed, the heavenly Isaac. No wonder he was filled with exultation concerning Messiah's day. He recognized and acknowledged the Son of God and King of Israel by faith in divine revelation. 'And to thy seed, which is Christ', Gal. 3. 16.

The Pharisees, whom Christ prevented from stoning the woman taken in adultery in the opening verses, now take up stones to stone Christ for blasphemy. How blind are those who do not want to see?

Christ – a greater than Abraham?
'He is greater than the greatest; far better than the best'!

Endnotes

- 1 1 John 1. 9.
- 2 Rev. 1. 5.
- 3 Heb 2. 17.
- 4 John 8. 29.
- 5 Isa. 50. 5.
- 6 'Out of the ivory palaces, into a world of woe, only His great eternal love, made my Saviour go', words of the chorus of a hymn by Henry Barraclough.

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DANIEL'S PROPHECY OF THE SEVENTY WEEKS

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

3

Daniel chapter 9 verses 24-27

The Six Goals to be accomplished in the Seventy 'Sevens', v. 24

Verse 24 is a six-part outline of the objectives involved in God's plan for the restoration of Daniel's people and city.

Negative	Positive
1. To finish the transgression	4. To bring in everlasting righteousness
2. To make an end of sin	5. To seal up vision and prophet
3. To make reconciliation for iniquity	6. To anoint the Most Holy

Seventy Sevens are determined

The Hebrew word for 'weeks' used here, *shabua*, is based on the word for 'seven', *sheba*, and it is legitimate to translate the word either as 'weeks', Dan. 10. 2-3, or as a 'seven' or a *heptad* or a 'period of seven' depending on the context. TREGELLES writes, 'the word, however, does not necessarily mean seven days – but a period of seven parts: of course it is much more often used in speaking of a week than of anything else, because nothing is so often mentioned as a week which is similarly divided'.¹ The term 'weeks' appears difficult to sustain in its normal English sense, for seventy weeks is less than a year and a half, and more time than this was required from the 'command to restore and build Jerusalem' to fulfil this prophecy. We shall look further at what is being referred to by this expression when we consider the chronology of the seventy sevens in a later article.

The word 'determined' used here comes from a root meaning 'divided' or 'cut'. This idea of 'cut' occurs later in the prophecy in verse 25, 'the wall' (or 'cutting'), verse 26, 'cut off', and verse 27b, 'determined' (a different word to that in verse 24). It reminds us here that the seventy 'sevens', along with all of the predetermined purposes of God, are carefully measured and will be strictly fulfilled.

For your people and for your holy city

EDWARD DENNETT writes, 'It must also be borne in mind that this revelation entirely concerns the Jewish people and Jerusalem. It is strange indeed that this should need to be insisted upon, considering the language employed; but the tendency is so persistent in some quarters to explain away, by spiritualizing, the scriptures which have in view the future restoration of

the chosen nation, that it becomes necessary to affirm and to hold fast their manifest application. Gabriel says to Daniel, 'Thy people', and 'thy holy city'. Even a child, if he knows but the elements of the New Testament, understands that Christians have no holy city upon earth. And should it be contended that it is the heavenly city, new Jerusalem, which is here indicated, it might well be enquired, when were its walls thrown down, so as to need rebuilding? No, the city prayed for is the city of which Gabriel speaks, as is evident from verse 25; and consequently Daniel's people are the Jews, and his city is the earthly Jerusalem'.²

To take two examples of the tendency here referred to, E. J. YOUNG applies it to 'the true people of God' (i.e., the church) and accuses Gaebelien of trying to 'restrict the reference'³ by taking the prophecy to refer exclusively to the Jews while, more recently, JOYCE BALDWIN asserts that it concerns 'the grounds on which God could forgive *human* sin'.⁴ By contrast, WILLIAM KELLY writes, 'I would call your attention to this . . . all his thoughts are about Israel and about Jerusalem. The prophecy is not about Christianity, but about Israel . . . Some are startled and ask, Have we, then, nothing to do with "reconciliation for iniquity" and "everlasting righteousness"? I ask, Of whom does the verse speak? You will find other scriptures, which reveal our interest in the blotting out of sin, and the righteousness which we are made in Christ. But we must adhere to this golden rule in reading the word of God – never to force Scripture in order to make it bear upon ourselves or others . . . Thus, if we take the Bible as it is, without being too anxious to find ourselves here or there . . . we shall not feel that we have been taking other people's property, and claiming goods upon a tenure

that can be disputed, but that what we have is what God has freely and assuredly given us'.⁵

Forgiveness of sin rests upon the same basis whether for Jew or Gentile, but the prophecy is concerned with more than simply the basis of forgiveness. It concerns the city of Jerusalem, the Jewish people, the prophetic scriptures, the temple sanctuary, Israel's sins, their promised Messiah, their great enemy and their eventual triumph; it is the prophecy itself which restricts itself to Jewish concerns.

To finish the transgression

The word 'finish', *kalah*, is quite common and used for a variety of purposes. It means to complete (in the sense of finishing a work like creation, Gen. 2. 1, or a building, 1 Kgs. 6. 38, to fulfil, in the sense of fulfilling prophecy, Dan. 11. 36, come to an end, as in a period of time, Gen. 41. 53; Dan. 12. 7, among other uses. We might say that it is the perfect word to use to describe the fulfilment of God's eschatological (or, 'end-times') purposes.

'Transgression' here is a strong word, 'combining . . . the idea of rebellion and self-assertion'.⁶ In contrast to a term like 'sin', which is of a general character, 'transgression' emphasizes human wilfulness in rebellion and revolt. The use of the article - 'the' transgression - would appear to refer back to the sins of the nation of Israel for which Daniel has made confession, for example in verses 5 and 11. Although Daniel used different Hebrew words in verses 5 and 11 for 'rebelled', and 'transgressed', the prophecy addresses the same issue.

This expression presents difficulties for all three of the main interpretive schemes. There seems to be no sensible way, on the critical view, to understand the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes IV as somehow 'finishing the transgression' of the people of Israel. Similarly, on the amillennial view, it is hard to understand how Calvary concluded 'human' rebellion. Some amillennialists would take the expression to refer to God forgiving sins and so putting them away, but the word 'transgression' looks at sin, not so much from God's point of view (in the judicial or forensic sense of sin needing atonement), but from the human point of view, in mankind's defiant rebelliousness. YOUNG, from an amillennial viewpoint, translates the expression 'to restrain the transgression' and asserts that 'the interpretation to *finish* or *complete* does not seem justifiable'.⁷ However, although the Hebrew allows YOUNG's rendering,

it is not clear why the meaning 'finish' is inadmissible. In any case, Calvary did not restrain human transgression. BALDWIN says, 'If [the word means] to be *finished*, we are being told about the final triumph of God's kingdom and the end of human history'.⁸

The problem, from a premillennial point of view⁹ is the question of how Christ's return finishes human sin and rebellion, for there is still human sin during the millennium and in the final rebellion of the nations at its end, Rev. 20. 7-10, because of the millennial kingdom's Judeo-centrism.

The key to understanding this problematic expression is the context of the prophecy: the restoration of national Israel. This means that 'to finish the transgression' means that Israel's 'rebellion will effectively finish at the return of Messiah to earth', TATFORD.¹⁰

Here, then, we have the key idea of completion, and what it appears to be speaking about goes beyond the cross to the fulfilment of the work of restoration at the end of the age: the promised period of Messianic blessing.

To make an end of sin

The expression 'make an end' is similar in meaning to 'finish' earlier in the verse and means 'to be complete or finished'. Although there is a textual variant here which reads 'to seal up sins',¹¹ the weight of external evidence tends to favour the reading 'to make an end of sin'. 'Sin' is a more common and general term than the word 'transgression' that has just been used, nor is there the article before the word 'sin' as we have before 'transgression'.

Although, as Christians, our minds instinctively turn and think of the cross, yet as GAEBELEIN says, the words of this passage 'concern exclusively Daniel's people and not Gentiles but the holy city Jerusalem . . . The foundation upon which this future work of Grace for His earthly people rests is the death of Christ . . . [but] Up to now the transgression of the Jewish people is not yet finished nor is for them made an end of sins'.¹² Romans chapter 11 verses 26-27 tell us that at Christ's coming, 'And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written, The Deliverer will come out of Zion and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins'.

To make reconciliation for iniquity

The word 'reconciliation' here means 'atonement,

propitiation, pardon or covering'. 'Iniquity' has at its root the idea of 'to bend, distort, make crooked, pervert', hence 'to commit perversion, do wrong, sin'. It is not simply the idea of iniquity but also of the punishment for iniquity, Gen. 4. 13, and the guilt associated with iniquity, Josh. 22. 17.

This third objective would appear straightforward enough, at first; the expression would most naturally look forward to the provision of spiritual forgiveness through the cross. This, after all, is the only righteous basis upon which pardon can be found. However, in view of the fact that the previous two objectives seem best understood in relation to national Israel, it seems better to also understand this objective in terms of national Israel's experience of pardon in the future. 'Although the basis for this was laid at the Cross, its effect will only be experienced when the nation looks upon the One whom they pierced and mourns repentantly for Him (Zechariah 12:10)'.¹³ Just as earnest prayer was a pre-requisite for the return from the Babylonian exile, Jer. 29. 13, so too, in the future, reconciliation will not be effected until Israel repents at the coming of the Son of God. Notice the time-marker: '*in that day* a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness', Zech. 13. 1.

To bring in everlasting righteousness

Liberal/critical scholars insist that we must not impose New Testament theology upon an Old Testament passage. Thus, we must not think of righteousness here in terms of justification, as in Paul's writings. Instead, they suggest that 'righteousness' refers to 'vindication' resulting from Antiochus being defeated by the Jews in 165 BC. However, if the defeat of Antiochus after the loss of about 100,000 Jewish lives was to somehow provide Jewish vindication (and it is hard to see how such a national catastrophe could be described in terms of divine vindication), then in what sense would this be 'everlasting'? Instead, in view of the emphasis upon sin in the verse, and the fact that the word 'pardon' has just been used, it would appear that God is here promising to provide permanent 'righteousness' for the Jewish people. This 'everlasting' righteousness carries overtones of other 'everlasting' things in Daniel's prophecy, notably Messiah's Kingdom, chapter 2 verse 44, and particularly chapter 7 verses 14 and 27. Thus, righteousness here refers to justification (in Pauline terms) as well as the righteousness that will characterize Christ's reign, Isa. 11. 4.

Whereas earlier items in the verse emphasized the completion of an old, sinful age, here we have the bringing in of a new order. For Israel as a nation, this age of righteousness will come only when Christ returns.

To seal up vision and prophet

The word 'seal' here is the same as the textual variant discussed in the second objective. Sealing could imply putting the finishing touch to a document, Dan. 12. 4, just as we put our signature to a letter, or, alternatively, closing something so that it could not be opened, read or understood (see Daniel chapter 12 verse 9 for this sense of a prophecy remaining 'sealed' and thus unfulfilled and not understood). Better still, BALDWIN says, 'To seal a document may involve closing it, but in law the meaning is rather to authenticate it with one's seal and signature'.¹⁴

The mention of the word 'prophet' (not 'prophecy', KJV, NKJV) alongside 'vision' here suggests not so much that the scripture will one day be complete, but that the time will come when there is no longer any prophetic voice either. This seems to point to the future consummation of all things – even the most ardent cessationists would accept that the church still fulfils a prophetic role in today's world by professing hope in the return of Christ. The mention of both the prophetic message (in scripture) and its prophetic messengers thus moves this objective beyond simply the fulfilment of a particular prophecy to the fulfilment of all prophecies at the return of Christ.

