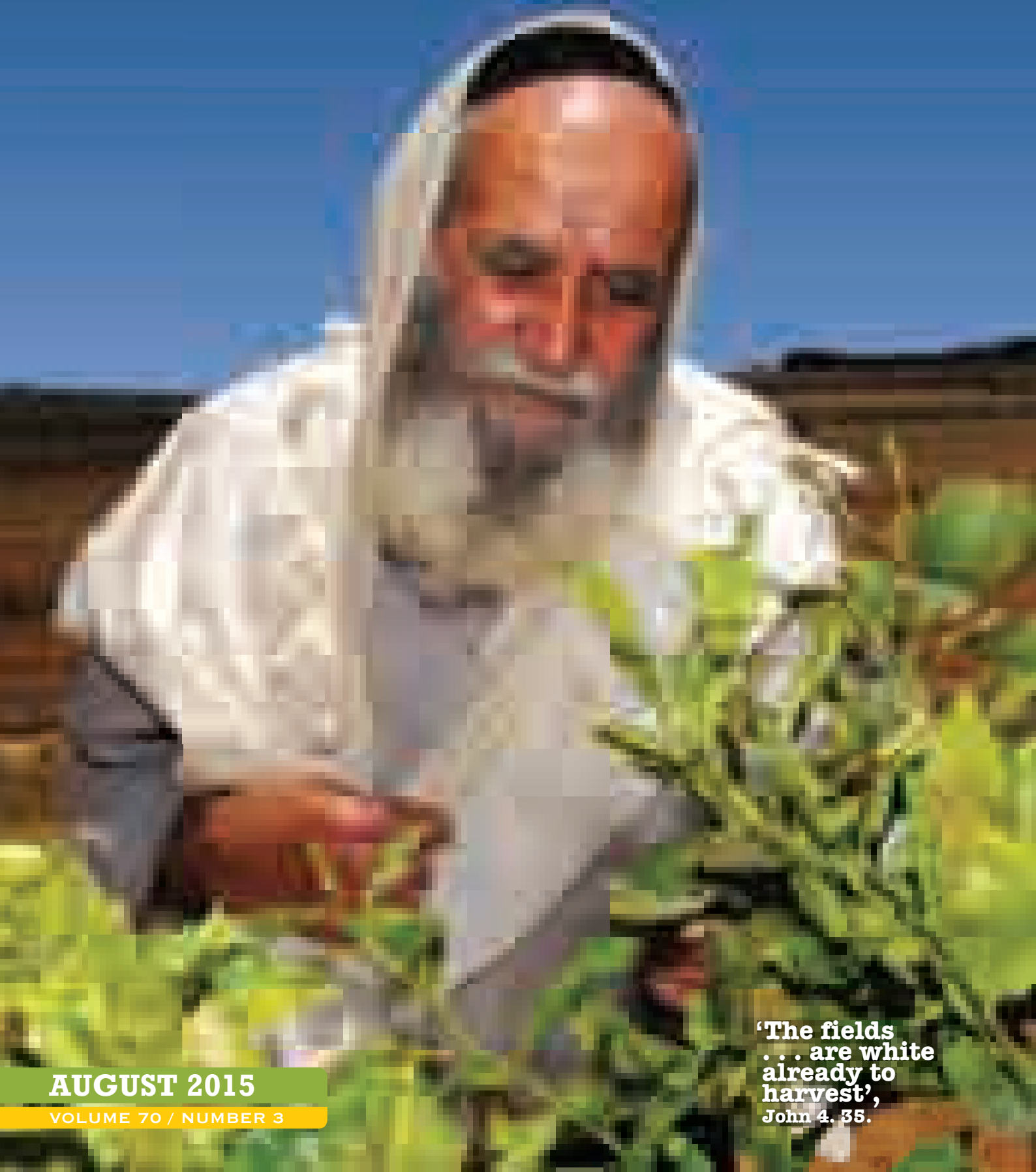


A MAGAZINE TO ENCOURAGE THE STUDY
OF THE SCRIPTURES, THE PRACTICE OF
NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH PRINCIPLES
AND INTEREST IN GOSPEL WORK



Precious SEED

INTERNATIONAL



AUGUST 2015

VOLUME 70 / NUMBER 3

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... are white
already to
harvest',
John 4. 35.**

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faith matters 5 fm

important spiritual matters for you Issue 5

Crisis WORLD

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

Ebola is not identified touched by lying on beds who suffer those fam ones.

As it spreads to the whole world 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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Jesus said that the conditions in the world before he comes back to this planet to reign will be very similar to what we see

back gain will be This

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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:

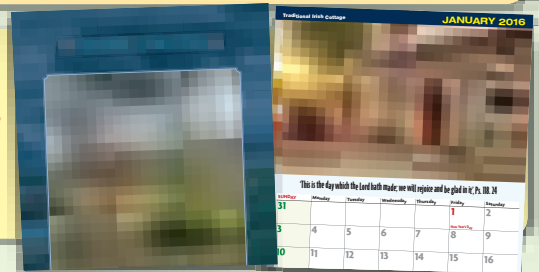
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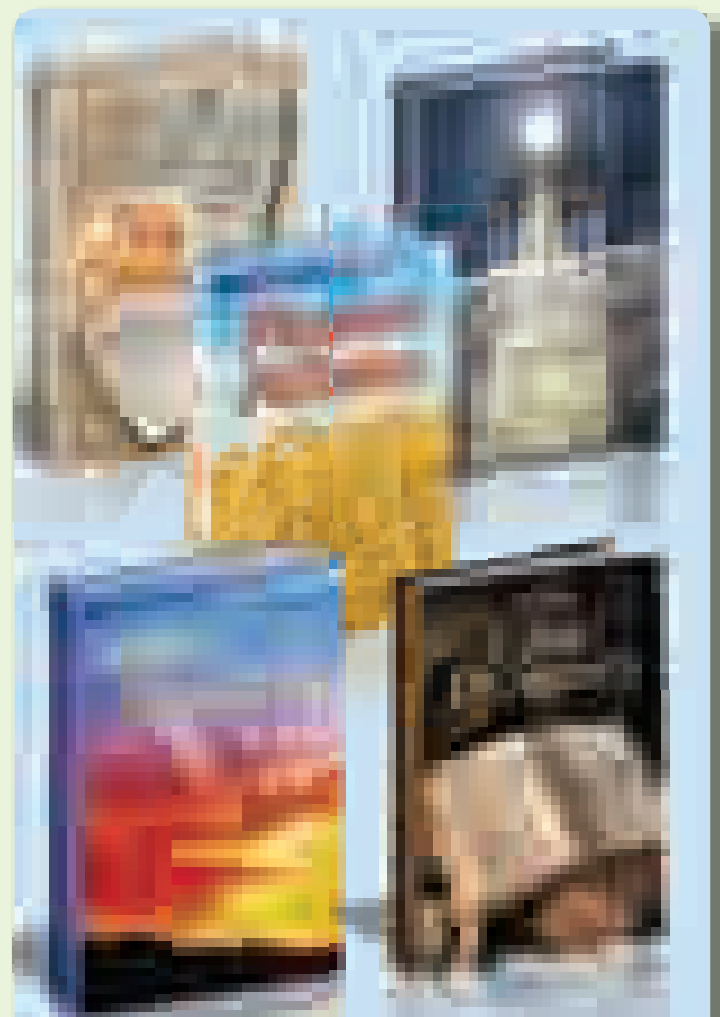
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Editorial

‘Some spake of the temple, how it was adorned with goodly stones and gifts’, Luke 21. 5.

One stone does not make a building. A pile of stones is not a building. However, once the stones are shaped, and put together in accord with an architect’s plan, a building will begin to emerge. The skill of the designer combined with the skills of the builders will determine the beauty of the end product.

As we consider any New Testament church, it is important to remind ourselves that God is the architect and the builder. He takes us, those rough stones,¹ and shapes them for His glory. He builds those same stones into the church, whether considered dispensationally or locally. It is all of Him! That is the essence of our responsibility individually and collectively – to manifest His glory.²

Although the temple was a physical rather than a spiritual building, the danger in the verse above remains. The temple was meant to be the house of God, the place where He dwelt in the midst of His people. It was evident that this was no longer the case.³ As well as its architectural splendour, it was still a place that was at the centre of Jewish life. Even the disciples could be counted amongst those who admired the building and the detail of its stonework and decoration.

Have we learned the lesson? Are there local churches today that seek the reputation and following that characterized the temple in the Lord’s day? Rather than physical stones, they rejoice in men of gift amongst their number, even though all gift is God-given. They delight in the numbers that are drawn to their fellowship, whether regularly or occasionally. They may even proclaim their faithfulness to the biblical pattern. The situation is not new. Church history should remind us of the folly of such a pursuit of glory. How many assemblies of God’s people were once very large, drawing crowds to their meetings, but are now populated by a few elderly saints facing the prospect of closure. May we remind our hearts that the spiritual building, the church, is God’s. It is for His glory! How sad if, as a consequence of our pride, ‘there shall not be left one stone upon another’!⁴

In this magazine, we continue to provide the mix of articles that is characteristic of *Precious Seed International*. The series of articles on Widows, Orphans, and Strangers continues. The short series provided by David Williams entitled ‘Much ado about “nothing”’ is concluded. We are grateful to him for this meditation. The insight into a particular believer’s call to service is given a different perspective by Ian Rees. In all, it is our desire to provide that which will be ‘for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ’, Eph. 4. 12.

ENDNOTES

- 1 1 Pet. 2. 5.
- 2 1 Pet. 2. 9.
- 3 John 2. 16.
- 4 Luke 21. 6.



Preaching in the barren wilderness of Judea, away from the usual places where people were found, dressed in uncommon clothing of camel's hair, with a leather girdle about his loins, and feasting only on locusts and wild honey; so came the greatest of all the prophets, Matt. 11. 11, to pave the way for the Messiah.

THE GOSPEL PREACHED

By IAN JACKSON Eastbourne, England

The focus of the preaching of John the Baptist, especially in the Synoptic Gospels, was on repentance. 'In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, and saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand', Matt. 3. 1-2.¹ All of this was in accordance with Isaiah's prophecy: His paths being made straight, the mountains and hills being made low, the crooked being made straight, the rough places being made plain and the glory of the Lord being revealed, Isa. 40. 3-5.

In John's Gospel one could almost be forgiven for thinking that it is another John of whom he writes, for the ministry is of such a different nature. John 'came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe', John 1. 7, and 'John bare witness of him', v. 15. Unbelief might point to this difference and claim that here is proof that the differences in the Gospels show that this is not God's word at all; but it should always be remembered that the writers, by the Spirit, select material to suit their objectives.

It had in view the kingdom of heaven

The preaching of the Baptist, especially in Matthew, Mark, and Luke has in view the 'kingdom of heaven' and its establishment. In fact, the preaching of the Baptist, of the Lord and of His apostles while He was here on earth was, in this respect, identical.² It is in John's mouth that we first hear this phrase in the New Testament (it is only found in Matthew), although the fact of that kingdom is well established in the Old Testament. Daniel informs us in chapter 2 that the God of heaven shall set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed and, in chapter 7, that there is given to the

Son of man universal and everlasting dominion. It is this very kingdom that John the Baptist came preaching; he knew of no other, and no separate definition of that kingdom is given for us to distinguish it from that of which Daniel speaks.

As the designated forerunner of the coming King and herald of the coming kingdom, John expected the imminent establishment in righteousness of the manifested kingdom of Christ here below. He did not seem to realize that though the King was about to be manifested, He would be rejected and that the kingdom of heaven would, therefore, take a twofold form. The kingdom as seen by Daniel, which was the expectation of every godly Jew, was to be postponed; the king, rejected here, would be received in heaven, leading to the introduction of the kingdom of heaven in mystery form as developed by the Lord in His teaching in Matthew chapter 13. This was not revealed in the Old Testament. The kingdom of heaven began, in fact, with Christ being exalted at the right hand of God and this New Testament view of that kingdom continues until He returns.

It is vital to see these different views of the kingdom in Matthew in order to reach a proper understanding of the whole concept of the rule of heaven on earth conveyed in the expression 'the kingdom of heaven'. A study will reveal that in that Gospel the kingdom is seen in *anticipation*, 'thy kingdom come', 6. 10; in *mystery form*, 'unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven', 13. 11; and, ultimately, in *manifestation*, 'then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven', 24. 30.

Some, who perhaps deny any real distinction between Israel and the church and the differing ways God treats each of these entities, and in order to maintain that view, strongly deny the concept of the postponement of the kingdom. Of course, as far as God is concerned there is no postponement, for He

knows the end from the beginning and has a purpose which will never change. But, from the standpoint of human responsibility, it is clear that if the King had been received by the nation the manifested kingdom would have been established there and then. It is equally clear that the mediatorial kingdom of Christ, as predicted many times in the Old Testament, was not set up on earth then. This can be seen in that we are still in the midst of a groaning creation, and we also groan; David's throne is not yet set up in Zion; the epistles never once suggest that the eschatological kingdom is established; and the idea that the saints are now reigning with Christ in a present kingdom of God on earth is specifically refuted by the apostle Paul.³

The preaching of John anticipated, therefore, the setting up on earth of the kingdom of the Son of man and he would have been very well aware that this would be a reign of righteousness. 'Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness', Isa. 32. 1; 'Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth', Jer. 23. 5. It was vital for one who desired to enter that kingdom, to repent and to demonstrate it in changed behaviour, which is the fruit of repentance. To remain unrepentant would attract the wrath of God and bar entrance to the kingdom.

It involved repentance

Repentance is a thoroughgoing change of heart, mind, and purpose. It involves a change of disposition and direction. In repentance a person sees that he is wrong and that God is right. His previous self-centred lawlessness, in rebellion against God, is wrong, not because the actions arising from that disposition have caused heartache and pain, or brokenness of life, but because God is now seen to be right and holy. This, then, is more than regret or remorse which need not involve radical change. Repentance is observable in the fruit that it bears.



BY JOHN THE BAPTIST

John was not shy about pointing this out to those who asked. Repentance produces practical righteousness. There will be interest in the well-being of others, for among the people clothing and food were to be shared with those who lack, Luke 3. 11. It will yield fairness in dealings with others, for the repentant publicans were told not to exact more than was due to them, v. 13. It will also mean that one will not harm another's health or reputation by violence or false accusation, and it will make a person to be content, v. 14. Entrance into the kingdom

the symbolic witness of the believer's death and resurrection with Christ. There is, however, this common theme: the old is passed and the new is embraced. It was the same with the children of Israel at the Red Sea, 'all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea', 1 Cor. 10. 1-2. Egypt was now behind them; the Lord Himself was before them.

While the people stood in Jordan to be baptized by John, they confessed their sins, which were to



is ethically, or morally, conditioned, and it is observable in the epistles that when Paul is speaking about the kingdom of God there is a moral dimension in the forefront of his mind.

There was a baptism connected with it

Connected with the change of internal disposition which repentance produces was the external symbol of it in baptism. John's baptism is not, of course, Christian baptism. Christian baptism is not unto repentance but

be abandoned and a new character of life embraced. John's baptism very publicly identified the people with all that he had preached; those who were baptized not only repented of their sins but embraced the fact of the coming King and kingdom.

Today, as perhaps never before, we need to remember that there will always be evidence of true repentance in the life of the one who is truly repentant. Evidence of the fact that we have entered the strait gate is seen in that we walk the narrow way.

If we are not walking in that way, we cannot expect others to think that there is reality in the profession of repentance we have made.

At the heart of it was a glorious person

The testimony to John the Baptist in the Fourth Gospel, by those who resorted unto him, was, 'John did no miracle: but all things that John spoke of this man were true', John 10. 41. This is surely something to be coveted for ourselves.

John, the greatest of the prophets, testified of Him as the coming King, the Lord, the Salvation of God, the Baptizer with the Holy Spirit and with fire, 'one mightier than I' who was 'preferred before me', the Light, the Lamb, the one on whom the Spirit descended, the Son of God. His ministry was full of Christ and in such a variety of ways. We do well to remember at all times that whether we are thinking of the kingdom in mystery or in manifestation, or the eternal day when it will be seen that sin has been borne away by the Lamb of God, or, if we are contemplating any aspect of Bible doctrine, Christ is all. The apostle Paul says of Him, 'Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus', Col. 1. 28.

The messenger is only that. The message he bears is greater than he is, but greatest of all is the subject of the message. In a day of self-praise, self-assertion, self-worth and multiple other 'self sins' may we be helped to be as John was. In relation to Christ he was self-effacing, retiring, not vainglorious, being glad simply to point others to Him that He might be glorified, 'The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus', John 1. 37.

Endnotes

- 1 See also Mark 1. 4 and Luke 3. 3.
- 2 See Matt. 3. 2; 4. 17; 10. 7.
- 3 For further helpful reading see: A. J. MCLAIN, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, BMH Books, 1980.

IAN JACKSON is in fellowship in the assembly in Eastbourne, England. He is a commended worker preaching and teaching the word of God.



THE P

By **JOHN BENNETT**

Kirkby-in-Ashfield, England

like Gad, to be used of God. He has a work to accomplish in our hearts and lives. We do not know much about who Gad was but we do know what he achieved for God.

His appearance

When we write of Gad's appearance we are not interested in his physical characteristics. It is the timing of his emergence that is of importance, from two different aspects. We should notice that this was:

A time of change

1 Samuel chapter 25 verse 1 records 'And Samuel died'. The significance of that death was great. The spiritual guidance that Samuel had given to Israel and to its king would be lost – he was no longer available to give that guidance. As the day of his death would be near in chapter 22, it is reassuring to know that though Samuel is about to be taken, God still has his men in place. Whether Gad was one of the prophets under the tutelage of Samuel at Ramah is conjecture. However, what we do know is that as Samuel is taken so Gad emerges as the man prepared to do a work for God.

Is there a challenge for believers today? Men of God are being taken from us. Are we prepared to rise to the challenge of doing a work for God that now needs to be done? While we may not be able to 'fill the shoes' of those who are taken we can seek to exercise the gift that God has given us for His glory.

A time of hardship

'Abide not in the hold; depart', 1 Sam. 22. 5. Gad did not arrive on the scene at the most propitious of moments in David's experience. David was

For many believers there might be an enquiry as to who was the prophet Gad. Whilst we may be familiar with the name as one of the twelve tribes of Israel, the man who forms the basis of this simple study may well be unknown. In general terms, he is one of those people who appear on the pages of scripture and then disappear again. Yet, while he occupies little in the way of space, clearly he had a role to fulfil and a work of the Lord to do. In modern terms, we would never have heard of Gad, never have seen his name in a magazine, and never have appreciated the contribution he made in his day. However, the Spirit of God has left us the record of the man and his mission for the Lord, and there is much that we can learn from it.

