

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

Precious SEED

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**'And . . .
we came to
Rome',
Acts 28. 16**

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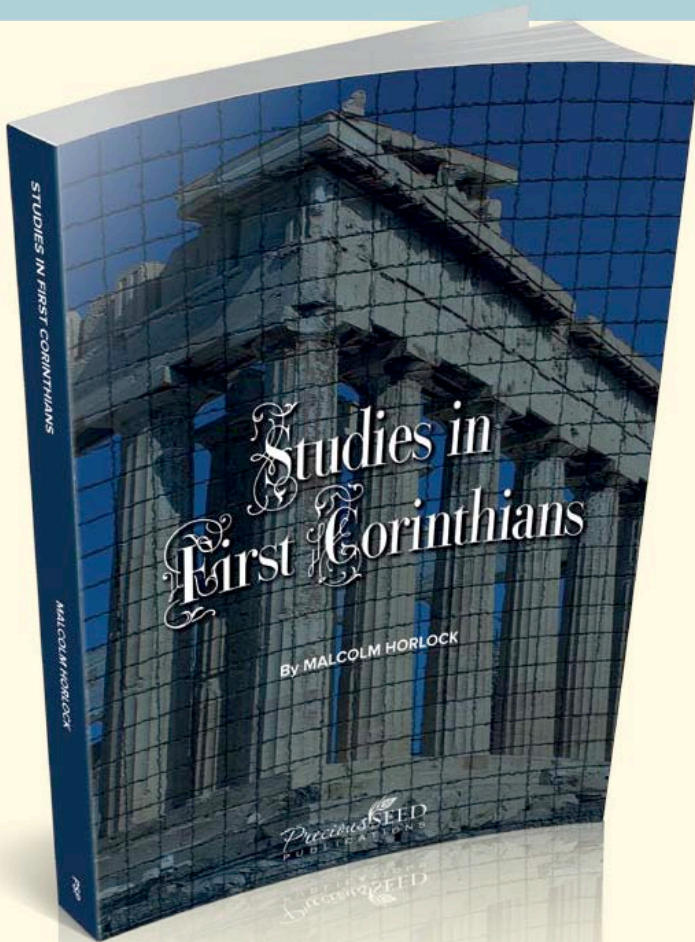
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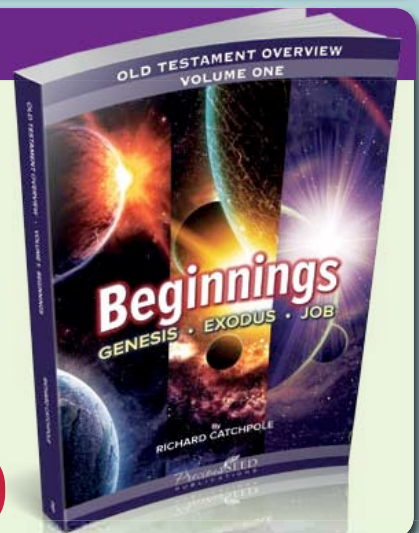
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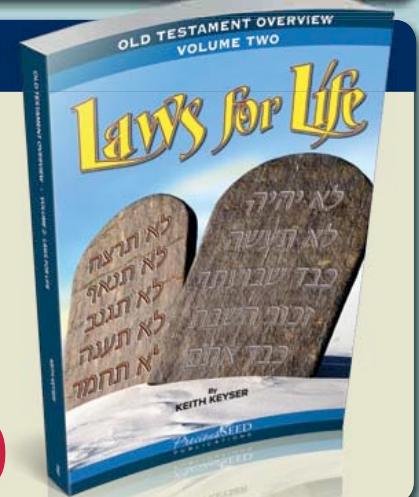
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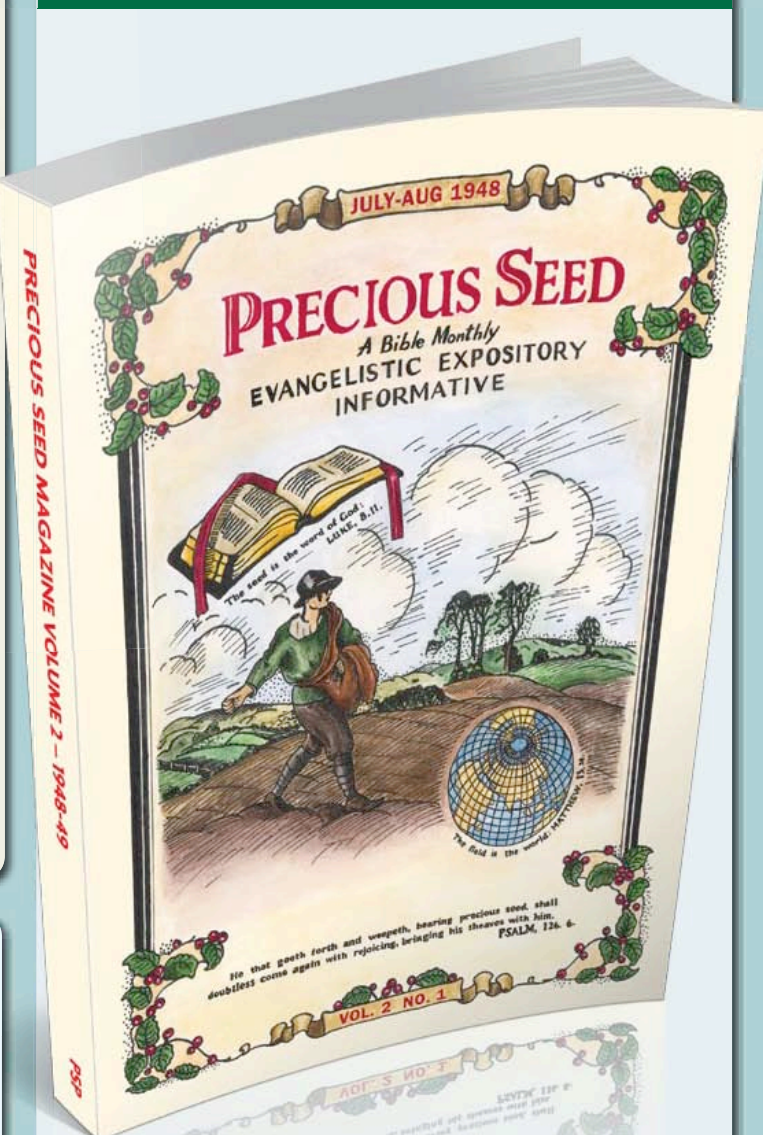
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We hope to have this available at the beginning of September. As this is a smaller size than its predecessor, the price will be £8.50, plus postage at cost. Order now to secure your copy.

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Editorial

‘For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing’, Acts 17. 21.

From this verse one might suggest that there are many parallels between First Century Athens and Twenty-first Century Britain. They wanted the latest news. They wanted that which was ‘new’ and were prepared to spend a considerable amount of time in pursuit of it. VINCENT quotes one of their own as saying, ‘No men are better dupes, sooner deceived by novel notions, or slower to follow approved advice. You despise what is familiar, while you are worshippers of every new extravagance’.¹ Thus, ‘old’ would be greeted with disdain and dismissed. Perhaps that is why age-old errors feel it important to re-badge themselves as ‘new’, for example, New Atheism and New Age Religion.

Is there the possibility that we approach the scriptures in the same way? Do we spend time in pursuit of the novel and new and treat that which is old with disdain? As fashions in the world change all too rapidly, some have sought to ‘re-interpret’ passages of scripture that have become unpalatable, to bring a ‘new twist’ to the well-worn interpretation which was based upon a simple acceptance of what the word of God teaches.

Whilst we should beware of tradition that has no foundation upon scripture, we should also beware of that which is new and novel. The Lord has not left His people without guides. Not only do we have the word of God but we also have those gifted of God as teachers who can rightly interpret that word. We can test all against the heritage of biblical exposition that is readily available to this generation. There should be no need to be ‘children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men’.²

This magazine concludes our series on the gospel in its different phases. We offer our thanks to Ken Totton and Ian Jackson for this study. As we considered the commencement and development of the work of the Lord in Ethiopia in February, we now have a similar article charting the work in Argentina. Equally, as we have detailed a number of different ways to spread the gospel, we have an article on classes designed to teach English to those immigrating into Canada as a medium of evangelism. Again, we try to provide a varied array of material with one foundation, the word of God, and with one desire, the encouragement of the people of God.

Endnotes

- 1 MARVIN VINCENT, *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament*, part of e-sword Bible software, no page numbers.
- 2 Eph. 3. 14.



One of the most glorious themes of scripture is that our Lord Jesus Christ, once rejected and disowned, will reign on earth in power and glory in a kingdom which has no end, in which He will be vindicated and enthroned.

The Gospel of the Kingdom

There is a coming King

At the start Adam, crowned with glory and honour, was given dominion over the whole earth, and he exercised it in association with his bride. At the end Christ, who is crowned with glory and honour far greater than Adam ever knew, will have dominion over the whole universe, and He will exercise it in union with His bride, the church. Truly, God's first thoughts are also His last thoughts.

Israel's greatest king was David. He was given a covenant by God. 'I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom', 2 Sam. 7. 13-14. This is confirmed in Psalm 132 verse 11, which says, 'The Lord hath sworn in truth unto David; he will not turn from it; Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne'. The particular importance of this verse is highlighted by the apostle Peter on the day of Pentecost. David, he says, was a prophet 'knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ', Acts 2. 30-31. Not only would there be a king in David's line but that king must necessarily rise from the dead before His reign begins.

There is a coming kingdom

There is, therefore, no thought that Christ's death and resurrection meant that in some way the covenant given to David was now fulfilled by our Lord's present session in heaven. The promise of a literal kingdom on earth still stands, and with it

there remains a glorious future for the nation of Israel. Christ shall exercise universal rule, but it must be remembered that governmental glories are connected with that nation. He shall reign as the Son of Man, with all that the title signifies of universal dominion, but He shall also reign as Son of David, and, as such, shall have rule in relation to Israel. This truth is being denied at the present time by many who think that there is no future for Israel nationally and that the covenants given to that nation are somehow now inherited by believers in this church age.

It is significant that before our Saviour ascended to heaven the disciples asked Him whether He would at that time restore again the kingdom to Israel, Acts 1. 6. This gave the Lord a straightforward opportunity to explain that this would no longer happen; in fact, His reply indicates that the kingdom will indeed still be established. This will be after the present interim period, which is characterized by a risen man seated on the throne of God and a divine person, the Holy Spirit, resident on earth.

Glorious Old Testament promises will yet be fulfilled. 'A king shall reign in righteousness', Isa. 31. 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. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS', Jer. 23. 5-6. The New Testament also extends this hope. 'He shall be great,

and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end', Luke 1. 32-33. It is self-evident that this kingdom has not yet been established and that the coming of the king to reign is still future.

The gospel of the kingdom

It will surely be good news, especially in the dark days of Daniel's seventieth week, that Messiah is coming to establish His kingdom. That message is, in essence, the same as that which was preached by John the Baptist, the forerunner of the coming king and the herald of the coming kingdom. The message demands individual preparation for His coming, involving repentance and the bringing forth of appropriate fruit as evidence of it. Only those who respond will have a place in the millennial kingdom.

It is also the same message that the disciples were sent to preach by the Lord Jesus. Matthew chapter 10 demonstrates this in a remarkable way. It is important to see that in this chapter there is a 'prophetic gap' between verses 15 and 16. (This same prophetic gap comes between Daniel's sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks; between the 'acceptable day of the Lord' and the 'day of vengeance of our God' in Isaiah chapter 61 and Luke chapter 4; between the nineteenth and twentieth verses of Daniel chapter 7.) The commission given by our Lord in Matthew chapter 10 was fulfilled by the twelve when He was on earth, in verses 1 to 15; but verses 16 to 42 clearly await a future fulfilment.



and the Everlasting Gospel

By **IAN JACKSON**
Eastbourne, England

Note carefully the difference in language of verse 14 on the one hand and verses 16, 17, 18 and 22 on the other. The only way in which the apparent failure in the predictions in verses 16 to 42 may be understood is by the recognition of the prophetic gap. The testimony given as to the nearness of the kingdom has been suspended in this present age of the preaching of the gospel of the grace of God; but it will be resumed at the time of the end.

Accordingly, the twelve are, in this chapter, seen as being representative of those who will, in the future, preach that same message of the coming king. What applied to the twelve will apply also to them. The kingdom as it was presented at that time, namely in Christ personally among them, was rejected; and, as a result, testimony to them was withdrawn. In this connection Matthew indicates that Jesus charged His disciples that 'they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ', 16. 20. That testimony will be resumed, however, once the calling out of the church is complete and it will reach its conclusion when the Son of man is revealed in order to receive His kingdom.

The preachers of the gospel of the kingdom in the tribulation period are in for a torrid time as the dark influence of the devil and the two beasts of Revelation chapter 13 rises against them. Verses 16 to 39 promise them opposition, outright rejection and persecution; martyrdom will be the lot of some of them. For those not martyred, endurance to the end will mean salvation, which will be enjoyed in that coming kingdom.

The preaching will be hugely blessed by God. In Revelation chapter 7 two companies are brought to our attention in what is an interlude recording divine activity and its fruits, before the more serious judgements connected to the trumpets and vials begin. Firstly, there are Israelites who are sealed for the purposes of preservation through those judgements, and then there are Gentiles who are arrayed in white. These will be carried through the great tribulation in victory, in relationship with Himself. That Gentile company, the fruit of the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom, are described as being 'a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues', Rev. 7. 9. The vision that John had of this great multitude anticipates what will be after the tribulation has finished.

It should be clearly noted that this company will not include those who in this present era 'received not the love of the truth' and 'believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness', 2 Thess. 2. 10, 11. No thought of a 'second chance' is entertained in scripture; those who are alive at the rapture and who have rejected gospel light will suffer judicial darkening. How important it is, then, in this present day to believe the truth.

The everlasting gospel

The everlasting gospel is mentioned in Revelation chapter 14. Its character is 'Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the foundations of waters', v. 7. The message of

the everlasting gospel concerns the rights of God as creator to receive worship, the claims of God on men. In addition, it contains warning of coming judgement, and is preached before Christ comes, before the destruction of the beast and, in all likelihood, before the destruction of Babylon. It is the last testimony before the great and notable day of the Lord and the great judgements of that time.

Accordingly, it will be universally preached at a time when unbelief and great delusion will be widespread in the earth and at a time when God will be denied. Man will have set himself up above all that is called God or worshipped and, in the midst of all the wicked depravity of that day, this testimony to the living God is made known. This has, in fact, gone forth in every age from the beginning of time and may be traced in the preaching of such servants of God as Enoch (see Jude 14) and Noah, a preacher of righteousness, Gen. 6. 13; 2 Pet. 2. 5. Profitable reference might also be made to the tenor of Psalm 96.

The preaching of the everlasting gospel suggests that there will be blessing to all who acknowledge it and respond affirmatively to it by refusing to bow to the beast and by doing homage to the living God. At all times, blessing on the earth is linked to the acknowledgement of the Creator. It is not clear what degree of overlap there may be between the gospel of the kingdom and the everlasting gospel, but together they constitute God's final testimony to man before the establishment of the manifest kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.



Baasha, King of Israel, came to power by assassinating Nadab, the son of Jeroboam. The historian recorded of him, 'And he did evil in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the ways of Jeroboam, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin', 1 Kgs. 15. 34. It was not surprising, therefore, that a prophet was commissioned to speak the word of the Lord against him, 16. 1. In days of declension, when God's word was ignored, the voices of the prophets were frequently heard.

Ahijah the Shilonite and Shemaiah had already appeared on the scene to reveal the mind of God in relation to Jeroboam and Rehoboam respectively, 11. 29; 12. 22; 14. 5. It was now the turn of Jehu to declare the Lord's message to Baasha. He was a prophet, who enjoyed a rich spiritual heritage. His father, Hanani, had left him a fine example by speaking out against Asa, king of Judah, for relying on the king of Syria, rather than on the Lord. His message was uncompromising: 'Herein thou hast done foolishly: therefore from henceforth thou shalt have wars', 2 Chr. 16. 9. Asa was angry with him for so doing and put him in prison, v. 10. Jehu, therefore, knew full well the cost of faithfully declaring the word of the Lord.

JEHU THE SON

Read 1 Kings 16. 1-7; 2 Chronicles 19. 1-4

Hanani challenges all Christian parents to be exercised about the spiritual example they set for their children. It was rare in the books of Kings for a son to rise above the spiritual standard set by his father.

As Baasha had been guilty of following the evil ways of Jeroboam, the message that Jehu delivered to him was similar to the one that Ahijah had communicated to Jeroboam, 1 Kgs 14. 7-10: 'Forasmuch as I exalted thee out of the dust, and made thee prince over my people Israel; and thou hast walked in the way of Jeroboam, and hast made my people Israel to sin, to provoke me to anger with their sins; behold, I will take away the posterity of Baasha, and the posterity of his house; and will make thy house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat', 16. 2-3. The phrase, 'exalted thee out of the dust' suggests that Baasha had risen to the throne from very humble origins. Nevertheless, whatever the man's origins were, if he dared to provoke the Lord to anger by displacing Him with idols, he would not escape unscathed.

The outlook for Baasha, therefore, was as bleak as it had been for Jeroboam. Jehu declared, 'Him that dieth of Baasha in the city shall the dogs eat; and him that dieth of his in the fields shall the fowls of the air eat', v. 4. For a man to remain unburied was considered to be one of the greatest disgraces and declared in the Mosaic Law to be a curse on the

disobedient, Deut. 28. 26. It was a harsh message indeed, but it was the word of the Lord; therefore, Jehu delivered it faithfully. If Baasha had responded positively to it, he would have found mercy. The judgement, however, did not fall directly on him, but during the reign of his son.

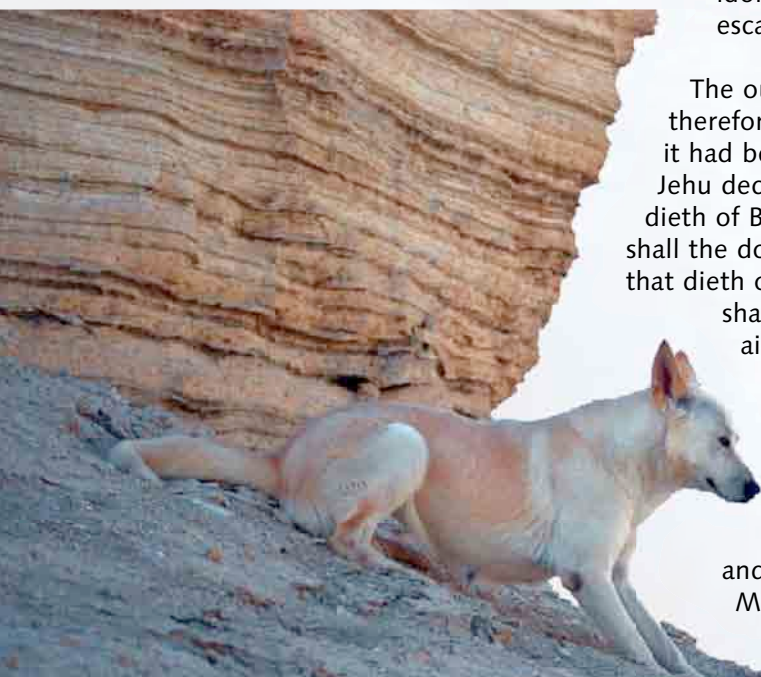
By

COLIN LACEY

Bath, England

The historian included an interesting supplementary comment on Baasha's life: 'And also by the hand of the prophet Jehu the son of Hanani came the word of the Lord against Baasha, and against his house, even for all the evil that he did in the sight of the Lord, in provoking him to anger with the work of his hands, in being like the house of Jeroboam; and because he killed him [i.e., the house of Jeroboam]', 1 Kgs. 16. 7. The Lord's censure of him for his evil deeds and for being like the house of Jeroboam is understandable and acceptable to most readers; however, to extend the censure to include the fact that he destroyed the house of Jeroboam seems harsh. Indeed, the Lord had prophesied that this would happen through the mouth of Ahijah the prophet, 14. 14; therefore, if he had simply done what the Lord had predicted he would do, it would appear unjust and unfair to hold him responsible.