Amillennialists, such as PHILIP MAURO, argue that 'when our Lord ascended into heaven and the Holy Spirit descended, there remained not one of the six items of Daniel chapter 9 verse 24 that was not *fully accomplished*'.¹⁵ However, ALVA MCCLAIN asks, 'Where in the period of the Acts can we find any "sealing up of vision and prophecy"? On the contrary, it is during this very period and beyond that we find the greatest loosing of "vision and prophecy" in all the history of revelation. But at the second coming of our Lord in glory, which will take place at the close of the Seventieth Week, vision and prophecy will no longer be needed. The Word of God Himself will be present in visible manifestation, and His law will go forth from Jerusalem'.¹⁶

To anoint the most holy

Or literally, 'to anoint a holy of holies'. According to a critical commentator, this refers

to the re-dedication of the temple just over three years after its desecration by Antiochus Epiphanes IV, celebrated ever since by Jews in the Feast of Channukah. In the Old Testament, 'holy of holies' often refers to the Most Holy place inside the Jewish tabernacle or temple, although other things associated with the temple are also declared to be 'most holy'.¹⁷

Therefore, Daniel's prophecy appears to be prophesying the anointing of an actual temple at Christ's return. This would seem to respond to Daniel's prayer for the restoration of the 'sanctuary' in verse 17. Some commentators would argue that the anointing being referred to here is not literal, but, like Christ's baptism, anti-typical, 'what is portrayed is the consecration of the millennial temple (Ezek. 40), perhaps not so much by literal anointing with oil as by the presence of the shekinah glory (Ezek. 43:1-5)'.¹⁸

Other commentators take the word 'anoint' here to refer to the fact that in the next two verses we read about an 'anointed one', referring to the Messiah, Christ. They argue that Christ, being Himself the fulfilment of the Old Testament dwelling place of God is in view, and that the reference is to His anointing by the Holy Spirit at His baptism, Acts 10. 38. However, the description 'a holy of holies' is never used anywhere in the Old Testament to refer to people, but is instead used to refer to things associated with the temple or tabernacle. One possible exception to this is the use of the expression 'holy of holies' to refer to Aaron the High Priest, 1 Chr. 23. 13. However, only the NASB translates the verse this way; all other translations reject this rendering.¹⁹ It seems hard to resist the conclusion, then, that what is being referred to here is the anointing of an actual temple.

Conclusion

There are four key ideas in this verse. Firstly, in three of the objectives, we have the idea of completion: of transgression, sin and the prophetic voice. Second, in the other three, we see the bringing in of something new: reconciliation, everlasting righteousness and a 'Holy of Holies'. Thirdly, while the verse is concerned with the spiritual issues of sin and righteousness, it is also, fourthly, concerned with national and physical recipients: Daniel's people and city.

This verse clearly lays out the terms of reference for Daniel's prophecy. It is concerned with the nation of Israel, and assures them a glorious future.

Endnotes

- 1 S. P. TREGELLES, *Remarks on the Prophetic Visions in the Book of Daniel*, Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1852, pg. 104
- 2 EDWARD DENNETT, *Daniel the Prophet and the Times of the Gentiles*, Central Bible Truth Depot, 1967, pg. 145
- 3 EDWARD J. YOUNG, *The Prophecy of Daniel*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1949, pg. 197
- 4 JOYCE G. BALDWIN, *Daniel*, TOTC, IVP, 1978, pg. 187 (emphasis added)
- 5 WILLIAM KELLY, *The Great Prophecies of Daniel*, Pickering and Inglis, 1897, pgs. 152-4
- 6 BALDWIN, pg. 187
- 7 YOUNG, pg. 198
- 8 BALDWIN, pgs. 187-8
- 9 Or, more properly, from a so-called 'classic or historic premillennial' viewpoint
- 10 F. A. TATFORD, *God's Program of the Ages*, Kregel Publications, 1967, pg. 45
- 11 The text of the Hebrew Bible (*Kethib*) reads 'to seal up sins (pl.)', along with Theodotion's Greek translation, however what is read aloud in the Hebrew Bible (*Qere*) is 'to make an end of sin (sing.)', a reading followed by most of the other major ancient versions, the Greek Septuagint, the Syriac and the Latin Vulgate. The KJV and NKJV mix the two and read the least likely option: 'to make an end of sins'.
- 12 A. C. GAEBELEIN, *The Prophet Daniel*, Pickering and Inglis, n.d., pgs. 131-2
- 13 TATFORD, pg. 46
- 14 BALDWIN, pg. 188
- 15 PHILIP MAURO, *The Seventy Weeks and the Great Tribulation*, Hamilton, 1923, pg. 53 (emphasis in the original)
- 16 ALVA J. MCCLAIN, *Daniel's Prophecy of the Seventy Weeks*, BMH Books, 2007, pg. 36
- 17 See Exod. 29. 37; 30. 10; Lev. 2. 3; Num. 4. 4, 19; Ezek. 43. 12
- 18 FREDERICK A. TATFORD, *Climax of the Ages*, Outreach Book Service, 1971, pg. 155
- 19 Other translations use 'most holy', e.g., JND and JPS; Keil and Delitzsch give 'to sanctify him to be a most holy one'. The Tanakh translation is 'most holy', and it does not just refer to Aaron, but to his sons as well. [Editor's endnote]

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RETIRED MISSIONARY AID FUND CENTENARY 2014

By **ANDREW JESSOP** Vice-Chairman RMAF

In 2014 we have cause to give thanks to our Lord for His provision as the Retired Missionary Aid Fund celebrates its one hundredth birthday! God willing, the Fund will continue to contribute to meeting the needs of retired faithful servants of the Lord who have laboured full time on the mission field. We are mindful of the need for the future, until our Lord returns; Hallelujah! what a day that will be, and, let us never forget, it could be today!

In 1914 three of the Lord's people saw a need and took steps to meet it, going forward in faith to provide for retired missionaries; they were true 'men of renown'. The three founders of the Fund were Mr. Arthur Boake, Dr. Eleazer Roche, and Mr. W. T. Wilson. They saw elderly brothers and sisters who had devotedly served the Lord in faith for many years returning home, often worn out by their service, but who were either unknown or forgotten by a fresh generation of believers. These three brothers made the provision largely from their own resources, for some years with little support, distributing about five hundred pounds per year to around twenty-five retired missionaries. They continued alone until 1922 when they were joined by two other brothers and, at that time, they formed the Fund's first Council. Today, there are seventeen trustees who endeavour to provide a local point of contact. They try to visit local RMAF family members and speak in various assemblies about the work of the Fund.

The Fund is an independent trust, but has close links with *Echoes of Service* and *Interlink* who have representatives on the Fund's council of trustees. The aim of RMAF has always been to provide some form of financial support to retired missionaries who have served the Lord faithfully overseas. The Fund seeks to be an extended family and provides prayer support, visits where practicable, and regular

updates on the comings and goings of members of the family. Many, but not all of the family, need and receive financial support, this being very much a mutual decision. The Fund also marks family member's birthdays, hampers are sent at Christmas time, although these, like the birthday gifts, can be sent only to those living in the United Kingdom.

The family has grown over the years and now has 225 members, of which the majority live here in the UK. Distribution of grants to these retired workers is now in excess of half a million pounds per year. It is clear from the 2013 *Echoes of Service Daily Prayer Guide* that there are a significant number of long-serving missionaries in the field who will, God willing, at some point in the not too distant future be eligible to join the RMAF family and, though we know that the Lord may come at any moment, we believe it is important for us to actively plan to continue to support both the likely new members together with existing members of the family. We continue to look to the Lord to provide. In addition to regular grants, there are occasional special financial one-offs such as funeral expense grants on the home-call of either a husband or wife who meet the Fund's criteria.

RMAF mainly supports workers who have served at least twenty years overseas and are of state-retirement age. A few missionaries who came home early have also been welcomed into the family because of special circumstances such as ill health. The trustees try to keep track of missionaries who have retired 'early' for other reasons and they are usually invited to join the family when they reach retirement age.

As the Fund is able to support and encourage family members, so we are encouraged by them, as they often write or email

to say thank you. Many give an indication of how financial help from the Fund has delivered practical and much-needed support:

'Many thanks again for your letter, and encouraging words from the Scripture. I am very thankful to all concerned for the grant put into my Bank account. It is such a help, and always so timely'.

'A big thank you to the trustees for their most generous gift which came the other day. I'm sure a lot will have to be spent on heating with the forecast of a hard winter. So I am so grateful for this generous gift'.

RMAF does not actively solicit funds, but looks to the Lord. The result of faith and prayer has been ample provision; the Lord is no man's debtor. The main sources of funding are gifts from Christian Trusts and legacies, with individual and assembly gifts making up the rest. While the Fund's trustees do have concerns for the future because legacies, individual and assembly giving, are slowly falling in real terms, we also know our Lord will meet the need of His people and so we continue in faith, 'Hitherto hath the Lord helped us', 1 Sam. 7. 12.

With the general financial climate, and uncertainty over future state benefit payments, there is a financial challenge for an upcoming generation of believers, to support retired missionaries as generously as the generation that commended them to the work.

We value your continued prayers, never forgetting that in this turbulent world we should always be listening for His footstep at the threshold of the door!





The exit of Elijah was as swift and dramatic as his entrance in 1 Kings chapter 17 verse 1. As JOSEPH HALL remarks, 'he comes in like a tempest, who went out in a whirlwind'.¹ He laboured during the reign of King Ahab when the pernicious tide of Baal worship was rampant throughout Israel. In response, he prayed for drought as a sign of divine punishment, and even this was based on his knowledge of scripture and confidence in God.² His overriding message was that only a return to Jehovah, the living and eternal God of the universe, could bring salvation to Israel. We too live in days of departure, and the same Elijah-spirit of courage and devotion is required among the people of God.³ As we retrace his final footsteps, certainly as far as his initial ministry was concerned, it is worth contemplating the legacy of Elijah's service.