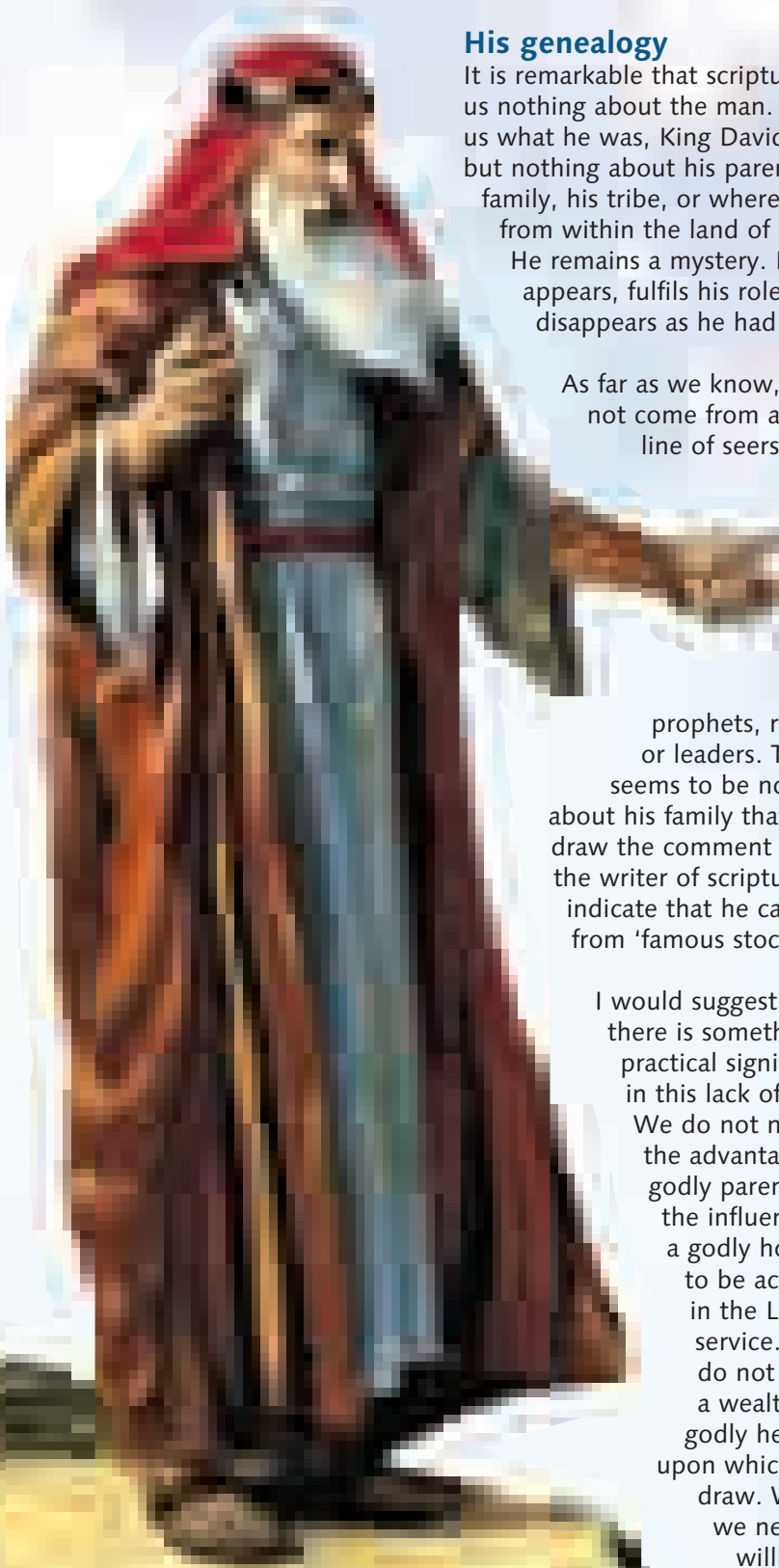
His genealogy

It is remarkable that scripture tells us nothing about the man. It tells us what he was, King David's seer, but nothing about his parents, his family, his tribe, or where he was from within the land of Israel. He remains a mystery. He appears, fulfils his role, and disappears as he had come.

As far as we know, he did not come from a famous line of seers,

prophets, rulers, or leaders. There seems to be nothing about his family that would draw the comment of the writer of scripture to indicate that he came from 'famous stock'.

I would suggest that there is something of practical significance in this lack of detail. We do not need the advantage of godly parents, or the influence of a godly home to be active in the Lord's service. We do not need a wealth of godly heritage upon which to draw. What we need is a willingness,





PROPHET GAD

being pursued with vigour and venom by King Saul. Later in the chapter we discover that there were spies who were prepared to betray David to Saul, for status and position in Saul's kingdom. In the following chapter the betrayers are numerous; fearing the king and his potential for retribution, many are prepared to deliver up David.

At such a time it was a serious risk to be found as a spiritual guide to David in a land that was in fear of Saul. Yet Gad was not to be intimidated by Saul, or any of his people. He was God's messenger with God's message to which he would be faithful.

It is not a popular thing to be seen as a Christian today. However, are we prepared to be God's messenger with God's message, desiring to be faithful to Him? In some countries that may entail a cost far higher than many of us will ever be asked to pay!

His message

Again, his message seemed to be twofold.

A message of instruction

'Abide not in the hold; depart', 1 Sam. 22. 5.

From the first verse in 1 Samuel 22 we see Gad's concern for the safety and welfare of David. Here was a man who had a heart for what was right and yet a tender heart that would be protective of those who were the chosen of God. In this, Gad demonstrates that balance of grace and truth that is so necessary amongst the people of God.

But then we read, 'Go up, rear an altar unto the Lord in the threshingfloor of Araunah the Jebusite', 2 Sam. 24. 18.

In this chapter of great difficulty, when David was responsible

for an act of folly in numbering the people, Gad has a word of instruction. It is one thing to point out what is wrong. In that sense, the task is easy. We are all deeply conscious of our short-comings and failures. The hard thing is to teach what is right. Again, we need to demonstrate the balance between the negative and the positive so that saints might learn and develop spiritually. This was the work in which Gad was faithful.

We might remember the words of the apostle Paul as he spoke to the Ephesian elders, 'I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God', Acts 20. 27. But, alongside that, he could also say, with feeling, 'by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears', v. 31. The two aspects of Paul's ministry went together.

A message of rebuke

'The word of the Lord came unto the prophet Gad', 2 Sam. 24. 11. We should not underestimate the seriousness of the task. Gad had to deliver a message to the king detailing the choices that God was to give him – painful and costly choices of judgement as a result of David's sin. Yet we read, 'So Gad came to David, and told him', 2 Sam. 24. 13. He did not shun his responsibilities. He did not seek to 'water down', or compromise, the message, but delivered it as God had instructed him.

There may be times when the message is not popular, and the consequences potentially difficult, but we have to stick to the word of God and carry out what His word would teach. Here is the mark of a faithful man.

His faithfulness

'And he set the Levites in the house of the Lord with cymbals, with psalteries, and with harps, according to the commandment of

David, and of Gad the king's seer, and Nathan the prophet: for so was the commandment of the Lord by his prophets', 2 Chr. 29. 25.

This reference in 2 Chronicles chapter 29 is to the reforms instituted by King Hezekiah. The far-reaching nature of those reforms is indicated by the reference to David, Gad, and Nathan. No previous king had brought about such a revival as this one.

But our focus is not upon Hezekiah but upon Gad. This reference tells us the nature of Gad's work. It stood the test of time and judgement in respect of its faithfulness to the word of God. The benchmark of truth in the lives of the kings of Judah was that established by David, Gad, and Nathan. That's quite a testimony and quite a challenge to all our hearts! What will we leave for future generations?

But then we should also notice Gad as a *writer*, 'Now the acts of David the king, first and last, behold, they are written in the book of Samuel the seer, and in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the book of Gad the seer', 1 Chr. 29. 29.

Gad left more than a verbal legacy of his work for the Lord. He put the truth on record. Clearly, not everyone is a writer. Neither would we suggest that it is everyone's gift. However, it is sad to think that as many brethren have left us for glory we have so little of their ministry in written form. While we revelled in their oral ministry when they were with us, there is nothing of that gift of exhortation or exposition from which a rising generation can benefit. Perhaps there is something here to exercise all our hearts.

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We have already noted in the previous article God's special love and provision for these three vulnerable and needy groups. Orphans are children who have lost their parents. In the scriptures they are described as being 'fatherless', and this seems to focus on the loss of practical support. We have no doubt, however, that the additional loss of emotional support in the form of a mother's love is equally devastating for any child who has lost both parents. This can occur through bereavement; it may also happen because of abandonment.

God speaks

The fatherhood of God is a delightful Bible theme. In the context of the Old Testament, it denotes His divine love and care for His earthly people, Israel. In the New Testament, it is realized in fullest measure in the relationship between the Lord Jesus, the eternal Son of God, and His Father. Finally, every Christian can rightly call upon God as Father. The apostle Paul often introduced his letters with the following words: 'Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ'. God is also described less commonly by Paul and others as the Father of mercies, glory, spirits, lights, and, indeed, Father of all.¹ Fatherhood denotes protection, provision, communion, counsel, and discipline, all undergirded by a constant love.

Israel knew much of God's provision for them throughout their history, but it is all the sadder to read the divine lament in the last book of the Old Testament, because the nation neglected God and brought dishonour upon His name: 'A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the Lord of hosts', Mal. 1. 6.

God gave the nation of Israel instructions for the care of orphans: 'He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and the widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment', Deut. 10. 18; 'The stranger, and the fatherless, and the

WIDOWS, ORPHANS AND S God loves the

widow, which are within thy gates, shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied', 14. 29. As we have already noted, the harvest gleanings were to be left for these needy ones. When we read of God executing judgement, it does not mean that He punishes the fatherless, but rather, in the context, it means that He upholds their interests, acts on their behalf, and blesses them, 'for in thee [God] the fatherless findeth mercy', Hos. 14. 3. He expects His people to do the same: 'Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy', Ps. 82. 3.

God also spoke and warned against mistreating the fatherless: 'Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child', Exod. 22. 22; 'Thou shalt not pervert the judgment of the stranger, nor of the fatherless; nor take a widow's raiment to pledge', Deut. 24. 17. He pronounced a divine curse upon those who would transgress in this way, 27. 19.

We have reached a very low point in human history when orphan children – indeed, all children – seem to be at an increased risk of exploitation and abuse. The violent nature of such abuse does not make for comfortable reading, even on the pages of scripture: 'Ye overwhelm the fatherless'; 'the arms of the fatherless have been broken'; 'they pluck the fatherless from the breast', Job 6. 27; 22. 9; 24. 9. Indeed, orphan children were sometimes robbed and even murdered.²

With shocking regularity, the media are reporting cases from all over the world of vile crimes being perpetrated against children, and we have every reason to believe that this world is fast ripening for judgement. God has taken note of every little one whose innocence

has been shattered, and whose life has been permanently scarred. The cry goes up, 'How long, O Lord?' In a day to come, we believe, every godless person will be judged according to his or her works. Their punishment will be in direct proportion to their evil deeds. God will not be mocked: what men sow, they will one day reap.

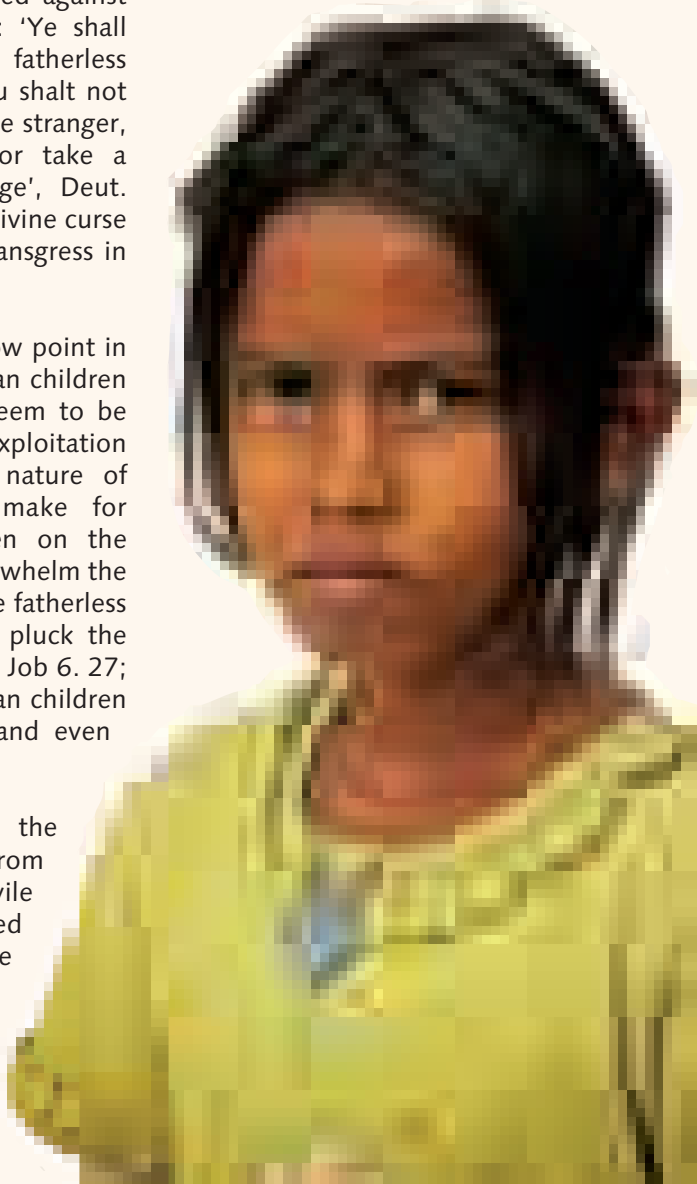
By

**CLARK
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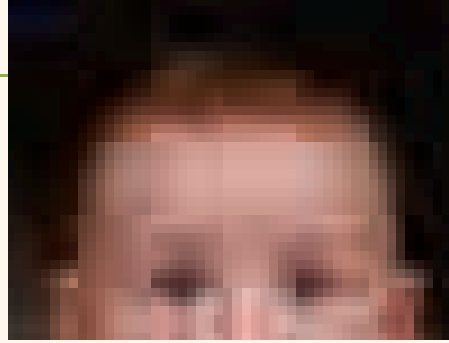
Christ speaks

The Lord Jesus Christ thought it necessary to issue a warning in His own day regarding the attitude of some people to children: 'But whoso shall offend one of these little ones



STRANGERS [2]

Orphan



which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea'; 'Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones', Matt. 18. 6, 10.

Turning with some relief to a more positive aspect of truth, we recall our Lord's tenderness and warm welcome for little children when He took them up in His arms and blessed them. These were not orphans, of course, having been brought to Him by their mothers, but the Lord had to counter the common disregard for children shown by the disciples: 'Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven', Matt. 19. 14. He had earlier used a little child to teach the essential features of His kingdom.³ The Lord was indicating that the childlike qualities of humility and unquestioning trust were essential for admittance to His kingdom. Pride and unbelief would prohibit any person from being part of the same.

Paul speaks

The apostle had many children in the Lord. He described Timothy as 'my own son in the faith', and Titus as 'mine own son after the common faith'.⁴ These verses suggest that he was used by the Lord in bringing these young men to know their spiritual need, and that they came to believe in Christ under his ministry. Paul was not one to abandon converts, but he maintained his links with them and sought to encourage them in the ways of the Lord. The travail involved in seeing others born again was not an end in itself for Paul;⁵ he continued to labour so that they would develop in their faith and become more like Christ.⁶

This is well illustrated by his first letter to the Thessalonian believers in which he reminded them

of his initial visit to the city. He had conducted himself wisely, and as a steward, 'put in trust with the gospel', he had preached the truth with faithfulness to God and integrity before men. He continued, 'But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children'. He warmly and lovingly tended to their spiritual care, just as a nursing mother would nourish her newborn child. He saw himself as much more than a preacher: 'we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us', 1 Thess. 2. 7-8. Motivated by sacrificial love, he gave himself unsparingly to them.

There was another firmer side to Paul when he reminded them of how 'we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children', 1 Thess. 2. 11. In other words, he gave them godly counsel and sought to guide them aright on the pathway ahead. As has been said 'Truth is hard if not softened by love, and love is soft if not hardened by truth'. In these ways, Paul fulfilled the spiritual functions of both parents in regard to his children in the Lord. There should be no spiritual orphans as far as he was concerned.

Challenges for today

Depending upon where one lives, the needs of orphans may not be so obvious if the state intervenes and undertakes for their basic care. Otherwise, in many developing countries, orphans are still cared for by the extended family. The stresses and strains of either arrangement can take an emotional toll on the lives of such children. Many of them never seem to overcome the sense of abandonment, if that was the way they were robbed of normal family life. Others, who have been bereaved, can feel cast adrift. Institutional care leaves much to be desired, and even the extended family situation in many countries is not free of tensions and

inequalities. All in all, whichever way we view the plight of orphans, they are rarely shown enough love and understanding.

Some Christian couples have risen to the challenge of providing practical care as foster parents, or even adopting orphans. Others seek to help the street children found in many of the cities of the world, or regularly visit orphanages. Christian orphanages are now much less common, but those who have read the story of George Müller are left in no doubt that a real work of God was accomplished during his lifetime in the nineteenth century. Relying solely upon God's provision he was able to build homes for hundreds of orphans in Ashley Down near Bristol. His name became synonymous with the principle of living by faith, never soliciting help from men but always and often bringing one's needs before God in prayer.

We have deliberately widened the definition of orphans to include those newborn Christians who require spiritual parenting. Applying the truth in this way highlights the responsibility to provide spiritual support for new believers, especially those from non-Christian homes. Wise elders will recognize this need and make sure that those young in the faith are well fed with a healthy diet of good spiritual food in an atmosphere of love and care. In addition to Bible teaching, individual Christians and couples can also open their homes and include the new believers in their family and social activities. There is always a cost involved in caring, but the Lord will not forget these sacrifices for His sake.

Endnotes

- 1 2 Cor. 1. 3; Eph. 1. 17; Heb. 12. 9; Jas. 1. 17; Eph. 4. 6.
- 2 Isa. 10. 2; Ps. 94. 6.
- 3 'Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven', Matt. 18. 3.
- 4 1 Tim. 1. 2; Titus 1. 4.
- 5 1 Thess. 2. 9.
- 6 Gal. 4. 19.

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(a) The Kingdom's commencement

Adonijah, Joab, and Shimei were all put to death at the beginning of Solomon's reign, 1 Kgs. 2. The millennial reign of Christ will likewise be prefaced by judgement upon His foes, Matt. 13. 41, 42; Zeph. 3. 8; Isa. 63. 1-6.

(b) The Kingdom's character – equity; tranquility

Solomon's kingdom was to be marked by righteousness and peace. David said of Solomon, 'Thou art a wise man, and knowest what thou oughtest to do . . . Do, therefore, according to thy wisdom', 1 Kgs. 2. 6-9. David was the man instructed by the oracle of God, 'He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God', 2 Sam. 23. 3.

In a coming day, 'Behold a king shall reign in righteousness', Isa. 32. 1. 'Behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and do wisely', Jer. 23. 5 RV. 'Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity', Heb. 1. 8, 9. Righteousness and peace go hand in hand. 'And he [Solomon] had peace on all sides round about him. And Judah and Israel dwelt safely . . . all the days of Solomon', 1 Kgs. 4. 24, 25. 'But now the Lord my God hath given me rest on every side, so that there is neither adversary nor evil occurrent', 1 Kgs. 5. 4.

David, in his prayer, says, 'In his [Messiah's] days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth', Ps. 72. 7. Christ is both Prince of Peace and Lord of Peace. 'Of the increase of his government **and peace** there shall be no end', Isa. 9. 7. Where Joshua failed to bring the people into rest, and Solomon's efforts were only a limited success, Christ will be triumphant.

(c) The Kingdom's continuance

● **Prosperity** marked Solomon's reign. How else could the temple have been so lavishly constructed? Think of his throne of ivory, and gold, 'There was not the like made in any kingdom', 2

CHRIST – A GREAT

(4) AS TO HIS SOVEREIGNTY

By **JOHN GRIFFITHS** Port Talbot, Wales

Chr. 9. 17-19. Consider the provision for his household and hospitality, 1 Kgs. 4. 22, 23. 'So King Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches and for wisdom', 10. 23.

The prosperity of this world under the reign of Christ can only be guessed at! 'Behold my servant shall deal prudently [*prosper*]', Isa. 52. 13. 'The pleasure of the Lord shall *prosper* in his hand', 53. 10. A land flowing with milk and honey! The desert blossoming as the rose! The righteous flourishing! No famine or droughts!

● The **unity** of Israel and Judah secured by David was maintained by Solomon, at least in outward semblance, throughout his reign. Immediately afterward, the kingdom was divided under Rehoboam and Jeroboam, never to be reunited until Messiah's reign. Ezekiel tells of the nation being reunited as the sceptres of Judah and Joseph become one in Messiah's hand. He speaks in the same chapter of their national unity, monarchical unity, geographical unity, and pastoral unity, Ezek. 38. 22, 24. A unity, through Messiah, that will never again be challenged! 'A kingdom which shall never be destroyed . . . shall not be left to other people . . . and it shall stand forever', Dan. 2. 44.

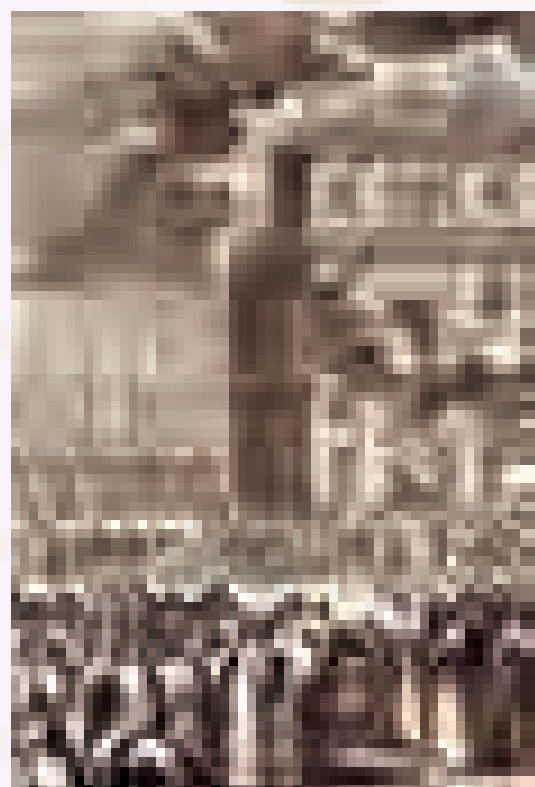
● The **sanctuary** at Jerusalem focused the minds of the people on their religion and their God. Its glory and beauty were awesome, and talked about widely. The males going to Jerusalem on three occasions per year ensured the centrality of the temple in the hearts and minds of the people. The breakaway kingdom, of which Samaria became capital, sought to divert the people's attention from Jerusalem by introducing shrines at Bethel and Dan.

