

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

Precious SEED

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**‘And Jesus said
unto him, No
man, having
put his hand to
the plough, and
looking back,
is fit for the
kingdom of God’,
Luke 9. 62.**



Sadly, many Christians neglect the Old Testament as a book that is 'different' and 'strange', perhaps almost irrelevant. It seems as if there is no connection between the Testaments.

This new series of books from Precious Seed aims to provide an overview of the Old Testament and reassure the reader that the Bible is a coherent whole. Indeed, in this first volume in the series, dealing with some of the prophetic sections, the links between Old Testament prophecy and New Testament fulfilment is clear. Equally, interpretation of prophetic passages within the New Testament would not be possible without key passages considered in this book.

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important spiritual matters for you

Issue 5

Crisis
WORLD

By the time you read this many more will have died with the deadly Ebola virus from which there is no known approved treatment or vaccine.

Ebola is not a new virus but was identified in 1976. We have been touched by images of dying children here on Tiers and I pray for many who suffer with no hope of cure and those families who have lost loved ones.

It is important to note that the country's political system is working well. The government is holding emergency meetings and speeding up procedures and means to place at airports to catch about 100,000 people.

How can deny that the world is in crisis today with nations, peoples, religions, families, tongues, and communities making a power struggle for life or death, for control, influence and survival?

But crises are not new, and they're not only described in their own language. Professor F. C. C. O'Connell and his team would like to see a book and not their words take place.

Jesus said that the conditions in the world before he comes back to this planet to reign would be very similar to what we see today.

But first He said he would come back and remove all who are born again from the world so that they will be saved from coming judgment. This could happen any moment.

...That is why faith matters!

...faith in a religion or a church but
...in a real living person, the Son of
...Jesus Christ.

The families inside describe how different people came to a crisis point in their lives, and how Jesus Christ, the Son of God, became their personal Saviour in this world of sorrow, suffering and pain. We trust you too will find a new answer—remember Jesus.

“You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” John 8:32

Jonathan Black London

Can we be sure?

My Conversion story

7 Swimming pool prayers



Book Reviews

Compiled by **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



Facing Death Franklin D. Taylor, Sr.

Paperback, 72 pages. Published by Everyday Publications International, Port Colborne, Ontario, Canada. ISBN: 978-0-888737-34-2.

Death is ubiquitous in our fallen world. The scriptures affirm that 'it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment', Heb. 9. 27NKJV. Given its universality, it is not surprising that death is a necessary subject to consider.

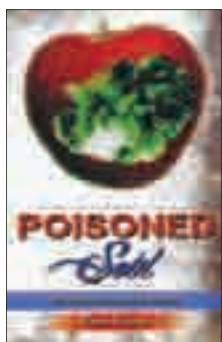
FRANKLIN D. TAYLOR, Sr.'s recently published book, *Facing Death* concisely examines death, and the practical issues surrounding it from a Christian perspective. DR. TAYLOR is described as an educator who has lengthy familiarity in counselling people, including the terminally ill and their bereaved loved ones. His practical experience lends helpful weight to his teaching. In dealing with such a momentous subject, DR. TAYLOR does not fall back

on personal opinion, or mere human wisdom; rather, he goes straight to God's word for answers to questions about death and the afterlife. *Facing Death* helpfully deals with the questions that both Christians and unbelievers pose. To this latter group, the author clearly explains the gospel, using many relevant Bible verses. To the former group, he likewise uses the scriptures to offer comfort to those who know the peace of God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who died and rose again to give eternal life to those who receive Him as Lord and Saviour, Rom. 10. 9.

The book is fairly short – about 37 pages of main text, plus a few sidebars and five appendices – and is written in a nontechnical, easy-to-read style. The author offers balanced and insightful explanations rooted in the biblical text. Theological questions, such as 'Where did death come from?', and 'How did Jesus defeat death?' are discussed, as well as more down-to-earth topics like planning a funeral, making a will, and counselling the terminally ill. The appendices deal with the common issues of cremation, euthanasia, suicide, and out-of-body experiences.

The fifth and concluding appendix is a template for planning one's funeral, providing opportunity for documenting the relevant information for family members or friends who are involved in carrying out the deceased's wishes, as well as space to record financial information that is germane to paying for the funeral expenses. There is also a journaling section, offering the dying person the opportunity to record their thoughts as they near the end of their course on this earth. This is a thoughtful and helpful touch that adds practical benefit to the value of the book. In short, I thoroughly recommend this book for all adult believers – and even strangers to the Lord Jesus who desire to know the Bible's teaching on death and what comes afterwards.

[Our thanks to Keith Keyser, USA, for this review]



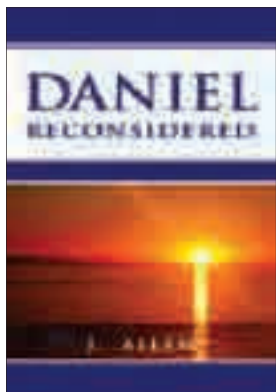
Poisoned Soul – the deadly effects of bitterness Paul Young

Paperback, 66 pages. Published by the author, 31 Fairmeadows, Maesteg, Wales, CF34 9JL. Price: £1.

It would be easy to dismiss this unprepossessing booklet. It is only a few pages. However, for anyone who has felt, or been in the company of someone consumed by bitterness, it is a booklet that is timely. The author writes, 'Bitterness is a deeply destructive emotion. It can develop in our spirits like infection in a physical wound. It has the potential to immobilise us in our work, destabilise us in our thinking, and destroy our relationships with other people. It can make us ineffective and useless for God's service and could undermine the work of our church and its standing in the community'.

The issues are covered in the three main chapters of the booklet: the causes, the consequences, and the cure of bitterness. The author uses many examples from scripture, including the experience of the children of Israel at Marah, Naomi, Esau, Hannah, Mordecai, Job, and Joseph. Alongside those biblical examples, the author draws upon the experiences of Fanny Crosby, Gordon Wilson, Susanne Geske, Charlotte Elliott, and C. L. Culpepper, amongst others. However, the booklet is concise, a quick and easy read, yet one that is challenging.

It is difficult to assess how useful this booklet may be. I am sure that the author has written it with the intention of bringing some help to those who may be caught up in the dread and downward spiral of bitterness. However, as the author writes under the sub-heading of 'How do we conquer bitterness?', 'The process is not easy and there are no simplistic answers and no straightforward formulae to follow'. What YOUNG has done is to seek to provide honesty and help in tackling an issue which has received relatively little attention, and yet can be so destructive of the individual affected, and their social and church connections. I trust that it will be a help in rescuing some, and preserving others.



Daniel Reconsidered J. Allen

Hardback, 689 pages. Published by Scripture Teaching Library, Cookstown, Northern Ireland. Price: £19.99 ISBN: 978-1909789-11-1.

Those who have read or referenced ALLEN's commentary on the book of Revelation in the *What the Bible Teaches* series will readily recognize that it is one of the best. This long anticipated 'prophetic sequel' on the book of Daniel will prove to be of similar ilk. There is meticulous attention to detail, a lucid style of writing, and comprehensive discussion of the more controversial scriptures and their various interpretations that have been propagated throughout the years. The reader is never left in any doubt as to the author's view, and his arguments are most persuasive.

First and foremost, this is a commentary. Every verse is treated in detail, and ALLEN first seeks to give the sense of the original Hebrew before interpreting the verse or section in its historical and prophetic context. In addition, there are charts and maps, and a series of appendices, such

as the 'History of Judah' and 'The Maccabees and their Times'. Some chapters have their own excurses or preliminary questions, which are of great interest and ensure that no stone is left unturned. One such excursus is entitled: 'Why does Scripture make no reference to a Revived Roman Empire?' It would be useful to see these listed as an addition to the contents page of future editions.

There are many points of particular interest which could be included in this review, but here follows just two:

1. Many will agree with MR ALLEN's support of Sir Robert Anderson's calculations in relation to Daniel's seventy weeks prophecy (Dan. 9). It is concluded, from scripture, that the prophecy begins with the decree of Artaxerxes issued to Nehemiah (1st Nisan 445 BC, Neh. 2. 1-9, Dan. 9. 25) and the 69th week ends 173,880 days later when the Lord Jesus rode into Jerusalem (10th Nisan AD 32).
2. However, not all will agree with the suggestion that the Antichrist is the False Prophet of Revelation chapter 16 verse 13 rather than the Man of Sin of 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 verses 3-4. In addition, the identification of the four beasts of Daniel chapter 7 with future kingdoms, such as a possible British-American coalition (lion with eagle's wings, Dan. 7. 4) will not be met with unanimous support. Yet, all of ALLEN's suggestions are very carefully presented, and, most importantly, fully supported by careful exegesis and references to many other scriptures.

All in all, this commentary is a must for every serious student of prophecy, or the book of Daniel. It uses very recent worldwide political events to indicate the nearness of the fulfilment of these prophecies, and seeks to exalt the person of the Lord Jesus. The book is well published, and, in my opinion, sensibly priced. It will sit very comfortably next to J. F. WALVOORD's classic *Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation*. This reviewer, for one, only hopes that the book will get the circulation it deserves. Very highly recommended.

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



Living with the glory of the Lord – Ezekiel's Prophecy Malcolm Davis

Paperback, 276 pages. Published by John Ritchie Ltd., 40 Beansburn, Kilmarnock, Scotland, KA3 1 RH. Price: £8.99. ISBN: 978-1-909803-78-7.

The origins of this helpful book are to be found in a conversation which the author had with a young believer who expressed a desire for help in understanding the prophecy of Ezekiel. Whilst the resulting commentary is aimed first and foremost at the needs of young people, it will also be of great help to 'those other Christians who cannot digest a very detailed commentary'.

MALCOLM DAVIS has produced a book which offers a survey of the prophecy of Ezekiel. He devotes the major part of this work to a succinct summary of each chapter, providing sufficient background information to allow his readers to understand the historical context against which Ezekiel is writing, without becoming bogged down in too much detail. Before that section there is a brief bibliography, and an introduction. This includes a useful chart of significant dates,

together with an overview of the historical setting of the prophecy; in addition, there is a note about Ezekiel himself, and a brief analysis of the literary features of the prophecy – the visions recorded, the symbolism, the allegories, and the lamentations.

Whilst the main part of this book is taken up with commentary, that is followed by eight studies which cover the main themes, and the recurring phrases – for example, the names, glory, and character of God; the Messianic prophecies; the principles of God's judgement; the significance of the various recurring phrases. And, because this commentary is intended to be practical, there is a chapter on the relevance of the message of Ezekiel for the world today.

In tackling this important Old Testament book, the author has set out for us the principles which he has followed: firstly, the book is authentic, historically accurate, and a genuine composition of Ezekiel in the sixth century BC; secondly, accurate prediction is not only possible but is to be expected in all prophetic literature; thirdly, God has planned a future for His ancient people Israel; fourthly, the book is to be understood as literally as possible, consistently with the use of figurative and symbolical language.

Writing from a premillennial position, the author declares his aim: to make clear for the general reader the overall theme and structure of Ezekiel's prophecy, and to apply its spiritual lessons to our situation in local church testimony today. He has succeeded admirably.

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By RICHARD COLLINGS

Editorial

**'In the last day, that great day
of the feast, Jesus stood and cried,
saying, If any man thirst, let him come
unto me, and drink', John 7. 37.**

It is not without significance that the Lord should choose 'the last day, that great day of the feast' to make His announcement. This day was the high point of the eight days of the feast. It was meant to epitomize all that the feast meant to the Jews who celebrated it. Practically, it was celebrated by everyone, by the household, by the servants, the Levite, and the stranger.¹ Prophetically, the feast looked forward to the millennial reign of Christ.² Characteristically, it was a feast of joy, and 'of rest that accompanies joy'.³ Yet, on this occasion, the Lord issues His call, 'If any man thirst'.

Clearly, what the feast was meant to be and what it had become were two different things. This is one of the features of John's record of the Jewish feasts. But what an indictment! After seven days of the feast, should any have come to this point empty? The emptiness of the ritual, and celebration, led the Saviour to issue His call to any that would hear. He chooses a point at the heart of the temple, in a place of public activity, and extends His invitation to all. What Judaism cannot supply is available from Him!

There is a sense of sadness in that invitation. Surely, the need was universal, but the problem was that not all appreciated the need that they had. They were clinging to old rituals and traditions, devoid of spiritual life, anticipating that this would bring them blessing. How true today!

It is the believer in Christ who looks to the finished work of Calvary and recalls the Lord's words, 'I thirst', John 19. 28. The reality and the depth of the Saviour's suffering on the cross form the basis upon which His invitation can be extended.⁴ The blessings of salvation flow out from the 'fountain' of Calvary! We rejoice in the simplicity of the call, 'let him come unto me'! What this feast was meant to be is realized in Christ, whose invitation is extended to all – 'any man'! The rest that should have resulted from the feast is available in Christ.⁵ May we never cease to rejoice in the fullness of our salvation!

In this magazine, we conclude the series on the kings of Judah. We extend our thanks to the authors who contributed to it so helpfully. We also have the first of two new articles provided by Malcolm Horlock to fill our centre expository pages. We are grateful to him for renewed help in this area. We also commence a series on the New Testament book of Ephesians. As always, we express our sincere thanks to all our authors, trusting that in this magazine there will be a range of material to feed, encourage and, perhaps, challenge the Lord's people.

ENDNOTES

1 Deut. 16. 14.

2 Zech. 14. 16.

3 A. McDONALD REDWOOD, *Seven Old Testament Feasts*, Oliphants, n.d., pg. 95.

4 Compare Ps. 22. 15.

5 Matt. 11. 28.



1. Introduction

The gospel, the good news of salvation, is essentially a New Testament message 'which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him'.¹ At the same time, the Bible is one harmonious revelation of the purposes of God, and this article outlines how the Old Testament prepares the way for the coming of Christ, and the gospel events. This matters for a number of important reasons:

The credibility of the gospel. The earliest gospel preaching was 'to the Jew first and also to the Greek'. Therefore, it was (and still is) vital to be able to prove from the Old Testament that the gospel is not some hastily-thought-up expedient, but rather the fulfilment of the promises and purposes of God as unfolded in the Old Testament.² 'To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins'.³ Faced with the heartbreak of Israel's rejection of their Messiah, Paul devotes chapters 9-11 of his Epistle to the Romans to show that the Old Testament anticipates such a tragedy, and that, notwithstanding Israel's obduracy, God's mercy will finally triumph.

The testimony of the early church. The Old Testament constituted 'scripture' for the apostles and the early church. Indeed, the Greek translation, known as the Septuagint, was widely used, and is frequently quoted by the New Testament writers. It is most instructive to study in the book of Acts *how* the apostles preached the gospel, proclaiming the great facts of Christ's life, death, and resurrection, and emphasizing throughout the fulfilment of Old Testament scripture.⁴

The unity of revelation. Sadly, for many Christians, the Old Testament is a neglected book, 'different' and 'strange' as though there was no connection between the Testaments. On the contrary, it is reassuring to grasp that the Bible is a coherent whole. Christ Himself is the key to all scripture: 'You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they

The Gospel and th

By **KEN TOTTON** Cambridge, England

[Unless otherwise stated, scripture quotations are from NKJV]

which testify of Me'.⁵ Step by step, in a rich variety of ways, as we shall see, the Old Testament introduces *gospel principles*, so that men might readily recognize and receive their embodiment in Christ when He came.

The character of God. The gospel is 'the glorious gospel of the blessed God'.⁶ In it we learn the consistency, faithfulness, and grace of God in His dealings with lost and guilty mankind from the outset of human history. The God who is fully and finally revealed in His only-begotten Son, is the same unchanging God: 'God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son'.⁷ Calvary was no afterthought; on the contrary, Christ 'was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you'.⁸

2. Prophecies and Types

The Old Testament forms the *preparation* for the gospel, and is full of instructive revelation pointing forward to the advent of Christ. This is seen in its prophecies, types, promises, and covenants.

Almost as soon as sin had marred God's fair creation, in pronouncing judgement on the serpent a glorious prophecy was given: 'And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel'.⁹ Whilst in the former part of the verse the respective 'seed' of the serpent and the woman may point in a collective sense to the conflict between the children of darkness and the children of light, the New Testament sees the conflict ultimately focusing on Christ and His decisive victory over Satan by His death and resurrection.¹⁰ This alerts us to a most important feature in much Old Testament prophecy, namely its application at *multiple* levels, with both immediate and

Messianic, corporate and individual fulfilments.¹¹

It has often been observed that the book of Genesis is the '*seed plot*' of the Bible. We see the following significant truths revealed:

- Adam and Eve clothed through *God's provision* of coats of skins, implying that an animal's life was forfeited.
- Abel accepted by God on the basis of *blood sacrifice* offered in faith, Gen. 4. 4; Heb. 11. 4.
- Abram *called* by God out of Ur, and received the covenant promise that in his seed all the families of the earth would be blessed, Gen. 12. 1-3.
- Abraham receives 'good news' and is

justified by faith, 15. 8.

- A *substitute* for Isaac is found in the ram provided by God, 22. 13.
- Abraham *justified by works*, 22. 12; Jas. 2. 21.

Adam specifically is said to be 'a type of Him who was to come (Christ)', Rom. 5. 14; however, the remainder of that chapter indicates that the respective heads of fallen and redeemed humanity are contrasted more than compared. The term 'type' signifies an example, symbol, or picture marked





The Old Testament [1]

out by God in order to point forward to a larger fulfilment.¹² For example, the sacrifice of carefully designated animals was the appointed means for the Israelite to approach God in faith and penitence, and thus experience the joy of forgiveness and restoration to fellowship with God.

God's gracious provision of a means of atonement, and the resultant sacredness of the sacrificial blood, are underscored in Leviticus: 'For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement'.¹³ Such sacrifices could never 'put away' sin in the complete and final sense, but together they pointed forward to the once-for-all, and permanently effective, sacrifice of Christ, Heb. 10. 1-18.



Exodus is the book of redemption – from the slavery and tyranny of Pharaoh and Egypt. But, at a deeper level, the story of Israel's journey from despair and bondage to the enjoyment of their Canaan inheritance illustrates many gospel truths. Much is typical of Christ, and the fundamental liberation He secured from sin, guilt and death. Moses is a deliverer, sent from God. He declares the name

of God, speaks the words of God, and displays the miraculous power of God. During the climactic judgement of God on Egypt on Passover night, the Israelites are preserved, sheltered by the blood of the Passover lamb. Later, at the Red Sea, they are delivered by the power of God, and the enemy is overwhelmed in the sea. Amidst these typical events, Moses himself points forward to Christ: 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear'.¹⁴

Events also foreshadowed the gospel. The Israelites were 'all . . . baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea', 1 Cor. 10. 2, pointing forward to Christian baptism. Later, in the wilderness wanderings, the uplifted serpent on the pole brought immediate relief and life to the dying Israelite, just as today 'there is life for a look at the Crucified One'.¹⁵ 'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up', John 3. 14.

Types of Christ and His salvation are thus wide-ranging in the Old Testament. It is apparent that gospel principles are embedded in the fabric of scripture, like a hallmark of authenticity. They include:

- **Great deliverances:** the exodus from Egypt; the return, or 'second exodus',¹⁶ from Babylon.
- **Holy places and vessels:** e.g., the tabernacle, altar of burnt offering, mercy seat.
- **Typical persons:** leaders such as Moses; priests such as Melchizedek and Aaron; kings, especially David and his dynasty; prophets and sages. Aaron and his sons point forward to Christ the eternal priest. Prophets fearlessly speak forth messages from God, paving the way for the advent of the Prophet *par excellence*.¹⁷

Israel was thus primed with all the necessary concepts in order that they might readily embrace the Deliverer when He came. Christ is greater than the temple.¹⁸ He is also the root and offspring of David. 'The Son of David is David's Lord because He is God; The Lord of David is David's Son because He is God incarnate'.¹⁹ The kings of David's dynasty point forward to Christ, insofar as they are seen to be representatives of God, administering His kingdom, and shepherding His people.