As an itinerant prophet, Elijah travelled throughout Israel and his closing walk took him from Gilgal to glory.⁴ On this occasion, he encountered his successor – Elisha – and the sons of the prophets who were privileged to observe, firsthand, the character of this remarkable man of God. Elijah had certainly remained steadfast throughout his service. Like Moses before him, he witnessed several mountain-top and valley experiences, but it is significant that both remained devoted to God until the very last.⁵ As believers today, we serve in the knowledge of the imminent return of the Saviour,⁶ and we too need to remain faithful to God and His word. The pathway of Elijah took him from Gilgal to Bethel, v. 2, and then to Jericho, v. 4, and Jordan, v. 6. The key phrase peppered throughout the section is, of course, 'the Lord hath sent me'. This is another hallmark of the prophet. He remained submissive to the word of the Lord, for he went where he was told.⁷ There can be no substitute for the simple adherence to the teaching of scripture, Jas. 1. 22. Then, with the news of his departure beginning to circulate, v. 3, the passage reveals the sensitive nature of Elijah. For, prior to leaving earth, he would spend the day educating

Studies in the life of

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Elijah ⁽⁵⁾

The Whirlwind ^{2 Kgs. 2. 1-11}

his understudy Elisha, for surely this is the explanation of the repeated test of allegiance in verses 2, 4, and 6. Perhaps Elijah's greatest legacy is seen in the ministry of Elisha, who must have benefited greatly from the example of his spiritual father, v. 12. The blessing of every believer, but especially those who teach in the local assembly, is to pass on the teaching of scripture to up-and-coming generations.⁸

Undoubtedly, there were occasions when Elijah was isolated in his service,⁹ and this may have impacted on his outlook.¹⁰ However, with his name meaning 'God is Jehovah', he was living proof that he served One who is unchanging, and faithful. Indeed, in the current passage we have important insights into the character of Jehovah. Consider, for example, the extent of His mercy. Elijah had been commissioned to warn Israel of their idolatrous practices, and his accompanying miracles testified to the God-given nature of his ministry. But the response was patchy, and, among the ruling family, non-existent. However, notwithstanding this negative reaction, Elisha was then sent to continue the ministry of Elijah, and both men testify to the mercy of God.¹¹ There are also glimpses of the omnipotence of Jehovah. The 'chariot of fire', v. 11, and 'whirlwind', vv. 1, 11,¹² are a comforting reminder that 'with God all things are possible', Mark 10. 27. Indeed, it is significant that Elijah's ministry is again associated with fire,¹³ for this displays the impotence of Baal over Jehovah.¹⁴ For believers who contemplate a rapid and radical change necessary to fit us for glory¹⁵, it is worth dwelling on this particular aspect of God's character.

Finally, there is the intriguing irony that the prophet who prayed for death was the one who was taken to glory without dying!¹⁶ God was faithful to reward His servant with the special blessing of entering eternity without the need of dying. Elijah's character is, therefore, stamped with the clear and unmistakable words, 'God is Jehovah'!

One joy in reading the Bible is that we can visualize the exploits and dedication of men of God such as Elijah. This is true as we follow him in his journey to heaven, for the Bible narrative records plenty of intriguing details. Note, for example, the following:

His Circuit

In leaving Gilgal, v. 1, Elijah visited the prophets at Bethel, vv. 2-3. This was a place with an important history, for it was there that the nation's namesake, Jacob (later named Israel) had a remarkable revelation of God.¹⁷ Sadly, however, the sin of the nation had led this historic place to become associated with idolatry.¹⁸ This initial stop served as a reminder that much work remained if the nation was to be restored to its former glory. From Bethel, the path led to Jericho, and this again was a place noted for its past history, though the fact that it was rebuilt testified to rebellion in Israel.¹⁹ From Jericho, the two prophets went to Jordan, which was the place where Israel began to possess their inheritance – it was to be the same for Elijah. The pathway was, therefore, divinely chosen, and illustrates that while Elijah was being taken, much work remained for Elisha. The same holds for us as we experience the departure of fellow believers – we need to keep our hands to the plough.²⁰



His Companion

We have already noted that Elisha accompanied Elijah throughout his journey.²¹ The previous occasion when the two men were recorded as being together was 1 Kings chapter 19 verse 21 when 'he [Elisha] arose and went after Elijah and ministered unto him'. We can be certain that the same spirit of support prevailed on this occasion. We are grateful that God, in grace, provides spiritual companions to provide support and fellowship as we journey to glory. However, there is something just as important as 'having a friend', and that is 'being a friend' to other believers.

portion' of Elijah's spirit to help him discharge his duties.²³ Put simply, Elisha requested that he would be heir to Elijah, as prophet in Israel, and that he was equipped to do the work of his spiritual father.²⁴ A wise choice on the part of Elisha, but the key aspect is that the discussions between these two prophets remained spiritual right to the end. It is worth reflecting on our own discussions with fellow believers – are they predominantly spiritual?

In concluding our consideration of Elijah, it is clear that he rightly occupies an honoured position in scripture and within the nation of

believing Israelite, Elijah's hope was in a spiritually restored nation, with Messiah at its head. Whereas John the Baptist acted in the spirit and power of Elijah at the Lord's first coming, Luke 1. 17, both the forerunner and Messiah were ultimately rejected by the nation. It will therefore be necessary for Elijah to literally return as forerunner for the victorious and all-conquering Messiah when He comes the second time to establish His kingdom. It is then that the prophecy of Malachi will be fulfilled and the world will again witness the courage and devotion of this remarkable man of God.³²



His Crossing

Like the Israelites before them,²² both Elijah and Elisha crossed the Jordan on 'dry ground', v. 8. This detail is neither superfluous nor incidental, but highlights the care God took to ensure a smooth transition for Elijah's journey to heaven (and Elisha's preservation for future service). We serve a gracious and powerful God who plans our pathway in the same meticulous manner as He did for His servants in a previous dispensation.

His Conversation

Aside from testing Elisha's commitment, Elijah asked him a direct and probing question, 'ask what I shall do for thee', v. 9. It would appear that in this father-son relationship, v. 12, Elisha acted in the position of the firstborn son and requested a 'double

Israel. He is, after all, linked to two important Bible characters in the Old Testament. Firstly, his departure was similar to that of Enoch, who also walked with God.²⁵ Secondly, his ministry replicated that of Moses. For example, they were sent to kings;²⁶ Jehovah revealed Himself to both by fire;²⁷ they separated waters;²⁸ had an advance warning of their departure from this world;²⁹ and were privileged to catch a glimpse of the Lord on the Mount that prefigured His millennial reign.³⁰ It is therefore fitting that scripture describes Elijah as a prophet, master, and father.³¹ He did much more than reveal the mind of God; he was also the faithful servant in Israel, and a role model for Elisha. The fact that he was taken to heaven without dying indicates that he is well placed to resume his service. As a

Endnotes

- 1 HALL J., *Contemplations on the Historical Passages of the Old and New Testaments*, reprinted Soli Deo Gloria, 1995, 2, pg. 179.
- 2 Deut. 11. 16-17; Jas. 5. 17.
- 3 Rom. 13. 11-14.
- 4 2 Kgs. 2. 1, 11.
- 5 Compare Deut. 35. 5-7.
- 6 1 Thess. 4. 16-17.
- 7 Compare 1 Kgs. 17. 3-5, 7-10; 18. 1-2.
- 8 2 Tim. 2. 2.
- 9 1 Kgs. 17. 5-6.
- 10 1 Kgs. 19. 10.
- 11 Ps. 130. 7.
- 12 Job 38. 1; 40. 6.
- 13 Compare 1 Kgs. 18. 38; 19. 12; 2 Kgs. 1. 10; 2. 11.
- 14 'Many of these elements – water, flour, oil, fire, and wind – were polemics against Baal, the god of rain, lightening (fire) and vegetation. Even the restoration of two boys back to life (one by Elijah and one by Elisha) was a polemic against the practice of child sacrifice and against the myth that Baal was dead six months each year and then was raised annually', CONSTABLE T. L., 2 Kings, *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Victor Books, 1986, pg. 541.
- 15 1 Cor. 15. 50-57.
- 16 1 Kgs. 19. 4.
- 17 Read Gen. 28. 16-22.
- 18 1 Kgs. 12. 25-29; Amos 4. 4.
- 19 Josh. 6. 26; 1 Kgs. 16. 34.
- 20 Josh. 1. 1-2; Luke 12. 62.
- 21 2 Kgs. 2. 1, 2, 4, 6-8, 11.
- 22 Josh. 3. 17.
- 23 Compare Deut. 21. 17.
- 24 'Elisha, resting his foot upon this law, requested of Elijah as a first-born son the double portion of his spirit for his inheritance. Elisha looked upon himself as the first-born son of Elijah in relation to the other sons of the prophets, inasmuch as Elijah by the command of God had called him to be his successor and to carry on his work', KEIL C. F., DELITZSCH F., *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Hendrickson Publishers, reprinted 1996, 3, pg. 207.
- 25 Gen. 5. 24.
- 26 Exod. 4. 10; 1 Kgs. 17. 1.
- 27 Exod. 3. 2; 1 Kgs. 18. 38.
- 28 Exod. 14. 21-22; 2 Kgs. 2. 8.
- 29 Deut. 34. 4; 2 Kgs. 2. 1, 10.
- 30 Matt. 17. 4.
- 31 Mal. 4. 5; 2 Kgs. 2. 3, 5, 16, 19; 2 Kgs. 2. 12.
- 32 Mal. 3. 5-6; Rev. 11. 1-13.

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God's Purpose

The sovereign authority of Christ is declared in the first mention of the church in the New Testament. The Lord Jesus emphatically declares, 'I will build my church', Matt. 16. 18. The church is His assembly, consisting of the people who distinctively belong to Him. They are pictured as a building. Christ is the Master Builder. Faith in Him is the rock-like foundation. His mighty project can never be thwarted. Neither the power, nor the guile, of Satan will prevent its triumphant completion. The assembly of all who confess Christ's name cannot die.

Often the world has been too quick to write a premature obituary of the church. A biblical scholar, with a keen sense of humour, once wittily remarked that Nero little thought the day would dawn when men would call their dogs Nero and their sons Paul! On being informed by a young producer that he was preparing a BBC programme on the end of the church in Britain, Lord Reith, its former Director General, waspishly remarked, 'Young man, the Christian church will attend the funeral of the BBC!'

In Paul's Epistles, the church is pictured as the body of Christ as well as His building.¹ The greatest thing going on in the world today is the gathering and growth of the church. Throughout this age, God is calling out of the nations a people for His name.² This is a key part of His eternal purpose.³ Believing Gentiles, and believing Jews, share the same spiritual privileges. As fellow heirs, they inherit the same blessings. They are fellow members of Christ's body, linked to each other through their living union with the risen exalted Saviour, the Head of the church. They are fellow partakers of God's promise in Christ through the gospel.⁴ Together saved Jews and Gentiles form 'one new man', the new humanity.⁵ The full inclusion of Gentiles in the people of God on a basis of absolute equality is a New Testament 'mystery', a secret

The Sovereignty and the Church

By **ALAN J. GAMBLE** Glasgow, Scotland

hidden in God for long ages but now disclosed by revelation from the Holy Spirit.⁶

The Church's ministry

The sovereignty of Christ, the Head of the church, is seen in His continual supply of her ministry. The victorious, ascended Saviour is the source of the Christian ministry. He graciously takes care to provide, through the long pilgrimage of the church on earth, gifted men fitted to serve each succeeding generation. These ministers include the foundational apostles and prophets, and a lavish succession of evangelists and pastor-teachers. Christ endows and provides them, so that by their ministry all the saints are equipped to exercise their individual spiritual gifts for service in the body of Christ. Thus, the church as a whole is built up numerically and spiritually, and brought to increasing spiritual maturity. God's eventual goal for His people is their full likeness to Christ.⁷

Human ordination is not envisaged in the New Testament. Ministers are not made by episcopal appointment, or the licence of a presbytery, or even the call of a congregation. Many men are truly gifted servants of Christ who have had one or other of these, but their ministry does not rest on any ecclesiastical procedure but on Christ's sovereign endowment. Equally, many other men, who have experienced no official recognition, are singularly gifted by the ascended Lord for His service in evangelism or teaching. It was a fundamental insight of ANTHONY NORRIS GROVES in 1827 that clerical ordination to preach the gospel, or to administer the Lord's Supper, had no scriptural warrant.