The millennial temple will draw in not only Jews, but Gentiles. Zechariah tells us that the remnant of the Gentile nations will go up to the temple to worship the King, the Lord

of hosts, and to keep the feast of Tabernacles, Zech. 14. 16. Further, 'Ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you [*to Jerusalem*]: for we have heard that God is with you', 8. 23.

● The **boundaries** of Israel during Solomon's reign were extended as far as they ever have been since God covenanted with Abraham, Gen. 15. 18-21.

However, the extent of the land promised to Abraham and his seed has never been fully realized, see 2 Chr. 9. 26. It is only at the second advent, with the establishment of the millennial kingdom of Messiah, that this unconditional promise to the patriarch will be fulfilled. The boundaries of Israel will be as promised to Abraham, under Christ's reign. Furthermore, the extent of Christ's jurisdiction will not be limited to Israel. Psalm 72 depicts a universal kingdom. Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome have all had extensive empires, but only Christ will be the world emperor in





GREATER THAN SOLOMON [3]

reality. The man of sin attempts to become the fifth world ruler of the times of the Gentiles, but fails due to the return of Christ, Dan. 8. 25. Daniel's prophecy is clear that there are four 'world' empires. The fifth is reserved for Messiah, 2. 45; 7. 13, 14.

Christ eclipses Solomon in the extent of the kingdom of Israel over which He is sovereign, and because His is a global and eternal kingdom. Such is the supremacy of our Lord and King. He is anointed 'with the oil of gladness above His fellows', Heb. 1. 9. 'Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen [Gentiles] for thine inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession', Ps. 2. 8.

(d) The Kingdom's conclusion – iniquity, delinquency

'As for thee . . . if ye turn away and forsake my statutes and my commandments . . . then will I pluck them up by the roots out of my land, which I have given them', 2 Chr. 7. 17, 19, 20. 'And this house . . . will I cast out of my sight. Why hath the Lord done thus unto this land, and unto this house?' vv. 20, 21.

The declension and division of the kingdom under Solomon's son, and

under his servant, were a direct consequence of Solomon's backsliding.

1 Kings chapter 3 verse 3 tells us, 'And Solomon **loved** the Lord'. Eight chapters later we read, 'But king Solomon **loved** many strange women', 11. 1. This was in spite of Moses' warning to any future king, 'neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away', Deut. 17. 17. Moses warned against the king who multiplied horses from Egypt, multiplied wives, and multiplied to himself silver and gold. This warning covered the methods, morality, and materialism associated with Egypt. Solomon became guilty of ignoring all three prohibitions. God kept His word, and Solomon and the kingdom suffered irreparably.

The warning to Solomon should be heeded by us. Where are our affections settled? We should beware of the methods, morality, and materialism of this present evil age!

In Ecclesiastes, Solomon states, 'I gave my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly', Eccles. 1. 17, also, 'I turned myself to behold wisdom and folly', 2. 12. A man who began well continued, but at the last finished badly.

What a contrast when the millennium has run its course! True, there will be a considerable rebellion at its conclusion from those born during its course who have not responded to the preaching of the gospel, but not because the King has given cause for discontentment, and subsequent uprisings, as did Solomon.

'Then cometh the end [*time*], when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father', 1 Cor. 15. 24. Further, 'Then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all', 15. 28. The millennium will run its course. Christ will surrender the kingdom to His Father. Then, when the 'eternal state' is ushered in, God, the triune God, will be all and in all. Sovereignty and supremacy will not be the portion of a particular member of the Godhead but of the triune God eternally.

(e) As to His sacrifice

Solomon provided 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep for sacrifice at the dedication of the temple, which appears to have run subsequently into the celebration of the feast of Tabernacles, 1 Kgs. 8. 62-66; 2 Chr. 7. 4-10. The brazen altar proved inadequate for the quantity of animal sacrifices. The Feast of Tabernacles symbolizes the millennium, and the added eighth day suggests the dawning of the eternal day. This, with the extent of the kingdom described in verse 65, certainly has a millennial atmosphere to it. A reminder that Solomon and his celebrations were but the foreshadowing of the glory, and joy of that future Jubilee, when 'a greater than Solomon' is on the throne. However impressive the great number of animals for sacrifice may be, God has no pleasure in them. At best, they point to the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ, 'who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God', Heb. 9. 14.

It is not quantity but quality that counts! God has received total satisfaction in the sacrifice of Christ. Propitiation has been made. The eye of God values the infinite worth of Christ's sacrifice and the shedding of His precious life's blood.

JOHN GRIFFITHS is in the assembly at Port Talbot, Wales.





MARKET STALL OUR

This article, like that in the February magazine, has been compiled from the writer's answers to questions posed by the editor. It is hoped that the material will give a different insight into such outreach activities and encourage others to see what can be done in reaching the lost with the message of the gospel.

By **MARK REYNOLDS** Hemsworth, England

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

Much of the gospel literature that we often see can be out-of-date, dog-eared, of little relevance, and, sadly, has obviously been in its place a long time. It suggests a lack of care, love, and seriousness for those who are outside of Christ and are one step away from a lost eternity. Also, the only people who would ever see this material are those who went to church where it was displayed. What about the thousands who don't go? How will they know?

After retiring and moving into fellowship in Hemsworth, I shared with the elders a burden I had for some form of market outreach. I had noticed when going around the local market that there was nothing for the Lord, and, as far as the assembly knew, there never had been.

I approached the management of the market with trepidation, but in faith, and explained that we were looking for a market stall so that we could give away free Christian literature to anyone who wanted it, and that we would be doing it on a non-denominational basis.

Points to consider:

- Some market managers could be more receptive to the idea if it is explained that the stall would not be representing any particular Christian denomination – we would just be representing the Christian faith!
- From a practical point of view, think about insurance. It may be that when you pay for your stall that part of the payment is an

insurance indemnity provided by the local authority. In other situations, you might need to inform the provider of your public liability insurance cover at your assembly building to ensure that you are covered for such activity.

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

From the point of view of fellow believers:

- Is the church ready to support the work prayerfully and seriously?

You don't start something unless it is an exercise of the Lord. We must all understand that what we do we will be accountable for!

- When would we do it? We need to be effective without overstretching ourselves because of other commitments, our age (most of us are retired and over sixty), or abilities. Whilst not all may be evangelists some can provide much needed prayerful support.

- Would the resources be there? This does not mean just financially but practically. Would there be sufficient helpers to stand with me.

- What literature would we use? It is important to carry fellow believers with you so that all are happy with the choice of literature. It also has to cover all age ranges, and the range of possible issues that you might have to handle. Once the material is agreed, it is important that at least one person is appraised of all that is on display so if a question were asked they could give an answer.

- If questions were asked to which one had no answers could the questioner be directed to an approved source?

Be prepared for, and discuss amongst those who may be able to assist in the work, the question that you will

not be able to answer. In every case, it is important to be able to direct any enquirer to the word of God.

- How would the literature be displayed?

The display is very important because it is the first impression that the passer-by gets of your stall. Take time over what you do – we actually did a 'dry run' in the hall. You might want to consider what posters you might use as part of your overall display

- What contact point for enquirers might you offer?

Whilst it may be desirable to have details of the church and its times of meeting, it may be helpful to consider setting up a web page which the enquirer can visit. In this way they do not have to 'come to church' but can find more about the gospel through the site.

With all enquirers, it is important not to give personal phone numbers or addresses out as contact points for further enquiries.

- Where would the material be stored, and, when the weather is bad, kept dry?

It can be helpful to inspect the site to see whether it may supply an answer to these and other issues. However, there are storage issues from day-to-day when the stall is not run. It is important to ensure that the literature does not become soiled, creased, or corrugated by poor storage.

As part of the storage, it might be useful for someone to catalogue materials and keep track of them for restocking.

What do you stock on your market and why?

Most of us do not possess twenty years of practical experience in evangelism through literature, or running children's work. However, we can all observe and, by experience, learn what works and what does not. Not all material is



TREACH 2



relevant to evangelism or outreach. The quantity does not matter, it is the quality!

Some that we have found useful include:

- Radio Bible Class ministries – material on life's issues;
- The Bible Society and their children's colouring books;
- Trinitarian Bible Society or SGM have helpful ranges, and access to foreign language material;
- Creation ministries and their children's range;
- Bibles;
- LivingWaters.com materials. They produce a lot of little cards and coins with the Ten Commandments on and they create interest. This material comes from the USA.

A2 Posters include:

- 'Light of the World' by Holman Hunt;
- 'The genealogy of Jesus' from SASRA;
- The 'Up Down Line', an old railway poster from the railway mission.

I am also working on 'The broad and narrow way' in order to remove the 'all seeing eye' to avoid giving the impression that the gospel has something to do with Freemasonry.

What type of question do you get from people?

Very often we meet people who want to tell us their opinion but who do not want to listen to others! However, it is important to expect certain issues:

- Why would God allow this to happen? Family tragedy can often lead to anger.
- Hasn't science disproved the Bible? Evolution is not regarded as theory but is assumed to be fact!
- What about disasters in the world and wars? Where is God in such situations?
- How can you know the Bible is true? Isn't it just made up stories?
- What church do you go to, or who do you represent? People

want to be able to label you!

Keeping abreast of things that are topical can also enable you to anticipate some of the questions that might be raised.

What are the benefits of such work?

I believe the benefits are significant. Romans chapter 10 verse 14 asks, 'how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?' The market stall provides a living 'wayside pulpit' where 'the whosoever' can come, converse, and carry away literature. What is more powerful than the written word of God in reaching sinners?

It is essential to keep uppermost in our thoughts that such activity glorifies the Lord, lifting Him up as the only Saviour. Equally, the local church will be blessed in doing what the Lord commanded, 'Go ye into all the world', the great commission, Mark 16. 15. Following on from that, this work stimulates prayer. This is true in a personal sense, but also in the church. It can focus our prayer meetings because we have specific contacts to pray for, as well as the general work of the stall.

The market stall, and gospel work in general, brings a sense of wonder to each heart. It is humbling to think that the Lord would 'use me, even me', as the hymn writer says!

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

It might be obvious but it is worth repeating. Always, but always, pray before you set up! You must never take anything for granted.

Here are some of the things we found useful to remember:

- Always try to be natural and pleasant – try to ensure that your manner does not detract from the message!
- Listen. It will help you determine

the issues. Trust the Holy Spirit to guide you in applying the word of God as the remedy or answer to the question.

- If possible, deal with a person on a one-to-one basis. Be gentle with your voice and avoid large groups all at once. Seek colleagues to help split up a group and tackle individuals.
- Exercise caution when dealing with a member of the opposite sex – making sure that there is somebody from the team watching you and praying for you is a help.
- Place your confidence in the word of God, and, if at all possible, open your Bible and let the enquirer see for themselves.
- It is always helpful to hold a conversation to the main point – present Christ and an acceptance of Christ. Some enquirers will want to take you away from the seriousness of their plight!
- Do not be drawn into argument.

Finally, one of the things you may find is that the market stall brings along believers who are not yet baptized, or who do not attend a church on a regular basis. It may be helpful to have material that will encourage a new believer, or untaught believer, to progress in their spiritual life, and to find a place where they can feed upon 'the sincere milk of the word', 1 Pet. 2. 2.

MARK REYNOLDS After over 20 years working for the Soldiers' and Airmens' Scripture Readers Association (SASRA), latterly at Catterick, he is now in fellowship in the assembly in Hemsworth, Yorkshire. He continues to remain active in various aspects of gospel outreach.



epistles

Ephesians chapter 1 unfolds the power of God. As we consider chapter 2 we are brought face-to-face with the grace of God. The chapter divides into two definite sections in which we find:

- what we are morally, vv. 1-10, and
- what we are ceremonially, vv. 11-22.

In the former section we are seen as being dead to God, as sinners, and, in the second, distant from God, for we are Gentiles.

The first ten verses set before us:

- our past, when we were enslaved by Satan, vv. 1-3;
- our present, where we are enlivened by God, vv. 4-6;
- our prospect, when we will be exhibited by God, v. 7;
- our provision, which we have as we are enriched by God, vv. 8-10.

In verse 1, we are dead! Evidently, Paul has Gentiles in mind, as he writes 'and you'. Death is seen in a threefold way in the word of God: natural death, to which we are all appointed; eternal death, seen as the second death, Rev. 20. 14, for all who reject the claims of God upon their lives; and spiritual and moral death, which is a man's separation from God during his lifetime. The cause of this is the 'sins' that mark us. Death is not the extinction of being, but separation from God.

In verse 2, we see not only what we were, i.e., dead, but what we were doing. We see dead men walking – men who walk 'according to the course of this world', that is, a system of life that leaves God out of the reckoning, and forgets that the individual must face eternity. The world system is seen to be controlled by 'the prince of the power of the

air', meaning men are devil-led. Not only so, but the devil is at work in the lives of men, as he works in 'the children of disobedience'. This would reveal that God has given opportunity to men to respond to His claims upon them, but they, being led by the adversary, move in disobedience to God.

Verse 3 points out where we were going: we were heading for destruction. The apostle brings the Jews into the equation, as he states 'among whom also we all had our conversation [manner of living] in times past'. Again, the moral failure, both physical and mental, is seen as the reason for the bringing of God's wrath upon men. We must appreciate that it is because of our nature that we are brought under judgement.

As we come to verses 4-6 we are indebted to the movements of God towards us. We are now brought to life in the Lord Jesus! These verses are very closely linked with the closing section of chapter 1 and they demonstrate the power of God towards us in salvation. In the former section we can say 'but man', now we must emphasize the expression 'but God'.

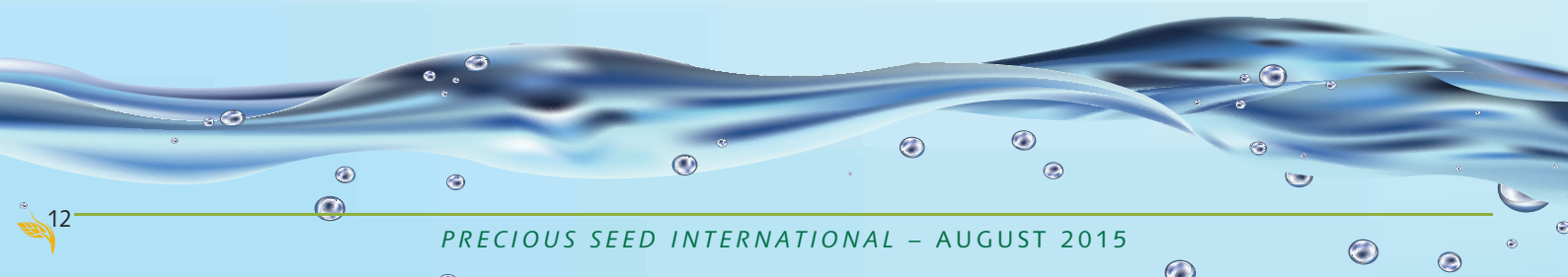
As we see the movements of God towards us, we must be thankful for the adjectives. We find that God is not only merciful but 'rich in mercy'. Nor does He merely love us, but it is a 'great love'. Mercy is a very individual thing, for God says, 'I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy', Rom. 9. 15. It is mercy that withholds the judgement men deserve, and it is the great love that moves His heart to bring, and offer, salvation to all men.

In verse 5 we have a God that dealt with us in the sad condition we were in, and recalls our past. But God has brought to life those who were once dead; it is these He has quickened, that is, caused to live. This is a life in relation to God, where both Jew and Gentile have been linked to the Lord Jesus. This is a work in the past, and, we are reminded, it is all of grace.

Paul now brings us to the present, and shows how we are seen raised and linked with the Lord in heavenly places. Does the verse imply that together we have been raised? It is with Christ that we have been made to sit in heavenly places! As far as God is concerned, we have been taken out of the sphere we were in before salvation, and we are now associated with the Lord in a new position altogether. All this is 'in Christ', bringing before us the place we occupy in the Lord. As worshippers in the book of Hebrews, we are linked to the holiest of all. Peter sees us as 'pilgrims and strangers', and brings us into the wilderness, 1 Pet. 2. 11. But Paul lifts us from the earth and sees us living in the heavenlies as those alive from the dead.

'The heavenlies' are a feature of this epistle that has a bearing on the movements of God during this present church age. In chapter 1 verse 20 it is the place of exaltation for the Lord Jesus. In our present passage, it denotes the separation of believers from this world. In chapter 3 verse 10, it is the scene of angelic observation, as they discern the manifold wisdom of God in the church. But it is also the place of Satanic opposition to all that is of God, 6. 12.

We find that God has great thoughts regarding the believers. Today, they





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PART THREE

The Grace of God

are despised and scorned, but, in verse 7, the day is coming when the world will have a glorious sight before them, as they see the saints displayed. The ages to come will unfold the wonder of this present age when God is moving in grace to save poor guilty sinners, as His kindness has been manifested in the Lord Jesus. The church, which is His body, is not for present testimony to the world; the local assembly has that responsibility. In a future day, the world will see what God has been doing through the gospel!

The following verses show the provision that was made for our salvation as we were enriched by God. All is of grace, teaching us that when we did not deserve salvation nevertheless God wrought in grace to bring us to it. The means of salvation is simply by faith. Now faith is not natural, for Romans chapter 10 verse 17 manifests that 'faith cometh', but thank God it cometh by 'hearing . . . the word of God'. Well might we be encouraged to preach the word, for this is the means by which God saves sinners. No form of entertainment, shows, or dancing will convict a sinner and bring salvation! Similarly, salvation cannot be earned; it comes as a free gift, and, once received, it cannot be challenged. Although much has been said and written regarding verse 8, according to the stand one would take doctrinally, the simplicity of the scripture is all that is required to fathom the wonder of the means of salvation the Lord has

for men. It is 'by grace' out of faith, and is 'the gift' from God. Well might the following verse proclaim that it is not of works!

Having established in verse 1 that we are dead, our salvation cannot be of works, for dead men cannot work! The second reason given for the fact that it is not of works is that no man 'should boast' before God regarding any salvation that he thinks he can attain to. The only boasting that will be known in heaven's courts is that which boasts in the finished work of the Lord Jesus to secure our salvation. Revelation chapter 5 sets forth the One who is worthy, and who will have all the adulation for the salvation into which we have been brought.

Before our conversion we were controlled by 'the prince of the power of the air', and he worked in our lives to produce disobedience to God. Now we discover that after conversion a new power is working within us as we have become His workmanship. The word 'workmanship', *poiema*, relates to something made, and that which is made is seen as a 'poem'. It is used of the original creation in Romans chapter 1 verse 20 where it is evident that man sees this handiwork of God, but refuses to believe the sight of

his eyes. Another 'poem' has now been written which is the salvation of sinners. This is further evidence to men of the transforming power of God that makes us new creatures in Christ Jesus, and, as Peter writes, it baffles men that we 'run not with them to the same excess of riot', 1 Pet. 4. 4.

This work of God, like everything else in Ephesians, is in Christ Jesus. Nothing is done without Christ, and all that we have is in Christ. This 'workmanship' is unto 'good works'. How different from that which marked our origin in verses 1-3 where all we sought to fulfil was the lust of the flesh and desires of the mind! These works that God would see in our lives were ordained prior to our salvation. The Lord has a pathway for believers to follow, and this has been prepared for us. Even as Christians we are not left to our own thoughts as to the character of life we ought to live, but God has predetermined all He desires us to fulfil, ultimately to glorify Him.