Again, answering to the ideals of the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, Christ personifies the divine wisdom.²⁰ As the unique Mediator between God and man, the yearning of Job is finally satisfied.²¹

ENDNOTES

- 1 Heb. 2. 3. Gal. 3. 8 does not contradict this assertion. The good news 'preached beforehand' to Abraham is that all nations will be blessed in his offspring, Gen. 12. 1-3. That good news is still 'preached' by scripture to us who live in the age when the promise has been fulfilled.
- 2 Rom. 1. 2; 16. 26.
- 3 Acts 10. 43.
- 4 1 Cor. 15. 3-4; Zech. 9. 9; Ps. 16. 8-11; Ps. 110. 1; Dan. 7. 13-14. Note that even when faced with pagan audiences ignorant of the Hebrew scriptures, e.g., Acts 14. 17, the apostles proclaimed biblical truths, albeit without explicit reference to the Old Testament.
- 5 John 5. 39.
- 6 1 Tim. 1. 11.
- 7 John 1. 18; Heb. 1. 1-2.
- 8 1 Pet. 1. 20.
- 9 Gen. 3. 15.
- 10 Compare Gal. 3. 16, but noting Rom. 16. 20.
- 11 Compare, for example, Hosea 11. 1 with Matt. 2. 15.
- 12 For a careful treatment of this topic see DAVID GOODING, *The Riches of Divine Wisdom*, pp. 24, 27, 116-118.
- 13 Lev. 17. 11; cp. Rom. 3. 25.
- 14 Deut. 18. 15. For a helpful survey of Moses as a type of Christ, see DAVID BARON, *Rays of Messiah's Glory*, ch. 6.
- 15 From the hymn of that title written by Amelia M. Hull.
- 16 See Isa. 52. 1-12.
- 17 Heb. 1. 1ff.; John 3. 34.
- 18 Matt. 12. 6.
- 19 H. P. LIDDON, *The Divinity of our Lord*, p. 43.
- 20 Prov. 8. 22-31; Col. 2. 3.
- 21 Job 9. 33.

KEN TOTTON is one of the publications editors of *Precious Seed*.



The closing years of the monarchy saw four young men ascend the nation's throne. Jehoahaz was twenty-three, his brother, Jehoiakim, who succeeded him, was twenty-five. His son Jehoiachin followed at the age of eighteen and the last king, Zedekiah, was twenty-one. Four young men with potential to follow the good example of king Josiah, yet, sadly, each one in turn received the censure from the Spirit of God, 'He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord'.

In order to follow the development of the last twenty-two-and-a-half years of the monarchy it is necessary to read and compare the records of 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles, together with the prophecy of Jeremiah and parts of Ezekiel.

Historically, the rising power was Babylon, although Egypt still wielded an influence, particularly around the eastern end of the Mediterranean. Within a short time, however, Egypt would succumb to the might of Nebuchadnezzar's territorial ambition; Jerusalem would be overrun and the people taken into captivity.

Jehoahaz

In 1 Chronicles chapter 3 verse 15 we discover that Josiah had four sons. Of the eldest we know nothing save his name; it is assumed that he died while quite young. On the death of Josiah, the natural progression would be for the eldest living son to take possession of the throne. However, as with his father, it was 'the people of the land' who took Shallum, the youngest son and, with his name changed to Jehoahaz, 'anointed him, and made him king in his father's stead'. No doubt they worked to an agenda which suited their purpose, but whatever the reason it was soon frustrated as his reign lasted only three months. In that brief time, however, he managed to gain the reputation of being 'evil in the sight of the Lord'; that which Josiah had striven to accomplish over the previous thirty-one years, Jehoahaz undermined in three months. With good reason, Jeremiah has been called 'the weeping prophet', as he exposed

JEHOAHAZ TO Z

the fickle disposition of the nation at large, Jer. 2. 11-13.

Following his victory at Megiddo, Pharaoh Necho proceeded to assume sovereignty over Josiah's successor. Removing him from Jerusalem, where his influence for any further opposition to Egypt would be strongest, he confined him 'in bands at Riblah in the land of Hamath', well to the north of Jerusalem, on the Syrian border. Having separated the figurehead from the heart of the nation, Pharaoh levied a crippling tax on the land, no doubt to help finance his military ventures against Assyria.

Pharaoh then decided it would be advantageous to have a puppet king in Jerusalem and chose Eliakim, the second son of Josiah. In order to stamp his authority on the decision, Pharaoh changed his name from Eliakim to Jehoiakim and set him on the throne. Jehoahaz, meantime, was taken from Riblah down to Egypt. Jeremiah directed the people to mourn no longer for Josiah, but rather for Jehoahaz who would never see the land of promise again, but would end his days a captive in Egypt,

Jehoiakim

With Jehoiakim ruling under the watchful eye of Pharaoh, events began to move swiftly towards the captivity of the nation, foretold by faithful prophets during years of idolatrous excess. Away to the east, the fledgling empire of Babylon was beginning to flex its muscles. Some four years after events at Megiddo, Nebuchadnezzar led a Chaldean army to Carchemish on the banks of the Euphrates, and all but annihilated the forces of Pharaoh Necho in 605 BC.

As a result of this defeat, Egypt's hold over Jehoiakim was broken and Nebuchadnezzar moved swiftly to annexe the nation so that 'Jehoiakim became his servant three years'. However, in the third year of Jehoiakim's reign he rather foolishly decided to rebel. As a result of this, Nebuchadnezzar began to remove certain of the nation

from Jerusalem to Babylon. Among those taken were the young man Daniel and his three companions, Dan. 1. 1-2, 6. So commenced the seventy years of captivity in Babylon, a period of time which also determined the remaining years of the Babylonian Empire. A powerful, all-conquering dynasty, seemingly set for centuries, would be brought to nothing in so brief a time that the word of God might be fulfilled! If only nations in our day would heed the word to Babylon's monarchs, 'There is a God in heaven . . . who rules in the kingdom of men', Dan. 2. 28; 5. 21.

Jehoiakim occupied the throne for eleven years and, yet again, the Spirit of God felt compelled to record the evil influence exerted by the man who should have set a good example to the nation. It was left to prophets like Jeremiah to challenge the nation and stir their conscience. So in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, word came to Jeremiah to take 'a roll of a book and write therein all the words that I have spoken unto thee against Israel, and against Judah', Jer. 36. 2.

With the written roll in his hand, the faithful and fearless scribe Baruch made his way to the temple. Jeremiah's instruction was to read it 'in the ears of the people'. However, he soon attracted the attention of the scribes and the princes, who listened attentively to the word of the Lord. Having heard the words, they decided that the king should be made aware of this writing, but not before advice was given to Baruch and Jeremiah to hide themselves in case Jehoiakim reacted badly!

Their fears were well founded! Having listened to just a small part of the scroll, Jehoiakim angrily snatched it, 'cut it with the penknife, and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth, until all the roll was consumed', Jer. 36. 23. As anticipated, he ordered the arrest of Jeremiah and Baruch, 'but the Lord hid them'.

The remaining years of Jehoiakim





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were plagued by incursions from the surrounding nations until eventually Nebuchadnezzar came to Jerusalem, and 'bound him in fetters to carry him to Babylon', 2 Chr. 36. 6. Jehoiakim's death is recorded in 2 Kings chapter 24 verse 6 by the familiar and sanitized phrase, 'he slept with his fathers'. Jeremiah, however, gives rather more explicit detail, 'He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem', unmourned, unmissed and for some time at least, unburied, Jer. 22. 18-19; 36. 30, regretting for all eternity his attempts to destroy the word of God.

Jehoiachin

On the death of Jehoiakim, the throne passed to his eighteen-year-old son, Jehoiachin; Babylon now reigned supreme from the Nile to the Euphrates. The tenure of Judah's penultimate king lasted precisely three months and ten days. It is interesting to note how, as the time of the monarchy draws to a close, the Spirit of God counts not only years and months, but days as well. Almost as though heaven's clock is counting down reluctantly to that moment when the city would be left solitary, widowed and weeping, Lam. 1. 1.

Jehoiachin emulated the evil ways of his father and soon attracted the attention of Nebuchadnezzar. He had no intention of allowing this young upstart and his troublesome people to have any influence in his well-ordered empire, so he came with his armies and besieged Jerusalem. Resistance, it would seem, was minimal and Jehoiachin with his family soon capitulated and cast themselves upon the mercy of Nebuchadnezzar, a somewhat hazardous and unpredictable action to take, Cp. 2 Kgs. 25. 21. The historical records see him taken to Babylon, with some 18,000 other captives, and 'all the treasures of the house of the Lord'. Then some thirty-seven years later Jehoiachin was released from prison and given both position and provision in Babylon for the rest of his life, 2 Kgs. 25. 27-30.

In spite of the brevity of Jehoiachin's reign, Jeremiah nevertheless spoke

strong words of censure about him. Using a shortened form of his name, Jechoniah or Coniah, Jeremiah denounced him as a 'despised broken idol . . . a vessel wherein is no pleasure', Jer. 22. 28. Calling earth to witness his words, he said, 'Write this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days'. Furthermore, though he did have sons in Babylon, Jeremiah recorded that no descendant of his would occupy the throne of David. His line of descent is recorded in Matthew chapter 1, to Joseph the husband of Mary; thus establishing a legal right to the throne for Mary's son. It is, however, the unbroken line through David's son Nathan to Mary which grants the absolute right of the Lord Jesus to ultimately occupy the throne of His father David, Luke 3. 23-38.

Zedekiah

When Zedekiah, the remaining son of Josiah, was placed on the throne by Nebuchadnezzar, just eleven years remained before the curtain would fall upon five hundred years of the nation's monarchy. Having learned nothing from the judgements which had befallen his immediate predecessors, Zedekiah indulged himself in their evil ways. For nine years Zedekiah 'humbled not himself', 'stiffened his neck, and hardened his heart'. The priests and people 'polluted the house of the Lord', mocked the messengers of God and misused His prophets until divine patience finally ran out and 'there was no remedy', 2 Chr. 36. 16.

To bring this chaotic situation to a conclusion, the Lord instigated rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar in the heart of Zedekiah, 2 Kgs. 24. 20. A two-year siege followed during which time the doomed king vacillated between moments of remorse and persistence in evil. On occasion he consulted with Jeremiah,

desired his prayers, Jer. 37. 3, and sought his help: 'Is there any word from the Lord?', 37. 17. At the instigation of the princes, however, he allowed him to be confined to the dungeon, then later arranged his release! When it became evident that Jerusalem could no longer withstand the siege, Zedekiah attempted to escape; he was soon caught and brought before Nebuchadnezzar.

Ezekiel was already among the exiles in Babylon by this time. Speaking of Zedekiah, the 'prince in Jerusalem', he prophesied that he would be brought to Babylon, 'yet shall he not see it, though he shall die there', Ezek. 12. 13. In callous confirmation of this, we read that they 'put out the eyes of Zedekiah', but not before ensuring that the last thing he would ever see was his own sons, who could only have been children, slain 'before his eyes', 2 Kgs. 25. 7.

Blinded and bound, Zedekiah, only thirty-two years old, passes from the record of scripture with no sons to follow him. Jerusalem is left plundered, ravaged and ransacked; nothing remained but the 'poorest sort of the people' and the tears of Jeremiah. Yet, a new dawn would break, a new day after the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths; a remnant would return, a temple and city would be built anticipating the first advent of 'the Desire of all nations', Hag. 2. 7.

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DEPRESSION - A CASE STUDY

I have to admit that one of Job's early comments has always puzzled me. Shortly after the arrival of his friends, he says, 'The thing which I greatly feared is come upon me, and that which I was afraid of is come unto me', 3. 25. What puzzles me is identifying what it was that he feared the most, and then scratching my head over why a loving, shepherd-hearted God would visit that fear, of all fears, upon the servant in whom He delighted.

It is probably safe to say that the loss of all his children and material possessions, heavy though that blow was, and all on the same day, was not Job's greatest fear; he seems to have coped with the loss better than did his wife. Even the loss of his health is something he seems to take in his stride, and in so doing proved Satan wrong in his assessment of him, 2. 4-5. Would God that all of us could react in the same way as Job, and say, when facing huge material loss, 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord', 1. 21; and, when facing sudden and inexplicable ill-health, 'Shall we receive good at the hand of God and shall we not receive evil?' 2. 10. Was it the loss of his good name, which followed on from the other two blows, in so far as even the children in the streets thought his misfortunes came because of secret sins which God had so evidently and so startlingly made manifest, chapter 19? After all, 'a good name is better than precious ointment', Prov. 7. 1.

I think not, since though these things were dear to Job, there was something even more precious. His greatest fear, surely, is loss of contact with his God. Listen to him as he sits on his ash heap. 'Lo, he goeth by me, and I see him not: he passeth on also, but I perceive him not', Job 9. 11. 'Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: On the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him', 23. 8-9. Yes, Job does wrestle over God's dealings with

him, and struggles to understand why a man as righteous as he, though not sinless, should suffer when the wicked around him prosper. But the heart of a righteous man suffers most at the loss of communion with his God.

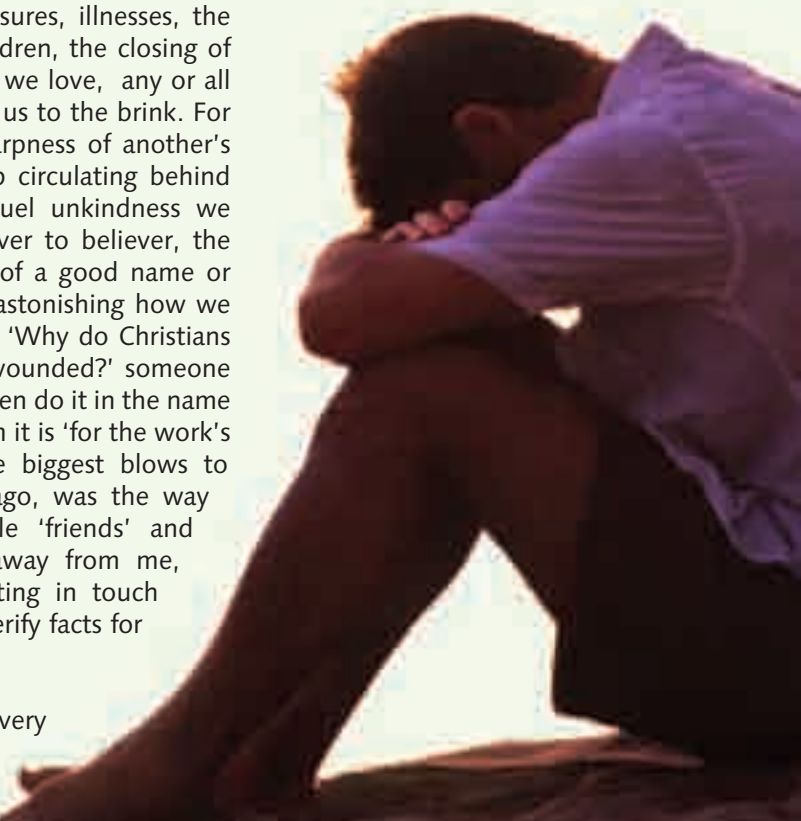
Verses 1 to 8 of chapter 1 show us Job's testimony; he brought pleasure to the heart of God. From verse 9 of chapter 1 through to verse 13 of chapter 2, we see his testing. Chapter 3 shows us his turmoil. He regrets the day he was born, longs for death, and struggles with the providence of God. Many of God's saints have not sat where Job sat, nor, like his 'friends', have they understood his grief, but some have. Depression, even despair, is an illness hugely misunderstood by the people of God! For those of you who have not been brought low, it is hard to empathize with those of us that have. 'Pull yourself together, man'. 'Why can't you just trust?' 'Faith overcomes everything'. But all the theological arguments of Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, Fred, Cuthbert and Dora cannot help. In the end, it is the return of the presence of God that gives Job relief. 'I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee', 42. 5. His God has come back!

Depression can be brought on by many things. For some, it may be genetic, for others, trials, pressures, illnesses, the failures of our children, the closing of the little assembly we love, any or all of these can bring us to the brink. For some it is the sharpness of another's tongue, the gossip circulating behind our backs, the cruel unkindness we hand out as believer to believer, the irrecoverable loss of a good name or a testimony. It is astonishing how we treat one another. 'Why do Christians shoot their own wounded?' someone once asked. We even do it in the name of Christ, and claim it is 'for the work's sake'! One of the biggest blows to me, many years ago, was the way in which erstwhile 'friends' and brothers turned away from me, without even getting in touch to ascertain and verify facts for themselves.

Depression is a very lonely, insecure, frightening place

to be, bringing with it tears, panic attacks, bewilderment, disorientation, physical weariness, insomnia, and no sense of self-worth. The trouble is, once experienced, it often returns over the succeeding years. It was the loving, patient, kind support of our assembly and brothers and sisters in it that remains a fragrant memory. I shall never forget, after the struggle and loneliness of a particular trauma, the tears that poured down my cheeks as we arrived home to a warm house, furnished for us by believers with flowers, cards, and a hot meal. I was in a deep despair and very close to a breakdown. What I had feared most had come upon me. It took several years for me to gain confidence and strength once again, though that is still not as it once was. A kind and wise Christian woman gave me hope. 'Remember Elijah', she said. 'He was instructed by the angel to eat and sleep. Both of these things are essential to a full recovery. And don't be afraid. You will, one day, meet your God again on Mount Horeb'.

The deepest, darkest moments are when we despair of feeling the presence of God again. We ask ourselves, what have I done? Why is this happening to me? How has God allowed so-and-so to treat me like this? Did Joseph always have that



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total trust and confidence in God that he expressed, many years after his troubles, when he said, 'Ye meant it for evil, but God meant it for good'? Did Job always have the confidence to believe that, 'He knoweth the way that I take. When he has tried me, I shall come forth as gold', 23. 10? At times, when we are overwhelmed, physically, emotionally, spiritually, we are with the sweet psalmist of Israel when he wrote, 'From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I', Ps. 61. 2; and, with David and Job it is a comfort to say, when we do not even know where we are any more, 'When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then **thou** knewest my path', Ps. 142. 3. Our God knows exactly where we are, even when we don't know it ourselves. And, dare I say it, when no-one else will sit with us amongst the ashes, He is not far from us. Though we may not sense His presence, the Shepherd is always in the valley of the shadow with His sheep.

And why did God bring upon His servant his greatest fear? Search me! Was it, perhaps, to show him, and us, that, even when a believer is down and almost out, faith and faithfulness still hold us fast. The faith is ours in our God, that divine gift of faith given to us, which will flutter and beat, be it ever so weak; the faithfulness is our God's to us, who will never let us go. Even in the valley of the shadow, the believer falteringly holds on to the sublime truth that we are 'kept by the power of God', 1 Peter 1. 5. And oh! the comfort, the enormous, blessed, rest-inducing comfort, of the words of our dear Lord to His Father, initially of the eleven disciples but surely of all His own, 'those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost', John 17. 12!



