

An international magazine to encourage the study
of the scriptures, the practice of New Testament
church principles and interest in gospel work

August 2018

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Precious SEED



'Now when they passed through
Amphipolis and Appollonia,
they came to Thessalonica',
Acts 17. 1.

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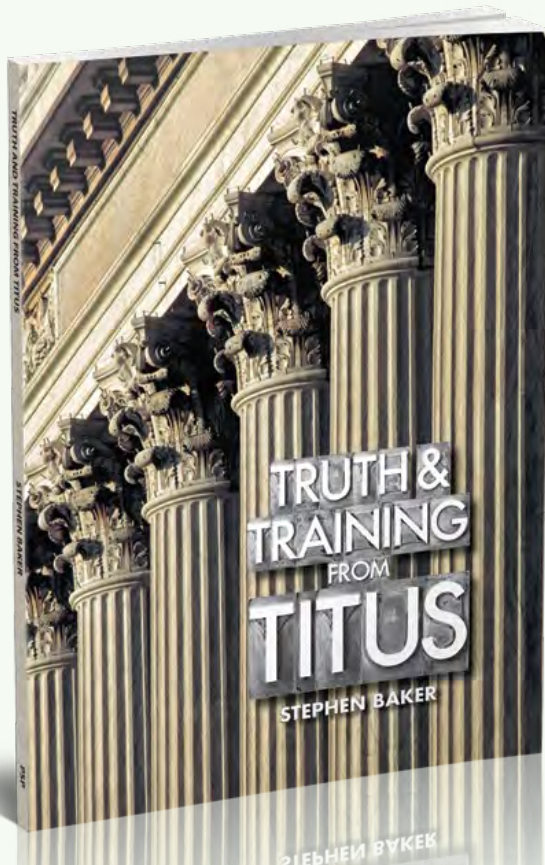
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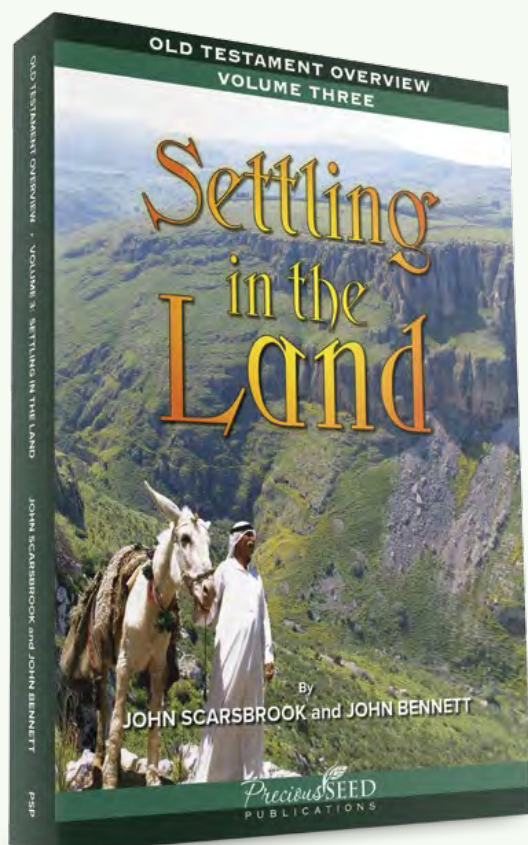
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‘And let them gather all the food of those good years that come, and lay up corn’, Gen. 41. 35. ‘As I have seen thee in the sanctuary’, Ps. 63. 2.

The kernel of Joseph’s advice to a troubled Pharaoh was something that perhaps we do well to consider.

While some may look back on bygone days and bemoan the loss of the spiritual ‘glory’ of previous generations, in our day, we remain immensely privileged in spiritual terms. With access to so many tools to enable us to study the scriptures, in many ways we are living in good years – years of plenty. One difference is that we don’t know how long these years will last, and maybe days of immense testing and challenge, years of deep drought, lie not too far ahead. But for now, they are not here! Likewise, in our personal experience, there will be ‘good years’ where we have the opportunity to ‘lay up corn’. However, there is an inherent danger in such days for complacency and the enjoyment of the wealth of the present can distract and divert us from getting to know the character of our God. We might make the mistake of thinking that only in tribulation can we learn

such things – not true! Indeed, if we don’t know Him before the trials, then we have nothing to depend on when they come! O the importance of storing up an appreciation of God, as He is revealed in His word!

In Psalm 63, David would seem to draw that lesson out for us too. In verse 2, he is not asking to be back in the sanctuary, although no doubt he would have loved that. In the dryness and thirstiness of a testing wilderness experience, his priority is to entreat God that he might see His power and glory. But it is noteworthy that he adds a phrase that shows us that he wasn’t asking for God to show him something new. He had put the years of ‘plenty’ to good use! He had used them to get to know his God and now, confident in the character of God, he draws hope, strength and solace for those lean times.

Of course, God is able to reveal Himself in power and glory to anyone, at any

time – He is sovereign – but can we really expect to neglect to harvest a knowledge of God in years of plenty, and then expect Him to miraculously turn up when we need His consolation? Shouldn’t we be seeking to implement the counsel of the perceptive and prudent Joseph?

Let us be industrious in our years of plenty, to store up a knowledge of the word of God, and an experience of our God, so that when these tough times come, as they always will in the experience of a believer, we will have something to keep us fed, and properly nourished.

It is the prayer of the committee that the efforts of those who have written the articles will enable our readers to ‘lay up corn’ so that in times of trial we might be able to pray like David.

SANDY JACK

Ministry Articles Editor

Contents

The Messianic Psalms

Psalm 45 2
By DANIEL RUDGE

Character Studies in the Book of Proverbs – Part 3

..... 4
By JOHN SCARSBROOK

The Epistle to the Colossians – Part 2

..... 6
By WILLIAM M. BANKS

Personalities at the Nativity – Joseph

..... 8
By MICHAEL WILKIE

Why are there so many Bible versions today?

..... 10
By ANDREW WILSON

The Baptism in the Holy Spirit

..... 12
By RICHARD COLLINGS

The Twelve Tribes of Israel – Reuben

..... 14
By LLOYD STOCK

Word for Today

..... 15
By BRIAN CLATWORTHY

The Gospel of Mark – Part 3

..... 16
By JOHN BENNETT

Lessons from Old Testament

Characters in James 18

By GRAEME HUTCHINSON

Their Finest Hour – Peter

..... 20
By JOHN SCARSBROOK

Regeneration

..... 22
By IAN JACKSON

Angolan Literature Fund:

20 Years of Service 24

The Desert Shall Rejoice

..... 26
By JIM LEGGE and CLARK LOGAN

Robert Eugene Sparks

..... 28
By JOHN BENNETT

Reaching out to your neighbours with the gospel

– **Noah’s Ark Replica** 29

By BRYON MEYERS

Book Reviews

..... Inside Back Cover Flap

By JOHN SCARSBROOK

Question Time

..... Outside Back Cover Flap

By RICHARD COLLINGS

PULL-OUT

Charting 1 Kings

By SIMON SHERWIN and

JONATHAN BLACK

YPS

The Messianic Psalms

PSALM 45

THE COMING KING

By **DANIEL RUDGE** Bracknell, England

Psalm 45 is 'a song of loves' celebrating the marriage of a king to a princess. The oldest tradition suggests that the psalmist wrote the song for Solomon and Pharaoh's daughter and was traditionally sung at the wedding feast, 1 Kgs. 3. 1; 7. 8. Be that as it may, but one greater than Solomon is presented in this psalm. He is more than a mere man, and more than a mere king; He is God, v. 6. PEROWNE remarks, 'The outward glory of Solomon was but a type and a foreshadowing of a better glory to be revealed. Israel's true king was not David or Solomon, but One of whom they, at best, were only faint and transient images'.¹ SPURGEON also comments, 'Some see in this psalm only Solomon; they are short-sighted. Some see Solomon and Christ; they are cross-eyed. Well-focussed spiritual eyes see Jesus only'.²

Thus, the psalm concerns Christ in the glory of His future manifestation in connection with His earthly people, Israel. Note the use of *shoshannim* in the inscription; a possible reference to the particular tune to accompany the psalm. *Shoshannim* means 'concerning the lilies', a flower which not only symbolizes Israel but also stands as an emblem of purity, Hos. 14. 5. It was a flower of the spring and is highly suggestive of a new beginning for the nation in the millennial glory of a future day.

The contemplation of the Psalmist, v. 1

The Psalmist has been meditating on the king. It has affected his whole being. His heart is moved by a delightful subject; he is bursting up like a fountain and boiling over as a saucepan. He can hardly contain the meditation that his mind has 'made' through careful, focused effort and activity. As a skilled or experienced scribe would pour out the written word, so the tongue of this psalmist is ready to overflow in eloquent spoken word – hence the content of the psalm. Can this be said of us as we gather at the Lord's Supper? Is our careful contemplation of Him throughout the week positively bursting forth from our lips? Part of our responsibilities as holy priests is to offer up the sacrifice

of praise to God continually, Heb. 13. 15. It is a most shameful thing if we have nothing to offer God in remembrance and worship of His Son. The meditation will need to be 'made' during the week, but there is no greater subject on which to ponder.

The character of the King, vv. 2-9

His attraction, v. 2. The king is 'fairer than the children of men'. The Hebrew is difficult to translate but literally reads 'beautiful, beautiful'. This king is beyond compare. Christ, as one who has become man, is the Man that transcends all the children of men for moral beauty. 'Grace' is only mentioned twice in the entire psalter. In Psalm 84 verse 11, grace is given from the Lord. Here, grace is

inherent; being poured into the lips of the Lord Jesus from within – not without! He is the personification of grace, Titus 2. 11. The word 'poured', is to cast as a mould. The lips of Christ gave grace its very form and shape – one is reminded of the gracious words that continually poured forth from His mouth, Luke 4. 22.

His **advent**, vv. 3-5. Christ is envisaged as the Mighty One coming forth to conquer and establish His kingdom, cp. Isa. 9. 6. As the 'Mighty' One, He is a person of exemplary and exceptional strength – far greater than Gideon, the mighty man of valour, and Boaz, the mighty man of wealth. This Mighty One comes with 'sword', clothed in the brilliance of divine glory and majesty. He rides in triumph on behalf of truth, meekness and righteousness, destroying His enemies with great power and strength. All is reminiscent of the second advent, cp. Rev. 19. 11-21.

His **administration**, vv. 6, 7. The administration of Christ is divine, for He is God. Some Bible scholars have done grave violence to the original here, re-translating as 'The eternal and everlasting God has enthroned you'.³ Such a translation has a doctrinal agenda – the denial of the deity of Christ. In the words of KIDNER, this verse 'is an example of Old Testament language bursting its banks to demand a more than human fulfilment'.⁴ Hebrews chapter 1 verses 8 and 9, clearly confirm the verse as a direct confirmation of the deity of Christ – 'Unto the Son he saith, Thy throne O God, is for ever and ever'. His rule will be with a straight [right] sceptre, i.e., a reign which actively promotes justice and opposes evil. He shall hold court 'morning by morning', removing the evildoers from the land, Ps. 101. 8. Therefore, God, His Father, has anointed Him with the 'oil of gladness'; a figurative expression to describe the fulness of joy which will be His as He sees of the travail of His soul and is satisfied. His 'fellows' are those earthly companions in His kingdom – yet He is anointed above them.⁵ He exceeds all. 'Grace may raise high its objects, whether heavenly or earthly; but in all things He must have the pre-eminence. Whatever grace may do He is still the Lord'.⁶

His **apparel**, v. 8. There is no word for 'smell' in the original and thus myrrh, aloes and cassia are His garments. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes with which to fragrance the linen burial clothes, but here we have the addition of cassia, John 19. 39. All is suggestive of the person and work of Christ. Cassia comes from a root word meaning 'to bow', reminding us of a birth and life characterized by humility. Myrrh was sweet to the smell but bitter to the taste, taking us in spirit to Calvary. Aloes produced a fragrance taken from a decomposed bough buried, then raised out of the ground. Whilst the Lord Jesus 'saw no corruption', nor could He, we are reminded of His burial and resurrection, Acts 13. 37. Thus, throughout the millennial reign, there shall ever be the sweet-smelling savour of Calvary upon His person.

His **associates**, v. 9. This king has a queen, but she is not a queen in her own right, rather a queen-consort by marriage. This writer is in agreement with various expositors such as DARBY, KELLY and FEREDAY, when he says that the queen is a picture of restored, earthly Jerusalem – the city standing as representative of her people, the cleansed remnant of Israel. After all, the king shall come unto Jerusalem, a city which shall yet be 'a crown of

glory in the hand of the Lord', Zech. 9. 9; Isa. 62. 3. She shall be called *Hephzibah* [my delight is in her], and *Beulah* [married one] – note Isaiah chapter 62, especially verse 5, 'As the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee'. She stands at the king's right hand, the place of honour and power, dressed in the 'gold of Ophir', the choicest gold and fitting symbol of divine righteousness. FEREDAY remarks, 'The Queen is here seen by His side, sharing His earthly glories, and such will Jerusalem be in the day that is approaching. We must not confound the Queen with the Bride, the Lamb's wife. There are heavenly things, and there are earthly: the vision of John sets us in the heavens, our Psalm to the earth'.⁷

The counsel of the queen, vv. 10, 11

The psalmist now appears to offer some personal counsel to the queen as she awaits the groom to collect and lead her to the palace. In order to please her king, she must present a fitting character of beauty as one associated with Him. She was to abandon her own people and her father's house, for old loyalties must not compete with the new. This king demands total allegiance. Again, there must be adoration [worship], for 'He is thy Lord'. His word, and will must

be obeyed – total authority. What a challenge to the believer today! The demands of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ are no less. The Christian has abandoned the old way of life and renders full allegiance, as bond slave, to the authority of their Lord.

The celebration of the court, vv. 12-15

As the queen, the 'daughter of Tyre' represents the people of a city. She is undoubtedly one of the 'honourable women' of verse 9. Tyre was the leading city of commerce and wealth and, in the millennial day, her people shall seek favour from the king by bringing a gift, Isa. 60. 11. The queen in her glorious clothing of interwoven gold, and raiment of colourful needlework is led from the bridal chamber [within, v. 13], to enter the king's palace, accompanied by gladness and rejoicing. In such glorious finery, one is reminded of the robing room of the bride – namely the judgement seat of Christ. It is salutary to think that the saints are weaving today, by the righteous acts they are performing, an individual contribution to the collective adornment of the bride for the day of her marriage to Christ, Rev. 19. 8.

The final two verses appear to be a return to the contemplation of the psalmist, cp. v. 1. He expresses his assurance that the offspring of the queen [restored Israel] will act as 'princes', i.e., representatives of the king throughout the earth. Truly Israel shall be restored as a kingdom of priests, Isa. 61. 6. And the psalmist has a desire, that his composition might cause the praise of the king to endure for ever and ever. Truly it will!



Endnotes

- 1 J. J. STEWART PEROWNE, *The Book of Psalms*, George Bell and Sons.
- 2 C. H. SPURGEON, *The Treasury of David*, Hendrickson.
- 3 PETER C. CRAIGIE, *The Word Biblical Commentary series (Psalms 1-50, Volume 19)*, Thomas Nelson.
- 4 D. KIDNER, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Volume 15): Psalms 1-72*, Inter-Varsity Press.
- 5 Compare the use of 'sons' and 'brethren', Heb. 2. 10, 12.
- 6 W. W. FEREDAY, *Psalm 45*, http://www.stempublishing.com/authors/fereday/Trsry/Psalm_45.html.
- 7 *Ibid.*

Character Studies in the Book of Proverbs

The fool and his friends

Part 3

By **JOHN SCARBROOK** Killamarsh, England

The first man in scripture considered to be a fool, by his own admission, was Saul the king of Israel. Saul was a man who was given privilege, time and opportunity to make something of his life. Sadly, he allowed pride, jealousy and selfishness to control his actions, and in 1 Samuel chapter 26 verse 21, he recorded his own epitaph, 'I have played the fool'. What a contrast is seen in the Saul of the New Testament, who, as Paul the apostle, at the end of his life could say without pride or boasting, 'I have kept the faith'.

In the book of Proverbs, the fool is not seen as someone to be laughed at or dismissed lightly. He is rather one who despises wisdom and instruction, 1. 7, and who hates knowledge, v. 22. It is not that he is ignorant of the truth, but chooses rather to ignore it. Wisdom is not hidden from him, but his heart is closed to it.

On most occasions when we meet the fool in the Proverbs, he is seen in contrast to the wise man, sometimes in his actions, and on other occasions in his words. He invariably carries a spiritual health warning! His behaviour is that of the unregenerate man and yet it is alarmingly possible for true believers to exhibit the characteristics attributed to the fool. How many today are guilty of turning their backs on the truth of God's word in both doctrine and practice? How many, under the guise of spirituality and 'the Lord's leading', have chosen something inferior, because it makes fewer demands upon them? How many, blessed with the care and prayer of a Christian home and assembly, have ridden roughshod over it all and have chosen their own pathway? The book of Proverbs says they are fools.

The character of the fool does not really begin to manifest itself until chapter 10. In the first nine chapters, the instruction of the wise man has a tone of intimacy. A father addressing a son, a teacher to an individual pupil; note the pronouns used are in the second person, 'thee', 'thou' and 'thy'. On a number of occasions, in chapters 1 to 7, and more particularly in chapters 8 and 9, the pronouns become personal as wisdom takes the role of the instructor. The tone is appealing and from the heart, 8. 5ff.; 9. 4ff. How these verses remind us of the loving tones of the Saviour as with gracious words He spoke to those around Him, imparting true wisdom from a heart of compassion!

