

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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**'As the branch
cannot bear
fruit of itself,
except it abide
in the vine; no
more can ye,
except ye abide
in me',
John 15. 4.**

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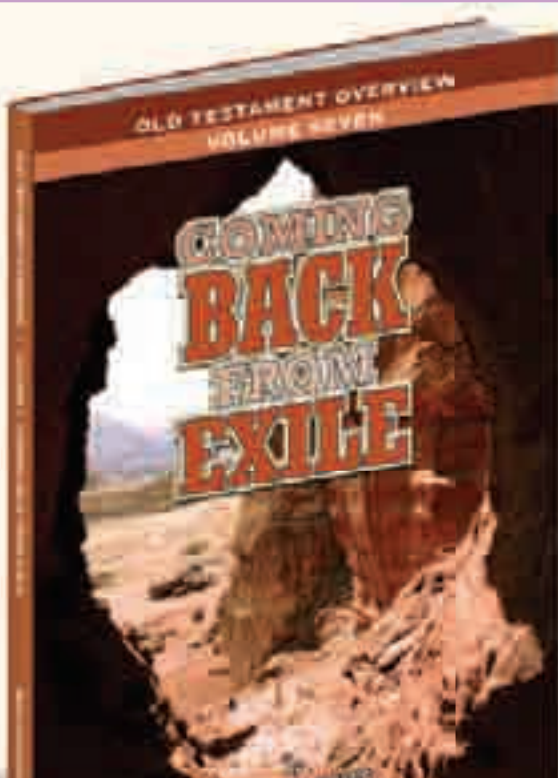


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Issue 5

faith matters 5 fm

important spiritual matters for you

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 lying on beds and we pray for many who suffer with no hope of a cure and those families who have lost loved ones.

As it spreads to other countries the whole world is watching. Governments are holding emergency meetings and screening processes are being put in place at airports to deal with this global crisis!

Few can deny that the world is in crisis today with nations fighting against nations, famines, plagues and earthquakes all making this planet look as if it is out of control. Is there an answer?

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The articles 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 the answer - remember Jesus said:

"ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" John 8:32

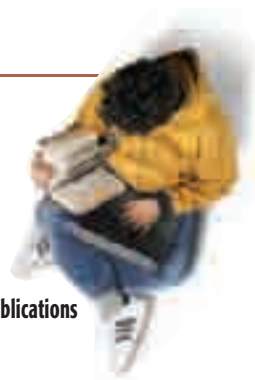
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PRICES AS LAST YEAR !!





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



Indispensable Ordinance: Baptism, the Lord's Supper and the Head Covering Romel Ghossain

Paperback, 142 pp, Published by Decapolis Press, Pitcot Farm, Pitcot Lane, Stratton-on-the-Fosse, Radstock BA3 4SX, England. Price £6.00 ISBN 978-1871642-51-3.

A book that brings together these three important strands of truth is quite rare, unless it is dealing with church truth as a whole. However, in this relatively short book, the writer covers what might be described as important first steps in the life of every believer. Although there are some aspects that might owe more to the provenance of the book, the writer is to be commended for providing something that is a clear communication of truth.

This is a book that will challenge. Believers who are somewhat bound by tradition may be concerned to read in relation to baptism, 'Our custom is somewhat different to the New Testament example and I fear that this is sometimes a hindrance in proclaiming the gospel to every creature'. Equally, the section 'Who should NOT be baptized?' is an issue seldom considered, but dealt with in this book. Of any believer that remains unbaptized, the writer warns that in procrastination, 'They will also become less sensitive to the commandments of scripture and find more obscure reasons not to be baptized'. To those about to be baptized, the writer says, 'With every decision there are responsibilities and consequences, whether good or bad, and with baptism it is NO different. Therefore . . . at least be acquainted with the significance and responsibility of baptism'. It is in this context that GHOSSAIN argues that, 'A baptized believer has "put on Christ". Just as clothing identifies the type of person I am, the believer's label of clothing is Christ!' Sadly, those who put off their baptism may well do so because they are not prepared to manifest that complete change of life that baptism symbolizes.

In the section on the Lord's Supper, there are also some challenging topics: my attire; the language I use; and my punctuality. As with the writer's treatment of baptism, there are also some issues that are not usually considered. For example, GHOSSAIN offers advice when, 'In some countries and parts of the world, believers cannot gather on a particular day or time'.

This book has much to offer that will be of help to those seeking guidance on these three important subjects. Some may not agree with everything that is said, but the breadth of treatment, and the honesty of the approach, is to be commended.



The New Calvinists, Changing the Gospel E. S. Williams

Paperback, 69 pages, Published by The Wakeman Trust and Belmont House Publishing, 38 Walcot Square, London, SE11 4TZ, England. ISBN 978-1-908919-32-8.

For those who do not follow events in evangelical circles, this book will seem to have little relevance. Whether it is 'old Calvinism', or so-called 'new Calvinism', many may feel that the turmoil affecting those of a Reformed persuasion is of no interest to readers of this magazine. However, the warning sounded by the author should not be so easily and readily dismissed. The advent of world-wide communication, and social networking, exposes every assembly to the influences abroad in so-called evangelicalism.

It should be said that the book is clearly written from a Reformed viewpoint and, as such, majors upon those who are pastors in various churches, mainly in America. Nevertheless, names such as John Piper, Don Carson, and John MacArthur will not be completely unknown in the UK, if only through their writings. The book seeks to sound an alarm, warning that some are embracing, and others associating with, a heterodoxy that could be devastating in its impact. As WILLIAMS puts it, 'The old, well-defined standards of separation from the world are obscured in the mist of pseudo-intellectual jargon, so that believers can be led into compromising flirtation with worldly methods'. The book contains three chapters dedicated to the leaders of New Calvinism, Tim Keller, John Piper, and Mark Driscoll, before two chapters on the groups in the UK that have embraced the philosophy. It would not be an understatement to say that the chapter on Keller is alarming, and that on Driscoll shocking. As WILLIAMS states, 'Keller's supreme "salvation" is about saving the world from injustice and oppression, while the Gospel of salvation from sin is a means to that end'. On Driscoll, the author quotes extensively from his books and sermons, the content of which is, at times, blasphemous. Whilst those familiar with the opposing forces in first-century Christianity may not find anything particularly new, it is of deep concern that there should be well-known evangelicals who are prepared to be identified with such teaching and practice in the USA and the UK.

This book is not pleasant reading, but the pages of endnotes indicate that the author has researched his book well. If the aim of this movement is to attract young people, drawing them in by its commitment to contemporary worship, elders need to be on their guard!



Of No Reputation Stephen Grant

Paperback, 90 pages, Published by John Ritchie Ltd, 40 Beansburn, Kilmarnock, KA3 1RH, Scotland. ISBN (ebook) 978-1-483522-30-2 (paperback) 978-1-909803-92-3.

The key theme of this book is that most Christians are 'more like the people who received Paul's letters than [like] the apostle who wrote them'. GRANT explains how Christians should aspire to live quietly, as the Thessalonians were exhorted by Paul, 1 Thess. 4. 11. The author reveals his own experience of a gradual redirection of spiritual ambition from city-scale evangelism to personal godly living. He shows in clear terms, with supporting biblical exposition, how an ordinary life can bring pleasure to God.

Ten short chapters and an informal style combine to make this an easy read: the kind of book you might get through in a single evening, or pick up and put down at regular intervals. Personally, it helped that I knew some of the people and places mentioned throughout the book. Perhaps this made the many anecdotes more relevant and powerful. Nevertheless, the general thrust of this work will be universally challenging: are we living useful lives for our God? I enjoyed the way that Bible passages and themes are regularly woven into the text, with relevant and incisive commentary. The author ranges across the scriptures, but tends to select more quotations from Proverbs and Paul's epistles. The context is clearly situated in the present day, with allusions to websites, including Google, Facebook and Wikipedia. This contemporary emphasis should help to interest younger believers. However, more mature saints will also appreciate the timeless advice on Bible reading, prayer, humility, and spiritual contentment.

In summary, this well-presented book on Christian living contains helpful and relevant scriptural lessons. Other books in the genre might include Piper's *Don't waste your life* and Ortberg's *The life you've always wanted*. However, GRANT is pragmatic, but decidedly undogmatic, attitude makes his latest work stand apart from the rest. It is available as an ebook, and is also produced in paperback.

[Our thanks to Jeremy Singer, Bridge of Weir, Scotland, for this review].



Learning to Lead – Next Generation David Clarkson and Stephen McQuoid

Paperback, 182pp. Published by Opal Trust, 1 Glenannan Park, Lockerbie, Scotland, DG11 2FA. ISBN 978-1-907098-15-4.

It is clear, from the focus of this book, that the authors are aware of the importance of spiritual leadership within each local church. They set the tone early by stating, 'It is vital the church is guided by quality leaders if it is to grow and develop'. Who could argue that true shepherds amongst the flock of God are difficult to find but highly important?

What makes this a frustrating and, at times, enigmatic book is the approach taken by the authors. One reviewer, quoted on the back of the cover, describes the book as 'profoundly biblical', yet I found it strange that so little reference is made to such key Bible passages as 1 Timothy chapter 3, Titus chapter 1, 1 Peter chapter 5, or Hebrews chapter 13. When dealing with the topic of 'The marks of a great leader' the qualities listed are all mentioned in the first two passages above but the authors fail to trace them back to these biblical roots. There are certain references to biblical leaders, such as Moses, Joshua, and Nehemiah but little reference to New Testament doctrine and apostolic delegates like Timothy and Titus, yet there is a whole chapter entitled 'Passing on the Baton'. Equally, whilst the book is addressed specifically to elders, and those who have that exercise, I felt, at times, that there was a lack of clarity in relation to the fact that 'elders . . . are among you', and that they are responsible to the 'chief Shepherd', 1 Peter 5. 1, 4. We must all be reminded that the local assembly is not ours but His and our responsibility is to serve Him rather than pursue our own agenda.

For many, the fundamental difficulty that this book presents is not necessarily that elders need to be trained but that such training should be formalized into a college course and that reference should need to be made to extra-biblical material such as that of Huggett, Fisher, Ury, and Patton as a consequence. It is a pity that a book which contains much useful 'common sense' and refreshing honesty may be rejected because of its superficiality from a biblical perspective.



Travel with Jonathan Edwards – A God-centred life, an enduring legacy

Michael Haykin with Ron Baines

Paperback, 128 pages, Published by Day One Publications, Rylands Road, Leominster, England, HR6 8NZ. ISBN 978-1846253-90-4.

To many readers of this magazine the name Jonathan Edwards may be largely unknown. Of American origin, Edwards' place in the annals of Reformed theology is unchallenged, and it is for this reason that many will find this book interesting. It is not a detailed biography but an attempt at enabling the traveller to visit and explore those areas in America upon which Edwards' life, preaching, and writing had such a profound influence. The guide covers significant towns and cities such as Hartford, East Windsor, and Northampton, as well as details of Edwards' time in New York and at Yale. Space is given to the first revival, 1734-35, which took place under Edwards' preaching, and how news of that awakening spread to, and influenced, preachers in England.

Though many readers may not agree with the theology of Edwards, this is a fascinating historical account in a book that is beautifully illustrated. It also contains ample explanatory sections to enable those unfamiliar with the detail of Puritan thinking to gain some insight into the theology of the time. I am sure that those who have the opportunity of visiting the parts of America covered in this small volume may well slip the book into their pocket and set off to explore. Whilst the book will explain the sights, it will also give the reader a better insight into the man and his deep spirituality.

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By RICHARD COLLINGS

Editorial

'When the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away', 1 Pet. 5. 4.

'It is an indescribable tragedy that Christianity is now under such threat . . . Of the 196 countries in the world studied from October 2012 until June this year [2014], 81 have religious freedom impaired'.¹

These extracts from a news report in November 2014 indicate the real and growing threat that is faced by many fellow Christians, and the context of Peter's words in our verse resonate with this situation. Peter wrote, to those 'scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia', 1. 1, of being a 'witness of the sufferings of Christ', v. 1. Peter tells us, 'Christ also suffered for us', 2. 21. He left us an example! The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews speaks of the Lord who 'endured such contradiction of sinners against himself', 12. 3. In doing so, he exhorts his readers to 'consider him . . . lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds'.

As those to whom Peter wrote would face persecution, and the elders who sought to shepherd and protect the flock of God would become particular subjects of persecution, it would be good to be reminded of a Shepherd who was, and still is, rejected, comprehensively and conclusively – 'He is despised and rejected of men', Isa. 53. 3. We are not alone!

But how should we face persecution? How important to remember the words of Peter, 'Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously', 1 Pet. 2. 23. A vision of the Saviour provides the answer!

Peter offers further strength when he says, 'When the chief Shepherd shall appear'. It is not 'if', but 'when'! Of one thing we can be certain, the Lord will come again. He will appear! Nothing can stop His appearing, and nothing can delay His appearing. At the appointed time, and in the appointed way, the chief Shepherd 'shall appear'! To a world that cast Him out and crucified Him, He will appear the second time in all His glory.

When the Lord appears in radiant glory, those under-shepherds, facing the heat of suffering, can be assured – 'Ye shall receive a crown of glory'. The Lord observes and takes account of every effort expended in service for Him, particularly in relation to the care and protection of His sheep.

In this magazine, we welcome two new committee members, Jonathan Black, from Bexleyheath, and Stephen Sherwin, from Derby. We look forward to their contribution to the work. There is a new series of articles on 'Widows, Orphans and Strangers'. There is also the conclusion to the short series provided by Malcolm Horlock to fill our centre expository pages. We are grateful to him for this most valuable insight. The occasional series on 'The Believer as . . .' continues, and our thanks to Ken Totton for his contribution on 'A Steward'.

ENDNOTES

¹ Source: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-29899571>



The previous article highlighted the significance of the Old Testament as preparation for the gospel. Attention was drawn to the prophecies and types, with reference to Genesis and Exodus. Significant persons and events (e.g., Moses and the exodus, David and his dynasty), and holy places, such as the tabernacle, were all seen to article forward to Christ. This paper continues by considering the covenants and the promises.

The covenants and the promises

Writing to the Romans, Paul enumerates Israel's distinctive privileges: 'to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God', Rom. 9. 4-5. The 'adoption' refers to God's gracious adoption of the nation of Israel as His son, Exod. 4. 22f. The 'covenants' include the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Palestinian, and Davidic covenants.¹ 'The giving of the law' explicitly revealed the holiness of God; thereafter, sin acquired the aggravated character of transgression. The 'service of God' denotes the provision of God for His people to approach Him, initially in the tabernacle, and later in the temple. The 'promises' point, in the first instance, to those made to Abraham, and repeated to Isaac and Jacob. But they widen out to encompass the many Old Testament promises pointing forward to Messiah and the associated 'good things to come'.² Israel's abiding glory, however, is that from her 'according to the flesh, Christ came'. He is the Seed in whom all the families of the earth are to be blessed. Note especially the provision for Gentile inclusion and worldwide blessing.³ Further, in Christ exalted and glorified the fortunes of the dynasty of David are eternally restored.

Isaiah has often been referred to as the 'Evangelical Prophet', and his climactic fourth 'Servant Song',

The Gospel and the

By **KEN TOTTON** Cambridge, England

[Unless otherwise stated, scripture quotations are from NKJV]

Isa. 52. 13 - 53. 12, merits special mention. In it the divine Messiah, the suffering Servant, makes full and final atonement for sin. In a highly structured poem of five stanzas, at the very centre we read, 'But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed',

the blessings are available to the believer through God's saving actions;⁵ In fact, as Hebrews clearly teaches, it is theologically impossible to cling to the arrangements of the old covenant, now that Christ has come. In fulfilling the types and shadows of the law, He terminates them as means of approach to God. To teach and practice otherwise



Isa. 53. 5. The Messiah's penal substitution is therefore central to this most remarkable prophecy. No wonder that Philip the evangelist could so readily begin at the same scripture and preach Jesus to the Ethiopian!⁴

Whilst I have indicated the continuity of divine purpose, there are also contrasts and discontinuities. The new covenant is radically different from that of Sinai. Most importantly, it is a one-party covenant where all

would be to undermine the efficacy of His atoning work. This is an essential aspect of the gospel.

A yearning for fulfilment and perfection

We have observed that in manifold ways God educated, disciplined, and prepared His people for the incarnation and sacrifice of Christ. The constant insistence of Israel's prophets on repentance and faith, as preconditions for salvation, paved the way for the New Testament's similar demand for



The Old Testament^[2]

repentance towards God and faith in Christ.⁶ The long continuation of the sacrificial system, which could never take away sins, caused the godly to yearn for a better, and permanent, solution to the sin question. Indeed, scripture itself had already pointed in this direction, Ps. 40. 6-8.

On another level altogether, the sovereign Lord of history and world empires prepared the politics, language, and infrastructure of the Roman world

Luke 24. 44-45. This cannot mean just a few isolated texts bearing upon the coming Messiah. Rather, it means the Old Testament as a whole, comprising the three major divisions recognized by the Jews. Earlier, they said one to another, 'Was not our heart burning within us, while he spake to us in the way, while he opened to us the scriptures?' 24. 32 RV. How blessed we are to live in the age of fulfilment and joyful gospel testimony! Truly the ends of the ages are come upon us. As Christ

ENDNOTES

- 1 See Gen. 15. 17ff., 17. 1ff.; Exod. 19. 5; Deut. 29. 1ff.; 2 Sam. 7. 5-16.
- 2 See (among many): Shiloh, universal ruler, Gen. 49. 10 RV; the Star and Sceptre, Num. 24. 15-17; David's offspring, 2 Sam. 7. 12, 16, 28ff.; royal Bridegroom, Ps. 45; Immanuel, Isa. 7. 14; Isa. 9. 6-7; Cornerstone, 28. 16; the Suffering Servant 42. 1-4; 49. 1-6; 50. 4-9; 52. 13 - 53. 12; the Branch, Jer. 23. 5; 31. 31ff; Son of man, Dan. 7. 13-14; the Angel of the Lord (*mal'akh YHWH*), at times identified with God, at times distinguished from Him, see Gen. 16, 18, 22; Exod. 3; Josh. 5. 13-15; Judg. 13; Zech. 1. 11-12.
- 3 See also Rom. 15. 9-12.
- 4 Acts 8. 35.
- 5 Heb. 8. 6-13.



for the advent of Christ, and the rapid worldwide propagation of His good news.

As the risen Lord discoursed with the Emmaus disciples, 'He said to them, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me." And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures',

could say, 'Many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it'.⁷

May the way in which the Old Testament so comprehensively charts the way for the coming of Christ enrich our understanding, deepen our faith, and cause our hearts also to burn in devotion to the One who came not to destroy but to fulfil, and in zeal to make His glorious gospel known.

- 6 See for examples of repentance and faith: Isa. 30. 15; 50. 10; 55. 7; 57. 13; Jer. 17. 7; 31. 18-19; Ezek. 18. 24-30; 33. 14-16; Hos. 6. 1; Joel 2. 12-14; Amos 4. 6-11; Jonah 3. 10; Nahum 1. 7; Hab. 2. 4; Zech. 1. 3-4; Mal. 3. 7. In the New Testament see Acts 2. 38; 20. 21.
- 7 Matt. 13. 17.

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



The first eleven chapters of Genesis are taken up with a survey of the creation of the universe and a considerable part of earth's early history. It is God's universe and it has significance in relation to the Bible as a whole because of one planet, earth, which was the scene of a unique manifestation of the character of the Creator, God. Hence, it is not by chance that it was possible for a New Testament narrative to tell of the risen Christ interpreting to two disciples 'in all the scriptures the things concerning himself', Luke 24. 27. All of earth's history and geography are but background to the basic story of the glory of God's grace told out in the person, the coming to earth, and redemptive work of His Son.

The next thirteen chapters centre on the story of how God had dealings with one man from Ur of the Chaldees, Abraham, as he was later called. He was an ancestor of Christ, and his story has significance for this reason. It is profitable to look carefully at some of the phases of his life as they develop the revelations between God and a chosen man, to whom King Jehoshaphat refers, near the end of the Old Testament in a prayer to God, as 'Abraham thy friend', 2 Chr. 20. 7. We remember that 2 Chronicles was the last book in the Old Testament, as the books were traditionally arranged by the Jews.