ARTHUR SHEARMAN 1923 – 2014

An appreciation by KEN RUDGE, St. Austell, Cornwall, England

In the home call of Arthur Shearman, the assemblies have lost a 'brother indeed'. His longstanding commitment to a very broad range of the Lord's work throughout his life made him a beloved brother and fellow labourer to so many. Arthur was not just a participator but an initiator and encourager of such work, and we have a heritage of ongoing spiritual activities as a result. Quiet and unassuming as he seemed, Arthur was a powerful influence for good amongst the saints and many of us owe to him much that influenced our early as well as later spiritual lives.

Born and educated in Gloucester, he left school at fourteen, known as 'a bit of a lad'. Never one to stand still, however, he immediately set about enhancing his education and life's work. He joined Nicks and Co, a firm that imported and processed timber for the building trade, and stayed with them until retiring at the age of seventy. He found it easy to mix with people and, putting them at ease, establishing firm and lasting relationships with all he met. At the age of fourteen, he trusted Christ as his Saviour, was baptized, and was received into fellowship in the assembly meeting at Ebenezer Gospel Hall, King's Square, in Gloucester. It was a 'Faith for Life' and he never looked back on his commitment to Christ.

Whilst working for Nicks, he passed his driving test and commenced a lifelong love for his cars, beginning with his beloved Morris Minor 1000. During his lunch breaks he used the time to study the scriptures and pray. This laid the foundations of his very fluent gift to preach and teach the word of God.

In April 1947, he married Rae, and settled into family life in Hucclecote. Through children's meetings they held in their home, the assembly work at Hillview commenced. It has since flourished into a fruitful work for the Lord in the area. As a result of having to move to Worcester for work, Arthur and Rae joined Charles Street assembly, where they were fully engaged in children's and youth work. By now, a recognised Conference speaker, he travelled widely, but never liked to 'stay away'! The new work on the large housing estate in the Warndon area of Worcester developed and Arthur was fully involved, acting as Sunday school superintendent and secretary for fifty years. At one time, the children's work reached to a crowded ninety-nine pupils.

Arthur always had a very full diary. Listing his many involvements demonstrates the extent to which he is so worthy of his epitaph, 'Not here, gone to another meeting!' Besides his constant Conference and mid-week ministry meetings, he developed Area Youth Meetings, a Prayer Fellowship Group, and Counties Work Liaison Groups and he had a hand in local village evangelism projects. He wrote most of the Gleaners Advanced Study Notes for the Postal Bible Educational Services, as also many helpful articles expounding scripture.

Arthur loved books and his collection outgrew most of the storage space in his home. One of his first loves was the work of Precious Seed Magazine and he served on the Trust for forty years. He joined in 1966 becoming Reports Editor in 1977 and also handling past issues requests. Ultimately, he served as Ministry Articles Editor from 2000 to 2002. Under his editorship, the magazine blossomed into the full colour, larger print, version it is today.

Beyond all this, Arthur was a 'genuine man'. He loved people, caring deeply, and was a constant visitor, with kindly face and cheeky smile. He loved music, and was a gifted pianist. Deeply missed as a dear husband, father and grandfather, we thank God for this remarkable and devoted servant of His that we were blessed to have and know.





As we said in the preceding article, the correlation between Jonah and Jesus Christ is seen both by way of comparison and contrast. That Christ is greater than Jonah may be seen also in respect of His:

3. SIGNIFICANCE: as a sign.

(i) *The Preparation of the Grave*

'The Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah', Jonah 1. 17 – A symbolic grave.

'And he (*they*) made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich (*man*) in his death', Isa. 53. 9 – A literal grave.

(ii) *The Period in the Grave*

'And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights', Jonah 1. 17.

'So shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth', Matt. 12. 40. 'He rose again the third day', 1 Cor. 15. 4.

(iii) *The Prayers for Deliverance*

Of Jonah it is recorded, 'I cried by reason of my affliction unto the Lord and he heard me', Jonah 2. 2.

Of Jesus, the writer of Hebrews says, 'Who in the days of his flesh when he had offered up prayers and supplication with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared', Heb. 5. 7.

(iv) *The Pangs of Suffering*

Jonah: 'the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me', also, 'The waters compassed me about, even to the soul', Jonah 2. 3, 5.

Jesus: 'deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all

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thy waves and thy billows are gone over me', Ps. 42. 7. 'The waters are come in unto my soul . . . I am come into deep waters where the floods overflow me', Ps. 69. 1, 2.

Jonah: 'out of the belly of hell (Heb. *sheol*) cried I', Jonah 2. 2.

Jesus: 'Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell', (Gk. *hades*), Acts 2. 27.

Jonah: 'I am cast out of thy sight', Jonah 2. 4.

Jesus: 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' Ps. 22. 1; Matt. 27. 46.

(v) *The Power of Resurrection*

Jonah: 'Yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O Lord my God', Jonah 2. 6.

Jesus: 'Neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption', Acts 2. 37. 'Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father', Rom. 6. 4.

(vi) *Their Praise and Vows*

Jonah: 'But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that I have vowed', Jonah 2. 9.

Jesus: 'My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation: I will pay my vows before them that fear him', Ps. 22. 25.

(vii) *Their Personal Deliverance*

Jonah: 'Salvation is of the Lord', Jonah 2. 9.

Jesus: 'Help me . . . deliver my soul

. . . save me . . . thou hast heard me', Ps. 22. 19-21.

Jonah: bleached by the digestive juices of the great fish (affecting his hair, skin-tone etc).

Jesus: bearing the marks of Calvary in His hands, feet and side.

4. SEERSHIP

(i) *The Prophet*

Jonah's role as a prophet is confirmed by our Lord, 'the sign of the prophet Jonas', Matt. 12. 39. Jesus' role as a prophet is predicted by Moses, 'A prophet shall

the Lord your God raise up like unto me; him shall ye hear', Acts 3. 22.¹

Moses predicted it but Peter and Stephen confirm that the Lord Jesus is the prophet of whom Moses spoke. The role of the seer was both to prophesy and to preach. A reading of Jonah leads one to ask, 'Where is the foretelling?' Jonah's significant role is 'forthtelling' rather than foretelling. His life, however, is a prophetic parable of the nation of Israel. He was one of the earliest prophets to put pen to paper.

(ii) *The Preacher*

Of Jonah it is recorded, 'Arise, go unto Nineveh . . . and preach unto it', Jonah 3. 2.

Of Jesus it is recorded, 'Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God', Mark 1. 14. Also, 'which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord and was

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confirmed unto us by them that heard him', Heb. 2. 3.

(iii) The Preaching

Jonah's message was one of judgement with but a hint of mercy, 'Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown', Jonah 3. 4. However, the timescale gives a hint of mercy, 'yet forty days'.

Jesus' message was one of judgement with great mercy. Because of their rejection of their Messiah, the destruction of Jerusalem was predicted. The timescale, however, was nearer forty years than forty days. Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70. Jesus' message for the Gentiles is in complete contrast to the message of Jonah. His was a message of grace seasoned with judgement. How merciful God has been to the Gentile nations; already, the patience of God has been displayed for two millennia! This message is not limited to a great city but embraces the whole world.

Jonah's message led to repentance, 'the men of Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonas', Matt. 12. 41.

Jesus' message leads to repentance, 'Repent ye, and believe the gospel', Mark 1. 15. Gospel preachers do not always put sufficient emphasis on the need for repentance. As we have seen, it was in Christ's first recorded message, and it was in Peter's first message on the day of Pentecost, 'Repent, and be baptized'. We often speak of the gospel message in terms of

invitation. However, we need to redress the balance with, 'but now *commandeth* all men everywhere to repent', Acts 17. 30. Remember, the invitation is the invitation of a Sovereign, and it should not be lightly set aside.

(iv) The Product

Jonah witnessed a whole Gentile city repenting of their sins and believing God.

This might be the 120,000 of Jonah chapter 4 verse 11, or an even greater population if the 120,000 are babies who 'cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand'. In either case, it is a finite number in view.

Jesus witnesses an innumerable company of Gentiles repenting of their sins, Rev. 7. 9. God is going to populate heaven with those made in the likeness of His Son.

(v) The Portrayal of the Character of God

Jonah expresses this privately in prayer, 'I know that thou art a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness', Jonah 4. 2.

Jesus expounded this publicly by His presence, 'God . . . hath . . . spoken unto us by his Son', Heb. 1. 2. 'Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ . . . the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him', John 1. 17-18.

(vi) Personal Traits²

Following his experiences, Jonah sat

down on the east side of Nineveh to see what would happen now the Ninevites had repented. He was filled with anger, Jonah 4. 5, 9.

Before His 'experience' at the cross, Jesus stood looking over Jerusalem considering what would happen now the city had rejected Him. He was filled with anguish, Luke 19. 41.

Jonah concluded arrogantly and angrily, 'It is better for me to die than live', Jonah 4. 3.

What can we conclude concerning our Lord Jesus Christ? His death has brought life to countless multitudes. 'But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour, Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel', 2 Tim. 1. 10. His life makes Him our *great* High Priest. 'If . . . we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life', Rom. 5. 10.

Jonah is a picture of the death and resurrection of Christ. He is a parable of the declension and renewal of Israel. Christ is pre-eminent – for He is greater than Jonah as a servant, as a sacrifice and a Saviour, as a sign, and as a Seer. Jonah is but the shadow. It is Christ who is the substance!

ENDNOTES

- 1 See also Acts 7. 37; Deut. 18. 15
- 2 Most of this article has been a comparison between Jonah and the Lord whereas their personal traits should be contrasted rather than compared.

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Background

The geographical position of the Promised Land ensured that the Israelites were exposed to wars, frequently not of their own making. Not especially militaristic, the nation of Israel is often seen in the Old Testament as being cast upon God to protect them and embolden them against opponents far more numerous and better equipped than themselves. In the New Testament, we find that the Christian's enemies are essentially *spiritual*, for 'we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places', Eph. 6. 12. Our Lord's words to Pontius Pilate should be definitive for all His followers, 'My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence', John 18. 36. How much better it would have been for the cause of Christ if these words had been obeyed through the centuries!

In New Testament times, Rome ruled the civilized world, and the evidence of military power was apparent on every hand. The thought of soldiers marching in formation, battling valiantly in foreign campaigns, and enjoying the

THE BELIEVER AS A

sweet triumph of victory provide the New Testament writers with a rich and instructive set of metaphors.

The believer's enemies

Conversion initiates a life-long struggle in the believer's life between the flesh and the Spirit.¹ To the dismay of every new convert, the flesh – one's unregenerate nature – remains, 'unremoved and unimproved'. Moreover, in addition to the flesh within, the world – the evil world system presided over by the devil – presents a constant danger from without, at times enticing our hearts, and at other times confronting us with cruel opposition. The world is the devil's masterpiece and kingdom, and he himself is the relentless foe of all who seek to serve God. Whilst he is to be resisted, it would be folly to underestimate his power

and subtlety, and we need to pray constantly 'bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one'.²

Christ's pivotal triumph

Lest we should quickly despair, let us remember that our Lord Jesus Christ has already decisively triumphed over all the malignant spiritual forces arrayed against us. Through death He destroyed him who had the power of death.³ Therefore, the key to the Christian's victory on every battlefield of life is to stand assuredly on the ground that Christ has already won for us. It is not a question of pioneering new territory, but rather (like Israel in the Promised Land) a matter of possessing what our Lord has secured for us. In our weakness, He must be our sure resource and our strength, at the same time drawing encouragement from the heroes of faith who 'out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens'.⁴ Christ's ultimate victory is assured, and through Him His people are overcomers, and 'more than conquerors', remembering always that 'the battle is the Lord's'. On the other hand, shallow triumphalism is to be avoided; instead we must soberly bear in mind that we are chosen to be His soldiers in a theatre of deadly conflict. The basics of military life will therefore provide us with some vital imperatives.

Characteristics of the soldier

The Christian soldier does not fight alone, and it is encouraging that scripture emphasizes the *collective* aspects of Christian warfare. Roman armies were expert at military manoeuvres in which warriors stood shoulder to shoulder, supporting and protecting one another. Terms such as 'fellow-soldier', 'fellow-prisoner of war' abound.⁵ Paul's letters to Timothy exhort his younger colleague to suffer hardship as 'a good soldier of Jesus Christ' and to 'fight the good fight of the faith'.⁶ Paul regarded his apostolic labours as campaigns, in which he fought with spiritual weaponry to storm pretentious strongholds of proud opposition to Christ and His gospel.





SOLDIER

By **KEN TOTTON**
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An essential part of being a good soldier is discipline, for example, the ability to 'keep rank' and, thus, be an asset rather than a liability to one's companions. King David enjoyed the support of men who could 'keep rank', 'being men of war, that could order the battle array'.⁷ For our part, in a day when individualism is rampant, what a need there is for godly discipline and obedience, whether to our Lord as 'commander-in-chief', or to local leaders of His appointing. The experienced soldier knows how truly vital teamwork and comradeship are.

Personal priorities

If we are to be effective Christian warriors how must we proceed? Ephesians chapter 6 verses 10-20 is the most comprehensive passage on the subject of Christian warfare, and should be studied carefully. We are to take to ourselves the 'whole armour' of God. This is the complete equipment of the heavily armed soldier. We dare not wait until the evil day is suddenly upon us; rather, we are to be ready, armed, and watchful at all times, shunning sloth and carelessness. As the conflict is spiritual, only spiritual resources will suffice. 'Girt about with truth' suggests personal integrity, and readiness for service. The breastplate of righteousness points to practical, transparent righteousness of character and conduct. Having one's feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace echoes a famous passage in Isaiah.⁸ It indicates that every Christian should be a bearer of the saving message of the gospel, both for the blessing of others, and for our own sake. Deep confidence in God will be a shield. Salvation, appropriated and enjoyed, supplies a vital helmet. The Christian warrior, like his Lord, is privileged to wield the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. But, have we made it our own? Are we comfortable and competent swordsmen? The Greek here suggests readiness with a timely word or saying, appropriate to the present threat, which will put the enemy to flight.

Examples of good soldiers

Scripture provides us with many

examples of faithful and valiant soldiers. Let two suffice, one from each Testament.

1. Uriah the Hittite

As Christians we are to be soldiers on active service, not entangled in the affairs of civilian life.⁹ Uriah the Hittite was characterized by great loyalty to David. He would not visit his wife Bathsheba when his fellow-soldiers were at the battle: 'The ark, and Israel, and Judah, abide in booths; and my lord Joab, and the servants of my lord, are encamped in the open field; shall I then go into mine house, to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife? as thou livest, and as thy soul liveth, I will not do this thing'.¹⁰ Singleness of purpose, and freedom from distracting cares, are essential for the service of Christ. Uriah did not recoil from the hottest battle, but laid down his life. How despicable his treatment at the hands of David!

2. Paul

From the outset, suffering was the appointed lot of the Apostle, in part designed to keep him humble and usable in Christ's service.¹¹ 2 Corinthians chapter 11 catalogues the 'battle-honours' won by Paul in the service of Christ. Not that Christian soldiers should dwell on such things, but Paul was facing unusual circumstances requiring him to write thus to the Corinthians. He bore in his body the marks of the Lord Jesus. He knew that suffering for Christ must precede reigning with Him. What do we know of hardship, inconvenience and opposition, in the furtherance of the work of the Lord?

An intellectual giant, he set about demolishing arguments, and vocal strongholds of satanic opposition, with alacrity. Is this not a timely challenge to us in the modern world, where Christianity is often discounted in favour of atheism and even, at times, the weirdest beliefs? Armed with the glorious gospel of Christ, the kingdom of God calls loudly for the engagement of faithful and prayerful warriors who will follow in this noble tradition. Indeed, every believer is called to contend earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints.¹²

Chosen to be soldiers
In an alien land
Chosen, called and faithful
For our captain's band;
In the service royal
Let us not grow cold;
Let us be right loyal,
Noble, true, and bold.
FRANCES RIDLEY HAVERGAL

The warrior's recognition

So much for present conflict, but what of the future? Following campaigns, deeds of gallantry are weighed, and battle honours and campaign medals are awarded for acts of outstanding bravery. Likewise in ancient times the victorious Roman general could look forward to the ultimate honour of a triumphal procession in Rome itself. His seasoned and loyal commanders and soldiers would be there, with the fragrance of incense filling the air, the appreciative crowds imagining the valour displayed on battlefields in some remote corner of the empire. Such considerations surely point us to the future, and the day of Christ, the day of review and reward. Paul was looking well beyond the discomforts of prison and the approach of martyrdom when he wrote: 'I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me at that day: and not only to me, but also to all them that have loved his appearing'.¹³

Soon 'the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed'. May we be found as those who have pleased Him who has chosen us to be soldiers!¹⁴

ENDNOTES

- 1 Gal. 5. 17.
- 2 Matt. 6. 13 RV, cp. 1 Pet. 5. 8-9.
- 3 Heb 2. 14; cp. Col. 2. 15.
- 4 Heb. 11. 34.
- 5 Fellow-soldier Phil. 2.25; Philem. 2. Fellow-prisoner (of war) Rom. 16. 7; Col. 4. 10; Philem. 23.
- 6 2 Tim. 2. 3; 1 Tim. 6. 12; 2 Tim. 4. 7.
- 7 1 Chr. 12. 38 RV.
- 8 Isa. 52. 7.
- 9 2 Tim. 2. 3 'The Letters of Paul: An Expanded Paraphrase', F. F. BRUCE.
- 10 2 Sam. 11. 11.
- 11 Acts 9. 15-16; 2 Cor. 11. 30.
- 12 Jude 3
- 13 2 Tim. 4. 7-8 RV.
- 14 1 Cor. 15. 52; 2 Tim. 2. 4.

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The book of Ephesians is the epistle that unfolds the great truth of 'the mystery', which, as we shall see, has been hid in God from ages and generations. It was given to the apostle Paul to reveal this truth to the saints, 3. 3-4, and that this mystery unfolds the present unity of all the redeemed, irrespective of nationality. They now form the body of Christ, of which He is the head. The six chapters manifest the exalted position believers presently enjoy, as we are now seen to be 'in Christ'. In chapter 1, we have blessings that cannot be denied. In chapter 2, we have a body that cannot be dismembered. In chapter 3, it is a building that cannot be demolished. In chapter 4, it is a book that cannot be divided, and a bond that cannot be destroyed. In chapter 5, we have a bride that cannot be divorced, and this is followed in chapter 6 by a battle in which we cannot be defeated.

ephesia

By **NORMAN MELLISH**
Stoke-on-Trent, England

If the actions of God are determined by His own will, the reaction by the saints is to raise an anthem of praise in verse 6, this is, 'to the praise of the glory of His grace', which is because of what we are now, sons. If grace is the means of blessing, such blessing will give eternal glory to the Lord. Not only so, but we have found acceptance in the Lord Jesus. What Christ is to the Father, as His beloved, is exactly what He has made us!

The previous verses relate to the eternal purpose of God who chose us, predestined us, and accepted us. Now, as we are

The letter divides itself into three sections, chapters 1-3, where we have our **heavenly calling**. Chapters 4-5 bring before us our **earthly conduct**, and chapter 6 our **Satanic conflict**. In chapters 1-3 we are sitting in heavenly places. This is followed by our walk, chapters 4-5, and, in chapter 6, we are bidden to stand on the ground that the Lord has won for us.

The opening chapter reveals in verses 1-9 the **purpose of God**; this is followed in verses 10-14 by the **prospect for Christ**, when He will take universal government in association with His own. Then, verses 15-23, we have the **prayer of Paul** when He is praying home the ministry he has given.

The purpose of God, vv. 1-9

The Epistle is not written to a church but to saints, that is, holy ones, for this truth is for all believers. Paul begins with blessing God as he appreciates all that has been done for us in Christ. If we bless God it is because He has blessed us. These blessings far surpass what was done for Israel in

a former day. Their blessings were in Abraham; ours are in Christ. Nor are they earthly, as those belonging to the Israelites, for ours are in heavenly places. Israel's blessings were also natural, whereas ours are seen to be spiritual blessings.