From his day until now, many local assemblies of Christians throughout the world have enjoyed the privilege of seeking to follow the simplicity of the New Testament pattern for ministry, untrammelled by formality but recognizing the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit in His gifting of all believers for service.⁸

The Church's expansion

The book of Acts presents the thrilling story of the gospel being taken from Jerusalem and Judea to Samaria and then to the Gentile world. It describes the expansion of the church's mission throughout the Mediterranean provinces of the Roman Empire, and ends with Paul in Rome itself. Throughout this gripping history, Luke records the sovereign hand of God at work.

After the apparently tragic and untimely loss of Stephen by martyrdom, there was a great scattering of believers from Jerusalem because of persecution. This scattering played a crucial part in the fulfilment of God's plan of worldwide evangelism. Some of the Jewish refugees took the revolutionary step of witnessing to Greeks in Antioch, which led to the planting of the assembly there, the first predominantly Gentile local church.⁹ Antioch then became the launch pad for the endeavours of Paul and Barnabas, selected by the Holy Spirit for mission.¹⁰ In later service, Paul knew God's definite restraint on further evangelism in Asia Minor, and then His clear positive direction to turn westwards in the vision of the man from Macedonia.¹¹

In providence, God protected Paul



Head of God

in Corinth by the neutrality of Gallio, the Roman proconsul, fulfilling His promise of preservation from danger, and leading to a fruitful ministry in that city.¹² Later, as Paul reflected on his situation in Ephesus, he could say that God had opened a great door for effective service there, despite the presence of many adversaries.¹³ God overruled the circumstances of Paul's arrest in Jerusalem to ensure that he would find his way to the metropolis of the empire. Then, He sovereignly brought Paul safely through storm and shipwreck so that he could bear witness to Christ in Rome.

These instances illustrate the declaration by the exalted Christ to the church in Philadelphia that He holds the key of David, the Messianic authority by which He opens and shuts doors of opportunity. When He opens no one can shut and when He shuts no one opens.¹⁴

Head over all things to the Church

The Lord Jesus is the Head of the church. He is also Head over all things, completely exalted in His risen life and power over all principalities and powers and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.¹⁵ He is supreme over all human authority and all unseen dominion, whether good or evil, angelic or demonic. The sceptre of universal sovereignty has already been placed in the hands of the once crucified Saviour by His Father. Presently, His authority is not generally acknowledged. Nor is its exercise visible. Nonetheless, God has given Christ the supreme place in the universe. Final authority does not rest with the White House in Washington, or the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, nor the Kremlin in Moscow. Rather, it lies with God's throne in heaven. It has been granted to the risen Man seated at His Father's right hand.

Paul presents a further dimension, which is often overlooked, when he writes that the Lord Jesus is Head over all things to, or for the benefit of, His church.¹⁶ Thus, in exercising His universal authority, the Lord Jesus does so with the interests of His people in mind.

This principle is at work in history. Human history is ultimately His, that is God's, story. The rise and fall of empires, and the developments of science and technology, alike take place under the sovereign authority of God, and the reign of His exalted Son. All these mighty movements are directed by heaven for the blessing of the church.

It was no accident that the invention and development of printing took place soon after the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453. That event led to the flight of many scholars to Western Europe, bringing with them their knowledge of ancient Greek, and many valuable manuscripts. This helped to spark off the Renaissance: the re-discovery of the classical civilization of Greece and Rome, and of the Greek New Testament. These events lie in the background to the Reformation, when God brought to light the long-forgotten truth of the biblical gospel and placed into the hands of the peoples of Northern Europe the scriptures translated directly from the original languages into their own. When MARTIN LUTHER nailed his Ninety-five Theses to the door of Wittenberg Cathedral in 1517, his protest rapidly spread with the new technology of printing. Later, his German Bible, completed in 1534, became easily accessible through that same technology. Likewise, WILLIAM TYNDALE was able, at the greatest personal cost culminating in his burning in 1534, to place the New Testament in English in the hands of the people with his translation of 1526. Every English speaking Christian owes an incalculable debt to TYNDALE. His God given desire that the boy who followed the plough

would come to know more of God's word than the Roman Catholic clergy of his day was amply fulfilled in succeeding generations.

In later centuries the world-wide colonial rule of Western powers, whatever criticisms can be made of some of its effects, permitted, in many cases, the spread of the gospel, and the translation and dissemination of the scriptures. In our own day, the dramatic developments in Eastern Europe in the latter decades of the 20th century, with the collapse of Marxist dictatorships, presented unparalleled opportunities for the gospel. Even Albania, where the regime claimed to have banished God completely, has opened to the Christian message. In Romania, Christians have used their new liberties, with the manifest blessing of God in the expansion and growth of the churches.

These are only a few illustrations of the great truth that Christ is Head over all things for the church. In days of growing difficulty and weakness in the churches of the West we need to grasp the sovereignty of God in working out His purpose for the church, until her completion at our Lord's return. Until then, may we trust Him to fulfil that purpose, and grasp the privilege of playing our part in carrying it out in our day of challenge and opportunity.

Endnotes

- 1 Eph. 1. 23; Col. 1. 18.
- 2 Acts 15. 4.
- 3 Eph. 3. 11.
- 4 Eph. 3. 6.
- 5 Eph. 2. 16.
- 6 Eph. 3. 3-5, 9.
- 7 Eph. 4. 7-16.
- 8 1 Cor. 12. 11.
- 9 Acts 11. 19-26.
- 10 Acts 13. 1-3.
- 11 Acts 16. 6-10.
- 12 Acts 18. 9-10, 12-17.
- 13 1 Cor. 16. 9.
- 14 Rev. 3. 7.
- 15 Eph. 1. 21.
- 16 Eph. 1. 22.

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Although believers are often referred to as disciples in the four gospels and the book of Acts, it is never mentioned by Paul in his letters. However, we wish rather to consider many lessons that we as believers can emulate as we consider the thought of discipleship.

We will consider it from five passages:

- The priority of a disciple, Matt. 8. 19-22;
- The purpose of a disciple, Acts 11. 26;
- The pathway of a disciple, Mark 8. 34;
- The proof that we are disciples, John 13. 35;
- The prospect of a disciple, Mark 10. 28-31.

The old adage is certainly true: a disciple is one who learns to follow and follows to learn. He is simply a pupil following the master's example. We get our word discipline from the same root which tells us a great deal about what is expected of a disciple.

The priority of a disciple

Matthew chapter 8 highlights the fact that there are many would-be disciples but they are not all prepared to pay the cost, and discipleship does not come cheap. The first man in the story confidently says to the Lord, nothing will stop me from following you, but the Lord reminds him that it is not an easy path to tread. There will be times when you are so tired that you could just lie down and sleep but there will be no place to rest your weary body. The Lord was not trying to put the man off but was simply pointing out the truth so that he could not say at some later date, 'I never knew it would be like this'. The second man said, 'I will follow you Lord only let me first bury my father'. The Master's answer seems curt; 'let the dead bury their dead'. He was not being heartless or unfeeling, for the Lord could never be that, but points out that He must be given priority, and have first place in a disciple's life. If that is so, how could this man say; 'Suffer me first' to the Lord, for such is a contradiction of terms. Paul states: 'For to me to live is Christ', Phil. 1.21, and so it ought to be

The BELIEVER as a DISCIPLE

By **IAN AFFLECK** Lossiemouth, Scotland

for every believer. But the question is, 'Can we say the same?' Some believers live for business, while others live for self, but let us be like Paul and give our Master the place He deserves.

The purpose of a disciple

In our reading it is lovely to see that the disciples were first called Christians at Antioch, and what a beautiful term this is: Christ-like ones. Commentators suggest that they were divinely called by this title, but, nevertheless, unbelievers used the term, albeit in a derogatory fashion. Surely this is the whole purpose for following the Master – so that we might become like Him! One day we shall be, for we shall see Him as He is!

This principle is readily seen in the world today. Think of great footballers, and many young hopefuls who try to emulate them. These youngsters will devour video after video of 'the maestro' in action to learn what and how they do great moves with a football. Then, they go out and try to put into practice what they have learned, and are delighted when others compare them to their idol. As believers in the Lord Jesus our aim should be to become more like Him each day. Paul puts it succinctly when he says, 'Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ', 1 Cor. 11. 1. So we should model our life on the Lord Jesus. We do this not to obtain salvation but because we have salvation, and can therefore become like Him. We also have His Spirit dwelling in our hearts to help us achieve our goal. Therefore, let us read about Him in His word, and see how He acted and reacted in the differing

circumstances of life, and in His submission to the will of God. Then let us put into action what we learn, so that others might see us like our Master and call us Christians. It is a high standard, but one that should constantly occupy us until He returns to take us home.

The pathway of the disciple

Following the Lord was never going to be easy. Indeed, two things clearly mark this pathway:

- Self denial
- Reproach

To deny self is to forego our rights, and things that may be legitimate but will not help us to be like the Master. You can be assured that the Lord is not asking us to do something He has not done Himself. He said, 'I came not to be served but to serve', Matt. 20. 28 NIKJV. What self denial is this! Many times He was weary, but He never thought of giving up. He was fulfilling the Father's will for Him.



Once again, we can see this illustrated in the world today. Think of the athlete who trains for the marathon, to win a gold medal at the Olympic Games. When others are still in bed they are training, and exercising, often till their muscles ache and cry stop, but they carry on regardless. When others go out at night to enjoy themselves, they forego such, so that they might be in top condition, ready to run the race of their lives. They do not want anything to stand in their way, or stop them

rather it shows how John could never get over the fact that Jesus loved someone like him.

Secondly, His love is unchanging; they could always depend upon it, for circumstances would never change His love. John stresses this in his Gospel where he says that Jesus 'having loved his own . . . he loved them unto the end', 13. 1, and this is how He expects us to love.

The prospect of discipleship

Some, like Peter, might ask, 'Is being a disciple worth all the hardship?'

Before we consider the Lord's reply let us think of the athlete again who has trained so hard. No doubt he often wondered, 'Was it all worth it?', especially when he rose up early while others slept, and pounded the streets till his muscles ached and screamed for mercy. He denied himself certain food, even though it was delicious, for he also knew it would not help him achieve his goal. Then, one day as he stands on the centre rostrum of some great stadium, having received the gold medal, he watches through tear-stained eyes as the flag of his country is raised aloft, and the strains of his national anthem ring in his ears. He knows it was worth all the pain and suffering!