God's calling of Abraham from his home in Mesopotamia was of tremendous significance for the story of redemption. When Stephen, in Acts chapter 7, was relating to the Jerusalem leaders the history of how the nation had consistently failed to recognize those whom God sent to lead them, he began, 'The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia', v. 2. This was a key event in the dealings of God with mankind. It introduced a chain of events which demanded full treatment in the inspired record in Genesis.

ABRAHAM, G

God entered into a covenant with Abraham, promising him many descendants, a land for them to dwell in, and blessings through his 'seed' for all the earth. Perhaps the key expression used in the dealings of God with Abraham is, 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted unto him for righteousness', Rom. 4. 3.

At an early period in Abraham's walk with God, there arose a dispute between his herdsmen and Lot's. The size of their flocks was making it difficult for them to continue to live in the same area. Since Abraham 'believed God' and God had made promises, he could afford to let Lot choose what area he would use for his flocks, for God's promise would ensure Abraham had suitable grazing. Lot chose after he had 'lifted up his eyes' and beheld the area around Sodom. The episode shows the contrast between people who choose according to what their senses suggest, and those who let God direct their steps. After Lot had chosen unwisely, God invited Abraham, 'Lift up now thine eyes', Gen. 13. 14, and we see how bountifully God chose for Abraham. By contrast, Lot's choice led to disaster for himself and his family.

At a critical stage in Abraham's relationship with God, the wickedness of Sodom had reached a level at which divine justice demanded that it should be destroyed. At this point in the narrative the remarkable statement occurs, 'And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?', Gen. 18. 17. Then God continues, 'For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord'. With minor variants, modern translations amount to how Knox's explanatory expansion of this sentence runs: 'I have acknowledged him (as my own) in order that he may teach his children'. We must not miss

the central fact in this context: God acknowledges His relationship with Abraham to be of such a kind that He cannot destroy Sodom without explaining to Abraham what is happening. This is in keeping with the fact that God appeared to him on a number of occasions as their relationship developed.

By
**WESLEY
FERGUSON**
Antrim,
Northern Ireland

Isaiah chapter 41 verse 8 refers to 'Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend'. Similar language is used by Jehoshaphat when he speaks to God about God driving out the inhabitants of the land and giving it to 'thy people Israel . . . and the seed of Abraham thy friend for ever', 2 Chr. 20. 7. No doubt these scriptures were in James's mind when he wrote, 'Abraham believed God and it was imputed unto him for righteousness; and he was called the Friend of God', Jas. 2. 23.

This acknowledgement by God of Abraham constitutes a kind of commentary on the original declaration by God in Genesis chapter 18, 'I have acknowledged him as my own'. No wonder that even men with only a superficial awareness of God would boast, 'Abraham is our father', John 8. 39, a claim refuted by the Lord Jesus, for they were not Abraham's offspring spiritually.

It is important to see that the acknowledgement of Abraham by God was not a single episode. There was a continuing contact maintained by God with His servant. At the climax of this continuing relationship there was the testing of Abraham's faith in Genesis chapter 22. Before this testing, God had



GOD'S FRIEND

already shown that He could bring life out of death. He had enabled Abraham to beget a son, as He had promised, when Abraham was physically 'dead', that is, impotent in view of the ageing process.

Genesis 22 shows once again the ability of God, the giver of life, to bring life out of death. Does God approve of human sacrifice? Certainly not, if we mean the gruesome ordeal of giving humans over to slaughter, simply to appease a god who delights in violence and horror. Abraham had already experienced how God could give, and bless, and fulfil promises beyond all expectation. Yet now He has directed Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, the son of promise, who was now his only son since Ishmael has

been exiled and disowned as unfit to inherit the promised land. But Abraham has learnt that God can make the barren woman fertile, the impotent man virile again.

He has also found God to be able to grant the desires of the heart of His servant, even beyond the limits of His trusting servant's prayers. We remember Abraham pleading that God would spare Sodom in order to save the righteous in it. But Sodom's doom was now inevitable, 'its iniquity was full'. But would God simply ignore His servant's prayer? What was Abraham's burden as he prayed for Sodom to be spared? He was thinking of those whom he loved who were in Sodom. God understood, heard his prayer, and answered by taking Lot safely out of Sodom. God answered the desire of Abraham, while not answering as Abraham requested.

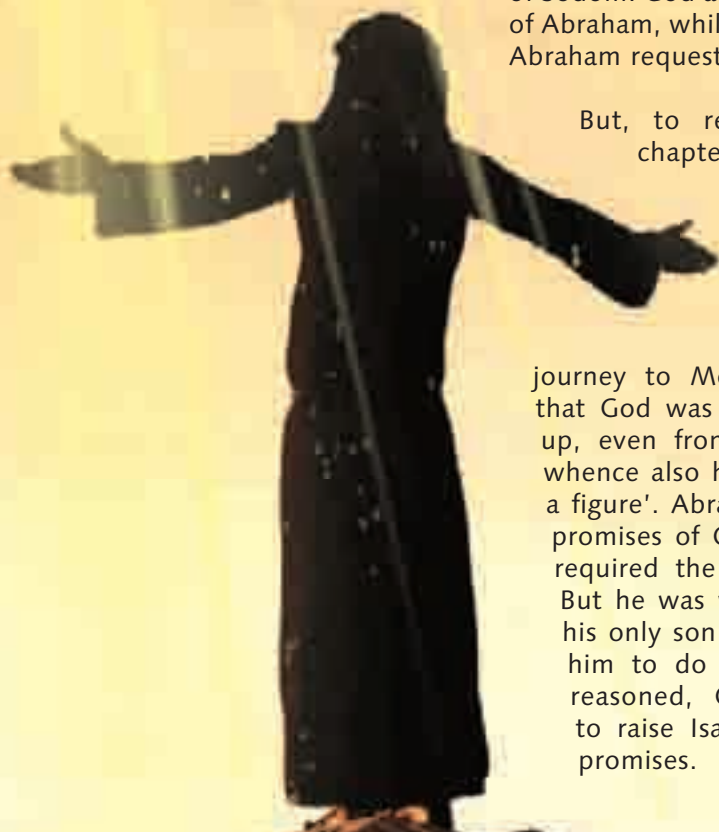
But, to return to Genesis chapter 22. It is clear from Hebrews chapter 11 verse 19 that Abraham did some careful thinking on his journey to Moriah, 'accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure'. Abraham believed the promises of God, which clearly required the survival of Isaac. But he was willing to sacrifice his only son because God told him to do so. Therefore, he reasoned, God must intend to raise Isaac as heir to the promises. He trusted God's

promises when he found it difficult to explain God's commands. 'Now I know', said God, 'that thou fearest God', Gen. 22. 12.

This was the climax of Abraham's education in the school of God, to teach him faith. It is the measure of his devotion to God, but also his graduation in the understanding of the ways of God. Are we justified in thinking that in this episode we have also a picture of God's grace in giving His own Son? I believe we are. Consider Paul's climax in Romans chapter 8 verse 32, 'He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?' The Septuagint translation of the Old Testament into Greek renders Genesis chapter 22 verse 16, 'For my sake thou hast not spared thy beloved son'. Paul's first readers, using a Greek translation of the Old Testament, must have seen the echo of Genesis chapter 22. We read John's Gospel with delight to see the Father and the Son in close harmony, the constant refrain in the words of the Lord Jesus, 'My Father'. So they went both of them together towards Calvary. And Paul says, 'He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all'. And Paul's readers read Genesis chapter 22 verse 16, where God says, 'For my sake thou hast not spared thy beloved son'.

Is this one reason why Abraham was called 'the friend of God'?

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God has a special love for widows, orphans and strangers. How do we know this? When the divine law was given to Moses there were specific provisions made for the care of these vulnerable and needy members of society. For example, when the reapers were bringing in the harvest and a sheaf was forgotten in the field, God had said, 'Thou shalt not go again to fetch it: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow'. The same principle applied to the olive and grape harvests, Deut. 24. 19-21.

God is the defender and helper of those who are widowed and orphaned, as we read in the Psalms, 'A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation', 68. 5; 'The Lord preserveth the strangers; he relieveth the fatherless and widow', 146. 9.

The vulnerable are often exploited, but God has said, 'Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child', Exod. 22. 22; Jer. 22. 3; 'Thou shalt not pervert the judgment of the stranger, nor of the fatherless; nor take a widow's raiment to pledge', Deut. 24. 17. To treat such groups unfairly is to risk divine judgement. In Isaiah's day the neglect of widows was a sign of the spiritual and moral decline of the nation, Isa. 1. 23.

The widow's sorrow

The Greek word for widow is *chera* which means 'bereft'; it carries the thought of suffering loss and being left alone. A widow is one who has been bereaved of her husband. The loss of a spouse is recognized as one of the most stressful and painful life events that a person can endure. God's perfect plan for marriage has always been that a husband should love and support his wife physically, emotionally, and spiritually. He is to protect her and provide for her. When all of this is suddenly snatched away, as it were, by death, there is a feeling of great emptiness and loneliness.

People grieve in different ways but there are usually elements of pain and regret, or even anger and doubt. Personal faith in God is put to the test and many unanswered questions

WIDOWS, ORPHANS God loves the

remain. In the goodness of God, time is a great healer, and with the loving support and prayers of family and friends, the pain can begin to ease. It may still require many months or even years for some to adjust to their loss. Of course, life must go on, but it can never be quite the same again with one's closest earthly companion no longer by one's side.

We recall that Naomi lost her husband and two sons. The experience left its mark upon her, Ruth 1. 20-21, but God was merciful and the bitterness was eventually replaced by joy and pleasantness (as her name indicates). After her daughter-in-law Ruth's marriage to Boaz, she became a proud grandmother in the line of the coming Messiah. God had not forgotten her.

The widow's Saviour

We are not surprised to learn of our Lord's tenderness and kindness in dealing with the widow of Nain; she was dependent upon her only son but tragedy struck when the young man died. He was being carried to his burial when the Saviour intervened. Fully aware of the helplessness and hopelessness of the widow, the Lord was moved with compassion and told her, 'Weep not', Luke 7. 13. He then addressed the lifeless body of her son and said, 'Young man, I say unto thee, Arise'. With those words the young man sat up and began to speak. After being returned to his mother, those who witnessed the miracle gave God the glory.

In His own hour of deepest woe upon the cross, the Lord still cared for others, and His mother, Mary, in particular. Her life had taken many unusual turns since the day the angel had spoken to her and announced that she, a virgin, was to conceive by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Her child would be called 'the Son of God', Luke 1. 35. But on that dark day, Mary remained standing beside the cross – faithful right to the end. Christ spoke words of comfort when He indicated that He would entrust her care to the apostle John, John 19. 26-27; in this way He made provision for her future needs.

The widow's strength

Godly widows bring spiritual maturity and strength to any company of Christians. In fact, in many parts of the world they are the backbone of the assembly, attending the meetings faithfully as long as they are able. They are sensitive to the spiritual needs of





AND STRANGERS [1]

Widow

By **CLARK LOGAN**
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others, including those who are still outside of Christ, and prayerful about those needs. Even when they have limited financial resources, they are often kinder than those with much more to spare.

In Elijah's time, God chose a poor widow to provide hospitality for him during a severe famine. If Elijah's faith was being tested by the word from the Lord, how much more was the faith of the widow being tried by the arrival of a visitor who not only asked for water but also requested bread to eat! The details are poignant: the prophet's request seemed modest – 'a little water' and 'a morsel of bread' – but the widow's resources were even more hard pressed than that. She spoke of the very little she had: 'a handful of meal . . . a little oil . . . two sticks'. Her intention was to make a final meal for her son and herself before they succumbed to the famine and died. She must have been perplexed. Did the prophet not hear or understand what she had just told him? He was still insisting on having his cake of bread first. He was asking the impossible, but with that Elijah brought a wonderful word to her – 'Fear not' – and spoke of the God of the impossible, 1 Kgs. 17. 13-14. As we know, the widow proved the truth that God's name remains Jehovah-jireh, and He can provide for every need.

In the New Testament we read of another selfless, unnamed widow. After referring to the pride and avarice of the scribes who often misappropriated widows' property, Christ visited the temple and observed how people gave their freewill offerings. The rich cast in much, but 'there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites', Mark 12. 42. Amazing as it might seem, the Lord explained that her offering was greater than all of the rest, the reason being that she gave all and had nothing left over for herself. This foreshadowed His own

sacrificial love when He gave His all at the cross for us.

Luke tells us of a godly elderly woman called Anna, one of a small remnant who continued to hope for the coming of the Messiah. She had been widowed after seven years of marriage, and from then had continued faithfully serving God in the temple, 'with fastings and prayers night and day', Luke 2. 37. When she first saw the infant Jesus, she added her praises to those of Simeon, and witnessed to all concerning the Saviour's coming into the world. Many other widows have followed her example, being women of prayer and praise, and always ready to speak of Him.

The widow's support

Many countries in the western world have a social security network that provides a basic level of financial support for widows. In the developing world, however, there may be little or no governmental assistance. The fact remains that widows everywhere need to be encouraged and assisted in different ways.

In the early church the Christians took their social responsibilities seriously and did not shy away from doing good and supporting the widows in their midst. As we learn from Acts chapter 6, a problem of racial discrimination came to light: the Hebrew widows were being given preferential treatment over the Greek-speaking widows. This matter was not swept under the carpet but dealt with promptly, and in a transparent manner.

Dorcas was a Christian lady who was known for her personal kindness to the widows of Joppa: she made clothing for them by her own hand. At her death the widows were consumed with grief. Peter was called for, and, after praying to God, he was enabled to restore her to life. As a result of this miracle, many others also believed, Acts 9. 36-42.

Further instruction concerning the care of widows is found in Paul's letter to Timothy, 1 Tim. 5. 3-16. The main points are these: a widow with no living relatives and limited resources should be cared for by the Christians; a widow with family should be provided for by her own relatives, thus relieving the assembly of this burden. There were also other stipulations regarding the widow's age: a young woman with children was encouraged to remarry; an older woman with a good testimony became the responsibility of the local church. Paul was also aware of the dangers of a widow slipping back spiritually and morally, and bringing dishonour upon the Lord and His people.

What can you do?

It may be that in the assembly where you meet, there are a number of widows in the fellowship. Those with families and a measure of financial support are fortunate, but what about those who no longer have close family? They may not necessarily need monetary assistance but would benefit from friendship and a helping hand from time to time.

When the Christians gather together it is important to greet and converse with older believers, including those who are widows. Then there may be opportunities to call by their home for a short visit. Often an offer of help with transport to the shops, or the clinic, or the post office, is appreciated, as well as a lift to the assembly meetings. An afternoon outing to the seaside or a local park might be welcomed. There may be odd jobs that need doing around the widow's house or in her garden. The possibilities for such avenues of service are endless – they only require the eyes to see them and the heart to do them.

James reminds us, 'Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world', Jas. 1. 27. The lesson for us all is plain: do no neglect the widow.

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CHRIST - A Great

Twice, our Lord comments about Solomon. Firstly, He speaks of Solomon's glory, of his outward magnificence and opulence, 'the gleam of his much wrought gold, the smooth whiteness of his ivory palaces, the rich apparel of his servants, his towers that shimmered in the sun, the gifts from afar brought by those who did him honour, his chambers scented with the spices of India, his multitude of chariots and horses and all the pomp and splendour of his court', J. B. WATSON, *Our Matchless Lord*, p. 40. Yet, all his glory could not compare with the glory of a wild, wayside Palestinian lily, for, 'I say unto you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these'! Eclipsed by a lily, God's creation!

Secondly, He speaks of Solomon's greatness, and, in particular, of his wisdom, for, 'all the earth sought to Solomon, to hear his wisdom which God put in his heart'. The Queen of Sheba concluded, 'The half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard'. Yet, our Lord could say of Himself, 'a greater than Solomon is here'! Eclipsed by our Lord, God's Christ!

The Lord is greater than Solomon in so many different aspects of his life.

(1) As to His Style

Both Solomon and the Lord were named by God before their birth. David was told, 'Behold, a son shall be born to thee, who shall be a man of rest . . . for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days', 1 Chr. 22. 9.

Of Christ, we read, 'And shall call His name Immanuel', Isa. 7. 14; Matt. 1. 23. 'And His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace', Isa. 9. 6. 'And thou shalt call his name Jesus', Matt. 1. 21.

Solomon's name means 'peaceable'. He was a man whom God declared to be 'a man of rest', bringing peace, and quietness to Israel.

Of our blessed Lord we read, 'The Prince of Peace'. Peace was promised

at His birth, practised during His life, procured by His death, and preached subsequent to His resurrection, while we have peace personified in the Prince of Peace Himself.¹

When Solomon was born, Nathan the prophet was sent to David with a second name for the child, Jedidiah, 2 Sam. 12. 24, 25. This means 'beloved', or 'darling of Jehovah', hence, the link with his father David, the 'beloved one'. Nehemiah records of Solomon, 'who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel', Neh. 13. 26.

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Our Lord Jesus Christ is the beloved Son, 'This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased'. Paul, in writing to the Colossians, speaks of Christ as God's 'dear Son' or 'the Son of his love'. We stand accepted 'in the beloved', Eph. 1. 6. Prophetically, David writes of crucifixion and cries, 'Deliver . . . my darling from the power of the dog', Ps. 22. 20.

Surely, it is plain that the names fit Messiah infinitely better than they did Solomon, who executed his father's enemies, chastised his people with whips, and even went to war at Hamath-zobah! His army and navy make it clear that Solomon did not believe in disarmament.

(2) As to His Sonship

Nathan reports to David the Lord's revelation, 'And when thy days be fulfilled . . . I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom . . . I will be his father and he shall be my son', 2 Sam. 7. 12-14. These words apply to Solomon as David's son.

However, Matthew refers to Christ, in his genealogy, as 'the son of David'. Of Messiah, the writer to the Hebrews says, 'Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee', and, again, 'I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son', 1. 5. This is great David's greater Son – not Solomon but Messiah. The Sonship of Christ is unique and when Christ addresses His Father, He addresses Him as an equal.

He is the Father's 'only begotten Son' giving Him a relationship that is both unique and exclusive. He is the eternal Son of the eternal Father.

(3) As to His Service

To Solomon, not David, was granted the privilege of overseeing the building of the Temple. This was because David's hands were stained with the blood of warfare but Solomon was characterized by peace. As an aside, however, let us give credit to David that, from an early age, he wanted to see the ark restored to Israel, and it was in his heart to build a permanent dwelling place for God amidst His people. After all, the blueprint for the temple was given in writing to David by God. Without David's preparatory efforts the project might well have been delayed, 1 Chr. 29. 2, 3. It has been estimated that 35 tons of gold and silver were used in the construction of the temple besides the precious stones, marble, wood, etc. The cost of the temple in today's market would be at least £112 billion, one internet source has calculated! Solomon took seven years to build the one temple that bears his name. Herod's temple was 46 years under construction.





er than Solomon (2)

Our Lord has the responsibility for building at least two temples, one spiritual and the other millennial.

(i) The Spiritual Temple – the Church

(a) *Material v Spiritual*

The church of this dispensation is described as a temple in Ephesians chapter 2 verse 21. Of this same aspect of the church, Christ declares, 'I will build my church; and the gates (*councils*) of hell shall not prevail against it', Matt. 16. 18. In contrast to the stones prepared off-site for Solomon's temple, and all the materials accumulated, the temple Christ is building consists of 'living stones'. Men and women hewn out of the quarry of this world, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and 'builded together for an habitation of God'. A spiritual organism not a material edifice!

(b) *Ephemeral v Eternal*

Jeremiah predicted the fall of the temple, and Isaiah records it, 'Our holy and our beautiful house where our fathers praised thee, is burned up with fire', Isa. 64. 11. This as a result of the Babylonian invasion. After David's many years of preparation, and Solomon's seven years of construction, the temple was but a temporal model of the reality in heaven, and lasted only an estimated 414 years.