The purpose of God for this age was all designed before the world came into being. In chapter 1, we saw how we were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, and the purpose of this choice is explained in the verses following. When we look at verses 10-14, we can see again that God has foreordained that the Lord Jesus will take up universal government during His millennial reign. In association with that, there is the place that we as believers will share, and this was also in the purposes of God. Here, in chapter 2, we realize that the walk that God would have the saints manifest was also foreordained for us. In these things God has mapped out the destiny for all who are redeemed, and desires us to understand His purpose for us.

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William Trotter 1818-1865

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



This year is the 150th anniversary of the death of William Trotter at the young age of 47. In that relatively short life, it was said that Trotter had done the work of three. It was NEATBY who wrote of him, 'William Trotter . . . is more highly spoken of by every one that knew him than almost any other Plymouth brother; and his untimely death, while he was yet under fifty, was felt to be a heavy loss of the kind that Christians can least afford'.¹

Born in 1818, William Trotter was converted at twelve years of age through the preaching of William Dawson, a Methodist preacher famous in the north of England as 'Billy Dawson'. Soon after, at the age of fourteen, he began to preach and, later, was active in a revival at Halifax. This was one of the happiest periods of Trotter's career. From Halifax, at the age of nineteen, he became an ordained minister at York. At that time York was an industrial centre and it became a place where his work was greatly used of God, and many souls were saved. According to ENGLE, 'There he was surrounded by the eager young converts in York in 1841, when he received the shocking news that the conference had decided to transfer him south to work with a sickly congregation in London'.² According to PICKERING, 'it was while being so signally used that the Conference . . . conceived the idea that it would be a good thing to transfer him to London, to a chapel which had gone down in popularity, and whose members were dwindling'.³

Along with others, Trotter resigned from the Methodist ministry. PICKERING states his reasons as: 'He saw what a terrible thing it was for a man, or a committee of men, to come between his work and God'. However, according to GRASS, Trotter was expelled by the Methodist New Connections Conference because he was 'suspected of Quaker sympathies because of . . . [his] biblical literalism' and his opposition to the concept of a paid ministry. He adds, 'Trotter criticised the ecclesiasticism and clericalism of the Connections Conference, and challenged the denomination's accumulation of wealth used for purposes such as the provision of pensions for ministers'.⁴

It must be appreciated that Trotter was still a young man yet the strength of the convictions that he had formed was significant. He delivered two messages that were later published, and these demonstrate his personal devotedness and willingness to stand by his convictions. As GRASS has indicated, one of these messages was of particular importance. In it Trotter argued that men of God who entrust their welfare to financial institutions will be tempted to allow their ministry to be affected. His fear was that, 'To pass from being the Lord's freeman to being man's hireling is a step too easily taken'.⁵

Whether Trotter was pushed out, or whether he chose to leave, it was certainly a period known for the number who seceded from denominationalism to seek a more biblical form of gathering. Trotter's departure also saw a number of congregations leave Methodism at the same time.

ENGLE and GRASS estimate twenty-nine congregations, with a total of more than 4,300 members, withdrew their membership from the New Connections.

Whilst only twenty-three years old when he left the Methodist Conference, it was not until 1843 that he identified himself with the assemblies in West Yorkshire and their format of gathering. GRASS cites various distinctive features of assembly gathering as appealing to Trotter in

those formative times: the biblical simplicity of the breaking of bread and the Bible reading. There were others, such as George Brealey, William and Thomas Neatby in south Yorkshire, J. Hudson Taylor, and W. H. Dorman, who came out of Methodism and began to meet in a more scriptural way. During that period, Trotter also came into contact with J. N. Darby.

For a few years, Trotter edited the paper, *The Christian Brethren's Journal and Investigator*. It was described as recording the 'little companies of earnest men who began to meet in the early part of the nineteenth century in various parts of the country . . . the inception of this movement arising from a new illumination of the Personality of Jesus Christ, and of the essential unity of all who believe in Him, under whatever name they were differentiated'.⁶ He wrote with great vigour, particularly in regard to the troubles in 1848 when brethren split into 'Open' and 'Exclusive' fellowships, but he is best remembered for his works *Eight Lectures on Prophecy* and *Plain Papers on Prophetic Subjects*. One has said, 'when we look at the whole of Trotter's writings, perhaps he had found the secret of how to face off with an enemy and still keep his eye on Christ. His opponents so admired the man that their opposition sounded very hesitant'.⁷ NEATBY, writing of G. V. Wigram, said, 'Perhaps no leading member of the community left behind him a higher reputation for personal sanctity, unless it were William Trotter'.⁸

Endnotes

- 1 W. BLAIR NEATBY, *A History of the Plymouth Brethren*, Tentmaker Publications, 2001, pg. 140.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 HENRY PICKERING, *Chief Men Among The Brethren*, Pickering and Inglis, 1931.
- 4 TIM GRASS, *Gathered to His Name*, Paternoster, 2006, pp. 58-9.
- 5 KEN ENGLE, *William Trotter*, part of Online library of brethren writers, See: <http://www.plymouthbrethren.org/user/304>.
- 6 HENRY PICKERING, *Chief Men Among The Brethren*, Pickering and Inglis, 1931.
- 7 KEN ENGLE, part of Online library of brethren writers, See: <http://www.plymouthbrethren.org/user/304>.
- 8 W. BLAIR NEATBY, *A History of the Plymouth Brethren*, Tentmaker Publications, 2001, pg. 251.

THE EPISTLE TO PHILEMON

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1

Philemon is one of only four letters written by the apostle Paul to individuals rather than to companies of the Lord's people. It is, in effect, a letter of commendation for Onesimus to Philemon, and, ultimately, to the assembly at Colossae where Philemon met.

The background of the letter is quite simple. Onesimus was Philemon's slave. However, seemingly unhappy with his situation, Onesimus had stolen from Philemon as a means of funding his escape from slavery and had absconded. It may be a matter of conjecture but it could be that Onesimus wanted to escape from a house where the gospel was known and lived, and, to all intents, preached. However, in escaping from Philemon, God brought the unwilling slave into the company of the apostle Paul and Onesimus was gloriously saved.

What this letter helps us to appreciate is that, as a consequence of Onesimus' salvation, there are issues that need to be addressed. We rejoice in the truth of 2 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 17, 'Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold all things are become new'. But let us not step beyond the bounds of scripture. Onesimus was, indeed, a new creature, a new creation. He had been born again. He had passed out of darkness into God's marvellous light. He had been delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of the Son of God's love. He stood in a new relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ. He stood in a new relationship to Paul and to Philemon – he was, as verse 16 says, now **'a brother beloved'**. However, in all the euphoria of this man's salvation, Paul was cognisant of the fact that certain issues from Onesimus' past life now needed to be resolved. He needed to make his peace and accomplish restitution with Philemon. It is this that forms the background to this little epistle.

We can divide the epistle into the following sections: The reader and writer, vv. 1-3; this forms the introduction to the letter.

The remembrance of Philemon and his house, vv. 4-7; the prayerful interest of the apostle.

The reasons for the letter, vv. 8-22; this section forms the bulk of the letter.

The reminders of the work and the workers, vv. 23-25; the salutations and closure of the letter.

The reader and the writer, vv. 1-3

There can be no confusion here. In the first verse, Paul writes, **'Paul . . . unto Philemon'**. Paul is the writer and Philemon is the reader, or recipient of the letter. However, if we stopped there we would miss something of supreme importance in this letter. In a sense, in the age of email, text message, Twitter and Facebook, there is a danger that we lose some of the details.

When letter writing was the standard means of long distance communication we were taught about styles of writing and how to correctly address letters. A very formal letter, perhaps an application for a job, would be addressed with 'Dear Sir', and close with 'Yours faithfully'. You would use this form because, usually, you did not know the person addressed and you wished to show them some degree of respect. Someone you knew a little better, an acquaintance whom you felt confident enough to address by name, you might write to with 'Dear Mr Smith', or, even, 'Dear John', if you knew him well. You would close the letter 'Yours sincerely'. However, if you were writing to your wife or husband, all such formality would be discarded and you could write expressing your affection and love, 'My darling', etc.

As we read through these opening verses, there is a genuine affection conveyed by the apostle for his reader, Philemon, and his wife and family. **'Paul . . . unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer, and to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellowsoldier, and to the church in thy house', Philem 1-2.**

In fact, that love is conveyed throughout this Epistle:

'dearly beloved', v. 1;

'Beloved', v. 2; [It is to be noted that the RV and JND replace 'beloved' with 'sister']¹

'thy love and faith . . . toward all saints', v. 5;

'For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, v. 7;

'Yet for love's sake I rather beseech thee', v. 9;

'a brother beloved', v. 16.

Yet it is remarkable to think that this bond of affection existed between **'Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ', v. 1,** and Philemon. They were on such different social planes. Philemon, the wealthy slave owner, in whose home the assembly met, is united in service with someone who has the stigma of being regarded as an enemy of the state. However, this is the wonder of Christianity. It can bring together people from different social backgrounds and unite them in love, as they labour together in the work of the Lord. In essence, this thought is fundamental to this Epistle, as we shall see.

Who are **'our beloved Apphia, and Archippus', v. 2?** Many commentators see them as Philemon's wife and son.² They are included as those that must have shared in the offence and injury caused by Onesimus' departure. This might suggest that Onesimus was a household slave, rather than someone employed in whatever business Philemon engaged in.

'And to the church in thy house', v. 2. It is interesting that what is essentially a personal letter should include this reference to the local church.

However, what affects individual Christians can often have a significant impact upon the local church to which they belong. Philemon's experience was clearly known amongst his fellow believers. Apart from the implications for Philemon of Onesimus' departure, it may well be that the testimony of the church was also affected. If slaves absconded from Philemon, what sort of master was he? Equally, what sort of Christian was he?

'Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ', v. 3. As this is so often the greeting that Paul uses in his letters it would be easy to pass over it. However, it is particularly appropriate as a greeting here. Reminding Philemon of the grace that God has shown him, and of the grace that God continues to minister, is timely. Philemon will need to find significant grace to deal with the matter of his erstwhile slave. Be assured, writes Paul, resources are available! As he opens this letter with grace, so he closes it, v. 25.

Similarly, there is a desire to bring peace. Onesimus needs to make his peace with Philemon. What a reminder that we have peace with God,³ and, in that chapter that addresses the discord between two sisters, we can experience the peace of God!⁴

The remembrance of Philemon and his house, vv. 4-7

In offering an analysis of any book it is easy to make artificial divisions. This might be the case here. The expression of Paul's affection for Philemon, seen in verses 1-3, is genuine, and is seen in his prayer life. Paul loved them, so he prayed for them. Equally, it might improve our love for all saints if we determined to pray for them as Paul did.

Notice, he prayed:

Appreciatively, **'I thank my God', v. 4.**

How good to think of something about a fellow saint for which we can give thanks to God! We are often too quick to find things that are wrong or irritating, but this is not the case here. Note, too, that Paul has something specific to give thanks for: **'the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother', v. 7.**

It is important to appreciate the *balance* that should characterize our prayer life. So often we approach God with an extensive list of issues to be resolved. How often do we give thanks?⁵ The scope of that thanksgiving is indicated by Paul in 1 Timothy chapter 2 verses 1-3, together with the fact that such an attitude is 'good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour', v. 3. The personal relationship that Paul had with his God, **'my God'**, lies at the basis of that statement to Timothy. 'Paul knew God in personal experience . . . God was a vital reality to him and instinctively Paul turned to Him in joy as well as in sorrow', HIEBERT.⁶

Personally, **'making mention of thee', v. 4.**

It is important to pray for people personally. It

is always encouraging when, in a weekly prayer meeting, a believer brings the name of a particular individual. So often it indicates that this is not just a passing acquaintance but someone that they are getting to know.

Regularly, **'always in my prayers', v. 4.**

How important to keep people in our prayers!⁷ It helps us to focus on their circumstances at the time. It might encourage us to get in touch with them again and renew fellowship so that we can continue to pray.

It is interesting that this should be one of the exhortations of Paul to the church at Colossae.⁸ Paul is consistent. He does not ask of others what he does not practise himself.

Specifically, or intelligently, **'hearing of thy love and faith', v. 5.**

It is one thing to pray for someone regularly but it is quite another to have something specific to pray about. We might pray for a brother but how much better, in days of such fast communication, to have something specific to pray about – his health, his wife's health, some meetings in which he might be involved, his family who are passing through difficulties, etc.

We should note the tense of the word **'hearing'**. WUEST translates as 'hearing constantly of your love and faith'.⁹ The fact that these significant characteristics of Philemon were mentioned on a regular basis says something about Philemon as well as indicating a topic of conversation – believers in the first century discussed the positive features of fellow believers, rather than the negative!

What is also instructive is that Philemon's love and faith was **'toward all saints'**. He did not display a partisan spirit, having some that he favoured more than others. As he had love and faith 'toward the Lord Jesus', so those features produced love for all the saints!

Developmentally, **'that the communication of thy faith may become effectual', v. 6.**

Paul continued to pray for spiritual development in the saints. He has their spiritual health and welfare in mind. It is a significant step forward. We can become occupied with the temporal, the physical, and the material, when our focus should be upon the spiritual. How important that saints progress in their spiritual lives. To stand still is, in effect, to regress. 'Paul is devoutly thankful for the blessings bestowed upon Philemon, but he cannot rest satisfied with them without asking for more', HIEBERT.¹⁰

Verse 6 teaches us that spiritual progress in the individual is to be shared.¹¹ There should be a subsequent evidence of growth that will be seen in effective witness amongst the lost and work amongst the saints. To some extent this was happening, **'the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee,**

brother', v. 7. WUEST's translation clarifies the meaning, 'because the hearts of the saints have been cheered and revived through you'.¹² There was a need for that refreshing to develop. It is a word that means 'to cause or permit one to cease from any labour or movement so as to recover strength. It implies previous toil and care'.¹³ In the toil and burden of the Christian life, when the way gets tough, it is important to have men like Philemon who are able to bring cheer, and revive the flagging spirits of fellow believers.¹⁴ It is clear from verse 20 that Paul also needed such refreshment.

There is a practical lesson in Paul's situation too. He was a prisoner in bonds for the gospel, chained to a Roman guard, languishing in Rome. Similarly, there are often saints who have run well. Their spiritual life has been a productive one. They have been engaged in service for the Lord over years. Now, because of weakness brought on by illness, or in old age, they feel they can do nothing. The frailty of the body has limited the scope of their service. Now it takes all their effort to get to a few meetings. Think of **'Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ', v. 9.** He is one who has borne such trials and persecutions for the Saviour and, to all intents, his ministry is now, at best, curtailed, and, at worst, over completely. May we, like Paul, become more involved in this most vital of ministries given here – prayer! The assembly may not know but their work for the Lord will prosper the more as a consequence of the continual prayers of the saints.

Verses 4 to 7 provide a suitable context for what Paul is about to deal with. As HIEBERT notes, 'the paragraph begins and ends upon the note of grateful thanksgiving for the nobleness of Philemon's character'.¹⁵ That character is about to be put to the test! The love towards all the saints would be needed now that the bearer of this letter, Onesimus, stood before him.

The reasons for the letter, vv. 8-22

The apostle's approach – **'I beseech thee', vv. 9-10.**

I think it is deeply significant that the apostle does not mention his status, or apostleship, in this epistle. This is what SCROGGIE calls 'the tact of the apostle'.¹⁶ When the truth is being assailed the apostle will be as stout as any defender of its cause. Here, however, how lovely to see the grace of the man when seeking to deal with matters on a personal level.

As he indicates in verse 8, **'I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee'**. He could have pressed Philemon to take back Onesimus. The word **'enjoin'** meaning 'to put upon one as a duty'.¹⁷ He could have exerted his apostolic authority, but he doesn't want Philemon to accept Onesimus back grudgingly. Rather, he wants Philemon to realize that taking Onesimus back is **'convenient'**, the right thing to do, in harmony with his confession as a believer.

But what we also see here is one of the spiritual

characteristics of the apostle. He did not have a high opinion of himself or his position. There is no pretence. He was prepared to **'beseech'**, to implore, to plead.¹⁸

On what basis does the apostle make his appeal?

(i) **'for love's sake', v. 9.** This is *agape* love, love that sacrifices for the good and blessing of others. There is a special bond between Paul and Philemon and some commentators suggest that this is because Philemon had been saved as a consequence of the ministry of the apostle; the idea is suggestive. As Paul had come alongside Philemon to speak to him of his soul's need of salvation, so he now comes alongside Philemon to appeal for Onesimus.

(ii) **'being such an one as Paul the aged'**. Age doesn't always command respect but it should when applied to the apostle here.¹⁹ Although most estimate Paul's age to be somewhere between fifty-five and sixty-five, this was still a good age for men in that day.

(iii) **'now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ'**. There is an added appeal in these last two statements. Paul is an aged man and a suffering man. He appeals on the basis of the bond of affection between these two men, and he appeals to the sympathy and spiritual concern that Philemon should manifest towards the aged apostle in his extremity.

The apostle's relationship – **'my son . . . whom I have begotten in my bonds', v. 10.**

The English doesn't quite indicate the structure of the verse. The name of Onesimus comes at the end. What this structure does is highlight the different perspectives on the man who now stood before Philemon.²⁰

It would be easy for Philemon to see Onesimus for what he had been – a thief, a runaway, a worthless slave. Paul describes him in a wholly different way. He is my spiritual son, one born again during the time of Paul's imprisonment. Grace has lifted him from the status of a runaway slave in the prison in Rome to the realm of a child of God. Although Onesimus remained a slave, and his earthly prospects had not changed significantly, his prospects of heaven most certainly had! As a spiritual son he occupies a privileged position, alongside such men as Timothy, and Titus. There is significance to the position of son in a spiritual context. It is not merely that he is brought into the family of God, but that he has been brought into a special relationship with Paul.

But it is important to notice too what grace has done from Paul's perspective. Think of that once proud Jew, that Pharisee of the Pharisees, one of the elite amongst Jewish society. He is now prepared to call this slave, one of the dregs of Roman society, his son. It is James who says, 'My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory,

with respect of persons', Jas. 2. 1. What a challenge to all our hearts as to how we view our brethren and sisters in Christ!

There is also something remarkable in this verse. **'I have begotten in my bonds'** tells us of a most unlikely event. The incarceration of the apostle might be seen as an insurmountable obstacle to him continuing a work for God. Yet, in the prison, Onesimus was saved. As SCROGGIE puts it, 'If we believe that our lives are plans of God, we shall look differently at our troubles, and more often turn them into triumphs'.²¹

The apostle's humour – **'but now profitable to thee and to me', v. 11.**

Perhaps it is difficult for us to see the play on words here, but it is worth noting how the relationship described in verse 10 has affected the service of Onesimus. Paul says, he is **'profitable . . . to me', v. 11.** In that sense, Paul would have retained Onesimus as one who **'ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel', v. 13.** Although Onesimus means 'profitable', he had hardly lived up to his name in the past. Now, Paul confirms the change that has been brought about in the life of this man. Such is the grace of God – it has transformed the unprofitable to the profitable; it has changed a sinner into a saint.

We might pause here to ponder what has been wrought in the life of Onesimus and what Christ-like features are now evident in his life. We can see:

- The faithfulness of his ministry – **'profitable to thee and to me', v. 11.**
- The unselfishness of his service – **'whom I have sent again', v. 12.**
- The humility of his service – **'ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel', v. 13.**

There is a pattern for us all. What Christ-like features are there in my life? Equally, I doubt that Onesimus' service was what we might call glamorous. In a prison in Rome, or even in Paul's hired house, it would not be auspicious, yet he fulfils it faithfully and humbly.

Notice, too, how Paul adds to the commendation of Onesimus: **'Whom I have sent again . . . that is, mine own bowels', v. 12.** Onesimus was a profitable servant of Paul. He was one who had ministered to the apostle, even in the prison in Rome. But Paul can also say what deep affection he has for this man. One commentator describes Paul's sending of Onesimus back to Philemon as, in effect, tearing his own heart out of his chest.²² To confirm this high praise, Paul says in **verse 16, 'Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me'.**

Endnotes:

- 1 J. B. LIGHTFOOT states that 'the preponderance of ancient authority is very decidedly in favour of sister'.
- 2 MATTHEW HENRY, HIEBERT, JAMIESON, FAUSSET, and BROWN'S Commentary, RIENECKER and ROGERS, SCROGGIE, WALVOORD AND ZUCK all suggest this idea. SCROGGIE'S

comment here is worth mentioning: 'The degraded classes of the Greek world were slaves and women. This epistle touches both and shows us Christianity in the very act of elevating both. So Paul sets the wife by the side of her husband, yoked in all exercise of noble end'.