From chapter 10, the Proverbs, as directly attributed to Solomon, take a more general and impersonal approach, and are given in the third person, 'he', 'him' and 'they'. In chapters 10 to 29, the fool and those of similar character are very prominent. The warnings and instruction given cover a number of situations.

On several occasions, the fool is seen in the home where his behaviour makes his parents' life

a misery.¹ The scriptures, not least in the book of Proverbs, are very clear in their teaching regarding parental responsibility. The care, the instruction and discipline of children is of vital importance. Equally so, children are left in no doubt as to their obligations of obedience and subjection to parental control. Sadly, in today's society 'man's wisdom' is considered superior, resulting in broken homes, dysfunctional families and whole communities where the 'sins of the fathers' are wreaking havoc upon a generation of feral children.

As we follow the fool going about his daily routine, we notice that he is often recognized not so much by how he looks, nor yet by what he does, but by what he says! While he remains silent, he is even considered wise, 17. 28! Yet such is his nature that he cannot keep quiet for long, 12. 23; 15. 2. The true character of a man or woman is often made apparent in both the content and the manner of their speech. Simon Peter could protest loudly at the accusations in the high priest's palace, yet his speech showed decisively what he really was, Matt. 26. 73. The Epistle of James is the New Testament counterpart of the book of Proverbs. He also has instructive words, particularly in chapter 3, on the importance of guarding our tongue.

The fool has no discernment in matters of morality. He makes a mock at sin, 14. 9; he is arrogant and careless, v. 16. In chapter 26, the wise man gives clear instruction on how to respond to those who manifest the character of fools. They are not worthy of respect, vv. 1, 4 and 5, and deserve only discipline, v. 3. They should not be given responsibility, v. 6, nor opportunity to teach, v. 9.

The warnings against taking the character of the fool are like beacons throughout the book. Perhaps the most succinct is given in chapter 14 verse 24. Here are seen his behaviour, his character and his attitude. 'The foolishness of fools is folly'!

Another character, often seen in

the company of the fool, is the simple man. In many ways, he is more to be pitied than blamed. He is not mentally deficient, but is gullible, easily led, naïve and lacks discernment. He is food and drink to the fool, who finds in him a natural audience and a willing disciple.

There are certain matters in which it is appropriate for the believer to be simple, e.g., ‘concerning evil’, Rom. 16. 19. It is best not to know the intricacies of behaviour, ‘done of them [unbelievers] in secret’, Eph. 5. 12. It is not too difficult for the believer to exercise wisdom and discernment, without becoming involved in inappropriate situations. Abraham did not need to visit Sodom to know that its behaviour was evil. We, as believers, do not need to see, hear or frequent many of those attractions which engage the mind of the world in order to know that there is nothing in them for the spiritual mind to feed upon.

In chapter 7, instruction is given to warn of the dangers of becoming ensnared in immorality. The character used to illustrate this is the simple man. His first mistake is to linger in the vicinity of temptation v. 8. How different to Joseph, who fled from the presence of his tempter, Gen. 39. 12. For this man, however, the lust of the eyes becomes the lust of the flesh, vv. 13-20, and the pride of life finally traps him, v. 21. He is left permanently damaged, v. 23!

In our present day, because the word of God is ignored, there appears to be no ultimate standard of truth. Therefore, with the proliferation of so much falsehood, even in nominally Christian society, souls lack discernment, and take on the character of the simple, ‘believing every word’, 14. 15. The result is that they ‘inherit folly’, v. 18. The only sure safeguard is a true knowledge of God through His word, and the constant application of that word to our lives.

Our final encounter with the simple man is a repeated warning in chapter 22 verse 3 and chapter 27 verse 12. ‘A prudent man foreseeth



the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished’. This good advice can be applied to many circumstances of life and is an excellent scripture from which to preach the gospel; it also teaches us to be aware of the possible outcome of our actions and to weigh up every option before making important decisions. Remember Lot’s choice in Genesis chapter 13 verse 11. It seems that he did not even consider choosing Bethel, the house of God, but turned his back upon it and his decision ultimately cost him everything. May the Lord help us to rise above the attributes of the simple man as seen in the book of Proverbs.

Another character quite at home in the company of the fool is the

scorner, 1. 22; we do not intend to linger in his company. He is a mocker, he will not listen to advice, 13. 1; 15. 12. Consequently, he is devoid of wisdom, 14. 6. Punishment has no effect upon him, though it may benefit others, 19. 25; 21. 11. There are no redeeming features about this man; he is unregenerate, awaiting only judgement, 19. 29. Yet we meet him often in the workplace, in the college, in the street and on the doorstep. He needs the gospel; he needs the Saviour. May the Lord give us grace to reach out to him and others like him before it is too late.

Endnote

1 e.g., 10. 1; 15. 5, 20; 17. 21, 25; 19. 13.

THE EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

Part 2

By **WILLIAM M. BANKS** Hamilton, Scotland

The two prayers, vv. 3-14

The two prayers can be outlined as follows:

- 1 Thanksgiving, vv. 3-8 – two hearings:
‘Since we heard of your faith . . . love . . . hope’, vv. 3-5;
‘Ye heard’ vv. 5-8. Note it is stated twice, vv. 5, 6.
- 2 Petition, vv. 9-14 – two requests:
‘That ye might be’, v. 9;
‘That ye might walk’, vv. 10-14.

The two prayers are based directly on what Paul and Timothy had ‘heard’, v. 4, and ‘since . . . we heard’, v. 9. Presumably the communicator in each case was Epaphras, vv. 7, 8. The first prayer is based on hearing of their ‘faith . . . love . . . hope’, vv. 4, 5, while the second is based on their ‘love in the Spirit’, v. 8. The prayers take their character from the communication received. In the first case, the thanksgiving is extended to embrace the doctrine of the gospel (note in passing that there was doctrine in prayer and doctrine in the gospel!) which was the basis of their faith emanating in love, and both their faith and love being on account of their hope. In the second case, the work of the Spirit, giving effect to ‘spiritual understanding’, v. 9, resulting in: ‘being’, v. 10; ‘increasing’, v. 10; strengthening, v. 11; and ‘giving thanks’, v. 12, is to the fore. It is to be observed that the prayers are full of spiritual vitality – surely a very salutary lesson today for emulating at our assembly prayer meetings!

The first prayer – thanksgiving, vv. 3-8

Again, there is an inbuilt couplet with the apostle and Timothy reminding the Colossians ‘since we heard’, vv. 3-5, and balancing this with the fact that ‘ye heard’ twice, vv. 5-8.

The prayer is essentially one of thanksgiving for the evidences of the

triad of Christian graces in the lives of the Colossians. Thanksgiving is very much to the fore in the Epistle as a whole and mentioned six times.¹ The triad of Christian graces are also mentioned in two other Epistles, 1 Cor. 13. 13; 1 Thess. 1. 3; 5. 8. There is comprehensiveness in the address to ‘God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ’. The address in Paul’s prayers is consistent with their contents, cp. Eph. 1. 17; 3. 14. In this case the comprehensiveness of the gospel is being emphasized emanating from the God of love, resulting in their faith in Christ Jesus, and all on account of a hope laid up in heaven. Paul had a busy prayer life, which gave him the moral right to encourage others to ‘pray without ceasing’, 1 Thess. 5. 17. He had also a large prayer list – ‘praying always for you’.

The saints at Colossae had evidenced **faith**, 1. 4; 2. 5, in Christ Jesus, 1. 4. This was not only a past act which brought them into the blessings of God’s salvation but was the ‘living environment within which their faith is exercised (c.f. 1. 2; 2. 19).’² Their **love** was comprehensive, embracing ‘all the saints’.³ This is an important lesson for today when discord is so much to the fore. They were not selective in their affection.

The apostle then goes on to indicate the basis of their faith and love, v. 5 – it is on account of [for = *dia*] ‘the **hope** which is laid up for you in heaven’, Christ Himself.⁴ Confirmation of the fact of the focus of their hope being on Christ Himself is found later in the Epistle where Christ is described as ‘the hope of glory’, 1. 27, and the culmination of their salvation, 3. 4. In 2 Timothy chapter 4 verse 8, Paul speaks of a ‘crown of righteousness’ being laid up for him and all who love His appearing. Thus, the believer can not only look forward in hope to seeing the One he faithfully serves

now, but in wondrous grace, to having any service faithfully rendered to Him appropriately compensated at the judgement seat.

What the Colossians had heard, vv. 5, 6

The comprehensiveness of the Christian graces which the believers had come to experience was based on hearing – ‘whereof ye heard’, v. 5; ‘since the day ye heard’, v. 6. It is important to hear! We must be careful, of course, as to what we hear, Mark 4. 24, and how we hear, Luke 8. 18! What they heard as the basis of their hope was ‘the word of the truth of the gospel’, cp. 1. 23. This is a lovely expression indicating the dignity and carefulness which has to be exercised in the presentation of the gospel message. The same idea of divine truth being at the heart of the gospel message is also seen in other New Testament passages.⁵ ‘Faith cometh by hearing’, Rom. 10. 17, so the gospel must be proclaimed clearly and scripturally lest the faith exercised be spurious. Maturity in divine things and a comprehensive awareness of divine truth must be the hallmark of the gospel preacher. Perhaps we would be saved from lightness in professions if this were the case.

The potential of the gospel they believed is expanded in verse 6. It has come to the Colossians as an example of its ability to spread, but there is no limitation at any time, ‘the gospel . . . is come unto you, even as it is also in the entire world’ RV. In other words, this is not only prophetic of the universal potential of the gospel, but indicative of the fact that the gospel is available to all, and at all times, no matter their geographical location. The message is universal as confirmed by Romans chapter 10 verse 18, ‘But I say, Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth and their words unto the ends of the world’. The same truth is stated further in Psalm 19, from which the above verse is quoted, ‘The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard’, vv. 1-3. We can rest assured that God has left mankind everywhere without excuse.

But there is further amazing truth about the gospel in the balance of verse 6. It is unique, in that it not only bears fruit, but it is ‘bearing fruit and increasing’ RV. These two don’t normally coincide in fruit-bearing plants or trees, but there is potential in the gospel not only to be fruit bearing but at the same time developing intrinsically the Christian graces necessary for spiritual development in the life of the believer. This was the case in the experience of the Colossians, v. 6, who, ‘knew [full knowledge] the grace of God in truth [truly or with truth]’, cp. John 1. 17 – the two cannot be divorced.

The ministry of Epaphras, vv. 7, 8

Epaphras had been responsible for communicating the above message to the Colossians – ‘as ye also learned of [from=*apo*] Epaphras’, v. 7; 4. 12, 13. At this time he seems to have been Paul’s fellow prisoner in Rome, Philem. 23. His work and ministry had been outstandingly effective, perhaps because of his ‘labouring fervently . . . in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God’. Paul uses a lovely couplet to describe him – he is a ‘fellow servant [fellow slave]’, totally committed to the work, and also a ‘faithful minister of Christ’, v. 7. It is lovely and rare to have brethren who can simply be trusted! ‘Help, Lord; for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men’, Ps. 12. 1. Perhaps he was involved in establishing the assemblies at Hierapolis and Laodicea, 4. 13, as well as that at Colossae?

It is not at all surprising that a man of his calibre should give an accurate report, v. 8, looking beyond the external and appreciating the work of the Spirit of God in their lives – their ‘love in the Spirit’. It is a demonstration of God’s love, ‘the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost’, Rom. 5. 5. This is the only reference to the Holy Spirit in the letter.

Endnotes

- 1 1. 3, 12; 2. 7; 3. 15, 17; 4. 2.
- 2 F. F. BRUCE, *The Epistle to the Colossians*, William B. Erdmans Publishing Company, 1984.
- 3 1. 4, 8; 2. 2; 3. 14.
- 4 *Ibid.*
- 5 Eph. 1. 13; Gal. 2. 5; 2. 14.



PERSONALITIES IN THE NATIVITY

JOSEPH

THE HUSBAND OF MARY

By **MICHAEL WILKIE** Inverness, Scotland

In this article, we are going to look at a man who is almost certainly the most underestimated man in the whole of scripture: Joseph, the earthly father of the Lord Jesus. He is a man about whom we know very little, and yet Joseph is one of the greatest men who ever lived; it was to him that God gave two immense, unique tasks. First, he had the responsibility of being a husband to the greatest woman in human history – the woman who was to bring the Son of God into the world. Second, he was the one whose duty it would be to lead the family in which the Lord Jesus Himself would grow up – it would be in his home that the long-promised Messiah would spend His childhood and youth. Of course, Joseph was not the biological father of the Lord Jesus, as is clearly taught in Matthew chapter 1 verses 18 to 25 and Luke chapter 1 verses 30 to 35, but he, nevertheless, had the position of father in the family in which the Lord grew up. These unparalleled privileges given to him indicate to us that Joseph was a remarkable man, and worthy of our consideration. In fact, we could go so far as to say that he is the pattern husband and father – the sort of man God wants every Christian husband and father to be, and the sort of husband that every Christian woman ought to wish for.

When we turn to the account in Matthew chapter 1 we begin to learn something of the greatness of character that this man of God had. First of all, we are told that he was a just man, v. 19 – one of only eight so called in scripture. This is the fundamental principle that will govern his conduct – he is a man who will do what is right. This is a challenge to us all – how much righteousness is there in our character and behaviour? As followers of the One who described Himself as ‘the truth’, we ought to be marked by justice in all that we do. Notice, however, that righteousness is not the only thing that is seen in Joseph. He is also a kind man. Think of the situation in which he finds himself – there is seemingly irrefutable evidence of Mary’s unfaithfulness, and he has the

right to bring the full weight of the law to bear upon her. However, he does not subject her to the shame of public exposure but is minded to put her away discreetly. Again, this is something we can learn from: what degree of grace and kindness do we show when dealing with those who have fallen? Let us always remember two principles of scripture that govern such situations – ‘love covereth all sins’, Prov. 10. 12, and, ‘ye which are spiritual, restore’, Gal. 6. 1. Sin must not be condoned or overlooked, but the failings of any of the people of God should be dealt with as quietly and gently as possible – this was what Joseph did. Notice also that his kindness was not weakness – he was a strong man. What Mary seemed to have done could not be ignored, and so, at great cost to himself (and to her!), he would

do the right thing and put her away. Let us never forget that God expects men to be strong, and that the cost of doing what is right should not be a deterrent to doing it.

In a situation like the one that Joseph faced, it might seem extremely hard to balance the competing requirements of righteousness and kindness, and yet there is another aspect of Joseph’s character that is revealed in this – he was a thoughtful man. Conscious of the fact that he had a difficult decision to make, he made no rash move, but ‘thought on these things’, Matt. 1. 20. This quality is most commendable, and when Mary’s innocence was revealed to him he must have been very glad that he had not been hasty in his actions towards her. Observe, however, that when the will of God is made clear to him, v. 24, then thoughtfulness gives way to action and obedience. How good it would be if all of us were similar in character! Also, his eagerness to obey when God speaks, marks him out as a most courageous man. Think of what it was going to cost him – Mary was expecting a child, and Joseph was going to stand by her. The world at large would put only one explanation on this, that the child was Joseph’s, and that he had been responsible for Mary’s condition. It must have been a heavy burden for this godly man to endure the false suspicion of his fellow men, and yet scripture records neither hesitation nor complaint on his part. Truly, he was a man of great moral courage! Then, in verse 25, we learn that he was a self-controlled man – he ‘knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn’. In a world that places no value on moral purity, let us not forget that the intention of God is that both men and women should be celibate before, and faithful during, marriage.

Thus, we see that Joseph was a man of great moral nobility, willing to sacrifice himself so that the purposes of God might be advanced through his behaviour. As a consequence of this, God gave him a remarkable reward, something that he shared with God alone; he knew what it was to have a father-son relationship with the Lord Jesus. Let us remind

ourselves immediately that in a physical sense he was not the Lord's father; let us also note that in Luke chapter 2 verse 49 the Lord, on entering into His early manhood, distances Himself from Mary's use of that title in reference to Joseph. Nonetheless, it is true that, in the context of the family home in Nazareth, Joseph was the father, and the Lord Jesus, as the perfect son in the family, would have given him all the love and honour that his position was due. What must it have meant to Joseph to be the recipient of more loving service, more sincere honour, more holy obedience, than any other earthly father had ever known! God had seen to it that the man who was prepared to take on a uniquely great responsibility was given a uniquely great reward.

When we move from Matthew chapter 1 into Matthew chapter 2, we see Joseph in a slightly broader sphere – not so much what he is as a husband, but how he behaves as a family man and a father. First, we see that he leads a home where the Lord Jesus is honoured, and where His worshippers are welcomed – when the wise men arrive in Matthew chapter 2 verse 11 they worship Him. Is this true of my house? If I am the head of a household, is my home the sort of place where people find it easy (as these wise men did) to express their value of the Lord? May God help us to do so! Secondly, he is a man whose movements (and therefore the movements of his family) are determined by the Divine will – he leaves his homeland, and later returns to it, in direct response to a command of God. Would I be willing to do so?

Turning to Luke chapter 2 we see more of Joseph as a family man. Note, by the way, that in Matthew the emphasis is on Joseph in particular, acting as the head of the family; in Luke, we see husband and wife moving in harmony for the glory of God.¹ In verse 22 we find that he comes to present his child to God, in fulfilment of the principle of Exodus chapter 13 verse 2. It would be well for us to grasp this important lesson – God has first claim on our children. No doubt Joseph looked forward to having a son who would follow in the

family business, who would grow to take a role in the family, who would be a comfort to him in his old age, but he recognized that God's claims on his family came before his own ambitions and desires. Could the same be said of us?

Then in verses 41 and 42 we are told that it was the custom of Joseph and Mary to attend the feast of Passover together. As the head of the house, Joseph was responsible for setting the spiritual tone for the family, and, again, there is a practical lesson here – if I am the head of a house, do I see to it that my family makes a habit of attending the occasions when the Lord's people gather together? It is not a spiritually beneficial thing if I allow a spirit of indifference towards the meetings of the assembly to permeate my home. The Lord Himself is present in the gatherings, and the principle of scripture is that we must not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, Heb. 10. 25.