The Master says if we give up anything for Him then we will receive one hundred times more in this life, and that will continue into the new life to come. Let us remember we do not strive for 'some poor withering wreath of earth, man's prize in mortal strife', H. BONAR. But we look to enjoy the commendation of God now, and eternal blessings in the life to come. So, let us follow our Master wherever He leads, for it will be worth it all when we hear Him say, 'Well done'.

rather, may such reproach spur us on, for 'this is the way the Master went, should not the servant tread it still?'. H. BONAR

The proof that we are disciples

The Lord makes clear that the badge of our discipleship is our love for our brothers and sisters. Let us think of the analogy of football again, for everyone knows that any fan can be recognized by the colour of his scarf, casual shirt, hat, or even face paint. These things, and the songs they sing, all show where the affections lie. Our Master says it should be similar with those who take the stand of being His disciples. However, it is not particularly by our dress but by our love one for another. He is the example of how we ought to love, for, He says, 'Even as I have loved you'. Two outstanding features characterize His love:

- It was impartial
- It was constant

He did not favour one disciple over another but He loved each with the same love. John speaks of himself in his Gospel as, 'the disciple whom Jesus loved', but that has nothing to do with his being favoured by the Lord over his fellow disciples but

claiming the prize. Surely it is the same for the disciple.

But it is also a pathway of reproach for we are to take up our cross and follow Him. Why did the Lord Jesus allow the very people He created to treat Him in such a despicable way? It was because He was here to do what His Father's will required. So it will be with you and me. Others will mock us, and think we are simple people who believe that there is a God and that the Bible is true. Then, when we tell them that God sent His Son to die for sinners, they think we are mad. Don't let them put us off, but,

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The third song, in Isaiah chapter 50, opens with, 'Thus saith Jehovah', and divides easily into sections by Jehovah the Father, vv. 1-3, Jehovah the Son, vv. 4-9, and Jehovah the Spirit, vv. 10-11. As in many other Biblical passages, the thought-rhyming pattern used is concentric symmetry,¹ where the theme is found in the centre of the poem, and is surrounded by statements that parallel each other before and after it in order. The theme of this song is the triumphant statement by the Son, 'The Lord God will help me'.

The Servant is seen as the provider of salvation to His people who reject Him. Much is revealed about the 'hidden years' of the Lord Jesus in this song. God manifests Himself as the Creator who came and found no one ready to receive Him, Israel's Instructor or Teacher. Considered untaught by the world's standards – having no formal schooling – yet He was able to teach the most learned scholars when only twelve years of age, Luke 2. 42-47. Later, in wondering amazement some asked, 'How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?' John 7. 15.

They did not know the secret of His personal tutoring and preparation, but it is disclosed right here in this song. Each morning of His formative years He was awakened to be instructed by His Father, v. 4. How would His purpose on earth be played out – what would it all involve? He shares a few details with us:

The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned (*limood*), Isa. 50. 4: one taught or trained by discipline.

that I should know (*yahdah*, with infinitive): to know absolutely and certainly; to be wise. The word includes the idea of knowing by seeing, hearing, and experience. He learned the facts and had wisdom to express them. This is indicated by the next word.

how (*ake*): how, where, or what
to speak a word in season (*ayth*): a fit time

to him that is weary (*yawef*): exhausted, fatigued; wearied out

The Servant Songs

By **ADAM THROPAY** Downey, California, USA

THE SUBMISSIVE SERVANT

from running, severe labour, or thirst, cp. Matt. 11. 28. Perfectly appropriate words always came from the perfect Servant at the perfect time.

'The Lord God hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious (*marah* – bitter), neither turned away back (*suwg*)', v. 5. This revelation of coming extreme torture did not cause Him to be bitter, or deterred from His course. Rather than recoil or shy away from what He must experience, He would deliberately *give* His back for scourging and place His face where it could easily be abused. 'I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting', v. 6. The soldiers contemptuously thought that He did not know what He was doing, when, blindfolded, He continued to place His face where they could easily strike Him.²

As the Servant anticipated the horrible treatment that He would receive, His confidence was stated in the theme words, 'The Lord God will help me'. The word help (*azar*) means 'to protect and help (by surrounding)', and brings to mind the Psalmist's promise, 'The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them', Ps. 34. 7. But wait – wasn't God going to forsake His Servant on the cross? How then could He confidently assert, 'The Lord God will help me', in the context of the crucifixion? This did not look like deliverance!

The same question was scornfully alluded to by those surrounding the cross. Matthew chapter 27 verse 43, 'He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God'. Psalm 22 verses 7 and 8, 'All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord that he

would deliver him: Let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him'. The enemies were convinced that His trusting in God was a vain hope. There He was, nailed to a cross to die in unspeakable torture. But their arrogant contempt did not have the desired effect upon God's Servant. His confidence in His God was unchanged, regardless of outward appearances, and circumstances. Knowing God's promises about Himself, He was steadfast in faith, evidenced by His words in verses 7 to 9:

I shall not be confounded (*kalawm*): This word means: (1) to be inwardly wounded or overcome by taunts or insults; to be inwardly ashamed; (2) confusion, and consciousness of disgrace, which follows disappointment of one's opinion, hope, or expectation. All the taunts and insults neither affected Him emotionally nor caused Him to be confused in any way. Quite the opposite! His calm words to the repentant thief revealed that He knew the actuality in this situation that others could not see. Thanks to His selfless sacrifice, the thief would be with Him in paradise, in a matter of minutes or hours. What a triumph!

Therefore have I set my face as a flint (*kacallamish*): a very hard rock. In holy endurance, and uncrushable, like a hard rock, He turned His face towards His antagonists without pulling back or flinching. **And I know (knowledge gained from experience) that I shall not be ashamed:** (*hoosh*) disappointed or ashamed. God had never let Him down before, nor would He now. This was His expectation.

He is near (*karob*): near in place, and/or near in kindred – namely, His Father.

that justifieth (*tsadak*): to make morally or legally right, to vindicate. **me; who will contend (*roob*):** to strive, quarrel, hold a controversy.



of Isaiah^[2]

with me? Despite all appearances to the contrary, the Servant maintains that *He will be vindicated*, and that the One who will vindicate Him is very near. Any who contend with Him will be proven wrong!

Challenging any adversary to stand with Him in God's court, the Servant expresses His confidence that God will judge in His favour and against His enemies. They will all waste away like an old, moth-eaten garment.

Who is he that shall condemn me? The condemnation of men did not matter to the Servant. He was interested only in God's assessment. It is interesting that the apostle Paul quoted these words in Romans chapter 8, verses 33 and 34, with regard to all believers. 'Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us'. God intends that we should have this same confidence in Him that His Servant had. Any barrier to that confidence has been done away by the blood of Christ, and the justice of God. In Christ we, too, are vindicated. We can rejoice that we are made free from the condemnation we deserved.

The Holy Spirit of God now addresses two classes of people in verses 10 and 11.

In verse 10, it is those who fear the Lord – reverencing, respecting, and recognizing His greatness and their own weakness – and who obey His Servant's voice. True obedience flows freely from the heart of one who is awed in the presence of God, 'and by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil', Prov. 16. 6.

This one who fears God may be 'walking in darkness' *chashekhah* – metaphorically applied to all types of sorrow and adversity. He may be in a time of testing, when

circumstances are like a heavy burden, with neither an apparent reason for the trial, nor an obvious solution to it. He feels totally *helpless*, without rest, and without even a ray of light. The situation seems *hopeless*. Notice that this is the very position of the Servant! We are exhorted to do what He did.

Let him trust (*batak*): to hurry for refuge; to put hope and confidence in. The hopeless one without light gets hope.

in the name of the Lord: The name stands for the Person. It represents the sum of all the characteristic qualities attached to the bearer of the name. To trust in the name of the Lord is to trust him completely, bearing in mind those things which make Him trustworthy.

and stay (lean, rest, rely) upon his God: The helpless one finds rest!

By contrast, in verse 11 the Holy Spirit warns those whose confidence is in themselves. Instead of trusting in God, they draw their own conclusions, and try to solve their own problems. How? By attack! They kindle a fire of wickedness, as described in James chapter 3 verses 5-6 regarding the tongue being 'set on fire of hell', and surround themselves with sparks (burning arrows) – a term used figuratively of blasphemies and falsehoods against the Servant or His followers. These are not occasional attacks, but the mood used in these verbs indicates intenseness and repetition. They constantly rekindle the flame to injure the attacked ones.

Suddenly, God reverses their position back upon themselves. The fire they have ignited for others will reflect upon them, and the burning arrows will turn around to pierce and burn them. 'Ye shall lie down in sorrow'. Instead of the rest they seek, they experience anguish and misery. The fire of evil which they have kindled becomes the fire of divine punishment, and their bed of torment.

This Song of the Submissive Servant is the only one of the four songs that ends with a solemn warning, addressed to those who actively oppose the Servant and His followers.

Endnotes

- 1 Concentric symmetry is a form of reverse symmetry. For the various types of Hebrew symmetry, see WALSH, JEROME T. PH.D., *Style and Structure in Biblical Hebrew Narrative*, Liturgical Press, 2001, pp. 13-31. Several forms of parallelism used in the Greek New Testament, including the chiasmus, are credited to Hebrew. See MOULTON, JAMES HOPE, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek, Vol. IV*, T. T. Clarke, pp. 96-97; also RADDAY, JEHUDA T., *Chiasmus in Hebrew Biblical Narrative*, Welch, pp. 61-62. Some scholars may take the view that this passage is inverse parallelism, i.e., the first section is repeated again later with a central section that is different.
- 2 Matt. 26. 68; Luke 22. 64.

Dr. ADAM THROPAY resides in the city of Downey, California, where an assembly meets in his chiropractic and nutrition office. He and his wife Heather have three grown children and two grandchildren.

Galilee BIBLE CAMP

Its Beginnings and Present Ministry

By **GEORGE FERRIER** Kanata, Ontario, Canada

Galilee Bible Camp commenced in 1956 when a few local brethren had a vision to place a Bible camp near Ottawa, Canada's capital. Witnessing elsewhere how camps had been used to preach the gospel, they were keen to do the same in the Ottawa valley.

After searching various properties they purchased a heavily wooded pasture land, possessing its own lake, a one hour drive from Ottawa. Since then the Lord has used the camp to lead large numbers to Christ, teach and encourage believers, and challenge many to discipleship and service. The camp site, though only moments from a very busy highway, is a private, secluded haven, which allows those attending the camps an opportunity for respite from their day to day busy lives.

The current dirt-packed, gravel driveway was not the original way into camp but was built through swampland a few years after the camp's inauguration. This proved very challenging, requiring ingenuity, heavy equipment, and truckloads of material to build and fortify the winding trail. Many other challenges required innovative solutions, hard work and dedication, and the Lord used many volunteers in tree clearing, construction, and teaching. Jim Booker, Fred Shaver Sr., and Alex Kilgour, together with Colin Anderson, Howard Foster, and many others, were instrumental in setting up and directing the camp in the early years. Initially, campers lived in 'tabins'. Comprised of tents with wooden floors, they accommodated six campers and one counsellor. However, by the third year more permanent cabins were constructed and use of the 'tabins' was eventually discontinued.

Naturally, the early days were quite rustic, utilizing outhouses for toilets, the lake for washing and cooking water, employing a large circus tent for chapel, dining, and rainy day

activities. Over the ensuing decades Galilee purchased more property, building an eight-room motel and a lodge that, together with the cabins, increased capacity to 120 campers. Further enhancements included a gym, kitchen, and dining hall, gazebo, tuck shop, and lodge addition for chapel meetings.