If God has blessed us, v. 3, we now find that these blessings are commensurate with the choice He made of us in verse 4. Here we have a truth that is not for the world, but a truth for saints to enjoy. This is not for believers to fight over, but something to cause the heart to rise in praise for the effective work of God with us. The statement is very clear that it was God who chose us, and the time of the divine choice was long before the worlds were framed.

How delightful to ponder the fact that there was never a time when we were not in the mind and heart of God! The purpose of the divine choice is also taught: it was that we should be 'holy and without blame before Him in love'. Does this refer to our present place in divine purpose, and is it how the Lord now sees us? Or is it the fact that the eternal purpose of God is in view, and we will ever be before Him, that is, face to face, in such a state as is here seen? When we are in His presence it will be in love.

Not only so but such is the call of God that we shall also be in His presence as sons. This is the truth of predestination, that is, marking out beforehand the destiny which we are to enjoy. The word 'adoption' carries the thought of 'son placing', and all is 'in Christ' and according to the good pleasure of God's will; no other reason is given for the kindness of God toward us. We have nothing without Christ, but in Christ we have all things!

in time, He had to redeem us. Redemption could only be through the precious blood of Christ, and alongside this is the forgiveness of sins. It is little wonder He speaks of the 'riches of His grace', v. 7. The glory of His grace makes us sons in the family, but the riches of His grace finds us as sinners, and brings in redemption and forgiveness. In these verses we have the praise that resounds, the placing He gives, the price that it cost, and the promise He made, even the forgiveness of sins!

A further aspect of the movements of God toward us is seen in verse 8, when He has 'abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence'. The great truth the Lord reveals is that which will see the Lord Jesus glorified in this world, but not by Himself. It will be in association with His saints. This is why it is called 'the mystery of his will'. That Christ is going to take up universal government is a well-known fact





NS PART ONE

from the Old Testament; that believers of this present age are going to share in that rule was not revealed in the Old Testament, and this is why it is called 'the mystery of his will', for all New Testament mysteries bring before us something that was not known in any former dispensation. Again, this is just because God willed it so; He hath purposed it in Himself.

The prospect of glory, vv. 10-14

The mind of God is that ultimately the administration of this world should find its completion not only in the earthly sphere, but also in the uniting of the heavens with it. This recalls the words of the Lord to Nathaniel in John chapter 1 verse 51. When speaking of the coming millennium, He says, 'hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man'. The original

purpose of God, to see a man ruling the world, will then be realized, and links with heaven will be restored. That this refers to the kingdom cannot be disputed, for all is in relation to Christ; in the eternal state the Son will be 'subject unto him who put all things under him, that God may be all in all', 1 Cor. 15. 28.

Verse 11 introduces the believers who will share with Christ in His coming glory. As 2 Timothy chapter 2 verse 12 teaches, we shall reign with the Lord during the day of His public honour, cp. Rev. 5. 10. This again has been marked out beforehand, as the Lord has predestined us, 'according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will'. All will be for the divine pleasure, and to the praise of His glory. Those who 'first trusted' would be those of the early chapters in Acts who were looking for Messianic glory. Gentiles are set forth as also having a part in this honour. WILLIAM KELLY writes, 'He means that we should share the glory along with

Christ. Thus there are two great parts in the mystery of His will. The first is Christ, the second is the Church'.¹

These first fourteen verses bring before us:

- the sovereignty of God, v. 4;
- the sufferings of Christ, v. 7; and
- the sealing of the Spirit, v. 13.

How precious to see the movements of the Spirit of God toward us as the Father confirms

the work of grace in us! The ground of salvation is clearly revealed as we have **heard, believed**, and were then **sealed**. To seal us indicates that at the moment of salvation the Lord immediately sets us apart for Himself, and the seal is the sign of ownership. The reading is 'upon believing', v. 13. The Spirit of God is given to the believer the moment he is saved, and it is this alone that enables us to call God 'Father', cp. Gal. 4. 6. That every believer receives the Holy Spirit at the moment of conversion is confirmed in Romans chapter 8 verse 9 where we see that 'if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his'.

The Holy Spirit of God is not only given to us as a seal, indicating that we are divine property, but He is also an 'earnest'. This would manifest that we have property – that property is the place we shall share with Christ in the kingdom, seen in Romans chapter 8 verses 18-22, when 'the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared

with the glory that shall be revealed in us', and when the worlds recovered at the

manifestation of the sons of God become the inheritance unfolded here in Ephesians. The earnest is the guarantee that we will receive all that God has purposed and promised.

The final redemption of 'the purchased possession' will only be known when the Lord returns in great glory with His own. The coming kingdom will be unto the praise of His glory.

These first fourteen verses manifest how that the whole of the Godhead is moving for the blessing of the saints. God chose us, and chose to have us in His presence as sons. They show how He has accepted us in the Son, and, finally, how we will share with the Lord Jesus in His future glory.

ENDNOTES

- 1 WILLIAM KELLY, *Lectures on the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians*, Bible Truth Publishers, 1972, pg. 26.

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Grandparents and Children for God

Every child born into the world, whether to poverty or privilege, is special to the creator God, who gives life to all mankind. All of God's purposes for the continuance of the race are wrapped up in the coming of children into the world.

In every great crisis in man's relationship with God, a child has been used to fulfil the prophetic word: to bring a people back from apostasy, or trumpet forth the news of a coming Saviour; from a slave prison in Egypt a deliverer came. Similarly, from three barren women God moved to bring three Nazarites into the world, in Samson to rescue a people from democracy, in Samuel to bring a nation out of the abyss of apostasy, and in the great Baptist, to herald the news that the King was coming.

The Lord himself loved children, as recorded, 'Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye cannot enter the kingdom of heaven', Matt. 18. 3. Again, He tells us without preamble, 'It is not the will of your Father . . . that one of these little ones should perish', v. 14. In this context, He speaks of angels and children and guardianship.

In opposition to this, Satan knows these things and it has always been his desire to frustrate the Divine will. In Eden's garden the promise was given that the

seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head. Thus, through the seed of Abraham, through whom all nations of the earth will be blessed, and through the seed of David, whereby the throne would be established, up until the time a promised child was born, Satan has sought to destroy the promised seed. From the children cast into the Nile, through Athaliah killing all but one of Israel's princes, up to Herod murdering the innocents and 'Rachel weeping for her children',¹ kill the child, destroy the seed, break the chain, has always been Satan's purpose.

By
TOM WATT
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Today, it seems as if the battle for the minds and souls of the race has intensified, and the ground of this warfare is in the fertile minds of young people. The religionist has always said, 'Give me a child till they are six and I will have him forever'.² When people are older, their minds and opinions are mostly set, but children are open and yet to grow, ready to explore and enjoy this great adventure of faith that God has promised. If only this vast field can be exploited and touched by the unchanging word of God!

Satan knows this, and in our age children are bombarded on every side with error, and even baser ideas. From same-sex marriage, so called, to theories of evolution, from blatant promiscuity to the promise of abortion by entitlement, from the very real power of 'peer pressure' to very easily obtained contraception, young people are seduced and pressurized away from God and His word, and the concept of 'living for God' is ridiculed, both publicly and privately. An over-exposure to television and the internet contribute to this atmosphere of godless self-will and self satisfaction.

It can be very difficult for parents, struggling with work life, family life, and the normal aspirations of children, to cope and counter this flood tide of anti-God propaganda, and this is where grandparents can help.

Older people have time to set aside, specific time to pray for

grandchildren and, instead of grumbling about noise, youth and irresponsibility, can make a real effort by telephone, letter, Skype, or, if possible, face to face, to bring their years of experience to help and encourage young people.

Some time past, a group of young people were telling me how tough it was in a group of unbelieving friends, and how hard it was today. After listening for some time I said, 'It has always been hard' – to kneel and pray in a room of thirty men on the first night of National Service, did they think it was easy? And many older people have been in these circumstances and benefited from them.

Some, probably many, grandparents have unbelieving children, and therefore grandchildren who have no knowledge of salvation. It would be our greater responsibility to build bridges, make time, keep in touch and, by life and love, keep trying to give the opportunity to hear the way of salvation.

In Ecclesiastes, the last chapter gives a picture of an old man sitting with his grandson reminiscing, remembering and talking about many things in an interesting way. He talks about

- the Creator;
- old age coming, inevitably with all its problems.

Because he was wise he used acceptable words. Children and young people are often very interested in yesterday, life in a past era, and this can provide grandparents with an opportunity to talk about the past, if used wisely to create an interest and give opportunities to converse.

The actions of grandparents in relation to grandchildren today require patience, perseverance, and, above all, prayer. Many of us will doubtless not see the results of our hopes and visions, but the day will declare the results of a generation for God.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Matt. 2. 18.
- 2 That was the Jesuit motto, alleged to be attributed to Francis Xavier, the co-founder of the Jesuit Order. See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Up_Series.

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THE MIRACLES AND THE REVELATION OF GOD

By **MALCOLM HORLOCK** Cardiff, Wales

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

1

INTRODUCTION

Many people have an entirely false impression about the frequency of miraculous activity throughout human history. No doubt, such people would be surprised to learn that, according to scripture, there have been relatively few periods when supernatural works were performed by divinely empowered men.

PRIOR TO MOSES

Although the early period of human history witnessed dramatic and unique instances of God's intervention (notably the great flood¹ and the tower of Babel²), as far as we know, no miraculous powers were exercised by anybody before Moses.

From the creation through to the days of Moses, the biblical narrative was dominated by characters such as Noah, Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph. Yet there is no suggestion that any one of these possessed miracle-working powers.

For example, with his 318 trained men, together with his allies (Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre), Abraham ('Abram' as he was at the time) defeated the combined forces of King Chedorlaomer and his three royal confederates.³ Although Abraham would have readily endorsed the statement of Melchizedek that ultimately it was the Most High God who had delivered his enemies into his hand,⁴ the evidence is that he enjoyed no direct and dramatic supernatural help, such as Joshua and the men of Israel later enjoyed when warring against Amalek – supernatural help which came as a result of Moses holding high 'the rod of God'.⁵

Again, there was neither angel nor earthquake to set godly Joseph free from his dungeon in the prison where Pharaoh's prisoners were confined.⁶ And, to that extent, Joseph's experience can be contrasted with the experiences of the apostles, who, a millennium and a half later, were delivered as a result either of angelic intervention or of a timely earthquake.⁷

Moses and his successor

But, in marked contrast to the experiences of those who lived previously, there was a flurry of supernatural activity in the days of Moses. Stephen later summarized the miracles performed through Moses: 'he brought them out, after he had shown wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness forty years'.⁸

And such supernatural happenings continued into the days of Moses' successor – Joshua.⁹ We have only to think of the occasion when 'all Israel crossed over on dry ground, until all the people

had crossed completely over the Jordan', or of the remarkable defeat and destruction of the walled and fortified city of Jericho, or of the instance when the Lord miraculously lengthened the hours of daylight to enable Israel to avenge itself upon its enemies.¹⁰

From Joshua to Elijah

But for six centuries or so thereafter, although there continued to be cases of spectacular divine intervention, extraordinary signs and wonders performed by miracle-working men ceased. Ceased, that is, until the days of Elijah and his immediate successor – Elisha. So that, by way of example, although the Book of Judges records instances of divine interventions¹¹ and of supernatural empowerment,¹² we read of no judge exercising any miraculous powers.¹³ Again, David clearly possessed no miracle-working power to enable him to inflict blindness on Goliath,¹⁴ judgement as Elisha and Paul were later able to do on the army of Syria and on Elymas the magician respectively.¹⁵

Elijah and his successor

Yet many indeed were the miracles which were clustered around the ministries of Elijah and Elisha.¹⁶ We read of instances in their days when dead men were raised,¹⁷ when an iron axe head floated,¹⁸ when fire was brought down from heaven – on one occasion to consume an animal sacrifice,¹⁹ and on another to consume two companies of men²⁰ – and so on.

From Elisha to the public ministry of the Lord Jesus

But, following the days of Elijah and his successor, no men with miraculous powers appeared until our Lord Himself came some 900 years later.²¹ So that, again by way of example, when Sanballat and Tobiah, Nehemiah's enemies, jeered at the remnant's efforts to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem,²² Nehemiah was not in the position to curse them in the name of the Lord and to wait for two she-bears to rend them, as had once happened to forty-two lads who had jeered at the prophet Elisha.²³

We read of no miracles being performed by Jeremiah, Josiah, Malachi, or even by John the Baptist.²⁴ For, although John was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb,²⁵ and not only stood at the end of the line of 'Old Testament type' prophets, but was the greatest of the prophets in that he alone was the one sent to prepare the way for the Lord,²⁶ we are explicitly told that 'many' who came to our Lord 'beyond

the Jordan' testified that 'John performed no sign'.²⁷

The Lord Jesus and His 'successors'²⁸

But, as we would expect, the miracles performed by the Lord Jesus entirely eclipsed those performed by all others who had come before Him, both in magnitude and in number.

Our Lord's miracles were many and they were frequent. Almost half of the Gospel according to Mark prior to the account of Passion Week focuses on His miracles. Also we find frequent references in the gospels to large numbers of sick people being healed and of demon-possessed people being delivered.

By way of example only, I cite (from Matthew alone): 'they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed. And He cast out the spirits with a word, and *healed all who were sick*', 'Jesus went about all the cities and villages . . . *healing every sickness and every disease among the people*', 'great multitudes followed Him, and He *healed them all*', 'when the men of that place recognized Him, they sent out into all that surrounding region, brought to Him all who were sick, and begged Him that they might only touch the hem of His garment. And *as many as touched it were made perfectly well*', 'great multitudes came to Him, having with them the lame, blind, mute, maimed, and many others; and they laid them down at Jesus' feet, and *He healed them*. So the multitude marvelled when they saw the mute speaking, the maimed made whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing', 'the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and *He healed them*'.²⁹

If Moses turned water into *blood*, our Lord turned water into *wine*.³⁰ If Elijah raised the son of a widow (but raised none others as far as we know), our Lord raised the dead on *three recorded occasions*.³¹ If Elisha fed *one hundred* men with *twenty* barley loaves – and with some to spare – our Lord fed *five thousand* men ('besides women and children') with just *five* barley loaves – and with 'twelve baskets full of the fragments that remained'.³²

Similar miracles continued in impressive numbers during the days of those we might (with due reverence) describe as the Lord's 'successors' – of the apostles and their contemporaries.

Again, the miracles were many and they were frequent. With reference to apostles, we read, for example, that: '*many wonders and signs were done through the apostles*'; 'through the hands of the apostles *many signs and wonders were done among the people* . . . so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches . . . Also a multitude gathered from

the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and *they were all healed*'; and 'all the multitude kept silence and listened to Barnabas and Paul relating what *signs and wonders* God had worked through them among the Gentiles'.³³

There can be no doubt that Paul's work for the Lord in general was characterized by miraculous events. When writing to the churches of Rome, he summarized his ministry by informing them of 'those things which Christ' had accomplished through him 'to make the Gentiles obedient – in *mighty signs and wonders*, by the power of the Spirit of God'.³⁴ And in his second letter to the church at Corinth, he claimed, 'Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in *signs and wonders and mighty deeds*'.³⁵

On occasions, *exceptional* miracles were performed by the apostles Peter and Paul. In the case of Peter, we read of the inhabitants of Jerusalem that 'they brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that at least *the shadow of Peter passing by* might fall on some of them',³⁶ and in the case of Paul that 'God worked unusual [extraordinary] miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even *handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body* to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them'.³⁷

And it is important to recognize that the performing of miracles was not confined to the apostles. Far from it! It is beyond question that 'the working of miracles' featured largely in the life of the first generation Christians.

The apostle Paul's exposition of 'spiritual gifts' in 1 Corinthians 12 includes that of 'gifts of healings' and 'the working of miracles',³⁸ implying that these gifts played no small part in the ordinary function of the church of God at Corinth. And we should note especially that 'miraculous powers'³⁹ and 'gifts of healing' are carefully distinguished from 'apostles',⁴⁰ so that 'the working of miracles' cannot be regarded exclusively as the 'signs of an apostle'.⁴¹

Again, Paul's letter to the churches of Galatia refers to God as 'He who . . . works miracles among you'.⁴² And we read on several occasions in the Book of Acts of miracles being performed by those who were not apostles. We note Luke's specific mention of miraculous powers being exercised by Stephen, Philip, and Ananias.⁴³ The evidence points therefore to *the churches of apostolic days* as being characteristically miracle-working churches.

I emphasize 'the churches of apostolic days' because, although it is clear that the working

of miracles cannot be viewed as the exclusive province of the apostles, nevertheless each of the examples I have cited above relate to individuals or churches which were closely associated with the apostles.⁴⁴

I accept, of course, the point which has been made, that 'the story of the New Testament Church is the story of what was done through the apostles and those closely associated with them. A similar argument might be made about evangelism or founding of churches: "In the New Testament, churches were only founded by the apostles or their close associates; therefore, we should not found churches today"'.⁴⁵

I recognize also that there is no evidence that the gift of miracle-working began to die out during the period covered by Luke in the Book of the Acts. The closing chapter reports several remarkable events which took place at Malta following the great shipwreck of chapter 27. There Paul not only shook a venomous snake from his hand into a fire and continued unharmed,⁴⁶ but went on to heal the father of the chief man of the island.⁴⁷ Following this single healing-miracle, Luke (himself an eyewitness of all these events) reports, 'the rest of those on the island who had diseases also came and were healed'.⁴⁸ Indeed, there is no firm evidence that miracle-working powers gradually waned or diminished during the lifetime of the apostles.⁴⁹

But then we must also take account of what the writer to the Hebrews says in verses 3 and 4 of chapter 2. Speaking of the 'great salvation' enjoyed by believers, he assures those to whom he wrote, not only that this salvation 'began to be spoken by the Lord', but that it 'was confirmed to us by those who heard Him',⁵⁰ God also bearing witness both *with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit*'. By his use of the past tense ('those who *heard* Him'), I understand the writer to be referring to an earlier generation of believers who had enjoyed experiences which no longer took place.

DAN WALLACE rightly argues that, if the miraculous sign gifts had still continued, 'the author missed a great opportunity to seal his argument against defection. He could have simply said: "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which was . . . confirmed to us by those who heard, and is still confirmed among us while God bears witness with signs. . . . All in all, Hebrews 2. 3-4 seems to involve some solid inferences that the sign gifts had for the most part ceased"'.⁵¹

It is also worth noting that, as had been true of the miracles performed by Moses and Elijah and their respective successors, the miracles of both the Lord Jesus and those of apostolic days were

often spectacular – and were certainly not open to denial.⁵² As far as I know, after the coming of the Holy Spirit, no attempt to heal ever failed. The recorded miraculous healings were always complete and they were always instantaneous.