In closing, notice that the last reference to Joseph is in Luke chapter 2 verse 48, after which he disappears from the Gospel records. In this passage, the Lord Jesus stands on the brink of adulthood, and the role of Joseph as his earthly father is coming to an end. How beautiful to see the quiet way in which Joseph fades into the background – having discharged the responsibility given to him in Matthew chapter 1, having raised a family for God in which the firstborn son is devoted to the things of His Father in a way that no other son ever was, Joseph steps back so that the focus can rest now on the Lord Jesus Himself. He has carried out one of the most important tasks in the earthly purposes of God, and having done so he seeks no earthly reward, but recedes from view so that 'in all things he [the Lord] might have the pre-eminence'. May God give us the grace to emulate him as a man, a husband and a father!

Endnotes

- 1 It is interesting, incidentally, to look at Mary and Joseph as a couple and see in them the answer to Adam and Eve's failure – their obedience to the will of God, the way they honour the word of God, the maintenance of the proper roles of husband and wife, etc.



Why are there so many Bible versions today?

By **ANDREW WILSON** Brisbane, Australia

This is a delicate subject to deal with because many Christians have a favourite Bible version. My purpose here is not to try to tell anyone which Bible version to use, but, instead, to try to explain some of the reasons why Bible translations differ. Certain Bible versions are better for certain purposes, and some versions sometimes make poor choices.

Inspiration applies to the text of scripture as it was originally written by the prophets and apostles who were 'moved by the Holy Spirit', 2 Tim. 3. 16; 2 Pet. 1. 21. God is not inspiring (i.e., infallibly supervising) the writings of Christian authors today, nor did He inspire the work of manuscript copyists, Bible translators or printers in days gone by. Our English Bible versions are inspired by God to the extent that they accurately correspond to and convey the original text of the Bible.

In this article, we shall deal with six reasons for differences between Bible translations.

The King James Version

Before that, however, we need to address some misconceptions about the King James Version which, in some quarters, are a source of strife and division. Some Christians believe that only the King James Version (KJV) is the inspired word of God. However, the prophets and apostles wrote in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, not in Elizabethan English. The Apostle Paul did not use the KJV. While we thank God for the great blessing the KJV has brought to many down through the centuries, and while it was indeed a masterpiece of Jacobean biblical scholarship, it has not been without mistakes.

Examples of early errors in the KJV include:

- the so-called 'Wicked Bible' (the 1631 KJV) read, 'Thou shalt commit adultery' (it left out the word 'not' in Exodus chapter 20 verse 14);

- the 1682 KJV read, 'if the latter husband ate her' (instead of 'hate her', Deut. 24. 3);
- and the 1795 KJV read, 'Let the children first be killed' (instead of 'filled', Mark 7. 27).

The KJV still contains mistakes today. For example, in 1 Samuel chapter 13 verse 21, it reads, 'Yet they had a file for the mattocks'. In the days of the KJV translators, the meaning of the Hebrew word *piym* in this verse was unknown and they were forced to guess its significance, translating with the word 'file'. The BROWN, DRIVER, BRIGGS *Hebrew lexicon* (1906) even suggested that the Hebrew text had been corrupted here. However, archaeologists discovered the Hebrew word *piym* inscribed on weights, and realized it meant two-thirds of a shekel. Virtually all modern versions thus translate the phrase as 'the charge was two-thirds of a shekel

for the plowshares' ESV. In the New Testament, the KJV still contains a misprint in Matthew chapter 23 verse 24 where it reads, 'strain at a gnat' instead of 'strain out a gnat'.

The KJV was not the original English Bible. Before it was BEDE's translation (8th C.), WYCLIFFE's (1382), TYNDALE's New Testament (1526), COVERDALE's Bible (1535), the Matthew Bible (1537), the Great Bible (1539), the Geneva Bible (1560), and the Bishop's Bible (1568). Even the KJV was attacked as a modern innovation, and its translators called 'damnable corrupters' of the word of God. The translators themselves claimed that they were not trying 'to make a new translation, nor yet to make of a bad one a good one . . . but to make a good one better, or out of many good ones one principal good one' (Translators' Epistle to the Readers).

If the KJV were the only true Bible, as KJV-only proponents argue, then what was the pure word of God, divinely-preserved for all time, before the KJV in 1611? Was it written in English or another language? Why did God take so long to give the world the only true Bible? If the 1611 KJV was inspired, why was it revised numerous times? The current KJV in use today is the 1769 Oxford Standard edition which contains approximately 75,000 changes to the 1611 KJV.

Reason 1 – Translation approach

There is always more than one way of translating from one language into another. Some Bible versions try to be very literal, and employ a word-for-word translation technique, while other versions are more flexible, and try to capture the sense of a verse. Paraphrases completely reword a verse in a fresh and punchy style, while an interlinear gives a very literal translation but makes no attempt to use readable English.

No English Bible version gives us a totally literal, word-for-word translation. For example, if we were to translate the first phrase of John chapter 3 verse 16 absolutely literally, it would read, 'So for loved the God the world'. All versions try to translate the Bible into readable English. Thus, all

English Bibles are found somewhere on a spectrum between more literal and less literal translations.

Reason 2 – Reader’s age

Bible translations can be compared by the reading level they are aimed at:

GNB, NLT	10-year-old
NIV	12-year-old
ESV	14-year-old
NKJV	16-year-old
NASB	17-year-old
KJV	18-year-old

Most Christians agree that children should be able to read the Bible. The same is true for people whose first language is not English. If our desire is for beginners to understand the main message the Bible teaches – our need of salvation in Christ – then it is good to encourage them to read from versions that they can follow without getting distracted by too many unfamiliar words.

However, there is a danger if translators use a less literal and more easy-to-read approach. While some paraphrases help convey the meaning of the Bible in an interesting way, if we believe that all the words of scripture are inspired by God, we will want a more literal translation for our normal reading and study. The Bible does not always speak in words suited to ten-year-olds, but often deals with complex ideas using technical vocabulary and intricate arguments. Children’s evangelism is important, but it is not the only reason that God gave us His word.

Reason 3 – Antiquated language

A third reason for differences between Bible versions is that translations made in previous centuries will contain archaic and obscure words that are no longer understood in the same way today. ‘Publican’, Luke 18. 10; ‘conversation’, Eph. 2. 3; ‘prevent’, 1 Thess. 4. 15; or ‘communicate’, Heb. 13. 16, mean something different nowadays to what they did in the KJV, while words like ‘besom’, Isa. 14. 23; ‘sith’, Ezek. 35. 6; ‘collops’, Job. 15. 27; and ‘bruit’, Nah. 3. 19, are not used anymore.

C. S. LEWIS wrote about the need for updating language in his introduction

to J. B. Phillips’ translation, ‘The truth is that if we are to have translation at all we must have periodical re-translation. There is no such thing as translating a book into another language once and for all, for a language is a changing thing. If your son is to have clothes it is no good buying him a suit once and for all: he will grow out of it and have to be re-clothed’.

Reason 4 – Ambiguity in meaning

Another reason for differences in Bible versions is because there is often more than one way to translate a particular word or phrase from the original Greek or Hebrew. The original languages also have subtle distinctions and shades of meaning difficult to render in translation. For example, in Acts chapter 17 verse 22, when Paul addressed the Athenian philosophers, he called them ‘too superstitious’ KJV, or ‘given up to demon worship’ JND, or ‘very religious’ (most modern translations). The word can be translated in a good or bad sense, and all three translations are possible.¹ However, it is unlikely that Paul commenced his speech by openly insulting his hearers. That is hardly the way to win hearers’ respect or attention. THAYER suggests Paul addressed them with a ‘kindly ambiguity’.

Reason 5 – Translation agendas

Another reason for translation differences is doctrinal biases. Hebrews chapter 1 verse 8 reads: ‘But to the Son He says: “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever”’. But in the Jehovah’s Witnesses *New World Translation*, this verse reads, ‘God is your throne’. There is no compelling reason for this strange translation other than a desire to remove a clear reference to the deity of Christ.

The 2011 New International Version (NIV) has come in for criticism because it replaces masculine terms with ‘gender-neutral’ expressions. Thus, ‘brothers’ is translated as ‘brothers and sisters’, ‘man’ as ‘mortals’, ‘father’ as ‘parent’, ‘son’ as ‘child’, and ‘leading men’ as ‘leaders’, Deut. 5. 23. This was done to make the Bible more acceptable in our modern egalitarian

culture, and in keeping with the view of certain editors of the NIV that men and women should both occupy positions of public leadership in the church. This is allowing an interpretational agenda to override translation.

Reason 6 – Underlying text

One last reason for differences between Bibles is the use of different underlying Hebrew and Greek texts. In the Old Testament, most English versions differ very little, using the same standard Hebrew Masoretic text, and usually only show textual variations in their margins or footnotes.

But in the New Testament, the situation is more complicated; our English versions are based on different underlying Greek texts, a subject that is beyond the scope of this article. However, we have an ‘embarrassment of riches’ when it comes to evidence for the New Testament text (we now possess over 5800 Greek New Testament manuscripts). We can be virtually certain that the true readings have been preserved among this surviving evidence. Furthermore, no doctrine is endangered by any textual variant, because doctrines are repeated in many verses not suspect of scribal corruption. Textual variants do not undermine the inspiration of scripture, although they are sometimes significant for interpreting the Bible at certain points.

Conclusion

No English Bible translation is perfect. We need to be diligent in studying scripture and discerning in our use of different Bible versions, comparing translation against translation and seeking to understand the original Hebrew and Greek words underlying them. Thankfully, today we have an abundance of resources for this task.

Endnote

- 1 The Greek word *deisidaimon* in Acts chapter 17 verse 22 includes within it the word for demon, but this was a word the Greeks used for gods generally (the word ‘gods’ a few verses before in verse 18 is *daimonia*, ‘demons’, and in Acts chapter 25 verse 19 *deisidaimonia* just means ‘religion’). Possibly, Paul could also have been emphasizing the idea of fear (*deisi-*) to indicate a superstitious attitude.

THE BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

By **RICHARD COLLINGS** Caerphilly, Wales

On the fourteenth day of the first month 'at the going down of the sun' the most momentous occurrence in history was enacted just outside the walls of Jerusalem. This unrepeatable event, the crucifixion of the Lord of glory, had been determined in the eternal past and was foreshadowed in the first of the feasts of the Lord recorded in Leviticus chapter 23.

Fifty-three days later there was another unrepeatable and extraordinary incident that had been conceived in God's eternal counsels, which was foreshadowed in the fourth of the feasts of the Lord. This event, the baptism in the Holy Spirit, is chronicled for us by Luke in the opening verses of Acts chapter 2, but, unlike the crucifixion, it occurred within the city of Jerusalem.

There are seven passages in the New Testament that provide us with information relative to the baptism in the Holy Spirit. In each of the Gospels, and in Acts chapter 1, the event is viewed as approaching; in Acts chapter 2 we have the factual account of it happening; and in 1 Corinthians chapter 12, it is referred to as having already taken place. Regrettably, there is much misunderstanding amongst Christians concerning this subject. Many godly saints have been pressurized into thinking that this is something they must aim to achieve at a point subsequent to their conversion.

To help us in our consideration of this subject, we shall examine the seven references in four parts. The Gospel records form the first part; Acts chapters 1 and 2 being parts two and three; and 1 Corinthians chapter 12 will be the final part.

The Gospel records

In the Gospels the baptism in the Holy Spirit is contrasted with John's baptism. He is the speaker on each occasion, and states that whereas he baptized people in water one mightier than him would baptize in

the Holy Spirit.¹ Thus, there are two points of contrast; the persons doing the baptizing, and that into which they immersed those being baptized. Therefore, we should not refer to anyone being baptized by the Holy Spirit, for the baptizer is not the Holy Spirit but the Lord Jesus.

In Matthew and Luke, we learn that not only would the Lord Jesus baptize in the Holy Spirit, but He would also baptize with fire, and some have linked this with what happened on the day of Pentecost, 'And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them', Acts 2. 3. Although this verse does refer to fire, Luke was using a simile, for the cloven tongues were 'like as of fire'. This baptism with fire has nothing to do with the events detailed in Acts chapter 2 but refers to the tribulation that shall take place after the rapture of the church, for, having referred to the Lord baptizing with fire, John continues, 'Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire', Matt. 3. 12. The four references in the Gospels

indicate that this baptism had not happened at the time John was speaking, nor do they specify when it would take place, other than that it would happen at some future point. However, we shall now look at the information given in Acts chapter 1, for it throws further light on the timing of this unique event.

Acts chapter 1

Just prior to His ascension, the Lord Jesus gave the disciples a specific instruction; they were not to depart from Jerusalem but they were to wait there 'for the promise of the Father', Acts 1. 4. This promise was something the Lord had told them about on the eve of His crucifixion, but, following the commandment to remain in Jerusalem, He adds, 'For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost **not many days hence**', v. 5.

What had been unspecified as to its timing in the Gospels, is now clarified, in that the disciples were informed that it would be not many days after the Lord was taken from them into heaven. In addition, Acts chapter 1 also identifies where this baptism would take place; it would be in Jerusalem.

Acts chapter 2

The first four verses of this chapter give us the only historical record of the events that occurred at the time of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. These verses tell us when it happened, where it happened, and what happened. As to **when**, it was 'when the day of Pentecost was fully come'. To appreciate the significance of this statement we would need to read Leviticus chapter 23 verse 11 and verses 15 to 21. By using that information, coupled with Peter's response to the accusation that the disciples were drunk in Acts chapter 2 verse 15, we learn that this baptism occurred just prior to 9am on a Sunday, fifty days after the Lord's resurrection.

As to **where** it took place, all we can stipulate is that it was in a house somewhere in the city of Jerusalem. As to **what** occurred, verse 2 supplies a vital piece of information; it states, 'there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting'.

Every kind of baptism in the scripture, literal or figurative, indicates that those baptized were fully submerged, and that was what happened at this event. The house where the disciples were located was 'filled'; thus, they must have been totally immersed in the Holy Spirit, whose descent from heaven is likened to a rushing mighty wind.

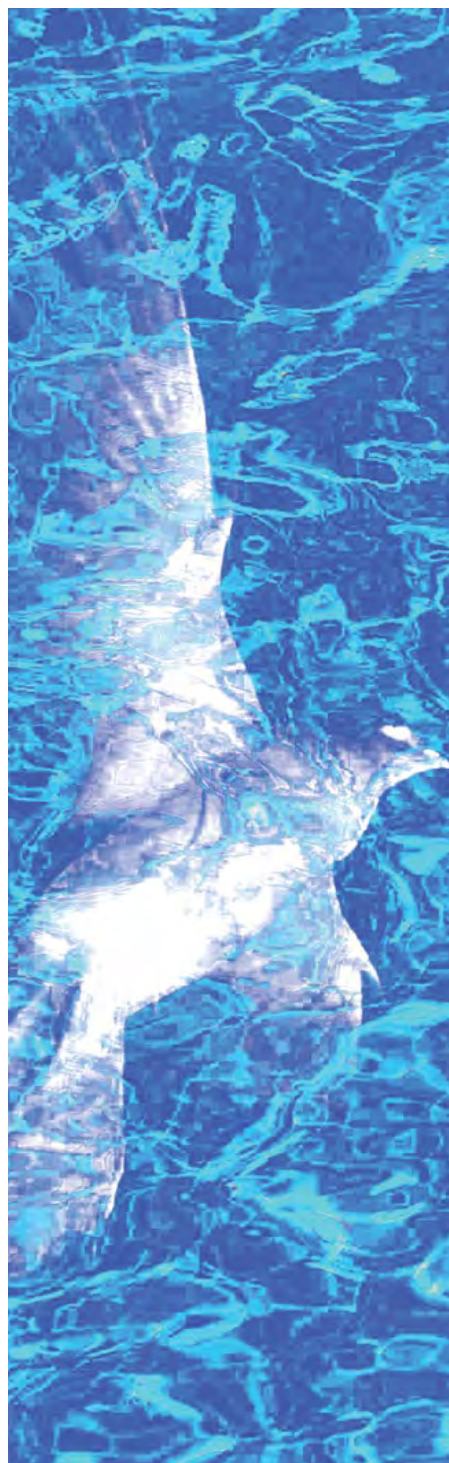
1 Corinthians chapter 12

Whereas the Gospels and Acts chapter 1 foretell the baptism in the Holy Spirit, and Acts chapter 2 supplies the historical record, the doctrinal relevance of it is given by Paul in his letter to the Corinthians, 'For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit', 12. 12, 13.

In verse 12, Paul refers to the human body for illustrative purposes. Each body is a unity composed of many parts, yet together those parts are not merely an amalgamation of disparate members but they form one body. The apostle's point is that just as that is the case relative to the human body, it is equally the case in respect of the church. Some translations, including DARBY and YOUNG's *Literal Translation*, conclude verse 12, 'so also is **the** Christ', referring to the vital union between Christ and His people. J. HUNTER, in his commentary on Corinthians, states, 'it is the whole Church that is in view, the dispensational Church'.

Verse 13 leads on from the final clause of verse 12, and explains how this dispensational Church came into existence; it was by the baptism in the Holy Spirit. As we examine this verse, we learn that this baptism is not individual but corporate; it is not continual but once for all; and it is not conditional but inclusive. Unlike baptism in water, we do not read in any of the seven references to the baptism in the Holy Spirit about individuals being baptized, for it is not a personal event. What was formed on the day of Pentecost by this baptism was one body, and, in the purposes of God, every believer was involved.