Contrariwise, the temple of Christ's building is still growing, and, on completion, will never be destroyed. It is proofed against the very councils of the Devil himself!

Solomon may have basked in the glory of the temple for 36 years at most but Christ's glory in the church is eternal, 'Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen', Eph. 3. 21. An eternal object of glory not an ephemeral, earthly edifice!

(c) *Temporal v Celestial*

The cost of Solomon's temple can be measured by means of human valuation. The materials, their weight, and preciousness can be calculated, in human terms, in tons and pounds sterling at today's prices.

But what of the church of the dispensation, this spiritual temple, the mystical body of Christ? Truly, it is beyond human calculation, it has been purchased with the blood of Christ. This is the celestial 'gold standard'. The heavenly and divine commentary is 'precious blood'. At what an amazing price the church has been bought!

(ii) The Millennial Temple

Scholars have suggested that the

tabernacle usually foreshadows the church, and the temple the millennium. Solomon oversaw the building of the temple in his day.

Christ will oversee the building of the temple to be used during the millennium. 'Behold the man whose name is The Branch . . . and he shall build the temple of the Lord', Zech. 6. 12.

Solomon used Gentiles in the building of the temple. He sent to Hiram, the king of Tyre, for cedars, and help in preparing the timber. He also numbered all the 'strangers' in Israel, and set them to labour. It has been estimated that in excess of 150,000 men were employed in its construction.

The millennial temple described in Ezekiel chapters 40-44 will be built with Gentile help. 'And they that are afar off shall come and build in the temple of the Lord', Zech. 6. 15. The glory of Solomon and his forty-year reign over Israel is unsurpassed until the 1000-year reign of Christ. 'And he (*Christ*) shall bear the glory and shall sit and rule upon his throne', Zech. 6. 13. What glory! What a reign! What a duration! Additionally, 'He shall be a priest upon his throne', Zech. 6. 13. Solomon might be king, but it is Christ alone for whom God has reserved the joint offices of king and priest. 'And the counsel of peace shall be between them **both**', Zech. 6. 13. Christ is the King-Priest, after the order of Melchisedek.

The temple of Solomon was filled with the glory of God, as Deity dwelt in a 'permanent' residence on earth for the first time.

The millennial temple, described by Ezekiel, will know the literal, physical presence of the Son of God, Himself. He will return by way of the east, i.e., Mount Olivet, and will enter through the east gate of the temple which is reserved for His exclusive use, apart from the prince. Not then the Shekinah but the glorious Son of God, the King-Priest, will grace its courts personally.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Luke 2. 14; John 14. 27; Rom. 12. 18; Col. 1. 20; Eph. 2. 17; Isa. 9. 6.

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As I start to tell how God made me aware of what He wanted me to do with the rest of my life – preach the gospel and teach the Bible – I must warn you that this is a very personal issue. You might not relate to everything that I say, or have been spoken to by the things that spoke to me. We are all individuals and God touches our lives in different ways. Our experiences are varied and what affects you might not affect me.

Equally, the call of God to serve Him, without the distraction of secular employment, doesn't just involve the man, but it involves his immediate family and, in particular, his wife. Therefore, there will be references to how God spoke to my wife (Carole) as the story unfolds.

Because God calls some men to serve Him in this way it does not mean that they are superior Christians. All believers are called to serve God. We are all full-time servants of God, but, for some, that also means trusting God to provide their income, i.e., income that is not directly related to the work you do.

A man who is called by God to preach and teach does not suddenly develop gifts to do this work, and his gifts are not superior to anyone else's.¹ Long before men are called, God has equipped them to serve him.² The calling ultimately is to a specific work, Acts 13. 2, and to the grace of God, i.e., God's provision for them as they serve, Acts 14. 26. The Holy Spirit calls men to do things and go places that others in full-time employment are not as free to do.

I was born in Hastings in the south of England in 1961 where my parents, who were Christians, were living for a couple of years. After that they returned to their home in Liverpool. In 1966 my dad's job took us to Scotland. I started my schooling at the age of five in Greenock in the west of Scotland and it was while we were living there that I trusted the Lord Jesus. My conversion was a simple

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The Story of how God

By **STEPHEN G BAKER** Liverpool, England

event. I remember kneeling by my bed and praying. My baby-sitter asked me if I had anything I wanted to ask God for and I remember that my response was to ask God to save me. I didn't know much about sin, but I am glad that my God hears the call of simple faith and saves those who call.

Despite struggling a bit at the age of sixteen or seventeen I was quite consistent as a believer. I left school at sixteen to join a bank and remained in the west of Scotland for about six years. At twenty-two I was transferred by the bank to work in the north of Scotland. Everywhere I went I could see the need to preach the gospel, so I did what I could: visiting people in their homes to give them tracts, running children's meetings in schools, or gospel meetings in community halls.

I wanted to be an evangelist or a missionary, but I had a problem! The Lord never called me to leave my work or to give all my energy to His work. In my late teens, I thought the Lord was calling me to be a missionary, firstly in Botswana and then Iceland, but the Lord never made it clear, so nothing happened!

In 1989 I married Carole. My job moved us about a bit and eventually Carole and I investigated the possibility of managing a Christian Nursing Home. We wanted to be involved in serving the Lord's people, but our ultimate aim was to serve the Lord in other ways as well. This never happened! In fact, I got to the stage where I thought that the Lord was not going to open the door for us to serve Him in any 'full-time capacity'.

After twenty-six years, I left the bank and set up a small business

training consultancy. The Lord made it clear that we were to set up in business and that we had to learn to trust Him to provide for us in these circumstances. My idea was to eventually free up time to serve the Lord more, but, in the meantime, I thought that possibly I could earn enough money to support the men and women that God had called to leave their jobs to serve Him – this was not to be! While I was in the training business, I was trying to help people run their businesses more efficiently, manage their human resources better, be better people in business, and all the time I was thinking I have an even more important message to tell them that can change their lives for eternity, not just for the present.

Although I was very cautious at first, the Lord began to speak to us. I had been taught for many years that serving God in any particular way without clear guidance would be disastrous. I knew that guidance from the Lord needed to have a number of factors.³

One of the things that I have done for a number of years is to keep a note of any lessons I feel that the Lord is teaching me in my daily scripture readings. Looking back, the Lord began to impress scripture on my mind about this new way of serving Him from the 8th January 2006. Some of the promptings from scripture came when other men were preaching.⁴

Our business had been plodding along for a couple of years. We were surviving, but needed a few bigger contracts to assure future income. I was approached by a company and asked to quote for a training contract. This was a great opportunity. There would be a lot of training involved. Work was beginning to come in from



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a number of sizeable companies. Things were looking good in business and we began to think that we were getting somewhere. But the Lord was testing us about the future focus of our lives!

At the time I was a member of a professional association for people who were involved in running seminars and delivering training. On the 4th April 2006 I attended a meeting of the association. At this point I was not clear as to what the Lord was telling me to do. At the meeting an unsaved lady quoted to me the scripture, 'Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days'.⁵ When I got home I looked up the verse, read the rest of the passage and began to discuss it with Carole. Verse 4 says, 'He that observeth the wind shall not sow'; that was clear enough. Verse 6 says, 'In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand'. Maybe, I said, 'God wants me to work in the day and serve Him at night?' Carole said, 'Maybe God wants us to sow His seed in the morning and do the same in the evening and He will decide which will bear fruit'. And so our days and weeks were filled with pointers and indicators from God in ways we could not ignore! Whether it was Llossiemouth Conference, or the Easter Conference in Belfast, whether I was speaking or listening, the Lord kept telling me, 'Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it', John 2. 5. There were times when it was simply the quiet persuasion of God in my personal times with Him. On other occasions it was the comments of trusted friends and people I looked up to, who had no idea of what was going on in our hearts, saying things like, 'How are you going to spend the rest of your life', and 'Are you going to give God the dregs of your life?'

I now felt that I needed to make a decision but Carole had a few questions that still needed to be

answered. She didn't give me her list; she left them with the Lord. One night Carole went to hear Phil Coulson speak at the David Street Missionary and Homeworkers Conference in Liverpool. That night Phil answered all six of her questions. How did he know? The Lord provided the answers.

The Lord used many different verses to persuade me to take this step of faith. The Lord gave us verses to tell us to serve Him, to assure us of His presence, to assure us of His provision for our needs and to give us confidence that though we were weak He is strong.

My last point relates to family. My children were 14 and 16 when the Lord called us and big changes in life affect you and your family. The Lord spoke to them and also used them to speak to us! On the 15th June 2006, when Carole was working overnight – she was a nurse. I was wondering how our family would accept the changes that would inevitably take place as a result of our commendation. My son came to me that night and handed me a poem that he had written. At this stage he knew nothing about what the Lord was asking us to do. The words took my breath away:

Listen to our God, when He's calling for you
Listen to our God, there's nothing else you can do
I don't know where I am going
And what I will do
Listen to my God before you lose it all

The rest of the story about how our assembly and elders felt is evident in that we were commended to the grace of God and to the work to which the Spirit of God had called us on the 1st September 2006. My prayer is the same as the one the Lord Jesus asked us to pray: 'Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He would send forth labourers into his harvest', Luke 10. 2.

ENDNOTES

- 1 See Acts 13. 1, 2.
- 2 See Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4.
- 3 Clear scriptural direction, Isa. 30. 21; circumstances indicating a certain direction, Gen. 24. 21, 27, 48; peace in our souls, Col. 3. 15; and good advice from others.
- 4 The first one I noted down was, 'We will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word', Acts 6. 4. I had read this passage many times, and, no doubt, had heard it preached as often, but the Lord began to speak clearly through this verse. One verse on its own could never be the basis for any call to leave what you are doing and 'follow' the Master but the staggering combination of scriptures week after week began to make an impression.
- 5 Eccles. 11. 1.





It is evident from verses 15-23 of chapter 1 that we find the apostle Paul in supplication, as he is 'praying home' the ministry that he has just revealed. The desire of Paul is that the believers will be able to comprehend these great truths, and he is seeking the help of God to make this a reality.

It is a common thing with Paul, though he knows the saints, to speak of them as he does here, saying 'Since I heard of your faith . . . and love unto all the saints', v. 15. As the servant of God who was instrumental in bringing the assembly into being, he obviously knew of the salvation that marked them. The present activity of the believers in Ephesus had now reached Paul's ears, and it must have been an encouragement to know that his labours among them had not been in vain. The thought behind 'heard' is that of constantly hearing.

The verse begins with a 'wherefore'; his writings often carry a 'therefore' or a 'wherefore'. A 'therefore' looks back after contemplation to encourage saints to active Christian living, whereas a 'wherefore' is a word of continuance, looking forward to a further work of God among those who love His name.

He recalls their faith God-ward and their love man-ward, and, as a result, he prays incessantly for them, v. 16. How true it is that faith generates love toward the saints! One of the marks of a truly born-again believer is the desire to show a love to those who belong to the Lord, for as John writes, 'He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?' 1 John 4. 20. This is **the cause** of his thanksgiving and prayer for them.

From verse 18 to 23 we have **the content** of his prayer. There are four basic facts that the apostle is praying for in these verses and I feel that all brethren who participate in the prayer meeting should look

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again at Paul's prayers, and seek to follow the example that he has left us. His prayers are full of spiritual desires for the believers, that they will appreciate the ground to which the Lord has brought them.

As we survey the content of this first prayer in Ephesians, we see that it is like the stones on the high priest's shoulders, for they were in the place of power, and this prayer speaks of power. The prayer of chapter 3 differs, and would correspond with the stones upon the high priests breast, which is the place of love. The prayer of chapter 3 would manifest the love that has brought us to God.

The four thoughts upon the apostle's mind are that:

- 1 We should be able to appreciate a person, God.
- 2 We value the position into which we have been brought as sons.
- 3 We are occupied with the prospect that is before us. It is that which occupies his thoughts in prayer when he anticipates a future reign with Christ.
- 4 We will understand the power that is available to us daily, demonstrated by the place the Lord now occupies.

He begins with thoughts of receiving the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God, v. 17. If we have been saved by His grace, and blessed abundantly by Him, then the first thing must be to get to know Him better, and that is in the 'full knowledge' of Him. God is introduced as 'the God of our Lord Jesus Christ'. This would reveal to us that when speaking of what has been done for Christ in verses 19 to 23, it has been done to exalt the humanity of the Lord Jesus. We shall see how the true humanity of the Lord Jesus has been taken to the highest place of authority. Associated with the exaltation of the Lord is that glory

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

will be brought to the Father; in this way God is 'the Father of glory'.

The only way that we can come to evaluate the 'God of our Lord Jesus' is by being given the spirit of wisdom and revelation. These two things, wisdom and revelation, were among the gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians chapter 12, and all these gifts were temporary gifts. They were operational until the whole mind of God for this age was completed in the Epistles that were written later. Thus, there was a need for this kind of gift in the early church when they had no written record of the desires of God for them. But we are now told that the only way we can comprehend the God that blessed us is by being given these two features to unveil His person. The words of the Lord Jesus set forth the truth of this when He said, 'It is written in the prophets, And they shall all be taught of God', John 6. 45. Throughout this letter, I notice that God desires our appreciation of all we now enjoy in Christ, but He begins with a desire that we should appreciate God Himself, who has made it all possible.

As the prayer continues, Paul desires that we will appreciate all we have in Christ, and he sets before us three 'whats'. His desire is that the eyes of our understanding, or heart as some translate this, should be enlightened. Mental appreciation is good, but for the affections to embrace it is better that we should know 'what is the hope of his calling'. This would take us back to verses 3 to 5. Paul is 'praying home' his ministry and longs that all believers will value the blessing of God that has chosen us, with a desire that we should be before Him holy and without blame



MS

PART TWO

in love. Far more is included, as we have seen, for he desires that we will be there as sons and all will be to the praise of His glory.

He continues to pray that we might know what are 'the riches of . . . his inheritance in the saints'. This would take us back to verses 10 to 14. We see that it is not *our* calling or the riches of the glory of *our* inheritance, but it is that which is of and for God Himself. That God has determined the honour that will belong to the Lord Jesus in His coming reign in association with the saints is the theme of the expression. At that time, God will, according to Romans chapter 8 verses 18 to 22, come into all that is rightly His, as the saints return, and creation is recovered from the fall. In this way it is 'the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints', v. 18.

The closing verses introduce the power of God toward the believer, and these verses look to what is going to be done for us, as seen in chapter 2 verses 1 to 10.

This power is that which is demonstrated in the resurrection and exaltation of the Lord Jesus. But what has been done for Christ is now available to each one of the saints. God has gone far above what is usual, with the exceeding greatness of His power, and it is according to the working of His mighty power. It is a known and tested power, demonstrated in a glorified Saviour. Can we grasp something of what was involved in bringing the Lord Jesus from the grave, and for men to see Him ascend to heaven and then for God to give Him the place of authority He has? This is the power that is available to the saints to live for God as we ought. Power is needed in every aspect of our lives. In chapter 3 verse 7, it is power to serve; in verse 16, for the inner man to be strengthened; in verse 20, power to pray; and, in chapter

6 verse 10, to be strong against the devil's attacks.

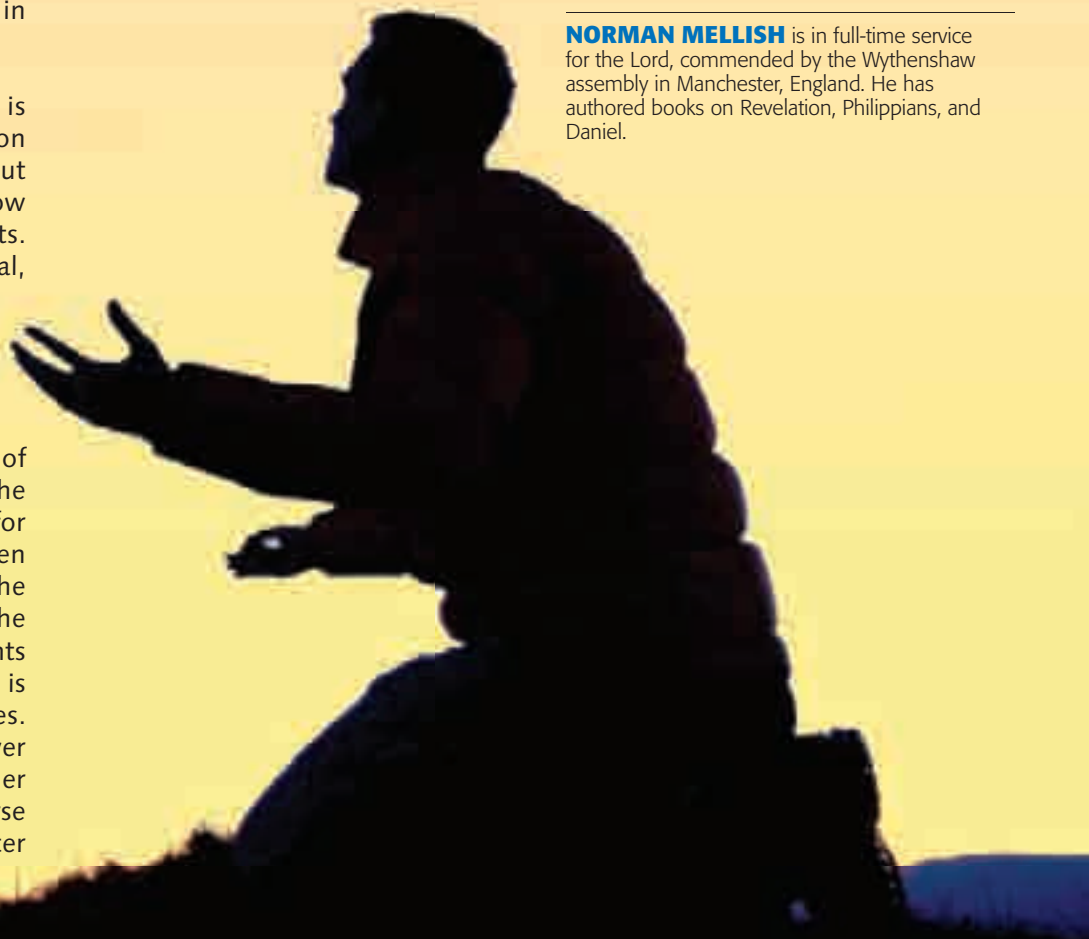
What has been done for the Lord Jesus is to make known the place of supremacy that now belongs to Him. It involves His resurrection, exaltation, the subjugation of all other powers, and the jurisdiction of the Lord Jesus, as He is made head of all things. The place given to God's beloved Son exceeds anything known in the universe. None has ever been set at the right hand of God; this is the place of authority and power. The Lord has been placed 'far above' all other authorities, whoever they may be, v. 21. God put governmental authority into the creation from the beginning, but none can compare with the honour given to the Lord, as He takes His place as a man at God's behest, in total sovereignty. This authority will compass not only this world but also the coming kingdom.

A little anatomy lesson can be drawn from these verses. In verse 18 Paul refers to the eyes, and longs for intelligence from the saints. He speaks of God's hand, and this would reveal authority for Christ. All is put beneath the Lord's feet in verse 22,

speaking of the subjection of all to His authority. Then, the head is set forth to manifest the control the Lord will have over all things. Notice that this is to the church; he is not speaking of the headship of Christ *over* the church, that is reserved until later in the Epistle, but what He is *to* the church, that is, for the benefit of the church. As we know, the word 'church' speaks of a body of people, and not a building, and means 'a called out company'. Thank God for this call that has linked us to Christ! We have not only been 'called out' from the world but we have also been linked to Christ as His body; in this way we are eternally joined to the Lord, and we are now seen as the fullness of Him. Here, it is not what Christ is to the church, but what the church is to Christ, and, as Adam would have been incomplete without Eve, so the Lord is seen as being only complete when the church is joined to Him.

If we are the fullness of Christ, He is the One who fills all things. The Lord Jesus stands supreme in the universe. What a glorious day is coming when this will be seen and acknowledged by all created beings.

NORMAN MELLISH is in full-time service for the Lord, commended by the Wythenshaw assembly in Manchester, England. He has authored books on Revelation, Philippians, and Daniel.