First, in seeking to address this dilemma, it must be acknowledged that although the Lord might predict the evil a man will do, it does not make Him culpable for that man's action. Baasha was responsible for his own deeds and, therefore, had to face the consequences. Indeed, even though the Lord knew what he would do, he put himself forward for the task. Second, the fact that he immediately embraced the idolatry of the man whose





ON OF HANANI

household he had destroyed demonstrates that his motives were not pure. He did not destroy Jeroboam's household out of zeal for the word of the Lord, but because he coveted position and power. It was often the case in the Old Testament scriptures that the Lord inflicted judgement on the instruments that carried out His judgement. His judgements were always just and He judged others for the unjust way in which they carried them out. They often took things too far and caused unnecessary suffering to His people by so doing, Zech. 1. 15.

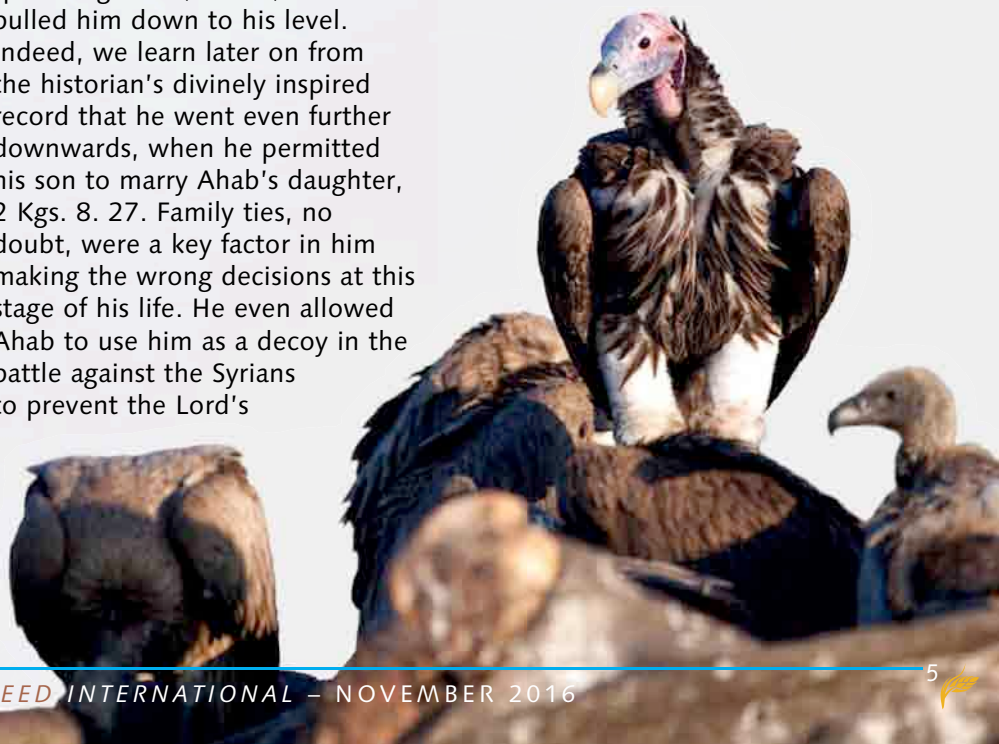
Just over thirty years later Jehu was called upon by God to rebuke one of the kings of Judah, namely, Jehoshaphat. He was thirty-five years of age when he began to reign in the fourth year of Ahab, king of Israel. He continued on the throne for twenty-five years in Jerusalem. He followed the example of Asa, his godly father, and he removed the sodomites that were still in the land at the outset of his reign, 1 Kgs. 22. 43, 46. He recognized that they were an offence to the Lord and condemned in His word. He was a very different king from Baasha; however, the fact that he was fundamentally a godly man did not mean that he was perfect. His reign was one of strange contrasts. It could have been much more productive for the Lord had it not been for his weakness in entering into an unholy alliance with Ahab, in order to repel the threat posed by Syria, 2 Chr. 18. 2-3. His response to Ahab's request to join him in the battle against the Syrians was a sad testimony to his lack of wisdom at this particular time: 'I am as thou art, and my people as thy people; and we will be with thee in the war', v. 3. He had already made a downward journey to visit Ahab, v. 2. He came from Jerusalem, the place where the Lord had chosen to set His name and from whence the Davidic line of kings

ruled; therefore, any journey from there into the rebellious northern kingdom of Israel would have been deemed as a downward spiritual pathway.

Jehoshaphat's underlying assumption that the differences between the two households were not a hindrance to unity was deeply flawed and led him to compromise the truth of God's word. The unenlightened reader might view it as a laudable achievement to bring Israel and Judah together, but it brought great displeasure to the Lord. The end achieved did not justify the means used to bring it about; indeed, the consequences of his foolish actions extended well beyond his lifetime. He stands as a strong warning to believers of all generations of the dangers of the unequal yoke. Paul's words are applicable: 'What part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? . . . Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing', 2 Cor. 6. 15-17. True and lasting unity can only be achieved on the basis of a shared obedience to the word of God. Jehoshaphat never succeeded in lifting Ahab to higher spiritual ground; rather, Ahab pulled him down to his level. Indeed, we learn later on from the historian's divinely inspired record that he went even further downwards, when he permitted his son to marry Ahab's daughter, 2 Kgs. 8. 27. Family ties, no doubt, were a key factor in him making the wrong decisions at this stage of his life. He even allowed Ahab to use him as a decoy in the battle against the Syrians to prevent the Lord's

judgement on him (Ahab) coming to pass, 2 Chr. 18. 29. Most of the time he made sound judgements that were in line with the Lord's will, but his errors cost him and the people dearly.

Jehu had a balanced approach when he met Jehoshaphat following his defeat at the hands of the Syrians. He did not hold back from rebuking him for his actions: 'Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord', 19. 2. However, he was also swift to praise him for the good that he had done in Judah: 'Nevertheless there are good things found in thee, in that thou hast taken away the groves out of the land, and hast prepared thine heart to seek the Lord', v. 3. It is good practice to balance rebuke with commendation when disciplining the Lord's people. Such an approach gained an appropriate response from Jehoshaphat. Unlike Ahaz in the past, he responded positively and showed by his succeeding actions that he was truly repentant. A purely harsh approach by Jehu would, no doubt, have been counter-productive. It is worthy of note that Paul commenced his letters with commendatory comments about the saints to whom he was writing. It was on the basis of this positive approach that he was able to go on and rebuke doctrinal or moral error.





The *Oxford English Dictionary* commemorates Jeremiah's legacy with the word 'jeremiad', defining it as 'a lamentation; a writing or speech in a strain of grief or distress; a doleful complaint; a complaining tirade; a lugubrious effusion'.¹ This is in keeping with the common appreciation of Jeremiah as 'the weeping prophet'. Yet his tears were understandable, and his multiple bouts of melancholy demonstrate that even the most faithful, godly saints may be afflicted with depression. Nevertheless, there is a gleam in the gloom: the Lord sustains and encourages His downcast children amidst horrendous circumstances with the promised blessings of the new covenant. As one has written: 'He was not only the prophet of sorrow and public calamity, but also the prophet of a new and better covenant of the heart'.²

The tracks of his tears

Jeremiah's inner life is revealed more than many other biblical heroes. Facing the conquest of his homeland by the Babylonian empire, coupled with his countrymen's apostasy, it is small wonder that he suffered depression. As FINDLAY remarks: 'Endowed with the finest sensibilities, in so evil a time he was bound to be a man of sorrows'.³ Others agree, citing his deep-seated struggles:

'It is impossible to plumb the depths of grief into which Jeremiah was plunged. Despairing of comfort (8. 18, 21), he desired to dissolve in tears for doomed Judah (9. 1; 13. 17) and abandon her to her self-inflicted fate (9. 2). Convinced of ultimate failure, he cursed the day he was born (15. 10; 20. 14-18), accused God of having wronged him (20. 7a), complained of the ignominy that had befallen him (20. 7b-10), invoked imprecations upon his tormentors (18. 18, 21-23). It is in this sense that the emotional, highly-strung Jeremiah was a tragic figure. The tragedy of his life springs from the conflicts which raged within and around him - his higher self wrestling with the lower, courage conflicting with cowardice, certain triumph struggling with apparent

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defeat, a determination to abandon his calling defeated by an inability to evade it (cf. 5. 14; 15. 16, 19-21 with 6. 11; 20. 9, 11; 23. 29). But these fierce internal conflicts and the ignominy in which his calling involved him (15. 17f; 16. 2, 5, 8) compelled him to find in God a refuge. Thus the OT ideal of communion with God comes to its finest expression in Jeremiah. And it was in this fellowship with God that Jeremiah was able finally to withstand the erosive effects of timidity, anguish, helplessness, hostility, loneliness, despair, misunderstanding and failure'.⁴

Clearly, he was distraught by his people's sin and the tragic discipline that Judah was about to endure.

The roots of his pain

Jeremiah's mental and emotional struggles were rooted in multiple documented causes:

- 1 In his anguish over the Jews' sin and the death and destruction that it will bring, he cries: 'Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!' Jer. 9. 1; and 'Woe is me for my hurt! my wound is grievous: but I said, Truly this is a grief, and I must bear it', 10. 19. His despair over these dark conditions even leads him to the Job-like bemoaning of the day of his birth, 15. 10; 20. 14-18. Like Asaph in the seventy-third psalm, he was perplexed by the apparent prosperity of the wicked, 12. 1-4, and sought answers from his righteous God.
- 2 His patriotism further distresses the solitary prophet. It broke his heart to watch the spiritual backsliding and increasing debauchery of his homeland, which resulted in the Lord employing the Babylonians as the instruments of His wrath, 9. 2-5; 10. 25. As HASTINGS writes:

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'A man of tender, loving, yielding, deeply impressible spirit, Jeremiah loved his country intensely. He would have given all he had to see Judah flourishing, Jerusalem prosperous; and, lo, we see him compelled by his destiny to announce to his fellow-citizens nothing but misfortune. Yet we may recognize in Jeremiah's character a special fitness for his mission. That tender, shrinking, sympathetic heart could more fully feel, and more adequately express, the ineffable Divine sorrow over the guilty people, the eternal love which was never stronger than at the moment when it seemed to have been metamorphosed into bitter wrath and implacable vengeance'.⁵

- 3 Jeremiah was falsely accused and persecuted by his neighbours, as well as so-called fellow prophets and the highest powers in the land, 11. 18-23; 26. 1-19. As one describes his career: 'Jeremiah's ministry was a lifelong martyrdom. It was in its nature a burden that might well have crushed the strongest spirit. Not only was he compelled to stand almost alone against the whole nation; but he was actually the object of bitter persecution; his very life was constantly in danger'.⁶ Others point out the severity of his service: 'The enmity to which he fell a victim, on account of his declaration of nothing but the truth, he deeply felt; see his complaints (9. 1ff; 12. 5f; 15. 10; 17. 14-18; 18. 23 . . .). In this sad antagonism between his heart and the commands of the Lord, he would perhaps wish that God had not spoken to him'.⁷
- 4 Eventually, Jeremiah was wrongfully imprisoned and would have starved to death apart from God's providential deliverance, 37. 11-21; 38. 7-13.
- 5 His ministry went unheeded by the nation and - on one notable



FAITHFUL AMIDST UNFAITHFULNESS

occasion – his written message was cut up and burned by the king, 36. 1-26. SCHAFF observes his intrepid commitment to the Lord's work in the face of daunting opposition:

'Jeremiah's task was a thankless one. He was the divine means, not of encouragement, but of discouragement. His voice was constantly heard calling upon the people to submit to their enemies. During all this time Jerusalem was in a most distracted and deplorable condition, and the prophet was calumniated, imprisoned, and often in danger of death. But no ill-treatment or threatenings could deter him from denouncing the judgments of God, which were coming upon the nation and that devoted city'.⁸

But the lack of response to his preaching was more indicative of the populace's hard hearts, rather than the true value of his efforts. CHEYNE comments: 'The visible success of a faithful preacher is no test of his acceptableness before God. There are times when the Holy Spirit himself seems to work in vain, and the world seems given up to the powers of evil . . . Jeremiah went on preaching, but with small apparent success; when all at once a little cloud arose, no bigger than a man's hand, and soon the fair prospects of Judah were cruelly blighted'.⁹

The fruit of his labours

In view of Jeremiah's sufferings, one may draw certain conclusions:

- 1 Even the most faithful believers are naturally disheartened by troubles and opposition. A compassionate saint cannot view the decline of the modern western world – not to mention other parts of the globe – and be unmoved by the plight of the perishing. Unbelieving family members, friends, and neighbours are a regular source of grief to Christians.
- 2 The increasing iniquity in the public square and its attendant

persecution – verbal and otherwise – gives concern and possible anxiety to the saints.

- 3 The decline of spiritual discernment, appetite for God's word, and inconsistent living within the Church causes pain to saints whose hearts are attuned to the Lord's glory being seen and experienced in the assemblies of His people.
- 4 Jeremiah was sustained by fellowship with the Lord; this is the continual refuge of depressed and suffering saints. We must carefully go to Him for encouragement, spiritual strength, and wisdom. Prayer and the scriptures are the unfailing resources for God's people, 1 Pet. 5. 7; Jas. 1. 2-8.

Jeremiah was not the last saint to experience depression. Many can testify to similar struggles (this author has family members and close friends that have suffered from clinical depression; he himself often battles discouragement in labouring for the Lord). One of the most used evangelists of the past five hundred years left this testimony:

'He who has been long experienced in the things of the divine life will sometimes be overtaken with a dark night and a stormy tempest; so dark will be the night, that he will not know his right hand from his left, and so horrible the tempest, that he cannot hear the sweet words of his Master, say, "Fear not, I am with thee". Periodical tornadoes and hurricanes will sweep o'er the Christian; he will be subjected to as many trials in his spirit as trials in his flesh. This much I know, if it be not so with all of you it is so with me. I have to speak to-day to myself; and whilst I shall be endeavouring to encourage those who are distressed and down-hearted, I shall be preaching, I trust, to myself, for I need something which shall cheer my heart—why I cannot tell, wherefore I do not know, but I have a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me; my soul is cast down within me, I feel as if I had

rather die than live; all that God hath done by me seems to be forgotten, and my spirit flags and my courage breaks down with the thought of that which is to come. I need your prayers; I need God's Holy Spirit; and I felt that I could not preach to-day, unless I should preach in such a way as to encourage you and to encourage myself in the good work and labour of the Lord Jesus Christ. What a precious promise to the young Christian, or to the old Christian attacked by lowness of spirits and distress of mind! "Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy redeemer the Holy One of Israel"'.¹⁰

Endnotes

- 1 The *OED* traces this word as far back as A.D. 1780 in English (1762 in French).
- 2 PHILIP SCHAFF, ed., *A Dictionary of the Bible*, Philadelphia; New York; Chicago: American Sunday-School Union, 1880, pg. 429.
- 3 G. G. FINDLAY, 'Jeremiah', in *Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. James Hastings, John A. Selbie, et al., New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909, pg. 434.
- 4 J. G. S. S. THOMSON and J. G. MCCONVILLE, 'Jeremiah', ed. D. R. W. Wood et al., *New Bible Dictionary*, Leicester, England: IVP, 1996, pg. 552.
- 5 JAMES HASTINGS, ed., *The Greater Men and Women of the Bible: Hezekiah-Malachi*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1915, pg. 233.
- 6 Ibid., pg. 236.
- 7 C. VON ORELLI and DAVID FRANCIS ROBERTS, 'Jeremiah', ed. James Orr et al., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, Chicago: Howard-Severance, 1915, pg. 1589.
- 8 SCHAFF, pg. 429.
- 9 T. K. CHEYNE, *Jeremiah, Vol. 1, The Pulpit Commentary*, ed. H. D. M. Spence-Jones, London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1909, pg. iv.
- 10 C. H. SPURGEON, 'Fear not', in *The New Park Street Pulpit Sermons*, Vol. 3., London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1857, pp. 389-390.

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(III) THE ADVENT OF THE LORD, 'Behold, I will bring forth', 3. 8, 9.

(i) 'My servant the Branch', v. 8.

Isaiah writes of Christ and His servant character. His first song begins, 'Behold, my servant', 42. 1. The word used for 'servant' is bond slave. Jesus Christ is only a bond slave relative to God. He is never called a bond slave in relation to man.

Isaiah writes of Israel's recovery and restoration, 49. 6, 'It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth'. The task of the servant is to restore Israel and to bless the Gentile nations. This is to be achieved by the sacrificial death of the Servant at Calvary as depicted in the fourth and final servant-song of Isaiah 52/53. This again begins, 'Behold my servant'.

The branch is more accurately the shoot or sprout. The stock, representing the nation, appears to be dead, until a little green shoot sprouts from it, the Branch! This is a messianic title of Christ, 6. 12.

Four Old Testament references to the Branch dovetail beautifully with the aspects of Christ portrayed in the gospel narratives:

- 'I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King', Jer. 23. 5, 6 – Matthew's Gospel;
- 'I will bring forth my servant the Branch', Zech. 3. 8 – Mark's Gospel;
- 'Behold the man whose name is the Branch', Zech. 6. 12 – Luke's Gospel;
- 'The branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious', Isa. 4. 2 – John's Gospel.

Christ is truly the root and offspring of David, Rev. 22. 16. He is both David's Lord and David's Son, Matt. 22. 45.

(ii) 'Behold the stone', v. 9.

There are three references to Christ as the Stone in Zechariah: here, a building stone, the headstone, 4. 7, and the cornerstone, 10. 4. The title

CHRIST in ZECHA

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'the Stone' is common to Old and New Testaments.¹

This 'one unique stone' has seven eyes.² In relation to the coming kingdom and reign of Christ, Isaiah refers to Christ's name as 'Counsellor', the One who advises, deliberates and counsels. Such will be His role in the golden years of the millennium. Nobody counsels God, Rom. 11. 34, though Isaiah speaks of the Holy Spirit resting upon Messiah as the future Governor among the nations. The Spirit is described as the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord, 11. 2. As supreme world emperor, Christ will have all these qualities to assist Him in His onerous task.

Verse 9 not only speaks of one, unique, singular stone but also refers to 'one day' when the iniquity of the land will be removed. Doubtless this is Israel's Day of Atonement. Although included with the feasts of Leviticus 23, this is the only feast that God has asked Israel to observe, 12. 10 – 13. 1.

(IV) THE ANOINTED OF THE LORD, 4. 14.

The golden lampstand speaks of testimony. Israel will be God's lampstand in the millennium and testimony will be sustained by the golden oil of the Holy Spirit.

'What are these?' enquires Zechariah of the interpreting angel, 4. 4. He is rebuffed by the angel who appears to feel that he ought to know! After all, he was a priest. 'These are the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth', v. 14. Anointing belonged to the king, the priest and, in one case, a prophet. The picture represents the two men holding office as anointed ones, Joshua the high priest, and Zerubbabel the prince and governor. They shared the religious and civil offices.

The use of the olive tree emphasizes

that the offices will be held by Jews. Israel is likened to a 'green olive tree, fair, and of goodly fruit' by Jeremiah. Hence, the olive trees remind us of the two men who are leaders of the nation in Zechariah's day, namely Joshua and Zerubbabel. Prophetically, they relate to the two offices of priest and king vested in the greatest Jew of them all, the Messiah, the Anointed One.