In Leviticus chapter 23 verses 16 and 17, it states, 'ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the Lord. Ye shall bring out of your habitations two wave loaves'. It is one offering that is described as 'new', and it is made from two wave loaves. The truth being foreshadowed relates to what is presented doctrinally by Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 12 verse 13 and in Ephesians chapter 2 verses 11 to 15. On the day of Pentecost, by means of the baptism in the Holy Spirit, something new was produced which comprised both Jews and Gentiles without distinction, that new thing being the Church.



The fourth feast of Leviticus chapter 23 was one of five one-day feasts, all of which relate to events that would occur at a specific point and would not be protracted over a period of time. This fact is further indicated by the tense of the verb 'baptized' in verse 13 which refers to a completed act – not a continuing one. In this connection it is worth quoting J. HUNTER again, 'In the mind of God all Christians were seen to be baptised. It is essential to see that the Holy Spirit only came down once. His coming was unique and final. It was unique for it never happened before; it was final in that it will never again happen in that way. There was only one baptism of this kind. This was the birthday of the Church'.

Whilst there might be some who would teach that being baptized in the Spirit was an attainment to be achieved by those who had progressed in their Christian experience, this verse would contradict that teaching. Paul is writing to the most carnal of churches and has to censure the Corinthians for their spiritual immaturity, and yet he says, 'for by one Spirit are we all baptized', i.e., even the carnal and immature believers at Corinth.

It may puzzle some to think that in the purposes of God all believers of this age were baptized in the Spirit at the same time even though none of us were actually present when it happened. However, none of us were present when we were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, nor were we present when Christ died for our sins. Our not being present does not alter the fact that both things happened, and such is also the case in respect of what happened on the day of Pentecost.

What we need to observe is that verse 13 does contain a reference to something that is individual, but it is not the baptism but that we 'have been all made to drink into one Spirit'. At Pentecost we were all put by one Spirit into one body, but at conversion we individually received the Spirit into us.

Endnote

- 1 See Matt. 3. 11; Mark 1. 8; Luke 3. 16; John 1. 33.

The Twelve Tribes of Israel

REUBEN

By **LLOYD STOCK** Bury St. Edmunds, England

Jacob's final address to his sons is recorded in Genesis chapter 49 verses 3 and 4, 'Reuben, thou art my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power: Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel; because thou wentest up to thy father's bed; then defiledst thou it: he went up to my couch'.

Great expectations

Being the first child in a family has its pros and cons. You are, after all, the first-born and, as such, hold a special place in the family. This was the case in biblical times, for reasons rooted in Middle-Eastern culture. We alluded to some of these in the series introduction. For one thing, privileges of birthright belonged to the firstborn. However, if and when you are joined by siblings there are inescapable pressures put on you to lead and set an example.

Those of us who are parents understand that we must not make these pressures too intense, but rather use them as a positive motivation for drawing out maturity. In reality, that is easier said than done. From Jacob's words to his first-born, his expectations were high. Reuben knew these expectations and spoke up in two critical moments in the accounts recorded for us of the family's affairs.

In Genesis chapter 37, he has the wisdom to defuse his brothers' murderous scheme. As the oldest son, perhaps the moral implications of the scheme lay heavy on his shoulders. It cannot be stated too strongly that this was very brave. His brothers were mad and playing the 'good-guy' could have enraged them more. In chapter 42, with Simeon bound in Egypt, Reuben returns home to a father who is two sons down, and a third one in jeopardy. Feeling the pressure again,

Reuben has the courage to speak up – he assures Jacob of Benjamin's safety when they inevitably return to Egypt. Both these interventions look promising on the surface. And we cannot demand much more of Reuben without being hypocritical. When faced with similar crises, how brave and courageous are we?

Scripture, on the other hand, has every right to tell things how they are, so we do well to note that Reuben's bravery was not enough, and that his courage was a little rash. Had Reuben been truly brave, he would have 'come clean' with his father about the real cause of Joseph's absence. Had Reuben been truly courageous, he would have offered himself as surety for Benjamin when in fact what he says is, 'Slay my two sons, if I bring him not to thee', Gen. 42. 37. This is the same rash, impetuous Reuben that fell to sexual temptation, 35. 22.

How disappointing all this is. Reuben was the firstborn – recall Jacob's words again, 'my might . . . the firstfruits . . . preeminent'.

Great expectations lay upon him. But, remember, God prevails despite man's failure. What do these adjectives call to mind? Which Son had equal expectations laid upon Him? Why, our Lord and Saviour, of course. And precisely because He met those expectations which were laid upon Him, He appears in Colossians chapter 1 as the firstborn of creation

and of the dead, the firstfruits, and, praise God, preeminent – in all things! In this connection, it is worth noting that the name Reuben literally means 'behold, a son'. The thoughts this evokes of the Lord Jesus are obvious, though again, only the Lord Jesus is worthy of our gaze.

Falling short

Jacob's words concerning Reuben as being 'unstable' are, therefore fair, and it is upsetting to see that they remain the principal characteristic of the tribe.

Men of Reuben joined prominent Levites in a rebellion against Moses – another moment of rash behaviour, Num. 16. 1, 2. Then, when the nation entered the Promised Land, the Reubenites dismissed the opportunity to take their inheritance west of Jordan, choosing to graze their herds east of Jordan instead. This seems to be allowed for by Moses on condition of military support west of Jordan. But, the fact is that they were at a distance from the rest of God's people physically and exposed to all the enemies bordering their territory. The best we can say is that this wasn't ideal in the long term, cp. 2 Kgs. 10. 32, 33.

Saving grace

How many of us may relate to Reuben's story all too well? Indeed, we may point to past failures and simply accept our current spiritual mediocrity as inevitable. Yet, if we reflect but for a moment on God's grace, we see that nothing need be further from the truth. We shall see this particularly with Levi, but, even with Reuben, the fact that he even remains in the twelve despite his crime is a testament to God's grace. When the high priest's breastplate was made, was it not grace that allowed a place for a stone for Reuben? At least some men in the tribe must have thought so. The Chronicler records that the Reubenites enjoyed victory over the Hagrites, not because they sent valiant men – though they were that – but because they trusted in God, 1 Chr. 5. 20. May we know God's grace in a similar way. Have we not known it in salvation? Do we not know it daily as Christ intercedes for us? Then let us trust in Him.

1 Kings

By **SIMON SHERWIN** Innerleven, Scotland

Introduction

The two books of Kings and 2 Chronicles cover the period of the monarchy from the reign of Solomon down to the captivity of the nation of Judah in Babylon. Whilst, during the period of the divided kingdom from Rehoboam and Jeroboam I onwards, Kings deals with the history of both kingdoms, Chronicles confines itself to the southern kingdom of Judah, only mentioning Israelite kings when they have a bearing on the history of Judah. The view of Chronicles regarding the northern kingdom of Israel is summed up in chapter 10 verse 19, 'And Israel rebelled against the house of David unto this day'. The existence of the northern kingdom was a denial of the essential unity of the nation of Israel as a whole. Whilst the chronology of the books of Kings until the captivity of the northern kingdom, therefore, is somewhat convoluted, because the writer is weaving together two separate histories, the narrative in Chronicles is much more straightforward. Although based on contemporary sources, which are often cited, both Kings and Chronicles are the work of a later author, though in neither case is the author known.

Date

It is to be assumed that the books of Kings are to be dated to the period of the Babylonian exile, c. 586-539 BC. More specifically, 2 Kings ends with the beginning of the reign of Amel-Marduk (Evil-Merodach), Nebuchadnezzar's successor, 562-560 BC, and the partial betterment of King Jehoiachin's circumstances. Given that no mention is made anywhere of the return from Babylon, nor is there any hope of it, it is likely that its composition falls within this time frame. 2 Chronicles, on the other hand, ends with the decree of Cyrus that permits the return of the exiles to the land, the decree with which the book of Ezra begins. It is possible, therefore, that the bulk of the books of Chronicles could have been composed around this time, after 539 BC, although

the inclusion of genealogies at the beginning of 1 Chronicles, e.g. 3. 19-24, that stretch into the intertestamental period, means that it could be later, possibly in the late 400s BC. Consistent with it being an exilic book, there is no singing anywhere in Kings – cp. Ps. 137. 4, 'how shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?' However, singing is mentioned several times in Chronicles, and is a key feature of revival amongst the Lord's people.

Purpose

In crude terms, Kings is written to explain why the exile was inevitable and that God is just in His judgements. Chronicles, on the other hand, is much more positive, stressing the possibility of recovery. In New Testament terms, Kings could be related to the great white throne, where every man is judged 'according to their works', Rev. 20. 13. Chronicles is the judgement seat of Christ, where what is to be commended is brought to light and then shall 'every man have praise of God', 1 Cor. 4. 5. Of course, this can only be true in general terms, for, sadly, in Chronicles, not every king can be commended. However, it is certainly true that several kings receive commendation whom we would have completely written off, had we only the account in Kings to go by. Kings is a book that deals with sin and its consequences. Chronicles, in contrast, deals with the possibilities and potential when the Lord is given His place, however imperfectly or briefly.

Analysis

Chapter 1 – The coronation of Solomon

Abishag cherishes David, vv. 1-4.
Adonijah conspires to take the throne, vv. 5-10.
Nathan counsels Bathsheba, vv. 11-14.
Bathsheba consults David, vv. 15-21.
Nathan confirms Bathsheba's word, vv. 22-27.

Solomon's coronation, vv. 28-40.
Jonathan carries tidings, vv. 41-49.
Adonijah clings to the altar, vv. 50-53.

Chapter 2 – cleansing the kingdom

The death of David, vv. 1-12.
Dealing with defaulters, vv. 13-46.
Adonijah, vv. 13-25;
Abiathar, vv. 26, 27;
Joab, vv. 28-35;
Shimei, vv. 36-46.

Chapter 3 – Solomon's wisdom

Solomon's affinity with Egypt, v. 1.
Solomon asks for wisdom, vv. 2-15.
Solomon adjudicates between two harlots, vv. 16-28.

Chapter 4 – Solomon's kingdom

Solomon's personnel, vv. 1-6.
Solomon's provision, vv. 7-19.
Solomon's prosperity, vv. 20-34.

Chapter 5 – Preparation for the Temple

Solomon requests materials from Hiram of Tyre, vv. 1-6.
Hiram's response and Solomon's payment, vv. 7-12.
Requisition of labour, vv. 13-18.

Chapter 6 – Building the Temple

Construction of the Temple, vv. 1-10.
The Lord's contract with Israel, vv. 11-13.
Cladding the house and the oracle, vv. 14-22.
Other construction, vv. 23-36:
The cherubim, vv. 23-30;
The doors and their carvings, vv. 31-35;
The inner court, v. 36.
The calendar of construction, vv. 37, 38.

Chapter 7 – Other buildings and furniture for the Temple

Solomon's house and the house of the forest of Lebanon, vv. 1-12.
Hiram's handiwork, vv. 13-47.
Hiram's credentials, vv. 13, 14;
The pillars, vv. 15-22;
The sea, vv. 23-26;
The bases, vv. 27-37;

CHARTING THE SCRIPTURES 1 KINGS by Jonathan Black

The life of King Solomon {peace} SOLOMON

'And he sent by the hand of Nathan the prophet; and he called his name **Jedidiah**, because of the Lord', 2 Sam. 12. 25

Egypt ← 480 years, 1 Kings 6. 1
40 YEAR REIGN OF
1015BC
SOLOMON ANOINTED
1 Kings 1. 39



Painting by William Brassey Hole

Ch 1-11 Solomon's reign - A united Kingdom

- Ch 1 Solomon's reign secured
- Ch 2 Solomon's enemies subdued
- Ch 3 Solomon's wisdom from God saves a child
- Ch 4 Solomon's writings - proverbs, songs and solos
- Ch 5 Solomon's preparation for building the house of the Lord
- Ch 6 Solomon's priority to build the house of the Lord
- Ch 7 Solomon's plans to build his own house.
- Ch 8 Solomon's prayer and the glory of God fills the house
- Ch 9 Solomon's walk and God's appearance to him.
- Ch 10 Solomon's wealth and the Queen of Sheba's visit
- Ch 11 Solomon's weakness for strange women

The *wise* MONARCH | The *wealthy* MAST

'And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had judged; and they feared the king: for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him, to do judgment', 1 Kings 3. 28

'And, behold, I purpose to build an house unto the Lord my God, as the Lord said by thy son, whom I will set up to build an house unto the Lord my God.'

A Song of degrees for Solomon. 'Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain.'

The Tabernacle
Location: Wilderness / Shiloh / Gibeon
1440 - 960 BC Built by Moses



1400 BC 1300 1200 1100 1000

Temple timeline

A greater than

DEPARTURE | DIV

A Psalm for Solomon. 'Give the king thy judgments, O God'

New Testament ref

'And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory
'And, behold, there appeared unto them Mo
'Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine a
'Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and
'Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee
which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and
and to eat things sacrificed

The lavers, vv. 38, 39;
Summary, vv. 40-47;
Summary of golden furniture,
vv. 48-51.

Chapter 8 – The dedication of the Temple

The dedication of the Temple,
vv. 1-11.
Solomon's blessing, vv. 12-21.
Solomon's prayer, vv. 22-61.
Sacrifices and feasting, vv. 62-66.

Chapter 9

The Lord's promise, vv. 1-9.
Hiram's cities, vv. 10-14.
Solomon's cities, vv. 15-25.
Solomon's ships, vv. 26-28.

Chapter 10

The Queen of Sheba, vv. 1-13.
Quantifying Solomon's wealth,
vv. 14-29.

Chapter 11

Solomon's downfall, vv. 1-13.
Solomon's adversaries, vv. 14-40.
Hadad, vv. 14-22;
Rezon, vv. 23-25;
Jeroboam, vv. 26-40.
Solomon's death, vv. 41-43.

Rehoboam and Jeroboam I

Chapter 12

Rehoboam's choice and Israel's
rebellion, vv. 1-20.
Rehoboam's response and the Lord's
intervention, vv. 21-24.
Jeroboam and the golden calves,
vv. 25-33.

Chapter 13 – The sad story of the man of God

The pronouncement of the man of
God, vv. 1-10.
The prophet's deception, vv. 11-19.
The prophet's prophecy, vv. 20-22.
The punishment of the man of God,
vv. 23-32.
The priests of Jeroboam, vv. 33, 34.

Chapter 14

The death of Jeroboam's son, vv.
1-18.

The death of Jeroboam, vv. 19, 20.
The iniquity of Rehoboam, vv. 21-24.
The invasion of Shishak, vv. 25-28.
The death of Rehoboam, vv. 29-31.

Abijam, Asa, Nadab, Baasha

Chapter 15

Abijam of Judah, vv. 1-8.
Asa's reforms, vv. 9-15.
Asa and Baasha, vv. 16-24:
Asa's recourse to the Syrians,
vv. 16-22;
Asa's reign ends in disease and
death, vv. 23, 24.
Nadab's condition, vv. 25, 26.
Baasha's conspiracy and
commencement, vv. 27-34.

Chapter 16

Jehu's condemnation of Baasha,
vv. 1-7.

Elah, Zimri, Omri

Elah, Zimri's rebellion and
ruthlessness, vv. 8-14.
Israel rent by civil war, vv. 15-22:
Omri's success. Zimri's suicide,
vv. 15-20;
Omri v. Tibni. Omri wins,
vv. 21, 22.
Omri's reign, vv. 23-28.

Ahab

Ahab's unparalleled provocation,
vv. 29-34.

Chapter 17 – Elijah

Elijah's pronouncement, v. 1.
The Lord's provision by the brook
Cherith, vv. 2-7.
The Lord's provision in Zarephath,
vv. 8-16.
The Lord's power displayed,
vv. 17-24.

Chapter 18 – Elijah on Carmel

Elijah's mission, v. 1.
Obadiah's misgivings, vv. 2-16.
Elijah musters the people, vv. 17-20.
Elijah makes a challenge, vv. 21-24.
Elijah mocks the prophets, vv. 25-29.
Elijah mends the altar, vv. 30-37.
The fire falls from heaven, vv. 38, 39.
The prophets are put to death, v. 40.
Raining and running, vv. 41-46.

Chapter 19 – Elijah on Sinai

Jezebel's threats, vv. 1, 2.
Elijah's flight, vv. 3-8.
The Lord's answer, vv. 9-18.
Elisha's call, vv. 19-21.

Chapter 20 – Ahab's wars with Syria

The God of the hills, vv. 1-21.
The God of the valleys, vv. 22-30.
Ahab spares Benhadad, vv. 31-34.
The Lord sentences Ahab, vv. 35-43.

Chapter 21 – Naboth's vineyard

Ahab's request and Naboth's refusal,
vv. 1-4.
Jezebel's solution and Naboth's
slaughter, vv. 5-14.
Ahab's possession and Elijah's
pronouncement, vv. 15-24.
Ahab responds, and the Lord relents,
vv. 25-29.

Chapter 22 – The battle of Ramoth Gilead

Ahab and Jehoshaphat plan the
battle, vv. 1-4.
The prophets are consulted, vv. 5-7.
Micaiah's prophecy, vv. 8-28.
The battle and death of Ahab,
vv. 29-40.

Jehoshaphat

Chapter 22

Jehoshaphat and his walk, vv. 41-43.
Jehoshaphat and his works,
vv. 44-47.
Jehoshaphat's disastrous alliance
with Ahaziah, vv. 48, 49.
Jehoshaphat's death, v. 50.