REACHING OUT WITH THE GOSPEL [1] MARKET STALL WORK

By **WINSTON VANDERPUT** Grantham, England

How did you go about setting up your market stall outreach?

These days people do not go to church on anything like a regular basis. Like many assemblies, we struggle to get people into our usual gospel meetings. Equally, when out with gospel literature we were conscious that people can easily bin it without giving it more than a glance. Our main concern was that we were anonymous. In contrast, the market stall gives us the opportunity to meet and talk to people – letting people know we are here!

On the second Saturday after starting the work, and when there were enough of us to walk about, we had an opportunity to talk to a person who was clearing up after the market. He spoke to us, and said, 'You have been noticed!' In this sense we feel that it has been very profitable. However, whilst we started with five volunteers, it is important to be able to ensure ample staffing. One point of interest is that over the last couple of months the Jehovah's Witnesses have started doing something similar!

What issues did you have to sort out before you could start? Were there any requirements that you had to meet?

Most markets are run by the local council (either district or parish). Before you can do anything, you must obtain permission from the council designated person – seek out the market stall supervisor. If classed as a 'charity' you may be allocated a space/slot on the fringes of the market and without a choice. Be prepared to take what place you are given! Alternatively, if you want to choose your location there is usually a charge.

It is important to realize that bookings must be made in advance. Equally, if you cannot staff the stall on an agreed date, you are obliged to inform the council representative/administrator. Be aware that times can be really early – initially, set up times are between 5.30 – 6 a.m. if, like ours, the stall is in a cordoned-off street.

This article has been compiled from a conversation between the editor and the named writer. It is included in the magazine as a means of sharing experience of this type of work of spreading the gospel to those amongst whom we live.

Whatever position you are granted, it is important to make some sort of visual impact upon those who pass by. Banners can be helpful and a simple check on size of the stall can provide you with some idea of what is needed and the cost. The display you may use on the stall is relatively open – we have received no objections as yet. Whilst some other stall holders are rather blasé about our stall, it has generated some interest.

Minor administrative points are:

- Ensure the stall is staffed at all times.
- Keep the stall tidy – many councils provide a bag for rubbish!

What do you stock on your market stall and why?

Apart from Bibles, we have mainly tracts and booklets, e.g., *Journey into Life*, NORMAN WARREN. Various booklets by John Blanchard are also acceptable and useful. We always try to have copies of different Gospels. As we have occasionally attracted interest from children, we now have a limited amount of children's materials. Lately, we have expanded to include some Creation/Evolution literature. This has been helpful in attracting interest. However, overall it is the display of the materials that is important.

Points to ponder:

- Some of this material can be expensive.
- Be careful not to stock too much.
- Plan how to deal with people who wish to make a donation for any materials.

What type of questions do you get asked by people who stop to have a look?

There is always the general enquiry



– Who are you? Be prepared and able to tell people who you are and what you believe! We do meet with scepticism – Why do you believe in God? The assumption that the theory of evolution is fact has also generated discussion. Therefore, it is helpful to know some of the basic issues surrounding the creation/evolution debate. Although in a minority, it is good to be prepared for people who may well come and try to challenge what you believe and what you are about. For example, what would be our response to the homosexual question?

What are the benefits of such a work?

We believe it is essential to talk with people and engage them in conversation over the gospel. The market stall has given:

- us the opportunity to let people know we are there and approachable;
- the public the chance to put faces to the people who go to the Hall;
- some success in drawing people into the gospel meeting, particularly through the Christmas calendar distribution.

We have noticed that we get quite a few people from out of town – the stall has enabled us to reach out into rural Lincolnshire. To have some people go away with tracts and Bibles is a thrill!

What lessons have you learned that have helped you improve the outreach?

We seek to listen to people and to answer without alienating them. One essential is to be prepared and knowledgeable about the issues that people have as 'baggage' that has to be overcome before openings for the gospel can be gained.

WINSTON VANDERPUT has been in active fellowship in the small assembly in Grantham, Lincolnshire, for over 40 years. He is happy to offer what advice may be helpful and can be contacted through the PSI email address.

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)

2

In the previous article we noted that, according to the biblical narrative, there have been relatively few periods (or epochs) of human history when miraculous works were performed by God-empowered men. We identified three such periods, the description 'God-empowered men' embracing 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'.¹

The evidence is that, in each of these periods of history, the cluster of miracles called attention to a new revelation from God, and attested the authority of those who performed the miracles. That is, that one major function of the burst of miracles and signs was to accredit a God-inspired revelation given at the time. This was true of the three great divine revelations: the Law, the Prophets, and the Gospel.

In the case of the first epoch (that of **Moses and his successor**), we note that, at the outset, God enabled Moses to perform three miracles to convince the Israelites that the God of their fathers had appeared to him. Of the first, we read, 'Moses answered and said, "But suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice; suppose they say, 'The Lord has not appeared to you'". So the Lord said to him, "What is that in your hand?" He said, "A rod". And he said, "Cast it on the ground." So he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from it. Then the Lord said to Moses, "Reach out your hand and take it by the tail" (and he reached out his hand and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand), *"that they may believe that the Lord God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you"*.² It is significant that it is recorded later that 'Israel saw the great work which the Lord had done in Egypt; so the people . . . believed the Lord and his servant Moses'.³ Moses, the man chosen by God to deliver His law to the nation of Israel, was the first prophet empowered to perform miracles. The many miracles associated with Moses, and his immediate successor Joshua,⁴ affirmed the divine authority of the law.

As regards the second epoch (that of **Elijah and his successor**), we note the words of the widow of Zarephath to Elijah, following the miraculous healing of her son: 'Now by this I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is the truth'.⁵ That is, the miracle served the dual purpose (i) of providing Elijah with his credential to be accepted as God's messenger, and (ii) of confirming the truth of God's message through him.

We should note, also, the way in which the supernatural fire which fell on Mount Carmel to consume Elijah's burnt offering (together with the stones of his altar, the wood, and the dust) served to accredit Elijah as God's servant. We hear him pray beforehand, 'Let it be known this day that you are God in Israel and I am your servant'.⁶ Although there had been several notable prophets before

their time,⁷ Elijah and Elisha can be said to have ushered in the prophetic era – coming in advance, as they did, of the writing prophets.

It is true that Elijah left no book, and, indeed, that the historical narrative contains very little that he said which was extraordinary. Yet no other Old Testament prophet, apart from Moses, looms anywhere near as large as Elijah. By way of example, we can note the near-final words of Malachi, 'Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet . . .',⁸ thereby presenting him as the very last man to be mentioned in the Old Testament.

With reference to the third epoch (that of **our Lord and His successors**), it was to be expected that any thoughtful Jew of the day would refer back to the previous occasions when major revelations from God had been ushered in by a flurry of miracles, and to demand equally compelling miraculous evidence to confirm, and validate, the divine origin of what they claimed and taught. And that, not only for the truth and authority of the message heralded by the Lord Jesus Himself, but also of that brought by His apostles, and the New Testament prophets.⁹

In this case, we need to consider separately the claims of the New Testament concerning the Lord Jesus, and the apostolic church.

First, we think of testimonies given to the Saviour. We begin with the connection which Nicodemus made between our Lord's signs and His teaching, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a *teacher come from God*; for no one can do *these signs that you do* unless God is with him'.¹⁰ We turn to the words of the Lord Himself to the unbelieving Jews during the feast of Dedication (Hanukkah), 'If I do not do the works of my Father, do not believe me; but if I do, though you do not believe me, *believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in me, and I in him*'.¹¹ Then, we hear the apostle Peter's declaration on the Day of Pentecost to his multi-national Jewish audience, 'Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through him in your midst'.¹² Scripture makes it clear, then, that the cycle of miracles which surrounded the person of our Lord were the authenticating evidences of His divine mission and message.

Second, we ponder that which is said concerning the apostles and the New Testament prophets. It is clear that these men played an altogether unique role in the history of the church,¹³ and that, as those who received and transmitted God's revelation by way of their preaching and teaching,¹⁴ they constituted 'the foundation' of the church, which is God's house(hold), building, and holy temple.¹⁵

It was to be expected, therefore, that they would perform miraculous signs to accredit both (i) themselves as God's servants and messengers, and (ii) the message which they declared.

And so we read, for example, of 'the apostles' Paul and Barnabas¹⁶ that 'they stayed there (Iconium) a long time,

speaking boldly in the Lord, who was *bearing witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands*'. That expression 'bearing witness to the word' links well with the closing sentence of Mark's Gospel, where we read of the original disciples that 'after the Lord had spoken to them, he was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and *confirming the word through the accompanying signs*'.¹⁷

I referred, towards the close of my previous article, to what the writer to the Hebrews says concerning the 'great salvation' enjoyed by believers; namely, that 'at the first' it 'began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard him, *God also bearing witness* ('with' them, literally) *both with signs and wonders*, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will'.¹⁸ I understand this to mean that those who had heard the Lord personally testified to what they had heard, and that God verified their testimony by the signs and wonders which accompanied their ministry.

In summary, we read in scripture of miracle-working men only during three very special periods in human history, each of which represented a significant development in God's revelation of Himself and of His truth. And I suggest that this casts light on one important feature of that which took place on the so-called 'Mount of Transfiguration'.

It was, of course, Moses and Elijah who there appeared in glory with the Lord Jesus, and who conversed with Him.¹⁹ That is, for a short time one night²⁰ *the three men who represented fresh revelations from God* 'stood' together.²¹ This would explain why Moses and Elijah appeared there, and not any other of the Old Testament worthies²² – not even Abraham and/or David.²³

It is clear from that which God said to the three apostles who had been selected to witness²⁴ the event, that the key issue raised by the presence of Moses and Elijah on the mountain was that of God's 'revelation' to men. Note carefully the last two words²⁵ which came out of heaven²⁶ according to all three accounts:

- (a) 'Behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."²⁷ **Hear him!**'²⁸
- (b) 'A cloud came and overshadowed them; and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my beloved Son. **Hear him!**"'²⁹
- (c) 'A voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my beloved Son. **Hear him!**"'³⁰

And these words 'hear him' stand out the more starkly when we contrast that which had been said by the same 'voice' when it had earlier sounded out of heaven at our Lord's baptism:

- (a) 'Suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"'.³¹
- (b) 'A voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"'.³²
- (c) 'A voice came from heaven which said, "You are my beloved Son; in you I am well pleased"'.³³

We can hardly miss the point that there was no suggestion on the banks of Jordan that men should 'hear' the Lord Jesus.

Furthermore, I believe a case can be made for regarding Moses as the representative of the law of God, and Elijah as the representative of the Old Testament prophets. I have in mind (i) our Lord's words, 'The law and the prophets were until John'. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached',³⁴ and (ii) the fact that Moses and Elijah are not only the last men mentioned in the closing chapter of the Old Testament revelation,³⁵ but that Moses is introduced there in connection with 'the law' ('Remember the law of Moses'), whereas Elijah is characterized there as 'the prophet' ('Elijah the prophet').³⁶

In connection with the Lord's words 'until John',³⁷ I note also that what Malachi said of Elijah ('he will *turn the hearts of the fathers to the children*, and the hearts of the children to their fathers')³⁸ is linked by Luke directly to the ministry of John the Baptist. For Luke records the declaration of the angel of the Lord to Zacharias concerning John that 'he will also go before him (the Lord) in the spirit and power of Elijah, to *turn the hearts of the fathers to the children*'.³⁹ Again, it is in that very context that Luke characterizes John as a 'prophet', recording the prophetic words of Zacharias, 'and you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest'.⁴⁰

But the Father's stated requirement on the mountain was that Peter and his companions should now attend only to the revelation brought by the Lord Jesus.⁴¹ For the two great Old Testament worthies associated with God's former revelation of Himself and His ways must take a back seat in the presence of our Saviour.⁴² Because, in contrast with every mere prophet, our Lord, being God's Son, brought God's full-orbed revelation and final word to men.⁴³

The first book of the Old Testament told how, after two *angelic* visitors from heaven had left Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, he was found in the presence of 'the Lord' alone.⁴⁴ Now the first book of the New Testament tells how, after two *human* visitors from heaven left the disciples on the mountain, they were found in the presence of the Lord alone; 'When they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only'.⁴⁵

I suggest that the evidence both of scripture, and of common sense, is that there was (and is) no need to repeat continually the miraculous evidences which were necessary at first to confirm the truth of an altogether fresh revelation from God. For this reason, it was not necessary, for example, for the remarkable miracles performed by Moses to be repeated throughout later centuries; the law had been fully accredited, and established as having come from God.

For a similar reason, I do not expect to find that miracle-working men (such as functioned during the apostolic era) have continued throughout the subsequent history of the church.

It is well known that several of the so-called 'Apostolic Fathers'⁴⁶ and 'Early Church Fathers' *claimed* that miracle-working powers continued in the church through the centuries following the days of the apostles. For a scholarly

assessment and critique of such claims, I would point to B. WARFIELD's classic work, *Counterfeit Miracles*.⁴⁷

In his article, '*Does God want Christians to perform miracles today?*', J. C. WHITCOMB asked pertinently, 'If God is indeed giving to certain men the power to perform healing miracles today, why are there so few of them, and why are their powers so limited, and why are the results so doubtful?' Good question, Dr. Whitcomb. For I state the blindingly obvious when I say that miracles either (i) of *the magnitude* we find performed during the three eras we have noted (such as parting the waters of the Red Sea, shutting up heaven that it gave no rain, raising the dead, walking on water, feeding vast multitudes with very small provisions etc.) or (ii) of *the quantity* we find then (when, for example, every sick person in a whole village or town was healed, regardless of his or her ailment or condition)⁴⁸ are simply *not* occurring today. For such to happen nowadays would indicate that someone had come with a fresh revelation from God to surpass that which was made known by our Lord Jesus! Perish the thought!

DR. WHITCOMB then added, 'By contrast, the miracles of Christ and His apostles were fantastically abundant, utterly spectacular, and totally undeniable . . . The question we must ask . . . is not whether God still has the power to perform those kinds of miracles today, but whether it is His plan'.⁴⁹ The issue isn't what God *can* do, but what He *wills to* do. I do not question the truth of John the Baptist's statement to the Pharisees and the Sadducees that 'God *is able* to raise up children to Abraham from these stones'.⁵⁰ But if somebody asks me to believe that, with God's help, he has the power to turn pebbles into people, I reserve the right to be cynical, and to challenge his claim! And in so doing I would *not* be doubting God's ability to do that very thing *if He willed to do so*. In other words, it is not a question of God's power (for He is all-powerful), or His authority (for He is sovereign), but of His will and purpose.

Let me make it clear that I am not denying that God Himself does 'perform miracles' today, *if* by 'miracles' we mean 'miracles' in the broader sense of (i) extraordinary providences and/or (ii) occurrences which defy natural explanation. For He most certainly *does* work such 'miracles', and often in gracious response to the prayers of His people.⁵¹ But I do not accept that in our day we have miracle-workers and faith-healers able to perform divinely-given miraculous signs, such as God used in biblical times to authorize a new revelation from Him.⁵²

We do well to consider the definition of 'miracle' offered by the 18th-century Baptist theologian AUGUSTUS STRONG, 'A miracle is an event in nature,⁵³ so extraordinary in itself, and so coinciding with the prophecy or command of a religious teacher or leader, as fully to warrant the conviction on the part of those who witness it, that God has wrought it with the design of certifying that this teacher or leader has been commissioned by Him'.⁵⁴ DR. STRONG continued, (i) 'Since only an act directly wrought by God can properly be called a miracle, it follows that surprising events brought about by evil spirits or by men, through the use of natural agencies beyond our knowledge, are not entitled to this appellation. The scriptures recognize the existence of such, but denominate them "lying wonders"

(2 Thessalonians 2. 9) . . . not all supernatural occurrences are divine',⁵⁵ and (ii) 'Miracles, therefore, do not stand alone as evidences. Power alone cannot prove a divine commission. Purity of life and doctrine must go with the miracles to assure us that a religious teacher has come from God'.⁵⁶

In summary, there have been three periods of history when clusters of miracles were performed by God-empowered men; namely, the days of Moses and his successor, the days of Elijah and his successor, and the days of our Lord Jesus and His 'successors'. In each case the miracles served to accredit both (i) a fresh God-inspired revelation (whether the Law, the Prophets, or the Gospel) and (ii) the one who brought that revelation. The Father's words 'Hear him!' which sounded on the so-called Mount of Transfiguration directed the attention of the disciples who were present there away from the two men who had been associated in Old Testament times with God's former revelation of Himself, and focused their minds and gaze on Him who brought God's full and final word to men. 'They saw no one but Jesus alone'.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Acts 10. 38; cp. the Lord's own claim that He 'cast out demons by the Spirit of God', Matt. 12. 28.
- 2 Exod. 4. 1-5.
- 3 Exod. 14. 31. For the unique role played by Moses, we note his inspired epitaph: 'Since then there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, in all the signs and wonders which the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt, before Pharaoh, before all his servants, and in all his land, and by all that mighty power and all the great terror which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel', Deut. 34. 10-12.
- 4 'Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him; so the children of Israel heeded him, and did as the Lord had commanded Moses', Deut. 34. 9.
- 5 1 Kgs. 17. 24.
- 6 1 Kgs. 18. 36.
- 7 Abraham, Moses, Samuel, Nathan.
- 8 Mal. 4. 5.
- 9 'The miracles of the Apostles stand in the same relation to those of Jesus, as the miracles of Joshua to those of Moses, or the miracles of Elisha, to those of Elijah. They are a continuation and a complement. In the most ancient epoch of the history of mankind (from Adam to Moses . . .) biblical history does not record one single miracle, properly speaking . . . The first miraculous acts in the domain of nature, are the signs given to Moses at the moment he entered upon his office . . . Then, six or seven centuries elapse, and no miracle occurs; but it re-appears at the moment when the existence of monotheism is seriously threatened by the invasion of the grossest paganism, in the times of Elijah and Elisha', F. L. GODET, the article titled 'Miracles' in the *Schaff-Herzog Encyclopaedia of Religious Knowledge*.
- 10 John 3. 2.
- 11 John 10. 37-38; cp. v. 25. See also the message which Jesus sent to John the Baptist, Matt. 11. 2-6.
- 12 Acts 2. 22. "'Miracles" is the general word, which Peter defined further as "wonders" (miracles eliciting awe) and "signs" (miracles signifying something)', THOMAS CONSTABLE.
- 13 That the names of the apostles are inscribed on the foundation stones of the wall of the New Jerusalem, Rev. 21. 14, may again suggest that they occupy a special place in the church.
- 14 They enlightened men concerning 'the mystery . . . which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to his holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ through the gospel', Eph. 3. 3-9. The order 'apostles and prophets' both in Ephesians chapter 2 verse 20 and chapter 3 verse 5 is significant, establishing that the 'prophets' in view are New Testament prophets as distinct from the prophets of the Old Testament. Contrast the order followed by Peter in 2 Peter chapter 2 verse 2, where his reference to 'the holy prophets, and . . . us, the apostles' indicated clearly that he had in mind the prophets of the Old Testament. Once a mystery has been revealed, it no longer remains a mystery, and therefore does not need to be revealed again.
- 15 Eph. 2. 19-21. By its very nature, a foundation cannot be continuously re-laid. Of necessity, it can be laid only at the commencement of the erection of any structure.
- 16 Acts 14. 3-4; cp. Acts 2. 43; 4. 30; 5. 12; 6. 8; 8. 13. Recall also the claims made by the apostle Paul, Rom. 15. 18-19 and 2 Cor. 12. 12.