During the great tribulation Israel, nationally, will be anything but a lampstand of testimony for God. Thus, God raises up the two witnesses, Rev. 11. 4, to be His witnesses for three-and-a-half years. The language of the verse alluded to is clearly based on our present chapter.

The practical lesson to be learned is that spiritual power comes from the Holy Spirit alone. God's house can only be completed as we are galvanized by Him. There is no substitute or alternative.

(V) THE ATTRIBUTES OF THE LORD, 6. 12, 13.

A scene is acted out in which Joshua (Jesus) takes the role of Messiah. A composite crown is placed on his head, made of silver and gold. Silver speaks of redemption and, hence, the priestly office. Gold speaks of royalty and glory, picturing the office of potentate. This crown symbolizes the union of the two offices in one person, something God has reserved exclusively for His Son.

Zechariah now addresses Joshua with a prophetic message. He is speaking to Joshua but not of him. He speaks of seven attributes of the Lord.

(i) 'Behold the man', the humanity of the future King of Kings.

Hebrews chapter 2 verse 7 speaks of the world's subjection to Adam. However, failure came through the fall, nevertheless the second man, the last Adam, is spoken of by way of contrast, 'But we see Jesus'. A Man is going to take the reins of government in the kingdom of God.



URIAH'S PROPHECY (2)

(ii) 'Whose name is the BRANCH', the posterity of Messiah.

We are told that He shall grow up out of His place, or, as CYRIL HOCKING states, 'This One shall sprout, spring up from beneath [lit.], referring to His resurrection and not simply to His lovely incarnation, v. 12'.³ The risen Christ will be the basis of a fruitful nation in a day to come.

(iii) 'He shall build the temple of the Lord', the Lord's activity.

He will supervise the building of the millennial temple, based on the description recorded by Ezekiel. In order that there may be no misunderstanding as to which temple and which builder is referred to, the above statement is repeated in verse 13. Today, He is building His church, Matt. 16. 18.

(iv) 'He shall bear the glory', the Lord's dignity.

'Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows', say the mourning remnant of the future. In marked contrast, He will bear the glory in that day. This word 'glory', DR STRONG tells us, 'exudes grandeur'.⁴ In contradistinction to the nation in unbelief who declared, 'he hath no form nor comeliness', Isa. 53. 2, this word portrays one with an imposing form and appearance. It may be translated beauty, or comeliness, words that accurately characterize Christ in His Messianic splendour.

Though they crucified the Lord of glory, one day the King of glory will appear outside Jerusalem. The question will be raised, 'Who is this King of glory?' Ps. 24. 8, 10. The answer resounds, 'The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory. Selah'. Three disciples were privileged to preview the glory of Christ as He will be in His majestic kingdom. Peter writes of that cameo on the Mount of Transfiguration, 'We were eyewitnesses of his majesty'.⁵

(v) 'And shall sit and rule upon His throne', the Lord's authority and majesty.

Matthew describes this throne as 'the throne of his glory'. The act of being

seated as a judge instantly implies authority. The word also implies a sense of permanence. Further, He is to rule. The idea is not purely one of a sovereign figurehead, as our queen, but invokes a hands-on approach to ruling. He will be King of kings and Lord of lords, but He will also administer the kingdom for one thousand years, Himself.

(vi) 'And he shall be a priest upon his throne', the Lord's ministry

The priests of Israel stemmed from Levi. The high priest who gave his name to this order of priesthood was Aaron. Christ was of the tribe of Judah, from which the royal line came. He could not therefore be an Aaronic priest. But predating Levi and Aaron was a Gentile called Melchisedek, Gen. 14. 18. Melchisedek was a local king and a family priest, yet he is the historical figure who depicts Christ as King-Priest. Our Lord is a priest forever after the order of Melchisedek. The Hebrew writer would have us 'consider how great this man was', 7. 4, 'made like unto the Son of God'. When King Uzziah tried to behave as a priest as well as a king, he was smitten in the head with leprosy.⁶

Christ is the only one permitted of God to be 'a priest upon his throne'. When He enters the temple He will enter by the east gate. This is reserved for Messiah and the prince. The people enter from north or south and exit south or north, but the east gate is exclusively for the use of Messiah and His princely representative, as Ezekiel reminds us.

(vii) 'And the counsel of peace shall be between them both', the Lord's ability

In chapter 1 the Lord was aggrieved that His people were oppressed while the angel-horsemen reported the Gentile nations were 'at ease'. Again, 'all the earth sitteth still, and is at rest'.

At last, the Prince of peace will bring peace to Israel and the nations by carefully balancing in Himself

the offices of king and priest. No longer will the request be needed, 'Pray for the peace of Jerusalem', Ps. 122. 6. Jerusalem will be known as the city of peace and the Prince of peace will reign universally. Shalom!

'His name shall be called Wonderful', Isa. 9. 6. How wonderful He is! He will build the temple, bear the glory and balance the offices of priest and king.

Endnotes

- 1 For example: at Christ's birth – the rejected stone, Luke 20. 17; in His life – the stumbling stone, Rom. 9. 32; in His death – the foundation stone, Isa. 28. 16; in resurrection – the headstone, Ps. 118. 22; at His second coming – the smiting stone, Dan. 2. 35.
- 2 In chapter 4 verse 10 the Lord has seven eyes. In Revelation chapter 5 verse 6 the Lamb has seven eyes. This refers to the perfect perception and knowledge of our Lord – His omniscience.
- 3 IVAN STEEDS (ed.), *The Minor Prophets*, Precious Seed Publications, 1992.
- 4 JAMES STRONG, *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, Thomas Nelson, 1997.
- 5 2 Pet. 1. 16.
- 6 The same combination was tried at Babel. Once again God came down in judgement and confounded the language of all the earth, Gen. 11. 9.





Stephen, the first martyr of the church age, flashes on and off the page of Holy Scripture in just three action-packed chapters in the Acts of the Apostles, yet leaves a legacy that changed the course of Christian witness forever. I believe that his finest hour came at the end of what appears to have been a short, but fruitful life. However, first let us consider the character of the man and the circumstances in which he lived for God.

His Circumstances

At the end of Acts chapter 5, the early believers, still confined to Jerusalem, were beginning to rile the local authorities with their zealous preaching of the gospel. Having been beaten at the hands of the Jewish Council and warned to stop preaching, the apostles carried on, 'rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name', v. 41. Persecution was the catalyst that drove the early believers to deeper devotion to Christ, and greater dependence on God. It was at this time that the rate of Church growth accelerated from addition¹ to multiplication.² Amidst persecution the gospel was prospering!

Sadly, an undercurrent of discontent began bubbling beneath the surface in relation to the distribution of provisions to widows, 6. 1. The great unity which marked the early believers³

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was under threat. Acknowledging that this task had become too much for them to administer themselves, the apostles proposed to appoint seven others to oversee this aspect of the work. As D. L. MOODY once said, 'It is better to put 10 men to work than to try to do the work of 10 men'. 'Look ye out among you seven men', was the instruction given by the apostles. It's interesting to note that Stephen and the other six men weren't parachuted in from a Bible college, or wheeled off the production line of a spiritual training camp. They were men who were already active, and proving their worth among the company. They were men who were known and trusted by the people and who had an obvious care and interest in the people. Aren't these the kind of men needed today?

His Character

The apostles declared the spiritual qualifications required of these men. Firstly, they were to be reputable: 'men of honest report'. Secondly, they had to be spiritual: men 'full of the Holy Spirit'. Thirdly, they needed to be practical: men who were 'full of wisdom' and, therefore, those

who knew how to apply biblical knowledge in real life situations. With these criteria in mind, Stephen and six others were chosen. The outcome of their appointment was that the 'word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith', v. 7. Isn't it true that the local church operates most effectively when everyone is doing that for which God has

fitted them?

We are informed about several aspects of Stephen's character. Verses 3 and 5 tell us he was 'full of the Holy Spirit' and so he was yielded to the will of God. Verse 3 also tells us that he was 'full of wisdom' and was therefore yielded to the word of God. Furthermore, in verse 8 we learn that he was 'full of power' and so he was also yielded to the work of God. This is the kind of man that God can use!

Such a man did not go unnoticed by the religious leaders. In verse 9 we read that 'there arose certain of the synagogue . . . disputing with Stephen'. The Greek word used for 'disputing' is most commonly translated 'questioning'⁴ and suggests that things began in a reasonable, orderly manner. However, this soon spiralled out of control.

His Countenance

The arrest and false accusation of innocent Stephen is reminiscent of how the Lord Jesus Christ was treated before him, and how the Apostle Paul would be treated after him.

Stephen's faith in Christ during his trial was outwardly manifested for his accusers to see: 'All that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel', v. 15. There was something heavenly about this man. When they looked upon Stephen they saw a life which reflected something of the beautiful character of his Saviour.





Only through hours spent in the presence of God, contemplating and reflecting on the person of Christ, can we begin to reflect something of His character in our lives. The outcome was that they looked steadfastly on him and could not take their eyes off of him. Perhaps when these men looked upon Stephen they realized that he had something they lacked. Their religion was only skin deep but this was a man who truly knew God!

His Courage

As Stephen comes to the climax of his defence before the council, he courageously decries his accusers as being immovable in their traditions, and unwilling to bow to the truth. These men prided themselves in their high standards of morality and law keeping, yet their consciences were pricked at Stephen's pointed preaching. 'They gnashed on him with their teeth', conjures up the image of a pack of incensed wild animals viciously setting upon him. In verse 57 we read that they 'ran upon him with one accord'. Sadly, one of the few things which brings people together is their hatred of Christ and those who belong to Him.

Amidst the violence, Stephen had a glorious vision. Verse 55 observes that he 'looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God'. Stephen lifted his eyes from the trials and troubles of earth. He was focussed on heaven, fixated on the glory of God, and the exalted Christ. His gaze was steadfast and so, as the rocks began to rain down upon him, he remained unmoved. What was it that captivated him as he looked into heaven? It was 'Jesus standing'. Hebrews chapter 1 verse 3 and Hebrews chapter 10 verse 12 tell us that, having dealt with our sins on the cross, 'He sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high . . . on the right hand of God'. So our Lord Jesus Christ sits down to rest in His finished work, but here stands up to receive His faithful witness, Stephen.

In verse 58 we learn that they 'cast him out of the city, and stoned him'. Yet while Stephen was cast out by men, he was crowned by God. The name Stephen means 'crowned' and comes from the Greek word, *stephanos*. There are two different

Greek words for crown in the New Testament: *diadema* which was a royal crown, and *stephanos* which was the victor's crown. While a royal crown can be inherited, a victor's crown must be earned. In Revelation chapter 2, writing to the suffering church at Smyrna, the Lord Jesus says in verse 10, 'be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life'. Stephen was willing to both live and die for Christ. The question we must ask ourselves is whether we are willing to die daily to self, sin, and the world, and to present ourselves as 'living sacrifices', Rom. 12. 1, unto God.

His Christ-likeness

The Christ-like character of Stephen undoubtedly shone most brightly in the darkest hour of his life. His final words are a vivid reminder of the words of Christ upon the cross. Consider those glorious words in verse 59 which highlight his faithfulness, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit' – reminiscent of the Saviour's words, 'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit'.⁵ Stephen, like his Lord, could depart, having faithfully finished the work he'd been given to do on earth. Consider too those gracious words of forgiveness in verse 60, 'lay not this sin to their charge' – reminding us of the words of Christ, 'Father forgive them'.⁶ The language describing the final moments of Stephen's life is appropriately beautiful, as, amidst the storm of violence erupting around him, scripture simply states that 'he fell asleep'. What a joy it would be for this faithful servant to awake to see his Lord face to face.

His Conclusion

Verse 2 tells us that there was great sorrow at the home call of this spiritual giant. Does it not cause us to consider whether we will be missed, and what we will leave behind when we are gone? Stephen left a great spiritual legacy. However, no individual is indispensable or irreplaceable! We are told that 'devout men carried him to his burial'. Perhaps these would be the men who would take up the work which Stephen had left behind. As CHARLES WESLEY once said, 'God buries His workmen but carries on His work'. Amidst the lamentation, a fresh wave of persecution arose according to chapter

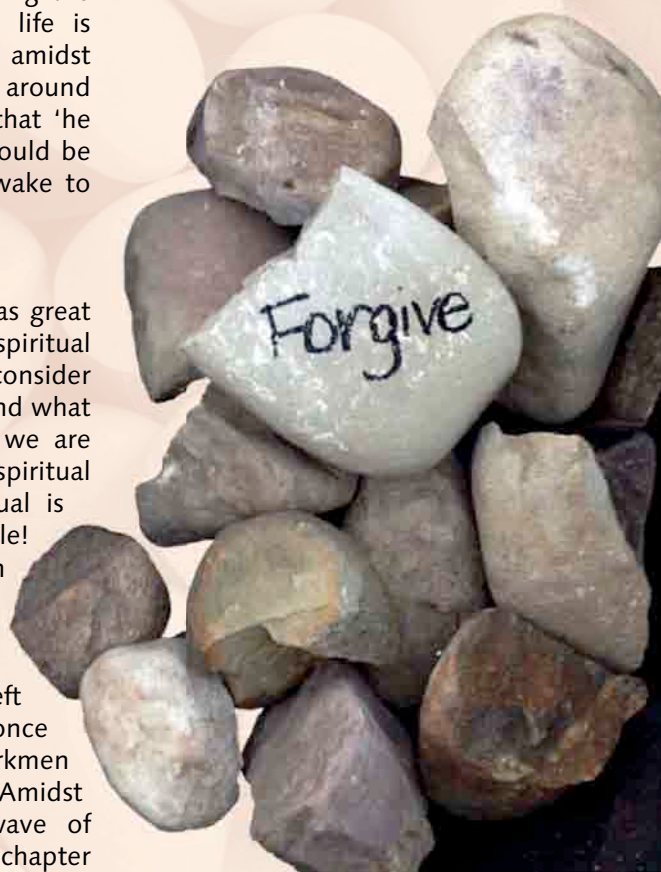
8 verse 1. As was noted previously, the outcome of persecution was further evangelization, as verse 4 tells us 'they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word'.

The martyrdom of Stephen was the seemingly unlikely event that would unleash the gospel from the confines of Jerusalem. Worldwide evangelism began with one seemingly insignificant little life surrendered and given to the Lord. Surely, it causes us to consider what God could do with our lives if they are fully yielded to Him. God can use a small match to light a great torch. I suggest, then, that Stephen's finest hour was his final hour, when he became the spark which set the gospel spreading like wildfire, eventually to reach 'unto the uttermost part of the earth', Acts 1. 8.

Endnotes

- 1 Acts 2. 41, 47.
- 2 Acts 6. 1, 7.
- 3 Acts 1. 14; 2. 1, 44, 46; 4. 24; 5. 12.
- 4 Of its eleven uses in the New Testament, it is translated 'question' or 'questioning' four times.
- 5 Luke 23. 46.
- 6 Luke 23. 34.

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Ephesians

Chapter 4 verses 1-16

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

The epistle now turns to what is practical. If we have seen doctrinal truth in chapters 1-3, where our wealth is set before us, now we have the desire of God that we live out the truth He has given us. We will see the walk that must mark every believer. Having concluded the former section by introducing the truth that we have been brought into one body, he is now going to teach the necessity of believers being characterized by unity.

In the first sixteen verses of the chapter we have:

- the desire for unity, vv. 1-3;
- a description of unity, vv. 4-6;
- the dispenser of unity, vv. 7-11;
- the development of unity, vv. 12-16.

The final verses set forth the display of unity by all the saints.

The desire for unity is foremost in the apostle's heart as he makes his appeal to them as being a prisoner of the Lord. Lordship is the theme of these chapters and it is such that all should be subject to it.

Here we find the **appeal of the servant** as he desires that we should walk worthy of the calling wherewith we are called. He is reflecting on all we have been brought into in chapters 1-3. If we are elect, if we have an inheritance with Christ in His future glory and the earnest of the Spirit as a guarantee of it, then we should walk worthy. The same could be said of the blessings received in chapters 2-3; all these should elevate the believer's life to be a true representative of heaven.

As far as the **attitude of the saints** is concerned, this must be in a twofold way: first, in our actions before the saints in lowliness and meekness; second, in responsibilities toward the saints with longsuffering and forbearance. Such a walk will maintain

the unity into which we have been brought.

We are then brought to consider the **activity of the Spirit** who has formed this unity, v. 4. Believers cannot make the unity. It has already been done. Our responsibility is to keep it; let nothing mar or spoil that into which we have been brought. Sadly, this unity is not always seen today, when men do that which is right in their own eyes and the result is that division marks so much of Christianity.

The **description of unity** is seen in verses 4-6, where we see that it is formed by the Spirit, v. 4, by faith in Christ, v. 5, and founded by God, v. 6. This section of the chapter brings before us truth for the body, while in verses 7-16 it is the body of truth that is taught.

A sevenfold unity is expressed in these verses and we find that each person of the Godhead is involved in creating and maintaining what is now seen.

This verse unfolds three aspects of the unity made:

- a) the unity of the body;
- b) the unifying Spirit; and
- c) the ultimate goal.

As the body came into being through the Spirit of God, so the destiny of it is brought before us. It is linked with the calling of verse 1 and presents a living hope.

In verse 5 'all' is centred in Christ for we all have one Lord. This Lordship was owned when, on the day of

conversion, we put faith in Christ. Some would link this with the doctrine which has been left to us, but as 'all' has to do with individual association with Christ it seems saving faith is in view. All is demonstrated by obedience to the Lord in baptism. The verse reveals the control of the Lord, our conversion by faith and the confession of that faith in baptism.

All is brought under the supreme authority of God who is said to be the Father of all. We judge that when Paul writes of one God and Father of all, v. 6, he is speaking within the confines of this sevenfold unity, and this, unlike chapter 3 verses 14-15, is limited to those in the one body who have one Lord.

God is also our Father. Three things are stated, as three different prepositions are used:

- 1) *epi* – He is above all; His pre-eminence;
- 2) *dia* – and through all; His purpose;
- 3) *en* – and in you all; His presence.

From verses 7-10 we see the dispenser of unity as the Lord Jesus imparts gift to maintain the unity into which we have been brought. Gift is always seen as a grace, that is, it is unearned and unmerited, but divine choice imparts it as the Lord deems fit. We now have the gifts of Christ before us; in Romans chapter 12 we see the gifts of God, and in 1 Corinthians chapter 12 we find the gifts of the Spirit. A careful reading of these passages will unveil the differences and the reason for them.





The gifts of Christ are given by a man who has passed through death, burial, and resurrection and who has now passed into the presence of the Father and occupies the place of absolute supremacy. These gifts are given to men and men are the gifts.

From verses 11-16 we see the development of unity by the gifts that have been given. These gifts are fourfold and divided by the word 'some', leaving us with the foundation gifts of 'apostles' and 'prophets', 2. 20, followed by the evangelist and, finally, the pastor teacher. The evangelist is the man with the hook to bring them in and the pastor teacher is the man with the book to keep them in. The last of the gifts must have the ability both to care as the pastor and to teach the truth of God. Every teacher must have a genuine care for those whom he seeks to lead on in the faith.

These gifts are given for the development of the saints and when stating 'for the perfecting of the saints', v. 12, it has the thought of 'to equip for service' and with a view to the ministry being carried on by those who follow as they also make a declaration of that which is passed on to them. The same thought is expressed in 2 Timothy chapter 2 verse 2, 'the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also'.

Once again, verse 13 would bring before us three desires of the Lord as gift is employed among the saints to produce those features the Lord would long to see in us. We see that the desire of the Lord is:

- that **unity** should be seen as far as the faith is concerned. Such is the diversity of thought today, all it has done is cause strife and denominationalism; this was never the desire of the Lord;
- for **intimacy**, that is, a deeper appreciation of the Lord Jesus

Himself; and

- for **maturity** in Christian growth. This is the divine ideal as the risen Head desires development, that features of Himself may be seen in all His saints.