Galilee opened in 1956 with a boys and girls camp totalling fifty-five campers. In the second year, the camps were split into junior and senior groups; the four sessions increased the numbers to 130. Adding a youth camp, they hosted 240 campers in their fourth summer. Since then, the camp has grown to its ministry today. From June to September Galilee conducts its summer camps, the other months renting its facilities to local churches for weekend retreats. In addition to children's and youth camps, the summer programme now comprises leadership, senior, and family camps, along with children's day camps.

Leadership camp promotes spiritual growth in committed Christian young people, encouraging life-long service to Christ and active involvement in their local assembly. Applications require a written testimony and three written references. The first week consists of memorization and six sessions of concentrated Bible teaching each day, while on the second week the students embark on a canoe trip to Algonquin Park in the beautiful Canadian wilderness. Enjoying fellowship and challenged by God's word they return with lasting memories and friendships.



Day camp, the only summer programme that does not afford overnight accommodation, provides daily bus service, gospel messages, and activities for the children. A normal year brings close to 200 children to each of the two one-week sessions and, over the years, many have professed faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. In order to ensure that no child is denied a chance to hear the gospel, Galilee provides financial assistance for children who need support through the Camper Sponsorship Programme.

Occasionally neighbours have spotted black bears in the vicinity. While normally shy and harmless, the camp exercises caution, nightly collecting the outdoor garbage to discourage these unwelcome visitors.

Each year Galilee trusts the Lord to provide the needed volunteers. He never fails. Some serve in kitchen, housekeeping, or maintenance, others in counselling, directing, or teaching. The camp desires that the volunteer's motivation and attitude be reflected in their motto, Colossians 3. 17, visibly emblazoned on t-shirts worn in the camp. Many young people have forfeited paid summer work, selflessly serving the Lord while learning teamwork and other life skills.

The Camp is a charitable organization, and assemblies are encouraged to become involved by participating on the board of directors that oversee the camp's direction. Many assemblies also provide volunteers to supervise weekend winter retreats and help in construction and renovation projects.

Only eternity will reveal Galilee Bible Camp's full impact but it is the board's prayer that it will continue to be a source for the proclamation of the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ until He returns, inviting all to Galilee, to see Him, to learn of Him, to serve Him, Matt. 28. 10.

For further information visit:
<http://www.galileebiblecamp.on.ca/>
Email: CampGalilee2013@gmail.com





Views from the News

COMPILED BY SANDY JACK

Top English judge to step down over lack of 'support' on marriage

A senior High Court judge is set to retire early, partly because of the lack of support from some of his colleagues for his pro-marriage beliefs. Sir Paul Coleridge says there are 'hundreds' in the judiciary who agree with him in private, but are too frightened to say so publicly. The judge set up the Marriage Foundation in 2012 to combat the culture of broken families. He was attacked for his involvement, with critics saying a sitting judge should not be so overtly 'political', but the Office for Judicial Complaints (OJC) dismissed complaints against him and allowed him to continue in his role with the Foundation.

Now, in an interview for the Roman Catholic paper *The Tablet*, he says he will take early retirement so that he will have more freedom to speak his mind. He said he 'could have struggled on' if he had got 'more solid support'. He added, 'But after April, I will be freer to be outspoken'. Sir Paul announced in October that he will retire from the bench next year in order to focus on his work with the Marriage Foundation. Last December he said the Government was pushing the 'wrong policy' with gay marriage, and should be concentrating on combating family breakdown. He said same-sex marriage was a 'minority issue' and that 'so much energy and time has been put into this debate for 0.1 per cent of the population, when we have a crisis of family breakdown'. Last year, Sir Paul was told to keep a 'lower profile' by the Office for Judicial Complaints (OJC) over his role as chairman and founder of the Marriage Foundation.

The OJC did not consider his involvement with the charity to be 'incompatible with his judicial responsibilities' but said a lower profile role within the organization would be 'more appropriate for a serving judicial office holder'. The investigation followed a complaint which media reports suggested related to comments the judge made at the launch of the charity.

<http://www.christian.org.uk/news/top-judge-to-step-down-over-lack-of-support-on-marriage/>



Christians have a right not to work on Sunday, court decides

The Court of Appeal in London has legally recognized the right of Christians to observe Sunday as a day of rest. The court was ruling on the case of Celestina Mba, a 38-year-old care worker from Merton, south west London, who was forced to leave her job when she refused to work on Sunday for religious reasons. An employment tribunal had previously argued that because not all Christians observe Sunday as a day of rest, it could not be considered a 'core component' of the Christian faith. However, the Court of Appeal rejected this notion, arguing that Sunday observance is an important part of the worship and practices of many millions of Christians, and cannot therefore be simply dismissed.

Employers have a responsibility to be conscientious and to work to find a balance between their business needs and an employee's religious obligations, the court judged. Had this judgement gone differently, Christians who objected to working on Sundays in the future could have found themselves without a legal defence. Andrea Minichiello Williams, barrister and director of the Christian Legal Centre, said, 'At last the courts are beginning to demonstrate greater understanding of what it means to be a Christian. Christian identity extends beyond private belief into daily life. We pray that the tide is turning. Many Christians will now be able to argue that their employer must respect their rights of Sabbath worship'.

<http://www.mychristiandaily.com/index.php/uk/177-news-item-2-uk-europe/8695-christians-have-a-right-not-to-work-on-sunday-court-decides>



Labour: We must 'do God' to fight anti-Christian persecution

Douglas Alexander, a senior frontbencher, suggested that public figures have allowed 'political correctness' to prevent them talking about faith and the persecution of Christians in the Middle East. In a thinly-veiled attack on the Tony Blair era, when Alastair Campbell, the then communications director in Downing Street, said, 'We don't do God', Mr Alexander warned that people should have the courage to speak up for Christians without fear of causing offence. Mr Alexander, the shadow foreign secretary, spoke out to voice his concerns about growing harassment and attacks suffered by Christians in the Middle East.

'Across the world, there will be Christians this week for whom attending a church service this Christmas is not an act of faithful witness, but an act of life-risking bravery. That cannot be right and we need the courage to say so', Mr Alexander says.

'In the UK today, perhaps through a misplaced sense of political correctness, or some sense of embarrassment at 'doing God' in an age when secularism is more common, too many politicians seem to fear discussing any matters related to faith'. He adds: 'People of all faiths and none should be horrified by this persecution. We cannot, and we must not, stand by on the other side in silence for fear of offence'. Mr Alexander says persecution of Christians should be treated in the same way as anti-Semitism or Islamophobia.

His intervention comes after the Prince of Wales said he had become 'deeply troubled' by the plight of Christians in the Middle East.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/labour/10532775/Labour-We-must-do-God-to-fight-anti-Christian-persecution.html>



Bits & Bobs

According to scripture, God 'created the heaven and the earth' on Day One of Creation Week.

Initially all was dark, until God said, 'Let there be light', Gen. 1. 3. Days Two and Three saw the oceans, firmament (or atmosphere), continents, and plants formed, as the earth was being progressively prepared for man's habitation.

It was on Day Four that God created the sun, moon, and stars, proclaiming, 'Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven', v. 14, one purpose of which was 'to give light upon the earth', v. 15.

This light was directional, coming from a particular source. The earth was evidently rotating underneath it, causing alternating periods of light and dark. 'And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night', v. 5.

Sceptics have long ridiculed the science of biblical creation over this point. How could there be light bathing the earth before the sun was created? Obviously the Bible must be in error. But as always, this apparent error drives us to look more closely at the relevant data, both scientific and biblical.

Actually there are many sources of light, not just the sun. There are also many types of light, not just visible light. Short-wave light includes ultraviolet light, X-rays, and others. Long-wave light includes infrared light, radio waves, etc. Light is produced by friction, by fire, by numerous chemical reactions, as well as the nuclear reactions of atomic fission and fusion, which is what we think is occurring in the sun. God had at His fingertips many options to accomplish His purposes. Light does not automatically require the sun.

Furthermore, we have important data given by the Hebrew words used in the creation account. When God created 'light', v. 3, the word used connotes the presence of light only, while the word used for 'lights' on Day Four is best translated 'light bearers,' or permanent light sources. Their purpose was not only to give light, but to serve as timekeepers for man once he was created. According to the best stellar creation theory now available, light from stars created anywhere in the universe on Day Four would reach earth in two earth days, and would be useful to Adam on Day Six.

Keep in mind that the Creation Week was a uniquely miraculous time, we are justified in speculating that miraculous events may have been taking place outside of today's natural laws. Especially when we realize that 'God is light', 1 John 1. 5, Himself, thus no outside natural source is necessarily mandated.

For semi-creationists who claim that the 'days' of Genesis chapter 1 must have been long periods of time, a more serious problem arises. Genesis plainly teaches that plants appeared on Day Three, and the sun on Day Four. But plants need sunlight for photosynthesis and cannot wait in darkness for millions of years. If the days were long epochs, as demanded by critics of a literal Creation Week, plants could not survive.

How much better and more satisfying it is to accept scripture as it stands. It doesn't need to be fully understood and explained by modern scientific thought; it just needs to be believed and obeyed.

<http://www.icr.org/article/3620/233>



REPORTS REPORTS REPORTS

GOSPEL WORK AND OTHER ACTIVITIES Compiled by SANDY JACK



ENGLAND

Devon

Clive and Christine Williams from Barnstaple, along with Trevor Howard, took the opportunity to take the gospel to those attending the **Barnstaple and Bridgewater Fairs**. Whilst Trevor took up position at the approach to the Fair, along with Christine, Clive visited the whole Fair with tracts and calendars for most of the first two evenings. Once again, the showmen were pleased to see him and receive the calendars. At one meeting at the dodgems, they had twenty-eight children, plus a couple of mums listening. A good number of conversations were held with groups of young people, many of whom were asking some very deep and searching questions.

One lady listened as Clive preached on, 'Are you good enough for heaven?', and angrily said, 'I defy anyone to tell me that I am not good enough for heaven', stated a very arrogant way. Thankfully, she calmed down as Clive explained that nobody is good enough.

Nicky, a spiritualist, who at first gave Clive a hard time with her New Age ideas, calmed down later and even confessed that her mum is a Christian.

Three young men showed good interest in the message and were pleased to chat with Trevor and take literature regarding creation.

They also conducted open-air

Barnstaple Fair Proclamation Ceremony



in Exeter and in Barnstaple town centres, which were encouraging.

Alex was a poor man and homeless but he stood up for the preaching, assuring them that he knew the Lord as his Saviour. They gave him details of a church near to the bridge where he lives.

One day there was a party of Dutch people in town enjoying a holiday. Clive had a lovely time speaking with two men from this party. Their English was very good. They took a Gospel of John and a 'Sure of Heaven' CD.

John listened to the preaching and Trevor had a good conversation with him. He thought all religions lead to God. Trevor put him right, and John said at the end of the conversation, 'I can see you truly have something I don't', and he took a Gospel of John.

There was similar encouragement at Bridgwater. About thirty children came to the Friday afternoon Fairground Children's meeting, with a nice number of adults listening as well. Once again, the showmen provided a small tent.

Wednesday was spent in the Fairground Market: many good conversations with religious folk and also Gypsies.