- 17 Mark 16. 19-20. I am happy to accept the judgement of J. N. DARBY on verses 9-20; 'I read them as scripture', quoted from the footnote to Mark chapter 16 verse 9 in his *New Translation (Morrish edition)*. It may be helpful to quote the comment of F. F. Bruce, 'Our conclusion with regard to these twelve verses, then, is that while we cannot regard them as an integral part of the Gospel to which they are now attached, no Christian need have any hesitation in reading them as Holy Scripture'; taken from the close of his article 'The End of the Second Gospel', published in *The Evangelical Quarterly* 17 (1945): pp. 169-181.
- 18 Heb. 2. 3-4.
- 19 Luke 9. 30-31. They 'spoke of his decease which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem'. And what stark contrasts there were between the Lord Jesus as He was seen then, and as He was seen on the so-called 'Mount of Transfiguration'. We might consider, not only (i) His companions (for Moses and Elijah – two men of immense moral and spiritual stature – would then, in fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy, be replaced by two malefactors, Isa. 53. 12; Matt. 27. 38; Mark 15. 27-28; Luke 22. 37), but (ii) His countenance (for His face which 'shone like the sun', Matt. 17. 2, would then, following the blows received from men who struck Him with their clenched fists and who slapped Him, Matt. 26. 67, be 'marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men', Isa. 52. 14), (iii) His clothing (for garments which had shone 'as white as the light', 'exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them', 'white and glistening', Matt. 17. 2; Mark 9. 3; Luke 9. 29, would then be stripped from Him, in fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy, to provide the spoil for His execution squad, Matt. 27. 35), and (iv) the cloud (for the bright cloud which enveloped Him during the night season would then give place to a supernatural darkness which enveloped Him through the early hours of the afternoon, Matt. 27. 45, and the well-known and much-loved voice which spoke out of the cloud would then be awfully silent, offering no response to His agonising cry, 'My God, why have you forsaken me?', Matt. 27. 46).
- 20 It is more than likely that this scene on the mountain took place at night. I note, for example, that we are told He withdrew 'up on the mountain to pray', Luke 9. 28 (something it was His custom to do at night, Luke 6. 12), that His disciples 'were heavy with sleep' and that there was a point when they (His disciples) became 'fully awake', Luke 9. 32, and that it was on 'the next day' that they came down from the mountain, Luke 9. 37.
- 21 Luke 9. 32.
- 22 Not even Enoch (who, in common with Elijah, had been taken by God to heaven without dying, Gen. 5. 24; Heb. 11. 5; 2 Kgs. 2. 1, 11), nor Jonah (the only prophet to whom Jesus directly compared Himself, Matt. 12. 40; Luke 11. 30).
- 23 This is the more noteworthy in the light of the prominence afforded to Abraham and David in the very first verse of the New Testament: 'The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham', Matt. 1. 1. 'The non-chronological order of David and then Abraham indicates that Matthew had more in mind than a simple chronological list of Jesus' ancestors. As the Gospel unfolds, it becomes clear that the Jews needed to accept Jesus as the promised Son of David before He would bring the blessings promised to Abraham. Jesus presented Himself to the Jews first. When they rejected Him, He turned to the Gentiles', THOMAS CONSTABLE. And so, whereas in Matthew chapter 10 'the Son of David' confined His disciples' preaching (as, by and large, He confined His own, Matt. 15. 24) to 'the lost sheep of the house of Israel', Matt. 10. 6, in chapter 28, 'the Son of Abraham' extended the mission-field of the disciples to encompass 'all nations', Matt. 28. 19 – which expression is the very same (*panta ta ethne*) as is used in the Greek Old Testament rendering of Genesis chapter 22 verse 18, 'in your seed shall all nations of the earth be blessed'.
- 24 Cp. 'We . . . were eyewitnesses of his majesty', 2 Pet. 1. 16.
- 25 In Greek (*akouete autou*), as in English.
- 26 The 'voice' that came 'out of' the 'bright cloud' which overshadowed those on the 'high mountain', Matt. 17. 1, 5, is said by Peter to have been borne 'out of heaven', 2 Pet. 1. 18 (literal translation). This is reminiscent of the way that the 'voice' of God which had spoken to Israel 'out of the midst of the fire', Deut. 4. 12, 33, 36, on Mount Sinai, Exod. 19. 18, was said by Moses to have come 'out of heaven', Deut. 4. 36 (cp. Exod. 20. 22).
- 27 Compare Peter's report of the Father's declaration 'on the holy mountain': 'He ("our Lord Jesus Christ") received from God the Father honour and glory when such a voice came to him from the Excellent Glory: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"', 2 Pet. 1. 17.
- 28 Matt. 17. 5.
- 29 Mark 9. 7.
- 30 Luke 9. 35.
- 31 Mark 3. 17.
- 32 Mark 1. 11.
- 33 Luke 3. 22.
- 34 Luke 16. 16. Note the combination of 'Moses and the prophets' in verses 29 and 31, and compare Matt. 11. 13; John 1. 45.
- 35 Contrast 'the prominence given to Abraham and David in the very first verse of the New Testament', Footnote 23 above.
- 36 Mal. 4. 4-5. Note the comments about Mal. 4. 4-6 in the *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries series*: 'Moses represents the literary collection of the Torah in the Hebrew Bible, while Elijah represents the literary collection of the Latter Prophets. Thus the association [of Moses and Elijah] serves to invest the Latter Prophets with the same divine authority accorded to the Torah and the Primary History of the Hebrew Bible', ANDREW E. HILL, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi*, p. 362.
- 37 Luke 16. 16.
- 38 Mal. 4. 6: a case of 'bridging the generation gap', J. G. BALDWIN, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi (in the Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries series)*, p. 276.
- 39 Luke 1. 17.
- 40 Luke 1. 76; cp. Matt. 11. 9-10; 21. 26.
- 41 This functions as a rebuke, of course, to Peter for his well-meant but unthinking suggestion that they 'make three tabernacles: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah', Luke 9. 33, thereby placing our Lord on the same level as Moses and Elijah.
- 42 All three gospels which record the scene stress that, following the Father's command, 'Hear him!', both Moses and Elijah disappeared from sight, leaving Jesus only. Mark says of the three apostles, 'when they had looked around, they saw no one anymore, but *only Jesus with themselves*', Mark 9. 8; cp. Matt. 17. 8; Luke 9. 36.
- 43 Heb. 1. 1-2. See also John 1. 17-18 (cp. Exod. 33. 20; 1 Tim. 6. 16) and John 14. 9 (cp. Matt. 11. 27).
- 44 Gen. 18. 2, 22; 19. 1.
- 45 Matt. 17. 8. All three gospels which record the scene stress that, following the Father's command, 'Hear him!', both Moses and Elijah disappeared from sight, leaving the disciples in Jesus' company alone; see Mark 9. 8; Luke 9. 36.
- 46 The Apostolic Fathers proper are the earliest non-apostolic Christian writers of the apostolic and immediately post-apostolic days. They are reputed to be 'those who were historically connected with the Apostles . . . those who are known, or may reasonably be presumed, to have associated with and derived their teaching directly from some Apostle, or at least to those who were coeval with the Apostles', J. B. LIGHTFOOT, *The Apostolic Fathers*, pp. 3-4.
- 47 See especially pages 6-18, 22-25 (together with footnote 22 on pages 239-240), 29-38, 51, 61, 67, 97-98. Two quotations may be of particular interest: (i) 'The writings of the so-called Apostolic Fathers contain no clear and certain allusions to miracle working or to the exercise of the charismatic gifts, contemporaneously with themselves' (page 10), and 'In point of fact the great majority of the [alleged] miracles of healing which have been wrought throughout the history of the church, have been wrought through the agency of *relics*' (p. 98)! The full text of *Counterfeit Miracles* can be read at: http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/warfield/warfield_counterfeit.html, and can be downloaded free from: <https://archive.org/details/counterfeitmirac00warf>.
- 48 Matt. 8. 16; 9. 35; 12. 15; 14. 35-36; Acts 5. 16; 28. 9.
- 49 Pages 6-7. The article, 'Does God want Christians to perform miracles today?' can be accessed at http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/grace-journal/12-3_03.pdf.
- 50 Matt. 3. 9; Luke 3. 8. 'The allusion is probably to . . . Isa. 51. 1-2, "Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug. Look to Abraham your father". Also likely is a pun in the original – whether in Hebrew, *banim* ("sons")/*abanim* ("stones"), or in Aramaic, *benayya* ("sons")/*abnayya* ("stones")', JAMES D. G. DUNN, *Jesus Remembered*, p. 364.
- 51 'Laws which bind nature I admit; laws which bind God I do not', J. N. DARBY, *Letters, Volume 3*, p. 410.
- 52 It is true that, miraculous powers will be bestowed on God's 'two witnesses' of the end times, Rev. 11. 3-6. But it is important to note that the supernatural acts performed by these 'two prophets', vv. 3, 10, will be patterned on the earlier miracles of Moses and Elijah, the purpose of which had been to authenticate the God-inspired revelation of the Law, and of the prophetic era of the Old Testament. It seems, therefore, that their message will comprise (mainly at least) that of the Law and of the prophets. 'The repetition of the miracles of (Moses and Elijah) would accredit their (the two witnesses) mission to Israel', F A TATFORD, *The Final Encounter*, p. 350.
- 53 'All which we term laws of nature are but the operations of divine power, in a regular and uniform manner'. BENJAMIN GODWIN, *Lectures on the Atheistic Controversy. 1835, Lecture 5*, p. 259 (Kindle Location 3622).
- 54 A. H. STRONG D. D., LL.D., *Systematic Theology*, p. 225. The complete *Systematic Theology* can be downloaded from <http://www.ntslibrary.com/PDF%20Books%20II/Strong%20-%20Systematic%20Theology.pdf>.
- 55 *Ibid.* p. 248. Interestingly, most English translations (including KJV, NKJV, RV, ESV and Mr DARBY's New Translation) never use the word 'miracle' to describe any of the 'signs and wonders' to be performed by (i) false Christs and false prophets, Matt. 24. 24; Mark 13. 22; cp. Matt. 7. 22, (ii) the False Prophet, Rev. 13. 13-15 with Rev. 19. 20; 20. 20, or (iii) the 'lawless one', 2 Thess. 2. 9. Nor do they use the word in connection with the activities of Jannes and Jambres, Exod. 7. 11, 22; 8. 7; 2 Tim. 3. 8, or of Simon of Samaria, Acts 8. 9-11.
- 56 *Ibid.* (c) p. 243. Cp. Deut. 13. 1-3; the acid test of a true prophet in those days was his fidelity to the law of God.



MUCH ADO ABOUT 'NOTHING' ¹²¹

By **DAVID J WILLIAMS** Penycraig, Wales

In nothing afraid – 'And in nothing terrified by your adversaries', Phil. 1. 28.

Here there is a change of tone and a shift in emphasis in this Philippian letter. It is not now Paul's circumstances and his conduct: it is their circumstances and their conduct. They too are being called to a battle. Notice words like 'striving', 'terrified', 'adversary', 'suffer', 'conflict'. The whole of this short paragraph speaks of a struggle, a battle.

Today, many of us know nothing of the conflict these believers had, even though we have the same enemy. What was this conflict all about? Why this strong, urgent, and passionate call to 'strive together'? What is at stake? It is all about 'the faith of the gospel', v. 27. It is a conflict in which all believers are required to be involved, and to defend and proclaim the 'truth of God', the body of doctrine given to the church.

The gospel, which is central to the word of God, is our sacred treasure. There is an enemy who is out to steal this heritage from us. We should remember that it ought to be as precious to the believer today as Naboth's vineyard was to him and his family, 1 Kgs. 21. Sadly, the enemy is gaining the victory in many a life, and many a church. The word of God is being given second place. The tragic consequence is that the local church is losing its distinctive character, and the individual believer's testimony is being lost or severely crippled. Belief and behaviour are inseparable – the one affects the other.

Verses 27 to 30 emphasize three ways by which the believer can demonstrate his relationship to the gospel, defeat the enemy, and bring glory to God in the local church.

Paul insists on:

(A) Consistency in daily living, 'Only let your conversation [your manner of life] be as it becometh [is worthy of] the gospel of Christ', v. 27a

No man ever lived, laboured, or suffered more for Christ than this apostle. He lived a completely devoted life. He knew the value of consistent godly living, so he can rightly call on these believers to do the same.

The word 'conversation' might also be translated 'citizenship'.¹ As such it would have been very meaningful to the Philippians. Philippi was a Roman colony, and all would be required to live public lives worthy of the great Empire. Are we conducting ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel, and living lives that commend our Lord to men?

In contrast to the city, the church at Philippi was a colony of heaven. What a great responsibility to live down here as those who belong up there! Often, the only message the world knows about the Lord Jesus is what it sees in our lives. Have we forgotten this weighty truth? We, as believers, represent the Godhead and the gospel.

(B) Harmony in church gatherings, 'stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel', v. 27b

Paul knew that there was not the harmony and unity in the church at Philippi that there ought to have been. There were two ladies who were not getting along with each other, 4. 2, and this resulted in other believers taking sides and dividing the church. How the devil loves to see that happen – internal division is the most powerful weapon the enemy has in destroying the testimony of a local church.

So, Paul makes a plea for:

● Tenacity – 'stand fast in one spirit', v. 27



The idea is: firmness, uprightness, or a resolve to stand firm and hold your ground, be unmoved. There must be no giving way. The words 'in one spirit' mean, literally, one purpose, one common objective.²

● Intensity – 'striving together', v. 27

An illustration from the world of the Greek games, these words picture the intensity and the agony that is required to win. If we transfer that thought into the spiritual realm, we are at once confronted with the fact that no Christian assembly can possibly maintain harmony, nor hold its ground in enemy territory, without effort and sacrifice.

The local church is not just a number of individuals who come together on certain occasions for their meetings. It is a company of believers who share a common life in Christ that is greater, richer, and more lasting than any earthly family. It is a community made up of different sorts of people who, through 'the faith of the gospel', know a fellowship that is unique.

The Philippian believers were citizens of Philippi, which was a Roman colony, but, more importantly, they were citizens of heaven. Therefore, they, as we, are exhorted to live lives consistent with the standards of heaven. We need to remember that our heavenly citizenship is to take priority over our earthly citizenship.

Let us be unyielding in our personal lives, undivided in our church lives, and unafraid in the battle against the enemies of the gospel.

ENDNOTES

- 1 See, for example, A. T. ROBERTSON, *Word Pictures in the Greek New Testament*, or MARVIN VINCENT, *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament*.
- 2 For example, Shammah was a man who stood in the midst of the piece of ground full of lentils that belonged to the king and protected it from the Philistines, 2 Sam. 23. 11-12.

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THEIR FINEST HOUR

ESTHER

If the book of Esther had been the work of a secular writer it would undoubtedly be termed a 'page-turner'! The narrative draws the reader on, and even for those familiar with the story there is a compelling inclination to continue reading through the book. There is the intrigue of a Middle-Eastern court in which the despotic monarch deposes his queen at a whim, the dubious practice of finding a replacement, which first brings Mordecai and Esther into focus, the plot to harm the king, and the rise of Haman the anti-Semitic psychopath. These all blend together to create a captivating opening to a story in which, though God is not mentioned, the evidence of divine sovereignty is unmistakable throughout, not least in the fact that the conclusion hinges upon a sleepless night! Truly, 'the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men', Dan 5. 21.

By **JOHN SCARSBROOK**

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ram with two horns of Daniel chapter 8. Some years before the time of Esther, Cyrus the Persian had issued a decree allowing as many Jews as so desired to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. The leader of this exodus was Zerubbabel, Ezra 1. 2, and the direct results take us to the end of Ezra chapter 6. There is then a break of some fifty-eight years before the narrative continues in chapter 7 with a second return, led by Ezra. It is widely accepted that the events of the book of Esther occurred during this interval.

The story is constructed around five leading characters: Ahasuerus the king; Vashti, his deposed queen; Esther, and her cousin Mordecai who are Jews living in Shushan; and Haman the egocentric official given position by the king. A number of other individuals play their part: Memucan, the misogynist prince; Hegai, the man with the hardest job in Shushan, 'keeper of the women'; Bigthan and Teresh, the would-be assassins; Hatach, Esther's trustworthy servant; and Zeresh, the vindictive but perceptive wife of Haman.

As the book of Esther opens, we are introduced to Ahasuerus, ruler of 127 provinces, from India to Ethiopia. It has been suggested that Ahasuerus may be a title, like Caesar or Pharaoh, rather than a name, as most commentators equate this monarch with Xerxes 1, known from secular history as impulsive, extravagant, and exceedingly cruel. The Persian Empire at this time was at the zenith of its power, but, already, far away to the west, the rough he-goat of Grecia was beginning to flex its muscles in order to advance heaven's programme in due time. Warning of this would be given to Ahasuerus by Persia's costly and ultimately Pyrrhic victory against Greek forces at Thermopylae, and the subsequent destruction of his fleet at Salamis. It is suggested that these events are embraced by the phrase at the commencement of Esther chapter 2, 'After these things', since Esther became queen some four years after the deposing of Vashti, cp. 1. 3 and 2. 16.

The catalyst for Esther's rise to prominence is seen in chapter 1. The ostentatious feast lasting six months, followed by a seven-day banquet for the palace staff, led to Ahasuerus calling drunkenly for the queen to parade before the guests. Vashti refused this demeaning suggestion. This gave opportunity for Memucan, a particularly objectionable individual, to ingratiate himself to the king by providing a solution whereby Ahasuerus could save face before the princes, the people, and the nation.

In chapter 2, Ahasuerus, having returned from his military exploits against Greece with mixed success, now turned his thoughts to more domestic matters; he needed female companionship. The suggestion made to the king would doubtless have found acceptance with any despotic ruler, east or west, but unknown to Ahasuerus, or anyone else for that matter, a sovereign hand would overrule the carnal desires of the king to bring Esther to his attention.

I suppose there are a number of perfectly reasonable questions which could be raised in connection with both Mordecai and Esther. Why, for example, did Mordecai not take advantage of the opportunity to return to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel? Why did he allow Esther to become a part of the king's harem, knowing that such involvement would be abhorrent to the Jewish law? No answers are given in scripture, but perhaps it would be fair to say that we have no idea of Mordecai's age, circumstances, or responsibilities in Shushan, though he did have a position of some authority and 'sat in the king's gate', 2. 21. His great grandfather Kish (not to be confused with the father of Saul), had been carried away captive to Babylon some 120 years before and both Mordecai and Esther had been born into Persian society and had imbibed the Persian culture. As far as Esther was concerned, she lived in Shushan, she was 'fair and beautiful', and so would hardly be able to avoid the search for such maidens. There is

There are two lines of truth which, among others, feature prominently throughout the scriptures. The first is that God has a people for Himself in every age, and, secondly, He has a plan and purpose for those who are His own. The two books of Old Testament scripture which bear the names of women underline these truths. The book of Esther is concerned with the preservation of the people of God, while the book of Ruth illustrates the protection of the purposes of God, even through the chaotic days of the Judges.

So, where does the book of Esther fit into the narrative of the Old Testament?

It is evident from the opening verses of the book that we are not in Jerusalem, or anywhere else in Israel, but in Shushan, or Susa, the winter palace of the kings of Persia. In the purposes of God, the Medo-Persians, conquerors of the Babylonian empire, were now the power on the world stage – the breast and arms of silver seen in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, the





ESTHER

no suggestion that Mordecai was instrumental in bringing Esther to the palace; the record simply says that, 'Esther was brought also to the king's house', 2. 8; it may well have been a heartbreaking experience for Mordecai.

The due process of choosing a queen takes its course and, 'the king loved Esther above all the women . . . so that he set the royal crown upon her head', 2. 17.

With Esther now in the required place, it is time for the next step in God's plan to preserve His people. A plot to overthrow Ahasuerus is overheard by Mordecai and made known to Esther, maybe for her own safety as well as that of her husband. She, in turn, reports the intended regicide to the king, the conspirators are summarily executed and the matter recorded in the meticulous records of the Persian monarchy, with no reason to think it would ever be referred to again.

A further five years of history pass by, then, enter Haman. Proud, ambitious, arrogant, and one of only three named individuals in scripture to be described as wicked. There was nothing unusual about his promotion; it may have been a deserved military honour. But when it was decreed that all should bow down to him, something stirred in the heart of Mordecai! Persian he may have been in dress, speech and conduct, but deeply ingrained in his conscience was a binding law, 'I am the Lord thy God . . . thou shalt have no other gods before me . . . thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them', Exod. 20. 1-3. And so it was that as Haman passed by and all around prostrated themselves, 'Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence'.