Not only are the gifts given for our spiritual prosperity, but also, v. 14, for our preservation from the satanic assault from without, which is intended to prevent the features of Christ being seen in us, v. 13. In His goodness, the Lord has provided for us, to prevent immaturity, instability, and gullibility.

Immaturity

The thought is of remaining a child, a babe, v. 14. It is always sad to see an infant that does not develop. Attention is drawn to the condition of the Corinthian believers in chapter 3 verses 1-3, where the same word is used (*nepios*). They are said to be 'babes in Christ'. The reason for the lack of growth was the carnality that marked them as they followed the teaching of certain men to the exclusion of other ministry that God had given.

Instability Lack of teaching leaves the saints open to the tempest of false doctrine. In James chapter 3 verse 4 an illustration is given of fierce winds driving along a ship which is guided aright by the shipmaster through the storm. The Lord, through the tongue of the teacher, which is the subject of James chapter 3, can, and will, preserve us through profitable ministry. In Jude verse 12, false teachers are seen as clouds that bring no blessing, 'carried about of winds'. In Jude's Epistle we have the false teachers; here we have their dupes.

Gullibility

These sad people are said to be 'carried about', that is, transported hither and thither, and are like those of Mark chapter 6 verse 55 when they 'began to carry about in beds those that were sick'. Today, we find many

that are spiritually sick, who go from place to place and take in all forms of wrong doctrine, simply because they do not listen to those who bring the truth of God to them. The reason why they are so gullible is because of the character that marks these false teachers and the way they operate, which is by sleight of hand. Notice the words that are used of them, 'sleight', 'cunning craftiness', and to 'lie in wait to deceive'. We would hardly think that any would take up the things of God to such ends, but this is the divine description regarding them.

How beautiful to see those who are growing up into Him. If the object of the ministry that is given is to bring us to 'the stature of the fullness of Christ', as seen in verse 13, in verse 15 we are taught that truth in the life will have the effect of causing us to grow, and that unto Christ, bringing us into deeper association with the Lord Jesus. Thus, the Lord Jesus is the object and end of our growth. Surely that should make us more Christ like?

The whole thought behind the giving of gift is not to make much of man at any time, but rather that Christ might be honoured in all things. With the figure of a body seen throughout these verses, the honour of the head must be paramount, for the body is completely controlled by the head. If there is deformity in the body, then the head loses the ability to motivate that member of the body and so loses control. To grow up into the Head means that Christ has complete sway over us.

In verse 16, all believers, according to the measure that has been given, contribute to the good of the whole, as each part fulfils its responsibility in the body. This makes for an increase of the body, as each member is used for the furtherance of the body, as we strengthen each other in love. This verse displays how every believer is not only an integral part of the body, but also vital to it, to cause it to be what the Lord desires.





ESL Evangelism in Vancouver A Philadelphian Open Door?



By **HAROLD SUMMERS** Vancouver, Canada

It is the responsibility of believers to preach the gospel to all the world, Mark 16. 15. Helping newcomers to our country to learn English and using this as an avenue to present to them the glorious gospel of the blessed God, 1 Tim. 1. 11, is one way to meet this responsibility.

Sixteenth Avenue Gospel Chapel in Vancouver first opened its doors in 1947. It was located on the edge of a large development of new homes occupied mainly by families with young children. A large Sunday School was started and was blessed by the Lord with the conversion of many children.

Over the years the demographics changed. The children grew older and the housing stock began to sell, often to recent immigrants to Canada. By the 1980s, a very large number of our neighbours were immigrants, mainly from south-east Asia. The assembly felt that this presented an opportunity for gospel outreach.

By 1992, two missionary sisters returned to our assembly from their former fields of service – Barbara Cummings, from service as a school teacher and administrator at Faith Academy in the Philippines, and Margaret Roberts, a mandarin speaker from youth work in Taiwan. The assembly felt that their complementary gifts and experience could be combined with the help of other believers for an outreach, teaching English as a second language

(ESL) and introducing the students to the gospel. This would help us fulfil the great commission of taking the gospel unto the uttermost part of the earth, Acts 1. 8, as well as our responsibility to the stranger among us, Deut. 10. 18-19.

In the context of much prayer, we began. Our programme is both simple and flexible. Classes run from 10 a.m. till noon on Wednesdays and Fridays. Students are grouped according to their capability in the language, and instruction, with emphasis on conversation, continues for an hour. After a coffee break, classes resume with more instruction, and a consideration of a Bible passage.

The interest from the community was very strong. The numbers attending have grown steadily, largely without advertising, and over the years continued to rise towards one hundred. Most of our students are parents (usually mothers) of school age or university age children. We have been humbled and encouraged to be used to reach so many with the gospel.

There are several reasons for their interest. First is a genuine desire to learn the language of their chosen country. This is often encouraged by the requirements of immigration boards. The second is a desire for friends with whom they have things in common. These classes enable them to meet others with similar interests and problems, as well as to meet Christian teachers and helpers who seek to befriend them. A third is that they have time! Those new to a country are not yet booked up by the 'cares of this world', which so often keep people from the gospel. In addition, they usually have a great respect for the country they have chosen and the culture that comes along with it. Many realize that the Bible is a major foundation of our culture.

It soon became apparent that

many were eager for more Bible instruction. Learning from regular sermons at the chapel was beyond the comprehension of most of these students so we introduced them to ESL Bible Studies. These are conducted on Tuesday afternoons, Wednesday evenings and, at the same time, we have Sunday School classes for children. The topics covered are the gospel, basic Christian living, and basic Bible knowledge.

The response has been as expected. Some have mocked and gone away, others have returned to hear more, and still others, by the grace of God, have believed, as was the case in Athens, Acts 17. 32-34.

It is common for new immigrants to move about, and so we find many of our contacts relocating to other parts of Canada and the world. This gives us a greater turnover than we would like, but the Lord is able to take and to use the word sown.

The interest was great in 1992 when we began this outreach, but it appears to be greater today. Immigration is increasing, and the Syrian refugee crisis is but one illustration. We recently prepared a flyer for distribution to our neighbourhood, looking mainly to increase attendance at our Sunday School but also listing our ESL programs. This was posted on social media by one of our sisters (who was recently saved as a result of this ESL outreach) to encourage some of her friends to attend. The result was overwhelming. There were so many wanting to attend the Wednesday and Friday morning classes that our building could not contain them. Rather than 'send them away' we have started similar classes on Tuesday mornings.

There appears to be 'an open door' and the Lord has promised that 'the harvest is plenteous'. Please pray for the Lord's blessing.



*Sixteenth Avenue Gospel Chapel
in Vancouver*



NUMBERS

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

1. Introduction

The Hebrew name of the book is *bemidhbar*, meaning 'In the wilderness'. This phrase occurs repeatedly in the book, e.g., 1. 1, and accurately describes its setting.¹ In the ancient Greek translation known as the Septuagint the book was known as 'Arithmoi';² this, in turn, became 'Numeri' in the later translation known as the Latin Vulgate. Both of these terms refer to the prominent censuses of Numbers chapters 1 and 26.³ One writer notes that both of the names 'reflect the importance of the census of the Israelite tribes in the book that is the basis for the allocation of territory; the phrase "according to the number of names" is found fifteen times in reference to the distribution of land'.⁴

To contemporary readers, these lists of impossible sounding names might be devoid of interest, but they actually serve an important purpose: they clearly identify God's people. As JOHN NELSON DARBY remarks: 'The first thing to be noticed is, that God numbers His people exactly, and arranges them, once thus recognized, around His tabernacle: sweet thought, to be thus recognized and placed around God Himself!'⁵

The censuses also demonstrate the Lord's faithfulness to His covenant. The first one is a list of those whom He delivered from Egypt, but who eventually fell under His judgement on account of their unbelief, Num. 14. 29; Heb. 3. 16-19. God promised to curse the unbelieving, Deut. 27. 26, and thus He performed His word. Yet the second census assures the reader that there is a generation that will inherit the blessing by His grace received through faith.⁶

2. The Purpose of the Book

Numbers is book four of a five-book series: the books of Moses. Although unbelieving academia has fiercely attacked Mosaic authorship since the early nineteenth century, the Son of God affirmed it.⁷ As the last verse indicates, the Lord Jesus directly referred back to Numbers, citing the story of the serpent on the pole. The apostles also believed that Moses wrote the Pentateuch, Acts 3. 22; 26. 22.

These books explain the history of

God's central work in the world, which is the creation of a people for Himself who will be a light to the nations. The continuity between Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers is explained by J. B. D. PAGE this way: 'Exodus describes the way out of Egypt, and the foundational truth of redemption. Leviticus tells of the way in to God, detailing the principles of worship. Numbers relates the way through the wilderness, with lessons for our conduct in this world. In Leviticus, the priests are prominent. In Numbers, the Levites, and later the people, are foremost'.⁸

Numbers continues the teaching at Sinai begun in Exodus chapter 16 and resumed in Leviticus.⁹ It follows Israel as they wander in the wilderness for nearly forty years,¹⁰ learning the folly of disobedience and the blessing of obeying the Lord's word. Along the way, the Almighty's faithfulness, mercy, grace, wisdom, and sovereignty is seen. The book also contrasts the blessings that Israel enjoys through Jehovah's covenant fidelity, e.g., Num. 1-10, and their practical failure and recurrent rebellion against His authority, Num. 11-21.

The practical and theological function of the wilderness

While the desert¹¹ was an austere setting, in God's hand it became the training ground for Israel's future blessing and inheritance. The Psalms often look back to this formative period in Israel's history as a warning against the cost of disobedience and thanksgiving for divine provision, Ps. 106. 14-33. Both Stephen and Paul referred to the wilderness experience in their sermons, Acts 7. 37-44; 13. 18. Likewise, Hebrews chapters 3 and 4 use the sin of the first wilderness generation as a solemn warning against apostasy to mere professors. The background to 1 Corinthians chapter 10 verses 1-13 – another serious warning passage – also looks back to Israel's spectacular sins in the wilderness era. Clearly, it left a mark on the consciousness of God's people. Its truth is of trans-dispensational importance, that is, it was valuable for Old Testament Israel and for the New Testament church, 2 Tim. 3. 16-17; Rom. 15. 4.

Believers have derived much spiritual benefit from 'wilderness experiences' through the centuries; its frequency

as a motif in Christian hymnody demonstrates this phenomenon. For example, DARBY's beautiful lyrics speak of the believer's longing for a better home and show that his 'life is hidden with Christ in God', Col. 3. 1-4:

*This world is a wilderness wide!
We have nothing to seek or to choose;
We've no thought in the waste
to abide;
We have naught to regret, nor to lose.*

*The Lord is Himself gone before;
He has marked out the path that
we tread;*

*It's as sure as the love we adore,
We have nothing to fear, nor to dread.*

Although the wilderness is not an end point in itself, it is an important pathway that leads towards the destination of enjoying God in His inheritance. It may be temporary, but it is also indispensable for sanctification. Christian character is moulded and formed under the Lord's hand in the desert of this world.¹² As C. H. MACKINTOSH declares: 'It is emphatically a wilderness book, and characterized by journeyings, service, and all the vicissitudes of wilderness life. As such, it is deeply interesting, most instructive, and easily applied to the Christian in this present evil world (compare Numbers 1 and 36. 13 with Deuteronomy 1. 3)'.¹³

3. The Plan of the Book

Broadly, the book may be divided generationally. Chapters 1-25 concern the first generation that rebelled and failed to enter the Promised Land. Chapters 26-36 are occupied with matters concerning the second generation that would eventually enter the Land under the leadership of Joshua. Since the book of Numbers prepares Israel for their journey through the wilderness to the edge of Canaan, accordingly the first ten chapters are preparatory for the journey. These instructions reflect the orderly nature of God's dealings with His people, 1 Cor. 14. 40.

The Lord begins by commanding Moses to conduct a census, chapters 1-4, including the preparation of the Levites for service. The censuses of this book are especially concerned with marking out the nation's eligible warriors. Like many modern democracies, the army was composed of 'citizen-soldiers',



CHARTING THE SCRIPTURES NUMBERS by Jonathan Black

Counting - Ch. 1

REUBEN - 46,500
SIMEON - 59,300
GAD - 45,650
JUDAH - 74,600
ISSACHAR - 54,400
ZEBULUN - 57,400
EPHRAIM - 40,500
MANASSEH - 32,200
BENJAMIN - 35,400
DAN 62,700
ASHER - 41,500
NAPHTALI - 53,400

Total soldiers able to
fight over 20 yrs
603,550

Charging Levites - Ch. 3

PRIESTLY ORDER

Levites - Not numbered among soldiers
to serve manward but
appointed over tabernacle:
to serve Godward.

Gershonites - Tabernacle / Tent
Kohathites - Furniture / Ark
Merarites - Boards / Bars / Pillars

W

Ephraim
Manasseh
Benjamin

Gershonites

Camping

Dan / Asher /
Merari

Kohath
Reuben / Simeon

38 YEARS

A great future ends in great failure

Wilderness of
Sinai

Wilderness of
Paran

The Nazarite, Ch. 6
'Separate from sinners'
Christ in separation
Heb. 7

Aaron's budding rod, Ch. 17
'It bringeth forth much fruit',
Christ in resurrection

The red heifer, Ch. 19
Offered without spot,
Christ in His death
Ashes for purification - Heb. 9

Christ in N

The smitten
Speak unto
Christ our gr

Wandering in

These are they that were numbered by Moses and Eleazar the priest, who numbered the children of Israel in the plains of Moab when they numbered the children of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai. For the Lord had said of them, They shall surely die.

Consecration in service at Sinai
The Wilderness of Sinai

- 1 Counting the soldiers
- 2 Camping with the standard
- 3 Charging the Levites service
- 4 Carried by the Levites
- 5 Cleansing in the camp
- 6 Consecrated - The Nazarite vow
- 7 Dedicated the altar
- 8 Separating the Levites for service
- 9 Keeping the Passover at Sinai

Continuing from Sinai in the wilderness

The Wilderness of Paran

- 10 Trumpets & travel - Sinai to Paran
- 11 Kibroth Hattavah - the people lusted
- 12 The sin of Miriam
- 13 The 12 spies and their report
- 14 Joshua and Caleb spared
- 15 Further laws when they enter land
- 16 The rebellion of Korah
- 17 The budding rod of Aaron
- 18 The charge to the Levites
- 19 The red heifer and separation

WARNING!
'Now these things
were our examples,
to the intent we
should not lust after
evil things, as they
also lusted',

1 Cor. 10. 6
Num. 11. 4, 33, 34



...but Can
they have wholly

Jesus Christ spoke of
Matthew 9. 36, 'as sheep
John 3. 14, 'And as Moses
even so must the Son of

Key words - numbered / service / charge / inheritance / **Writer** - Moses

- Ch. 2

Carrying - Ch. 10

Counting - Ch. 26

/ Naphtali
tes

hites
eon / Gad

EARS

Moses Aaron & Sons

Judah
Issachar
Zebulun

E

MARCHING ORDER

- 1st - Judah, Issachar, Zebulun
- 2nd - Gershonites / Merarites
- 3rd - Reuben, Simeon, Gad
- 4th - Kohathites
- 5th - Ephraim, Manasseh, Benjamin
- 6th - Dan, Asher, Naphtali

REUBEN - 43,730
SIMEON - 22,200
GAD - 40,500
JUDAH - 76,500
ISSACHAR - 64,300
ZEBULUN - 60,500
MANASSEH - 52,700
EPHRAIM - 32,500
BENJAMIN - 45,600
DAN 64,400
ASHER - 53,400
NAPHTALI - 45,400

but failure looks forward to a great future

Total soldiers able to
fight over 20 yrs
601,730

Wilderness of
Zin

Plains of
Moab

Numbers

rock, Ch. 20
to the rock,
eat high priest

The brazen serpent, Ch. 21
Son of Man lifted up,
Christ crucified

Cities of refuge, Ch. 35
The hope set before us,
An anchor of the soul

Inheritance ahead, Ch. 34 / 36
An inheritance incorruptible,
The fulness of Christ:

in the wilderness

Moab by Jordan near Jericho. But among these there was not a man of them whom Moses and Aaron the priest numbered,
e in the wilderness. And there was not left a man of them, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun.

leb and Joshua

y followed the LORD.

of Numbers in the Gospels.

having no shepherd' - Numbers 27. 17

lifted up the serpent in the wilderness,

of man be lifted up' - Numbers 21



WARNING!
'Neither murmur ye,
as some of them also
murmured, and were
destroyed of the
destroyer',

1 Cor. 10. 10
Num. 14. 2, 29

Consequences of disobedience

The Wilderness of Zin

- 20 The smitten rock - Aaron/Miriam dies
- 21 The serpent of brass on route to Moab
- 22 The plains of Moab - Balaam
- 23 Balak
- 24 Balaam's parables
- 25 Sin with the Midianites

Counting the cost of the wilderness

The Plains of Moab

- 26 Numbered near Jericho
- (Only Caleb and Joshua)
- 27 Joshua charged
- 28 Offerings remembered
- 29 Feasts remembered
- 30 Family vows and oaths
- 31 Battle with Midian
- 32 2 1/2 tribes settle east of Jordan
- 33 Charting the course - God's leading
- 34 Setting borders & appointing brethren
- 35 Cities of refuge
- 36 Securing the inheritance

arez > Libnah > Rissah > Kehelathah > Shapher > Haradah >
both > Ijeabarim > Dibongad > Almondiblatthaim > Nebo >
s of Moab

Makheleoth > Tahath > Tarah > Mithcah > Hashmonah > Moseroth > Benejaakan > Horhagidgad > Jotbathah > Ebronah > Eziongaber >



rather than a professional warrior caste. The camping arrangement around God's sanctuary, the tabernacle, is also laid out, and the camp is purged of defiling and defiled objects or people; this includes the trial of jealousy in chapter 5 verses 11-31. The other side of holiness is detailed in the Nazarite vow, 6. 1-21, which depicts total consecration for the Lord's service. Chapters 7-9 deal with the worship and service of the tabernacle, and detail the sacrifices of the leaders, the arrangement of the lamps in that sanctuary, and the celebration of the Passover. Chapter 10 concludes this preparatory section with instructions concerning the silver trumpets and the movements of the camp as directed by the Lord. This section of the book emphasizes the resources and blessings that Israel enjoys through the goodness of their God.

Chapters 11-21 follow the repeated rebellions of the people and the ensuing discipline from the Lord. There are repeated challenges to His authority – usually focusing on His servant and representative, Moses – followed by divine judgement. Complaints come from sources as varied as the mixed multitude, Moses' siblings Miriam and Aaron, the ten unbelieving spies, Korah and his allies, and even Moses himself. Interspersed within these sad accounts of human disloyalty are reminders of the Lord's gracious and purifying work, chs. 15; 18-19. There are also divinely given victories over various enemies, ch. 21.

While they apparently relate a radically different topic, in actuality chapters 22-25 continue to demonstrate the Lord's faithfulness towards His people, as He protects them from the spiritual machinations and assault of King Balak and his prophet-for-hire Balaam. Despite their best efforts to curse Israel, He turned their malediction into blessing. What is more, He used the false prophet to reveal the tremendous position of Israel in the Almighty's sight, 23. 21. Sadly, chapter 25 shows that the attack came from a different, more alluring direction. The women of the Moabite-Midianite coalition invited the Israelite men to a feast, thereby beguiling them and enticing them into both spiritual and physical fornication.¹⁴

The second census, ch. 26, sweeps the old generation off the scene and turns the reader's attention to the new generation that will inherit the Land. Preparations for entering the Land are made as teaching concerning inheritance laws, chs. 27 and 36; daily

and seasonal sacrifices, chs. 28-29; laws regarding vows, ch. 30; victory over their enemies the Midianites, ch. 31; and instructions concerning the Transjordanian settlement of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, ch. 32; the establishment of Levitical cities and cities of refuge, ch. 35, are all set forth. Chapter 33 verses 1-49 looks back on where the Israelites have travelled during their wilderness wanderings, and verses 50-56 give teaching concerning the future conquest of Canaan. The boundaries of the land are delineated, 34. 1-15, and administrators are chosen to divide the inheritance, vv. 16-29. Perhaps most importantly, there is a change of leadership, as Moses inaugurates Joshua as his successor to lead God's people into the land of their inheritance, 27. 18-22.