Summary

The evidence suggests that there were three periods (and *only* three periods) of human history when there were God-empowered miracle-working men.⁵³

ENDNOTES

- 1 Gen. 6-8
- 2 Gen. 11. 1-9.
- 3 Gen. 14. 9-24.
- 4 Gen. 14. 20.
- 5 Exod. 17. 8-13.
- 6 Gen. 39. 20-41. 14.
- 7 Acts 5. 19; 12. 7-10; 16. 26.
- 8 Acts 7. 36. See Exod. 4-12; Exod. 14; and Exod. 16 to Num. 21 respectively.
- 9 I speak of Joshua as the 'successor' of Moses on the basis of Num. 27. 18-23 and Deut. 34. 9.
- 10 Josh. 3. 7-17; 6. 2-21; 10. 12-14.
- 11 I instance the miraculous sign of the fleece and the dew in Judges 6, and the miraculous provision of water at Lehi in Judges 15. The birth of Samson was also clearly miraculous, Judg. 13. 2-24.
- 12 I need only cite the remarkable exploits of Samson, Judg. 14-16; of which his killing a thousand Philistines when armed with nothing but the jawbone of an ass is a notable example, Judg. 15. 15.
- 13 It is noteworthy that the divine interventions in chapters 6 and 15 came in response to the prayers of Gideon and Samson respectively, and not to any miracle-working powers possessed by the two men, Judg. 6. 36-40; Judg. 15. 18-19.
- 14 1 Sam. 17. 40-50. Although David recognized that it would be the Lord who would deliver him from the hand of the Philistine champion, 1 Sam. 17. 36-37. According to scripture, God's hand can be seen in directing, not only a stone from a brook, 1 Sam. 17. 40, 49, but a piece of a millstone, Judg. 9. 53, a royal spear, 1 Sam. 18. 10, a randomly fired arrow, 2 Chr. 18. 33, and a lightning strike, Job 36. 32 JND.
- 15 2 Kgs. 6.18; Acts 13. 9-11.
- 16 I speak of Elisha as the 'successor' of Elijah on the basis of 1 Kgs. 19. 16 and 2 Kgs. 2. 9-10, 15.
- 17 1 Kgs. 17. 17-24; 2 Kgs. 4. 18-37. Compare 2 Kgs. 13. 21.
- 18 2 Kgs. 6. 5-6.
- 19 1 Kgs. 18. 38.
- 20 2 Kgs. 1. 10-12.
- 21 Although, again, there were unmistakable demonstrations of God's direct activity. I need only refer to the shadow turning back on the 'sun dial' (possibly 'staircase') of Ahaz in the days of Hezekiah, 2 Kgs. 20. 11; Isa. 38. 7-8, or to the miraculous deliverances of Daniel and his three companions, Dan 3. 23-28; 6. 20-23.
- 22 Neh. 4. 1-3.
- 23 2 Kgs. 2. 23-24. 'Baldhead' was a term of disrespect. The challenge 'go up' may have been a scoffing reference to the report of Elijah's ascension 'by a whirlwind'; the Hebrew word used twice in 2 Kings chapter 2 verse 23 is the same as that used of Elijah in verse 11 ('went up').
- 24 'The great prophets, Isaiah, Amos, Micah, Jeremiah,

John the Baptist, work no miracles', A. H. STRONG, *Systematic Theology*, pg. 242. (The complete work can be downloaded from <http://www.ntslibrary.com/PDF%20Books%2011/Strong%20-%20Systematic%20Theology.pdf>.)

25 Luke 1. 15.

26 Matt. 11. 9-11.

27 John 10. 41.

28 The word 'successor' is defined by Cambridge Dictionaries Online as 'someone or something that comes after another person or thing'. The word is often used of a person who succeeds another in an office. I speak of the apostles as the 'successors' of our Lord only in terms of His and their earthly and special ministry and mission. I do so on the basis of John 17. 18 (noting that verse 20 distinguishes them from believers in later generations), and 20. 21.

29 Matt. 8. 16; 9. 35; 12. 15; 14. 35-36; 15. 30-31; 21. 14.

30 Exod. 7. 20-21; John 2. 6-11.

31 1 Kgs. 17. 17-24; Mark 5. 22-24, 35-43; Luke 7. 11-17; John 11. 39-45. Our Lord's summary of His works includes the words, 'the dead are raised up', Matt. 11. 5. He also gave the twelve apostles the commission (and with it the power) to 'raise the dead', Matt. 10. 8.

32 2 Kgs. 4. 42-44; Matt. 14. 16-21.

33 Acts 2. 43; 5. 12-16; 15. 12 (literal translation). See also Acts 14. 3; 19. 12; 28. 9.

34 Rom. 15. 18-19.

35 2 Cor. 12. 12.

36 Acts 5. 15. Separately, it seems that the disciples at Joppa were convinced that Peter possessed exceptional miraculous power, or they would not have sent for him to come to them, presumably with the purpose of raising up Dorcas, Acts 9. 36-42.

37 Acts 19. 11-12.

38 1 Cor. 12. 9-10.

39 1 Cor. 12. 28 JND. The Greek word used is *dynameis*, literally 'powers'.

40 1 Cor. 12. 28-30.

41 2 Cor. 12. 12. Although, undoubtedly, there were occasions when special powers and spiritual gifts were imparted to others through the laying on of the hands of the apostles. See Acts 8. 14-19; 19. 6; and 2 Tim. 1. 6.

42 Gal. 3. 5.

43 Acts 6. 8; 8. 6-7; 9. 17-18 (cf. Acts 22. 13).

44 Compare D. A. CARSON's comments in paragraph 8 of his article, 'The Purpose of Signs and Wonders in the New Testament'. The article, which forms chapter 4 in *Power Religion: The Selling Out of the Evangelical Church?* (edited by CHARLES W. COLSON and MICHAEL SCOTT HORTON, Moody, 1992), is freely available at http://s3.amazonaws.com/tgc-documents/carson/1992_purpose_of_signs_and_wonders.pdf.

45 The quote comes from WAYNE GRUDEM in his article 'Should Christians Expect Miracles Today?' from the Winter 2000 issue of the *Pneuma Review*.

46 Acts 28. 5.

47 Acts 28. 8.

48 Acts 28. 9.

49 References to the illnesses of Epaphroditus, Phil. 2. 26-27, Timothy, 1 Tim. 5. 23, and Trophimus, 2 Tim. 4. 20, following the end of the period covered by the Book of Acts do not prove that, in Paul's later days, he was no longer able to perform healing miracles. That is one possible explanation, but it certainly does not amount to proof. We must bear in mind that the apostle had made no attempt to heal himself of his own 'thorn in the flesh' many years before the close of the period covered by

Luke, 2 Cor. 12. 7-8.

50 It is possible that the description 'those who heard Him' refers to a wider circle of early Christians than the apostles. But it is also possible that the writer deliberately avoided referring to the 'apostles' by that title, so that he might restrict the application of the word to our Lord Jesus – who is 'the Apostle', Heb. 3. 1. In much the way that he appears to studiously avoid speaking of believers as 'priests', so as to restrict the application of the word to our Lord Jesus – who is the 'High Priest', Heb. 3. 1.

51 PROFESSOR D. B. WALLACE, 'Hebrews 2:3-4 and the Sign Gifts'. In context, the quote from PROFESSOR WALLACE runs as follows: 'The eyewitnesses seem to be the only ones implied here who exercised such gifts . . . The aorist indicative loses much of its punch if the author intends to mean that these gifts continue. He so links the confirmation to the eyewitnesses—and the proof of such confirmation by the sign gifts—that to argue the continued use of such gifts seems to fly in the face of the whole context. If such gifts continued, the author missed a great opportunity to seal his argument against defection. He could have simply said: "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which was . . . confirmed to us by those who heard and is still confirmed among us while God bears witness with signs . . ." By way of contrast, note Gal. 3. 5 (written when the miraculous was still taking place . . .): "Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith?" (RSV) This contrast is significant: The author of Hebrews, who is so articulate a defender of his position, lost a perfect opportunity to remind his audience of the reality of their salvation by not mentioning the current manifestation of the sign gifts. That is, unless such were no longer taking place. Though an argument from silence, I think the silence is fairly deafening . . . All in all, Hebrews 2. 3-4 seems to involve some solid inferences that the sign gifts had for the most part ceased". The full article can be accessed at <https://bible.org/article/hebrews-23-4-and-sign-gifts>. We might say, therefore, that our Lord foretold that miraculous signs would be performed (Mark 16. 17-18), that the Book of Acts recorded that they were performed, and Hebrews 2. 3-4 testified that they had been performed.

52 See, for example, Luke 11. 14-16; John 9. 16; 11. 47; Acts 4. 14-16.

53 This description would include the person of our Lord Jesus, of whom the apostle Peter declared that 'God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him', Acts 10. 38. Compare Acts 2. 22.



J. CHARLETON STEEN, 1865-1931

By **JOHN BENNETT** Kirkby-in-Ashfield, England

Although to many the name J. Charleton Steen will be largely unknown, his contribution to the work of the Lord over the latter years of the 19th Century and into the 20th Century was significant.

J. Charleton Steen was born in June 1865 and spent the early part of his life in the Scottish town of Greenock. Although little is recorded of this part of his life, it is known that he was saved as a youth, and showed early promise, both in his studies of the scriptures and his zeal in the gospel. His early exercises did not diminish, and, at the relatively young age of twenty-three, he gave up secular employment and began full-time service for the Lord.

Initially, he set out to preach the gospel in Wigtownshire, south-west Scotland, joining a well-known evangelist, Robert Miller, to evangelize those coastal areas of Scotland. He was faithful to his task and was soon busy in gospel preaching. It did not take long for Steen to travel further afield, and for his obvious gift in the handling of the scriptures to become apparent. Eventually, his ministry took him all over the British Isles.

As a diligent student of the scriptures, Steen was always able to offer help to believers as a teacher. He moved from Scotland in the early years of the 20th Century, living in Nottingham, Leytonstone, Woodford and, finally, Buckhurst Hill, London. Of his service, B. R. MUDDITT wrote appreciatively, 'he laboured assiduously in the service of the Master . . . he met with the saints at Princes Hall, Buckhurst Hill, where his gracious ministry was always valued and appreciated'.¹

It was during the early 1920s that Steen wrote his first book *God's Prophetic Programme*, which was published by Pickering and

Inglis. Although focusing largely on the prophecy of Daniel, it was described as 'Indicating the Consummation of "The Times of the Gentiles" - with two charts in colour'.² It was some years later that the book by which he is best known, *Christ Supreme, an exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, was published by John Ritchie Ltd.³ Although by no means a detailed exposition, it has provided many profitable lines of study from its relatively few pages.

In 1925 Steen became associated with the *Believer's Magazine*. The first editor and founder of the magazine, John Ritchie, began to show signs of failing health. At that point, Steen was called upon to give his help to this particular work, and took up the task of joint editor. He compiled what were then known as 'Treasury Notes' for the magazine, these contributions being described by his successor, William Hoste, as of 'a helpful and Christ-exalting character . . . a source of pleasure and profit to the many readers'.⁴

On the death of John Ritchie, in March 1930, Steen took over the editorship. Having served alongside John Ritchie for a number of years, he was ably fitted to the task. However, as he had worked in conjunction with the older servant so he sought to enlist the help of others to continue the work. William Hoste recorded, 'he ever sought to give to the Lord's people that which would edify, as well as that which would lead to the path of true separation from the world, its systems and its ways'.⁵

Hoste was to succeed Steen, but worked with him during his short tenure as editor of *Believer's Magazine*. Not only did he get to know the character of Steen's ministry but also something of the man himself. In his appreciation of Steen, Hoste wrote, 'I found him

a man to be trusted, of equable temperament, tenacious to the truth, and very jealous of anything that might in any way reflect on the personal glory of our Lord'.⁶

Although only in his early sixties, Steen's commitments began to take their toll upon his health. Yet, in spite of these early signs of health problems, he did not slow down. He continued to travel to fulfil speaking engagements whilst still committed to his work as magazine editor. He commenced a series of meetings at the York Street Gospel Hall, Leicester in early September 1931. As R. G. Taylor of Leicester wrote later, 'It was noticeable to those who knew him well, that he was looking older and did not appear to be quite himself, although he did not complain of any ill-health. His ministry on the Wednesday evening meeting was much appreciated. This being the last occasion on which his voice was to be heard, it is not without significance that one of the hymns he gave out was "I'm waiting for Thee, Lord, Thy beauty to see Lord". About ten minutes before the end of the meeting Mr Steen suddenly closed his message and then collapsed on the platform'.⁷ In spite of his immediate hospitalization, within 12 hours he had passed peacefully into the presence of his Lord.

ENDNOTES

- 1 B. R. MUDDITT, writing in *Believer's Magazine*, October 1931, pg. 219.
- 2 Some date this book as early as 1920 but the books are often undated and therefore it is difficult to be precise as to the year of publication. Most would put the year as 1923.
- 3 Generally dated as 1930.
- 4 WILLIAM HOSTE, writing in *Believer's Magazine*, October 1931, pg. 217.
- 5 Ibid, pg. 217.
- 6 Ibid, pg. 218.
- 7 Ibid, pg. 219.

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Prayer has always been made to God by His people. Acts chapter 2 verse 42 tells us that those who received His word were baptized, and 'continued steadfastly . . . in prayers'. In the ten-day period between the Lord's ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit, the disciples (about 120 of them) met together to pray in an upper room, Acts 1. 14. Prayers were one of the principal practices of the early church so that when a member of the fellowship was imprisoned, he would know the church would be praying for him, Acts 12. 5, 12.

Examples of the early church at prayer

In Acts chapter 4 verses 24-31, the apostles Peter and John were 'commanded not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus', v. 18. They went back and reported 'all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them', v. 23. The group went to God in prayer. They didn't pray that the persecution would stop, but began their prayer by saying, 'Lord, thou art God', v. 24. The disciples recognized God's sovereignty, vv. 24, 28, and praised Him first of all as the Creator of all things. They accepted that nothing happens without His knowledge, and that He can use all circumstances for His purposes and glory. Today, when the assembly comes together to pray, we should adopt the same approach, always remembering that God is sovereign.

The glory of God, not the needs of men, should always be the highest aim in assembly prayers. Requests made in accordance with God's will can be certain of receiving answers to them. We discern God's will through the scriptures, and should ask accordingly. True prayer is not telling God what to do, but asking God to do His will in us, and through us, 1 John 5. 14-15. The early disciples recognized that they would face opposition, and they petitioned the Lord to give them boldness to speak His word.

In Acts chapter 12 verses 2-17, Peter had been put in prison by Herod the king after 'he killed James the brother of John with the sword',

THE ASSEMBLY P

v. 2. The assembly prayed without ceasing, v. 5, for Peter, even to the extent of having an all-night prayer meeting. God answered their prayers, and the proof was seen in Peter standing at the door of the house where they had gathered. One of their number, Rhoda, recognized Peter's voice, and was so excited that she ran to tell the others, but they said she was mad. When eventually they did open the door 'and saw him, they were astonished', v. 16.

We must face the fact that even in the most fervent assembly prayer meetings there is sometimes a spirit of doubt and unbelief. These Jerusalem saints believed that God could answer their prayers, so they kept at it night and day. But, when the answer came right to their door, they refused to believe it. Have we ever prayed but without really expecting anything to happen? No doubt many times!

Guidelines on the composition of our prayers

The Lord Jesus gave a pattern to the disciples when they asked Him, 'Lord, teach us to pray', Luke 11. 1, and it would be good to follow this basic pattern. However, it would be wrong to lay down any 'rules', other than that our prayers must be reverent, should commence with praise and thanksgiving to 'God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ', Eph. 5. 20, and be led by the Spirit of God. We should rise above simply presenting a list of requests to God.

At the assembly prayer meeting, prayer is to be offered for all people, especially for those that are in authority, 1 Tim. 2. 1-2. Prayer for a leading official, a Prime Minister, or a President, is, of itself, of no more importance than that of any other citizen, but the welfare of thousands may depend on him/her, and hence those in authority should be made a special subject of prayer. We may find it difficult to pray for those who are godless, and enemies of the cross of Christ, but we should remember that they are still people for whom Christ

has died. Men may spurn our appeal, reject our message, oppose our arguments, despise our persons, but they are helpless against our prayers!

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Of course, we should also remember our brothers and sisters in Christ, who are having a 'tough' time due to employment difficulties, family concerns, failing health, etc. We should pray that even in (or because of) such circumstances their spiritual life will be enhanced by the afflictions they are experiencing. If the difficulties they have cause them to turn more and more to God, then those trials become a blessing.

Paul prayed for people he had never met, and for others who he did not expect to see again. He prayed that they might have a greater appreciation of the love of Christ, to know more of the certain hope that God had given to them, and to experience the greatness of His power. Such positive prayer should be included for all the saints in the assembly prayer time, so that spiritually the assembly, as well as individuals, might grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour. It is so easy to limit our prayers to asking God to ease physical suffering.





PRAYER MEETING

One special item for assembly prayer is to support before the throne of grace those who are serving the Lord in a 'full-time' capacity in the home country, or overseas. Paul asked the Colossians to pray to God that He would open a door for him to preach the gospel, Col. 4. 3. It was a specific need then, and no doubt one that we could bring before the Lord today on behalf of missionaries and evangelists. The missionary expeditions of the book of Acts clearly show that it is God who opens the doors of opportunity. When the sphere of witness became enlarged, and men were called by the Holy Spirit to the work of preaching the gospel, the churches supported them by prayer 'that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified', 2 Thess. 3. 1. As an assembly, we should think of one missionary we know and pray that Satan's activities will be minimized, allowing the gospel to prosper in the country where that missionary is working.

How should we pray?

'With one accord', Acts 1. 14; 4. 24. There were no schisms, no divided interests, and no discordant purposes. It doesn't mean that all the people thought and felt the same way about everything, but it does mean that

they set aside personal feelings, and committed themselves to beseech the throne of grace on behalf of others. There was among these believers a wonderful unity that bound them together in Christ, Ps. 133. 1-3; Gal. 3. 28. The people were of one heart and mind, and so should we be. This is one of the great benefits of the assembly prayer meeting! Division in the church always hinders prayer, and robs the church of spiritual power. Prayer promotes unity.

On a practical point, some fellowships have found it helpful to bring before the assembly a list of prayer requests and subjects, so that all present might concentrate on praying to the Lord 'with one accord' for the different issues presented.

Who should pray?

Every Christian is vital to the functioning of their local church; we are all dependent upon each other, 1 Cor. 12. 26. If we choose not to be with the believers when they meet then we are depriving them as well as ourselves. We shouldn't be absent when the believers are gathered for prayer. On occasions many would rather do anything than attend the assembly prayer meeting, but it is only when we wait before God in

believing, fervent, and united prayer that the power of the Spirit of God is poured out. An elder in the Redcar Assembly once described it as 'the powerhouse of the assembly'.

In the public gatherings of the assembly it is only the men who pray audibly, 1 Cor. 14. 34, 1 Tim. 2. 8, but this does not mean that the sisters are not to pray. Their silent prayers are every bit as important as the audible prayers of the men.

There is no age restriction. It is not just that the older men pray but 'men', that is males of all ages. Public prayer is not a gift, nor is it only for those who are 'preachers'. If we are male, God expects we will take part in public prayer. It is not only for the few. Don't even think about giving up. That's what Satan wants. God says, 'Continue in prayer', Col. 4. 2, stick at it, persevere, and don't ever stop.

Young men might be put off because they cannot pray as long as others, or quote many verses. The assembly prayer meeting is not about showing people how much of the Bible we know, it is about speaking to God. Other believers will be encouraged if they hear younger men praying, however short their prayers. Prayers that are made should be in language that is understood by all, so that all can add their 'Amen'. It is not necessary to make long prayers, and there should be an intelligent exercise of the mind, 1 Cor. 14. 15.

The only requirement to be fulfilled for those who pray is that they need to have 'holy hands', 1 Tim. 2. 8. This is a metaphor for our conduct. If we have been involved in sin, and have not confessed it, then our hands are defiled, and our prayers will not be heard, Ps. 66. 18.

As the last word in a prayer, we would normally say 'Amen', and it means 'may it be so'. When it is God that says it, Rev. 3. 1, it means 'it shall be so'. Once, a common phrase to close a letter was 'Your obedient servant'. That's the attitude in which our prayers should close!