Ahaziah

Ahaziah begins to reign in Israel,
vv. 51-53

WORD FOR TODAY

By **BRIAN CLATWORTHY** Newton Abbot, England

σκανδαλίζω, *v* (to put a snare or stumbling block in the way)

σκάνδαλον, *n* (stumbling-block/offence)

σκάπτω, *v* (to dig)

Almost everyday throughout the world, newspapers report one scandal or another. In fact, one could justifiably argue that many newspapers only sell because of the extent of the scandals they report. *Plus ça change?* But although the English word ‘scandal’ can ultimately be traced back to the Greek word **skandalon**, in its biblical context the word had nothing to do with something that was salacious, but rather encompassed the idea of a snare or a trap or a stumbling block that caused an individual to deviate from a set course of action. It is a word that is imbued with religious overtones in the sense that in its use in Middle English it refers to the reprehensible behaviour of a religious person, and in ecclesiastical Latin, it meant to be the cause of offence.² Hence, in the New Testament, the preaching of Christ crucified is stated by Paul to be a stumbling block [literally an offence] to the Jews, 1 Cor. 1. 23.

In the Septuagint (LXX) the word is used in Leviticus chapter 19 verse 14 of prohibiting anyone from taking advantage of a blind person by literally placing a stumbling block in their way. Its use in Proverbs reminds us that the transgressions of evil individuals acts to ensnare or entrap them, whereas those who instruct others in the wisdom of God save lives by steering individuals away from deadly snares or temptations, Prov. 29. 6; 13. 14.

When Isaiah reflected upon the positive aspect of his ministry, offering many the opportunity to change the direction of their lives, he was also mindful of the fact that to others he was ‘a stone of offence and a rock of stumbling to both

houses of Israel, a trap and snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem’, Isa. 8. 14 ESV. This contradiction is often observed when the word **skandalon** is used. For example, in Isaiah chapter 28 verse 16, Christ is prophetically referred to as ‘a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste’, or ‘He who trusts need not fear’ Tanakh. But when this text is quoted later by Paul in Romans chapter 9 verse 33, this precious corner stone now becomes ‘a stumblingstone, and rock of offence [**skandalon**]’, cp. 1 Pet. 2. 7, 8. At first, one might think that Paul has misquoted Isaiah, but what he does is to conflate two texts from Isaiah that refer to Christ as a ‘stone’ to make his point, 8. 14; 28. 16.

What we observe, therefore, in the Old Testament, is that **skandalon** presents two distinct pictures. The first is derived from the idea of setting traps or snares that close on their victims. The second conveys the idea of someone slipping or stumbling into sin because of an obstacle they have encountered. This distinction is also evident in the New Testament. In Matthew chapter 13 verse 41, we read that when Christ establishes His kingdom, everything that offends, or is an enticement to sin, will be removed. Christ warns us of the great danger in putting obstacles in the way of those who are young and the serious consequences of such action, 18. 6. This is illustrated in chapter 16 verse 23, by Peter, who is being used by Satan as a stumbling block to Christ Himself. As PLUMMER states, ‘In Peter the banished Satan had once more returned’.³ In Romans, Paul warns those who are strong in the faith not to act in such a way that their actions might become an impediment or stumbling block to those who are weaker in the faith, 14. 13. The danger of doctrinal error is highlighted in Galatians chapter 5 verse 7, where the Galatians are criticized for deviating from the Christian race, cp. Rev. 2. 14. The false teachers in Galatia had tripped them

up.⁴ Later in the chapter, Paul uses **skandalon** to argue that the cross would cease to be an offence if he still insisted on the rite of circumcision, i.e., to the Jew, the cross was offensive because it glorified someone who was cursed.⁵

In terms, then, the word is applied figuratively of Christ as being a stumbling block and an offence to those who reject the message of the gospel, Matt. 26. 31. We too can be a stumbling block to others, especially believers, but as John reminds us, if we truly love other believers then we will never cause those believers to stumble or induce them to commit sin, 1 John 2. 10. May we continue to walk in the light so that we never induce others to fall or deviate from running the race.

For further reading/study

Introductory

σκάνδαλον at pages 255 to 258 in *New Testament Words* by WILLIAM BARCLAY

Advanced

σκάνδαλον At pages 1036 to 1038 in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament - Abridged in One Volume*

Endnotes

- 1 Rom. 3. 9-18.
- 2 ‘For example, ‘stumbling block,’ the contribution of William Tyndale’s English translation of the Bible (1526), is an image shaped from an expression current in his day, ‘to stumble at a block’; that is, to stumble over a tree stump’; *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*: Gen. Eds LEYLAND RYKEN et al at pg. 823.
- 3 In A. T. ROBERTSON, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol. 1, pg. 136.
- 4 The Greek word used in this context for ‘hinder’ is *egkopto*, and whilst it also has to do with the idea of impeding someone, the imagery is taken from an athlete ‘cutting in’ in front of another runner so as to hinder their progress in a race.
- 5 Cp. Gal. 5. 11; 3. 13; Deut. 21. 23.

THE GOSPEL OF MARK

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

Part 3

The manifestation of the Son, vv. 9-13

Mark's account of the baptism of the Lord by John in Jordan is remarkable in its conciseness. It is Mark who tells us that 'Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee', v. 9, indicating that this event marked the commencement of the Lord's public ministry. Mark, with Luke, also makes the message from the voice from heaven to indicate divine approbation – 'Thou art my beloved Son', v. 11. That approbation was given to the perfect servant and to the perfect man.

In respect of the temptation in the wilderness, it is only Mark who mentions that the Lord 'was with the wild beasts', v. 13. The significance of this phrase is difficult to determine. It indicates the utter loneliness of His experience, there was no human company, but it might be taken to remind us that Adam failed in an environment that was perfect and harmonious, whereas the Saviour maintained His sinlessness in an environment that was hostile.

The acceptance of His mission, v. 9

It is Mark who indicates this event to be the commencement of the Lord's public ministry and in his statement 'Jesus came from Nazareth' tells us that these steps were taken voluntarily. At the appointed time, the Saviour took up the reins of service.

It is clear from the events that follow that the Lord did not have any sins to confess or any need for repentance, and yet He comes to be baptized by John. On why the Lord was baptized of John, CRISSWELL comments, 'At least four reasons seem evident: (1) to connect Himself with John, the prophet who prepared the way for the Messiah; (2) to identify Himself with

the sinful race He came to redeem, see Matt. 3:16, 17; (3) to establish the course of His own ministry; and (4) to inaugurate that ministry officially'.¹

It is Matthew who tells us that the Saviour indicated that His baptism was the fulfilment of all righteousness. In Mark there is the indication that it marked the dividing line between the Lord's private and public life. In these two Gospels we can see that it was viewed by the Lord as the proper way for the servant to enter upon His ministry. In the Lord's baptism there was the clear signal that He accepted the role and purpose for which He had come.

The affirmation of the Spirit, v. 10

The 'coming up out of the water', v. 10, indicates the mode of baptism that John practised – the baptism of immersion.

Mark's characteristic word, 'straightway', opens the verse and indicates how one event follows immediately upon another.² There was no delay. The Lord came up out of the water and the Spirit of God descended down from heaven. Mark's language suggests a heaven rent asunder to indicate an event of great importance and moment.³ It is the word from which we derive our English word 'schism'.

The fact that the Spirit of God is seen descending in the form of a dove indicates the harmony between divine persons. The Son of God and the Spirit of God were united in their purpose and desire. There is also the reminder that as the Spirit of God brooded over the waters in creation, so He broods over the waters of Jordan, and the work of new creation commences with the public ministry

of the Saviour that will culminate in Calvary.

The approbation from the Father, v. 11

How important to see all three persons within the Triune Godhead working together. We have the descent of the Spirit, the obedience of the Son, and the voice of the Father.

It is Mark's account that tells us the voice spoke to the Son rather than to those that were present at the baptism. The message is a message personal to the Son indicating not only the unique relationship that exists between the Father and the Son but also the pleasure that the Son has brought and continues to bring to the Father. It might be taken to refer to the years of His private life in Nazareth, but the construction of the verse really suggests a wider application of the phrase to the life of the Son as a whole.

'Thou', the opening word, is emphasized to indicate that this is a relationship that is unique. Only the Son, distinct from all others, can occupy such a position and enjoy such affection. The words 'Thou art' stress that the relationship between Father and Son was eternal – an abiding reality. But He is not only the Son, He is the 'beloved Son'. He is the special object of divine affection, infinitely precious to the Father. Finally, 'in whom I am well pleased' tells us of the pleasure that the Father finds in the Son. This pleasure, delight, and satisfaction is not limited to His earthly life but stretches across eternity. As WUEST states, 'It is a delight that never had a beginning, and will never have an end'.⁴

The activity in the Spirit, v. 12

With no time to pause, Mark tells us that 'immediately the Spirit driveth Him into the wilderness', v. 12. The true and perfect Servant of the Lord is never still.

Matthew and Luke tell us that the Lord was led, but Mark uses stronger language. The idea behind the word 'driveth' is given by GRASSMICK as 'that of strong moral compulsion by which the Spirit led Jesus to take

the offensive against temptation and evil instead of avoiding them'.⁵ Thus, the Spirit was the energizing force that brought the Saviour into the wilderness, a scene of conflict and testing. In a practical sense, it is only in the power of the Spirit of God that we can face the foe.

The accomplishment of the Saviour, v. 13

Mark is again brief in his description of this momentous event. He omits the detail of the trial but gives us the summary of it.

He tells us of the inhospitable nature of the scene. It was 'the wilderness'. It was populated only by 'wild beasts'. There was no physical sustenance in the form of natural food. There was no emotional sustenance in the form of companions or fellowship. It was for forty days as the period of testing and the limits of human endurance. It is clear from Mark's language that the temptation was not limited to the close of the days but was constant throughout them. At every moment and in every sense the Lord was being solicited to do evil by Satan himself. WUEST comments, 'A present tense participle speaking of continuous action. Satan tempted Messiah constantly during the forty

days. The three temptations which Matthew records at the end of the forty day period of temptation, merely indicate the additional intensity of the temptations as the period of temptation closes'.⁶

We have to draw the marked contrast between the circumstances in which Adam was found and those of the Saviour. Adam, surrounded by every form of physical comfort and sustenance that God could provide, and enjoying the fellowship of divine persons in the garden, fell as a consequence of one temptation from Satan. The Saviour, alone in the inhospitable surroundings of the wilderness, starved of food and fellowship, defeated Satan in every temptation and trial.

The ministry begins, vv. 14-20

It was the imprisonment of John that saw the commencement of the Galilean ministry of the Saviour.

This signified that the old order, symbolized by the ministry of the Baptist, was giving way to the new order ushered in by the Saviour. It was fitting that His ministry should commence in Galilee, as this was the area in which the Saviour was brought up – Mark tells us that 'Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee', v. 9. The work of the perfect Servant starts in His own locality!

The content of the ministry, vv. 14, 15

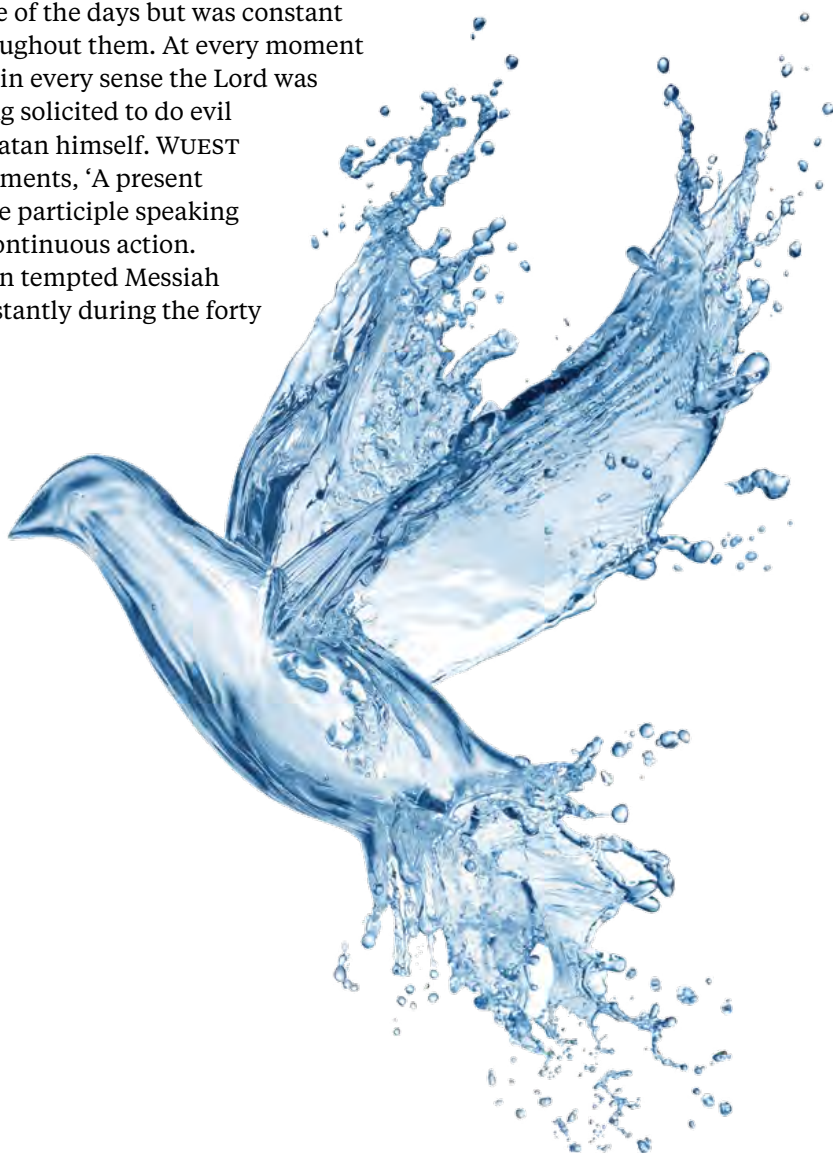
Mark tells us that, 'Jesus came . . . preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God', v. 14. The Saviour's message was 'the gospel'. It was a message of hope and mercy and, therefore, truly good news.

The detailed content of the message is given us in verse 15. There are two commands: 'repent', and 'believe the gospel'. The essential element was to see the reality of personal sin and how God views that sin. Then, having turned away from sin, we need to believe the gospel. If we have accepted God's verdict in respect to sin then it is an obvious step to accept the provision that He has made for the sinner. This faith is prepared to commit wholeheartedly and fully.

Apart from the two commands, there is also the warning, 'the Kingdom of God is at hand'. That which the Old Testament had looked forward to, had now arrived. The King was present. The time of decision was upon the nation. It could no longer delay. It must decide. Would it willingly submit to the rule of the King or would it, in rebellion, seek to cast out the King?

Endnotes

- 1 W. A. CRISWELL, *Believer's Study Bible*, Nelson, Logos Bible Software resource.
- 2 CRISWELL observes, 'It is used 42 times in Mark and only 12 times in the rest of the N.T. This word serves to advance the narrative at a rapid pace'.
- 3 'The forceful verb, being torn open, schizomenous, split, reflects a metaphor for God's breaking into human experience to deliver His people, cf. Pss. 18:9, 16-19; 144:5-8; Isa. 64:1-5', JOHN D. GRASSMICK.
- 4 KENNETH WUEST, pg. 25.
- 5 GRASSMICK, *op. cit.*
- 6 KENNETH WUEST, pp. 25, 26.



Lessons from Old Testament Characters in James

By **GRAEME HUTCHINSON** Moneyreagh, Northern Ireland

Editor's Note: After his home-call to glory, and at the request of the author, this article was submitted to *Precious Seed* by his wife. It is a mark of our brother's faithfulness in the work of the Lord right to the end of his life.

Writing principally to Jewish believers, James mentions five Old Testament characters from whom we can learn valuable lessons about faith and works. True salvation will always be demonstrated by a godly lifestyle. Although MARTIN LUTHER considered the letter 'a right strawy epistle', because he thought it compromised the truth of salvation by faith alone, in fact, James clearly illustrates from his chosen Old Testament characters that there is a connection between faith and Christian works. How true it is that 'Faith alone saves but the faith that saves is not alone'! J. RONALD BLUE puts it well when he says that 'Spiritual works are the evidence, not the energizer, of sincere faith'.¹

Abraham's promise, 2. 20-24

Abraham is first mentioned in Genesis. There are two broad parts to this book: from Genesis 1 to 11 we have four key events, namely creation, the fall, the flood, and the Tower of Babel. The rest, by far the larger portion of Genesis, is given over to four characters: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. Let us consider the patriarch Abraham.

Abraham's affection – Terah was the father of Abraham (initially called Abram), Nahor and Haran, Gen. 11. 27. Abraham married Sarah (initially called Sarai) and they had a good marriage relationship, although sadly, while in Egypt, he referred to his wife as his sister, repeating the same lie in Gen. 12. 11-13; 20. 2. However, when the God of glory called him from Ur of the Chaldees to Canaan, Abraham obeyed.² There is no doubt that he showed love towards his family and his God.

Abraham's belief – Abraham had a personal, working faith in God. Genesis chapter 15 occurs before chapter 22, making the point that we must have a personal faith in God

before we can demonstrate it in our life. This was the case with Abraham, and a full chapter in the New Testament is devoted to this subject.³ Whereas in Romans chapter 3 verse 24 we have the divine side of salvation, Romans chapter 4 teaches our responsibility to exercise faith in God. Abraham's faith shines out in verses 20 to 22: 'He staggered not at **the promise of God** through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what **he had promised**, he was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness'. It is worth quoting JAMES STIFLER, 'Weak faith looks at difficulties and scarcely looks to God. Strong faith looks at God who has promised, and does not see the difficulties'.⁴

Abraham's conduct – Following Genesis chapter 22, James tells us that Abraham was prepared to obey God and offer Isaac, the son he loved, on one of the mountains of Moriah.⁵ James mentions a wonderful title given to Abraham elsewhere in scripture – '**the Friend of God**'.⁶ What a commendation! We all have the potential to be called a friend of God,

but we need a personal, working faith in God for all the circumstances of life.