A simple breakdown of the book is:

- Preparation for travels, chs. 1-10.
- Journeying from the desert to the edge of the Promised Land, chs. 11-25.
- Preparation for entering the Promised Land, chs. 26-36.

Some writers divide the book based on geographical setting:

1. 'The people of God prepare to enter the Promised Land (1. 1 – 10. 10)
2. From Sinai to Kadesh (10. 11 – 12. 16)
3. Forty years near Kadesh (13. 1 – 19. 22)
4. From Kadesh to the plains of Moab (20. 1 – 22. 1)
5. Israel in the plains of Moab (22. 2 – 36. 13)¹⁵

4. The Author and Date of the Book

Contrary to liberal and non-believing scholarly consensus, like the rest of the Pentateuch Numbers was written by Moses, circa 1405 B.C. Its material focuses on events between the second and fortieth years after the exodus.¹⁶

5. Important Themes in the Book

- A) God as a God of order.
- B) Unity of the people of God.
- C) Spiritual warfare.
- D) Holiness and its practical development.
- E) God's view of His people and their position of favour in His sight.
- F) The danger of murmuring.
- G) The human propensity to sin.
- H) Grace after human failure.
- I) God's sovereignty in carrying out His will.

[Extracted from *Laws for Life, Volume*

2 in the Old Testament Overview series published by Precious Seed].

Endnotes

- 1 'That term [*bemidhbar*] occurs over 40 times throughout the book, and in several places its occurrence is so dense (chapters 14 [8 times], 20 [7 times], and 33 [7 times]) that one cannot help but recognize that it constantly directs the reader's attention to the importance of the wilderness to the context of the narratives in the book'. GREGG WATSON, 'Numbers, Book of', ed. JOHN D. BARRY and LAZARUS WENTZ, *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, Lexham Press, 2012.
- 2 TERTULLIAN, a second-century Latin-speaking Christian, referred to it as 'the book of *Arithmi*', indicating that the book was called 'Numbers' as early as the first century A.D. [R. DENNIS COLE, *Numbers*, The New American Commentary, Vol. 38., Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000, pg. 23].
- 3 T. WHITELAW, 'Numbers, Book of,' ed. James Orr et al., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, The Howard-Severance Co., 1915, pg. 2163.
- 4 BARRY L. BANDSTRA, 'Numbers, Book of,' ed. Mark Allan Powell, *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary (Revised and Updated)*, HarperCollins, 2011, pg. 707.
- 5 J. N. DARBY, *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible: Genesis to 2 Chronicles*, Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2008, pg. 247.
- 6 ROBERT D. SPENDER, 'Numbers, Theology of', in Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Baker Reference Library; Logos Library System (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), electronic edition, no pagination.
- 7 Matt. 8. 4; 19. 8; Luke 24. 27, 44; John 3. 14.
- 8 J. B. D. PAGE, 'Introducing Numbers', in *Day by Day through the Old Testament*, ed. C. E. Hocking and M. Horlock, Day by Day Series, Precious Seed, 1982, pg. 80 [italics original].
- 9 JOHN D. CURRID points out the Hebrew verbal clue to Numbers' continuance of the Sinai teaching of the previous two books. See: *A Study Commentary on Numbers*, EP Study Commentary, Evangelical Press, 2009, pg. 26 [boldface original].
- 10 38 years and 10 months, M. G. EASTON, *Easton's Bible Dictionary*, Harper and Brothers, 1893, no pagination available.
- 11 On the definition of 'wilderness/desert': 'The Hebrew word for wilderness (*midbar*) means a place for driving flocks. It is not a completely arid desert, but contains a little vegetation and a few trees. The rainfall in such areas is too light, a few inches per year, to support cultivation'. GORDON J. WENHAM, *Numbers: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, Vol. 4, InterVarsity Press, 1981, pg. 65.
- 12 Epistles such as 1 Peter and James have the imprint of the wilderness very strongly upon them. They are written to a pilgrim people journeying through the wilderness 'to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away', 1 Pet. 1. 4.
- 13 MACKINTOSH, pg. 419.
- 14 Num. 31. 15; Ps. 106. 28; Rev. 2. 14.
- 15 WENHAM, pg. 61-62.
- 16 Many conservative commentators hold to this date, seeing the Exodus around 1445 B.C. See MACARTHUR JR., ed., *The MacArthur Study Bible*, pg. 195 and WILLIAM MACDONALD, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. ARTHUR FARSTAD, Thomas Nelson, 1995, pg. 169.



A WORD FOR TODAY

Aphar (Ashes, dust)

'Es (Tree, wood)

Asap (Grief)

Trees play an essential part in protecting our environment and meeting many of our practical needs. They produce large amounts of oxygen on a daily basis, and constantly absorb harmful carbon dioxides. They help to control pollution, provide a stabilizing influence against soil erosion, as well as playing a major role in water management by reducing the risk of flooding and the impact of drought. Trees provide a habitat for wildlife and supply human beings with food and wood for basic uses. In other words, trees symbolize life, especially longevity, as reflected in evergreens, i.e., undying life. They have a certain therapeutic value, and, according to the Royal Parks Foundation, research shows that within minutes of being surrounded by trees and green space, your blood pressure will drop, your heart rate will slow and your stress levels will come down!¹ So when we come to the Hebrew noun for tree, 'Es, which occurs some 300 times in the Old Testament, the Bible provides us with a number of contexts where many of these positive qualities are mirrored, and imparts useful spiritual lessons. With so many references to trees in the Old Testament, however, this short paper will only merely touch the hem of the garment!

In Genesis chapter 2 verse 9, we are introduced first to 'the tree of life' and 'the tree of the knowledge of good and evil'. These formed part of the many trees created by God from the ground in the garden of Eden, which the text states, 'was pleasant to look at and good for food'. It was 'the tree of life' with its life-giving efficacy that becomes no longer within the reach of humanity after the fall, thus preventing man from obtaining immortality, Gen. 3. 22. It is later through the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ that life and immortality are brought to light again, 2 Tim. 1. 10, and is a reward for those who finally overcome, Rev. 2. 7. In the New Jerusalem, the tree of life features prominently once again as it provides a variety of fruit on a monthly basis, and its leaves are for the healing of the nations, 22. 3. Some suggest that the tree of life is symbolized by the vertical shaft on the golden lampstand with its three branches on each side and its cups 'shaped like almond flowers with buds and blossoms', Exod. 25. 34.² These pictures of trees are symbolic of the life of God Himself, as evident in many Old Testament texts. For example, in Psalm 1 verse 3 the ideal righteous individual is compared to an evergreen tree that displays both uninterrupted fruitfulness and arboreal majesty.

By **BRIAN CLATWORTHY**
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A tree analogy provides us with an evocative picture of love in the Song of Solomon chapter 2 verse 3. In Proverbs chapter 3 verse 18, wisdom, which is personified, is likened to a 'tree of life', a metaphor for the source of life and health. This was the same wisdom that was used by God in the creation of the world, 3. 19. Other references to a 'tree of life' are found elsewhere in Proverbs, but the motif is changed in each context, i.e., in chapter 11 verse 30, the fruit of a tree of life is likened to righteousness, in chapter 13 verse 12, all the fulfilled desires linked with hope is likened to a tree of life, and in chapter 15 verse 4, healing speech is likened to a tree of life. The prophet Isaiah in chapter 65 verse 22 uses the word 'Es to show how the longevity of a tree is illustrative of the longevity of the nation of Israel. Ezekiel, in chapter 31 of his prophecy, uses the imagery of a cedar tree to teach Pharaoh, king of Egypt, a salutary lesson from history on the dangers of being an arrogant ruler. Even though the cedar tree – a metaphor for the Assyrian empire – was unrivalled in its beauty and stature, it was nonetheless ultimately handed over by God to another ruler, who proceeded to cut the tree down, 31. 11-18. Notice the similarity of this metaphor to Nebuchadnezzar's tree dream in Daniel chapter 4. The difference, of course, is that Nebuchadnezzar is restored again, because he recognizes the sovereignty of God who rules with equity and justice over the nations and abases the proud, Dan. 4. 34-35, 37. Contrast these metaphors with the tree imagery used in Isaiah chapter 11 verse 1 of the ideal Davidic king who is depicted as a 'shoot' and a 'branch'. This ruler will usher in a reign of justice and righteousness, Jer. 23. 5-6, and bring about peace and prosperity for His people, Ps. 72. 2-3.

Trees are often associated in the Old Testament with the presence of God, as in Genesis chapter 12 verses 6-7 where Abram passes through the land and comes to the oak of Moreh.³ It is here that God appears to him, and promises that the land would be given to his offspring, Gen. 12. 7. When Joshua ratifies the covenant at Shechem he places a memorial stone at the foot of an oak tree, which was literally, 'in the sacred precinct of the Lord', Josh. 24. 26b. But trees or groves were also associated with idolatry, and vehemently denounced by God, especially through the prophet Isaiah who chastised Israel for their desire to worship at such places, Isa. 1. 29-30.⁴

In the Septuagint (LXX), the Hebrew word 'Es is chiefly translated by the Greek word *eulon*, and occurs at least twenty times in the New Testament. In its ordinary sense,

eulon simply refers to a tree or to wood in general, i.e., anything derived from wood. In the papyri and other non-literary sources, *eulon* was used to describe 'wood imported from abroad' and, interestingly, 'a log of wood used as a battering-ram'.⁵ The New Testament use of the word is both general and metaphorical. It refers to clubs made of wood in Mark chapter 14 verses 43 and 48, to a moist or green tree in Luke chapter 23 verse 31,⁶ and to stocks in Acts chapter 16 verse 24. Figuratively, Paul uses wood as an example of the sort of combustible building material that may not survive the critical judgement of God when a believer's service is finally reviewed, 1 Cor. 3. 12. Jude uses the word to characterize those who are ungodly, describing them as 'fruitless trees in late autumn', 12 ESV. But it is the use of *eulon* as a means of describing the cross that makes the word so important in the New Testament. Paul picks up the wording of Deuteronomy chapter 21 verses 22-23 (LXX) in Galatians chapter 3 verse 13 to explain how Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law. By being hanged 'on a tree', Christ became our curse, just as the death He died was rightfully our death. Peter identifies Israel's part in this event when he states, 'whom you killed by hanging him on a tree', Acts 5. 30 ESV, cp. 10. 39. He reinforces this later when referring to the vicarious death of Christ for us when he states, 'Who his own self bore our sins in his own body on the tree', 1 Pet. 2. 24. No wonder Paul made the cross of Christ the solitary ground of his boasting, Gal. 6. 14. May we too learn to evaluate everything in the light of the Man who was hung upon a tree for us!

For further reading/study

Introductory

J. D. DOUGLAS (ed.), *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary - Part 3 - Trees*, InterVarsity Press, 1980, pp. 1585-1593.

Advanced

LELAND RYKEN, TREMPER LONGMAN (ed.), *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery - Tree, Trees*, InterVarsity Press, 1998, pp. 890-892.

Endnotes

- 1 www.supporttheroyalparks.org - Accessed on 21 May 2016.
- 2 LELAND RYKEN, TREMPER LONGMAN (ed.), *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, InterVarsity Press, 1998, pp. 890.
- 3 WILLIAM P. BROWN (*Seeing the Psalms - A Theology of Metaphor*, pp. 71) suggests that 'the name of this oak literally means "teacher" or perhaps "oracle giver" . . . It is also referred to as the "diviners" oak', Judg. 9. 37 (cf. v. 6).
- 4 ALEC MOTYER (*The Prophecy of Isaiah*, pp. 51-52) states that in this context, '"Oaks and gardens" are the symbols of the life of "nature" and of the fertility gods'.
- 5 J. H. MOULTON and G. MILLIGAN, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*, Hendrickson, 1997, pp. 435.
- 6 Although this is a literal reference to a tree, the argument in this context is figurative in the sense that if God did not spare His Son from judgement (green wood), then how much more severe will the judgement be on the nation of Israel or anyone who is impenitent (dry wood).



This article explores the name of the Lord Jesus Christ as it is associated with collective Christian activity. Whilst it is often stated that believers should gather to the name of the Lord Jesus, it is important to appreciate the significance and the challenge of such an assertion.

THE NAME OF TH

By **WALTER GUSTAFSON** Hatboro, Philadelphia, USA.

For gathering, Matt. 18. 20

There is only one Saviour for sinners and only one gathering centre for saints – the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. The name to which we are gathered is His full name, Lord Jesus Christ emphasizing His lordship, His person, and His work. Since the word 'gathered' is in the passive, this suggests that the two or three do not gather themselves. Someone else gathers them. The Holy Spirit is the gatherer, and He would not sanction any group that is indifferent to any one of the three things, the lordship of Christ, the doctrine as to the person of Christ, or His work.

For unity, 1 Cor. 1. 10

The Corinthians had written to Paul about matters on which they wanted help, although Paul does not begin to deal with those matters until chapter 7. In the meantime, he deals with more important matters. He uses a threefold appeal in this verse. He is not commanding them, even though he is an apostle and he was instrumental in the large assembly in Corinth being planted. Instead, he is beseeching them. His second appeal is in his use of the word 'brethren'. Appreciating that word helps all of us to be of one mind. His third appeal is the most important – the lordship of Christ. Paul mentions the Lord Jesus Christ, or Jesus Christ the Lord, five times in the first nine verses. Corinthians is the epistle where much of the teaching concerning the local assembly is to be found, and it is pre-eminently the epistle of His lordship – mentioned sixty-eight times. How could Paul ever

expect the Corinthians to accept this truth? Only the Holy Spirit working among them could bring them to one mind.

Although the truth of the church is not found in the Old Testament, yet there are examples of truth that would illustrate, and encourages us to follow, New Testament teaching relative to gathering. The divisions evident in 1 Corinthians chapter 1 are illustrated for us in 1 Chronicles chapter 12. All the thirteen tribes are there.¹ Of the men of Issachar, we read that they had 'understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do', v. 32. How good it is when we have men like that! Indeed, knowing what the men of Israel ought to do so gripped their hearts that they had all their brethren at their commandment. They could see the enemies on every side. They needed to give David his rightful place. Thus, we read in verse 38 that all Israel were of 'perfect heart' and 'one heart' to make David king, and we read in verse 40, 'there was joy in Israel'. There is joy in any assembly when we give our Lord Jesus the rightful place as Lord.

For discipline, 1 Cor. 5. 4

1 Corinthians chapter 5 deals with the subject of discipline for moral evil. The mention of the name of the Lord Jesus Christ suggests the action is taken by His authority, as representing Him and in fellowship with Him. Similarly, 'when ye are gathered together' suggests a special gathering to carry out this discipline.

The word 'temple', used for the local assembly² is the Greek word

naos, which means the inner sanctuary. How important to appreciate that the Spirit of God dwells within the local assembly, 1 Cor. 3. 16. God Himself dwells within, 2 Cor. 6. 16, and our Lord Jesus, Matt. 18. 20. Thus, the most important reason for putting away the morally reprobate is because of the indwelling of the Trinity – the assembly should always be characterized by holiness.

However, discipline of this nature should have restoration in view. I believe that the person in 1 Corinthians chapter 5 is the same man referred to in chapters 2 and 7 of 2 Corinthians. Clearly, the man had repented, but the assembly who had been slow to judge, were now slow to reinstate him.

For testimony, Col. 3. 17

This verse should govern everything that we do – we should always remember that we are representing Him. It is possible for any one of us to cause His name to be blasphemed, as the Jewish people did in Romans chapter 2 verse 24, or like David in 2 Samuel chapter 12 verse 14. But we can thank God that, by the grace of God, we can cause His name to be glorified.³

For reproach, Acts 5. 41

After the apostles were beaten in Acts chapter 5 verse 41, we read that they 'were rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name'. What made them rise above the persecution? It was the value of the name of Christ to them. The more we value the name of Christ the more reproach we can bear for His name's sake. Three days after Paul the apostle



THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

got saved, the Lord told Ananias, 'I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake', Acts 9. 16. Paul never forgot that he once persecuted the saints. In reference to his past life, His words were, 'who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious', 1 Tim. 1. 13. He thought that he 'ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth', Acts 26. 9.

We are exhorted in Hebrews chapter 13 verse 13: 'Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach'. The central word in the verse is 'him'. As JOHN DOUGLAS said, 'if it were me writing the epistle to the Hebrews I would have put the exhortation in chapter 1. There it would be a mandate. But the Spirit of God knew better. He guided the writer of the epistle to unfold the glories of Christ in the first twelve chapters. When he puts it in chapter 13, instead of it being a mandate, it is a magnet. He is the attraction!' How good to capture the attitude of Moses, 'esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward', Heb. 11. 26!

It is encouraging for us to notice in Matthew chapter 5 verses 11-12 that for the first time the Lord Jesus changes from the third to the second person, 'Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were

before you'. When we are being persecuted, we should make sure that we are not being persecuted because of our inconsistencies or failures for it is a blessing when we are persecuted *for Christ's sake!*

For gospel effort

How important to remember that there is power in the name of the Lord Jesus. In Acts chapter 19 verses 13-17 we read, 'Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth. And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so. And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know and Paul I know, but who are ye? And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified'. The name of the Lord Jesus was magnified, even though it did not work in the mouth of those vagabond Jews, who had never submitted themselves to the lordship of Christ.

A gospel meeting is like a battle. The psalmist provides us with pictures of battle encouraging us to take the 'banner . . . that it may be displayed because of the truth', Ps. 60. 4. However, it is 'in the name of our God we will set up our banners', 20. 5. Similarly, may the following verses encourage us to trust in the Lord in our gospel

activity: 'Our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth', Ps. 124. 8; 'The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it and is safe', Prov. 18. 10.

We read in 3 John verse 7 of some: 'Because that for his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles'. They went forth without any guaranteed salary. His name's sake was their motive for service and their trust for support. Perhaps some reader of this article might be challenged to go forth with the gospel today!

Endnotes

- 1 There are only three other chapters where all thirteen tribes (counting the tribes from the sons of Joseph separately) are mentioned: Num. 1, 2, and 26.
- 2 In 1 Cor. 3. 16 and 2 Cor. 6. 16.
- 3 2 Thess. 1. 12; 1 Peter 2. 12; and Matt. 5. 16.

WALTER GUSTAFSON was commended to full-time service by the Cliff Street assembly in Boston, USA, in January 1954. A similar commendation was given by the Hatboro assembly, Philadelphia, when he moved there with his family in June 1972.





The Background

Accompanied by Roman Catholic priests, both Spanish and Portuguese invaders came to conquer and convert in South America. For three centuries South America was the stronghold of Roman Catholicism without competition. Despite being, as DAYTON ROBERTS wrote, 'A fortress with the oceans as its moat, impregnable to merchants and missionaries' the result was simply more of the same. Lives were not transformed, just a change of rituals and a new type of slavery and idolatry. Argentina was part of that process which also resulted in the emergence of a very wealthy and powerful elite minority and a great majority of underprivileged masses. At present, Argentina has a population of 42 million. Official figures suggest 14 million live in poverty.