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Elijah the prophet is given a prominent place in scripture. He is one of seven individuals in the Old Testament to be named as a 'man of God'; one of two to appear on the Mount of Transfiguration with the Lord Jesus; one of two to be taken to heaven without dying; and unique in prophecy.¹

It is also of interest to note the contrast between the character of Elijah's ministry and that of his successor, Elisha. Elijah anticipates John the Baptist,² whilst Elisha typifies the Lord Jesus, as the contrasts in the table below suggest.

During his early scriptural history, Elijah spent time in Gilead,³ a region of riches, refreshment, and rocky heights, Cherith,⁴ where he learned separation and sustenance, and Zarephath,⁵ where he learned submission. Although these locations were of immense importance in the preparation of the prophet for the service of Jehovah, surely Elijah's 'finest hour' was on Mount Carmel, or at least he thought so!⁶ Therefore, if 1 Kings chapter 17 speaks of the *refining of the man of God*, then the events of 1 Kings chapter 18 on Carmel see the *restoration of the people of God*.

The Call to Follow

(1 Kgs. 18. 20-21)

Elijah and the People

At the time of 1 Kings chapters 17 and 18, Mount Carmel, meaning 'fruitful field', was a shadow of its typical splendour, and a picture of the barrenness of the nation. Three and a half years of neither dew nor rain had rendered the place desert. This pictured a lack of blessing for God's people.⁷ Normally a place of rich pasture and vines,⁸ there was now no fruit or joy for God. Furthermore, in

ELIJAH HIS

a place ordinarily of natural beauty and abundance of flowers,⁹ there was now no fragrance for God.

What was the cause of the physical and spiritual famine? The word of God plainly declares: 'And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word', 1 Kgs. 18. 21. The people were 'halting' or better 'hobbling' on two crutches. Who was their God? Was it Jehovah or was it Baal? There was indifference and half-heartedness amongst God's people. Like the lame, there was no evenness in their walk. Consistency in their conduct had long gone. By *profession*, they were the people of God, but by *practice* the worshippers of Baal. There was *head* knowledge of Jehovah, but no *heart* affection. Are we any different? Constantly we 'wobble' between devotion to the world and devotion to Christ. This state is abhorrent to God. It is all, or nothing (see Ephesus, Laodicea, or even Obadiah!).¹⁰

The Challenge of Fire

(1 Kgs. 18. 22-40)

Elijah and the Prophets

We praise the grace of our God who will not allow such a condition to continue. He is going to turn the people's hearts again.¹¹ They are going to see His fire!¹²

The prophet of the Lord now stands deserted,¹³ as God's people often do, being found in the minority or alone.¹⁴ The prophets of Baal, by contrast, are 450 men and demonstrate their devotion. They call, climb, cry, and

cut themselves in an outward display of religion and zeal, but there is no fire of God in it.

As EDERSHEIM notes: 'First rose a comparatively moderate, though already wild, cry to Baal; followed by a dance around the altar, beginning with a swinging motion to and fro.

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The howl then became louder and louder, and the dance more frantic . . . the madness now became infectious'. How important it is that genuine believers should beware of professing Christianity which often engages in a sensuous, fleshly appeal, but has no reality of God about it. One translation of 1 Kings chapter 18 verse 29 puts the point succinctly: 'They used every religious trick and strategy they knew to make something happen on the altar, but nothing happened – not so much as a whisper, not a flicker of response'.

Now Elijah takes centre stage and bids us 'come near'.

Come near and see the stones, vv. 31-32. It was sixty-one years since Solomon had died and the kingdom was divided into ten and two tribes, but God had not forgotten that His people were one people. Thus, in a time of ruin and division, Elijah takes twelve stones to bear witness to this unity (note also four barrels of water poured three times).¹⁵ Elijah was viewing Israel as God viewed them¹⁶ and we should always view each other as part of one body, in both a local and universal context.¹⁷ Unity is of great importance to our collective testimony.¹⁸

Come near and see the sacrifice, vv. 33-39. The nation is guilty of spiritual adultery. The fire of Jehovah in judgement is due to them. Israel is present at her own judgement day. How is it, therefore, that they can be spared? How can they escape? How can their hearts be turned? Through a divinely accepted sacrifice, bearing the judgement of God in their place! The fire falls; not on the wicked masses, not on the false religious leaders, but on the sacrifice!

Prophet	Elijah	Elisha
Book	1 Kings	2 Kings
Upbringing	Poor	Rich (12 yoke of oxen)
Character	Dramatic, confrontational	Modest, compassionate, humble
Ministry	Public. Characterized by law, judgement and severity	Private (often with individuals). Frequently characterized by grace and love
Duration	25 years	50 years
Name	<i>My God is Jehovah</i>	<i>My God is salvation</i>



FINEST HOUR

How important therefore the trench 'made . . . about the altar'.¹⁹ When all the people saw the fire their hearts were turned again: 'And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, 'The Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is the God', 1 Kgs. 18. 39. In like manner, God can restore our wayward affections through a glimpse of Calvary.

So the challenge of fire has been completely and fully answered.²⁰ The first three references to fire in the

puts it like this: 'For ye have died, and your life is hid with the Christ in God. Put to death therefore your members which are upon the earth', Col. 3. 3, 5 JND. Sin no longer has any claim over the believer. We have been delivered, we have died and yet, we live in Christ.

The Communion of Faith

(1 Kgs. 18. 41-46)

Elijah and his Servant

In the light of such a great victory we would allow Elijah some time

in closer communion with God, our ears would hear His softest whispers'.

Whilst Ahab was busy minding the earthly (eat and drink), Elijah had his gaze fixed on the heavenly. God was about to open the windows of heaven and pour out a mighty blessing of 'great rain'. May God grant to us similar exercises of faith as we seek to live in the light of the victory of Calvary and in dependence upon Him.

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Bible indicate the importance of the symbol. It speaks of the presence of God,²¹ the judgement of God,²² and the acceptance of the sacrifice.²³ Praise God, the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus has satisfied the justice of our righteous God fully and completely. Although the fire of the Lord consumed the sacrifice at Carmel,²⁴ we thank God the sacrifice consumed the same at Calvary!

Come near and see the slaughter, v. 40. The prophets of Baal had held God's people in spiritual bondage. They threatened their spiritual future and so they must be slain. In so doing, their deaths brought deliverance. We are reminded of the precious truth that not only has Christ died for us, but we have died with Him. Not only did the fire of the Lord fall on the sacrifice, but it also fell on, and consumed, the stones (representing the nation of Israel). The apostle Paul

to refresh and recuperate, yet the victory was not complete. Spiritual barrenness had begun to be addressed, but the physical still remained. The people had seen God's fire (judgement), now they needed God's rain (blessing). Consequently, Elijah went up to the top of Carmel (the place of victory) and cast himself down upon his knees. This is dependence, marked by the hearing, praying and watching of faith.²⁵

We are reminded that the mighty victory of the Lord Jesus at Calvary does not mark the end of our Christian experience, but rather the beginning! There is a life of faith to be lived in complete dependence upon God. Are we watching and praying in faith?²⁶ Are our ears 'dull of hearing'²⁷ or sensitive to the voice and will of God? As A. W. PINK has said, 'If we were more separated from the din of this world, if we were

ENDNOTES

- 1 Mal. 4. 5
- 2 Luke 1. 17
- 3 1 Kgs. 17. 1
- 4 1 Kgs. 17. 2-7
- 5 1 Kgs. 17. 8-24
- 6 1 Kgs. 19. 10
- 7 Gen. 27. 28; Ps. 72. 6
- 8 Jer. 50. 19
- 9 Isa. 35. 2
- 10 1 Kgs. 18. 3
- 11 1 Kgs. 18. 37
- 12 1 Kgs. 18. 24
- 13 1 Kgs. 18. 22
- 14 2 Tim. 4. 16
- 15 1 Kgs. 18. 33-34
- 16 Ezek. 37. 22
- 17 Rom. 12. 5; 1 Cor. 10. 17; Eph. 2. 16
- 18 Eph. 4. 3; Phil. 2. 2
- 19 1 Kgs. 18. 32
- 20 1 Kgs. 18. 24
- 21 Gen. 15. 17
- 22 Gen. 19. 24
- 23 Gen. 22. 7
- 24 1 Kgs. 18. 38
- 25 1 Kgs. 18. 41-43
- 26 Jas. 5. 15-18
- 27 Heb. 5. 11



I wonder if, when questioned, you've ever struggled to recall what benefit you have gained from a speaker's subject. Perhaps, after some thought, the considered answer has been, 'well nothing really', meaning, of course, you had gained little from his ministry. No word of encouragement, no word of challenge or cheer, no word of hope, no spiritual food. In short, there had been nothing whatsoever to feed your soul. How sad! In John chapter 21, the Lord Jesus said to Peter, and as an instruction to all who teach God's word, 'Feed my sheep'.

These articles will consider four occasions where Paul, in his letter to the Philippian saints, used the word 'nothing', occasions, perhaps, when nothing was acceptable:

1. *'In nothing I shall be ashamed', Phil. 1. 20;*
2. *In nothing afraid, v. 28;*
3. *In nothing ambitious, 2. 3;*
4. *In nothing anxious, 4. 6.*

Each reference brings to us a challenge for today.

1. In nothing ashamed

For many years Paul had desired, and longed, to preach the gospel in Rome, the hub of the great Roman Empire.¹ If he could establish a strong witness there, then, possibly, millions would be reached with the message of God's salvation.

He wanted to go there as a preacher, but God took him there as a prisoner. If the experiences through which he passed were all recorded, they would have filled a book. He summarized them simply: 'the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel', 1. 12.²

Now in Rome, as a prisoner, Paul writes to the saints in Philippi about three matters he wanted them to know.

a) His Bonds and their benefits

Four times in this chapter he speaks of his 'bonds'. The word is 'chains', *desmos*, that is, iron chains. It is

MUCH ADO ABO

By **DAVID J. WILLIAMS** Penycraig, Wales

not just a figure of speech for his imprisonment.

A mayor may wear a gold chain – speaking of his position of honour. There are chains that other people wear as ornamentation, often to display their wealth. Paul was kept in iron chains, the humiliating shackles of a prisoner. However, Paul's chains were divinely planned. This was God's will for him; it was no event of mere chance. Nevertheless, we also observe that his chains were distinctly productive, for they did not prevent Paul from preaching and spreading the gospel of Christ, vv. 12-14. In reality, his chains brought him into contact with lost sinners; his circumstances were being used for Christ!

Paul tells us quite clearly that his bonds resulted in the 'furtherance [or spread] of the gospel' – the word 'furtherance' meaning 'pioneer advance'. As a military term, it refers to an army of troops opening the way into new territory. Paul's chains, and confinement in prison, were the means of opening new doors for the gospel. He was making in-roads into the very heart of the emperor's palace. The praetorian guards, Caesar's soldiers, were hearing the message of salvation, and they, in turn, were telling others about it, v. 13. Out of his adverse circumstances came good results!

When he wrote to Timothy, Paul said, 'I suffer trouble as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound', 2 Tim. 2. 9. It has been said that Paul's imprisonment caused 'A chain reaction'!

The expression 'my bonds in Christ' means that all knew he was a prisoner because of his loyalty to the crucified Christ. God sometimes uses these strange means to further His work and spread the gospel. Who would have thought of this activity associated with one, a man chained and guarded by soldiers, probably four per shift, each shift possibly of six

hours, that is sixteen soldiers per day? In the presence of each of them, Paul would pray, and to each soldier Paul would make known the gospel of God's salvation. Souls were reached and saved, including 'they that are of Caesar's household', Phil. 4. 22.

It is not easy to speak about, but God sometimes puts 'chains' on his people to use them effectively in the spread of the gospel. The 'chains' He puts upon His own may include a period of trial, or suffering. It may involve restriction in their activities and movements, so that God can use them to accomplish His work. Often a time of sorrow and loss comes so that through us others may hear the way of salvation. Perhaps God has put you in chains recently, and you wonder why?

Paul's chains had one other good result – they gave courage to lukewarm saints: 'Many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear', 1. 14. His chains gave him contact with the lost, but God also used those chains to give courage to timid believers. Many believers in the city of Rome, who, when they heard of Paul's faithfulness and determination to witness under such trying circumstances, took courage, and began to 'speak the word without fear'. The word 'speak' here does not mean preach; it means to converse openly about Him in daily living. If fear is contagious, so also is courage. God wants to use your circumstances, your 'frailty', or 'disabilities', to help, and encourage other saints to go on with God.

b) His Brethren and their criticism and behaviour

In all his sufferings for Christ there were some who purposed harm for Paul, but the message of these verses is that however much harm was intended for him, criticism could never prevent Paul from defending and rejoicing in the gospel of Christ, vv. 15-18.



OUT 'NOTHING' III

There were two parties, supposedly believers, who were 'preaching Christ'. We read 'the one preach Christ of contention . . . the other of love', vv. 16-17. Paul does not condemn the men who preached of contention. He did not say they preached false doctrine. Rather, he was saddened by the motives from which they preached, and the results it produced. We read words like 'envy', 'strife', 'contention', 'not sincerely', 'supposing to add affliction to my bonds'. The word 'contention' means 'to seek for followers, to begin a faction, and so set up rivalry'.

The sinister motives of such men are still present today, and churches are suffering. How sad when brethren set out to oppose the gospel and hinder the work of Christ! They hurt the testimony and hurt themselves too. Like the true man of God he was, Paul continued with singleness of heart to defend the gospel, and even rejoiced that 'whether in pretence or truth Christ was preached', v. 18. What an example to us!

c) His Burden of heart, or crisis

It seems clear from verses 19-26 that Paul faced a crisis, a crisis that weighed very heavy on his heart. It was the awful fear that he would fail the Lord, and let Him down. How will he hold up? How will this great man behave in these trying circumstances?

This was a very trying time for the apostle. It was possible that Rome would find him guilty of being a traitor, and he would be taken out and executed. He had always lived in such a way that Christ would always be glorified. How will his manner of life be seen in this position? In these circumstances would he live a responsible, well-behaved life, would his demeanour accord with the teaching of the gospel he preached? Would his conduct be worthy of Christ?

When David faced the fury of the court of Saul, it was written of

him, 'David behaved himself wisely in all his ways; and the Lord was with him', 1 Sam. 18. 14, Here Paul expresses two important matters in respect of his life where wisdom was needed:

i) His Concern – lest any shame be brought upon the Lord and His gospel. He did not want to fail the Lord – he desired only that the watching eyes of the unbelievers saw Christ in him. Whatever happened, he desired that his body become the vehicle through which Christ might be brought closer to men – he wanted his life to be a spiritual telescope! Verse 20 expresses this perfectly.

ii) His Confidence. What triumphant words are contained in verse 19, 'For I know that this shall turn to my salvation'. This is a key verse in the chapter, especially in relation to Paul's situation. Two words must be highlighted: 'this' and 'salvation'.

Some Bible teachers see in the word 'this' a reference to his imprisonment, that it would eventually turn out to be for his benefit. I believe that he is thinking of the news of the previous verses that Christ is being preached. Whatever means or motives, one thing

his imprisonment and bonds has accomplished is: believers are talking about Christ and preaching Christ; Christ is being made known!

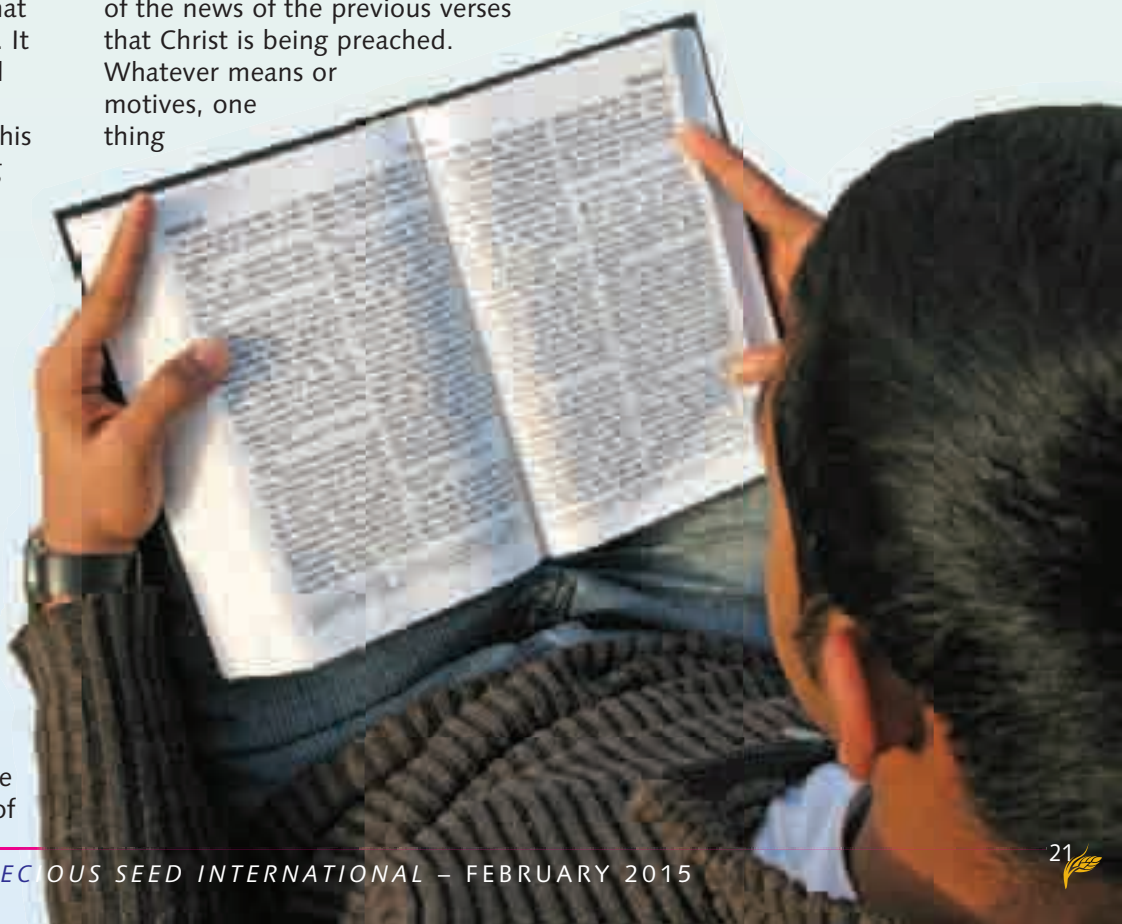
The word 'salvation' does not mean his release from prison. The word refers to his spiritual, mental, and emotional well-being. The good news of the furtherance of the gospel was like a tonic to his soul, saving him from discouragement and despondency. Indeed, it resulted in his spiritual welfare, spurring him on to greater service for the Lord, and lifting him above the petty contentions of the 'brethren' who opposed and sought to hurt him. All this saved, or preserved him from being ashamed. All this would be brought about by two indispensable factors: 'your prayers', and 'the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ'.

When faced with the burdens of life, may we, like Paul, never undervalue the prayers of our fellow believers, or hinder the gracious ministry of the Holy Spirit.

ENDNOTES

- 1 'After I have been to Jerusalem, I must also see Rome', Acts 19. 21.
- 2 For details see Acts 21. 17 – 28. 31.

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The GRACE of G

By **W. H. BURNETT O**

The boundless grace of God is one of the great themes that permeate scripture. When we speak about 'grace' in this context, we refer to the lavish, unlimited, unmerited favour that God has been pleased to bestow upon sinful man. This is something that will never cease to fill us with wonder and worship whilst here in this world, and it is the theme that will be our song for all of eternity. As is found in the well-known hymn 'Amazing grace' of the onetime slave-trader JOHN NEWTON,

When we've been there
ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days
to sing His praise,
Than when we first begun.