- 3 Rom. 5. 1.
- 4 Phil. 4. 7.
- 5 That this was a regular feature of Paul's prayer life can be seen from: Rom. 1. 8; 1 Cor. 1. 4; Eph. 1. 16; Phil. 1. 3; Col. 1. 3; 1 Thess. 1. 2; 2 Thess. 1. 3; 2 Tim. 1. 3.
- 6 D. EDMOND HIEBERT, *Titus and Philemon*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1957, pg. 97.
- 7 MATTHEW HENRY wrote: 'usually, not once or twice only, but frequently. So must we remember Christian friends much and often'.
- 8 Col. 4. 2-4.
- 9 KENNETH S. WUEST, *The New Testament, an Expanded Translation*, William B. Erdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1961.
- 10 D. EDMOND HIEBERT, *Titus and Philemon*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1957, pg. 102.
- 11 'The relationship of the second clause to the first [in this verse] is difficult to translate. The NIV suggests that the second is a *result* of the first: **so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ.** Philemon's sharing of his faith would then lead to a full understanding of his spiritual blessings. However, the NIV words "so that you will have" are simply the one Greek word *en* ("in"). This hints that the first clause results from the second. As Philemon would gain a fuller understanding of his blessings in Christ he would become more active in sharing Him. He would share Christ *in* (i.e., in the sphere of) his full understanding of his blessings. The more a believer comes to comprehend all he has in Christ the more eager he is to share Him with others', EDWIN C. DIEBLER, *Philemon*, in Walvoord and Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Dallas Theological Seminary [electronic edition]
- 12 KENNETH S. WUEST, *The New Testament, an Expanded Translation*, William B. Erdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1961.
- 13 W. E. VINE, M. F. UNGER, and W. WHITE, JR., *Vol. 2: Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, Nelson, 1996.
- 14 See also 1 Cor. 16. 18; 2 Cor. 7. 13.
- 15 D. EDMOND HIEBERT, *Titus and Philemon*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1957, pg. 105.
- 16 W. GRAHAM SCROGGIE, *Studies in Philemon*, Kregel, 1977.
- 17 W. E. VINE, M. F. UNGER, and W. WHITE, JR., *Vol. 2: Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, Nelson, 1996.
- 18 'Authority is the weapon of a weak man . . . or of a selfish one . . . Love is the weapon of a strong man who can cast aside the trappings of superiority', MACLAREN, quoted by: W. GRAHAM SCROGGIE, *Studies in Philemon*, Kregel, 1977, pg. 41.
- 19 There is some disagreement between translators as to the word used here. Some take it to be 'aged', as KJV, NKJV, RV, JND, YLT, ALFORD, ESV, NIV, and ROBERTSON, others to be 'ambassador', so WUEST, RV margin, LIGHTFOOT, VINCENT. In itself either meaning gives excellent sense. *The Cambridge Greek Testament* comments: '(1) In favour of "Paul (the) old man" . . . is the important fact that, with the possible exception of Theophylact in the eleventh century . . . all writers accepted this rendering . . . If this be right the sentence [should read] . . . "I appeal to you, and remember that I am old and also a prisoner"; or possibly "I appeal, for it is not so fitting for an old man and a prisoner to command." (2) But it must be confessed that "ambassador" makes a far stronger sentence . . . He is an ambassador (probably "Christ's ambassador"), even though in bonds . . . and yet he does not use his power'.
- 20 'In the *Greek*, the name "Onesimus" is skillfully put last, he puts first a favourable description of him before he mentions the name that had fallen into so bad repute with Philemon', JAMIESON, FAUSSET, and BROWN'S Commentary.
- 21 W. GRAHAM SCROGGIE, *Studies in Philemon*, Kregel, 1977, pg. 50.
- 22 D. EDMOND HIEBERT, *Titus and Philemon*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1957, pg. 112.



A WORD FOR TODAY

zogreo (capture alive)

Zoè, os,e (life)

zone, es,e (belt, girdle)

One of the distinctive features of the Greek New Testament is that words which are used to describe ordinary mundane things are often elevated by the Holy Spirit to express ethical and spiritual truth. The Greek word **zoè** is one such word. In classical Greek, **zoè** was used to describe physical life, i.e., with the activity of breathing, whether it related to men or animals, hence our English word zoology.¹ This was contrasted with the synonymous word *bios*, which although also meaning life, suggested a more ethical and qualitative aspect of life. But in the New Testament, this pattern is to some extent reversed, and **zoè** is frequently, but not exclusively, used to emphasize spiritual life, and, ultimately, eternal life when it is combined with the Greek word *aiónion*.² As R. C. TRENCH succinctly put it over 150 years ago, 'But, while **zoè** is life *intensive*, *bios* is life *extensive*'.³

In the Septuagint (LXX), **zoè** and the related verb **zen** are used regularly to translate the Hebrew word *hayah*, which occurs over 200 times in the Old Testament. This Hebrew word had a variety of meanings, but, significantly, it was used to describe the benefits of the life that Israel could live in the Promised Land, provided they complied with God's law, Deut. 8. 1. One Hebrew translation of this text renders it as, 'that you might thrive and increase'. Similar expressions are found in Psalm 119 verses 17, 77, and 93 as well as in Proverbs chapter 12 verse 28 where the emphasis is not simply on life itself, but on the good life that equates to a life of righteousness. This notion of a righteous life is further developed in the LXX of Daniel chapter 12 verse 2, where the noun **zoèn** is combined with the adjective *aiónion* to show that the resurrection of the righteous is to eternal life. All the literature of the Intertestamental period continues to reflect the combined use of **zoèn** and *aiónion* to highlight eternal life, so it is unsurprising, therefore, that when we turn to the New Testament this becomes a leading theme of our Lord's ministry, highlighted principally in John's Gospel narrative and his First Epistle.

The word **zoè** occurs over 130 times in the Greek New Testament. In a limited number of occasions **zoè** refers to ordinary physical life, whose antithesis is death, Rom. 8. 38. In Acts chapter

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17 verse 25 when Paul preaches on Areopagus, he refers to God as the giver of all physical life. He also refers to physical life in Philippians chapter 1 verse 20, where he seeks to bring honour to Christ or, literally, for Christ to be seen by others in his life, either by the way that he lived that life, or by the way that he might give up that life. Physical life to Paul meant Christ, Phil. 1. 21! Other texts use **zoè** to refer to life as the period of a man's life, Rom. 7. 1, and what it means to be alive physically as contrasted with those who are dead, 1 Thess. 4. 15. Paul exhorts us to present our lives to God as a living sacrifice, Rom. 12. 1, and that even the necessities of life can be met for those who preach the gospel on a full-time basis by acquiring a living from that exercise, 1 Cor. 9. 14. However, **zoè** in the New Testament mainly refers to spiritual life, especially as it is linked with Christ Himself. John makes much of this link in terms of who Christ is and what He does. He delights in telling us that 'In him was life (**zoè**) and that life (**zoè**) was the light of men', John 1. 4, cp. Ps. 36. 9, which is a parallel text to John chapter 5 verse 26, and confirms that 'both 1. 4 and 5. 26 insist that the Word/Son shares in the self-existing life of God'.⁴ Moreover, since Christ is the 'bread of life', John 6. 35, 48, and gives life to the world, John 6. 33, even His words are life, John 6. 63, 68, and eternal life is only obtainable in Him, 1 John 5. 11, who is revealed to be (the) life (**zoè**), John 14. 6. Peter later asserts that Christ is the very 'author of life', Acts 3. 15. F. F. BRUCE suggests that in Aramaic this would be the same as **tòn árchegòn tēs soteriase** in Hebrews chapter 2 verse 10, and that both texts denote Christ as the source of life and salvation.⁵ These New Testament texts point unequivocally to the fact that faith in Christ in His sacrificial death is essential to the obtaining of eternal life, cp. John 3. 16. DAVID HILL makes clear that 'eternal life' is not just something added on at death, but

is organically related to the actual life lived. 'One man's act of righteousness led to acquittal and life . . . and that "life" is both the immediate and ultimate result of that state of things into which the Christian enters when he is declared righteous'.⁶ Paul's perspective is even more dynamic when he states in Romans chapter 5 verse 10 that salvation will ultimately be effected in ('the power of' JND) His (Christ's) (risen) life. Some other passages where the word **zoè** is used in various spiritual contexts are illustrated in the table below.

Throughout the New Testament when the expression 'eternal life' is used in John or Paul's writings, both reveal their dependency on the Jewish idea of the age that is to come in contrast to the present evil age, e.g., Gal. 1. 4. May our daily lives be so regulated by that future age that we 'take hold of the life that really is life', 1 Tim. 6. 19 NRSV.

For further reading/study

Introductory

JAMES STRONG, *The New Strong's Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Holy Bible*, 'Life', pg. 124.

Advanced

C. K. BARRETT, *The Gospel According to St John - An Introduction with Commentary and notes on the Greek Text*, 'Life', pp. 157-158, 214-215, 503-504.

Endnotes

- 1 Aristotle made a distinction between human life and animal life by stating that, 'Life is defined in the case of animals by the capacity for sensation, in the case of man, by the capacity for sensation and thought' (1170a).
- 2 'The adjective *aiónios* first appears in Plato, and from that period onwards it is used to mean 'enduring for an indefinitely long period, perpetual, eternal', DAVID HILL, *Greek Words and Hebrew Meanings - Studies in the Semantics of Soteriological Terms*, pg. 172.
- 3 *Synonyms of the New Testament*, pg. 86.
- 4 D. A. CARSON, *The Gospel According to John*, p. 118.
- 5 *The Acts of the Apostles - The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*, pg. 109.
- 6 DAVID HILL, *Greek Words and Hebrew Meanings - Studies in the Semantics of Soteriological Terms*, pg. 191.

Text	Context
Mark 9. 43-47	Eternal life is equated with entry into the kingdom of God
Romans 6. 4	Our death with Christ means that we now walk in newness of life, aptly illustrated by baptism
Romans 7. 7-12 Romans 8. 1-3 Galatians 3. 21	The law was intended to give life, but was weakened by the flesh
Galatians 6. 8	Eternal life is the fruit of a life controlled by the Holy Spirit
Colossians 3. 1-4	Our present raised state is only possible through the life of Christ Himself
2 Timothy 1. 10	Eternal life and the abolition of death has been manifested in the decisive work of Christ our Saviour



THE 'FINEST HOUR' TRUTH



NEHEMIAH

The story of Nehemiah is a thrilling example of what can be achieved for God in the most adverse of circumstances. One man and a demoralized remnant of Jews in the city of Jerusalem faced with what appeared to be an impossible task. The difficulties that confronted them would have suggested that his call for action, 2. 17, was ill-advised and, therefore, the desired goal could never be reached. Yet, remarkably, the task was accomplished; therefore, it would be difficult to disagree with those who believe that his 'finest hour' is encapsulated in the brief and simple statement in his memoirs, 'So the wall was finished in the twenty and fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty and two days', 6. 15. He achieved in fifty-two days what most of us would have found hard, if not impossible, to accomplish in fifty-two weeks!

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'finest hour', i.e., the dedication of the wall on its completion, 12. 27-47. Once again, it would be hard to disagree with their choice. For Nehemiah, this event was the climax of the entire work of restoration in Jerusalem, and it would have left an indelible mark upon those who were present. The spiritual atmosphere that was generated lifted them to a level of worship that they had not experienced in exile. So many features that should characterize a vibrant worshipping community were seen on this landmark occasion. Glory to God, gathering together, gladness, gathering in purity, giving thanks, godly order, great sacrifices, great joy, generous giving, and God's word read and obeyed combined to produce a scene with limitless potential for God. Indeed, 'the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off', v. 43. Not everyone would have been present on that day, but none, including the enemies of Jerusalem, were left in any doubt as to what a worshipping community sounded like. It is a challenge to believers in local assemblies today as to whether the neighbourhood in which they meet is aware that a worshipping community is among them.

in reaching the halfway point in a work for the Lord. ALAN REDPATH writes, 'The halfway stage is the toughest of all. When the initial enthusiasm for some project has departed . . . you are more and more conscious, not so much of what has already been done, but of what is yet to be done; you are increasingly impressed with the magnitude of the unfinished task. Just then it is the toughest bit of all'. Certainly, it got tougher for Nehemiah's workforce in Jerusalem. Their enemies joined forces and increased the pressure by surrounding them and threatening them with violence, vv. 7-11; therefore, they were in great danger. However, they had learned from their leader, and they joined him in prayer. In times of adversity and uncertainty, the Lord's people can gain great strength through praying together. Once they had expressed their faith in God through prayer, they put their faith into practice and 'set a watch against them day and night', v. 9. Watchfulness and prayer are two vital ingredients for believers in the battle against their adversaries.

It is important to begin a work for the Lord, but it is also vital to finish it. The life of the believer can all too easily be marked by impatience; therefore, it becomes littered with unfinished work for the Lord. It was Nehemiah's vision of the greatness of God and His work that motivated him to pursue his task of rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem with patience, perseverance, and determination. It prevented him from being distracted by the devious actions of his enemies to draw him away from the task. His response to them displayed a confidence that we need to cultivate today if we are to achieve great things for God: 'The God of heaven, he will prosper us . . . I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down', 2. 20; 6. 3.

These two occasions, along with many others, highlight the difficulty in selecting Nehemiah's 'finest hour'. However, I suggest that this accolade should be reserved for a critical point during his time in Jerusalem that could have marked the end of the work if he had not acted decisively to deal with it. This critical point was reached when the wall was half-built, 4. 6. This was, indeed, a remarkable feat in such a short period of time. It was a testimony to the outstanding leadership of Nehemiah and to the fact that the people's hearts were in the work. However, there is a danger

However, it was inevitable that at some stage discouragement would begin to set in. It was to be expected that the surrounding enemies would try every tactic to discourage the builders; however, it was particularly disappointing that discouragement also came from *within*. It was the men of Judah who approached Nehemiah with a pessimistic report: 'The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish', v. 10. This was, no doubt, a statement of fact; however, it was their conclusion that was unhelpful and untrue: 'we are not able to build the wall', v. 10. Conditions are never too difficult to 'build' for the Lord. Discouragement often comes from the most unlikely

Some will, no doubt, point to the end of the book to identify Nehemiah's



NEHEMIAH

of sources, including those who ought to know better. Judah was the largest, most powerful and kingly tribe, Gen. 49. 8-12. Of all the workers, the men of Judah ought to have had a vision that lifted them above the adverse circumstances and enabled them to focus on the glorious possibilities. However, later events revealed that they were more interested in forging links with their enemies than in remaining distinct from them, Neh. 6. 18. They were even guilty of profaning the Sabbath day, 13. 15-18.

The great need of the hour, therefore, was for wise and decisive leadership, and Nehemiah was not found wanting. Indeed, this was arguably his 'finest hour'. He was not insensitive to people's feelings, but he had no intention of allowing them to capitulate at every sign of pressure. He introduced a fresh approach to the work that arrested the decline in morale and rekindled the builders' enthusiasm. Sometimes, local assemblies can become bound by tradition and thereby lack flexibility in the way in which they respond to developing needs; nevertheless, changes must always be prayerfully considered in the light of the word of God. Although events moved swiftly, there was no indication of panic decisions; every move Nehemiah made was carefully considered. Clearly, there had to be a temporary cessation of the work to allow the new defence strategies to be put in place and to preserve what had already been achieved. Spiritual leaders in local assemblies need to be sensitive to the times when it is necessary for them to take similar action, thereby ensuring that current activities do not become ends in themselves and new opportunities are not missed.

First, Nehemiah records, 'Therefore set I in the lower places behind the wall, and on the higher places, I even set the people', 4. 13. Although it is not easy to understand the Hebrew of the first part of this verse, the main thought conveyed appears to be that he placed guards at the most exposed and vulnerable parts of the wall.

Second, he 'set the people after their families with their swords, their spears and their bows', v. 13. They required weapons to defend the city but they also needed an incentive to engage in warfare against their adversaries. Nehemiah gave them both! With their families and houses nearby they had every reason to fight for the preservation of the things that were most precious to them. Indeed, the unity of the family was the basis for the wider unity of Jerusalem. It is important for the Lord's people to remember that the quality of a local assembly will rarely rise above the spirituality of its families.

Third, Nehemiah addressed the crisis of faith and genuine fear that gripped the people's hearts at this time. It is clear that he understood the effect that the constant rumours and gossip around the city were having on the workforce, v. 12. He did not share their fear and therefore he was morally qualified to say to them, 'Be not ye afraid of them', v. 14. This might have appeared to be a glib thing to say, but he went on to reveal that he had the antidote to their fear: 'remember the Lord, which is great and terrible [dreadful, fearful]', v. 14. When the people of God lose sight of His power and majesty they become afraid of men; a reverential awe of Him will garrison them against fear.

Fourth, Nehemiah commanded them to 'fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses', v. 14. It is so easy for the Lord's servants to become blinkered and to focus only on the short-term goals of what they are involved in. Nehemiah widened the people's

vision. He opened their eyes to look beyond their immediate circumstances and to appreciate that they were defending something that was vital for the future welfare of their sons and daughters. He teaches us that the next generation is always important as far as the preservation of truth is concerned.

The resolve of the people could have been dealt a fatal blow at the mid-point of the building of the wall, but Nehemiah's leadership guaranteed that this did not happen. Far from them coming out of the encounter bruised and defeated, the adversaries themselves were demoralized, v. 15. A 'new-look' workforce returned to the wall with renewed confidence, vigour and enthusiasm. He adapted the way in which the people worked in order to combat the changed tactics of their enemies, vv. 16-20. Half of them worked, while the other half kept watch. He valued all the workers and ensured that they were suitably prepared for both working and defending. He was also aware of the dangers of a growing work; therefore, the blowing of the trumpet ensured that they did not become isolated and lose the sense of unity. However, he knew that it was not structures alone that were going to win the day. At the very heart of his confidence was the knowledge that God was for them: 'our God shall fight for us'. It was a cry that at the same time encouraged the workers and struck fear into the heart of the enemy. Such leadership called for commitment and sacrifice from the workers, and they rose to the challenge, vv. 20-23. Nehemiah led the way and they followed, v. 23. Inspirational leadership and committed workers remain key aspects of any fruitful work for the Lord. Let us rise to the challenge!

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Though He called me to be a preacher and teacher of His word, it would be difficult for me to speak of God's call to one particular place as my wife and I are now in our third sphere of service for Him. I shall begin, however, with our call to Botswana, which first burst upon my consciousness when I was eighteen years old.

Phase 1

I had been saved at the age of eleven in Sakeji School in what was then Northern Rhodesia, now Zambia, where my parents Norman and Iris Rees were missionaries. For as long as I can remember, I had wanted to be a missionary and there was no question in my mind that I would serve the Lord somewhere in Africa, as it is a continent very dear to my heart. The question was, 'where'? Stan Ford, an evangelist, came to preach for a couple of nights in the assembly in Aberystwyth, where I was a student, and after the last meeting he shook us all by the hand and went downstairs to his car. To my astonishment, he came back into the hall, came up to me and said, 'Ian, the Lord wants you in Botswana'. To be honest, I had never heard of Botswana, but I couldn't get his words out of my mind. I looked up the country in *Echoes* magazine and began writing to Jim and Irene Legge in Serowe. All sorts of difficulties were thrown in my path before, eventually, I arrived in Serowe, seven years after I first heard Stan Ford's comment. When my father had wanted to go to Northern Rhodesia in the 1950s, he was told he had to go single and had no right to go engaged to a young lady, even though she was also called to go. When I wanted to go to Botswana in the 1980s, the advice given to me was I could *not* go single! How things change!

I have always felt that God calls someone to a work by giving him or her a particular desire for that work, by ordering his circumstances towards it, and by confirming it in His word. The interest in Botswana had been awakened along with a desire to go and help there. I

HOW GOD CALLED ME TO FULL-TIME SERVICE

graduated with a law degree, but did not last long with an accountancy firm as my heart was now set on Botswana. I went to London and spent a year at the Missionary School of Medicine. On my return to Swansea, I felt I could not apply for jobs involving training as my conscience felt it was wrong to apply for a job knowing – or hoping – I would not be long in it, so I worked as a hospital porter for a year or so. Circumstances were leading me towards missionary work, but how does God call a person through His word to work for Him in a country that is not

mentioned in the Bible? Here's how God did it to me.