On the Thursday in Wells, at the open air, some very religious folk were offended; one in particular was a lady who said she had a degree in theology, helped in the church and is a church member. She said the preachers were a hindrance to religion! Sadly, the Bishop and his wife disdainfully refused a tract! Trevor had a very long conversation with a young man called Manu who had listened well to the preaching. Clive had an interesting conversation with a Jehovah's Witness; she even got her Bible out, but had no answer to Clive's reasoning on John chapter 5!

Yorkshire

The eighteenth residential Yorkshire

Bible Study Week was held at Sneaton Castle Centre, Whitby, with eighty-five people from all parts of the U.K. in attendance, plus a family of five from Australia. Ian Jackson led Bible Readings on 1 John chapters 3 and 4, and gave ministry on 'The Ascended Christ'. The sound teaching and warm fellowship was much appreciated.

Nottinghamshire

The assembly at **Kirkby-in-Ashfield** held its second Evangelism Day for 2013 on Saturday, 5th October. A number of young people from across the East Midlands gathered for a time of prayer before going out with the gospel. Help was also provided by Michael Buckeridge of Grantham.

In the morning they concentrated on an area of the neighbouring town of Sutton-in-Ashfield, covering over 1500 homes. In the afternoon the believers reached out to areas of Kirkby that had not been leafleted before and gave out God's word to about 1250 homes. A number of contacts were made, including a Muslim couple who were out leafleting themselves for the opening of their new fast-food shop.

The assembly continues to be encouraged by the support of the many young people who come to help and by the response they are seeing to the tracts given out. Although people do not often come regularly, the number of opportunities to tell others of the Saviour seems to be increasing. Please pray for Ron, James, and Bernard that through the power of the Spirit of God the gospel might touch their hearts.

The assembly has commenced a work in the town centres of Sutton and Kirkby on a Tuesday evening. This has provided a number of opportunities to share the gospel. Please pray for Beryl who invited them into her home to find out more about the message.

On the first Friday night in December, the assembly was able to use the annual switch-on of the town's Christmas lights as an opportunity



for outreach. With parts of the centre closed to traffic and a considerable crowd present, over 400 tracts and invitations were given out and a number of contacts made or renewed. The work was followed by a time of prayer that there might be blessing upon the seed sown. Prayer is requested for two young men, Nick and 'Helmet'.



Lanarkshire

In **Hamilton**, High Parks and Low Waters assemblies have enjoyed the privilege of another season of open-air testimony in the town square on two Sundays per month, with the permission of the town council. The weather was excellent for open-air work during the summer and many of the townsfolk heard the gospel. Prayer would be valued that, God willing, this door will remain open for the preaching of the gospel.



Hamilton Town Square

The believers at High Parks assembly also commenced a new work in one of the local care homes in the town and they now visit once a month, on a Sunday afternoon, and have a short time of hymn-singing and a brief gospel message. There are usually about twelve residents who attend, along with some of the staff and visitors.

In mid-September 2013, Gordon McCracken completed his second visit of six days during the year, visiting twelve primary schools in the area around the **Overtown Gospel Hall**. Gordon has been doing this for a number of years and is well received by the teachers and pupils. He spoke at eleven school assemblies and to Primary 6 and 7 classes in eight schools. Over 2200 children and 105 adults heard the message at

each visit. Please pray that the seed sown will bear fruit and those school doors will remain open to the gospel.



The weekly Bible club has recommenced in **Riverchapel**, County Wexford, and the saints have been delighted to see the return of most of the kids who came along regularly in the Spring term, as well as one or two new starters. Each Tuesday afternoon around twenty children are attending and it is exciting to see the progress in their basic Bible knowledge.

As part of their outreach efforts during the summer, some of the saints visited many homes in Gorey to distribute a free gospel magazine, and many people answered questionnaires on spiritual beliefs, through which the gospel was explained. Matthew, and Anthony (who trusted the Lord a year ago), have now started visiting those areas of the town that were not covered in the summer, and it is amazing to hear Anthony testify to folk of the change the Lord has made in his life. Please pray for good conversations with these people and ultimately for their salvation.

In September they returned to the National Ploughing Championships, this time in County Laois. Matthew's brother Andrew had his 'Good News 4 U' trailer as one of the exhibition stands for the second year, and the Lord truly blessed the three days. Along with many other believers from across Ireland and the UK, they were able to distribute 19,000 John 3. 16 shopping bags, as well as thousands of other materials all containing God's word and they have already been encouraged by a number of

National Ploughing Championships



people who have made contact to request Bibles, literature, and CDs.



Botswana

In December, the assembly at **Serowe** had the joy of baptizing a couple who have since expressed the desire to come into fellowship – an encouragement to the saints. The previous week they conducted the funeral of a brother who was, with his wife, in assembly fellowship. As normally happens in Botswana, each evening there was a meeting in their yard. Many gathered and, as the word was preached, they were greatly challenged about their spiritual condition. The funeral itself was very big and again many heard the gospel preached. Please pray for blessing upon those who heard.

Mavis, one of the sisters, lives in Shoshong Village. This is the village in which F. S. Arnot lived when he passed through Botswana. She was one of the first to be saved in the early days of Jim and Irene Legge's work in Serowe. Since then, she has gone on faithfully for the Lord. She conducts a small Sunday school in Shoshong and in another settlement called Ikongwe. What a strong foundation she is laying in the lives of the children whom she instructs! Some of them have trusted the Lord. Some younger brethren, along with Mavis, have recently pitched a tent and are having gospel meetings. Please pray that the Lord will encourage them and that many will trust the Saviour.

Fiji

The assembly in Suva is actively involved in distributing gospel tracts. The tracts are given out in hospitals, health centres, educational institutions, cultural festivals, homes, and to tourists on cruise ships. The assembly has a community mailbox drop schedule and has sent tracts to assemblies which have been planted in other Pacific Island countries including Nauru, Tuvalu, and the Solomon Islands.

Cyprus

Colin Clarke (Chairman of Logos Trust) writes: 'We have recently been able



to help needy families from Syria and Egypt who deeply appreciate being able to put their children into a high-quality, English-speaking school. The Lord continues to provide for the payment of salaries and expenses. Due to the financial crisis in Cyprus, more parents than usual are asking for a discount on their fees. The vast majority of these are genuine cases, but we need much wisdom in this matter, and value prayer'.

'We praise the Lord for the continued commitment of the Logos staff in providing after-school activities for the pupils. These occasions not only allow relationships to be built between staff and pupils, but also provide an opportunity for the study of the scriptures together in discussion groups, or the presenting of a short gospel message. This year a special effort is being made to keep in touch with boys who had reached Year 10 level, and who have now left the school. Do pray that in all these groups the Lord will open hearts and minds to the truth of the gospel and that many of these young people will be saved'.

Romania

From Romania, Jonathan Kelso writes: 'Floarea is still "holding her own" despite the fact that she is terminally ill with cancer. I gave her stronger pain killers recently and she was able to make it down the hill to remember the Lord on Sunday morning. After the meeting, I inquired how she was; she smiled and said, "I am without any pain". It got me thinking of a day, maybe not too far distant, when Floarea's pain will be gone forever and she will never shed another tear. Continue to pray for Floarea.

After a shaky start, Alina, Floarea's daughter has settled well into the Christian High School in Sibiu. Ruth and I spoke to her class teacher and made him aware of her difficult circumstances at home. The staff were now aware that Alina needed some extra encouragement, which is helping. Sile, his wife, and some of his family moved to Orlat from one of the cities one year ago. He had been involved in commerce, but is now retired and has moved to Transylvania for a healthier lifestyle. A few months ago, his wife, who is a professing Christian, went to Spain for work. Sile, who up until now has not believed in the existence of

God, began to read a Bible which his wife had left behind and became very interested in spiritual things. He has been attending meetings and during a conversation with him recently, he related to me that he has taken his first step towards a relationship with God. Concentrated prayer for this sincerely interested man would be greatly appreciated.

Petru, the local Orthodox priest is on the 'war path' at the moment. Neighbours of ours, Voicu and Ana, who are commended missionaries from an evangelical church in America, teach extra English in the two local schools. Petru has been trying to discredit this Christian couple by telling his congregation that no one should allow their children to be taught by them. He applied pressure on the headmistress not to allow Voicu and Ana to teach in the school. She called both of them to her office and told them she wanted them to stay and teach regardless of what the priest was saying – she then quietly said, "I like repenters". This lady is a believer, although secretly because of her husband's strong attachment to Orthodoxy. Prayer would be appreciated for the headmistress that she might have the necessary courage to take a stand against the local priest and his influences. A few days ago Ruth brought some educational toys to the junior classes of the school in Gura Raului. As she walked in with her arms laden, Petru, who happened to be at the school, stared as Ruth walked past. Subsequently, he protested that the school should not receive toys from the 'repenters'. A school inspector happened to be there that day and welcomed the toys, saying they would be an asset to the school and that the school should be grateful for the very useful gift'.

Cameroon

Adrian and Bonny Grieve write: 'A very small group of believers, who gather at brother Gabriel's home each Lord's Day, recently sought our help. Most of them are Christians from traditional church backgrounds, looking for teaching and seeking the Lord's guidance for their future gathering. Tentatively, we organized a weekend Bible workshop for the little group and for some of their Christian friends, teaching the very basics of scripture, and a simple interrogatory form of Bible study, much as we have

done in Dompla. The teaching was well received and seven came for the whole weekend (others for parts of it) and so we hope to make this a monthly exercise. We would value your prayers: for us, as we seek to encourage this little group to grow in faith, knowledge and love; for the group, that it would grow and become established as a much-needed witness in this dark town; and for the monthly workshop – that it will equip local men to use the scriptures and that the scriptures would bring forth much fruit in their lives. The outreach to the Tupuri people in Akana continues to astound. They want us to come and help them baptize some in the next village who have believed. May the Lord continue to change lives!'

Malawi

On a recent trip to Malawi, Stephen and Gail Harper were joined by a number of believers from around the UK. This visit was for a time of intensive literature distribution, and other forms of gospel outreach. In the evenings, literature packs were assembled containing a bilingual Romans 5. 8 Seed Sower text, a John's Gospel, and the latest edition of the gospel leaflet, 'Exploring God's Word' and it proved almost impossible to satisfy the demand for these packs. The times of literature distribution were punctuated by open-air gospel messages, when brother Harold Makawa ably translated for the visiting brethren.



At Kachulu, a fishing village on the shores of Lake Chilwa, the brethren preached from the vantage point of one of the little fishing boats, on account of the assembled crowd – just as our Lord Himself did many years ago. Most commented that they had never expected to have so many opportunities to preach, or to share the gospel on a one-on-one basis. The sisters who accompanied did a marvellous job too, and it was tremendous to see their zeal in leaflet distribution and in befriending the ladies and the many children we encountered - no doubt a powerful testimony to all.