Isaac's position, 2. 21

Like James, we will only mention Isaac in passing. He had the privilege of being brought up in a home where both his parents loved and obeyed the Lord. Isaac was born to Sarah and Abraham when they were old. His name means 'laughter', for he brought joy to his parents and is a lovely picture of the joy we have in the Lord. Psalm 16 verse 11 reminds us that in the Lord's presence there is fullness of joy.

Rahab's past, 2. 25

Rahab is the only Old Testament woman mentioned in James and this is significant. Salvation is for all, both Jew and Gentile, male and female, Gal. 3. 28. The blessing God wants to give His creatures is universal in its scope, for He 'will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth', 1 Tim. 2. 4. Only when people reject the truth of the gospel do they place themselves beyond God's mercy.

Joshua, James and the writer of Hebrews all stress the background of Rahab, namely that she was a harlot, Josh. 2. 1-22; Heb. 11. 31. As 'sinners saved by grace', we are to remember not only what we've been saved from but also be thankful for God's grace which has brought us into blessing. Rahab, along with three other women – Tamar, Ruth and Bathsheba – are mentioned in the genealogy of Christ, Matt. 1. 3, 5, 6. This illustrates the role of grace in the salvation of individuals.

As with Abraham, there is a strong link between true salvation and Rahab's works of righteousness. HIEBERT notes, 'Her faith revealed itself in her deeds . . . Her works were entirely different than those of Abraham, but both alike prove that a living faith is a working faith'.⁷

Job's patience, 5. 10, 11

Job is a remarkable Old Testament character. The book that carries his name opens with his **plight** when he lost one thing after another. Perhaps the most significant loss for Job was his family, Job 1. 18, 19. However, in

the only New Testament book that mentions his name, the reference is to Job's **patience** [endurance or steadfastness]. In order to learn some truths from Job, we shall consider:

- **Jehovah** – Challenged to consider Job's amazing lifestyle, Satan argued that Job only served God because of the benefits he received. To prove how wrong he was, Jehovah granted him permission to remove those blessings. But what a glowing commendation God gave His servant! 'There is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil', 1. 8.
- **Oppression** – The trials faced by Job were numerous and occurred in quick succession, 1. 13-19. However, in all this, Job's reaction was to worship the Lord, 'Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord', 1. 21. NEWELL comments, 'James mentions the Old Testament prophets in general as faithful men grievously afflicted, who nevertheless bore up under the pressure. Then he turns to Job as the outstanding example of human endurance under strain. It is through his unparalleled sufferings that Job has become the divine model of fortitude for everyone under trial. Out of Job's desolation have come strength and encouragement for untold generations of believers. Because he was miserable Job has become memorable'.⁸

- **Blessing** – The patience of Job is best seen in the last chapter of his book. We are reminded of Job's **faith** in God when he says, 'Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes', 42. 6. He had a firm grasp of God and His word. We also note that Job enjoyed an increase in his **fortunes**, because 'the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before . . . So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning', 42. 10, 12. But how blessed was Job when he had a **family** again and lived to enjoy four generations thereafter, 42. 13, 16.

Elijah's prayer, 5. 16-18

The final Old Testament character mentioned by James is Elijah, with the emphasis rightly placed on prayer. Consider:

- His **holiness** – In chapter 5 verse 16, James speaks of, 'The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man', which no doubt introduces the person of Elijah. As with the other Old Testament saints in James, the prophet Elijah was marked by faith in God that made him a righteous person. The same can be said of every genuine believer in Christ, namely that, 'if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ', Rom. 5. 17. Elijah also demonstrated a knowledge of the word of God, for his prayer was consistent with Deuteronomy chapter 11 verses 16

and 17, 'Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them; And then the Lord's wrath be kindled against you, and he shut up the heaven, that there be no rain, and that the land yield not her fruit; and lest ye perish quickly from off the good land which the Lord giveth you'.

- His **humanity** – James states that Elijah was 'a **man** subject to like passions as we are', 5. 17. He was not an angelic being, but a 'down to earth' character whose example we can follow. Whatever difficulties he faced in life, we also face. Rather than putting him on a pedestal, we should follow the example of his godly life.
- His **hard work** – James emphasizes that Elijah prayed **earnestly** (ESV, 'fervently'). His prayer did not follow a stale routine but was fresh and diligent. The same should be true of us in that our prayer should not consist of a mere form of words but spring from the heart and be based on the word.
- His **honesty** – Let us remember that when Elijah visited king Ahab he told him what he needed, rather than what he wanted, to hear, 1 Kgs. 17. 1. The same should be true of every child of God in that we are called to stand for the truth and tell sinners to 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ', Acts 2. 38.
- His **humility** – Elijah was of a lowly spirit. 'Prayer in private was the source of his power in public: he could stand unabashed in the presence of the wicked monarch because he had knelt in **humility** before God'.⁹



Endnotes

- 1 J. RONALD BLUE, James in J. WALVOORD and R. ZUCK, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament*, Victor Books, 1983, pg. 826.
- 2 Acts 7. 2; Gen. 12. 1-5; Heb. 11. 8.
- 3 Rom. 4.
- 4 JAMES STIFLER, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Moody Press, 1978, pg. 83.
- 5 Gen. 22. 1-14; Heb. 11. 17-19.
- 6 2 Chr. 20. 7; Isa. 41. 8.
- 7 D. EDMOND HIEBERT, *James*, BMH Books, 2002, pg. 178.
- 8 DAVID NEWELL, *Job, What the Bible Teaches Old Testament Commentaries*, Ritchie, 2017, pp. 80, 81.
- 9 A. W. PINK, *Elijah, The Banner of Truth Trust*, 1997, pg. 24.

THEIR FINEST HOUR PETER

By **JOHN SCARSBROOK** Killamarsh, England

If it were possible to ask Peter what he considered to be his 'finest hour', I rather think that he would recall that unforgettable experience 'in the holy mount', concerning which he would later write, we 'were eyewitnesses of his majesty'. The scene was still fresh in his memory some thirty years later, the voice 'from the excellent glory' still rang in his ears as he wrote, 'we were with him'; the emphasis being on 'him' rather than 'we'.

The Apostle Peter has now, of course, been 'with him', enjoying His presence for the best part of 2000 years. Yet the Spirit of God has given to us an account in the New Testament writings which enables us to benefit from the life and experiences of Simon the son of Jona, the fisherman from Galilee, who became Peter the disciple and apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The disciples of the Lord Jesus provide us with a very rewarding study. We love to trace the devotion of John, the zeal of Andrew, the hesitant honesty of Philip and the unquestioning obedience of Matthew. But there is something which draws us irresistibly to Peter. Maybe we can more readily identify with the mountains and valleys which marked his path. The roller-coaster experience so familiar to many believers, who know the exhilaration of a victory, only to succumb to defeat and despair before the sun has set.

The scriptures record for us more detail of Peter's character and experiences than most others in the New Testament. We know that he grew up in Bethsaida, he was married and had a house in Capernaum (the guide will still take the credulous tourist to it today!). His given name was Simon, his father was called Jona and he was a fisherman, in partnership with his brother Andrew and the sons of Zebedee, James and John. We can glean from the Gospel records that

he was brave, impulsive, outspoken and a natural leader. Peter could walk tall in his native Galilee, but felt uncomfortable and even intimidated among the religious men, the scholars and lawyers in Jerusalem.

The Gospel writers are faithful in their presentation of individuals, whether virtuous or otherwise. Inspired by the Spirit of God, they record historical events, precisely, accurately and without embellishment; yet the Gospels are not just a tedious textbook. The personalities come alive, they have feelings, show emotion, take on character and draw the reader into their lives and experiences.

Simon Peter is an excellent example. It does not require a particularly fertile imagination to have a picture in our minds of Peter. We envisage a man, a little older than his immediate contemporaries, with weather-beaten bearded face, open and honest, broad of shoulder and demonstrably strong. A man who would not lightly take a backward step, a loyal friend, but a potent adversary. Little did Peter know on that day when the Man from Nazareth simply said, 'follow me', that all his natural abilities and instincts were to be put to the test in the years that followed. The synoptic writers are clear in their presentation, that Peter, together with others, left the boats and nets that represented their lives hitherto; the proving time had begun, and it would be costly! It would seem, however, that Peter did not sell his

boat, that would be used by the Master on a number of occasions. Did he also continue to carry his serviceable fisherman's blade? – one never knew when that might be useful!

Peter's, or Simon's first meeting with the Lord Jesus is recorded in John chapter 1. His brother Andrew had been attracted by the preaching of John the Baptist, but John had directed his followers' attention to a young man called Jesus, from neighbouring Nazareth, whom John declared to be 'the Lamb of God'. It was to this One that Andrew introduced his brother. It was a brief encounter, and may have left Peter rather puzzled, with his new identity – a stone. Later, he would write of a 'spiritual house' made of 'living stones' and of the One whom he came to know as both the foundation and the 'chief corner stone'. It would all fall into place for Peter at the appropriate time.

Peter received three commissions from the Lord Jesus, apart from those which were directed to all the disciples. The first is recorded in Matthew chapter 4, Mark chapter 1 and, with certain other detail, in Luke chapter 5. It was the challenging call, 'Follow me'. If this was the Lord's first instruction to Peter, then the last is found in John chapter 21 when he questioned the Lord's plans for John. The answer came direct to Peter's heart, 'what is that to thee? Follow thou me'. The intervening years had not changed the instruction to Peter, and for ourselves, whether we are on the path for a few years or many, the directive to us does not vary, as we still hear Him say, 'Follow me'.

Peter's second personal commission is found in Luke chapter 22, verse 32. Luke's detail of events in the upper room takes on a different order from that of the other Gospel writers, in keeping with his overall presentation of the Lord Jesus. With omniscient perception the Lord made known to Peter that he would shortly experience the winnowing of Satan's sieve. Yet, through the Lord's prayers for him, he would be restored and was commissioned to use the experience to be a strength and support to his brethren in similar circumstances.

The third charge to Peter was given in

that early morning encounter, recorded only by John at the end of his Gospel. The risen Lord had already met with Peter privately; Luke says He 'appeared to Simon', 24. 34; Paul recalls, 'he was seen of Cephas', 1 Cor. 15. 5. But John records the public restoration of Peter in view of his threefold denial. Having drawn from Peter the affirmation of his affection, the Lord gave him the task of tending and feeding His sheep and lambs.

When Peter came to write his Epistles, we see just how faithfully he carried out these responsibilities to scattered, persecuted believers. He encouraged them to follow, 1 Pet. 2. 21, and his purpose throughout was to strengthen their faith and provide food for the flock.

We have already noted that Peter had undoubted leadership qualities; he is always the first mentioned in the lists of the twelve disciples. In Matthew's Gospel, of those who followed the Lord only Peter is heard to speak, apart from the traitor Judas. Yet, those occasions when Peter does speak provide us with further insight to his character, and also some of his finest moments. In chapter 14, lately come from seeing the multitude fed by the Master's hands with seemingly meagre fare, the disciples, following the Lord's instructions, were in 'the midst of the sea', but, 'tossed with waves'. To add to their fear, a form, spirit-like to their troubled minds, drew near, 'walking on the sea'. Above the tempest the

familiar voice was heard, 'it is I; be not afraid'. It was Peter who responded. We know the story well, the invitation given, the remarkable step of faith and outstanding bravery, the boisterous wind, the cry for help, the outstretched hand of salvation; that was a fine moment in Peter's experience.

Matthew chapter 15 commences with one of those occasions when the Lord's censure of the Pharisees developed into teaching which the disciples struggled to grasp. In verse 15, it is Peter who ventured to ask the meaning. The Lord, with patient sympathy, responded, 'Are ye also yet without understanding?' It would be reasonable to suggest that the fishermen of Galilee were not known for their academic prowess. However, the time would come when, arraigned before the religious hierarchy in Jerusalem, Peter and John, though reckoned to be 'unlearned and ignorant men', confounded their accusers, who marvelled and, 'took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus', Acts 4. 13. Peter would have considered that a fine moment!

Once again, in chapter 16, the Lord reveals their lack of understanding and graciously explains to them the lessons set forth in His teaching. Luke will tell us that it was about this time that the Lord turned His face towards Jerusalem and, with the work of the cross before Him, He asked His disciples, 'Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?' Opinions among the people varied and each suggested

name had some merit. But when the challenge was made personal, 'Whom say ye that I am?', again it is Peter who steps forward with an answer that could only have been revealed from above. 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God', a fine response, a truly fine moment! In view of such a clear confession of faith, the Lord reveals His purpose, 'I will build my church', with Himself the foundation against which the powers of darkness will ultimately fall.

Before the chapter closes, however, Peter challenges the Lord's words that He must 'suffer many things . . . and be killed'. The Lord's rebuke was not forgotten by Peter as he later writes his first Epistle. One leading subject, mentioned in each chapter is, 'the sufferings of Christ'.

Peter learned much in the school of God. He learned there was One who can meet present need, as he took the coin for the tribute money from the mouth of the fish. He learned the dangers of self-confidence, as in Matthew chapter 26 he stated his willingness to die with the Lord, rather than deny Him! Peter, with others, learned how frail we are, even when our intentions are good, as he slept on the mount of transfiguration, Luke 9. 32, and in Gethsemane, Matt. 26. 40.

Matthew, in his Gospel, leaves Peter weeping bitterly outside the high priest's palace without further mention. Other writers take us further and tell us of the resurrection morning, Peter's entry into the vacant tomb and the events which followed, culminating in the Lord's ascension and the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost.

My personal choice of Peter's finest hour is recorded in Acts chapter 2, verses 14 to 40. Now endowed with the Spirit, no longer struggling to decipher the Lord's teaching and speaking out of turn, but standing boldly, drawing on Old Testament prophecy and speaking of the 'man approved of God' whom 'ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain'. Certainly, one of the most challenging gospel messages ever delivered – and the result? Three thousand saved, a fine hour certainly, but Peter would, without doubt, give God all the glory.



Regeneration

By **IAN JACKSON** Eastbourne, England

The word: its meaning and usage

The word 'regeneration' occurs twice in the Bible, in Matthew chapter 19 verse 28, and Titus chapter 3 verse 5. It is somewhat surprising that it does not occur in John chapter 3, where the Lord Jesus is speaking to Nicodemus about the need to be born again, or in John's Epistle, in which He speaks of being born of God. Also, neither Peter nor James use this word, even though both speak of the new birth.

The common usage of the word is, perhaps, not as accurate as it might be. It means 'new birth', but, contextually, it is used in scripture of a new state that is brought in to replace an old one, rather than of the process whereby this is brought about. Matthew's reference to the regeneration anticipates a new state of things that is to be brought about when 'the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory'. Then, all that is not suited to God, or consistent with His will, shall have been removed. That millennial kingdom has other descriptions, too, such as 'the times of restitution of all things', Acts 3. 21, and 'the dispensation of the fullness of times', Eph. 1. 10, both of which imply a new state of things. It will also be the time when all things in earth and in heaven are reconciled to Himself, Col. 1. 20. In Titus chapter 3 'the washing of regeneration', which has an objective force, refers to the new state that we have been brought into by new birth and the renewing of the Holy Spirit, which has a subjective force, is His moral power day by day in the lives of those who have enthroned Christ in the heart.

Blood and water

Our need as sinners had two aspects. Firstly, we were dead, having no principle of life towards

God and, secondly, we were guilty and in need of justification. In 1 John chapter 5 all of our need was met by the One who came by water and blood. Water, a figure of imparted life, meets our deadness: blood, standing for life sacrificially laid down, meets our guilt. These two matters are brought together in 1 John chapter 4 verses 9 and 10. In verse 9, 'God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him': this connects with what is symbolized by water. In verse 10, He 'sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins', something clearly connected with His blood.

Blood, then, is for our guilt, which arises from what we have done; water is for our natural state – what we are. The one is connected to our justification, the other to our new birth and resultant regeneration. All of our need, therefore, has been fully met by the work of Christ, by which everything that was a hindrance to relationship with God has been removed.

There are various passages in scripture where blood and water are together. The priests knew the value of blood at the brazen altar and water at the laver. On the occasion of the consecration of the priests, Aaron and his sons were washed all over with water and were anointed with blood. The leper knew something of the same in regard to his cleansing. In 1 Corinthians chapter 6 the apostle reminds the believers that they have been washed – the action of water – and sanctified and justified – connected with blood. In Hebrews chapter 10, our hearts have been sprinkled, by blood, and our bodies washed, with pure water. This line of things gains heightened interest when we remember that in John chapter 19 there flowed, miraculously, from the side of our dead Saviour blood and

water; and that in 1 John chapter 5 He is spoken of as having come by water and blood.

Born of water

In John chapter 3 there is no reference to the blood of Christ because it is not the forgiveness of sins that is in view, or the removal of guilt; but the Lord Jesus said to Nicodemus, 'Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God', John 3. 5. The water is, of course, nothing to do with Christian baptism. We know this because it had not yet been instituted and it is, in any event, connected with death rather than life. Also, when the Saviour speaks in verse 6 of being 'born of the Spirit', He makes no reference to water.

In scripture, a mass of water often speaks of judgement, such as in Psalm 42 verse 7, which says, 'all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me'. Running water may speak of the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus said of the believer that, 'out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water' and He makes it clear that He is referring to the Holy Spirit, John 7. 38, 39. Peaceful water speaks of the word of God; the psalmist famously said, 'Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word', Ps. 119. 9.

In John chapter 3, then, a person is born again by water and the Spirit. The mention of water is a reference to the word of God and the reference to the Spirit has in view the Holy Spirit. In the new birth the word of God is the means, and the Holy Spirit is the agent, by which it is accomplished. It is by the word that washing takes place. In addition to the reference to the washing of regeneration in Titus chapter 3, the Apostle Paul speaks in Ephesians chapter 5 verse 26 of 'the washing of water by the word', something which happens when a person is saved. Peter, in 1 Peter chapter 1 verse 23, states that we have been 'born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever'. The incorruptible seed is not

a reference to the whole of the word of God but that part of it which the Holy Spirit applies to our hearts at the time of new birth.