The Beginning

The arrival of John Ewing from England in 1882 and Charles Torre in 1889 marked the beginning of assembly work in Argentina. On purpose, they did not travel far from Buenos Aires, and what they accomplished was truly remarkable. They saw the first assemblies established, and a day school opened in the city. Also in Quilmes, near to Buenos Aires, Charles Torre saw the first assembly planted, a printing press set up to meet a growing need for literature for both believers and unbelievers, and also the Quilmes orphanage. All three areas continue to the present day.

The Pattern

British companies were involved in Argentina's meat industry and the development of the railway network. Brethren who worked in those companies also 'looked on the fields'. In contrast to efforts by denominationally based missionaries, a distinct pattern evolved, where those in secular employment worked side by side with their missionary brothers in the development of the early assembly movement in the country.

This meant that early in the growth of assemblies the priesthood of all

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believers was practised, understood, and imitated by the new converts. There is no doubt that this one factor contributed, and still does, to both the numerical and spiritual growth of assemblies in Argentina. Several of these men in secular employment felt the call of God to full-time service and, together with their wives as constant companions, they did lasting work for God.

The Expansion

The expansion of the work in the first fifty years of assembly testimony was mainly due to two factors: 1) the indomitable pioneer spirit of Will Payne, a very gifted evangelist, who, with almost apostolic strategy, preached in the main cities from Buenos Aires all the way north and over into Santa Cruz, Bolivia, where he and his wife settled; 2) the expansion of the railway system, which involved the movement of people, including brethren who were used to help the work and who preached in the new towns springing up.

In each of the places of relatively large population, a missionary couple settled to establish the work. The vastness of Argentina does not lend itself to easy contact with others, nor is it possible to leave a work dependent on regular visiting speakers for its support. The pattern up to the present has been for the missionary to establish and stay with the new assembly to nurture it and give opportunity for the development of local gift. Then, with their spiritual support, lead them in outreach to establish other ventures, which the missionary will again nurture and repeat the process. It would be impossible to mention all those who were involved, but Mr and Mrs James Clifford in Tucumán, Mr and Mrs Alfred Furniss in Santiago el Estero and Mr and Mrs James Hogg in Santa Fe, all spent years in sacrificial labour in these cities. Today, there are

numerous assemblies in each of those cities and provinces where no foreign missionary is present. Evidently the Lord approved and blessed their vision and work pattern.

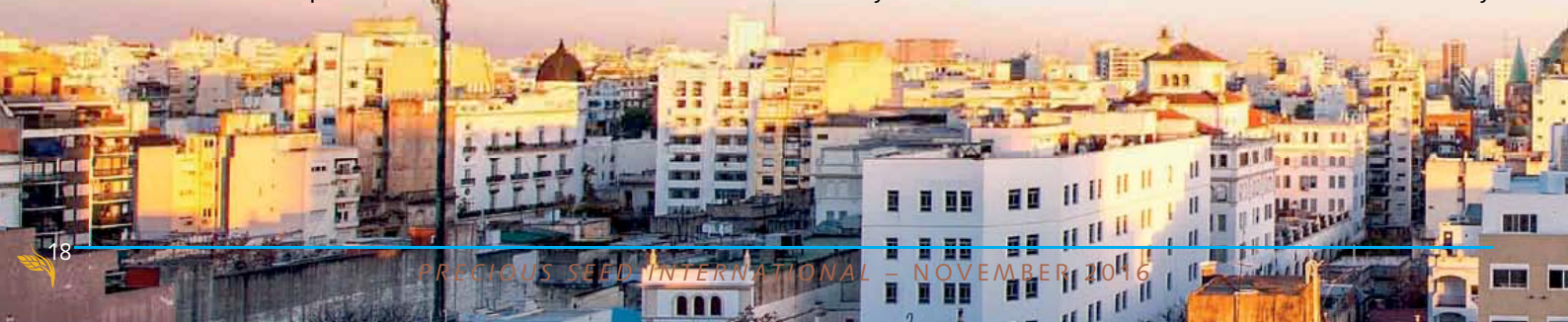
National Workers

There are now only a total of twelve foreign workers, while the number of national workers who are also called missionaries has increased to eighty-three. Following the pattern mentioned means there are very few itinerant workers. It would be expected by commending assemblies that new workers serve in cities and areas where there are no assemblies or where the assemblies are new or small in areas of great potential. These servants of God go forth on the principle of faith. They may receive help from those assemblies in which they serve, which is also biblical, 1 Tim. 5. 18. Having said that, we have no knowledge of contracted or paid pastors in Argentina.

The Work Pattern

Argentina has had no revival history and so there is no revival mentality as such, rather the constant effort with extraordinary Latin passion. There is no history either of growth through people coming out of the established churches, except from the Roman Catholic church and these all needed salvation. New assemblies would not normally begin with a campaign over several weeks but by personal contacts being built up and, perhaps, a weekly meeting being held in one or two areas. The weekly basis helps to deepen relationships and also the expansion to neighbours or family members. This would continue until an assembly is formed, which is then followed up on that same basis to build and instruct in the word of God.

Argentina has a young population and great emphasis is made on the young. In all known assemblies a weekly





effort is made to reach pre-teens or teenagers, no matter how many or how few. This would normally take place on Friday or Saturday evenings, in an informal setting, in a home or hall, with games, quizzes and food, but always a message from God's word. Believer's children prove to be a real spiritual capital in this regard through inviting their friends. No other effort has produced more fruit and growth over the years. Naturally this leads to their introduction to the formal assembly meetings and principles.

These principles have led to the establishing of approximately 700 assemblies and, at present, 300 outreaches, stretching over the 2770 miles from La Quiaca on the Bolivian border to Ushuaia, the most southerly city in the world.

The Mesopotamia

The three north-eastern provinces of Misiones, Corrientes and Entre Ríos comprise the Mesopotamia. It is separated from other Argentine provinces on the west by South America's second largest river, the Paraná, and on the eastern side is separated by the river Uruguay from Brazil and Uruguay. Growth came much later to this area, eighty years later in fact, after the beginning of assembly witness in Argentina. In the five provincial capital cities of the north-east only one had a very small assembly (now extinct). The others were without any assembly witness.

In the 1960s Willie and Pearl Jack were used of God to see an assembly formed in the first of these, in the **city of Posadas**. On their furlough in 1972 they presented the need of the north-east. As a result of that, Jim and Betty Burnett sailed for Argentina in 1974 and spent their first three years of service there where they were involved with the new assembly. Also, in the early days of preaching and seeing souls saved, they were involved in an outreach which later became the second established assembly. There are now four assemblies in Posadas

that have their origins in that first one. In the remaining three of the five provincial capitals mentioned, a national worker and his wife took up residence and today there are assemblies in all five cities.

Paraná, Province of Entre Ríos

Jim and Betty took up residence in the **city of Paraná** (Pop. 300,000) in 1978. From children's meetings on a spare piece of ground, then on to meeting in a garage, the present assembly of about seventy in fellowship now meets in its own building. It is lovely to see converted folk from about fourteen different Roman Catholic churches gathered in the name of the Lord Jesus. Teaching too has yielded fruit among them. Gifts are in evidence and ample opportunities are given for their development. It is vitally important that the first assembly be strong and the biblical pattern firmly established in view of expansion in the city, where there is room for several assemblies.

Full Circle in Paraná

Jim and Betty feel privileged to be part of the Holy Spirit's work in the assembly in the commendation of new workers. Through the efforts of the first of those, Heber and Fiona Gallitto, a vibrant and growing work has begun in North Paraná. In November of 2015 larger premises were rented to meet the growing need. In April of 2016 a harmonious separation from the first assembly of about twenty baptized believers took place to form the second autonomous assembly. Also in 2015, Nelson Gallitto was commended to full-time service along with his wife Rosana. They are being used in retreats and conferences and have taken over the 'Life Rescue' ministry on the streets of Paraná. Parallel to that they are involved in the development of Argentina's first assemblies-linked resident rehabilitation centre for those with addictions, in an assembly camp site twenty-five miles away.

Full Circle in Argentina.

In 1882 the first assembly missionary

arrived in Argentina. In the last twenty years there has been a movement of the Holy Spirit, and now eighteen have been commended to other countries. Some have gone to Spanish-speaking countries and others to Angola, Pakistan, Morocco and Papua New Guinea.

Meeting Present Needs – Retreats

One-day conferences are still held, usually for local assembly anniversary dates (so important in Argentine culture), but are not practical for lots of visitors because of distances. Two- or three-day retreats for elders and helpers, and, in some cases with their wives, fill a great need. Subjects related to their qualifications, recognition and work, as well as all aspects of assembly discipline, reception and assembly life are dealt with in depth.

In the last two years, Jim and Betty have participated in an 'Orientation Retreat' for young people who have an interest in or are called to serve overseas. Jim was responsible for the ministry. Elders are also invited because the local church will be involved. The contributions at question times reveal some hazy areas and highlight the need for such a retreat even more.

Bible Training

All assemblies have their weekly teaching meetings. In Buenos Aires and some of the major cities the George Muller Institute functions on a one night a week basis with a four-year curriculum. Subjects are taught mainly by gifted brethren in secular employment. Since it is not a residential institute, it is available to young people who are either studying or working. The classes are held in local assembly buildings so there are no overheads either. Overall, it represents a valid contribution to assemblies and to their future.

This article has been written by brother Jim Burnett who, with his wife Betty, has been deeply involved in the development of the assembly work in Argentina since 1974.



This article is part of an ongoing study. The writer's intention is to look at each phrase and statement in the letter and to glean a simple understanding of what Paul was writing to Titus about. There will not be a lengthy introduction to each article so it would be advantageous to read the previous articles either in the printed edition of the magazine or online via www.preciousseed.org.

Verses 6-9 – Definition and checklist for an elder

Handling the word of God, v. 9. *'holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and convince the gainsayers'.*

There are a number of issues that this verse raises. I want us to consider them before looking at what the verses teach about elders.

Number 1 - God's word can be trusted. This is because the author is trustworthy! His word reflects his character! Think about it like this. As you get to know someone, you develop an opinion about him or her. If they let you down regularly you begin to feel that you would find it difficult to believe what they say. If they are dishonest, always exaggerate, or are just plain deceitful you would be forgiven for being careful in your dealings with them. Our God is the exact opposite of this. He is trustworthy in the extreme; He has no dark side; He can always be depended upon. His word reflects His personality and character.

Number 2 - All believers are in full-time education. Older people often talk about the 'school of life'. Part of this process is our day-to-day experience with God, the things that we can only learn as we face each situation.

The other part of the cycle of learning is more formal but it has two dimensions, personal or internal and public or external.

Personal learning requires your time and discipline in reading and studying the Bible. This is a 'lifelong' process

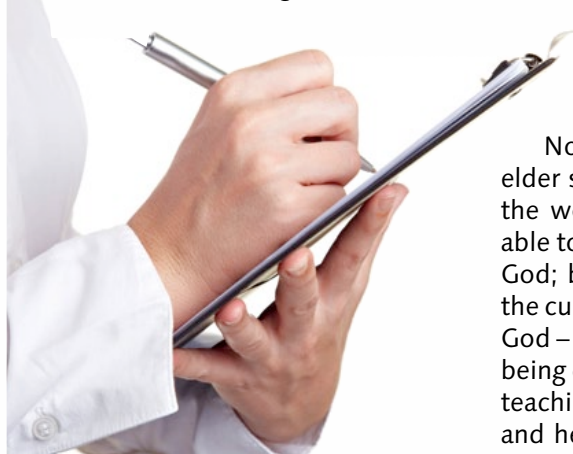


By **STEPHEN G. BAKER** Liverpool, England

and, to make the most of it, you need to keep at it! You also need to regularly take time to pray about what you learn.

The second dimension is listening to others teach God's word. In 2 Timothy chapter 2 verse 2 Paul describes the process by which truth is passed on from generation to generation. God has called certain men to teach His word and exposure to good sound Bible teaching is essential for a Christian to grow in their faith. We should grasp every opportunity we have to learn from the teaching and experience of others who know God and His word. This is a privilege some believers do not have, but, if you do, take advantage of it.

Number 3 - There are things in a believer's life that are worth holding on to. We are reticent to give up things that are really special to us and rightly so. If we meet someone and learn to love them we will want to cherish them, love them and ensure that we can have their lifelong friendship. The best example of this is marriage, but it is also true of other relationships and friendships. There are other examples of things of value that we give priority to and ensure that they are carefully preserved. Paul is teaching Titus here that the word of God falls into this category; in fact, the word of God takes the ultimate priority in this sense, along with our relationship with God. We must cling tenaciously to the 'faithful word'; there is nothing else in life that has a higher value.



Let us go back and think about this teaching as it applies to the elder.

He must be a man who so values the word of God that he will not let it go. He is clinging to the word; he is holding on firmly; he has a real grip on it. The word of God has so gripped him and blessed him that he will not become detached from it. He is not willing to disregard its teaching or to change it. He is going to keep a hold of what he has been taught because it has become a blessing to him and will be a blessing to other believers. In 2 Timothy chapter 1 verses 13-14, Paul instructs Timothy to 'hold fast the form of sound words' that he had heard from Paul. In the verse we are considering, the word of God is described as 'faithful'; that is, it is to be trusted, it is dependable, it is reliable. If elders have this high view of the word of God then it will encourage other believers to adopt the same attitude.

Next, we are reminded that the elder is a man **who has learned from others** – 'he has been taught'. So elders are men who have learned from God's word. They have had it explained to them. There are a variety of ways of being taught. Sometimes it is teaching in a church gathering, as seen in Acts chapter 11 verse 26. It could also be in the form of individual learning from other wiser believers, 1 Tim. 4. 12, but sometimes you get it on your own, 1 Tim. 4. 15-16. Never forget that the elder is a man of experience who has learned and been taught from the word of God.

Now we get to the crux of why the elder should be well taught and value the word of God highly. He must be able to do two things with the word of God; by the way, did you notice how the current verse describes the word of God – 'sound doctrine'. It is effectively being described as wholesome healthy teaching. Anything that is wholesome and healthy is good for you! Give me



from Titus

(5)

some of that, I hope I can hear you say! Now back to the two things:

- 1 Use the word of God to encourage and stimulate God's people. God's word is not depressive but stimulating. The instruction of scripture is not mere information but truth that lifts up the believer, builds up the believer and leaves them in a better state of mind after they have listened to it. Do our elders use the word of God to do this for the Lord's people? I trust that they do – it is what the Lord expects of them!
- 2 Use the word of God to counteract those who are opposed to it. The elder is capable, with the word of God in his hand and the Spirit of God guiding him, to convince the opposition, to show them the error of their ways. Titus is reminded in chapter 2 verse 15 that he must do the same thing and do it with authority.

The elder, therefore, must be a man who can handle the word of God. He is described in 1 Timothy chapter 3 verse 2 as being 'apt to teach'. This means that he is skilled in teaching and capable of giving instruction. This is applicable to all elders. There are also some elders who have been called to 'labour in the word and doctrine', 1 Tim. 5. 17. These are men who expend much time and effort in teaching the word of God. I must, however, clarify that nowhere in the New Testament do we find one elder/shepherd/pastor doing this work in a local church; there is always more than one. What a great provision God has made for His people when he provides men capable of feeding the saints and defending the word of God.

Verses 10-16 – The Elder's task – the people and the problem

Verse 10 – The people

The people that the elders have to confront are now described. As their character is defined, we begin to see why the men that God chooses to care for the Christians have to

be so godly and well taught. The competence and qualities of the elder reflect the character of God and the task that they are asked to deal with. Things aren't really much different today. Elders and assemblies face a wide range of difficult issues and situations. False teaching is often very subtle and persuasive and false teachers are dangerous and often very smart and cunning. It takes a lot of godly wisdom and experience to know how to handle them. We really should pray carefully and consistently for the elders of the assemblies where we are in fellowship.

Paul describes these false teachers in three ways:

- 1 Unruly or Insubordinate – they kick against authority and are rebellious;
- 2 Vain or Idle talkers – they make empty, unsupported claims and threats and are known for the fact that they come out with what we would call nowadays, hot air;
- 3 Deceivers – they mislead people, i.e., they deceive themselves and in turn deceive others as well.

This is not exactly a flattering description of any group of people. These are people we would be wise to avoid if at all possible. It is not as if there was only one or two of them. Paul writes that there are 'many'. To make matters worse, the most active opponents of the truth were those from a Jewish background

– those of 'the circumcision'. The Jewish false teachers were especially aggressive and hard to handle. They were not prepared to accept the revelation of God in the Lord Jesus Christ and submit to the will of God. They refused to accept the authority that God and Christ had vested in the apostles, they badmouthed the truth of the gospel and they actively sought to discredit the gospel and those who preached it. Their aim was to deceive people and keep them from the truth.

Conclusion

In the next article we will discuss the action that needed to be taken to deal with these false teachers. Please don't be tempted to think that we don't have to deal with false teachers today. In Acts chapter 20 Paul talks to the elders of the assembly in Ephesus. As he talks, he reminds them of a number of facts that are pertinent to the teaching in the passage that we are looking at:

- 1 Elders must guard themselves and God's people;
- 2 Elders must feed and shepherd God's flock;
- 3 The church (local and dispensational) belongs to God;
- 4 The Holy Spirit appoints elders.

Then, Paul dropped a bombshell! He told the elders that false teachers would come in among God's people. They would be destructive and vicious like wolves. They would have no consideration for anyone.

But it gets worse! Paul then told them that some men who were already in fellowship would rise up and distort the truth with the primary aim of creating a following.

Our challenge today is twofold – to ensure that we maintain good sound teaching of biblical doctrine in the gatherings of God's people and to preserve believers from being confused by false teaching that is so easily accessible through the internet, channel TV, etc. The potential for taking on-board false doctrine is probably greater today than it has ever been.

This is why we need men of God as shepherds in each local assembly.

To be continued





Pontius Pilate was caught in a trap. He had been given the unenviable task of governing the Roman province of Judea. No proud people ever love being subjugated by a foreign power, but the Jews had a reputation for being even more difficult than many other oppressed people, in that not only had they political objections to foreign rule they also had strong religious objections. They worshipped the one true God, and were not prepared to tolerate the worship of other gods in their own land, even if such worship was engaged in by non-Jews. Judea and Jerusalem was a poisoned chalice to any Gentile governor. Pilate did not help himself, however, in that he was an arrogant and immensely cruel despot who, in the end, caused so much trouble and unrest in Judea that he was eventually re-called to Rome and sent to govern elsewhere.

Pilate was essential to Jewish plans to eliminate Jesus of Nazareth. Although attempts had been made in the past to push our Lord over the cliff, or even to stone Him to death because of His perceived blasphemy in 'making Himself equal with God', the Sanhedrim, at the instigation of the high priest Caiaphas, had decided that the most effective way in which to eliminate this preacher and prevent any god-fearing Jew from following Him, was to crucify Him, for 'cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree'.¹ However, in order to have this Jesus crucified, the Jews needed to have Pilate on-board. He was the only one who could have passed such a sentence upon Jesus, so our Lord was taken first of all to Pilate, then to Herod (at Pilate's insistence), and finally back to Pilate again. The first charge laid against our Lord was a political one. 'We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ a King', Luke 23. 2. Pilate, however cruel and arrogant he may have been, was an astute man, and realized that there were other reasons for this arrest. He did not want to be involved in matters relating to the Jewish faith; that was none of his concern. Having

CHARACTERS AROUND THE PILATE who cond

established that Jesus was no political threat to Rome,² Pilate deduced that it was for envy the Sanhedrim had delivered up Jesus to him, Matt. 27. 18, and he tried time and time again to release this Jesus of Nazareth, reporting to the Jewish authorities, 'I find no fault in this man'.³ However, he was put under immense pressure by the chief priests and others to condemn our Lord to an unjust death.