Events then began to move rather more quickly. The first three chapters cover a period of some nine years; chapters 4 to 8 no more than a few days. Mordecai's refusal to acknowledge Haman soon incurred his wrath and a plan to exact retribution formed in his mind. Scorning just a personal vendetta, Haman embarked upon a devious scheme of ethnic cleansing; he would attempt to eradicate all the Jewish people. On the pretext of achieving something of benefit for the nation, Haman embroiled the unsuspecting king in his plot.



There is no doubt that the inspiration behind the scheming Haman was the adversary himself. Seeking here, as on other occasions, to destroy not just the people of God but, more particularly, the line along which Messiah would be born. Little did he realize that the one who carried that line was already safely back in the land in the person of Zerubbabel.

Plans are finalized, dates are fixed, the cost is met and the people notified, somewhat to their confusion. The effect on Mordecai was devastating as,

draped in sackcloth and fouled with ashes, he wept before the king's gate. Before long, news reached Esther in the palace and a dialogue commenced through Hatach, a loyal and reliable servant who faithfully passed on the messages entrusted to him.

Having read the decree, Esther realized that Ahasuerus must be made aware of the enormity of Haman's scheme. The difficulty of relaying the message lay in Persian protocol: an audience with the king was a rare privilege to which even the queen could not be assured an acceptance. Nevertheless, the deed must be done. Tension builds as Mordecai, through Hatach, makes Esther aware of the alternatives. As a Jew, she would not escape the genocide, but Mordecai was assured that by some means the nation would be preserved. And who could forget his emotive plea culminating in his last spoken words recorded in the book, 'who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?'

Esther's finest hour had come! It could be argued that it was in truth when she stood in the outer court awaiting acceptance. However, the firm resolve, after three days and nights of fasting, have characterized this young Jewish woman over centuries of time, 'I will go in unto the king . . . and if I perish, I perish'.

The die is cast, an audience is granted and, from that point on, Haman's doom is sealed. But not before his abject

humiliation in granting to Mordecai the honour he intended and expected for himself! Haman's fall is spectacular, from the dignity of the highest ranking official, to the ignominy of the gallows built at the instigation of his scheming wife; the wicked Haman received his just desserts. He foreshadows another who will yet rise up and oppose the nation in a future day; he, likewise, will fall under the judgement of a sovereign God.

JOHN SCARBROOK is Secretary of the Precious Seed Trust



SUMMERHILL HOME ABERDEEN - FIFTY YEARS

In the early 1960s Mr. Alex Ross had the desire to see a residential home established in Aberdeen, for elderly saints who were in assembly fellowship. After discussing his hope with brethren from local assemblies and, after much prayerful consideration, a committee was set up to examine the options available. A fund of approximately £3,200 was lodged and the assemblies in the area notified of the course and progress of the intended development.

It was decided that a new build would be preferred to the purchase of an existing building, and in 1963 a piece of land became available on Summerhill Road (the present site) and was given by the City of Aberdeen Land Association free of charge! After consultation with several building firms, an estimated cost of £13,000 was agreed, although the brethren were desirous of having 75% of this amount to hand before the work began. They looked to the Lord to provide the remainder of the cost through the exercise of assemblies and individuals.

The architectural and planning expertise of Mr. John McRobert was sought, plans approved by the Local Authority, and building commenced in July 1964. The initial

capacity was for twelve residents with accommodation for a matron or superintendent.

Another important decision to be made was the setting up of a constitution. This was done and the initial intent was that potential residents were to be believers and, preferably, in fellowship in local assemblies, in keeping with the ethos and guidelines of those who had the initial desire for such an enterprise. Over the years some flexibility has been allowed to enable some from other church fellowships to be cared for at the home also. This has helped to ensure full capacity of the home and enabled the trustees to respond to specific identified needs.

After steady progress and a few difficulties, the home opened officially on 30th July, 1965. Mr. and Mrs. William Dunbar were employed as handyman and matron respectively, and accommodation also provided for their son Alan.

Miss Jessie Middleton, Holburn Gospel Hall, was admitted as the first resident, the initial charge being £6 10s. 0d. (£6-50) per week!

Over the years, the number of elderly saints requiring care has increased steadily with applications received from the locality and areas

further afield; this has necessitated improvements and extensions in the Home. Extra bedrooms, a second lounge, a new and extended dining room, kitchen improvements, en-suite showers, and a laundry room have been added as the needs have arisen. The Lord's hand has been seen in all the changes, many gifts have been received, and the ongoing expenses met throughout.

As well as the physical care being provided, the spiritual welfare of the residents has been a priority. The assemblies in and around Aberdeen have provided support in many ways over these fifty years and have not only committed to providing financial support as needed but many of the local saints have given of their time in a variety of ways, whether to conduct short services, give morning talks or simply to spend time chatting, reading to or singing with the residents – one sister for example attended every Friday afternoon for twenty-five years to help the residents enjoy singing their favourite hymns. All of this provides encouragement to those who are unable to get out to the regular assembly meetings.

Staff, with help from relatives and visitors, provide other interests regularly; residents may be taken on outings by car or bus, such as a visit to Aberdeen beach, Hazlehead Park, Stonehaven, Banchory, and other venues with the ever popular garden centres, coffee shops and restaurants





ARTS OF CARE FOR GOD'S ELDERLY PEOPLE

enjoyed by all. Crafts, quizzes, puzzles, exercise sessions and other activities also help to stimulate some interest within the Home for those unable to get out. The staff, Trustees and Management Committee greatly appreciate the willingness of all those who give time and effort to participate in these activities.

Inevitably, many changes have taken place in the fifty years since the Home was opened. The number of residents has varied, capacity increasing to twenty-seven then decreasing to twenty-two after some en-suite showers were added. The present capacity is twenty-one with one respite room. In excess of 300 believers have been cared for, some for a short time, some for a period of respite care, others for many years. Staff have changed, as have the Officers in Charge, but the principles and aims have been maintained and those being looked after have benefited from the care given and enjoyed the comfort and fellowship of like-minded Christians.

Throughout the years, the Lord's guidance in so many ways has been recognized and acknowledged. Without His provision, Summerhill would have been unable to continue as it has until now.

It should be mentioned that Mr. Alex Ross, whose original ambition saw the establishment of the Home, and who gave valuable service as a Trustee and Management Committee Member until 1985, became resident with his wife Olive in 1991, and although Mrs. Ross died a year later, he remained in residence until his death in 1997, aged 93.

In the early years, those applying for accommodation could be accepted with no approval being necessary from Local Government. Many were relatively physically fit, requiring little or no special care, one resident was still driving her car for some considerable time during her stay!

Government policies in relation to 'Care of the Elderly' have now changed; supplementary funding is given and individuals may be



admitted only after assessment by the Local Authority determines that they can no longer be cared for in their own home because of increasing frailty, or health problems.

As a result, those being admitted now are more frail, have a greater degree of dependence, and require a higher level of support with personal care. This places an extra burden on staff who provide the attention necessary for the welfare and comfort of each resident. The standard of care remains high and carers, kitchen staff, domestic/laundry workers and administrators can all be commended for the part they play in maintaining it.

The Trustees and the Management Committee continue to pray that the work, in the Lord's goodness, will be able to continue, maintaining this admirable standard of care,

and that those requiring support in their latter years may benefit from being looked after in a Christian environment. Please pray with us that the Management and Trustees will be given the necessary wisdom and help as they seek to maintain the facility and that the staff may be encouraged as they care for these elderly saints.

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Information for this article has been provided by Mrs. Esme Wilkie of Aberdeen as a result of research on some historic and original documentation.





Introduction

Possibly everyone reading this article will be familiar with what an earthquake is, yet very few will have experienced one! Modern seismic equipment locates between 18,000 - 20,000 earthquakes worldwide every year – equating to about fifty every day. Most of them are located beneath the sea, and many are of such low intensity as to be of little consequence to us. Earthquakes *normally*, but *not exclusively*, occur at the Earth's crustal plate boundaries, in specific seismic zones, which move in relation to each other, causing friction and vibrations. However, they *can* occur anywhere, even in the United Kingdom!

Awesome Energy

Earthquakes normally only last for a very short time, ranging from just a few seconds up to about two minutes, or somewhat longer in exceptional circumstances, yet their effects are far-reaching. Their energy is phenomenal! One of the largest scientifically recorded modern earthquakes occurred on December 26, 2004. This magnitude 9.2 earthquake was the cause of the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster – its energy was equivalent to 23,000 Hiroshima atomic bombs, a number calculated according to pressure required to displace the billions of tons of water. The resulting tsunami's wave was over thirty metres high in places causing more than 300,000 deaths, one million people displaced, and about five million people deprived of basic services. Vast coastal areas of Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka and S.E. India were affected – there were even deaths and damage along the east coast of Africa, 5,000 miles from the epicentre of the earthquake! Even the smallest earthquakes generate energy five hundred times the power of an atomic bomb, and earthquakes are second only to floods as the cause of the highest death rates from 'natural' disasters.

Current Attitudes

Millions of people in 21st-century, western culture do not believe that God exists, or, if He does, they do not care. They point to evolutionary theories, and insights

EARTHQUAKES

By **JEFF BROWN** Cardiff, Wales

gained by 'scientific' research, to show that the universe exists on its own as a self-regulating and self-determining natural system, and that all processes have remained almost constant in character and rate over great periods of geological time. Thus, events we see around us today are just the natural outcome of millions of years of change. In *complete contrast*, the Bible clearly indicates an omnipotent and omniscient God who not only designed but continually maintains this universe according to His divine purpose. It also recognizes slow, natural processes, but with the occurrence and very significant effects of sudden catastrophic events of divine intervention, such as the Flood.

Real Significance

The attitude of the majority today to 'nature' is so different from the outlook of the Bible. When considering the stars, people think of light-years and ultimately inter-planetary travel – yet biblical writers considered the night sky as a breathtaking display of the wisdom, glory, and power of God.¹ The movements and courses of the stars, the wind circulatory systems, and the hydrological cycle were all ascribed to the activity of God.² In our generation, we often just think of the cycles of days and seasons in regard to work and holidays, yet God's people of old saw in them a sign of the covenant faithfulness of God. Many people today question why 'natural' disasters, like earthquakes, hurricanes, volcanoes, etc., cause great suffering and loss of life, both to believers and unbelievers alike. In this respect, we should always remember the effects of the Fall, Gen. 3; the *whole* of creation was affected by sin, i.e., human, animate, and inanimate creation, Rom. 8. 19-23; so sin is the ultimate cause of death, disease, sickness, suffering, and 'natural' disasters! The Flood was to have further far-reaching consequences (see later in this

article). Yet we should remember that God is just, Gen. 18. 25. He never permits anything without a purpose, even if we don't understand it, Rom. 9. 20.

Scriptural References

There are nineteen direct, and at least as many indirect, references, e.g., 'shake'; 'shaking', to earthquakes in scripture. Some of the references refer to the same earthquake, but I believe there are fourteen specific earthquakes mentioned, with many others alluded to. Although every earthquake is significant, the purpose of these articles is to consider those of most scriptural significance.. All are demonstrations of divine power and sovereignty, while some specifically relate to judgement, deliverance, and the immediate presence of God.

Earthquakes of Major Scriptural Significance

We propose to look at five groups of earthquakes that *have been*, and *will be*, associated with biblical events of major importance:

- 1 at the Flood in the time of Noah, Gen. 7. 11;
- 2 at the giving of the Law, Mount Sinai, Exod. 19. 18;
- 3 earthquakes associated with the crucifixion, Matt. 27. 51-54, and the resurrection, Matt. 28. 2;
- 4 those associated with events prior to the return of Christ to Earth as Sovereign, i.e., during, and at the end of, the seven-year tribulation period;³
- 5 the greatest earthquake ever to be experienced on Earth, and very closely connected with the previous section, concerning the *actual, literal* coming of Christ to earth in power and glory, Zech. 14. 4-5; Rev. 16. 18.

There are other earthquakes referred to and alluded to in scripture – no less real for those who experienced them, and not without significance, but *not* within the remit of these articles. Some that come to mind are:

- Jonathan smiting the Philistines' garrison, 1 Sam. 14. 15;





OF SCRIPTURE (1)

- Elijah on the mount before the Lord, 1 Kgs. 19. 11;
- the earthquake in the days of Uzziah, king of Judah, Amos 1. 1, and referred to in Zech. 14. 5;
- the prayer meeting of the early church, Acts 4. 29-31;
- Paul and Silas in jail at Philippi, Acts 16. 26.

Local or Global?

The earthquakes, and other associated phenomena involved in the Flood, were the catalyst for far-reaching *global* effects on the Earth – for the Flood was certainly global in extent! The earthquake at Sinai was more *localized*, for God was communicating specifically with the nation of Israel. The earthquakes at Calvary, and at the resurrection, were geographically *localized* to that area, yet what they were associated with would be truly *global*. The earthquakes involved in the tribulation period, and at its close, will be both *local* and *global* in effect.

Earthquakes associated with the Flood, Gen. 7. 11

The Flood was Earth's greatest physical upheaval since creation. Both Old Testament and New Testament writers spoke of it as a literal event.⁴ The Lord Jesus Christ Himself spoke of Noah, the Ark, and the Flood as real, literal events.⁵

The geological and geographical implications of this great event were far-reaching. Genesis chapter 7 verse 11 records the *subterranean*, and then the *atmospheric* effects on the first day of the Flood. The subterranean effects are mentioned first – this may be significant! In this verse the Hebrew word for 'broken up' is *baqa* which literally means *to split* or *to cleave*.⁶ The Earth's crustal break-up caused gigantic earthquakes, and widespread volcanic activity, as well as releasing vast quantities of subterranean water. Immense quantities of volcanic dust would be blown upward, together with

expanding and cooling gases. This gas, and other particles, served as nuclei for condensation, and triggered a reaction in the upper canopy, with its waters rapidly condensing and coalescing to produce incessant torrential downpours, 'the windows of heaven were opened'. This activity continued unabated until after the 150 days.⁷ In total Noah and his family were in the Ark for 371 days, based on a 30-day month.⁸ Obviously, all this activity was under the control of an omnipotent God!

The Effects of the Flood

With the 'windows of heaven' now being opened, Gen. 7. 11, this great canopy of water vapour was dissipated, creating temperature differentials, global air circulation, and creating, amongst other things, the hydrological cycle of rainfall, which was a new experience for the Earth! Climatic extremes now came in, extreme heat, cold, aridity, etc., limiting man's habitation possibilities. Oceans were now more extensive because of the extra water. Harmful ultra-violet radiations were not now being intercepted as before because of the loss of the water canopy, as a result, men's ages dramatically *decreased* after the Flood. *Before* the Flood the average age of man was 912 years, Gen. 5, yet *after* the Flood, Gen. 11. 10-26, 32, the average age had reduced to 388 years! In succeeding generations the average continued to fall, until you come to Psalm 90 verse 10, where we read of average life-spans of 70-80 years – not too dissimilar to today!

Spiritual Lessons to be learned

What can we learn from the Flood for our spiritual benefit? I believe that there are many important lessons to consider – we shall look at some of them briefly.

- We see the holy and righteous character of an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent God who cannot tolerate sin. Sin must be judged, and so it

was at the Flood; yet in it all we see a longsuffering God, giving more than adequate opportunity for men to be saved, 2 Pet. 3. 9.

- Human depravity in all its depths is also seen – continual wickedness, evil, corruption, and violence marked the entire Earth, Gen. 6. 5-6; 11-13. Men seemed oblivious to God, yet God was still looking on the Earth, Heb. 4. 13. Men may leave God out of their lives, but, ultimately, God will not stay out of their lives.
- So many parallels can be drawn with today's society – but does mankind ever learn lessons from the past? Sadly, the obvious answer is *no*.
- There is a bright light of spiritual encouragement for us. Despite the character of the days in which he lived and the immense pressures he was under, there was a man, Noah, who stood out, and lived for God in contrast to all that was around him. He was righteous, just, and upright in character, Gen. 6. 9. He was obedient, v. 22, and knew the intimacy of God's presence, v. 9. Noah was also regarded as one of the great examples of men of faith, Heb. 11. 7. What a commendation!

Are *all* these features, or indeed are *any* of these features, marking out our lives in the world in which we live?

References – for further reading

BROWN, JEFF, Creation – The Facts, article in *Present Truth* magazine, issues 185-194;

BROWN, JEFF, The Flood, article in *Present Truth* magazine, issues 197-203.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Job 38. 31-33; Ps. 19. 1-4; Isa. 40. 25-26.
- 2 Job 38. 24; Ps. 104. 10; Jer. 10. 13.
- 3 Matt. 24. 7; Mark 13. 8; Rev. 6. 12; 8. 5; 11. 13; 16. 18). See also Joel 2. 10; Nahum 1. 5, amongst many other references.
- 4 Isa. 54. 9; 1 Pet. 3. 20; 2 Pet. 2. 5.
- 5 Matt. 24. 37-39; Luke 17. 26.
- 6 See also for similar use of the word: Num. 16. 21; Ps. 78. 15; Isa. 48. 21; Mic. 1. 4; Zech. 14. 4.
- 7 Compare: Gen. 7. 24; 8. 1-2.
- 8 Compare: Gen. 7. 11; 8. 13-14.

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Introduction

The topic of stewardship opens up an interesting field of study with the potential to inform, enrich, and challenge every Christian. God's arrangement of His affairs and interests is far from centralized; rather, in very many respects He devolves responsibility to human agents, who are thus accountable to Him for the administration of that which has been entrusted to them. In considering stewardship, the central notion is that of *delegated responsibility*. The usual New Testament word for 'steward' points, literally, to someone who is a manager of a house, or an estate, or a part thereof. It could signify someone who is the head of a department, such as head cook or accountant, and, in New Testament times, they would typically be a slave or a freed person. The steward functions with particular reference to *people* for whom he is accountable, as well as other resources. He is answerable to the master to whom, at any time, he may be called to give account.

The Old Testament background is always of interest when considering a Bible topic. There are several references to stewards as administrators usually in connection with royal courts.¹ From the outset of human history, Adam and Eve were entrusted with responsibility as God's stewards and representatives over creation, a high honour celebrated in Psalm 8.² In the providence of God, Joseph was entrusted with all of Potiphar's household, and his master could rest assured that his affairs were in good hands, a situation later replicated in the prison.³ Moses was entrusted with a momentous and daunting stewardship over God's house, Israel. At the same time, we are reminded that Moses served as one who was himself part of the household.⁴ In each of these cases, the ideas of devolved responsibility, trust, and accountability are prominent.

Stewardship as a metaphor

Very few of us are literal stewards,

The Believer as a STEWARD



By **KEN TOTTON** Cambridge, England

but scripture points to several important examples of stewardship in a metaphorical sense. We will briefly consider these in turn.

Paul's apostleship

Paul writes to the Corinthians, 'Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful', 1 Cor. 4. 1-2. The Corinthians were aligning themselves to prominent servants of God, much as the Greek world celebrated its philosophers and orators. Therefore, Paul is concerned to bring them back to a true Christ-centred spirituality. Even an apostle is but a servant and steward, and accountable to God. Faithfulness in the discharge of his apostleship is vital in view of the coming day of review and reward.⁵

Further, writing to the Colossians, Paul brings out his special responsibility when he states, 'I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God; even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints', Col. 1. 25, 26. He is concerned that the Colossians, endangered as they were by false teachers, should recognize his uniquely important ministry 'to complete the word of God', v. 25 JND. This refers to his receiving and communicating the revelation of the 'mystery' of the church as the body of Christ, integrating believing Jews and Gentiles on an equal footing.

Whilst the apostolic era has passed, we should still regard those who preach and teach the word of God as exercising a solemn stewardship. Frequently, Timothy and others in the Pastoral Epistles are exhorted to guard the 'deposit' entrusted to them. This precious heritage of scriptural and apostolic teaching is to be cherished, and, most importantly, communicated to faithful men able to teach others also.⁶ This remains an imperative today.