It is very important to recognize that Nicodemus did not need an education for his intellect so much as he needed quickening for his soul. Without birth from above, he could neither see nor enter the messianic kingdom. As he was a teacher in Israel, he should have known this, because of the word of Ezekiel chapter 36 verses 25 and 26. 'Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean . . . A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh'. That which is born of the flesh is flesh and therefore has its origin in human nature, which is fallen, dead and dominated by sin. New birth is of the Spirit, an act of God, and it is spiritual in its nature.

The wind

The need for new birth is not limited to Israelites. Our Saviour said in verse 8, 'so is every one that is

born of the Spirit'. He had said that you cannot stop the wind blowing or redirect it, for its origin and destination are unknown. The wind is, of course, the Holy Spirit. It is an allusion reminiscent of Acts chapter 2 when He came as a rushing mighty wind, but it has its roots in Ezekiel chapter 37 where the wind, v. 9, clearly relates to the Spirit, v. 14. The Lord Jesus is indicating that the new birth is always connected with the dealings of God with the individual and is a sovereign work of the Spirit of God, brought about by the word of God.

When Jesus said to Nicodemus that he did not believe when He told him of earthly things, v. 12, He is referring not to water, wind or natural birth but to the new birth itself, which in John chapter 3 is earthly and connected to the manifested kingdom of God. However, new birth is needed, whether it stands connected to the earthly or the heavenly side of things. In this era of heavenly things, new birth is connected with divine purpose regarding salvation and eternal life for the individual.

New birth is also connected to the matter of faith, occurring simultaneously with a person believing in His name, John 1. 12, 13.

The result of the new birth

As a result of having been born again, a person is possessed of a new nature. This does not mean that that person does not still have the flesh; we need to wait for the redemption of the body to be rid of it. In 1 John chapter 3 verse 9 we learn that the person who has been begotten of God, and is therefore a child of God, does not practise sin, 'for his seed remaineth in him'. The seed here is not the seed sown by the sower, as in Matthew chapter 13, but the incorruptible seed of 1 Peter chapter 1. The Holy Spirit, by the word of God, produces divine life. This is a unique statement in scripture and points to an incorruptible nature now possessed by the believer; seed always brings forth of its own kind.

This leads to communion with the Father, love of the brethren, the practising of righteousness and unworldly conduct, all found in John's first Epistle.



Angolan Literature Fund: 20 years of service

The Angolan Literature Fund was set up in 1998 with a clear vision 'to further the spread of the Gospel of Jesus Christ amongst the people of Angola and such other charitable objectives as the Trustees may from time to time select'. Through the financial support it receives from individuals, assemblies and various trusts, the fund can send to Angola, Bibles, hymnbooks and other Christian literature, as well as equipment, paper and consumables for literature production within Angola.

History and impact

Having been involved with the Angolan Literature Fund throughout its twenty-year existence, Brian Howden, missionary and trustee, can testify to the immense blessing it has been to the ongoing spiritual work which is the basis of any missionary activity.

Prior to 1998, the literature that was available for missionaries to use and for national believers to enjoy, could be best described as sparse and frequently unavailable. There was no way that individual missionaries could meet the vast literature needs that exist in Angola and so, in 1998, Ruth Hadley initiated the setting up of the fund in an attempt to meet that need. Because of the lack of missionaries over the years, it was, and still is, vital to support the many assemblies through the provision of literature.

It is testimony to the Lord's goodness that, for many years now, the missionaries have not lacked Bibles, which is the Fund's primary aim, namely to make sure the word of God is available to the people of Angola. The missionaries now have a plentiful supply of both Chokwe and Portuguese Bibles and can maintain adequate stock levels. If they do run out, then there is usually only a couple of

months delay due to transport issues.

Apart from literature in Chokwe and Portuguese, the fund has also been able to supply material in the Umbundu, Luvale, Bangala and Songo languages and anticipates others being added to that list in the future.

Literature provided

In addition to Bibles and hymnbooks, the fund has been able to supply a good selection of study aids, commentaries and other books in Portuguese to help believers in their daily walk with the Lord. One habit that is being encouraged is that of the daily reading of the scriptures, and, to that end, the trustees are pleased that Choice Gleanings has been produced in Portuguese and has now arrived on the field. Please pray that the daily meditation will help believers glean a little more from their Bible readings.

Many organizations have willingly donated books, including Mytrlefield Trust, Precious Seed, Chamada, Everyday Publications Inc. and Assembly Testimony; their generous contribution to the work cannot go without the grateful acknowledgement of the trustees. The trustees are also so thankful for the massive contribution that Medical Missionary News makes in not merely transporting the literature, but also

holding literature in the warehouse, sometimes for several months, before a container is loaded. This is an immense practical help, as is their generous contribution to the cost of transport, equipment and supplies.

Distribution

With some assemblies only having one Bible and hymnbook between them, a significant challenge which the missionaries face is the task of distributing the literature to key areas and, while not easy, this is an ongoing effort. With the roads in poor condition, lack of manpower to do the work and constant demands on time and energy to do other things, it means that they mainly rely on folk coming to Saurimo and Luanda to make their purchases. When villages and isolated areas can be visited, it quickly becomes obvious that greatly subsidized prices are needed to make it possible for everyone to have a Bible, hymnbook, or whatever they are seeking.

Translation

The loss of Doris Pitman from Canada in January 2018 will be felt very much, as she, at the age of 97, was still faithfully translating books into the Chokwe language. Having already served the Lord in Angola for many years, she continued labouring behind the scenes, producing literature for the blessing of thousands. She has surely already heard His highest commendation, and we salute the memory of one who shunned publicity and, despite advanced years, never tired in her aim to translate books that would edify the Lord's people.

Her co-worker, Marjorie Beckwith, served the Lord faithfully for almost fifty years in Angola. She had a great heart for literature and was a tremendous help in distributing it to the provinces of Angola. She was called home in May this year. She also continued translating books up to the end and will be greatly missed.

Eunice Carapeto (Lisbon, Portugal) and Terry Blackman (Newport, Wales) have been heavily involved in translating material that the fund has requested, and much of their work is now in print and in use in Angola.

Sourcing literature

The trustees are grateful for the contribution Crawford Brown makes to the work of the fund. Being based in Brazil and himself heavily involved in literature work, he is well able to give guidance as to what is available in the Portuguese language. He does much of the work in sourcing the material needed from different publishers before sending it to MMN for loading into the containers that go directly to Camundambala.

Printing in Angola

Apart from providing literature, the Fund has established two printing works, one in Luanda, the capital, and the other in Saurimo. The Saurimo operation has worked continually since the printing work started there in the year 2000 and has provided many thousands of Emmaus Bible courses for use in the province and beyond. It has also supported the work of the local assemblies in printing material that they require, as well as for the school at Camundambala and paperwork for local medical stations. The Luanda operation has been out of action for several years, but the trustees are hoping that a fresh start can be made in the second part of 2018 when the newly upgraded facilities receive replacement equipment.

The printing work has many challenges, and the economics of it needs to be constantly under review, with the price of bulk printing in Asia being very competitive. Nevertheless, the fund continues to supply printing equipment, paper, ink and other



consumables, enabling the printing work to meet the needs of the local assemblies, especially in the production of Emmaus courses.

The trustees would be grateful for the prayer support of the Lord's people as they continue to meet the demands made on the fund and for wisdom in the days ahead. Please pray that the vision does not fade and that the Lord will raise up younger people with the needed skills and abilities to join the trustees, but above all, that glory be given to the Lord for what He is doing in Angola.

Appreciation from Angola

While the missionaries can see the appreciation of the Angolan believers for the literature received, this is not often written down. However, on the occasion of this twenty-year anniversary, the brother who runs the printing room and the sister who oversees the bookroom in Saurimo wrote,

'... we are strangers, but you support us with so much love. What admiration



we have. The world calls this waste and those who hear about the work of ALF think it is a lack of responsibility to do this with your money, they don't appreciate what is done with that money. We do and will always be grateful . . . The Angolan faithful rejoice and thank you so warmly for ALF in our lives and in our Country . . .'

The following was seen written in the front of a young man's Bible.

'This Bible was given to me on the 13/10/2016. I am very grateful because now I can read and understand about the work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross'.

Points for prayer

- Thanksgiving for the Lord's faithful provision and the support of the Lord's people.
- That the Lord would raise up others who have a vision for the work in Angola.
- That wisdom would be given in the allocation of funds, literature sourced and equipment provided.
- For those who translate material into the various languages used in Angola.
- For continued safety in the delivery of literature.
- For better facilities to distribute more widely across the country.
- For the work of the Camundambala school in giving the next generation the ability to be able to read and comprehend which is so vital for the spiritual work.
- For wisdom in knowing how long to support printing within Angola.

For further information, or if you are interested in a trustee giving a report, please contact Michael Buckeridge, email: mjb1978@talktalk.net



The desert shall rejoice

By **JIM LEGGE** and **CLARK LOGAN** Botswana

Isaiah's prophecy points forward to a bright future for a repentant and restored Israel in the land that God has given them. In that coming millennial day, 'the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose'. The ultimate result will be that others 'shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God', Isa. 35. 1, 2. The praise shall be His alone.

Those of us who serve the Lord in Botswana are constantly reminded that our country is a desert. Indeed, over 80% of the land is covered with the sand of the Kalahari Desert. We have sometimes wilted under the harsh, unrelenting sun and often seen the effects of severe drought on the crops and livestock, but God has called us to this needy land, and we would not wish to be anywhere else. The people of Botswana are polite, gentle and peace-loving, and we are privileged to be welcome guests here.

Thankfully, the spiritual landscape is very different from the physical conditions. Despite being a landlocked country in an unsettled region of the world, Botswana has enjoyed a remarkable degree of peace and stability for many years. We continue to have liberty to travel anywhere within the country and speak to anyone about the Saviour and His love. The Lord has given us widespread opportunities for the sowing of the good seed of the gospel, and over the years many people, both young and old, have come to faith in Christ. We have been witnesses to the grace of God in saving souls – the joy has been theirs, ours and heaven's too! We thank the Lord for all of these mercies.

Early years

When Jim and Irene Legge moved to Serowe in 1969, Botswana was still a neglected and relatively poor part of the world. Having achieved independence in 1966, the humble

leadership and wise guidance of Sir Seretse Khama, our first president, was exactly what was required. When rich deposits of diamonds were discovered, the country was set on a course of growing prosperity and rapid development. The government did not squander these assets but used them for the benefit of all.

At first, Jim and Irene had to learn the difficult language of Setswana. Mr. Crawford Allison, their senior colleague in Salisbury, Rhodesia – now Harare, Zimbabwe – encouraged them to make this a priority. A few souls were saved, and a small assembly was planted in Serowe. Medical work was also used to bring help to those who were ill and suffering. The first steps were taken to provide suitable gospel literature and Bible teaching material in the language of the people. Opportunities were taken to make Christ known in schools and also in prisons. Step by step the work began to grow.

In those days most of the population were involved in agriculture. This would mean an annual migration out from the home village to the ploughing areas and also the cattle-posts. Such mobility presented its own challenges then, as it still does now, with regard to regular assembly activities.

Subsequent growth

Clark and Hazel Logan joined Jim and Irene in 1982 and spent two years in Serowe learning the language and also assisting in the medical and

assembly work. In 1984 they moved to the capital, Gaborone, then just a small, quiet town. They were joined in 1990 by Joy Griffiths who has given valuable help in the work, especially among the children and young women. Just as in Serowe, the work in Gaborone grew slowly in early years. Others also heard God's call and came to further the work in new places. Colin and Christine Raggett have built up the assembly in Palapye, and John and Onty Bandy are involved in the work of the Francistown assembly. The two newer assemblies are smaller numerically: Dan Nguluka, a Zambian brother, helps in Maun, while the Selebi-Phikwe assembly is maintained at present by several younger local brethren. In past years others from overseas have had varying terms of useful service in Botswana before relocating.

The present situation

The six assemblies continue in happy fellowship. Due to the great distances between, we do not see one another as often as we would wish, but annual conferences in various locations give us the opportunity to enjoy fellowship and feed on the word together. We are grateful that God has raised up gifted local brethren who not only share in preaching the gospel and teaching the scriptures, but also have a heart for shepherding the flock.

In general, we find that the work continues to grow slowly. While there is still a measure of respect for the word of God in Botswana, there is also a great deal of religious confusion, and currently many are being swayed by a false gospel that promises health and wealth. Adult men are particularly hard to reach, preferring to stay within their familiar male-only social group and rarely venturing outside it. Many men do not possess a Bible and some still have difficulty reading, so 'coming to church' can be something of an ordeal.

What has really made the difference over the years has been the wide-open door for work among the children. Hundreds of young ones are hearing the gospel each week, and children have been saved. They have influenced their parents – usually the mother – to come along and hear

the word. Many mothers have been converted and the result has been transformed homes. Men and women we once knew as small children in Sunday School are now parents themselves. The spiritual influence upon many of them has proved to be lasting, not only in their own salvation but also in the way they have lived before others at school, college, in their work places, and especially in their own families.

We continue to make use of the many opportunities to preach the gospel in our halls, in tents, on street corners in the cities and under trees in villages, in people's homes and yards, in schools, colleges and at the university, in clinics and hospitals, at funerals or weddings, and even at housewarmings and graduation celebrations. For a number of years, we were invited to preach over the national radio. Gospel correspondence lessons continue to be sent out over all the country to places none of us might ever reach personally.

Showers of blessing

God has worked in wonderful ways that have exceeded our expectations. It is one thing to see someone saved, but a much greater delight to see them progress in the ways of God and become effective soul-winners. One young woman was saved in the early years in Serowe. She became a busy nurse and was sent to work in different parts of the country, sometimes without any fellowship or assembly nearby. Despite this, in every place she has been, she has taken an interest in

young people and seen some of them saved. She has continued faithfully to nurture them, often using her own home and resources. Some of us have gone from time to time to visit and give Bible teaching to these new believers. We always leave with a sense of deep gratitude for what God has done and continues to do through a single sister fully committed to the Lord. This is just one of numerous other stories that could be told.

Winds of change

During some years many have been saved and we have seen abundant evidence of the mighty hand of God in blessing. At other times, the going seemed tough and we felt we were not making much progress. Just as happened in the days of the Acts, after times of blessing there can follow days of opposition, when the devil would seek to hinder and disrupt the work of God by whatever means he can employ.

There are those who are still held in bondage by fear. *Badimo*, the spirits of the ancestors, continue to play an important part in the thoughts and feelings of many, even those who are educated. If they enjoy 'success', they need protection from others who might be jealous; if they have experienced failure, it may be because someone has bewitched them. In either case they will need to visit the traditional doctor. Only Christ can liberate from these fears. Another problem that has affected the lives of many has been the AIDS epidemic, and few families are unscathed. There

have been times when all we seemed to do was attend funerals. Despite the government now offering treatment for all, there remains a large number of patients who suffer from this serious condition and require constant medical support.

New challenges have presented themselves. The gentler rural life is fast being replaced by a more hectic and sometimes chaotic urban existence in which the traditional cultural values no longer apply. At present 58% of the population live in urban areas. These changes are common to many other cultures, but here it is the rapidity of change that has been so notable. Students are no longer guaranteed employment after finishing their college or university courses because jobs are scarce. Even when some of our young men and women have succeeded in finding a job, they have had to face increasing pressure from their bosses to devote more and more time to their work. The competitive business environment sits uneasily with those who desire to give time and energy to the things of the Lord.

God is able!

It is true that those who serve the Lord are sometimes anxious about the future of the work in which they are engaged, given the rising apathy and deepening spiritual darkness in the world today. One can fret over disappointments and even personal failure. As the apostle Paul sat in his prison cell awaiting execution, he had many reasons to be despondent. And yet his spirit soared with confidence in the knowledge that 'the word of God is not bound' and 'the foundation of God standeth sure', 2 Tim. 2. 9, 19.

In Botswana we see ourselves principally as sowers of the good seed of the gospel. We believe that this labour has not been in vain, and the blessing we have seen so far is only a foretaste of an even greater harvest yet to come. Perhaps SAMUEL RUTHERFORD will not mind us adapting his soul-thrilling words: 'If one soul from Botswana meets me at God's right hand, my heaven will be two heavens in Immanuel's land'. There will be no regrets in heaven, only joy!



Robert Eugene Sparks

1844-1918

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

Of all the notable men involved at the inception of the work that later became known as Echoes of Service, it is likely that the name Robert Eugene Sparks would be largely unknown. Yet his contribution to that work in its formative years was considerable, as was his knowledge of, and interest in, the work of missionaries abroad.

Robert Sparks was born on September 17th, 1844, the son of a Dublin doctor. As one of a family of four children, Sparks did not follow his father into medicine but instead took up law. Little is recorded of Sparks' early years, his education, his conversion or early life in assembly fellowship, and this is perhaps typical of a man who carried on his work quietly and unobtrusively. Following his legal training as a solicitor, Sparks was employed at the Head Office of the Ulster Bank in Waring Street, Belfast from 1874-94. His role was officially described as a 'law clerk' but, as a solicitor, he provided the interface between the commercial and the legal needs of the customers of the bank, although quite what that involved is unclear. However, a bank with branches all over Ireland was likely to give Robert Sparks plenty to do.