On one occasion when Jim Legge was home on furlough, I decided to meet him and hear him give a report on the work in Botswana. I caught a train from Swansea to Cowdenbeath to hear him. Nothing he said spoke to me. However, my reading for that particular day contained the words, 'Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place', Mark 6. 31. When Jim had finished speaking on Botswana, Crawford Allison stood up to speak. He had been serving the Lord in Malawi and was a good friend of Jim's. He prefaced his report on his work in Malawi with the following words, 'I'm very glad to hear that report from our brother Jim, because, you know, Botswana is a desert place'. That was all he said about Botswana, and there seemed no reason why he should have used those particular words apart from the

fact that the Lord immediately linked them in my mind to the reading I had had that morning, 'come ye apart into a desert place'. Botswana, evidently, was, for me, that desert place.

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I was eventually asked by the then editors of *Echoes of Service* in Bath to move there to work with them. I met my wife, Rebecca, in Manvers Hall, Bath. She had been saved as a young girl and, by the time I met her, had an interest in going as a missionary to Brazil. When she agreed to marry me, I mentioned the problem of her interest in Brazil and mine in Botswana and she replied, 'There is no problem. Where you go I go'. Rebecca has always faithfully followed me and served with me, even in places to which

she has not felt called. Her work has been by my side as a wife, and mother to our children; I could not have done what I have done without her support. And so we married in 1982 and the assembly meeting in Manvers Hall commended us to the grace of God and the work of God in Botswana in 1984. We spent some time learning the language in Serowe and helping in the little assembly there, then moved up to Francistown where, eventually, we built a hall and planted an assembly, which is still there. We were able, also, to give teaching in Livingstone,





Zambia, which eventually led to the planting of an English-speaking assembly.

Phase 2

After thirteen years in Botswana, and due to a number of difficult circumstances, I was on the verge of a breakdown. Our commending elders in Manvers Hall, Bath, were very anxious that this should not take place. I remember discussing it with Rebecca on one occasion and she said, 'I think we should go home'. I replied I was not so sure. She said, 'If the elders in Bath tell us to go home, we will take it as guidance from the Lord'. I replied, 'They will never tell us that. They will never advise us what to do'. However, that very evening when Ivor Sampson, one of the godly elders in the Bath assembly, was on the phone to me, I broke down in tears. His response was, 'Ian, we had an elders' meeting last night and we feel that you should come home before your health breaks down'. When I mentioned this to Rebecca, she said, 'This is the guidance we have been looking for', and within a month we were back in Bath. Thus began the next thirteen years of our service for the Lord. After a year of recovery, the elders insisted that I remain in full-time service for the Lord in this country and so we continued, preaching and teaching in the

is that a Welshman usually returns home to Wales. It was no surprise to her, therefore, as the assembly in Bath grew and there was evidence of much gift in preaching and teaching from other brethren in the assembly, that I began to feel surplus to requirements and felt we should move to Wales, where we could be of more use. Assembly testimony in Swansea and West Wales was a shadow of what it had been when I was a teenager. The Lord gave me an increasing burden to strengthen the existing work in West Wales and also to start something new. He confirmed this through His word and through circumstances in Bath and in Pembrokeshire. Rebecca knew I was itching to move to Wales, and so she suggested I go down and look for a suitable house. I found the one in which we are now living, a dilapidated, empty, country farmhouse, and took her excitedly down to see it. She did not like it! However, she suggested that we try to sell the house in Bath and see if the Lord was in this move. We had tried to sell before, over a number of years, but nothing had come of any attempt.

two boys to a holiday house in Saundersfoot, kindly made available to us by two believers in the Pen-y-groes assembly, in order to get the boys started in school as soon as possible, as the learning of Welsh is compulsory in all schools in Wales. Our two heroic lads began to learn Welsh at the age of 12 and 14! It was a hard thing for us to attend a farewell supper at Manvers Hall, but the believers were very kind to us and prayed with us as we left.

We have opened up our house here in Pembrokeshire to the young people from the assemblies in this area, and further afield, and have seen their numbers grow. We have witnessed over twenty baptisms in this area in the four years we have been here, and are thrilled to see Saturday evening ministry meetings packed out with youngsters where, five years ago, there were only about thirty older believers sitting at the back of empty halls. We are in happy fellowship in the Carmarthen assembly, to which we were commended by Manvers Hall. Once again I started a Bible Class in the Carmarthen assembly and we have seen a Sunday School re-commence after a Children's Holiday Bible Club held there two years ago. But what of planting another assembly, a work dear to my heart? It is a remarkable thing that there should be a county in Britain without an assembly of Christians meeting after the New Testament pattern, but Pembrokeshire is one. I started preaching three years ago, every Lord's Day evening, in a community centre in the town of Tenby, with a view to planting a new assembly there. We average thirty people on a Lord's Day evening in Tenby, and twenty at the weekly Bible Class there on a Thursday evening. It may be that we will begin breaking bread in Tenby in the will of the Lord this year.

assembly there and the smaller assemblies round about. I started a Bible Class in the assembly and Rebecca started a Mothers' and Toddlers' Group and our home was open to all. I also took on responsibility as an elder in the assembly that had commended us to Botswana, and it steadily grew in numbers.

Phase 3

One thing my wife has always felt

A few weeks before I saw the house in Pembrokeshire, a leaflet had dropped through our letterbox asking us if we wanted to sell our house. I telephoned the gentleman who had posted the leaflet on the Monday following our visit to Pembrokeshire. He came and saw the house on the Friday evening of that week, and put in an offer for the full asking price the following day. And so we began to pack up the house in Bath to move to this house in the country just outside Narberth, assuredly gathering the Lord was opening up the way. I initially moved down with our

So, though called to full-time work for Him, we have not been called to serve in one place. Some do so all their lives, some are prevented from doing so, and some move on if and when the Lord leads. The important thing for us all as believers is to be open to the Lord's leading, to serve Him wherever He places us, to give Him our all, and to obey His word.



Introduction

In our previous article we noted that there were five sets of earthquakes recorded in scripture associated with events of major biblical importance. In this article we will look at the earthquake recorded at Mount Sinai at the giving of the law,¹ then examine those earthquakes associated with the crucifixion² and the resurrection,³ and, finally, review the spiritual significance of all these events.

Mount Sinai – the giving of the law

God's people (Israel) had been miraculously brought out of bondage in Egypt about three months previously,⁴ and had now arrived at Mount Sinai, situated in the centre of the southern portion of the present Sinai Peninsular, between the Gulf of Suez and the Gulf of Aqaba. Exodus chapter 19 verses 16-18 gives us a vivid picture of the scene – the thundering and lightning, the thick cloud, the loud trumpet voice, the smoke, and finally the great earthquake! Many of these features could be termed *natural* phenomena, but what occurred at Sinai was anything but natural. All these *forces* occurred at this specific place and at this specific time,⁵ on the third day (a.m.) after the children of Israel arrived at the wilderness of Sinai. God was in control.

The nature and character of God

- The whole scene reveals His glory, His greatness, and His omnipotence. He is God, yet in it all He descends to talk with man. Moses acknowledges these things when recounting this experience, Deut. 5. 24.
- Sinai also evidences the immediate presence of God Himself on earth, Ps. 68. 7-8.
- The dignified holiness of God is also seen here. The Hebrew words that have been translated 'holy', 'holiness', and 'sanctify'

EARTHQUAKES

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derive from a root which means 'to divide' or 'to cut' – thus, the biblical idea of holiness is that of separation, or setting apart. When God descended to the top of Mount Sinai, He set boundaries separating Him from His people, Exod. 19. 12, 23.

This emphasis on the holiness of God was seen in the tabernacle, and later, the temple. A barrier or veil existed between the Holy of Holies and the Holy Place, with only the High Priest able to enter once every year, and only with the blood of atonement. He entered into God's presence on behalf of the people, and then came out to the people on behalf of God! As believers, we have a wonderful privilege of knowing One, our mediator, who has come between us and God, 1 Tim. 2. 5.

Present spiritual applications

Reverential fear

Hebrews chapter 12 verse 21 tells us that even Moses, the man of God, trembled with fear. The lesson is surely that we should have a healthy, reverential fear of God. We don't fear in the same way that Israel feared, because, as believers, we have come to another mountain, Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem.⁶ The factor that makes the difference between the New Testament believer and the people of God in the Old Testament is the work of Christ. We enter into God's intimate presence, because of the death and resurrection of Christ, with a degree of boldness, joy, and thanksgiving, which were wholly lacking in Exodus chapter 19. That is not to say that we enter casually and without reverence! It is true that God is our Father, but we must

never forget that our Father is still God! The way we see and appreciate the character and awesome holiness of God will affect our worship day by day, our service, and our lives generally.

Absolute holiness

God's holiness indicates that He is distinctly different – set apart from all else that exists. God's people were clearly required to be separated from the nations around them, and from that which was ceremonially unclean.⁷ This is a picture and a type of the divine requirement for us as believers today, to be holy in our conduct. Scripture shows us that holiness is the pattern that God desires for our lives,⁸ and indicates that holiness is essential, if we are to serve God as He wants us to.⁹ In addition, holy lives are a requisite if our prayers are to be heard and answered.¹⁰

Earthquakes associated with the crucifixion and the resurrection

Just as an earthquake was associated with the introduction of the old covenant, Exod. 19. 18, so one introduced the new covenant at Calvary,¹¹ while another occurred at the resurrection.¹² Matthew's account¹³ records *five* miracles associated with Calvary:

- 1 the three hours of darkness;
- 2 the rending of the veil in the temple;
- 3 the earthquake and the rocks splitting;
- 4 the tombs opening;
- 5 the raising of the dead saints, after His resurrection.

It was *after* the three supernatural hours of darkness that the Lord cried with a loud voice and yielded up His spirit – it was then followed by the other four miraculous events.



OF SCRIPTURE (2)

The three hours of darkness

Matthew chapter 27 verse 45 speaks of supernatural darkness from midday until 3 p.m., yet what an eternity of suffering was compressed into those three hours! Mankind was not to witness the intense suffering of Christ when the sin of the world was placed upon Him. This same verse states that 'there was darkness over all the land', land – *ge*, a word that can mean land locally or universally. However, Luke chapter 23 verse 44 states that 'there was darkness over all the earth [*ge*] until the ninth hour'; this gives us a clearer picture of what actually took place. It is worth noting that God had intervened with the sun before,¹⁴ and each time all the world had been affected.

What caused this instantaneous darkness? It certainly was **not** an eclipse of the sun. This was the time of the Passover, the time of full moon, when eclipses are naturally impossible. Eclipses never occur suddenly, and they only last for a few minutes (maximum) – not three hours. What occurred here was supernatural – God directly intervening in nature, and in His creatorial power placing all relevant heavenly bodies in their right order. At Christ's *birth* there was supernatural light in the night, Matt. 2. 2; Luke 2. 8-9, yet at His *death* there was supernatural darkness in the day! Midnight became mid-day, and mid-day became midnight!

The veil of the temple

The veil of the temple was rent not as a result of the earthquake, but after Christ's final cry from the cross.¹⁵ This was divine intervention from above, not as a result of the earthquake below. What was revealed behind this veil/curtain as it split? The 'glory' had long departed, Ezek. 11. 23, so all that was seen was the emptiness of human religion without the presence

of God. This miracle was proof that the work of Christ at Calvary was a work of God, sufficient and complete in itself, and that any religious system could never accomplish what God had done in Christ. The rent veil indicated that the way into God's presence had now been opened up through the death of Christ.¹⁶ Just imagine the priests ministering there at that time – this huge curtain almost six metres high, eighteen metres wide and the thickness of a man's hand, instantaneously split from the top to the bottom! Was this one of the reasons that many priests came to accept Christ as Saviour, Acts 6. 7?

The earthquake at Calvary

This was the next supernatural event surrounding the death of Christ, probably occurring simultaneously with the splitting of the veil and the opening of the graves, or certainly in very quick succession. This earthquake was independent of nature: it was a sole act of God, for a number of reasons:

- it coincided with the exact moment that Christ died, and His final cry from the cross;
- it is closely connected with other events which were clearly miracles – the three hours of darkness and the rent veil;
- it coincided with the rending of the rocks, and the opening of the graves.

Yet it seems that this earthquake worked selectively, and specifically, as nothing else seems to have been disturbed – it opened graves, yet not all graves, only the graves of some saints! Golgotha was shaken, but the cross was not displaced.

The significance of Sinai and Calvary

The earthquake at Sinai reminded man of the absolute power and

holiness of God, and also man's sin which keeps him separated from God. The law showed man as powerless to defeat sin, and it condemned him. The earthquake and associated events at Calvary were significantly different – it was an attestation of the perfect, finished, and never-to-be-repeated work of Christ. The demands of a holy and righteous God were fully met, and now God, through Christ, is approachable via grace.

The resurrection earthquake

In Matthew chapter 28 the great earthquake is connected with the descent of the angel of the Lord from heaven, and the rolling back of the stone from the tomb entrance. The order of events is interesting.¹⁷ We see a *physical* manifestation in verse 2, 'a great earthquake', which was the result of an *angelic* manifestation, also in verse 2, 'for the angel of the Lord descended'. Finally, there was a *divine* manifestation in verse 9, 'Jesus met them'. Here, and elsewhere in scripture,¹⁸ physical and angelic events cause fear and consternation, but their meeting with Christ in verse 9 resulted in comfort and worship!

Endnotes

- 1 Exod. 19. 18.
- 2 Matt. 27. 51-54.
- 3 Matt. 28. 2.
- 4 Exod. 19. 1.
- 5 Exod. 19. 16.
- 6 Heb. 12. 22-24.
- 7 Lev. 11. 44-45; 19. 2; 20. 7, 26. Compare with 1 Pet. 1. 14-16.
- 8 1 Thess. 4. 3, 7; 1 Pet. 1. 15-16.
- 9 1 Thess. 2. 10.
- 10 Ps. 66. 18; 1 Tim. 2. 8.
- 11 See note 2 above.
- 12 See note 3 above.
- 13 Matt. 27. 45-53.
- 14 Josh. 10. 10-14; 2 Kgs. 20. 9-11; Hab. 3. 11.
- 15 Matt. 27. 50-52 – note the *order* of events.
- 16 Heb. 9. 6-7; 10. 19-20.
- 17 Matt. 28. 1-9.
- 18 Luke 1. 11-12, 28-30; 2. 8-10; Acts 16. 27; Heb. 12. 21 and many more.

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SANCTIFIED

By **MERVYN HAL**

Few biblical doctrines have generated as much controversy as sanctification. Even as recently as 2014, writers and bloggers across the world have engaged in debate as to its nature and meaning. Much of this controversy is generated by confusion surrounding the nature and purpose of salvation, but, additionally, it is not helped by an unhealthy desire by some to dilute this biblical teaching. Controversy and confusion lead to conversation, with questions raised, such as 'can I be sinless in this life?', or, worse, 'am I free to live as I like?' These questions arise from a misunderstanding of sanctification, and the aim of this article is to take a look at what the Bible teaches, so that clarity might be achieved. But first we need a basic definition.

English is a fusion of Old German and Norman French, and consequently often has two or more words for the same Greek word. This creates a situation where, in the King James Version, two different English words are used to refer to the same idea. For example: justification and righteousness; and liberty and freedom, to name but two. The same is true for sanctification and holiness, both of which are used to translate derivatives of the one root word *hagios*, meaning 'pure' or 'holy'. From that is derived the verb *hagiazō*, meaning to 'make holy', or 'sanctify', and the noun *hagiasmos*, describing the state of 'being holy' or 'sanctified'. In total the root and its derivatives occur over 300 times in the New Testament, but has only one meaning, and that is to be 'set apart', or 'holy', whether it be of things, places or people. The focus of this article is the sanctification of

people; thus, we are concerned with the aspect of salvation in which God has set us apart, making us holy and fit for heaven.

But is our fitness for heaven the extent of sanctification? It is contended that scripture outlines four aspects, an understanding of which will protect the believer from making the mistakes of others, and provide blessing in our salvation. This article will investigate each in turn.

Since sanctification is part of our salvation, a biblical perspective will dictate that we understand that we were sanctified when we first trusted in Christ. However, there is an aspect of sanctification that is effectual prior to our conversion. We will refer to this as **preparatory** sanctification. In his first epistle, Peter reminds his readers about their election which is in accordance with the foreknowledge of God, through sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ, 1 Pet. 1. 2. Paul tells the Thessalonians that God had chosen them to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth, 2 Thess. 2. 13. Both reveal that the Holy Spirit is operative in our experience as sinners prior to salvation, calling us to believe in the truth, convicting us of our sin, and convincing us of the need of obedience to Christ. In reality, no one would ever have been saved but for the sanctifying intervention of the Holy Spirit, Rom. 15. 16. While we rely on the objective statements of scripture for our assurance, believers can often look back to days prior to salvation when worldly desires were replaced by eternal concerns, and satisfaction previously enjoyed became illusory. But what does this

preparatory sanctification by the Holy Spirit bring us to?

Our definition reminds us that sanctification is a work of God; therefore, it is eternal and irreversible, 1 Cor. 1. 30; 1 Thess. 5. 23. It describes what we are as a result of our faith in Christ, and is our possession apart from any effort of ourselves. He has made us holy. This is referred to as **positional** sanctification. Paul taught it when he quoted the words of the Lord Jesus to King Agrippa to explain the purpose of his calling, 'That they [Gentiles] may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me', Acts 26. 18. Notice that sanctification is imparted at the point of our placing faith in Christ and through our link to him, 1 Cor. 1. 2, 30. This is why we are confident that a sinner is immediately ready for heaven upon conversion. They have been made holy. In Hebrews, the writer outlines how our sanctification came to be: we are sanctified through (by means of) the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all, Heb. 10. 10, and, by the blood of Christ, who offered Himself to God by means of the eternal Spirit, 9. 13-14. We conclude that as to its origin we are sanctified by means of the offering of the body of Jesus Christ, and as to its outcome we are sanctified by the blood of Christ, which has purged our conscience from dead works to serve God. Often we focus on what we have been set apart from, but notice the two aspects presented in Hebrews chapter 9 and verse 14: we have been set apart and this has purged our conscience from dead works, but, more, we have been set apart to serve the living God. The



SANCTIFICATION

L Bicester, England

Bible always presents sanctification in a balanced manner; the negative, what we have been delivered from, beautifully balanced by the positive, what we have been brought to.

The question might be asked, how then is there controversy surrounding something that appears to be so clear? Surely, if God has set us apart then we are holy, sanctified and pure, and no one can say otherwise? It might shock readers to learn that it is erroneously taught by some that our sanctification is dependent entirely on us, while others suggest that complete perfection is possible on earth. The biggest cause of this confusion is a failure to distinguish between different uses of the word in scripture. As always, how a word is used in its *context* will determine the doctrine, and sanctification is no different.

When approaching a scripture such as Romans chapter 6 verse 19 we might be inclined to think that the apostle Paul is teaching that it is our responsibility to guarantee our holiness (sanctification) by yielding our members servants to righteousness. But this casual reading of the text overlooks the fact that in this chapter Paul raises a hypothetical question concerning the possibility of a Christian continuing to live in sin following conversion. He states emphatically that it is impossible, because we have died to sin, breaking the mastery of sin over us so we need not obey its lusts any longer. Therefore, says Paul, practice righteousness so that the sanctification that we have by faith might be ours by experience also. In fact, this is one of the enduring

themes of the New Testament: that our spiritual *condition* should reflect our *position*. Sanctification is no different. Peter exhorts his readers by quoting the Lord in Leviticus: 'Be ye holy, for I am holy', 1 Pet. 1. 16; Lev. 11. 44. Paul encourages the Thessalonians that this **practical** sanctification, sometimes called progressive, is God's will for them, 1 Thess. 4. 3, having been called to it, v. 7.

While it is true to say that a desire for practical sanctification is not natural, Rom. 7. 15-24, it should be the ambition of every believer to become more like their Saviour. However, this is only possible through the power of the Holy Spirit, and, contrary to the teaching of some, has no bearing on our eternal destination. Our personal holiness will not take us to heaven – God has done that by making us holy – but it will count in heaven when we stand before the judgement seat of Christ. It should be pointed out that a professing believer who has no desire for practical holiness is out of line with the teaching of scripture, 1 John 2. 6.

But what of the other error, believing that we can achieve full sanctification or sinlessness in this life? For as long as the church has been in existence there have been those who believe that it is possible to achieve perfection in this life, 1 John 1. 8. They even suggest that God requires it for us to get to heaven. As with the error that springs from conflating practical and positional sanctification, so this emerges from a failure to distinguish between positional and **prospective** sanctification. God has promised that we will be like His Son,

3. 2, that He might be the first in rank amongst many brethren, Rom. 8. 29, and, accordingly, deliverance from sin, being like God's Son, was Paul's desire, 7. 24-25. But he clarifies when this will be: at the redemption of our body, 8. 23, at the rapture, 1 Cor. 15. 51-52. The pursuit of holiness might present us with numerous difficulties, discouragements, and disappointments, but we should be encouraged. The fact that God has started a work in us is evidence that He will finish it, Phil. 1. 6.