Overseers

The assembly elder (or overseer) is a steward of God in a special and important sense: 'an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach', Titus 1. 7 ESV. The preceding verse teaches that a well-ordered home life is required of overseers, such that a would-be critic should have nothing compromising to point to. Such is a 'steward of God', reminding us of Paul's remark to Timothy that if a man is not exemplary in his own household, how can he care for God's?⁷ One is also reminded of the parting exhortation of Hebrews, 'Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you', Heb. 13. 17. The stewards of God's household will have to render account when the Owner comes again! In this connection, the Lord's parable of the steward should be carefully pondered, 'Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season?' Matt.





24. 45. Note the need for *wisdom* as well as faithfulness to order aright the household of God.

Every believer

Whilst few are called to be elders, all believers have stewardship responsibilities in a number of vital respects.

Spiritual gifts

Peter exhorts, 'As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God', 1 Pet. 4. 10. It is to be noted that each believer has received some spiritual gift which is an expression of the grace of God, to be exercised in the power of the Holy Spirit for the benefit of all. The New Testament supplies us with several lists, none of which is exhaustive, bearing out the fact that God's grace-gifts are richly varied.⁸ Therefore, how ill-advised it is to envy another's gift! Again, the parabolic teaching of the Lord Jesus has a particular bearing on this, both the Parable of the Pounds, and the Parable of the Talents.⁹

Opportunities

Daily life supplies us with numerous opportunities which we should seek to grasp for the furtherance of the kingdom of God. A kindly deed for someone in need could set up an opportunity to share the gospel. To a greater or lesser extent, God has given us skills and resources. We are bought with a price, we are not our own, and, in a very real sense, we are accountable to Him for their proper use. How sad if a believer's life is consumed in the acquisition of things which will one day be left behind in this world! In the Parable of the Unjust Steward, the steward exhibited *shrewdness* by making use of the resources at his disposal to ensure his *future* wellbeing, when removed from his stewardship.¹⁰ Hence, Christ taught, 'Make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when it shall fail, they may receive

you into the eternal tabernacles', Luke 16. 9 RV. Let us see to it that our money, homes, means of transport, and whatever else God has entrusted to us, are used for the extension of His kingdom. Happy the believer who wisely converts the perishable resources of this world into the imperishable assets of the world to come!¹¹

Time

Time is a critical resource, and especially so in the modern world. The Lord Jesus knew a strong sense of urgency in His ministry, 'I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work', John 9. 4. We all know that time is short, and once again it is Paul who counsels, 'See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil', Eph. 5. 15-16. The force of this is that we should be alert to buy up opportunities for the gospel which might otherwise slip through our fingers. Here, the word translated 'time' denotes a season, a significant period of opportunity which will not last.¹²

Divine administration

As we feel our deep need of God's grace to worthily discharge our personal responsibilities, let us take encouragement that, for His part, God is 'administering' everything for His ultimate glory. He is working towards the fulfilment of His eternal purpose to 'head up' all things in Christ. The outworking of this purpose is described as an *administration* (or 'stewardship'): 'according to his good pleasure which he purposed in himself for the administration of the fullness of times; to head up all things in the Christ', Eph. 1. 9-10 JND.

Indeed, the Lord Jesus is the faithful Steward *par excellence*, with full authority to admit and exclude in relation to His kingdom, 'He that hath the key of David'¹³ – an allusion to Isaiah

chapter 22 and the story of Shebna and his successor Eliakim. Stewardship, and governmental responsibility, are assigned to Eliakim, 'The key of the house of David will I lay on his shoulder', Isa. 22. 20-22. As for the Lord Jesus, we may be assured that 'the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand', 53. 10, and one glorious day 'when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God . . . then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all', 1 Cor. 15. 25-28.

Conclusion

How instructive and inspiring it is to see our stewardship as playing some small part towards the realization of God's eternal plan to head up all things in Christ! What a privilege to be entrusted with local responsibilities for the furtherance of His kingdom! May we be faithful and wise stewards of all that God has entrusted to us, as the day of review draws near!

ENDNOTES

- 1 Those who are 'over the household', 1 Kgs. 4. 6; 2 Kgs 18. 18, 37; Isa. 36. 3, 22; 37. 2; one who is the 'steward of his house', 1 Kgs. 16. 9; the 'officers of his house', Esther 1. 8.
- 2 See Gen. 1. 26-29; Ps. 8.
- 3 Gen. 39. 6, 21-23.
- 4 By contrast, Christ rules over the household as the Son whom the Father has appointed to exercise this rule, Heb. 3. 5.
- 5 1 Cor. 4. 5.
- 6 1 Tim. 6. 20 ESV; 2 Tim. 1. 14 ESV; 2. 2.
- 7 1 Tim. 3. 5.
- 8 Rom. 12. 3-8; 1 Cor. 12-14; Eph. 4. 7-13; 1 Tim. 4. 14; 2 Tim. 1. 6.
- 9 Luke 19. 11-27; Matt. 25. 14-30.
- 10 Luke 16. 1-13.
- 11 Matt. 6. 19-21.
- 12 The parallel verse, Col. 4. 5, suggests alertness for opportunities to witness to neighbours.
- 13 Rev. 3. 7.

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THE LORD IS RISEN

He is not here, but is risen

Early on the third day, after the Lord was crucified, some women went to the tomb in which His body had been placed. They were told by two angels, 'He is not here, but is risen', Luke 24. 6. The bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus is a fundamental doctrine of Christianity. Paul wrote, 'Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures . . . he was buried, and . . . rose again the third day according to the scriptures', 1 Cor. 15. 3, 4. By the power of the Holy Spirit, men of God such as Elijah, Peter and Paul performed miracles. Thus, the miracles the Lord performed did not prove His deity, but His resurrection from the dead, never to die again, did prove His deity.¹ By His resurrection, the Lord was 'declared to be the Son of God with power', Rom. 1. 4. The Lord told His disciples that He would be raised,² and the resurrection was a dominant theme in the preaching of His followers.³

In accordance with the will of God His Father, the Lord laid down His life and rose again the third day.⁴ The resurrection of the Lord showed God's complete approval of the life of His beloved Son, and His satisfaction with His finished work. Therefore, as believers we have full assurance of our salvation,⁵ through our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ who 'was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification', Rom. 4. 25.

Did not our heart burn within us?

In Luke 24 we read that in the evening

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of the day of the Lord's resurrection two sad, dejected disciples were walking from Jerusalem to a village called Emmaus, v. 13. Their hopes and aspirations had been shattered: they loved the Lord and He had been crucified and had died. The two disciples were not resting in, nor enjoying, the truth of the resurrection of their Lord and Saviour. As they walked, the Lord, who loved them, joined them, but they were prevented from knowing Him, vv. 15, 16. It was good that they were talking about the Lord and not about inconsequential trivia!

The two disciples told the Lord that they were sad because He had been crucified and was dead. They said, 'We trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel', v. 21. The Lord graciously explained to them that they were slow to believe all that the prophets had said concerning Him. He told them that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer before entering into His glory, vv. 25, 26. 'And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself', v. 27. The two disciples listened and were taught and blessed. Later they said, 'Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?', v. 32. They had not yet been enabled to recognize Him, but when they beheld Him in the Old Testament scriptures, their hearts were joyful. They urged the Lord to stay with them, v. 29.

When the Lord was seated in their home, He 'took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them', v. 30. It was then 'their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight', v. 31. They no longer needed to see Him for now they knew He was alive.

The two, now joyful, disciples returned to Jerusalem and joined the Eleven and others and told them that they had seen the risen Lord. The Lord had already appeared to Peter, v. 34, and, even as they spoke, the Lord 'himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you', v. 36. They were filled with joy, v. 41, and then 'opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures', v. 45.

The disciples were glad because they had seen the risen Lord and they had been with Him, John 20. 20. Those of us who are believers are among those who are blessed, for, not having seen the risen Lord physically, we believe, having seen Him in the scriptures, John 20. 29. His sacrificial death and His resurrection are the sources of our joy, and should be the subjects of our praises and witness.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Matt. 12. 39, 40.
- 2 Matt. 17. 9; 20. 18, 19; Luke 9. 22.
- 3 'With great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus', Acts 4. 33.
- 4 John 10. 17, 18.
- 5 John 3. 36; 10. 28, 29.

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Views from the News

COMPILED BY SANDY JACK

Alabama Supreme Court orders halt to same-sex marriage licences

Alabama's Supreme Court has ordered the state's judges to stop issuing marriage licences to same-sex couples. A federal ruling says banning same-sex marriages is unconstitutional.

But the court in Alabama has decided that does not preclude state law being followed, which defines marriage as between a man and a woman. Last month, a US federal judge ordered an Alabama official to issue marriage licences after a three-day standoff. The all-Republican court in Montgomery sided with two conservative organizations which had appealed a decision by US District Judge Callie Granade who had ruled in January that Alabama's ban on same-sex marriages was unconstitutional.



'As it has done for almost 200 years, the state of Alabama allows for marriage between only one man and one woman. Alabama probate judges have a ministerial duty not to issue any marriage licence contrary to this law', the ruling by the State Supreme Court in Montgomery says.

It is the latest apparent defiance to the US Supreme Court in Washington and it highlights the depth of opposition to same-sex marriages in that socially conservative state.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-31727556>

Assisted Suicide Bill: Nicola Sturgeon unconvinced

The Scottish First Minister has revealed she is not convinced by new legislation to allow assisted suicide. Nicola Sturgeon gave her view on the Assisted Suicide Bill, currently being considered at Holyrood, during an interview with the Scottish Catholic Observer.

The Bill, which is being taken forward by Green MSP Patrick Harvie, would allow those with terminal or life-shortening illnesses to obtain help in ending their suffering. It is the second attempt to legislate for assisted suicide at Holyrood, after the first was defeated by MSPs in a free vote in 2010. Ms Sturgeon said, 'I voted against it the last time and, although we are not near another vote yet, I haven't been convinced about assisted suicide this time'.



'I believe we should support people to live and I am therefore in favour of good quality palliative care. There also remains a major stumbling block to assisted suicide, how could you have sufficient safeguards?'

Her comments were welcomed by those opposing the proposed new laws.

<http://www.scotsman.com/news/health/assisted-suicide-bill-nicola-sturgeon-unconvinced-1-3710952>

Letter written in Italian by Albert Einstein defending his theory of relativity and referring to 'God' as a scientific concept sells for £50,000

The Austrian genius's 1925 missive to Italian electrical engineer Giovanni Giorgi defends his 1915 theory of relativity in the face of strong criticism.

It also speaks of 'God' as a scientific concept, despite Einstein not believing in a deity.

The letter was penned after the scientist faced the criticism of American physicist Dayton Miller who sought to disprove his theory in a series of experiments. Dismissing his findings, Einstein wrote to Giorgi, 'I agree with your opinion on the fact that the movement of an ether with a [mathematical formula] so high is particularly impossible. God created the world with more intelligence and elegance. You're right to compare with Miller's works, the laws of aberration. The theory of Stokes-Planck is very artificial and cannot - in my opinion - explain this law of aberration. I would be very curious to know the real cause of the Miller's phenomenon. I do not doubt the validity of the theory of relativity'.



Although Einstein was fluent in Italian having lived in Italy with his family in the mid-1890s letters written by him in the language are scarce. A spokesman for RR Auction in Boston, Massachusetts, where the sale was held, said, 'This magnificent letter is rife with intriguing content - each and every sentence contains a revelatory turn and could be expounded upon at length within the context of Einstein's life and work.'

That it is written in Italian is notable in itself. His family had moved to Italy for a few years in the mid-1890s and, although he was fluent, letters in Italian are seldom seen'.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2964405/Letter-written-Italian-Albert-Einstein-defending-theory-relativity-referring-God-scientific-concept-sells-50-000.html>

Bits & Bobs

No Big Bang?



Christians who believe the universe began billions of years ago often point to the Big Bang model to try and verify a creation-like beginning, but a new origin of the universe model offers an 'everlasting universe' and dismisses the whole idea of a Big Bang.

Genesis does not describe a Big Bang. Instead of a hot explosion, it presents a rather cold, watery origin. Instead of stars first, followed by Earth's emergence billions of years later, God made Earth first, then stars four days later. If the Big Bang really happened, then nobody told God about it. And if scripture's history falls this far off base, then what other errors might it contain?

Despite the dangers that the Big Bang presents for the Bible - to say nothing of the baffling scientific quandaries it generates - some Christians continue to believe it and even use it to argue *for* creation. But this noble intention can have bad results. Lured by the prospect of illustrating how secular science incorporates a kind of beginning point for the universe that could merge with the concept of God, this particular argument pays the price of accepting a model with almost no resemblance to Genesis. And how can anyone trust the books of the Bible that refer to the creation account if Genesis is almost completely wrong? After all, those books also teach us about Christ, the focal point of the Christian faith.

In the new model, published in *Physics Letters B*, researchers included quantum correction terms to the standard formula assumed in Big Bang cosmology. This time, the formula ended up describing a universe with no beginning and no end.

Why would scientists even think to challenge a long-held concept like the Big Bang unless they saw some deal-breaking weaknesses in it? Their paper lists some of the flaws they recognized, including 'the smallness problem', 'the coincidence problem', 'the flatness problem', dark matter, and the inexplicable singularity from which the universe supposedly sprung.

So, the second price Big Bang-promoting Christians will have to pay is swallowing all these problems, each of which refutes Big Bang cosmology. Without compromising either biblical history or observational science, Christians can simply believe and defend the exact words of Genesis.

<http://www.icr.org/article/8648/>



REPORTS REPORTS REPORTS

GOSPEL WORK AND OTHER ACTIVITIES Compiled by SANDY JACK



ENGLAND

Oxfordshire

For the third year in a row, the believers at **North Leigh** have sought to reach out to the local area with a February half-term Children's Holiday Bible Club. They were encouraged again this year to see a further increase in the numbers of children reached with the gospel. Following the publicity and visit to the local school, prayer was answered by the presence of thirty children over the three days, along with four parents! The saints were assisted by Steve Buckeridge who also helped in the evenings with a Gospel Campaign. Steve used his experiences working as a Chaplain at Heathrow to tell out the gospel, challenging those who came with titles such as 'choosing your destination' and your 'final call'. Over the three nights, a further eight adults attended, all as a result of personal invitation, one of whom has since attended a subsequent gospel meeting.

Friday Focus was set up four years ago with the primary aim to bring monthly Bible teaching to the young people of Oxfordshire and the surrounding area. The fourth in the series has been looking at 'Pictures from the Old Testament' and, in particular, covering the tabernacle and the offerings. Each September a weekend of meetings is held and last year a full day's teaching was also introduced in March. Around eighty, mainly young people, were present as Iain Lewis, Aberdeen, taught on the topics of, 'The biblical parties to marriage', 'The biblical purity of marriage' and 'The biblical pattern of marriage'. As society around seeks to normalize sin and undermines this divine institution, it was good to learn what God's word has to say very clearly on these matters.

Berkshire

The assembly at Bracknell Gospel Hall held a Holiday Bible Club during February half-term with seventy different children attending throughout the week. As many as twelve unsaved parents were also present, with some

coming every day. Good links continue to be established with the primary school adjacent to the hall. School assemblies have been taken and an Easter exhibition is planned for April. Permission has also been given to distribute children's Bibles on an annual basis to the reception classes, which comprise about sixty children.

Somerset

Coleford Gospel Hall is situated on the High Street of the village and is well placed as a stop-off for mums returning from delivery of their children to the village school. As many as twenty-five mums take the opportunity to come in with their tots – which can result in space being at a premium!

Over the February half-term, the assembly had a profitable Holiday Bible Club for children of school age with Gordon McCracken and attendance was approximately forty children each day. There was good interest from the youngsters and the subject of the week was 'Animals of the Bible'. The family service was well attended at the end of the week, with a number of the parents present.

Last year a Coffee Morning was started on the first Tuesday of the month and this has been successful in bringing people into the hall. Many spiritual conversations have been held and literature handed out and some are attending the gospel meetings as a result of this 'Building Bridges' outreach.

In October, a Children's Mission is planned and it is hoped that a number of visits will be possible into local schools to present Bible stories. Prayer is needed that the schools will remain open to visits by Christians seeking to make the gospel known.

Nottinghamshire

The assembly at Kirkby continue their market stall outreach in the Idlewells Shopping Centre. This year they were to be charged for the stall but have been offered it for free for alternate months rather than every month. Prayer is requested for this opportunity to continue to be available. The assembly paid to have a stall in the Kirkby

precinct for the Christmas lights switch-on. The weather was very cold but over 200 calendars were given out and one man has attended the gospel meetings ever since as a consequence of this outreach.

Newcastle

Jim McMaster reports, 'A few weeks ago we heard of the death of Tony Pratt. I first met this man in jail in the late 90's. He was part of a large criminal family who were well known and pretty high up in the local pecking order amongst the Tyneside law-breaking community. He was a heavy drug user but not a street person. For two years he had managed to avoid being brought back into prison but had sunk lower and lower in his drug use, depression and ultimately isolation. In December of 2012, at his lowest point, hungry and cold in a flat without heating, he made his way to our Sunday night soup kitchen, where we renewed our contact. The story is quite remarkable but Tony tells how, lost and confused, he prayed, and then decided to make his way home, "stumbling" on the soup kitchen at the very last minute. The fresh contact allowed us to encourage this man and, after several visits to be fed on a Lord's Day evening, he became deeply impressed by the witness of two of our young brothers. Mainly as a result of their influence Tony attended our Carol Service in 2012 and often related how the Lord had saved him. He would tell how that after the service he walked home slowly, thinking seriously about what he had heard. "I had been brought up as a Catholic and always believed in God. I always thought a person had to work hard to get to heaven and even then it was never guaranteed. That night I heard for the first time that Christ had died for MY sins and that working was useless. All I had to do was TRUST! So I stopped half-way over the Tyne bridge, looked up to the stars, and right there and then put my faith in the Lord Jesus to save me".

By God's grace Tony lived to prove his reality of faith in the Lord Jesus. Despite frequent personal difficulties and illness as a result of his former life, he was baptized and became a precious member of the local



fellowship. The young brothers in the assembly regularly visited Tony in his flat for Saturday evening Bible study and encouragement. It was only a few weeks ago we wept as he stood in the morning meeting to thank God for His Son.

We were deeply shocked, then, when waiting for him to arrive at the gospel meeting an old friend of Tony's arrived with the news that Tony had died last Friday. It seems that he died of natural causes. He was a very severe diabetic and, due to his previous life, was always in a very precarious position with his health. What a shock to all in the meeting that night, both believer and unbeliever. We are deeply sad still that we have lost one whom we were so close to, but rejoice in the absolute assurance that Tony was the Lord's and that he is at rest in the presence of his Saviour.

The needs on the streets never decline, rather, the reverse; they seem to continue to increase both in numbers and intensity. It would be inappropriate to go into the details of modern drug abuse; sufficient to say that the recent national upsurge in the distribution and availability of "Legal Highs" fills our heart with fear and urgency as we watch young lives being ruined and sucked away by such dangerous material. Last night, we spent much of our time trying to stop several from openly using these drugs at our soup kitchen. While, in the main, respect is always shown to us aggression is never far below the surface. I am grateful to the Lord for special help in dealing with such an incident last night and grateful too for some "special skills" picked up through eighteen years of training inside prison. As I witnessed to Donna, I offered her a ten commandment coin (a useful and memorable witnessing aid). She told me she had seen one like that before. She related how her grandfather, who I knew from prison and the streets, had died a few years ago and insisted that the ten commandment coin I had given him was embedded in his headstone. I hope to try and find the location of the grave soon and get a photograph. The Lord is so gracious in showing the things that He is doing behind the scenes. The street work is challenging and is routine to us now. We have hundreds of contacts and scores of people who at one time or other come to hear the gospel at Bensham'.