In our day, I feel that we are in grave danger of losing sight of the grace of God in relation to salvation. Perhaps this is due to an over-emphasis on the sovereign purposes of God, to the exclusion of the grace of God in the matter of a truly universal offer or opportunity. This has created a deep divide among the Lord's people, where the issue is seen to be one of sovereignty versus grace. This is unfortunate, because each has its place in the matter of salvation. I have no desire to exacerbate the divide that exists, but feel compelled to emphasize the involvement of the grace of God in relation to salvation to protect the integrity of the gospel.

The source of grace

The grace of God in relation to the salvation of man finds its

source in the eternal counsels of God. Scripture gives us to understand that even before the universe had been created, God, anticipating the fall, conceived the plan of salvation for ruined man through the giving of His only begotten Son to the cross of Calvary. Not only so, but ever since the first man sinned, it is God, in His grace, who has reached out to man with a view to restoring fellowship with Him. Man, in his unregenerate condition, has no thought of God, nor does he seek after Him. It is God who takes the initiative to reach out to man in salvation. The hymn writer JOHN KENT put it well when he wrote,

A monument of grace,
A sinner saved by blood,
The streams of love I trace,
Back to the fountain God,
And in His sovereign
counsels see,
Eternal thoughts of love
to me.

The scope of grace

Such is the love of God for His benighted creature man, that He has placed the possibility of accepting His grace within the reach of all, without exception. Scripture abounds with insights into the will of God in relation to man's salvation. We read, 'The Lord . . . is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that **all** should come to repentance'.¹ Again, '[God] will have **all** men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth'.² Again, 'For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to **all** men'.³ Perhaps one of

the most eloquent statements regarding the grace of God in salvation is contained in the statement of the Lord Jesus when He said, 'For God so loved the **world**, that He gave His only begotten Son, that **whosoever** believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life'.⁴ In this latter verse, two words emphasize the limitlessness of the grace of God. We learn that it embraces the 'world', and that the offer is made to the 'whosoever believeth'. These few statements regarding the grace of God must dispel any idea that any human being on the face of the earth is excluded from receiving God's grace in salvation. SIR ROBERT ANDERSON has written, 'There is no shuffling of the cards; there is no deception in it; if forgiveness is preached to all, it is because all may share it'. And, again, he writes, 'He so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son' – and he adds, not as a cold formula which the initiated know to be overshadowed by the doctrine of election – 'that WHOSOEVER believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life'.⁵

The receiving of grace

We have already shown that the will of God is that all men should be saved, and we have shown the work that God has done in order that the 'whosoever' can have eternal life through believing in Him.

In other words, such is the grace of God, that He has done all that He can do to bring men salvation,



God in salvation

Oakville, Ontario, Canada

and now man is responsible to believe, to accept, and to receive, the terms of the gospel. The New Testament abounds with exhortations to men to do so. Indeed, the exhortation to 'believe' is predominant in the Gospel of John. From this we learn that while it is the will of God that all should be saved, man must now bend his will to the will of God in order to be saved. Unfortunately, man can, and does, resist the will of God. The same freedom given to Adam to cede to, or resist, the will of God in the garden of Eden, is still in evidence today. Men, like Adam, have been given freedom of choice, and have the ability to accept or reject the grace of God in salvation.

A word must be said about the role of the Holy Spirit in the matter of salvation. Scripture makes it clear that no one can be saved apart from the convicting work of the Holy Spirit leading to conversion, and those of us who have been saved can testify to this fact. However, we must avoid the notion that the Spirit of God is selective in His dealings with men, thus giving opportunity to some, whilst denying it to others. This would be a reprehensible thing. One can testify, from personal experience in evangelizing, that we have seen some come under the conviction of the Spirit, yielding to it, and being saved. We have also seen others come under the deep conviction of the Spirit, and then, sadly, turn away from it, and to be lost.

Prayer and the receiving of grace

One of the important factors in relation to the salvation of the lost is to engage in prayer for them. In doing so we are in harmony with the will of God, who desires that all men should be saved, and our prayers must be offered with this in mind. The apostle Paul could say, 'Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved'.⁶ Writing to Timothy he says 'I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for **all men** . . . God our Saviour; who will have **all men** to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for **all**, to be testified in due time'.⁷ We remember the story about the paralytic whom the Lord Jesus healed. His friends made valiant efforts to bring him before the Lord, to the extent of letting him down through the roof. We then read, 'And when he saw **their** faith, he said unto him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee'.⁸ So we also must make valiant efforts to bring the lost before the Lord, and to do so with the confidence the Lord will respond. One recalls hearing the late Harry Bell of Jarrow, UK, telling the story at a conference, how that he prayed for his sister's salvation for over forty years. Upon receiving news that she was dying he hastened to her bedside, only to be told that she had passed away just minutes

before he arrived. His heart sank upon hearing this. However, those present told him, that just before she died she made a clear confession of Christ as Saviour. Prayer had been answered. Harry Bell told this story as an encouragement to the saints to continue in prayer for the lost.

In conclusion, the mysteries relating to the interaction between sovereignty and grace may only be fully understood when we have the capacity to do so upon reaching heaven. But, in the meantime, we must never limit the scope of the gospel, nor flag in our efforts in both preaching and prayer, on the understanding that both of these are an essential part of our responsibility before God, and to the lost around us, and to do so with the understanding that 'whosoever' may come.

That grand word, whosoever,
Is ringing through my soul,
Whosoever will may come.

ENDNOTES

- 1 2 Peter 3. 9 [my emphasis].
- 2 1 Tim. 2. 4 [my emphasis].
- 3 Titus 2. 11 [my emphasis].
- 4 John 3. 16 [my emphasis].
- 5 SIR ROBERT ANDERSON, *The Gospel and its Ministry*, Nisbet and Company, pg. 86.
- 6 Rom. 10. 1.
- 7 1 Tim. 2. 1-6 [my emphasis].
- 8 Luke 5. 20 [my emphasis].

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The Servant Songs of Isaiah ^[6]

Concluding our studies in Isaiah chapter 53, verse 12, the *life work* as well as the *death work* of the Christ, the Messiah is presented. He instructed the disciples, Matthew 5-7, and justified many through His wisdom or knowledge.¹

Therefore will I divide: (*achaleq* – imperfect continuous tense of *chillegb'*) I give, I distribute by lot. 'The imperfect tense may have reference to habitual or customary action either in the present or in the past'.² God is distributing or giving Him a portion. In this song, both past and present tenses are used prophetically.

him a portion with: in, or from among, **the great:** (*harabbin*) greatness in multitude and might; many. This may refer to the Gentiles, see 49. 7; 52. 15. A portion from the great multitudes will be given to Christ.

God loves Israel. His heart is with Israel. He anticipates the day when, no longer as a few scattered individuals, but as a collective nation, Israel turns back to the Lord in truth. In that day Israel will belong to God. More – through them the entire world will turn to God. The souls and hearts of men will be the victory that God receives. Because God's heart is so invested in Israel's success, the land will be as God's particular possession when Israel occupies it. God will share in Israel's joy.

and He will divide: (*yechaleq* – imperfect tense of the same verb as above) 'He divides' **the spoil with the strong:** The word 'strong' is plural and could be translated 'strong ones'. There are various ways of understanding who these strong ones may be:

(a) More accurately, the words read, 'The strong he apportions as spoils' or 'He will divide the mighty as spoils'. The

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Messiah as Leader will share in the time of world dominion for Israel when the peoples are given as an inheritance and the ends of the earth are given for a possession, Ps. 2. 8. This was partially fulfilled during the times of Kings David and Solomon. However, the ultimate fulfilment will be during the Messiah's reign on the earth.

- (b) The strong ones may refer to all believers. They are strong because they are indwelt and strengthened by the Holy Spirit, Eph. 3. 16. These strong ones receive by lot the inheritance from the Lord Jesus Christ. They are blessed with every spiritual blessing in Him, Eph. 1. 3, they receive His inheritance with Him, Eph. 1. 11, and spoils from Him. (See Ephesians chapter 4 verse 8, and Colossians chapter 2 verse 15). The Lord Jesus stripped His spiritual enemies, and gave spiritual gifts unto men, Eph. 4. 11.
- (c) The strong ones may be those mentioned in Psalm 110 verse 3. These are volunteers who will stand up against the enemies of Christ when He comes in power to rule out of Zion. Strong ones will surround Him and fight the Beast along with Him. The Lord Jesus will divide the spoils of war among these loyal followers.

because: We are given at least four reasons for the rewards that the Servant is about to enjoy.

- [1] **He poured out:** (*oroh*) stripped or emptied; poured out clean, even to the very last drop or remnant, **His soul unto death:** This answers to Philippians chapter 2 verses 7-8. He emptied Himself, giving all that He had, including His reputation. His life was

voluntarily poured out totally at the cross. See John 10. 17, 18.

- [2] **and He was numbered:** (*monoh*) allotted, appointed, counted **with the transgressors:** Is there a reward for being declared guilty when one is innocent? 1 Peter chapter 2 verse 20, 'For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God'. This was part of the Servant's sufferings.

- [3] **and He bore:** (*nasa*) as verse 4 – to lift and remove. The word in scripture is especially used of sin, Lev. 22. 9; to bear away or take away (sin), Lev. 10. 17; Gen. 4. 17 margin.

the sin: (*khete'*) to miss the mark, **of many**

- [4] **and made intercession:** (*yapheniya'* imperfect tense, as above) was making entreaty; was interposing

for the transgressors: (*poushaia*) as verse 4. Those who revolt, rebel, and refuse subjection or allegiance to rightful authority. The Servant of Jehovah, our Messiah, was making intercession for them!

Engulfed in excruciating sorrows, the Suffering Servant on the cross expressed a perfect example of this intercession: 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do', Luke 23. 34.

We can but worship.

ENDNOTES

- 1 For examples, see John chapters 3 and 4 during His life. He bore the iniquities of sinners in His death.
2 C. L. SEOW, *A Grammar for Biblical Hebrew*, pg. 142.

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Views from the News

COMPILED BY SANDY JACK

Schools 'failing to teach children about the Bible'

A Bible Society study found that large numbers of children are not being taught about the Bible, Koran, or Torah to avoid favouring 'one religion over another'. The study found that more than a fifth of pupils had not been exposed to any religious texts such as the Bible, Koran, and Torah at school, and also revealed that less than half of teachers were confident about incorporating these texts in lessons. Reasons for downplaying the texts included poor training and guidance, but one in five teachers said they were reluctant to teach religious books in case they were 'taught inadequately or incorrectly, or create the perception that one religion is favoured over another'.

Ofsted also found that many pupils were leaving school with a 'very limited understanding' of Christianity because of a dip in standards of religious education.

The latest research was based on two separate surveys of almost 800 teachers and 566 pupils aged eight to fifteen.

Large numbers of teachers supported greater access to texts such as the Bible, Koran, Torah, Mahabharata, Guru Granth Sahib and the Book of Mormon and around forty-two per cent of school staff said more pupils should be taught religious texts across the curriculum, including in lessons such as English, history and citizenship.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationnews/11241226/Schools-failing-to-teach-children-about-the-Bible.html>



'Safe Haven' for those who wish to leave Islam

Christian Concern has launched an initiative to help protect those in the UK who want to leave Islam but fear the consequences of doing so. Entitled 'Safe Haven', the project is a response to the brutal treatment experienced by some in the UK who have left Islam and become Christians. It offers confidential advice and support to those considering leaving Islam and may even help individuals to relocate.

One of those who spoke at the launch event, Fiaz, explained, 'My own household, my brothers, my parents, they don't want anything to do with me. They'd rather see me dead'. His own experience has moved him to highlight the problems that others in the UK, especially women, face if they want to leave Islam.

'When an Asian girl turns away from the culture or the religion itself then it's all about honour. They are at greater risk than the men are', he warned. 'There are hundreds and hundreds of women across the country who have turned away from Islam. And there are those who are still at home, but they are too afraid to turn away because they don't feel that they have anywhere to go'.

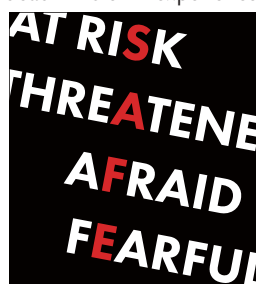
Another supporter of the project explained how, as a ten-year-old she thought about leaving home but 'felt that I couldn't dishonour the family and leave, so I ended up being quite suicidal and didn't talk to anybody and spent all my time on my own'.

Now she asks, 'It's OK for people when they convert from another religion to Islam. Nobody says, "I'm going to kill you". They don't live in fear of their lives. Why is it that when a person leaves an Islamic background, becomes a Christian, why do we have to live in fear of our lives'?

You can download a copy of the poster to put up in your area at:

<https://gallery.mailchimp.com/bed173cc9adfcad1e0e442a35/files/SafeHavenAdvert.pdf>

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/faith/article4271203.ece>



Koran should be read at Prince Charles' coronation says top bishop

Prince Charles' coronation service should be opened with a reading from the Koran, a senior Church of England bishop has said. Lord Harries of Pentregarth said, 'The gesture would be a creative act of accommodation to make Muslims feel embraced by the nation'. Critics attacked the idea, accusing the Church of 'losing confidence' in its own institutions and traditions.

Lord Harries, a former Bishop of Oxford and a leading Church of England liberal thinker, said he was sure Charles' coronation would give scope to leaders of non-Christian religions to give their blessing to the new King.

Douglas Murray, associate editor of the *Spectator*, said if Muslims were included in the coronation service, there must be room too for Hindus, Sikhs, and atheists and added, 'If there were to be a reading from the Koran at the coronation, surely as a matter of reciprocity, all mosques in the UK should have prayers for the King and the Armed Forces every week at Friday prayers'.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2853638/Koran-read-Prince-Charles-coronation-says-bishop-Critics-attack-proposal-accuse-Church-England-losing-confidence-traditions.html#ixzz3L7ldZnX>



Bits & Bobs

Brain Bath: A Clever Design Solution



What makes sleep so mentally refreshing? University of Rochester neuroscientist Jeff Iliff addressed the crowd gathered at a September 2014 TEDMED event and explained his amazing new discoveries. The words he used perfectly match what one would expect while describing the works of an ingenious designer.

Other organs rely on the lymphatic system to remove metabolic waste that builds up in the spaces outside cells, but no lymph vessels exist behind the skull.

Since the brain uses a fourth of all the body's energy, there must be some other mechanism at work to clear away brain waste. Iliff and his colleagues discovered this mechanism and published their findings in the journal *Science Translational Medicine* in 2012. In his TED talk, Iliff described his team's findings using the appropriate language of design.

'We've found that sleep may actually be a kind of elegant design solution to some of the brain's most basic needs, a unique way that the brain meets the high demands and the narrow margins that set it apart from all the other organs of the body'.

During sleep, special cells found alongside blood vessels pump cerebrospinal fluid from the edges of the brain to its centre and the brain's neurons actually shrink to permit the fluid to rush through the tiny spaces between cells where it picks up and carries off metabolic waste products.

'If you think about it, using the outsides of these blood vessels like this is a really clever design solution, because the brain is enclosed in a rigid skull and it's packed full of cells, so there is no extra space inside it for a whole second set of vessels like the lymphatic system'.

He used words like 'elegant', 'beautiful', 'solution', and 'clever design' to describe how the brain, an 'unimaginably complex mechanism', bathes itself.

How was this remarkable system created? Iliff noted that the lymph system evolved, and then he credited the brain itself for somehow solving 'the problem of waste clearance'.

The brain is amazing, but it cannot build its own parts any more than a computer can install new hardware all by itself. God could, so He is by far the most reasonable source of the information needed to manufacture and distribute along brain blood vessels these amazing and necessary tiny cerebrospinal fluid pumps.

<http://www.icr.org/article/8381>





REPORTS REPORTS REPORTS

GOSPEL WORK AND OTHER ACTIVITIES Compiled by SANDY JACK



ENGLAND

West Yorkshire

The assembly in Skelmanthorpe appreciated a week's visit from Jonathan Black. Jonathan ministered the word and gave reports on the Lord's work in London at the Home Worker's Conference. He also presented the gospel at a senior citizens' tea. From Monday to Friday his Bible Exhibition was displayed, and it was encouraging to have over 400 children from eight different schools come through it during school hours. Six new children have attended the assembly's children's work following their visit. A number of adults from the local community also came in during the general public sessions, some of whom had never been inside the hall before, and one man spent an hour in serious conversation about spiritual things. The assembly looks to the Lord that there might be lasting fruit for His glory from this special effort.

On the 19th of November 2014 the Leeds Muslim Youth Forum held a fair at the Hamara Centre to which many different faith-inspired organizations were invited to have a stall. They were seeking to attract organizations who had been inspired by their faith to do good for their communities and to make a positive contribution to society. Schools were booked to attend the fair, and all participants were asked to plan an activity for children to participate in.



The organizers contacted *Precious Seed (Faith Matters)* and the information was passed onto the believers in Harehills Gospel Hall, Leeds, to see if they would be interested in staffing a stall. Ruth, one of the sisters in the assembly, became the main organizer and, along with others, staffed the stall.

They report as follows, 'We felt everything went really well, there were different stalls representing different groups – police, women's support, Islam, Sikh sword fighting, etc. About eight school groups came to our stall to do cake decorating and loom band making. These activities were linked to creation. Every child, and everyone who passed the stall, got a goody bag containing a DVD called "The Cross". For some, it was an immediate turn-off, for others it was the reason they stopped and spoke with us.

A Jewish lady offered to come to the Gospel Hall and show us how to make challah bread – "ON A SUNDAY"! After we picked our jaws off the floor, I just thought "at least she's got boldness to ask". I quite admired her audacity!

Please pray for Harjinder, a Sikh man who heard Billy Graham in Leeds in 1966 but felt "his style of preaching wouldn't work now as you have to allow for all faiths" – I disagreed with him, and let's just say we had to agree to disagree.

Please pray for Joss, a teacher at Bankside Primary; he calls himself an atheist, and refused point blank to take a goody bag when he saw the DVD. When I asked him, he said he was a good person; I asked, "by who's standard?" Incredibly, he said, "well I suppose God's"!

Please pray for Shabana, a Muslim supply teacher. She asked us to pray about her getting a job. We prayed for her on the spot, and she took a bag.

Please pray for Catherine, a Christian teacher, and for each child who took a bag, heard the gospel, or took

a "million pound" tract. We know God's word will not return void. We were told to pack away at 4.20 pm as the weather started drying up, but, at 4.15 pm, the organizer asked if we had an activity for the children who had arrived late. We were the last stall standing, and closed at 4.45 pm. Give God the glory'!

Northamptonshire

Over fifty-five school assembly visits over fourteen days in December! This was what CSalt (**C**hristian **S**chool **A**ssembly **T**eam), from Spencer Bridge Gospel Hall, Northampton, took on. They majored on the nativity in these visits and have seen some new schools ask for their help over the past few months. Entry to one of these schools is through a teacher who has recently moved from a school that closed its door to them. They have also been using a World War 1 presentation, which is very well received by schools, and staff; in particular they have been impressed by the life of William Coltman, VC. Please pray that, as pupils and staff hear these presentations, they will be struck by the fact of God's love to us, and the necessity of responding to it.



REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

County Wexford

Matthew and Shirley McKillen report from Gorey, 'Many have asked about Sabrina, who was baptized in May. She has made good progress spiritually. Her husband is confused by the change in her and she often finds regular fellowship difficult. Pray for them.