Our attitude to sanctification will determine our style of Christian life. Will I allow myself to indulge in aspects of the world that I find tempting, or will I abstain from certain activities and pleasures on the basis of what I am – sanctified? But while it is true to say that the negative aspect of sanctification is vital, 'Flee also youthful lusts', we must remember that sanctification is positive and liberating; 'but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart', 2 Tim. 2. 22. A believer who pursues practical sanctification is 'a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use', 2. 21. May God provoke in our hearts this most noble and necessary of biblical desires.

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THE TYRANNY OF CHOICE

By **RANDAL AMOS**
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The United States is known as the land of the free, with liberty for all. Its very government was built on choice to escape religious oppression and political tyranny. There was the choice of electing one's leaders, rather than the acceptance of a royal dynasty. There was the choice to own property, as you were able. There was the choice of education and profession. There was the choice of religion, or no religion. There was freedom of speech, to express one's self religiously or politically. Government had no power to suppress that personal choice.

Governmentally speaking, 'choice' was a delightful baby in a world of oppression. It allowed for mutual respect of all citizens, and coexistence in peace. It provided the incentive to be all that you could be, and, in the free market system, America became the richest and most powerful country in the world. The gospel and the church flourished here because of this very freedom, and it became a beacon of light to darker nations.

However, 'choice' did not have a birth certificate stamped with the gospel of Christ, or the word of God. 'Choice' was conceived in the womb of assumption, that its citizens would be grounded in morality and virtue. The second American president wrote, 'Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate for the government of any other'.¹

Now 'choice' has grown up and has become a king not a servant. 'Choice' gives a woman the legal freedom to kill a baby in her womb. 'Choice' grants the freedom, without being judged, to choose a sexual lifestyle, when and with whoever one chooses. 'Choice' permits one the liberty to marry the same sex. 'Choice' gives one the right to be a witch, or a wizard, and worship Satan, or a plate of spaghetti.

'Choice' is not a preacher. It does not instruct in absolute morals, ethics, or virtue. 'Choice' is conscienceless and sterile. 'Choice' is non-judgmental, is not biased, is tolerant, is accepting of

all, is kind, fun, and 'love'.

But now 'choice' as a master is tyrannical. It demands that it be submitted to as the only way – the truth. To criticize another's choice as sin is to sin against 'choice'! To choose to refuse another's choice in your business, or school, or even a church's legal functions such as marriage, is becoming a criminal act and could soon be seen worthy of punishment. To not grant 'choice' in every area of your life and government is looked at as insubordination and insurrection. 'Choice' now wields the sword – bow or be punished. 'Choice' judges those who judge her.

Sadly, 'choice' decrees that the *judging* of evil is more wrong than the *doing* of evil. It will not tolerate what doesn't tolerate her. 'Choice' will not accept those who do not accept her. 'Choice' will censure absolutely those that claim absolutes. She will not let others choose who don't choose her.

The gospel and the church

The gospel of God in His Son Jesus Christ the Lord is offered equally to all sinners. It doesn't consider colour, gender, age, class, country, lifestyle, or religious pedigree. Any sinner who repents of his or her sin, wrong choices, and confesses Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, who fully bore our sins in death, and rose again, is equally blessed. They are saved from sin, self, and Satan. They will never see judgement, but have eternal life.

A sinner is not forced to do this. He has a choice. But if he chooses to come to Jesus as Lord, then Christ and not 'choice' will be his Lord. His new thinking will be like his Saviour, 'not my will, but thine, be done'.² This is because he is born again of the Spirit with a new heart that now desires and is able to understand God's choices. The gospel teaches and provides true virtue and morality. The believer is to show he agrees with God, that Jesus is Lord, by public baptism.

But beware! 'Choice' will try to regain control of the mind. It will tell you that 'grace' still allows you to choose. It will tell you that choosing to obey the Lord Jesus' commands is bondage, not love. It will tell you that *your* choices are more logical than *God's* choices. It *won't* tell you that God's choices can free you from the power of sin to be all that you can be for His glory. It *won't* tell you that in being a slave to God you will be free to experience true joy and spiritual heart satisfaction.

'Choice' will tell you to go to the church of your choice. It will let you choose what you like: your style of 'worship', music, or church government. It will promise you liberty. And, in time, it will liberate you and your children – from the wisdom of God, and a spirituality that comes from the church functioning by means of the Lord's choices. The Lord's teaching is: a plurality of gifted men involved in a church meeting; the man's headship over the woman; the centrality of the Lord's Supper in keeping us focused upon Christ; and holiness by the purging of sin and bad doctrine that can spread like leaven in the Christian church. 'Choice' will free you – from God's growth, joy and rewards. Christ will bless you.

Endnotes

- 1 JOHN Q. ADAMS, found at: <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/j/johnadams391045.html>.
- 2 Luke 22. 42.

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God is infinite in every aspect of His being. He is unfathomable, majestic, and awesome, and can be understood only to a very limited extent by finite human beings. If we are to have any understanding of God, however limited, the revelation of truths concerning Himself must come from God, and He has indeed graciously revealed Himself:

- The universe reveals His glory and creatorial power, Ps. 19. 1-6, and that we are 'fearfully and wonderfully made', Ps. 139. 14.
- God revealed aspects of His being through the titles, names, and compound names in the word of God.¹
- God has revealed Himself throughout the scriptures, and this revelation is gradual and piecemeal, the full and final revelation being in and through His only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.²

Knowledge of God, gained through what He has revealed of Himself, will increase our love for Him and provide comfort and courage in times of difficulty and anxiety. It should create within us a desire for greater holiness in our lives, and a more effective witness to His saving grace in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Father

The word *Father* speaks of a loving, tender relationship, and of authority, guidance, and protection. The word also raises thoughts of one who is to be loved, respected, and obeyed.

None of the names and titles of God brought before us in the Old Testament reveal God as Father in the sense in which the Lord revealed Him. There are references to God as Father of His chosen people, the nation of Israel,³ but these tend to express His love and care for the nation, and not the relationship brought about as a result of faith and trust in the person and completed work of the Lord on the cross. Those of us who have been saved have been brought into this blessed relationship with God and know Him as Father individually. Thus, for us, all the thoughts associated with the other titles and names of God revealed in the scriptures are brought together in the title *Father*.

The Lord, in the model prayer He gave to His disciples, taught them to say, 'Our Father', Luke 11. 2-4, the

Abba, Father

By **CLIFF JONES** Cardiff, Wales

use of these words indicating the relationship His disciples would enjoy with God eternally. Lest they should ever presume on this relationship, the Lord said of His Father, 'which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name'. The Lord never joined His disciples in prayer to His Father as the prayer in Luke chapter 11 was an outline of a prayer the disciples might make.⁴

Similarly, the risen Lord told Mary to go to the disciples, referring to them for the first time as 'my brethren'. She was to tell them that the Lord had said, 'I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God', John 20. 17. This reminds us that God is the eternal Father of the eternal Son, their relationship had no beginning. However, the believer became a son of God at the moment of salvation.

Abba, Father

In the Garden of Gethsemane, the Lord experienced intense agonies, anticipating what He would suffer when hanging on the cross as the perfect sin offering. Out of the midst of His awful suffering, He, the perfect Servant, prayed to His Father saying, 'Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt', Mark 14. 36. The title, 'Abba, Father', is one which conveys love and intimacy. *Abba* is an Aramaic word meaning 'father', and in the New Testament it is always combined with 'Father', Greek, *pater*.⁵ Thus the title 'Abba, Father' is tautological, in that the word *Father* is repeated, once in Aramaic and once in Greek.

The word 'Abba' was the usual form of

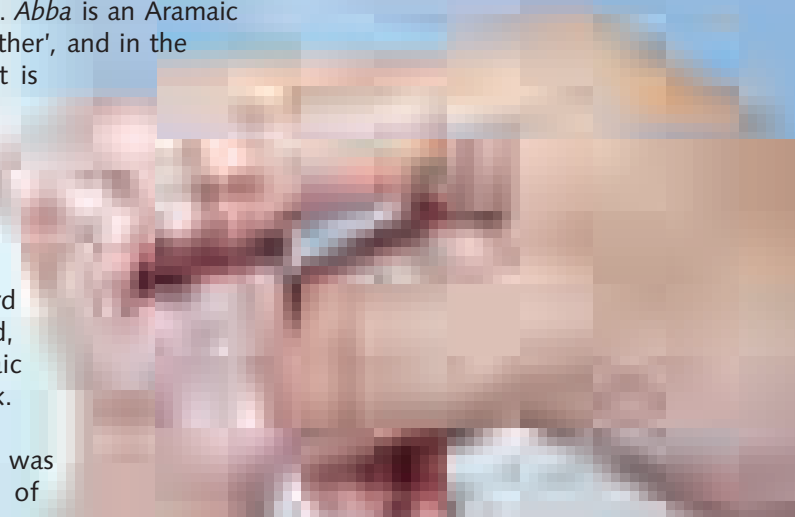
address used to his father by a child. It is an informal term for father and indicates a child's love for his father, and the complete, unquestioning trust and confidence the child has in his father. The word 'father' brings to mind a more mature appreciation of the blessed relationship between a child and his father.

In Galatians chapter 4 verse 6 we read, 'because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father'. At the moment of salvation, we have the Holy Spirit dwelling within us: we become sons of God, and the Spirit causes us to cry, 'Abba, Father'. We are told elsewhere, 'ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father', Rom. 8. 15. Believers are adopted in the sense of being placed, as mature sons, in the family of God. As a result of the relationship into which the saints have been brought as sons of God,⁶ they cry 'Abba, Father'. This is the blessed position of every believer!

Endnotes

- 1 The names and titles reveal something of His character and attributes. Taken all together, the names and titles of God stimulate us to worship.
- 2 Heb. 1. 1-3; John 14. 9.
- 3 See Deut. 32. 6; Jer. 31. 9; Hosea 11. 1.
- 4 Equally, in Luke chapter 11 verse 4 we read 'forgive us our sins', and these words would not be uttered in a prayer in which the Lord was involved because 'in Him is no sin', 1 John 3. 5.
- 5 Aramaic was spoken by the Jews, and Greek by Gentiles.
- 6 John 1. 12; 1 John 3. 1, 2.

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3. In nothing ambitious, 'Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory', Phil. 2. 3.

In each of the four chapters of Philippians, we are given a glimpse of the supreme sovereignty of the Lord Jesus in the life of Paul. To Paul, Christ was everything.

Sadly, the main point of chapter 2 is often lost sight of. The truth of the self-humbling, and exaltation to glory of the Lord Jesus is clearly taught, and believers have thrilled to the majestic words of verses 6-11. However, the context of these verses is not only doctrinal; it is intensely practical.

The object of Paul's letter is, in the main, to teach believers two vitally important truths. In chapter 1, for the believer it must be Christ first, 'For to me to live . . . Christ', v. 21. In chapter 2, for the believer it will then be others next, 'Look not every man on his own things [interests], but every man also on the things [interests] of others', v. 4.

As we come to consider the third mention of our word 'nothing', we might think of its context:

Exhortation to the saints, vv. 1-4.

The unity of the church was threatened because there was disagreement among the saints. There was a need to maintain unity.

Example of the Saviour, vv. 5-11.

The problem among the saints at Philippi was not only serious it was spiritual, and spiritual problems can never be solved by rules, and certainly not by a spirit which brings 'strife and vainglory'. In these verses the mind of Christ is our pattern.

Expected of the saints, vv. 12-16.

We often overlook the truth that every church belongs to God. They are His witness to a godless world. They are required to manifest light in a dark world.

Expressed in God's servants, vv. 17-30

In these verses we observe three men who ministered selflessly in the interests of others. To these men the Christians at Philippi were especially dear.

MUCH ADO ABOUT

In the first verse, he lists four wonderful qualities that they had displayed.

The basis of his appeal, v. 1

'If [since there is] there be any consolation in Christ'. Here Paul mentions the first thing they showed to him. This word 'consolation' is from the Greek word *paraklesis*, and speaks of the encouragement they gave him because of their common relationship with Christ.

'If [since there is] any comfort of love'. This is the only time this word 'comfort' is used in the New Testament. It refers to the persuasive power of love. Paul urges the Christians in Philippi to use that same love to settle their dispute.

'If [since there is] any fellowship [communion] of the Spirit'. The word 'fellowship' has already been mentioned in chapter 1 when he thanked them for their 'fellowship in the gospel', v. 5. That fellowship had been a miracle of grace.

'If [since] any tender compassions and mercies [heart feelings]'. What Paul is calling for is a display of their hearts' affections and tender compassions towards their fellow believers. After all, they had shown such feelings towards him when he had passed through difficult times. He reminded them, 'you have me in your heart both in my bonds and in the defence and confirmation of the glad tidings', 1. 7 JND.

Surely, they should be able to show these features of spiritual character towards their fellow Christians, and restore the unity of the church. Loyalty and love shown to saints far away is one thing, but unless it is shown to the saints we live with it is worthless. May God give us all the capacity to manifest love to our brethren and sisters by responding to their needs!

The burden of his appeal, v. 2

The unfolding of the four-fold truth of verse 1 was intended to produce a response from the Philippians.

Again, Paul displays spiritual wisdom; he is both tender and gracious. He asked them to do something for him personally. Love always asks. It never orders.

'Fulfil ye my joy'. What lovely words! They were already a joy to him, 1. 4; 4. 1. Now he desires them to fill his cup full in one overwhelming, decisive act, rather than a gradual process.

'Be like minded'. In the matter of fulfilling his joy, he seeks the whole church to be unanimous.

'Having the same love'. As Paul beseeches in chapter 4 verse 2, Euodias and Syntyche included! Paul wanted the power of spiritual love to be put into action among them now, just as it had been when he was in need.

'Being of one accord'. That is, be joined in soul, rather than split into parties and cliques. Let all your aims and affections for each other be seen in deeds, and not word only.

'Being of one mind'. Be focused in mind upon one thing, the unity of God's church.

The benefits of his appeal, v. 3

The problem of disharmony in the church had produced a spirit of rivalry, factions, and a bitter spirit.

'Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory'. Avoid self-esteem! Don't make it your ambition to be in the chief place. Paul warns the Christians that unity will never be achieved that way. Equally, he appeals to them not to bring strife and squabbling into the church in pursuit of self-promotion. The word 'vainglory' is used as it is about lifting me up, even though it means putting my fellow believers down, and bringing hurt to them. 'Strife' is the end result.

'But in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves'. This is hard! Not in a display of false humility, but in a genuine display of a lowly disposition.



'NOTHING'

PART THREE

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

'Let each esteem others better'. Put simply, it means 'consider others more important than yourselves', not in ability, nor in the matter of God-given gift, but in the matter of personal value.

One has beautifully said: 'Lowliness of mind does not mean that a person thinks meanly or lowly of himself and a lot of others. He simply does not think of himself at all'. Similarly, ANDREW MURRAY wrote, 'Humility is that grace that when you know you have it – you have lost it!'

4. In nothing anxious, 'be careful [anxious] for nothing', Phil. 4. 6.

The closing verses of chapter 3 teach us about the very high standard that God expects from every believer as they live each day in this world. It is spoken of as our walk, 'our conversation', or manner of life. We should also notice the moral order required for harmony among Christians:

- Right living, 3. 17 – 4. 3;
- Right praying, 4. 4-7;
- Right thinking, 4. 8-9.

We notice, first, that chapter 4 begins with the word 'therefore' which refers us back to what has already been said. In particular, on the basis of the glorious hope detailed in chapter 3 verses 20-21, Paul makes a number of appeals to the church.

'rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say rejoice', v. 4

Paul wanted the saints at Philippi to display a spirit of happiness, an atmosphere of rejoicing in the Lord. The fact that Paul said 'rejoice' twice shows that he knew the Lord cared for His saints.

'let your moderation be known unto all men', v. 5

The word 'moderation' can be rendered 'patience', 'forbearance', or 'sweet reasonableness'. The yieldingness here is in the realm of people and their circumstances.

'The Lord is at hand', v. 5

This thought will always make us

more considerate and thoughtful of the needs of others. People are more important than private principles. One translation puts it, 'the Lord is at your elbow', watching your conduct, and observing your behaviour.

'be careful for nothing', v. 6

These words bring the challenge to rest more upon the Lord in dependency and prayer. Anxiety is the central thought of this short portion, and it is a most distressing condition for any believer. In our everyday language it is worry.

The Lord knew that we, like the disciples, would worry about the necessities of daily life.¹ The disciples had left all to follow the Lord, and Jesus knew that they would worry because they had too little. The Lord had to teach them to 'take no (anxious) thought for your life', Luke 12. 22. It is the same word that Paul used here.

'but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God'

A prayerful attitude is demanded. Although our requests are known to God already, He loves to hear us ask for them in our prayers and manifest our dependence upon Him. As we bring this short series to a close:

'In nothing I shall be ashamed', Phil. 1. 20;

In the trying circumstances of life, let us see what God may achieve through us, and through the prayers of His people.

In nothing afraid, v. 28;

In the midst of persecution and trial, let us be steadfast in the gospel as those whose citizenship is in heaven.

In nothing conceited, 2. 3;

In a world that applauds self-interest, let us be characterized by humility, desiring to put the things of God first in our lives.

In nothing anxious, 4. 6.

As we seek to serve God, let us be confident of the sovereignty of God and His provision for His children.

As Paul closes this chapter and epistle, he tells the Philippians that what is maintained must also be clearly manifested. The result will be that 'the God of peace shall be with you', v. 9.

Endnotes

- 1 'Take no (anxious) thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on', Matt. 6. 25.

DAVID JOHN WILLIAMS is in fellowship in the assembly at Treforest. His ministry has been widely accepted in the assemblies in South Wales and beyond.



REPORTS REPORTS REPORTS

GOSPEL WORK AND OTHER ACTIVITIES Compiled by SANDY JACK

ENGLAND

Lancashire

Stephen Baker has been working with the assembly in **Haydock**. This has involved door-to-door visits followed by five nights of gospel meetings. This is a small and struggling assembly and they would appreciate your prayers.

The small assemblies in **Ellesmere Port** and in **Heswall** have also had gospel meetings and Stephen has visited door-to-door as well. It was really hard to get people to listen to the gospel, both when visiting around the doors and in the halls. A couple of people came into the meetings in Ellesmere Port, but no one came into the meetings in Heswall. All of the meetings were well supported by believers and a couple of unsaved people were brought along from other areas. Since the beginning of the year Stephen has had the opportunity to publish a regular column in two local community newspapers/magazines in Heswall and West Kirkby. The total readership is just short of 30,000 so this has proved to be a great opportunity to spread the gospel.

Hertfordshire

The assembly at Mill Lane Gospel Hall, **Cheshunt**, held their February half-term Holiday Bible Club and had a happy time with over thirty children attending. Lessons were drawn from the life of Joseph.

Cambridgeshire

A week of gospel activity in March at **Ely** with David Tinkler gave the opportunity of visiting nearly all the junior schools in the city and in the local villages, including a new opportunity to visit a school whose new head had been a deputy at a previously visited school. He asked that his new school might be included in the schedule.

IRELAND

County Wexford

The assembly in **Gorey** are thankful for the blessings of the past few months.

They commenced a new 'Christianity Explored' study in January and have been encouraged by the attendance which has included a few new contacts. Some have continued on with a further study on Tuesday nights, perhaps the biggest encouragement was the husband of one of the sisters in fellowship. This was the first time he had ever come to a study. He seems aware of his need of Christ but has yet to profess faith. It would be a marvellous blessing to him, his family, and the assembly if he got saved. Another encouraging aspect of these studies was the attendance of three believers who had been away from fellowship. One of them has been restored. Please pray that his wife and the other brother will soon follow.

Forty-one young people attended the Easter Bible Camp in April and Andrew Thompson delivered four challenging messages from the life of Jonah. Many positive conversations were had. There is so much potential with this group – pray that the Lord would move among them powerfully.

Recently, a local primary school invited Michael McKillen to teach through the Bible. After teaching about the Ten Commandments it was moving to hear one student ask, 'Does that mean that we're not all going to heaven?' How good it was to speak about God's provision for our sin.