He ignored a warning

What do we make of the fact that Pilate's wife had a dream about our Lord at just this time? Was God warning Pilate, so that any decision he made was one made deliberately but clearly in the wrong, one from which he could not absolve himself by saying he did not realize the innocence of his victim? The drama and high tension of a courtroom scene, packed with soldiers, Roman officials, and all the pomp and circumstance of a hurried trial is suddenly domesticated when a message is delivered to Pilate from his wife! 'Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him', Matt. 27. 19. The timing of the dream, and the immediate message from his wife, does make us wonder whether it was not just his wife who was warning Pilate, but God Himself. We do see warnings delivered by our Lord in the Upper Room to Judas, too, before he went out into the night to betray our Lord. Yet Judas, as well as Pilate, chose to ignore them.

He made a choice

Initially, Pilate does his utmost to heed this warning and even to go with his own instincts on the matter. He remembered a tradition that allowed him some wriggle-room. It was apparently his custom to release one prisoner on death row at these Passover feasts, and the choice of whom to release was given to the people. So he called up from the

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cells Barabbas, a convicted murderer and terrorist, hoping that the crowds of people gathered before his palace would be persuaded to release Jesus and crucify the murderer. This would surely get Pilate off the hook. The chief priests, however, bullied the crowds into choosing Barabbas for release, to Pilate's evident consternation. 'Why, what evil hath he done?'⁴ He had also ordered our Lord to be whipped, hoping that this unjust sentence would draw out the sympathy of the crowds. 'Behold the man!'⁵ he called out, as our Lord was brought forth, unjustly beaten. But the sight of blood only caused the crowd to cry out all the more for His crucifixion. The final blow for Pilate was when the Jews put him under extreme political pressure. This was, in fact, nothing short of blackmail. When they saw Pilate wavering, struggling to acquit Jesus of Nazareth and to let Him go, they said, 'If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar', John 19. 12. Since when had the Jews ever sought to be Caesar's friends? But Pilate saw his career coming to an end if the Jews sent a deputation to Rome complaining that he had acquitted a would-be pretender to Caesar's rule, and he buckled. He made a choice. If it was career or





CRUCIFIXION 5

emmed him

Christ it would have to be career. 'Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified', v. 16.

He attempted a disclaimer

Even non-churchgoers, unbelievers, have heard of the expression 'I wash my hands of it'. In a very cynical move, Pilate made it perfectly clear to all that he had been compelled to make a political decision in condemning Jesus of Nazareth to be crucified, although he knew him to be innocent of all the charges the Jews had laid against Him. So, in front of all the people, Pilate ordered a bowl of water to be brought and he publicly washed his hands in front of them all, saying 'I am innocent of the blood of this just person; see ye to it', Matt. 27. 24. Was this a deliberate referral to the law of Moses recorded in Deuteronomy chapter 21, where God instructed His people to do their utmost to discover the identity of a murderer? If the elders of the city in which a body had been found had done their best to solve the crime, identify and sentence the murderer to death, they would not be held guilty of the murder themselves.



Having done all they could to further justice, God told them they could wash their hands of the matter by sacrificing an heifer. They were then to say, 'Our hands have not shed this blood, neither have our eyes seen it. Be merciful, O Lord . . . lay

not innocent blood unto thy people of Israel's charge', as they washed their hands over the heifer, Deut. 21. 1-9. The response of the people to Pilate is most instructive. They reply, 'His blood be on us and on our children', Matt. 27. 25.

He made friends with a wicked man

God, of course, did not accept Pilate's claim to innocence. The book of the Acts of the Apostles records, 'Against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together', Acts 4. 27. That day and that occasion brought Herod and Pilate into a friendship that had never existed before. In standing against Christ, in mocking Him, beating Him and condemning Him, he found something in common with others who had done the same. Pilate attempted to stand apart from the crime of condemning our Lord to death, but God would not let him do so.

We do not know from the scriptures what happened to Pilate after this debacle. History, however, tells us he went on to offend the Jews time and time again with his cruelty and arrogance, until he was re-called to Rome to answer for his vicious ways, in particular in putting to death many Samaritans. Who can say how much his encounter with our Lord, and his comment/question, 'What is truth?' remained with him all his days? There is surely little doubt that his encounter with our Lord left Pilate uneasy. Pilate was afraid when he heard our Lord claimed to be the Son of God; he was disturbed when he heard our Lord dismiss Pilate's claim to have greater authority over Him, 'Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given

thee from above';⁶ I have little doubt that he could never have forgotten that our Lord had clearly told him what he was about to do was sin. 'He that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin', John 19. 11. Yet despite all of this he chose to save himself.

Is there anything we can learn from this tragic man, Pilate? First of all, let us remind ourselves of the many warnings God, and His people, have given us over the years. How often have we been clearly told, either by godly friends or relatives, by the word of God through a preacher, or by the Holy Spirit and our conscience, that something we were about to do was wrong. Yet we have disregarded their warnings and gone on, willingly, to disobey God and His word. What a serious matter this is! Deliberately to sin against God, His word and our consciences is a serious matter. Many can claim ignorance of God's word, but His rebellious people cannot. Then again, have we ever made wrong choices in our Christian lives? We may have been put under extreme pressure, from circumstances, from friends, from family, but that does not change the fact that our choices were wrong. Career or Christ, family or the Lord, hobbies or His work, the pleasures of sin for a season or the reproach of Christ; these choices will be constantly before us in our Christian life. Let us do all we can, by the grace of God, to choose the right, and not the wrong. And let us remember that God does hold us responsible for the decisions we make, even though we may attempt to wash our hands of them. And finally, there is one telling phrase about Pilate of which we must all be aware, and careful that we are not pressured into repeating. Pilate did what he knew to be wrong because he was 'willing to content the people', Mark 15. 15. Doing what is wrong will content unbelievers, and may even make us friends with them, but it will never bring us peace with God.

Endnotes

- Gal. 3. 13.
- 'I, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse him', Luke 23. 14.
- See: John 18. 38; 19. 4, 6.
- Matt. 27. 23; Mark 15. 14; Luke 23. 22.
- John 19. 5.
- John 19. 11.



Continuing our examination
of the essential characteristics
or attributes of God:

Omnipresence

It is difficult for us as human beings who think in terms of being in one place at any one time in the world, to comprehend how someone could be everywhere at the same time, i.e., ubiquitous or all-pervasive. Yet this is precisely how the activities of the Holy Spirit are described in scripture. He is in everything and is everywhere. For example, in Psalm 139 verses 7-8, the Psalmist refers to the Spirit of God being present in all places, and that no one is able to avoid His grasp, irrespective of location. A. F. KIRKPATRICK suggests, 'escape would be impossible if he wished it'.¹ Even more perplexing for the Psalmist was the fact that 'wherever he went, (he) would find himself confronted with a God who was already there'.² When the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples on the day of Pentecost, we are told that 'they were all filled with the Holy Spirit', Acts 2. 4 NKJV. This was not simply a diffusion of the Spirit, but an indwelling of each one of them by the omnipresent Holy Spirit. Similarly, Paul emphasizes this omnipresence when he refers to the baptism of believers into the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit. As FRED CUNDICK points out, 'The Spirit must be in every locality to perform this ministry'.³

Omniscience

Today we live in a world dominated by the Internet, which, for some people, is omniscient. But that would be to invest in man something that is germane to God alone. And scripture makes it abundantly clear that it is the Spirit of God who knows all things, and there is nothing in the divine being of God that the Holy Spirit does not know, 1 Cor. 2. 10-11, or, as the ESV translates verse 11b, 'So also no

THE DEITY AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

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one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God'. This enables the Holy Spirit to reveal all things and thereby teach all things, John 14. 26. The closing doxology of Romans chapters 9 to 11 has been described 'as an eloquent expression of wonder and adoration before the mystery of God's ways, the majesty of His mercy and wisdom'.⁴ This again highlights the fact, as in 1 Corinthians chapter 2 verse 10, that God is inscrutable to the natural man. In other words, this verse 'suggests the limit of divine profundity that is barred to humans except with divine assistance'.⁵

Immutability

The one thing that we as human beings are constantly prone to is change, whether in ourselves or in the world in which we live. As finite creatures subject to these almost daily challenges, the idea of immutability seems to be very much removed from us. Yet in the divine realm, immutability is an important attribute of God. In the Old Testament, God declares His immutability by way of contrast with Israel's constant tendency to change allegiance, Mal. 3. 6-7. The Psalmist too is conscious of the immutability of God by way of contrast to things that are considered to be permanent in the creation yet which will ultimately perish, Ps. 102. 25-28; Heb. 1. 10-12. God remains and is always the same; hence, God the Father is not subject to change as are the heavenly bodies in the universe.⁶ This is also applicable to our Lord as evident from Hebrews chapter 13 verse 8. So, if God the Father and the Lord Jesus are immutable, then

it must follow that the Holy Spirit is likewise immutable.

What is evident?

Clearly, that the Holy Spirit is God in His own right without any qualification. The unequivocal statement made by the Lord in Matthew chapter 28 verse 19 that the disciples were to baptize converts 'in the name (singular) of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit' NKJV, provides support for teaching that the Holy Spirit is also part of the Holy Trinity.

The personality of the Holy Spirit

It is easy to accept God the Father as a person. Similarly, because of the incarnation, we speak about the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. But what about the Holy Spirit? Does the Bible teach that the Holy Spirit is more than an impersonal force, influence or power? Is it scripturally correct to speak about the Holy Spirit as being a real person, that is, having the essential characteristics of personality? To answer this question, we need to consider what actually constitutes personality, and whether the Bible does reveal the Holy Spirit to be a person.

What constitutes personality?

One definition of 'personality' is that it is a combination of an individual's thoughts, characteristics, behaviours, attitudes, ideas and habits. It is essentially an individual's characteristic way of behaving across a wide range of situations. It could also be defined as the totality of an individual's behavioural and emotional tendencies, or as the



PERSONALITY

PIRIT [2]

socialist JOHN J MACIONIS defines it, 'the constant pattern of thinking, feeling and acting'.⁷ So personality has to do with mind, feelings and will, which are the essential constituents of a person as distinct from a thing, or an abstraction. Turning then to the Bible we find that it does confirm the Holy Spirit to be a person not just merely an impersonal force.

THE BIBLICAL EVIDENCE

He communicates

The Holy Spirit spoke through David's writings in the Old Testament, i.e., David acted as His spokesman, Acts 1. 16. He also speaks, as in the prompting of Philip to engage with the Ethiopian eunuch, 8. 29, and forbids individuals from preaching as in the case of Paul and his fellow workers in Asia, 16. 6. This ability to communicate must reflect behaviour appropriate to personality.

He teaches

In an important section of John's Gospel, Jesus makes provision for His disciples to be taught after His departure. The teacher is identified by Him as the Holy Spirit, John 14. 26, who would be sent by the Father in the name of His Son. Later in his First Letter, the apostle John highlights the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit again so that 'you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything – and is true and is no lie, just as it has taught you – abide in him', 1 John 2. 27. The ability to teach highlights intelligence as well as mindset thus again reflecting personality.⁸

He comforts/can be lied to/ and can be grieved

Not only does Jesus make provision for His disciples after His departure, but He describes the Holy Spirit as another 'Comforter' (or 'Counsellor'), John 14. 16, i.e., 'another Comforter of the same type'. This presupposes that the new Comforter would act in the same way towards the disciples, thus, again, reflecting the traits of personality. According to Peter, one can lie to the Holy Spirit, Acts 5. 3, and, according to Paul, it is possible to grieve and quench the Holy Spirit, Eph. 4. 30; 1 Thess. 5. 19. If the Holy Spirit was merely an impersonal force, both Peter's and Paul's statements would be nonsense! However, what they both confirm is that the Holy Spirit has feelings, which again reflect personality. The above verses represent only a tiny number of biblical references that could be used in support of the argument that the Holy Spirit is a person in all the senses of that word.

A concern for some Christians is why, in our English translations of certain verses in the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is referred to as 'itself' rather than 'himself', e.g., Rom. 8. 16, 26, e.g., KJV. This has to do with the rules of Greek grammar in that the word 'spirit' is neuter in Greek, so for an accurate translation, the appropriate English pronoun should be used, which, in the case of Romans chapter 8 verses 16, 26, would be 'itself', because 'itself' is a neuter pronoun. Curiously, the King James Version reverses this grammatical trend in its translation of John chapter 16 verses 13-14 – the use of the English pronouns 'he', 'him' etc., in certain other parts of the same narrative is, however, grammatically justified on the

grounds that the word 'Comforter' is masculine in Greek so accordingly takes masculine pronouns.

Well what do we make of all this? It was the Reformer MARTIN LUTHER who once asserted, 'What is theology, but grammar applied to the text'.⁹ Accepting that compliance with the rules of Greek grammar are important, we should never lose sight of the fact, however, that in biblical exegesis it is the context that overrides other considerations. Thus, whether we agree or disagree with how a particular translation has handled this particular matter, the clear and unequivocal teaching of scripture is that the Holy Spirit is a person. Whenever, therefore, we are dealing with this subject, we should always reverently, and with a deep sense of awe and wonder, refer to the Holy Spirit as that glorious third person of the Holy Trinity.

In terms, then, we believe absolutely in the deity and personality of the Holy Spirit.

Endnotes

- 1 A. F. KIRKPATRICK, *The Book of Psalms*, Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges, pg. 787.
- 2 LESLIE C. ALLEN, *Psalms 101-150*, Word Biblical Commentary, pg. 328.
- 3 FRED CUNDICK, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit - Treasury of Bible Doctrine*, John Heading and Cyril Hocking (ed.), pg. 223.
- 4 CHARLES CRANFIELD, *Romans*, The International Critical Commentary, T&T Clark, pg. 589.
- 5 ROBERT JEWITT, *Romans*, Hermenia - A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible, pg. 716.
- 6 Note the comments of the Jewish philosopher Philo, 'Every created thing must necessarily undergo change, for this is its property, even as unchangeableness is the property of God' (*Allegorical Interpretation* 2.33).
- 7 JOHN J MACIONIS, *Sociology*, Pearson Education, 13th edition.
- 8 Note also Romans chapter 8 verses 26-27
- 9 WALTER A. ELWELL (ed.), *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Baker, pg. 613.



It is important to distinguish not only the various aspects of the work of Calvary but also their effects, so as to avoid confusion of thought and doctrine. When the Holy Spirit speaks of truths such as salvation, justification, reconciliation, sanctification and redemption, He is not using a variety of words just for the sake of it; rather, each word has its own peculiar meaning.

Redemption sees the sinner as shackled and bound by a power which afflicts him and which he cannot break. Thus, what is needed is a price to be paid, sufficient to secure his freedom, and a deliverance afforded to the one who is redeemed. There is also the thought in scripture that that deliverance has a purpose in view greater than the immediate blessing and greater happiness of the redeemed person.

REDEMPTION

Blood in the basin was not sufficient by itself. All the time that the blood was in the basin, the firstborn still languished under the judgement of God, and would die at midnight, just as surely as the lamb had already died. But the obedience of faith, seen in the sprinkling of the blood on the doorposts and the lintel, meant that the lamb was most surely a substitute for the firstborn: it could now be said that the lamb had died instead of that son, and not only on his behalf. How often have the Lord's people rejoiced in the fact that the blood of Christ has shielded them from judgement as they have lived in the good of the fact that the blood of sacrifice was always firstly for the eye of God, and that it is still true,

bought by the Lord, 2 Pet. 2. 1. The price He paid puts, as it were, the title deeds of the universe in His hand. However, the world does not yet know redemption (and the apostate never will), because it knows nothing of deliverance from the vanity to which it is now subject. The Israelites were delivered. God opened the sea to let them out of Egypt; and closed it again behind them to ensure that they did not return to that which formerly held them in bondage. We praise God that our Lord Jesus Christ 'gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father', Gal. 1. 4.

It is little wonder that the first song in the Bible, and the last, is



In the past

In the Old Testament, the great picture of redemption is where Israel is delivered from the hand of Pharaoh. The words of God to Moses at the burning bush are worth recalling: 'I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; and I am come down to deliver them', Exod. 3. 7-8. Who has not felt the burden of the Israelites, the people of God held captive by a mighty captor, as they were beaten by the taskmasters, held in the iron furnace of affliction, hated by the Egyptians, and also been grieved for those who still are captives to iniquity?¹ God Himself felt their affliction and heard their cry and so brought them 'out of the house of bondage', 'from the hand of the enemy', and 'out of the house of servants'.²

He accomplished this by blood, Exod. 12, and by power, Exod. 14.

'When I see the blood, I will pass over you', 12. 13.

When God, of old, the way of life
Would teach to all His own;
He placed them safe beyond the reach
Of death, by blood alone.

It is His word, God's precious word,
It stands for ever true:
When I, the Lord, shall see the blood
I will pass over you.

DANIEL W. WHITTLE

The blood of the lamb in Exodus chapter 12 is complemented by that which speaks of the death of Christ, the Red Sea, in Exodus chapter 14. Redemption is not merely purchase. In the parables of the kingdom a man found treasure hid in the field and, for the joy he had in the treasure, he sold all that he had to buy the field. Now, 'the field is the world', Matt. 13. 38, 44. By the blood of Christ such a price was paid that the whole world was purchased, so that Peter could speak even of apostates as those

a song connected to redemption. 'He brought forth his people with joy, and his chosen with gladness', Ps. 105. 43. In that first song the purpose of God as to the reason for their deliverance is recognized. Moses and the people are not taken up merely with the fact that they no longer need to endure Egyptian rigour, but sing of the fact that God had redeemed them for Himself, and would learn that He would have them be His 'peculiar treasure', Exod. 19. 5. They were now peculiarly and uniquely His, even as when He delivered us, Gal. 1. 4, He delivered us for Himself.

In the present

'In whom we have redemption through his blood', Eph. 1. 7; Col. 1. 14, is the language of assurance for believers in the present day. Our redemption, together with every other blessing we have, is in Him, the risen and ascended Christ, something peculiar to this church age. Its basis is the blood of Christ. What a price He paid! The Greek



agorazo has the thought of one entering into the market place to do business, buying or selling. Thus, 'ye are bought with a price', 1 Cor. 6. 20; 7. 23. The Lamb is worthy because He was slain, and has 'redeemed us to God' by His blood, Rev. 5. 9. But another word, *exagorazo*, is also used. This has the added idea that not only has a price been paid but it was with a view to the freedom of the one who was purchased: it means, 'to buy out', Gal. 3. 13; 4. 5. Then, in addition, another word that is used is *lutroo*. It means 'to release on receipt of a ransom', and is used in the well-known verse in

the law was our schoolmaster 'until' Christ; when faith came, which had Jesus Christ as its object, they were no longer under a schoolmaster nor in bondage, 4. 3. Redemption brought them into the privilege of sonship. Titus tells us that God redeemed us that He might 'purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works', 2. 14.

We praise God that the shackles that bound us are snapped. The Son has set us free by redemptive power.

at Calvary, will be delivered. His saints, 'sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession', Eph. 1. 14, will then be brought into the good of His inheritance, jointly possessing it with Christ.

Israel, too, will be in the good of all that the Redeemer will bring. Speaking of signs that will yet be seen relative to His coming, our Saviour said, 'And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh', Luke 21. 28. 'Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness', Isa. 1. 27, and 'the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee



which we learn that we 'were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ', 1 Pet. 1. 18-19. The currency of heaven is not the precious metals of earth, which, at best, are corruptible, but Christ's precious blood, the sacrifice which He offered to God.

'The curse of the law', 'vain conversation', and 'all iniquity' are all things from which redemption has delivered us.³ Galatians tells us that we have been redeemed that we might know sonship. Under the law, the Israelites are viewed as children under tutors and governors, and, in a statement of great dispensational significance, the apostle says that 'the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ', Gal. 3. 24. The thought in the verse is that

In the future

Although it is true that 'we have redemption', it is also to be remembered that our bodies are not yet redeemed. That will happen when sonship in all its fullness is known and experienced, when we shall be 'conformed to the image of his Son', Rom. 8. 29. In anticipation of what is involved in the redemption of the body, believers now groan within themselves, 8. 23. They live in a fallen world, in a groaning creation, in a universe subjected by God to vanity, in a body not yet redeemed. How different will it be when they are conformed to the image of His Son!