We had three weeks of outreach teams during the summer and are thankful for all the young people who volunteered to help and who worked so tirelessly. Each morning of the three weeks we had a Holiday Bible Club in Riverchapel. It was a joy to see the enthusiasm and participation of the many children who attended. During week one we spent the



afternoons doing door-to-door work in neighbouring villages. Whilst this work was hard going, there were some good conversations. One lady has since completed an evangelistic Bible study. In week two we ran a Bible Club in Gorey in the afternoons. We were pleased to have about thirty children each day. The fact that a number of these were new contacts was also encouraging.

Afternoons in the third week involved a new venture for us. We hired the gym and classroom in a local school and ran a two-hour programme for teenagers, entitled *Identity?* About thirty-five attended each day. Most of these come to our Youth Club, but we also had some new contacts. We ran various activities and then concluded each day with a half-hour video presentation, looking at who we are and why we are here. Good attention was given and a number took the New Testaments we offered. The summer also gave another opportunity to have a stall at the Gorey Agricultural Show. Again, it was encouraging to see a number from the assembly getting very involved in this outreach.

In October we commenced a new evangelistic Bible study. This has proved much tougher than in recent times. Several of those who attended previous studies were unable to return and only one new person came.

We continue to have many opportunities to present young people with the gospel. The Wednesday afternoon Seekers Club is attended by up to twenty-five children. We have had quite a few new children this term – mostly as a result of the summer club’.



Venezuela

The assembly in San Carlos has extended the hall they use for their annual conference. Due to the ‘overflow’ in recent years, they decided to add an extra four hundred square metres to the existing hall. At conference time in August it was a joy

to see over 1,500 people comfortably seated.

The Lord continues to bless in Barinas. Last month in the city the assembly held two weeks of Bible teaching and one week of gospel meetings, which ended with nine baptisms. All who obeyed the Lord by taking this step were added to the assembly. The enemy, however, has been busy in this little assembly and two of the little group have had to be ‘put away’. Antonio, who takes a lead in the work there is quite discouraged, yet plods on. Please pray for him, the work, and the believers.

In Barrancas, they have had three weeks of meetings and hope to baptize a couple who have given clear evidence of new life. Daniel, the son of a sister in the assembly, gave much trouble for years. He was into drugs, gambling and much more, but was awakened to his spiritual need when his closest friend was taken from his side by a bullet. On the night of his baptism, he asked permission to give to his friends a leaflet containing his testimony.

William Turkington has settled in Tucupita, which is the capital city of this eastern delta state. He has an exercise to reach the Indian tribes that live in stilt-house settlements on the delta. He certainly needs our prayers in this new work.

Albania

Enri and Sylvia Nase from Tirana report, ‘At the end of May we had a baptismal service. Nuri, a young man who has been a Christian for a couple of years, proclaimed his faith by going through the waters of baptism, and was received into fellowship. Nuri’s mother, a non-Christian, came to witness and was very touched. She is a widow and travelled more than three hours just for the occasion. Nuri is married and his wife is also in fellowship. They are eager to share the gospel with their work colleagues, and have brought many of them to our gospel meetings.

At the end of August, we had a weekend conference time at a small facility in a beautiful, and now largely unpopulated, ancient town about four hours from Tirana. It is home to some twenty-three Orthodox

Tirana



churches, which at one time were thriving communities but are now in disrepair and frequented only by tourists. There we were able to take time out together to study the word, enjoy fellowship with one another, and admire the handiwork of our Creator. For some, it was the first time, and they were simply amazed at the quietness and natural beauty of the place.

At the end of September we hosted a group of eight young people from the assemblies in Germany and Austria for a week. Although young in age, the group was motivated and were a great help to the assembly. In the mornings, they were involved in street evangelism, engaging people in conversations regarding spiritual matters and the gospel. In the afternoons, we had special children’s meetings, which coincided with the start of our regular children’s meeting on Saturday mornings. The culmination of the week was a special outreach night organized by the team, and we were all thrilled to see around fifteen new attendees. Almost all of them were students and, after the gospel message, we had a number of very good conversations with them. Since then, one of the young men has been coming to the gospel meeting every Sunday and to the Bible study and prayer meeting on Thursdays. Please pray for his salvation.

One of the young ladies, who has been attending the gospel meeting over the past few years, has been showing much interest in spiritual things. She has asked for a Bible and, with it, we gave her an Emmaus course – *What the Bible teaches* – which she has been studying at home. Sylvia and I are meeting with her weekly before the children’s meeting. We are earnestly praying for her salvation. She also invited her twenty-year-old brother to one of the special evenings we organize with the young people at our home’.



Joyfulness, prayerfulness and thankfulness in the life of the believer

We all enjoy a good assembly conference, especially if we can listen to our favourite speakers and meet our friends during the interval. But, between seasonal meetings when we are on our best behaviour, what of the spiritual quality of our lives in the intervening periods? In this matter, this writer addresses his own heart also.

Let me ask another question: How carefully do we read the New Testament? We are, of course, pleased to teach memory verses to young people in Sunday School, complete with the Bible references, and this is laudable. But we should remember, in this era when the news media projects and distorts reality through 'sound bites', that the chapter and verse divisions of the word of God are not themselves inspired, though useful. So often a verse of scripture contains not an isolated set of thoughts but rather finds its significance within the context of its surrounding passage.

For example, it is very interesting that Paul in 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 verse 16 says, 'Rejoice evermore'. The very next verse says, 'Pray without ceasing'. Verse 18 says, 'In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you'. The subsequent verse goes on to exhort Paul's readers to be open to the Spirit's leading.



By **MARK FENN**
Scarborough, Ontario, Canada

The themes of joyfulness, prayerfulness and thankfulness are each very worthy subjects in their own right, but here, in 1 Thessalonians, Paul is most definitely linking them together. What does this suggest to us? It surely means that, by their very juxtaposition, the Apostle is not isolating these themes in his readers' spiritual lives, but bringing them together as a progression of thought. Joyful believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are believers with a prayerful attitude. And prayerful believers are thankful ones. As those who profess to be 'led of the Spirit in the Lord's service', we, in principle, engage in all these activities, but it would be to offer strange fire to presume¹ – especially in public – to turn on and off like a tap apparent, occasional projections of these spiritual exercises.

As E. W. ROGERS said in a context in relation to prayer, 'Care must ever be exercised lest formality and rigid unauthorised rules tend to legalism. It is the state of the heart that counts'.²

While it can be profitable to make this observation about joyfulness, prayerfulness and thankfulness from 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, yet Paul makes exactly the same point in Philippians chapter 4. From time to time, many of us will quote verse 4, 'Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, rejoice'. Interestingly, verse 6 of the same chapter says, 'Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God'.

Separated by just a few words, Paul, by the Spirit of God, is drawing his readers' attention in both passages to these three spiritual activities, and indeed to others also. In these passages, we should consider whether the Lord is issuing a highly

relevant challenge to us to examine the quality of our personal, spiritual lives.

It is most commendable not to be found 'forsaking the assembling of ourselves together', Heb. 10. 25. But it is relatively pointless to put on a front of supposed orthodoxy at assembly gatherings if our personal, spiritual lives in between these occasions are not driven by faithful Bible reading, and a spirit of joyfulness, prayerfulness, and thankfulness. Stated differently, what is our ongoing state of mind when, before others, we profess fellowship with the risen Lord Jesus Christ?

Paul's letter to the believers at Philippi is sometimes read as an 'Epistle of joy', in which he stresses the importance of the spiritual life of believers as they serve and suffer for their Lord. In 2 Corinthians chapter 9 verse 15, Paul ascribes heartfelt thanksgiving for the believer's bountiful blessings centred in the person of Christ.³

If spiritual activities such as joyfulness, prayerfulness, and thankfulness were more to the fore in our personal lives, perhaps we would be more earnest in our gospel endeavours, or spend less time talking about what others at assembly conferences have been wearing; and, in any case, it is to be earnestly hoped that people, ostensibly in assembly fellowship, would be less frequent in filing petitions in the divorce courts! Before the Lord, let us take heed to our spirits, and be exercised in the scriptures!

ENDNOTES

- 1 Lev. 10. 1.
- 2 E. W. ROGERS, *Answers to Bible Problems*, John Ritchie Ltd., pg. 200.
- 3 For corresponding Old Testament truth regarding 'sacrifices of thanksgiving', Ps. 107. 22, see, for example, Ian Rees's article: *Sacrificing to God today*, http://www.youngpreciousseed.org/pdfs/yps_2009_vol6_3.pdf.

MARK FENN and his wife Sue are in fellowship at the West Hill assembly, Ontario, Canada.





A WORD FOR TODAY

Καθαρισμός (*Katharismós*)
= cleansing, purification

Καθαρόε, -ά, -όν (*Katharós, á, on*)
= pure, clean

Καθαρότης, -ητος (*Katharótes, etos*)
= purity, cleanness

Personal hygiene is a feature of everyday life that most of us take very much for granted, yet it so often comes to the forefront when some major health scare arises. Even in the very places where personal hygiene should be of the highest standard, we repeatedly find that these are the very breeding grounds of infectious diseases! Our society clearly needs to engage more with the biblical text, as it has been keenly observed that, 'throughout the Bible the cleansing of the body is highly regarded and practiced. No doubt this had important consequences in the prevention of disease'.¹ Personal hygiene is, therefore, of paramount importance if we are to live healthy lives, especially as we interact with other people in society. In the same way, the Greek adjective *katharós* was used to express the idea of personal purity and moral uprightness, being free from any form of contamination, thus enabling an individual to be clean and fit for service. MOULTON AND MILLIGAN suggest additionally that *katharós*, and its derivatives, had a wide range of usage, being applied physically to animals, land, grain, bread, milk, etc., and ceremonially, for example, of prescribing the conditions of entrance to a temple.²

In the Septuagint (LXX), *katharós* is mainly used to translate the Hebrew words *tahor* and *zakah*. Both these Hebrew words denote being clean, free from contamination, or, in some contexts, innocent. For example, in David's great penitential Psalm, he asks God to create in him a clean heart, or, as one Hebrew translation puts it, 'fashion a pure heart for me, O God', Ps. 51. 10. According to EICHRODT, in Old Testament usage, the verb 'to create or fashion' refers to divine action which 'brings forth something new and astonishing'.³ It was only as David's heart was cleansed and renewed that he could resume serving and worshipping God. Similarly, in Ezekiel chapter 36 verse 25, God sets out how He intends to purify Israel prior to their resuscitation in chapter 37. Notice the parallel in verse 26 with Psalm 51 verse 10. In both contexts, moral and ceremonial purity are essential in approaching God. These texts reflect something of the fundamental aspect of Old Testament theology, in terms of the sharp division that is frequently emphasized between that which is clean and unclean. This was not just evident in terms of communion with God, but can be seen in almost every aspect of Jewish life, whether in terms of dietary

By **BRIAN CLATWORTHY**
Newton Abbot, England

requirements, as in Leviticus chapter 11, or simply avoiding uncleanness by contamination, through contact with a woman at childbirth or menstruation, Lev. 12, or touching a dead body, Num. 19. 11. Purification through ritual washing, as in the procedure surrounding the ashes of the red heifer, Num. 19, or even through a variety of animal sacrifices, such as the sprinkling of blood on the Day of Atonement, Lev. 16. 14-16, only, however, represented ritual purity. As F. F. BRUCE states, 'It is an inward and spiritual purification that is required if heart-communion with God is to be enjoyed'.⁴ Sacrifices, then, were only sufficient to remove ceremonial pollution; they could not remove spiritual defilement. Or, in the unforgettable words of ISAAC WATTS:

'Not all the blood of beasts
On Jewish altars slain,
Could give the guilty conscience
peace,
Or wash away its stain'

The prophets of the Old Testament constantly rebuked Israel for simply going through the motions of ritual cleansing rather than experiencing genuine heart-felt spiritual change, e.g., Isa. 1. 11-18; Mal. 1. 10-14.

When we look at the use of the word *katharós* in classical Greek it is found to be identified with physical cleanness, as well as purity of metals that are free from impurity. WILLIAM BARCLAY also suggests that the word was used in the sense of 'free from debt', and that 'to make someone *katharós* is to give him a discharge from a debt or to acquit him of a charge'.⁵ In the New Testament, the word *katharós* occurs at least thirty times, and, significantly, it mirrors much of the Old Testament concepts of physical, ceremonial, and ethical purity. The table below shows the breakdown of the word into these concepts in a small number of texts.

One of the principal Beatitudes in Matthew chapter 5 centres on this notion of purity. Scholars are divided as to whether verse 8 refers to inner (ethical) purity or ceremonial purity. In the light of the overall teaching of Christ in this

passage, it probably covers both aspects of purity. In other words, those who are morally upright, because of imputed righteousness, will also seek to eschew evil in their lives. This was certainly the question that earlier exercised the mind of the Psalmist in Psalm 15, when considering the nature and character of the person who sought fellowship with God. Paul is very much a user of *katharós*, especially in the Pastoral Epistles where purity is seen to be an essential part of godliness, e.g., 2 Tim 2. 22. John emphasizes the practical nature of this process when he uses the related verb *katharízō* in his first letter, 1. 7, 9. It is through the confession of sin that the believer is cleansed or made pure through the blood of Christ, or, as KNIGHT puts it, 'Thus the pure heart is the one cleansed by the forgiveness and cleansing that comes to those who continually confess their sins'.⁶

How conscious we are of impurity in our spiritual lives will depend, to a greater or lesser extent, on the quality of our fellowship with God. To practice what James describes as 'pure and undefiled' religion before God, Jas. 1. 27, which may be an idiom for absolute purity, requires not only practical philanthropy but practical holiness. Keeping oneself free from the evil influences of this world is a pressing requirement of all believers. May we ever look in this regard to the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, 'who is holy, blameless, pure', Heb. 7. 26 NIV.

For further reading/study

Introductory

HAROLD K. MOULTON, *The Challenge of the Concordance - Cleansing and Purity*, Bagsters, 1977, pp. 176-180.

Advanced

W. BAUER, W. F. ARNDT, AND F. W. GINGRICH, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, University of Chicago Press, 2001, pp. 388-389

ENDNOTES

- 1 *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, pg. 156.
- 2 *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*, pg. 311.
- 3 *Theology of the Old Testament*, II, pg. 104.
- 4 *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, pg. 206.
- 5 *New Testament Words*, pg. 171.
- 6 *The Pastoral Epistles - A Commentary on the Greek Text*, pg. 77.

TEXT	CONCEPT
Matthew 27. 59 'And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth'	Physical purity
Luke 11. 41 'But rather give alms of such things as ye have; and, behold, all things are clean unto you'	Ceremonial purity
John 13. 10 'Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all'	Inner (ethical) purity

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QUESTION

Is it essential for an overseer to be married?

ANSWER

I assume the questioner is thinking about 1 Timothy chapter 3 verse 2 and Titus chapter 1 verse 6 rather than expressing any personal preference, for these are the only verses in the New Testament that may indicate marriage as a prerequisite to a brother serving as an overseer. I also recognize that this is a subject that has been discussed many times and that there is not a unified viewpoint as to what the apostle is teaching. The following answer touches on nothing that has not been aired in the past and, in all probability, it will not convince anyone that understands these scriptures in a different way.

In detailing the qualities that should characterize all overseers, the apostle Paul focuses on three aspects of the man's life, his personality, his family and his testimony. Each should be beyond reproach, so that none can point an accusing finger at him and thereby discredit his service for the Lord. Interestingly, the expression 'the husband of one wife' in Timothy and in Titus is immediately preceded by the requirement for the overseer to be 'blameless' and I believe this has a significant bearing on what it means to be the husband of one wife.

An overseer's personal testimony has to be such that no one can accuse him of behaving in an unseemly manner towards any woman; he has to be blameless. If he is married, it is not only essential that he is faithful to his wife but that his faithfulness is apparent to all. Anything less than this would bring him into disrepute and would incur dishonour on the testimony of the assembly within which he serves.

If we accept that Paul is teaching that an overseer has to be a married man we would have to concede that he must also be the father of more than one child, for both 1 Timothy chapter 3 and Titus chapter 1 refer to his 'children'. On what possible spiritual basis would a godly man be precluded from being an overseer just because he was not able to have

any children? Equally, why should a gifted, caring brother be unable to work as an elder just because he did not have a wife? In what way would that make him deficient to labour amongst the saints in the manner expected of an overseer?

There are those who believe that a remarried widower would not meet the requirements stipulated in the two verses cited above, believing that the brother was no longer the husband of one wife having been married twice. Apart from not being in harmony with the general teaching of scripture relative to the marriage bond, those who subscribe to this belief would have to answer the question as to why his remarriage would make him unsuitable to be an overseer. His desire to remarry would not indicate any less degree of self-control than that which necessitated him marrying the first time.

It cannot be denied that there are many blessings for an overseer to have a wife who is a godly complement to him in his onerous work for the Lord, but this benefit does not preclude unmarried brothers engaging in the same spiritual service. The qualities listed in Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus are given to ensure that an overseer is spiritually and morally suited for the work, being single does not render a man unsuitable on either count.

There is a definite sense in which a brother who is unmarried is able to devote more time to the shepherding of the assembly than a married man. In addition, he would be better able to relate to the needs of those who face issues that being single brings, for he would be in a similar situation to them. Of course, it has to be accepted that an unmarried brother would not have personal experience of the difficulties many parents encounter within family life. For these reasons a plurality of elders from differing domestic backgrounds can complement one another, and meet the varying needs of the assembly.

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Throughout the Bible we find that most people were involved in some way or other with agriculture, hence the link that God made for Israel with seasonal festivals such as those prescribed in Leviticus chapter 23. Critical to the success of any agrarian economy was the timely preparation of the soil so that the vegetative seed might be sown at the appropriate time. Failure to do this, for whatever reason, e.g., laziness, as suggested by Proverbs chapter 20 verse 4, would ultimately mean the loss of the harvest and possible financial ruin for the farmer. The soil was normally prepared by the use of a farming instrument known as the plough, which consisted of a heavy blade at the end of a beam of wood that was pulled by one or more domesticated animals, as the picture on the front illustrates. The term 'ploughing' is often used in scripture by way of metaphor to describe various attitudes and aspects of life, such as the breaking up of those untilled parts of our lives so that our hearts might be opened to the Lord, Jer. 4. 3-4, and to the inexorable principle that ploughing evil into our lives leads to trouble, Job 4. 8, cp. Gal. 6. 7. Ploughing, or tilling the land as it is sometimes referred to in Hebrew, see Genesis chapter 45 verse 6 (Tanakh translation), was extremely hard work, and it was not a task that was undertaken lightly by anyone. When our Lord challenged individuals with the cost of discipleship at the end of Luke chapter 9, His requirements were far more demanding than that of the prophet Elijah, 1 Kgs. 19. 19-21. Therefore, a true disciple of Christ is one who is wholly focused on and occupied with the Kingdom of God, Heb. 12. 1, regardless of past experience, Phil. 3. 13. It is only when we are single minded in this way that we will bear a harvest for Christ.



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 - IBAN: GB75 LOYD 3098 9400 3994 75 • BIC: LOYDGB21454

If you use this method please let us know separately either by email to info@preciousseed.org or via the post as sometimes the details of payees are not evident from bank statements.
- 3) **SEND THE REPLY SLIP BELOW** with a cheque donation to any of our addresses in UK, Ireland and the Eurozone, Australia, Canada. Because recent USA money laundering regulations are making it very difficult for overseas banks to process domestic US \$ cheques, these can no longer be accepted. Please refer to 1) or 2) above if you are living in the USA and wish to make a donation. We apologise for any inconvenience this may cause.

Name

Address

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