OVERSEAS

Nepal

Bearing in mind recent tragic events in Nepal, Charles Davidson, who has visited the country, writes, 'Our two-day trip to Kathmandu was a blessing for more than one reason. A dozen believers had come to receive us at the airport. Most of them were elders from the assemblies in the Kathmandu valley. There are five assemblies in the valley; Kathmandu, Kapan, Machhegaon, Lalitpur, and Bhaktapur. We had a profitable conversation over dinner and we went to Lalitpur to stay with brother Raj and his family'.

'The next day, we had a plan to visit all the five assembly halls. Some Korean believers from the US were conducting training on coping with disaster in all of the assemblies. Our

visit was a bit of a distraction, but they graciously managed to fit us in. Brother Maheshwar Hamal volunteered to give his twenty-nine year old car, which had undergone a major repair and was taken out of the workshop just the same day. It was noisy, but somehow managed to pull through the day. Brother Heerakazi, leaving his ailing father at home, came with us as our driver. Two brothers, Ram Saran and Dinesh patiently accompanied us throughout the whole day. Dinesh had to leave the construction work of his makeshift house that he is building which is very, very urgent'.

'**Machhegaon** Assembly is perhaps the biggest assembly in Kathmandu in terms of number of believers in fellowship and the size of the hall. Over 140 people gather in the weekly meetings. Brethren Peter and Bir Bahadur are two elders in the assembly. There are some major cracks in the building. Che, a Korean missionary who is in fellowship there, said that one of the main pillars has to be re-erected, and engineers from Nepal and Korea inspected the building separately and have given the go-ahead for repair work. They want to start the reconstruction as soon as the government allows. At least twenty-nine believing families are living in tents as their houses are damaged'.

'**Kathmandu** Assembly is the oldest assembly in the capital city of Nepal. Brother Lee, a missionary from Korea, came with his wife Lee Yun Sook and pioneered the work in Kathmandu. The Lord blessed their labour and that of other brethren. Some years later brother Choi Guen Min, another missionary from Korea, came with his family to join the mission. While Lee went back to Korea last year after almost two decades of ministry in Kathmandu, Che plans to stay a bit longer. The assembly hall is fine. Around eighty people gather in the hall for weekly meetings'.

'**Kapan** Assembly. Brother Dhruba, who has been serving the Lord with his wife Kim, is in fellowship in this assembly. The rented building is not in very good shape. While Dhruba was showing us the hall, his wife was anxiously going up and down the stairs telling us to cut short our inspection. Three believing families who were living in the top floor of the same building have vacated their rooms. The assembly is meeting in a tent on



Dhruba's property, where they want to construct a hall later. A few metres away, a seven-storey building was razed to the ground, with a church meeting going on and at least twenty-six believers were killed. Quite a few buildings have been damaged in this area, a few of them have been reduced to rubble. That explains the believers' nervousness'.

'Bhaktapur Assembly. Bhaktapur is the smallest district in Nepal, and located within the Kathmandu valley. Brother Anand Lepcha, a commended worker from Lalitpur Assembly, has been labouring in this assembly. It is the youngest and, therefore, the smallest assembly in the valley. Their rented hall is perfectly fine. There are eighteen believers in fellowship, who started gathering eighteen months ago. The work is promising. Brother Anand has a sweet family'.

'Lalitpur Assembly. We had the privilege of having fellowship with this vibrant assembly. Brethren Ram Saran, Dinesh, Maheshwar Hamal and Heerakazi are on the oversight. These brethren faithfully give believers rides back home after the meetings on their motorbikes. They have to make several trips. That is some zeal! Ram Saran has rented out his house to believers. His father's house, where he was living, is badly damaged. He is living in a tent. He is a gem of a brother, blessed with a perpetual smile. He does not want to ask the believers to vacate his home. Dinesh was living in a rented apartment. He was asked to vacate the place at short notice as his landlord wanted to move in there after his own house was damaged. He is living temporarily in a store on his cousin's housetop. He is busily constructing a makeshift house on his land. He runs a goldsmith store which has been closed for over a month now. Back in his old place, surrounded by Christian-hating relatives, life is difficult for him. Every house has engraved idols on either side of the main door'.

'Raj, with his family, runs a boys' hostel on the ground floor of the building. A sister in the assembly runs a girls' hostel on the first floor. Most of the children are believers from different parts of Nepal. They are studying in various schools in Kathmandu. The boys are very well trained in various fields. They know haircutting, cobbling shoes and cooking. They are helping Dinesh in the construction and they seem amazingly efficient and skilled in bamboo work too. In our two-day stay, we hardly saw them sitting idle'.

'The aftershocks are felt daily. The frequency is possibly on the wane – on an average two per day. The assemblies in Kathmandu are blessed with tremendous zeal and love for the Lord and His people. There is a wonderful unity among the local assemblies. Most of the elders are relatively young, but incredibly humble. It was a great learning experience for us. Dewas, my fellow-traveller to Kathmandu, is a new believer. He remarked, "Wow, these brethren are really special!" The fellowship is warm. Evangelistic passion is unmistakable. Little wonder there are now five assemblies in the valley after just eighteen years. The assemblies are involved in planting three assemblies outside Kathmandu. Nepal is hungry for the truth and these dear saints are racing against all odds to reach out to needy souls'.

Sri Lanka

During the month of February, Jack Hay visited Sri Lanka. Meetings were held in **Colombo, Kuliypitiya, Jaffna, and Vavuniya**. A large conference was held at Thunavi Gospel Hall in Jaffna, where our brother taught lessons over four sessions from the life of Hezekiah. These studies were a great blessing to the believers. There has been much growth visible in Jaffna Assembly during the last two or three years. There are now several brothers that take an active part in the assembly. During the month of March, Bill Stevely visited and meetings were held in Valaichenai, Omadiyamadhu, Alankulam, Vaddan, Soorainagar, Pinnaiyadi, Hatton, and Kuliypitiya. Very helpful ministry was given at the conference in Valaichenai and a large number attended the gospel meeting in Hatton. Several homes of believers were also visited and encouraging ministry was given from the word of God.

In Matugama, there have been large numbers following the correspondence courses. Recently, some gospel meetings have been held in this area, which is two hours south of Colombo. The last gospel meeting held was attended by approximately 100 people. Please pray that this new work, which was started in the last few months, will see souls saved and a new area of witness established.

In Hatton, the gospel continues to be proclaimed and souls are being saved and coming into fellowship in the local assembly. Great progress has been seen in the children's outreach work in this area, with several contacts being made through the nursery and the children's clubs that are conducted there. Satan is very active in this area and a great effort is being made to stop the spread

of the gospel. Recently, the assembly vehicle in Hatton was sabotaged while the meeting was in progress. After the meeting, when the elderly saints were being dropped home, it was discovered that the brakes had failed. God preserved the life of the saints and the vehicle was stopped safely. Later, the mechanic showed how the brakes had been tampered with. We would be grateful if you could pray for the protection of the saints, as the Hindus, Muslims, and Buddhists are determined to stop the Lord's work in this area.

Romania

The assembly in **Giurgiu** rented the Art Gallery in an excellent position in the town for two days in April. During the two days, over 350 people attended, of which at least 95% were unbelievers. The first day in particular, there were good numbers of young people. A lot of gospel literature and John's Gospels were distributed. In the city of Iasi the Bible Exhibition was set up in a gospel hall and four very profitable days were spent with a Christian School [20 classes, 420 pupils]. It was also used in a large Shopping Mall for three days and forty-five believers from five assemblies were a great help. Over 1,500 people visited the Exhibition, including students from North African countries studying in Iasi. Many contacts were made and young assembly believers were greatly encouraged.

Gospel tent work commenced in April near the capital, Bucharest, in the village of Draganeasca and, despite some poor weather, fifty-five children attended the afternoon tent meeting and, during the weekend, over twenty unsaved adults heard the gospel clearly preached. Prayer is valued for the small assembly in Draganeasca and the ongoing work of the gospel.

In the County of Alba, eight nights of Bible studies were held with Paul Williams in the fairly new assembly at Rachita, two meetings with the Spring assembly, a youth conference in Salistea that was very well attended, with excellent interest in the word of God, and the opportunity to preach at baptisms in Călnic assembly. At Călnic, nine believers were baptized by immersion, including five young people from Călnic, a believer from Miercurea Sibiului, and three believers from Dobârca. These three believers from Dobârca all heard the gospel for the first time in tent meetings in Dobârca during the last two summers, one of whom was saved last August in the tent.

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



A Study of First Thessalonians: The Model Church Gary McBride

Paperback, 102 pages, Published by Gospel Folio Press, 304 Killaly St. West, Port Colborne, ON L3K 6A6 Canada. ISBN 978-192752-145-8.

This is a short book amongst a number of recent very helpful books by this author. The presentation of the Thessalonian church as a 'model' church, as is the premise of this book, has much to commend it, although this idea has been outlined by a number of other authors.¹ This is an eminently readable primer for further detailed study and is easily read in a couple of sittings. It covers each section in the Epistle in turn, with a short introduction followed by sections where most verses are commented on. Good practical application flows from sound interpretation of the text. The balance in dealing with the text across the Epistle is about right, although chapter 3 seems to get a little lost amidst coverage of the larger issues.

It is not a detailed exposition of the book, and does not set out to be so. Thus, it does not cover in detail a number of exegetical challenges, mostly eschatological in nature, for example, which phase of the Lord's return is being referred to in chapter 3 verse 13, but covers it sufficiently to whet the appetite for further studies. The brevity does, however, raise some issues: the section dealing with differences between the dispensational and reformed/covenant view of scripture, particularly in the context of future events, is, of necessity, rather scant. Unfortunately, this results in the presentation of a 'straw man', which does not present the nuance of the reformed position accurately. What MCBRIDE does present might be easily dismissed and, thus, it is open to criticism, albeit this reviewer agrees with his conclusions. The comments throughout the book on the insufficiency of many contemporary presentations of the gospel are welcome (some of which are not the gospel at all), and many of the practical points raised in this regard should be adopted in our proclamation of the gospel. Overall, well worth reading and worth encouraging others to read.

¹ See, for example: JOHN MACARTHUR *The Master's Plan for the Church*, Chapter 7.



The Riches of Divine Wisdom David Gooding

Paperback, 425 pages, Published by Myrtlefield House, 180 Mountsandel Road, Coleraine, BT52 1TD. ISBN 978-1-874584-21-6.

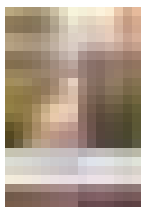
Over forty years ago, PROF. JOHN HEADING and I had the privilege of sitting in on an informal debate between DR. DAVID GOODING and a number of modernist theology professors in the staff common room of the Theological College of Wales in Aberystwyth. David Gooding won hands down! It was delightful to hear a conservative evangelical voice stating traditional scriptural truth in a contemporary and academically acceptable way. In many ways, this book by DAVID GOODING seeks to serve the same purpose in unpretentiously addressing the important subject of the book stated in its subtitle - 'The New Testament's Use of the Old Testament'.

The book is in three parts: 'The General Relation of the New Testament to the Old Testament'; 'New Testament Thought Categories for Old Testament Interpretation'; and 'Guidelines for our own Interpretation of Old Testament Narrative'. These are subdivided into various sections, many of which can be profitably read separately such as 'Abraham's Sacrifice of Isaac' and 'The Story of David and Goliath'.

Discussion of the areas covered, especially the very interesting analysis of the tabernacle, present some interesting new viewpoints, even if more traditional approaches are not always pressed. For example, much is made of the lampstand being made to resemble a living almond tree - 'the first tree to blossom after the deadness of winter' - as being symbolic of 'the tree of life and at the same time it carried the light. It eloquently pointed to Him of whom John said "In him was life, and the life: was the light of men"'. Then, when the laver is dealt with, the author postulates that this covers the idea of the once-for-all bathing and subsequent washing of the New Testament, without the need for the introduction of the contemporary Greek picture of the public baths followed by later feet-washing.

Young Christians should be encouraged to read this 'Christ in all the scriptures' themed book; it will arm them against 'the wiles of the devil' in the world in which they move. However, we should say that anyone expecting a conventional Bible commentary might find this book tedious in places, and sometimes where the author in his 400+ pages painstakingly and unhurriedly sets out his arguments, modern readers might be tempted to flip over the pages.

Thanks to Howard Barnes, West Houghton, England for this review



Wisdom for Fools - 101 Proverbs to Live By Shane Watson

Paperback, 218 pages, Published by Gospel Folio Press, 304 Killaly Street West, Port Colborne ON L3K 6A6, Canada. ISBN 978-1-927521-50-2.

The book of Proverbs does not lend itself to analysis, and apart from a six page introduction, *Wisdom for Fools* does not attempt this. This is just as well, as the introduction is the least successful part of the book. In the remaining 200 pages the author paints 101 miniatures, setting the golden apples of God's wisdom in word pictures of silver. These are brief sketches, each study is typically about a page long, but they are skilfully drawn. Without cliché or pomposity, the author re-examines each chosen verse, and brings out their enduring relevance to anyone who wants to walk wisely through this wilderness world. The short chapters are best taken in small doses; a couple to be taken morning and evening, a suitable word doing good, like a medicine. The rendering of each chosen text in the KJV and the NKJV echoes the parallelism of the poetry, and the commentary is fresh and thought-provoking even to those familiar with the verses.

Whatever the situation, there is a proverb for it, well expressed, apposite, straight from the Holy Spirit's treasury of wisdom, and when He is the guide, the wayfarers, though fools, will not mistake their road. It certainly feels as if the author could have easily found another 264 proverbs to complete a day-by-day style diary of Proverbial wisdom. I'll certainly buy it if it is ever published!

Anyone wishing to follow the Lord in the way of integrity, spiritual good sense, and manner of life, will attain to the wise counsels of the book of Proverbs, the words of the wise and their dark sayings, and this little book illuminates and applies them readably and helpfully.

Thanks to John Stewart, Killamarsh, England for this review.

QUESTION

What are the fundamental doctrines of Christianity?

ANSWER

We are living at a time when 'fundamentalism' is perceived to be something extreme and to be avoided, but the question above is vital for at least two reasons. First, it gets right to the heart of what makes Christianity distinct from all forms of human religion. Second, a right appreciation of those doctrines that form the bedrock of divine revelation will enable us to contend earnestly 'for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints', Jude 3.

In addition to these fundamentals there are many other weighty matters that we must not consider as being inconsequential. Everything in the scriptures is to be taken seriously and accepted as the word of the Lord. However, there are certain first principles without which there would be no Christian faith at all. Within the scope of this response **it will not be possible to refer to them all, nor to elaborate on any.**

The foundation of all that we believe has to be the doctrines relating to the trinity, the Godhead. In the unity of the Godhead, there are three distinct but co-equal persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Each possesses every divine attribute absolutely yet they are not three Gods but one. To the human mind this is incomprehensible, but, as believers, things that are darkness to our intellect are sunshine to our hearts.

Another fundamental tenet of Christianity concerns the incarnation of the Lord Jesus. Within one person resided the fullness of deity combined with impeccable humanity. Born of a virgin, He was made in the likeness of men and He was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin, Heb. 4. 15. At Calvary, He offered Himself without spot to God in a sacrifice that made 'propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world', 1 John 2. 2.

The universality of sin is clearly taught in the scriptures. Sin originated with the devil and when he fell a host of angels who aligned themselves with him fell also. However, the introduction of sin into the human race was through the deliberate transgression of Adam: 'as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned', Rom. 5. 12. Just as one man was responsible for the entrance of sin into the human race, so salvation from God's righteous judgement of sin is also possible

because of one Man, 'For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous', Rom. 5. 19. Salvation is offered graciously by God to everyone without exception and is obtained through the conviction of sin by the Holy Spirit and on the ground of faith in the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ at the cross.

The apostle Paul, writing to the church at Corinth, emphasizes the importance of the resurrection of Christ. His words are unequivocal, 'if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain . . . ye are yet in your sins . . . Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished . . . But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept', 1 Cor. 15. 14-20. We may state without fear of contradiction that the death, burial, and resurrection of God's Son lies at the very root of Christianity and elevates it above any religion invented by men.

Basic to the fundamental doctrines of Christianity is the fact that the original scriptures, comprising the Old and New Testaments, are God's word and form the only book divinely inspired. It is God's word for all peoples for all times and is our only authority for all matters of faith and practice. It is living and powerful and able to make people wise unto salvation. It provides suitable nourishment for every child of God and it will endure forever. Men have attempted to destroy it, deny it, and discredit it but 'we know that when time and the world pass away, God's word shall forever endure', FANNY CROSBY.

The word of God teaches that man has an eternal future. Death does not bring the cessation of existence and one day all who have died will be raised, either to eternal life through Christ or to eternal punishment. 'Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation', John 5. 28-29.

The imminence of the Lord's return to the air for the church, His subsequent return to the earth to establish His millennial kingdom, the destruction of the earth and the heavens after man's final rebellion, and the making of a new heaven and earth are all doctrines set out within the scriptures.

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- The magazine is published quarterly by the Precious Seed Trust, Registered Charity No. 326157.
- It is distributed, without charge, to over 100 countries.
- Numbers printed are over 13,000, plus over 1500 in India.
- About 50% of copies go overseas and half of these to 'third world' countries.
- Postage accounts for over 60% of our costs.
- Including postage, each magazine costs around £1.00 sterling.
- Gifts to help in the work may be sent in any major currency to any of the addresses shown opposite or through the website.

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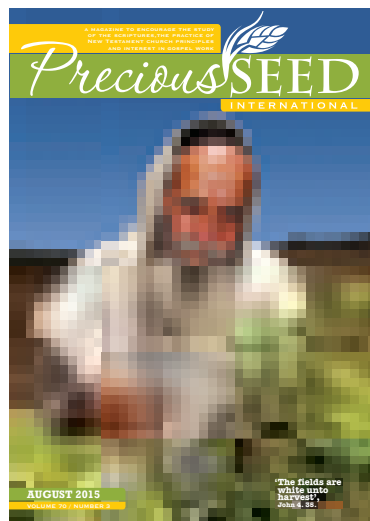
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Front Cover Illustration

One of the interesting features of modern life in the United Kingdom is to see groups of children visiting major supermarkets to find out where their food actually comes from! In our increasingly urbanized way of living in the western world we have become more and more ignorant of how and where our food is sourced and produced. But this was not so in the Greco-Roman world of the first century AD, when our Lord preached to multitudes of individuals who had an intimate knowledge of food production and distribution. Many of the illustrations that we find in our Lord's parables were taken directly from the environs of food production, e.g., Matthew chapter 13, so it is unsurprising, therefore, that His disciples should completely misunderstand His comment in John chapter 4 verse 32 that He had food to eat that they knew nothing about. They took His words literally, thinking that someone else had supplied Him with food, v. 33, but He meant something completely different. So different in fact that He had to explain His mission once again to them, v. 34, by way of analogy with Moses in Deuteronomy chapter 8 verse 3. His mission was to produce a spiritual harvest for God, and though literally there were still four months left before the ordinary spring harvest was gathered in, v. 35a - the food that would perish - the imperative for the disciples now was not to wait, but to immediately engage in the harvesting of souls. This was already evident in our Lord's ministry with Nicodemus, 3. 1-21, and the Samaritan woman, 4. 5-29. The disciples simply had to see the potential for themselves as the 'fields were white unto harvest'. Additionally, they would learn that not only was this harvest to be plentiful, but there would be very few labourers involved with the harvesting, Matt. 9. 37. Nevertheless, that should not discourage them, because it was God's harvest, v. 38, and provision was made by Him to raise up others to reap this harvest, provided the disciples played their part in prayer and went themselves. Have we faced up to the potential harvest of souls all around us, and are we meeting the challenge of Christ's words?



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- Australia** Precious Seed International, PO Box 836, Lilydale, Victoria 3140.
- Canada** Precious Seed International, c/o Counsel Magazine, P.O. Box 427, St. Catharines, ON, L2R 6V9.
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- 1) **BY CREDIT/DEBIT CARD** using our web site www.preciousseed.org and selecting 'Support Precious Seed' on the menu bar, or
- 2) **BY ELECTRONIC BANK TRANSFER** either using online banking, or by instructing your bank local branch to make an electronic payment. The Precious Seed bank account details are: -
 - Account name: Precious Seed
 - UK Account Number: 00399475
 - UK bank Sort Code 30-98-94
 - IBAN: GB75 LOYD 3098 9400 3994 75
 - BIC: LOYDGB21454

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

Name

Address

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