Creation itself also awaits its glorious deliverance, as it waits for the 'manifestation of the sons of God', 8. 19. It shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. Christ is a redeemer inheritor. The field, having been purchased

away', 51. 11. What a day it will be for the afflicted earthly people of God when 'the redeemer shall come to Zion', 59. 20, and they shall call them 'the redeemed of the Lord', 62. 12.

Redemption has brought to us true freedom. But that freedom is not a liberty to do as we will in self-pleasing. It is, rather, a deliverance that brings us into being bondmen of the Lord, and this is true freedom. 'Let my people go that they may serve me', was the word to Pharaoh. They became His own peculiar treasure. The contemplation of all our Redeemer has done for us, the price He paid to secure our redemption, the blessings into which He has brought us, all ought to combine to give to us a desire to repay something of the debt of love we owe in devoted service to Him.

Endnotes

- 1 Exod. 5. 14; Deut. 4. 20; Ps. 105. 25.
- 2 Deut. 13. 5; Ps. 106. 10; Mic. 6. 14.
- 3 Gal. 3. 13; 1 Pet. 1. 18; Titus 2. 14.



THE EXERCISE OF GIFT IN THE LOCAL ASSEMBLY ^[2]

The distribution of spiritual gifts

I want to commence this article by repeating what has already been emphasized in the first article: every believer has a gift.¹

Scripture clearly indicates that, within the same gift, God gives a different measure or degree of gift to one than He does to another. If God determines the measure given to each then it is not for me to despise a brother with a lesser measure of gift. Nor should it make me jealous of a brother with a greater measure of gift.

Similarly, we can only exercise gifts which are listed in scripture and not all these gifts are with us today. Equally, spiritual gift is not natural ability, either what I was born with or what I attain by education, 'For to one is given **by the Spirit** . . . to another **by the Spirit**', 1 Cor. 12. 8 [my emphasis]. Spiritual gift is given to a believer by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, I cannot be born with it and I cannot be educated in order to acquire it.

We must also appreciate that gift is not of our choosing, 'dividing to every man severally as he will', 1 Cor. 12. 11. We are only the recipients of what the Spirit in His sovereignty decides we should be given. So I do not look at the list of gifts in the scriptures and decide which one I would like to have. We submit to the sovereign will of the Holy Spirit in the matter.²

It is possible for a believer to have more than one gift. For example, a brother with the gift of the evangelist may also possess the gift of teacher, although it does not always follow. It is a well-known saying, but nevertheless bears repeating, that we don't believe in a one-man ministry but neither do we believe in an any-man ministry. We must see the clear evidence of gift, and gift is given primarily for use in the assembly where God has placed us. It is there

By **ALAN MAUNDER**
Cardiff, Wales

that a young brother is 'proved', 1 Tim. 3. 10, and then allowed to serve with the approval and commendation of his home assembly. At the other end of the spectrum, although it is true that we do not retire from the service of the Lord, there may come a point when, through poor health or old age, a brother is no longer fit to exercise his gift as he once did. This is something that needs to be done with wisdom and understanding.

The discharge of spiritual gifts

Every believer has a gift. Each one of us needs to ask, 'am I using it?' Sadly, there are some companies where a small handful of people are exercising their gifts and the rest are contented to 'sit back and do nothing'. Many, like the man in the parable of the pounds in Luke chapter 19, have hidden away that which the Holy Spirit has endowed them with, even though the clear instruction was, 'occupy till I come'. Each one of us needs to ask, 'am I occupied in using the spiritual gift I have been given, for the glory of God and the blessing of others?'

When Paul penned the opening words of 1 Corinthians chapter 12, he was turning their attention to spiritual matters. Up to that point he had been dealing with carnal matters

affecting the Corinthian assembly. This would teach us the important truth that spiritual gifts can only be exercised by spiritual men. Spiritual gifts are not to be used for self-gratification or self-exaltation. This was the problem in the assembly at Corinth in relation to the use of the gift of tongues; they were 'puffed up', and Paul has to rebuke them for it.

As Paul wrote 1 Corinthians chapter 13, he indicated that gifts must always be exercised in love. There is no value in the exercise of gift unless it is done in love. So, as we preach the gospel and warn men and women about the consequences of sin – hell and the lake of fire – we should always show sincere love to the lost. As we might, at times, have a ministry of correction or reproof to the saints we must do so out of love. Paul writes to the Ephesians about making 'increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love', 4. 16.

As we close this study, let us remind our hearts of the hymn:

There's a work for Jesus,
ready at your hand,
'Tis a task the Master just for you
has planned.
Haste to do His bidding,
yield Him service true;
There's a work for Jesus none
but you can do.

Work for Jesus, day by day,
Serve Him ever, falter never;
Christ obey.
Yield Him service loyal, true,
There's a work for Jesus
none but you can do.

[WILLIAM T. MEYER]



Endnotes

- 1 The reader is referred to: Rom. 12. 3; 1 Cor. 12. 7; Eph. 4. 7. There is no such thing as a believer without a gift. This is emphasized again in 1 Peter chapter 4 verse 10. Just note in passing the use of the word 'measure', Rom. 12. 3; Eph. 4. 7.
- 2 1 Corinthians chapter 12 verse 31 is not written to individuals but to the whole assembly. Paul wanted them to have the best.



Precious Seed

Changes in the Precious Seed Trust

As the careful reader will have noted, there have been a number of significant changes in the Precious Seed Trust over the course of 2016. These changes will enable us to move forward in 2017 DV, and I have detailed them as follows:

1 Rutherford Rabey has stepped down from his role as chairman of the Precious Seed Trust.

We would like to thank him very much for his assistance in the work. Although he was with us a relatively short time, he helped us through a period of transition and restructuring. We appreciate the time and effort he gave to the work in the two years he was with us. Apart from being a worthy ambassador of the work, the continuing success of the *Precious Seed* calendar owes much to our brother's endeavours. We wish him well in his labours in the north-east of England and further afield and trust that he might know the Lord's continued help and blessing.

2 Howard Coles has retired as treasurer of the Precious Seed Trust.

It was in the January 1991 magazine that the name of Howard Coles first appeared in the list of trustees. Although he was approached before that, he has been part of, and has contributed significantly to, the work for over twenty-five years.

He became secretary to the Trust in January 1998 and treasurer in July 2008. As secretary, he worked closely with Roy Hill as chairman and Michael Jones as treasurer. As treasurer, he has worked closely with John Scarsbrook, Roy Hill, and Rutherford Rabey. Both roles that he has fulfilled have involved a significant amount of work but none more so than the role of treasurer. Indeed, only those who have worked closely with Howard, as I have, will know the extent of the burden that he has carried.

It is safe to say that Howard introduced a much more open and detailed way of working in this latter

role, streamlining and computerising systems to the benefit of the working of the Trust. Although not everyone was as engrossed in the accounts that were presented at each meeting, it was Howard's passion! In the last eight years his contribution to the work has been massive, enabling it to grow to the extent that it has. We owe Howard a significant debt of gratitude for his consistency, diligence, tirelessness, and wise counsel over the years. We shall all miss him in his retirement but, I am sure, join to wish him every blessing in his work for the Lord in Coleford as well as in the south-west of England.

3 Michael Buckeridge (Grantham) is joining the Trust.

We are pleased to welcome Michael to the work, although he is not a complete stranger to it. He has contributed to YPS and has taken an interest in other aspects of the magazine in the past and we look forward to what he can bring in the future. Although we have streamlined the tasks involved in the role of treasurer to the Trust, none more so than through the new *Precious Seed* online shop, it remains a significant responsibility.

Readers are reminded that any donations, changes of address for magazine mailing or changes to your magazine order should be addressed to Michael – his address is on the back cover of the magazine. I am sure that he will value your co-operation in this important task.

4 Sandy Jack becomes the new Ministry Articles Editor.

Sandy has already been involved in compiling and editing the Reports Section of the magazine. With information being readily available

through the Internet and social media, we have decided to re-focus our reporting of gospel activity to that which is more generic and less specific to a named local church, individual, or time. Based upon this change, Sandy is taking on the role of editing articles for the magazine – this will be effective from January 2017. Writers wishing to submit material for consideration will find his address on the back cover of the magazine, or they can send it to this email address, editor@preciousseed.org

We thank all our readers for their patience if they have been inconvenienced during this period of change. As always, we value the prayers of the Lord's people to continue the work as He deems appropriate and for the blessing of His people.

John Bennett

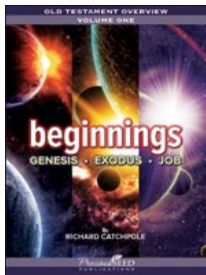
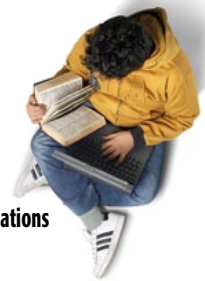
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On behalf of the Trust*



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



Beginnings – Old Testament Overview Volume 1 Richard Catchpole

Paperback, 323 Pages, Published by Precious Seed Publications, 34 Metcalfe Avenue, Killamarsh, UK. ISBN 978-1-871642-66-7.

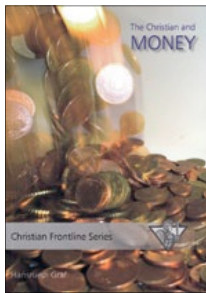
Precious Seed Publications set themselves the very worthy task of providing Christian readers with a series of books that offer an overview of a number of books of the Old Testament at once, arranged according to their chronological rather than their place-in-the-Bible order. This book – appropriately entitled 'Beginnings' – covers the familiar books of Genesis and Exodus, while additionally tackling the rarely read book of Job, who is thought to have been contemporary with the earliest patriarchs.

Although one might have expected simple introductions to each book, Richard Catchpole has provided, if not verse-by-verse coverage, then certainly complete topic-by-topic comments. Genesis and Exodus contain some of the most important themes in the Bible, such as the creation, the fall, the flood, the call of Abraham, then the grand themes of the redemption of the children of Israel from Egypt, and worship in the tabernacle, as well as the giving of the Old Covenant in general. These are clearly explained and the New Testament significance of all these topics is also well presented.

The Book of Job is long, and for the first-time reader quite complicated. However, the author deals with the story very well, including a good description of Job's spiritual suffering, and the unhelpful comments of his friends, who could only think that God was punishing Job for his sins, whereas God actually had a purpose in it all. Where appropriate here and elsewhere in the book, the readers are challenged to look at their own lives in the light of the spiritual issues raised.

For those readers motivated to dig deeper into the Bible books covered, lists of in-depth, reliable commentaries are provided. The reasonable price of £7.50 means that this book is certainly good value for money, and overall represents a good buy!

[Our thanks to Howard Barnes, Westhoughton, England, for this review]



Christian Frontline Series – The Christian and Money Hansruedi Graf

Paperback, 94 pages, Chapter Two, Fountain House, 3 Conduit Mews, London, SE18 7AP, United Kingdom ISBN 978-1-85307-257-4.

Programmes or articles about money are usually deadly boring. Who can listen to 'Moneybox Live', or read the financial pages of their newspaper without their pulse slowing to 40 b.p.m. and fear of slipping in and out of consciousness?

It is refreshing, then, to come across this slim volume which manages to deal readably with an important subject from a biblical standpoint. The author avoids making money itself a thing of importance, emphasizing, rather, that it is our attitude to it that God is interested in. The reader finishes the book with a clear understanding that financial success from a spiritual point of view is not simply a matter of how much money we accumulate, but how we handle it in the Lord's service, whether we have much or little.

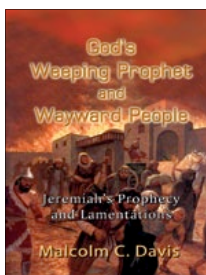
A popular secular lyricist misquoted the scripture as, 'Money, so they say, is the root of all evil today', but our author sets the record straight, 'money itself is neutral, but our relationship with it strongly influences our lives' and the book is at pains to bring out what the Bible has to say about how to conduct that relationship.

The most technical passage is in the section headed 'Money and possessions during different times in history' where the Christian's relationship with money and this world's goods is carefully distinguished from that of the faithful in Israel before the Lord Jesus came. This exposes the error of the 'Prosperity Gospel' where people are promised earthly riches if they become Christians; even this section is clear and easy to read.

'Practical instructions for handling money', deals with the matters of debt, savings, giving, budgeting, employment and ethics. Without sounding horribly like 'Moneybox Live', the book provides not too heavy, financially well-informed common sense, based on relevant Bible verses.

The third section notes the fact that many of the Lord's parables use a financial framework to make their point. However, rather than following the main point of the parable the author looks at the way that the principles he has already brought out are illustrated in the Lord's teaching. This is fresh and effective, as is the book as a whole.

[Thanks to John Stewart, Killamarsh, Derbyshire, England for this review].



God's weeping prophet and wayward people - Jeremiah's prophecy and Lamentations Malcolm C. Davis

Paperback, 269 pages, Published by John Ritchie Ltd, 40 Beansburn, Kilmarnock, KA3 1RH, Scotland. ISBN: 0978-1-910513-50-7.

A cursory glance at the brief comment on the back cover of this book brought me up with a jolt! Referring to the subject matter I read, 'The books (of Jeremiah and Lamentations) are relevant to us today, as we face a still greater judgement of God in the coming tribulation'. Being well acquainted with the author, I knew that rather than 'we' he meant 'the world', and, sure enough, the statement soon followed that the commentary is 'written from the premillennial, pretribulational standpoint'.

This book complements the author's works on Isaiah, Ezekiel and Daniel in concluding his studies in the writings of the 'major' prophets. It is presented in similar style, with a concise commentary on each chapter, setting out its relevance to the people of Jeremiah's day, together with historical background and practical application as appropriate. The introduction, explaining the political and moral atmosphere of the days in which Jeremiah wrote, is particularly beneficial in understanding the message of his prophecy. The burden and weight of Jeremiah's message is clearly portrayed throughout the book and helpful comment is made to explain the structure of the chapters which, at times, are not chronological. The brief comment on Lamentations is useful as a succinct introduction for any who would consider studying this intriguing little book in more detail for themselves.

The commentary closes with a number of 'Practical studies in Jeremiah's major themes and recurring phrases'. These include, 'The names and character of God', 'Christ in Jeremiah's writings' and 'The restoration of the faithful remnant of Israel'.

If one criticism could be levelled at the writing style, this reviewer found the preponderance of capital letters, particularly in the chapter introductions, to be quite irritating. However, that is a personal comment and should not deter a prospective buyer from obtaining this helpful and recommended book.

QUESTION

Is ill health an evidence of God's chastening?

ANSWER

The root cause of all suffering is sin not sins. For example, a baby that only lives a few hours or weeks does not die because it has sinned; the cause of that infant death goes back to the dawn of human history. Before sin invaded God's creation there was no death, no sweat, no tears, no pain and no curse. One of the direct consequences of Adam's sin is the effect it has had on the human body. In his state of innocence, Adam had a body that would never age or die, but from that moment of rebellion in Eden things changed. Amongst the saddest words recorded in the Bible were those spoken by the Lord God to Adam: 'In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return', Gen. 3. 19.

But that verdict was not limited to Adam but extended beyond him to all who have inherited his fallen nature, so that Paul wrote, '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. Not only has death passed upon all men but so too has sickness, for our bodies are not only mortal, but also corruptible. Therefore, the outcome of Adam's sin is that we live on a planet spoiled by sin in bodies that are susceptible to all forms of disease and ill health.

Frailty, pain and death blight the whole human race, and such suffering is experienced by saved and unsaved alike. Writing to the church at Rome, Paul states, 'For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body', Rom. 8. 22-23. Thus, sickness is the common lot of mankind and, therefore, we must not think that every time we are ill that God is chastening us for some act of disobedience.

As we read through the scriptures, we discover that many godly people suffered ill health. Paul could

write in very commendable terms to the Philippians about one of their company, Epaphroditus. He said that he is 'my brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants', 2. 25. What an asset this man was to the work of the Lord and to the assembly in Philippi and yet we learn that he had been 'sick nigh unto death'. Timothy was another person whose testimony was without blemish, he is one of the few people in the Bible who is called a man of God. He enjoyed a unique friendship with Paul and his affinity with the apostle was such that Paul could say of him that he had no man likeminded. Despite this commendation, however, Timothy was afflicted with frequent infirmity and suffered from some form of stomach complaint.

There are other examples that could be cited but these will suffice to prove that ill health is not, of itself, evidence that the sufferer is being chastened by God. However, we must not deduce from that summary that ill health is never a proof of divine displeasure, for sometimes it might be.

Early in the book of Acts, we read of the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira; they were summarily dealt with because they had lied to the Holy Ghost. Another example of sickness being inflicted due to disorderliness relates to the church at Corinth. Their appalling behaviour towards each other at the Lord's Supper invoked stern discipline from God: 'For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep', 1 Cor. 11. 29-30.

Sometimes, because of our waywardness, God has to deal with us in a punitive way. However, let me add one point of caution. Whilst God may choose to deal punitively with someone, neither you nor I have the right or spiritual discernment to assume that someone is being punished of God.

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Precious Seed International

Front Cover Illustration

'And . . . we came to Rome', Acts 28. 16

The ancient city of Rome is situated on seven hills that sweep down towards the River Tiber. Tradition maintains that the city was founded in 753 BC, and for approximately 244 years was a monarchy until the Etruscan king Tarquin the Proud was expelled by the citizens of Rome in 509 BC. From that period onwards, Rome was centrally governed by the Senate, whose members came from an elite group of wealthy aristocratic families known as the Patricians. The Senate was often in conflict with the lower social classes (Plebeians) of the day, but, in essence, this form of shared government became extremely effective. So much so that, within a very short period of time, Rome through her powerful legions became the dominant force throughout the whole of the Mediterranean region, and beyond. One of the great features of Roman conquest was the way in which they built connected roads throughout their empire to the city of Rome. Hence the famous saying, 'A thousand roads lead men forever to Rome'. This unique and convenient network of roads clearly aided the spread of the gospel throughout the Greco/Roman world in the first century AD, and Paul may well have this partly in mind when he thought about the timing of God in respect of the incarnation of His Son, Gal. 4. 4. So to visit Rome was an ambition of most individuals, including Paul, Rom. 1. 13; 15. 22-24, but his motivation was very different from those who simply wanted to enjoy the experience. Yet, instead of Paul visiting Rome to help develop the local church as he anticipated, he arrived as a prisoner in chains under armed escort, Acts 28. 16. How different are the ways of God from our own, Isa. 55. 8-9, they are, in Paul's own words, 'past finding out', Rom. 11. 33! Nevertheless, despite the limitations imposed upon him by being bound with chains, Acts 28. 20, Paul spends two years under some form of house arrest, freely proclaiming the gospel to all who visited him, vv. 30-31. Thus proving that the word of God can never be fettered even when our own personal circumstances are constricted, 2 Tim. 2. 9. Whilst scholars are divided on this issue, in all probability, Paul finds time at this juncture to write a number of letters that are often referred to generically as the 'Prison Letters', i.e. Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon. The witness to the gospel had started in Jerusalem, and had now reached Rome, the centre of the civilized world. It would continue to travel throughout the rest of the world, and ultimately fulfil the words of the Lord prior to His ascension, Acts 1. 8. In Paul's day, men boasted of the freedom and privileges that Roman citizenship gave them, but even this status pales into insignificance when we think of the freedom and privileges that are ours as citizens of an eternal kingdom, Phil. 3. 20; 2 Pet. 1. 11.



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