On February 6th, 1877 he married Catherine Rose Elliott at Alma Road Chapel, Clifton, Bristol. The couple settled in Belfast and, later, the assembly at Holywood was commenced in their house and Sparks was one of the two treasurers. It is here that Sparks' interest in missionary activity was first noted. The assembly was generous in its giving to missionary work and, to support intelligent giving to meet specific need, Sparks developed a wide knowledge of the mission field, even in days when communication was much more difficult than today. Initially, the gifts were channelled through the organization that published *The Missionary Echo* which, in 1891, became known as *Echoes of Service*. Apart from his generosity to support

gospel work abroad, Sparks also took a keen interest in the gospel in his own land. In 1891, he built Apsley Street Hall, Belfast, and rented it to that assembly. After his death they were able to purchase it from his executors.

Sparks was no stranger to tragedy. After only eight years of married life his first wife died, leaving Robert with three children. Although the circumstances are not recorded, only one of those children survived, a son, John Elliott. He followed his grandfather into medicine, qualifying as a surgeon at the University of London. It may be that his father's interest in the mission field influenced John and developed in him a desire to serve the Lord abroad. Thus, in June 1906 he set out for Angola. As STUNT *et al* record, 'On the way from the coast to Okapango (Capango) there was a lot of illness in the party. He was indefatigable in tending others but then was stricken with the illness from which he died'.¹ Although Sparks was naturally shocked at the loss of his only son, he believed John had followed the Lord's guidance in the decision and accepted it as of the Lord.

In 1893, Sparks married Janie Bogue. Robert and Janie shared a keen interest in missionary work, Janie joining her husband in the work at Holywood. She began a missionary sewing class and cooperated enthusiastically in her husband's and stepson's missionary interests. With Sparks' interest in, and commitment to, the support of labourers upon the mission field, it is not surprising that Henry Dyer² approached him about joining the work of Echoes at Bath.

Sparks gave himself to prayer, and on October 6th, 1894 the family moved to 6 Widcombe Crescent, Bath.

With his legal training and experience, Sparks' first task at Echoes was to develop an appropriate framework for the holding of various properties overseas which had been vested in the Editors. He was involved with such organizations as the Continental Lands Company Ltd., and, later, Stewards Company Ltd., being a director of the former and managing director and secretary of the latter.

One matter that concerned both Bennet and Sparks was the issue of succession, particularly necessary in regard to the aging Dr. Maclean. Working carefully and prayerfully over a period of time, they were both instrumental in bringing to Echoes two men whose contribution to the work would be significant – W. R. Lewis and W. E. Vine.

Robert Sparks was not a gospel preacher or a well-known Bible teacher.³ To many readers he will be a complete unknown, but the legacy he has left is considerable, if evident more in organizational structures, trusts, and properties. The challenge of his life is simple. He brought his wealth, his professional expertise and his energy and devoted it to the Lord's work for over twenty years, before, in the closing years of his life, preparing others and passing the work on to them. Are we prepared to demonstrate the same devotion and to develop others who show promise and gift?

Endnotes

- 1 W. T. STUNT, A. PULLENG, A. PICKERING, G. P. SIMMONS, D. K. BOAK, S. F. WARREN, *Turning the World Upside Down*, Upperton Press, 1972, pg. 52.
- 2 Henry Dyer was one of the brethren involved in the early stages of the work at Echoes. At this time, the others were William Henry Bennet and John Lindsay MacLean. However, it would appear that this approach to Sparks, which took place at a Missionary Conference in Belfast, was Dyer's personal exercise derived from his concern to find a helper for MacLean.
- 3 This should not detract from Beattie's comment that Sparks' ministry was 'of a kind that was always practical and helpful'. DAVID J BEATTIE, *Brethren, the story of a great recovery*, John Ritchie, 1944, pg. 156.

Reaching out to your neighbours with the gospel

NOAH'S ARK REPLICA

By **BRYON MEYERS** Arlington, Washington, USA

The replica of Noah's ark was originally built for the gospel outreach effort at the Pacific National Exhibition in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, an effective outreach that the Christians from the Gospel Halls in the Vancouver area have had for many years.



The ark is 11 feet long, 8 feet wide and 6 feet high, (approximately 3050mm, 2440mm, and 1830mm) representing the front quarter of the ark, and is built on a 1 to 10 scale. When transported it is fully covered and is on its own trailer. It takes at least three people to set up the ark and the canopies that go over it. When set up, it has the three floors and the one door. The animals are placed in the ark after it is set up, although they are not to scale, and people are able to walk into the ark model to see the display.

One important thing is that the ark is very attractive. This draws people in from every age group. A 10 foot by 20 foot space (3050mm by 6100mm) is needed to set up the

ark with a gospel table. As part of the stand/display that we set up with the model, we offer very colourful scripture verse texts, 8 inch by 10 inch (200mm by 250mm), 5 inch by 7 inch (125mm by 175mm) scripture verse texts, tracts, booklets, magnets, Bibles, bookmarks, etc., which are free. We get into many conversations and share the gospel with all age groups. We also have some good conversations with believers who are usually impressed that we are able to be involved in so many different ways with the gospel. If we are working with an assembly that is interested in building up their youth work, then we get a 10 foot by 30 foot space (3050mm by 9150mm) and have a craft table with crafts that fit in with

the ark. At times we have someone making balloon animals which really draws in the younger ones.

We have used the ark at Country Fairs, Street Fairs, Exhibitions, Rodeos, Vacation Bible Schools, on Indian (First Nations) Reservations in Canada and the USA. We were in two parades in which we took first-place prize.

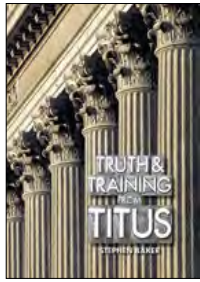
We try to ensure that most of these outreaches are in connection with a local assembly. Whilst this gives us somewhere to point interested people, this also gives the assembly a great opportunity to reach out to their community and also get involved in a gospel outreach. We generally have two people working the ark and gospel table, each taking a three-hour shift. Therefore, it is a good opportunity for younger believers to get started in serving the Lord in a public way.

My wife is very much involved with the work and we travel together. In the early spring, she starts to make a list of all the things we will need and then we get them ordered. We are very thankful that most of our supplies are available to us from the International Bible House of Delta, British Columbia, Canada. Once we have the ark set up, then she sets up the gospel table, puts all the animals and displays in the ark and does the crafts with the kids at the craft table.

We give out a lot of material at each setting and, over the period we have used it, we have many good conversations with both saved and unsaved. For the most part, only eternity will reveal the outcome of such efforts.



Book Reviews



Truth and Training from Titus Stephen G. Baker

Paperback, 62 pages. Available from: Precious Seed Publications, 34 Metcalfe Avenue, Killamarsh, Sheffield, S21 1HW, UK. ISBN: 978-1-871642-94-0.

The substance of this book, which runs to sixty-two pages, first appeared as a series of ten articles in the *Precious Seed* magazine. The writer's stated intention is to 'look at each phrase and statement in the letter to glean a simple understanding of what Paul is writing to Titus about'.

Having established that purpose, STEPHEN BAKER sets out, in his usual methodical way, to provide a detailed and practical commentary without technical language. Each of the three chapters are analyzed, expounded and summarized, with emphasis given to the many practical applications enjoined upon Titus, but having a clear voice to

readers of the Epistle in every age.

Having undertaken to examine 'each phrase', there is no escape from dealing with the more difficult verses, and the writer, true to his brief, does not attempt to evade any part of the Epistle.

After explaining the opening verses, the instruction to Titus to 'ordain elders in every city' is dealt with in detail, with due emphasis given to the qualifications required. The balance of the chapter then shows the need for such leaders, as the 'vain talkers and deceivers' are exposed.

In Chapter 2, behaviour is in view for older ones, both male and female,

younger believers and those who were servants. The heart of the Epistle's teaching concludes the chapter, 'denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly, in this present world'.

Three alternative divisions are suggested for the third chapter, dealing with the principles of holy living and the importance of sound doctrine. The book concludes with a bullet point summary of the third chapter and commentary on the closing verses.

I rather think that both Paul and Titus would have approved of this work!



His Coming – A Guide to Future Events Various Authors.

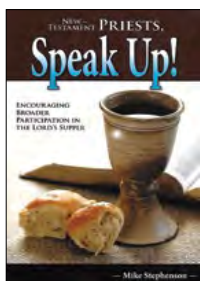
Paperback, 140 pages. Published by John Ritchie Ltd. 40 Beansburn, Kilmarnock, Scotland, ISBN: 978-1-910513-42-2.

Books dealing with future events are not in short supply and cover every shade of opinion that has been put forward since the scriptures were completed. This publication, however, brings together nine subjects written by authors who are currently engaged in oral and written ministry throughout the British Isles. Their approach to subjects ranging from the literal interpretation of scripture, the future of the nation of Israel and Daniel's seventy weeks, on through the prophetic programme to millennial days is from one united standpoint. All write from a convinced and convincing dispensational angle, clearly showing, from scripture, the weakness and the limitations of Covenant Theology expressed

in Reformed teaching. The brief description of the book on the back cover, suggests that it would be suitable for 'new Christians' among others. That may well be so for some of the subjects considered, but in other cases a fairly mature grasp of scripture is needed to follow the lines of reasoning. A number of passages need to be read and re-read to really take on board the teaching. Most of the subjects are dealt with in ten to fifteen pages and provide an adequate framework for further study. The final chapter, however, entitled 'Is Amillennialism Biblical', extends to twenty-seven pages and presents a far more detailed survey which would present quite a challenge to many of those 'young in the faith'. The primary value of the

book is as a positive antidote to the Reformed or Replacement theology which is gaining ground in many evangelical circles.

The forthright stance of all the writers in support of the scripture teaching regarding the future restoration and blessing for Israel as a nation is unequivocal. This is particularly refreshing at a time when, in the political sphere, Israel is considered a pariah nation by many; yet to the careful student of scripture their future glory is assured. The list of books suggested for further reading is brief but helpful, and as one who is personally acquainted with most of the contributors to this book, I have no hesitation in recommending its purchase.



New Testament Priests, Speak Up! Mike Stephenson

Paperback, 79 pages. Published by ECS Ministries, PO Box 1028, Dubuque, IA 52004-1028. ISBN: 978-1-59387-229-8.

The title and theme of this book will strike a chord with many who would love to hear more audible contribution from certain fellow brethren, particularly at the Lord's Supper. The writer explains that participation in worship is not a matter of gift or ability with oratory, but should be seen as both a privilege and a responsibility by those who have an appreciation of the Lord Jesus.

As one would expect from an ECS publication, a number of 'training sessions' are set out in the first part, with corresponding 'worksheets' at the end. For the general reader, however, these do not detract from the overall purpose and practical

approach to the subject, which commences in part two of the book.

The writer sets out the primary purpose of the Lord's Supper, emphasizing the priesthood of all believers, both male and female, while maintaining the scriptural role for each. STEPHENSON considers the practical reasons which lead to a reticence on the part of some, but suggests that there is really no reason why the males in the assembly, if on self-examination are in a right spiritual condition, should not participate audibly in the Lord's Supper.

He deals with the importance of worship in the life of all believers,

without limiting its place to the Lord's Supper. Also, practical matters such as wisdom in choice of hymns, brevity in participation and clarity of delivery, whether reading the scriptures or taking part in prayer and thanksgiving.

This book, though brief, has much to commend it, as it deals with a very relevant issue in our present day. The only jarring note for the present reviewer is the repeated reference to 'Brethren assemblies', which he indicates were launched in the early part of the 19th century by William Kelly and others. The remembrance of the Lord Jesus supersedes any denominational tag!

QUESTION

Should Christians fast?

ANSWER

To begin, it is necessary to define what is meant by 'fasting'. In its primary usage, fasting refers to the voluntary abstaining from food, but, perhaps in a secondary sense, we can broaden this to include the self-denial of anything we could legitimately have so as to be more devoted to the Lord and His work.

Thinking of the primary meaning, a search of the word 'fasting' and words that relate to it, shows that it was a practice that was followed in Old Testament times as well as in the days of our Lord and in the apostolic era. From the Epistle to the Romans onwards, it only occurs three times; once in 1 Corinthians chapter 7 verse 5, where most translations omit the word, and the other occasions relate to the various privations Paul experienced as part of the 'great things he must suffer for my name's sake', Acts 9. 16.

In respect of the passage in 1 Corinthians, it's important to observe that this fasting and prayer by the husband and wife is a voluntary act to which both spouses are in full agreement. This is not something that is obligatory for all married couples, nor can it be insisted upon by one of the partners. This, therefore, conforms to the overriding pattern in scripture that fasting was a voluntary abstinence from food. The issues being dealt with by Paul in chapter 7 were in response to a letter the Corinthians had written to him, so perhaps fasting was something that the Corinthian believers may have practised as part of their commitment to the work of the Lord. However, it was not a specific divine command, nor something that, as a consequence, was required of all believers.

In relation to the primary meaning of the word and based on the foregoing comments, my mind is that fasting is a personal and voluntary exercise. There is nothing to stop individual believers abstaining from food as part of their own devotions, if they so wish, but equally there is no scripture that mandates that everyone or anyone should do it. Whereas it was a part of Jewish religious ritual, fasting is virtually absent from the New Testament

Epistles and this very obvious contrast may teach us that it does not have the prominence today that it held then.

Interestingly, the probability is that many of God's people fast from time to time without actually realizing it. I'm sure that there are times when believers have become so immersed in their studying they have foregone a meal rather than interrupt their meditation. Others have left work late and have gone straight to the assembly meeting rather than going home for their meal. How many elders have had to help a saint in need and this pastoral care has resulted in them missing a meal and maybe even a night's sleep? Fasting in this sense is not a fixed observance of a ritual but the direct outcome of love for the Lord's word and the Lord's people.

If we take the broader application of the word and link it to self-restraint and self-denial then other scriptures have to be taken into account. Twice in 1 Corinthians, the apostle states, 'All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient', indicating that for the sake of others and in certain situations there are matters which, though not wrong in themselves, are better avoided. In chapter 9 of the same letter he writes, 'Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection', 9. 24-27. In this very challenging section, Paul is teaching that stringent self-discipline is necessary in order that we may serve acceptably and, finally, that we may gain reward at the judgement seat of Christ.

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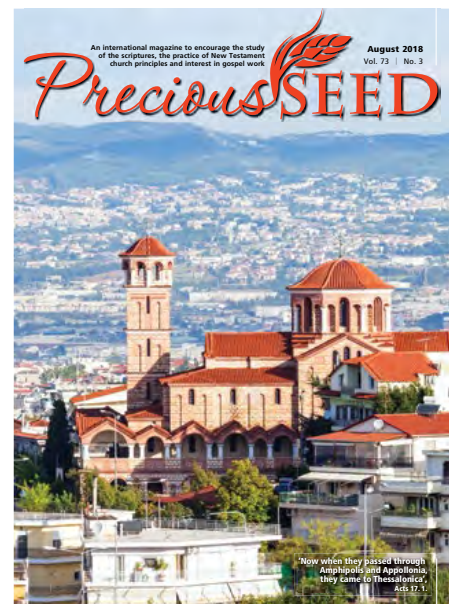
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'Now when they passed through Amphipolis and Appollonia, they came to Thessalonica', Acts 17:1.

In the days of the Apostle Paul, the city of Thessalonica (present day Salonica) was a famous commercial seaport of Macedonia (Northern Greece) situated on the Thermaic Gulf. The city was named Thessalonica by Cassander in honour of his wife, Thessalonike, a step-sister of Alexander the Great. On becoming a Roman province, Macedonia was divided into four districts and, according to Livy, Thessalonica became the capital of the second division. The Romans used Thessalonica for military purposes, as the city was strategically positioned on the *via Egnatia*, i.e., at the junction of the main land route from Italy to the East. During the second Roman civil war, the city sided with Antony and Octavius, and, as a reward, Octavius conferred on Thessalonica the honour of being a free city.

The citizens of Thessalonica had the right to elect their own counsels and magistrates, and Luke correctly refers to the magistrates as *politarches* in Acts chapter 17 verse 6. The accuracy of this historical account has been vindicated by the later discovery of a number of ancient inscriptions unearthed in the city, one of which is now located in the British Museum. It was to this empire stronghold, then, that Paul and his faithful band came to present a message of true freedom, a message more dynamic than that of all the legions of Caesar. In fact, Paul and his companions were accused of turning the habitable world upside down, Acts 17:6, a feat never accomplished by even the mighty Roman empire! The city was populated by various groups, with the Jewish contingent having a synagogue in the city to which many devout Gentiles or proselytes had attached themselves, because of the immoral and idolatrous atmosphere of the city, and their rejection of paganism. From 1 Timothy chapter 4 verse 10, it is not difficult to realize the attractiveness of this city, even for those who professed faith in Christ. After their traumatic experience at Philippi, Acts 16, Paul and Silas travelled next to Thessalonica. On arrival in the city, Paul immediately went into the synagogue and preached from the Old Testament arguing that Jesus was the Christ. It must have been a very cogent and comprehensive exposition of scripture as the recorder of the incident tells us that Paul not only completely opened up the scriptures but gave proof of the claim being made. How very much like that other exposition of scripture given on the road to Emmaus, Luke 24:25-27. Paul's custom was always to present the gospel to the Jews first, Rom. 1:16, but the majority of his converts in Thessalonica were evidently Gentiles, as 1 Thessalonians chapter 1 verse 9 and chapter 2 verse 14 emphasize. This is particularly evident in both his letters to the Thessalonians, where there is a lack of any direct quotations from the Old Testament. Acts chapter 17 records a very mixed reaction to Paul's preaching in the city, and he is forced to leave, rather prematurely it seems, having possibly only stayed in the city some 2 to 3 weeks. Nevertheless, whatever time Paul actually spent in the city of Thessalonica, it proved to be for the glory of God, as the fruit of his labour was large, and those who were converted became a model New Testament church, 1 Thess. 1:7. It is good to know that even today the power of God is still actively changing lives, and model New Testament churches can still be a reality.

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