France

Alan and Valerie Kyle from Hanches, France write, 'The recent dramatic events in Paris and the surrounding area gripped the attention of the French nation and much of the world. A march to defend freedom of speech and the French way of life brought together a huge crowd of people from all walks of life and leaders from over forty nations. One newspaper called the tragedy "France's 9/11". The slogan that appeared rapidly after the events, "Je suis Charlie" put Christians in a difficult position. Yes they are "Charlie" if it means defending freedom of speech and condemning the dreadful attacks, but no, they are not Charlie if it means identifying with the philosophy of the French satirical newspaper attacked. There is no doubt that French Christians have had more opportunities to witness to their faith in Christ over the past two weeks but, unfortunately, it has increased suspicion of everything religious. We value your prayers for this great nation. We continue to work happily hand-in-hand with our brothers and sisters in Christ in Rambouillet. On Sunday mornings we welcome new people almost every week; some are just passing by, some are Christians, while others do not know the Lord as yet. There is a very international flavour, with over a dozen nationalities regularly represented. Among them are many young people; we long for them to make their lives count for the Lord. God willing M will be baptized in April, a first generation Christian. Do pray for Fred and Sarah who lead the young adults group. One of our young people works in the same street as the Charlie Hebdo offices and was there when the attack took place'.

Romania

Jonathan and Ruth Kelso write as follows, 'Irina is a sixteen-year-old Romanian girl who has grown up under very difficult circumstances in the village of Gaura Răului. Her mother died six years ago, leaving Irina and her three siblings in the care of their elderly grandparents, Vasile and Jeni.

We got to know this family shortly

after the death of Irina's mother; we tried to help where and when we could and encouraged the family to come to the assembly meetings. They began to attend and Jeni was the first to profess faith in the Lord Jesus. Old Vasile (who passed away last year) was the next to be saved and, soon afterwards, both were baptized and became members of the little assembly. Irina and her younger sister, Vasilica, thirteen years old, have been very keen attenders at most of the meetings over the past six years. They have attended many camps and have always been a part of our lives here in Romania.

Last year, we decided that the girls should have a little house built specifically for them; living in conditions that were too cramped and unhygienic was not altogether ideal. They now live in a new house, which was built inside the courtyard of their existing home, improving their living standards greatly. Last September, Irina moved to the Christian high school in Sibiu and has been so enthusiastic about this new chapter in her life. It has been so encouraging to see how well she has "slotted into" life in her new school. She has the motivation to achieve and do well in class and so rising every morning at six and catching two buses to be at school on time for class at eight is not a big problem for her.

On the 13th of February this year, Irina courageously faced up to the biggest problem in her life – her sin! The burden of guilt was weighing her down and she knew that God was speaking very loudly to her. We were holding a birthday party at our home and, while the others were having fun, Irina went off to a room to seek God's salvation. Later that evening, a much more joyful Irina told us that she had repented of her sins and accepted Christ as her Saviour

On Sunday morning something very lovely happened; at an opportune moment, Irina stood up and announced to those gathered, mostly unsaved folk, about the change that had taken place in her life. It was a very courageous thing to do, but was fully in accord with the words of Romans chapter 10 verse 9, that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved'.



✠ THE GOD OF ALL COMFORT ✠

By **HOWARD A. BARNES** Westhoughton, England

Introduction

The apostle Paul was very relieved to hear that the Corinthian assembly had, generally speaking, reacted positively to his very critical First Epistle, 2 Cor. 7. 6-7. Not surprisingly, therefore, in writing his Second Epistle, he commenced it so differently from his first, immediately confiding in the Corinthians, sharing with them his personal experience of God's comfort through the most difficult days.

Divine eulogy

After his normal salutations, Paul introduced the Epistle with one of his two opening divine eulogies.¹ In both, the particular word 'blessed' is from the Greek word *eulogeo*, which means 'to speak well of', giving us our English word 'eulogy'.² After the expected divine title, 'God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ', Paul adds two extra divine titles, 'Father of mercies', and, 'God of all comfort', 1. 3, both being found nowhere else in the Bible.

We will concentrate here on the final title 'the God of all comfort'. The Greek word usually translated as 'comfort' in our King James Version is of quite wide meaning and it has been rendered as 'help', 'exhortation', 'encouragement', 'cheer', 'solace', 'support', 'aid', and 'a cheering and supporting influence', so as 'to stir up our hearts'.³

The point Paul is making is that God Himself is the source of such comfort, so we may paraphrase verses 3 and 4 as 'well spoken of be God . . . the God of each and every experience of comfort. This is the God who comforts us in all our trouble and tribulation. He does this for us so that we in turn may then be able to comfort those who are in any kind of trouble, through our own practical experience of His comfort'.

These general truths are then particularized by Paul by sharing a very distressing incident which had happened to him in Asia, which he describes in verses 8 to 11. For a number of reasons, we cannot be dogmatic as to whether this was his experience in Ephesus, with its ferocious mob described in Acts chapter

19, but whether there or elsewhere in Asia, Paul was 'in deaths oft', 2 Cor. 11. 23. In this very distressing incident, he certainly stared death in the face, and, humanly speaking, he was 'pressed out of measure, above strength' and he 'despaired', v. 8. He had certainly given up all hope of escape, but God rescued him from 'so great a death', v. 10. This itself had a purpose, reminding him that 'we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead', v. 9. Trusting in God when we despair is then a great

comfort *through* Christ; if the affliction overflowed, then so did the comfort.

Deliverance

Paul explains that not only will God comfort us through extreme difficulties, but He can, in His will and time, rescue us from them. *Young's Literal Translation* of phrases in verse 10 is very marked, that God – 'did deliver – doth deliver – will deliver', where to deliver is simply to rescue. Two other instances of such deliverance were elsewhere in Paul's thoughts, so though he had known persecutions and afflictions – to the extent of being left for dead – in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra; 'out of them all the Lord delivered me', 2 Tim. 3. 11.⁵

Conclusion

What a great truth that God is the true source of every comfort in every instance! Sometimes we miss the awe of this truth, but when we realize that the original Greek word translated as comfort (or the verb arising from it) occurs no less than *ten* times in the five verses, vv. 3-7, then we get nearer to a proper appreciation. Paul was glad to share his own experience of this truth and assure the Corinthians that God was able to help them in 'enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer', v. 6. It is important for us to realize that our problems can become opportunities for us to help others, if, through them, we find that God is indeed 'the God of all comfort'.

ENDNOTES

- 1 The other beginning in Ephesians Chapter 1 verse 3.
- 2 See Mark 14. 61; Luke 1. 68; Rom. 1. 25; 9. 5; 2. Cor. 11. 31; 1 Pet. 1. 3.
- 3 Note, in this chapter, the words 'comfort', vv. 3, 4, 5, 6 (twice), 7, and 'consolation' are the same original Greek word; similarly, 'tribulation', v. 4, is the same as 'trouble', vv. 4, 8.
- 4 WILLIAM KELLY, *Notes on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, <http://www.stempublishing.com/authors/kelly/2Newtest/2corinth.html>
- 5 Later, after his first court hearing during his last imprisonment, he would be able to write, 'I was delivered out of the lion's mouth', 2 Tim. 4. 17.



'comfort' truth that he could and did share with others. Of these thoughts, WILLIAM KELLY wrote, 'Grace delights in sharing all it can; and faith gives the highest character to whatever it can discern to be of God'.⁴ The best helpers for us when we are in any kind of trouble are those who have been there themselves, and, in their trouble, found God's help and strength. Perhaps we could be such helpful people ourselves, who have found that although God did not necessarily take away the trouble quickly, He helped us all the way through it.

Paul explained that the comfort that he experienced was in proportion to the affliction suffered, v. 5, so that suffering *for* Christ brought the same degree of

A WORD FOR TODAY

Torach (cumbrance, trouble)

Torah (teaching, instruction, law, the law)

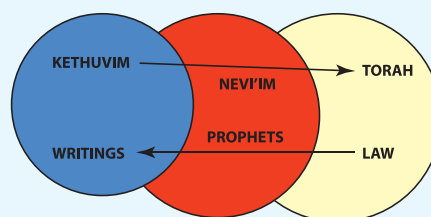
Toren (beacon, mast)

Where people have sought to live in harmony with one another, there has always been some basic code of behaviour, whether written or otherwise, that regulated the interaction of individuals within that particular community. Some communities made a firm distinction between law that governed morality, and divine law that covered religious practices, and, even today, there are many leading jurists who see a clear conflict between the roles of law and religion. But in the Old Testament, there is an indissoluble relationship between the law of God (**torah**) and the outworking of moral codes of practice/behaviour. The biblical idea of law is therefore much wider than law in general, so under Mosaic law coveting is a moral prohibition, Exod. 20. 17, but not, for example, under English law.

The Hebrew word **torah**, translated as 'law' over 200 times in the Old Testament, comes from the root *y-r-h*, and there are differing schools of thought as to whether the word means to shoot an arrow with a view to hitting a target, or, literally, to instruct or teach. If the former, it might well provide the background to Paul's statement in Romans chapter 3 verse 23. Other scholars take the view that it refers to teaching or instruction 'in the practice of extending a hand or finger to point in a particular direction'.¹ This idea is applied generally to the instruction or teaching given by parents to their children, as in Proverbs chapter 1 verse 8 and chapter 6 verse 20, and specifically to the way in which God teaches and instructs His children in the Old Testament. So when we think about the giving of the law (**torah**) at Sinai, Exod. 20, we should not simply restrict our thinking to a strict legal code. In fact, the word **torah** not only reveals God as the supreme Lawgiver, Isa. 33. 22, mirroring His own holy nature and character, but also as the supreme Teacher or Instructor of His people, Isa. 54. 13. This is reflected in the 613 *toroth* or commandments conveyed to Moses in the Old Testament, which Israel was obliged to keep in order to walk (*halakah*)² in harmony with God. Although Israel failed to comply with these commandments on many occasions, they never lost their outward love of **torah**, even though their hearts were so often far away from God. This love can be seen in Psalms 1 and 19, and is the exclusive theme of the celebratory Psalm 119.³ Notice the variety of synonyms used by the writer in translating the word law (**torah**) in that Psalm, e.g., decrees, ways, precepts, statutes, ordinances, to mention just a few! **Torah** was also to be the centre of devotion for God's people, 2 Chr. 31. 4, and to be carefully studied and observed by them, Deut. 6. 25, cp. Rom. 2. 18, 20. Regrettably, whilst **torah** was revered, the constant failure of Israel to listen to and observe God's word brought about divine retribution, Lev. 26. 14-39, eventually leading to exile for seventy years, Jer. 25. 3-14.

By **BRIAN CLATWORTHY**
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Not only does the word **torah** provide us with a wide range of meanings, but Jewish tradition since the late biblical period uses the word '**torah**' to describe the first five books of the Old Testament.⁴ In this specific context, the English definite article is used to differentiate the term from law in general. Sometimes, the expression '**the Torah**' is used by Jews to refer to the whole of the Old Testament, not just the first five books of Moses. However, the importance of '**the Torah**' in the restricted sense of the first five books of Moses as it relates to the rest of the Old Testament cannot be overstated. The Jews divide the Old Testament into three main parts – (the) **Torah** (Pentateuch), **Nebiim** (Early and Later Prophets), and **Ketubim** (Writings or Hagiographa), and this was the way that our Lord divided the sacred text in His discourse on the Emmaus road, Luke 24. 44.⁵ In appreciating this division, Judaism recognizes levels of sanctity (not inspiration) within the Old Testament in that '**the Torah**' underpins all the books in the second and third collections. This means that the other inspired texts outside of '**the Torah**' not only take their lead from the books of Moses, but always revert back to them. This can be illustrated by the diagram below where both trajectories start or end with '**the Torah**'.



This deference can be seen throughout the Old Testament. One such example is the 8th-century BC prophecy of Amos. Amos is often described as the prophet of social injustice, and his prophecy is concerned with the exploitation of the poor in Israel by the nouveaux riches. Amos constantly denounces Israel for failure to comply with God's word, i.e., '**the Torah**', by breaking such commandments in respect to the misuse of security deposits, Deut. 24. 12-13, in respect of sexual promiscuity, Exod. 21. 7-11, cp. 1 Cor. 5. 1, and where they encouraged the Nazirites to break their vow of abstinence by drinking wine, Num. 6. 1-21. Despite the moral vacuum that existed in Israel, there was still a punctilious observance of religious rituals, which was an abomination to God, Amos 4. 4-5. But simply going through the motions of religious piety was insufficient as far as God was concerned. What God required from His people was obedience to His word, 1 Sam. 15. 22, and lives that reflected righteousness, loving kindness, and humility, Mic. 6. 8. Although, in theory, this might have been possible, Rom. 2. 13, the reality was far different, Rom. 3. 23. It needed someone (Christ) to completely fulfil its demands, Matt. 5. 17, and thereby enable God to place His law within His people, and ultimately

write it upon their hearts through a new covenant, Jer. 31. 32.

In the New Testament **torah** is usually translated by the Greek word *nomos* (as in LXX) or, in respect of the law, *ho nomos*, 1 Cor. 9. 9. References to the law, *nomos*, are widespread throughout the New Testament,⁶ and in each context, the law of God as revealed in the restricted term '**the Torah**' is implied. Our Lord not only delighted Himself in '**the Torah**', but used it extensively during His ministry on earth.⁷ To completely reverse a famous Rabbinic saying, for our Lord, 'Words of **Torah** are (were) more beloved than words of Soferim, i.e., tradition'.⁸ Paul makes us aware of the fact that it is only in the revelation and work of Christ that the law can be properly understood, Rom. 10. 4. He further explains that the law was a parenthetical regime, simply brought in by God because of human sin, Gal. 3. 19. The inherent problem in respect of **torah** was that it could not produce righteousness for God because, 'it was weakened by the flesh', Rom. 8. 3 ESV. The law was not, however, evil, *per se*, Rom. 7. 12, but became the agent of sin, Rom. 3. 20; 7. 7-9. It was a positive force that produced very negative results in the lives of sinful men. By the death of Christ, however, all the demands of **torah** have been perfectly met in that we have been redeemed from the curse of the law, Gal. 3. 13. The legal requirement to keep **torah** so that we might acquire a righteous standing before God has been abrogated, Col. 2. 14. Since we have now been set free from **torah** by the 'law' of the Spirit, Rom. 8. 2, may we prove to be effective ministers of a new covenant, 2 Cor. 3. 6, 'who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit', Rom. 8. 1.

For further reading/study

Introductory

RYKEN, WILHOIT AND LONGMAN (Eds.), *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* – Law, pp. 489-492.

Advanced

ALEXANDER AND BAKER (Eds.), *Dictionary of the Old Testament - Pentateuch* (LAW), pp. 497-515.

ENDNOTES

- 1 ALEXANDER AND BAKER (Eds.) *Dictionary of the Old Testament - Pentateuch*, pg. 498.
- 2 On the meaning of the Hebrew word *halakah* see 2011 Volume 66, Issue 3.
- 3 Each year Jews celebrate the law by reading the five books of Moses in their entirety at the synagogue at *Simhat Torah* = *Rejoicing of Torah*.
- 4 The Greek equivalent being the term *Pentateuch*, which is derived through Latin.
- 5 The reference to Psalms in that verse is simply shorthand for 'The Writings' as Psalms is always the first book, and early sources suggest it may have been the title for the entire collection. It is so identified in the Dead Sea scrolls. Paul also uses this threefold division, e.g., Romans chapter 15 verses 10-12, to buttress his argument by selecting texts from Deuteronomy, Isaiah, and Psalms.
- 6 For example, Luke 24. 44; John 18. 31; Acts 6. 13.
- 7 See Matt. 4. 4; 7. 12; 12. 5.
- 8 With apologies to Rabbi Johanan!

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QUESTION

What is the most effective way of teaching God's people?

ANSWER

In seeking to answer this question I assume that it relates to the teaching meetings convened for the whole assembly, and not teaching that can be given on a more personal, or informal basis. In addition, there are two other factors that need to be borne in mind. Firstly, God's people need exhortation as well as doctrine, but the following paragraphs deal with the issue of teaching, for that is what is mentioned by the questioner. Secondly, the vast majority of believers in the early church would not have had direct access to any written portions of the word of God; they would have been dependent on someone publicly reading the scriptures to them. An example of this is seen in Colossians chapter 4 verse 16, and in 1 Timothy chapter 4 verse 13.

Within the UK, and probably in many other places, there have been two primary forms of teaching meetings. One is usually referred to as 'the Bible reading', a slightly misleading term to describe a conversational Bible study, and the other is generally called 'the ministry meeting', at which there may be one or more brethren participating in turn. This response will focus on these two meetings.

An examination of the New Testament supplies very limited evidence of a 'Bible reading', something caused in part by the limited availability of the written word. In Acts chapter 20, we read, 'And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow', v. 7. The word translated 'preached' means 'to discourse', or 'to reason', and would indicate that the meeting was not a monologue but conversational. This incident in Troas is the only example I can find of an assembly-based conversational Bible study, but it gives us at least one very helpful principle. Although there may have been a number of brethren participating in the discussion, it was the apostle Paul, the Bible teacher, who took the primary lead.

For a 'Bible reading' to supply edifying teaching, this principle needs to be followed today; it needs to be led by those who have been endowed with the ability to teach. If every brother had that ability there would have been no need for the Spirit of God, or the ascended Lord, to have selected a limited number of men to have this gift. Whilst the meeting would be open to any brother to make contribution, and share with the assembly things they have particularly enjoyed, it should be the responsibility of the Bible teachers to ensure that the passage is seen in its context. I believe that any questions that may arise should initially be directed to such men, and they would also need to move the discussion through the verses in an orderly manner to preserve it from becoming side-tracked or entrenched on a specific point.

We now need to think about the 'ministry meeting', and there is no doubt that far more emphasis is given in the Epistles and Acts to this meeting' and the role of the teacher, than is true of the 'Bible reading'. In the early days of the church the gift of prophecy was vital as the New Testament had not been written, but, with the completed word of God, Col. 1. 25, the work of the prophets became redundant, and they were superseded by the teachers. God's intention is that an assembly should be a place of spiritual 'education', or teaching, as it is designed to be the 'the pillar and ground of the truth', 1 Tim. 3. 15. Paul spent a year teaching at Antioch, eighteen months in Corinth, and three years at Ephesus. Clearly this preserved those assemblies from piecemeal ministry, and resulted in them receiving systematic teaching on 'the whole counsel of God', Acts 20. 27. If we want to be spiritually healthy as believers, and not carried about with every wind of doctrine, it is essential that we are the recipients of 'sound doctrine', delivered by men who have been raised up by the Lord for the edifying of the body of Christ.

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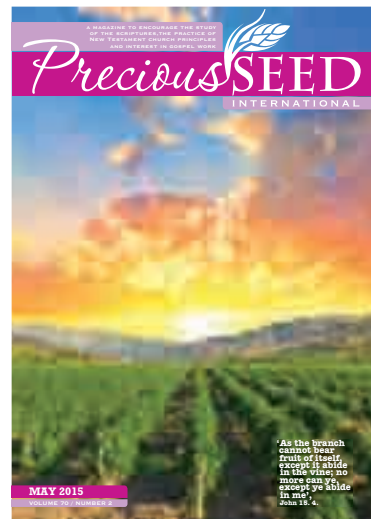
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Front Cover Illustration

Bearing fruit is a common feature of all flowering plants, and through this process the plant is enabled to distribute its seeds, often by some form of symbiotic association with insects or animal life. The vine was an important commodity in the ancient world, and became the symbol of economic wealth and prosperity as well as a religious motif. When Israel entered the Promised Land, God gave them vineyards that were already planted, Deut. 6. 11, and this is later acknowledged by the psalmist as a gift from God, Ps. 107. 34. But Israel was warned against forgetting God's munificence, and the risk of apostasy, Deut. 6.12. Later, the vine came to represent Israel itself, Isa. 5. 1-7, and when God heaped His grace and blessing upon Israel, He looked for justice and equity from His people. Sadly, God found nothing but injustice and iniquity, 5. 7, or as one writer puts it, 'They remained as if grace had never touched them'; the fruit was unholy. Israel had disconnected itself from the source of blessing, and had fallen because of sin, Hos. 14. 2. But the True Vine would appear, John 15. 1, displacing Israel, and revealing Himself to be the faithful and true witness for God, Rev. 3. 14. Those who continuously remain in the True Vine will experience the vibrance of life in Him, and will bear fruit in abundance.



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