A WORD FOR TODAY

po-krinomai (hypokrinomai) to answer on the stage, play a part

po-krisij, -ewj, n (hypokrisis) play-acting, pretence, hypocrisy

po-krithj, -o, (hypokrites) a pretender, dissembler, hypocrite

Sadly, we live in a world that is characterized by hypocrisy. How often do we hear politicians saying one thing on the hustings, and then completely reverse their policies when in government? Or the financial institutions, who regularly emphasize the importance of corporate governance, yet are later found guilty of some form of commercial malpractice? Even religious leaders are not exempt from this form of duplicity when, for example, they publicly criticize pay day loan companies only to find that their own establishment is heavily invested in these companies! The Bible is not slow to condemn all forms of hypocrisy, as we shall find as we look at the use of the Greek word *hypokrisis*. WILLIAM BARCLAY points out that 'in the New Testament there is no sin more strongly condemned than hypocrisy, and in popular opinion there is no sin more universally detested'.¹

The word *hypokrisis* and its related forms are rarely used in the Septuagint (LXX). Where they are used, it is by way of metaphor to represent someone who is considered to be a pretender or dissembler, hence, a hypocrite. In two references found in the book of Job, both characterize *hypokrisis* negatively as sin or impiety. In Job chapter 34 verse 30, Elihu in one of his dramatic speeches reveals that in the affairs of men God is known to keep the godless or hypocrite from ruling over His people. He also makes the point in chapter 36 verse 13 that the hypocrite finds it difficult to have any sense of inner peace, being constantly angry with himself. The idea of impiety being equated with hypocrisy is developed further in Psalm 12 verse 2 where even the righteous who actively sin are judged to be hypocrites. Later contemporary writers, such as the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria, make a similar use of the word *hypokrisis* in the context of dissembling or concealing the truth. Josephus is, however, typically ambivalent about the word *hypokrisis* when in the life of Joseph he thinks that his subterfuge, or play-acting, 'personate an angry man',² led to ultimate blessing, whereas he soundly condemns John of Gischala as a 'ready liar' and a 'hypocritical pretender to humanity'.³ These observations reveal that both the Old Testament and Jewish writings (in the main) make an explicit distinction between what is genuine, i.e., true/

By **BRIAN CLATWORTHY**
Newton Abbot, England

truthful and what is essentially pretence, or playing a role. This thought of role playing was later vividly captured in the Greek theatre where the word *hypokrisis* was often used for the term 'play-actor', and for someone in a play who put on a mask to hide their real identity. So deception is an integral part of hypocrisy, i.e., pretending to be something or someone that the actor is not, and the avoidance of such a state in God's people is seen as a mark of spiritual integrity, cp. Ps. 26. 4. The influence of the word in the Greek theatre was subsequently carried over into the New Testament to the extent that whenever *hypokrisis* is used by writers, it always refers to the sin of hypocrisy. But the acts are masked, as WILLIAM BARCLAY acerbically writes, by 'theatrical goodness'!⁴

Turning then to the New Testament, we find that the group that comes under most attack for the sin of 'hypocrisy' is the Pharisees. 'The Pharisees are the prototypical hypocrites of the Bible'.⁵ Our Lord denounced them for various aspects of hypocrisy, and, by analyzing His comments, we can see the different ways in which this sin, so prevalent among these religious leaders, manifested itself. It will also provide us with a salutary and timely warning as to our own personal conduct before the Lord and others. The first thing that one notices about the Pharisaic approach to religious life is that it was ostentatious. Their whole perspective on life was about playing to the gallery by seeking the plaudits of men rather than seeking approbation from God.⁶ This was evident in respect of almsgiving, Matt. 6. 2, and prayer, Matt. 6. 5. Even in those basic observances of life, such as honouring the fifth commandment, Exod. 20. 12, they found a way of circumventing this requirement by declaring that goods or money that would have been used in support of their parents had already been set aside for the temple treasury, thus becoming *korban*, Lev. 27. 9, 16; Num. 30. 3; Matt. 15. 5-6. MICHAEL GREEN states that *korban* was such a sacred vow that it could not be revoked, even in order to care for one's parents in their old age. But it was agreed that you could continue to use *korban* money during your lifetime!⁷ Such a practice made the commandment of God null and void; it was a pious deception, but God was not deceived, Matt. 15. 6b. The second aspect of their hypocrisy can be judged as simply form without substance, paying lip service to religious minutiae when all the time their hearts were far away from God, Mark 7. 6. They were punctilious about such matters as washing cups, Matt. 23. 25, observing the Sabbath, Mark 3. 2, and making

certain that when fasting they drew attention to themselves, Matt. 6. 16. The Pharisee in the parable in Luke chapter 18 refers to the fact that he fasted twice a week as well as giving tithes of all he possessed. These works were intended to provide evidence that the Pharisee was righteous before God. Instead, they simply confirmed that the Pharisee was reliant on his own self righteousness. Fasting and tithing were not wrong *per se*. It was the pride and arrogance of the Pharisee that condemned his actions before God. The most solemn warning is given by the Lord about the final end of such hypocrites, Matt. 25. 30.

Outside the Synoptic tradition, *hypokrisis* used by Paul to describe the hypocritical actions of certain Jewish believers who, together with Peter, withdrew themselves from fellowship with Gentile believers, Gal. 2. 13. Their action led Barnabas astray.⁸ Perhaps Peter learnt from this experience when he encourages us later to rid ourselves of a number of sins including hypocrisies, 1 Pet. 2. 1. In the Pastorals the word has developed an even more sinister meaning when it is directly linked to apostasy. One of the features of the 'latter times' will be the hypocrisy of deceitful liars whose consciences will be cauterized to prevent them from discerning the truth of God, 1 Tim. 4. 2.

It has been said that hypocrisy is the easiest of sins to fall into, and one of the most difficult to put off. Deceiving oneself is bad enough, but deceiving others can ultimately prevent them from entering the kingdom of God, Matt. 23. 13-15. In the light of the warnings contained in our Lord's teaching concerning the sin of hypocrisy, let us endeavour to drop any future pretence in our lives and seek to live in all sincerity before Him, 2 Cor. 2. 17.

Further reading/study

Introductory

Word Pictures in the New Testament (volume 1) - *Gospel According to Matthew* (pages 50 - 51) comments on *upo-krisij* in Matthew 6. 2 by A. T. Robertson (Baker)

Advanced

Galatians (pages 109-110) - comments on *upo-krisij* in Galatians 2. 13 by Hans Dieter Betz (Hermenia)

Endnotes

- ¹ *New Testament Words*, pg. 140.
- ² *The Antiquities of the Jews* (2. 9. 160), Whiston edition.
- ³ *The Wars of the Jews* (2. 21. 585), Whiston edition.
- ⁴ *New Testament Words*, pg. 142.
- ⁵ *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, pg. 415.
- ⁶ Contrast Paul's approach in Galatians chapter 1 verse 10.
- ⁷ *The Message of Matthew*, The Bible Speaks Today, pg. 170.
- ⁸ The Greek word here to 'lead astray' literally means to be carried away with some form of error, cp. 2 Pet. 3. 17.

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QUESTION

Should small assemblies merge if that is geographically possible?

ANSWER

I cannot comment as to whether assemblies 'should' merge but that they 'could' do so is very evident in many areas. No one wants to be the person to make that final decision, none of us would happily volunteer to turn the key for the last time and there are many laudable reasons why we would be reticent to do so. Some will have served in that assembly for decades and poured their spiritual and physical energies into seeing the work maintained for the honour of the Lord.

Others will have fond memories of former days of blessing, maybe they themselves were saved there, and previous generations of their family helped fund and build the hall. Many might be disinclined to merge, as they believe it marks the end of the testimony in a locality. They may be the last form of collective witness in the area and, out of a concern for the folk in the vicinity of the hall, they are reluctant to see the lamp of testimony being extinguished. These, amongst other issues, are all factors which make it far from easy to contemplate merging with a neighbouring assembly. Unfortunately, there may be other reasons that prevent this happening which are not so commendable, not least of which is the issue of personality clashes or the unwillingness of some brethren to give up the controlling influence they have held over a long period of time.

In the years following the day of Pentecost the gospel spread far and wide from its roots in Jerusalem, and, as a result, churches were planted over a vast area, reaching as far as Rome, and possibly beyond, in the West. In the process of time things degenerated, as indicated by Paul to the elders of Ephesus, 'For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock, Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them', Acts 20. 29-30. Although God has never left Himself without witness, about 180 years ago there was a great recovery of church truth and the late 19th and

first half of the 20th centuries were characterized by an evangelical zeal in the UK and abroad. Many new assemblies were started and numerical growth was commonplace. Now those halcyon days are, in the main, behind us and assemblies are closing or dwindling to just a handful of elderly saints.

Some assemblies have reached a point where physically and financially it is a struggle to continue the work. They may hold a weekly gospel meeting but few if any 'outsiders' attend and the last time someone was saved and added to the fellowship has become a distant memory. The hall in which they meet is an added burden; it is too large and very costly to maintain and may need significant upgrading to make it legally compliant and presentable. In addition, the brother who invites speakers to take meetings finds it increasingly problematic because so many of them are themselves in small meetings and go out speaking only once every month or less.

Although it is a difficult situation, serious thought should be given to the possibility of merging with other assemblies. Instead of having several struggling fellowships in close proximity, there are definite spiritual, and financial, benefits in merging. The overheads of heating, lighting, and repair work are shared by a greater number of people, and halls no longer used can be sold and the funds can be channelled into the Lord's work locally and much further afield. The larger company can enjoy the support and spiritual wisdom that the others bring, thereby enriching the contributions at the Lord's Supper, the prayer meeting and other gatherings, and, with additional numbers, it may be possible to rekindle a positive gospel outreach. Rather than just one or two brethren having to shoulder the responsibility for all that takes place others might be able to help in this work, using their years of spiritual experience to the mutual encouragement of all. May we have the courage to overcome sentimentality, and be given grace to seriously seek the mind of the Lord on this issue.

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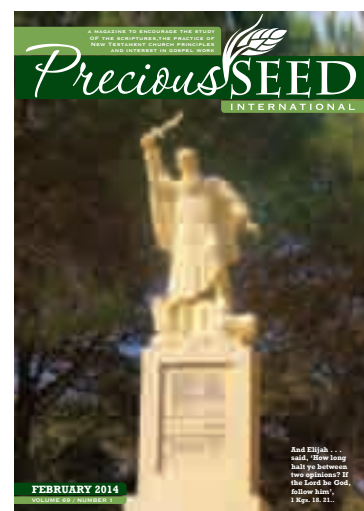


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Front Cover Illustration

The figure of Elijah virtually dominates the whole of the First Book of Kings. Such is his abiding influence that in the thirteenth century the Carmelites built a monastery on Mount Carmel and erected a statue to him in the crypt of the monastery. According to tradition, the crypt was the original cave where Elijah had supposedly lived for part of his lifetime. One thing we do know for certain, however, is that Mount Carmel was the scene of Elijah's great victory over the prophets of Baal and Asherah as narrated in 1 Kings Chapter 18

verses 17-40. Israel looked on at this spectacle in silence, and Elijah challenged them to make their minds up once the contest had ended. Would they still waver between two opinions, effectively would they still 'sit on the fence', or would they choose the God who answered by fire, 1 Kgs 18.21? Despite the serried ranks of the opposition, Elijah meets them head on and calls upon the name of his God (Yahweh). He then unequivocally demonstrates to all those present that his God is indeed the one and only true God by the revelation of fire from heaven. Whilst men today continue to crave after forms of syncretistic religious experience, the God of Elijah is still the God, who answers all the wavering doubts of humanity through the revelation of the person and work of His incarnate Son, John 3.16.



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