

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

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Precious SEED

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give tribute to
Caesar, or not?'
Mark 12. 14.

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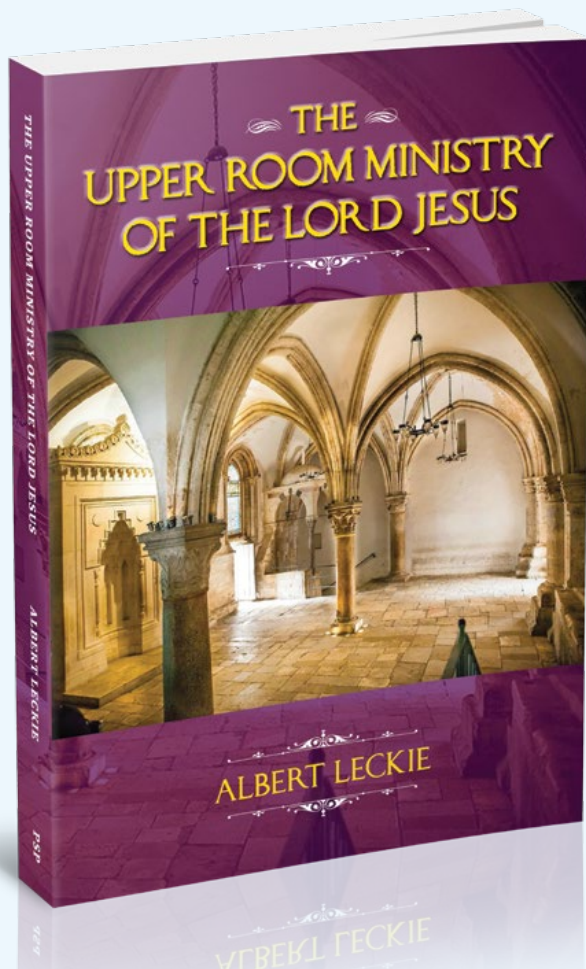
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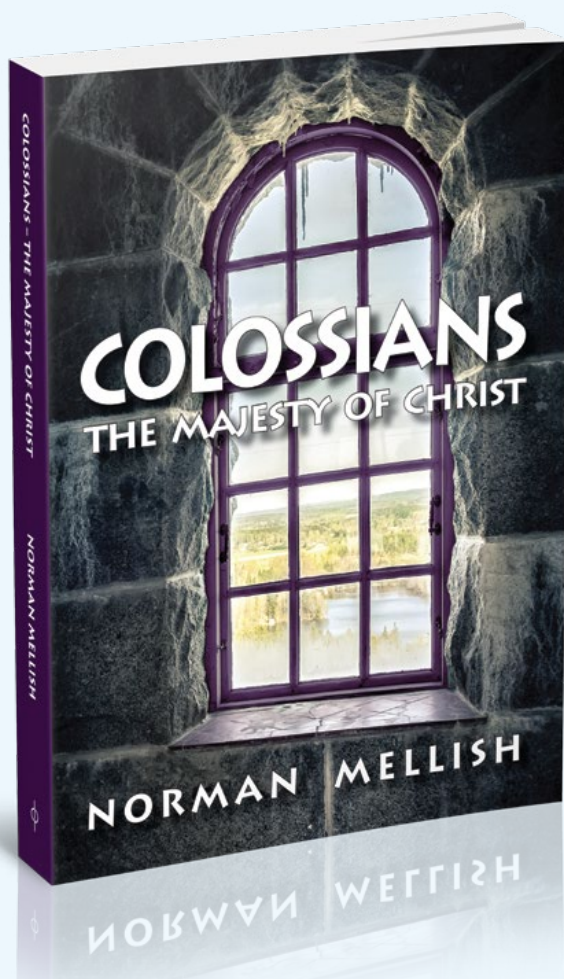


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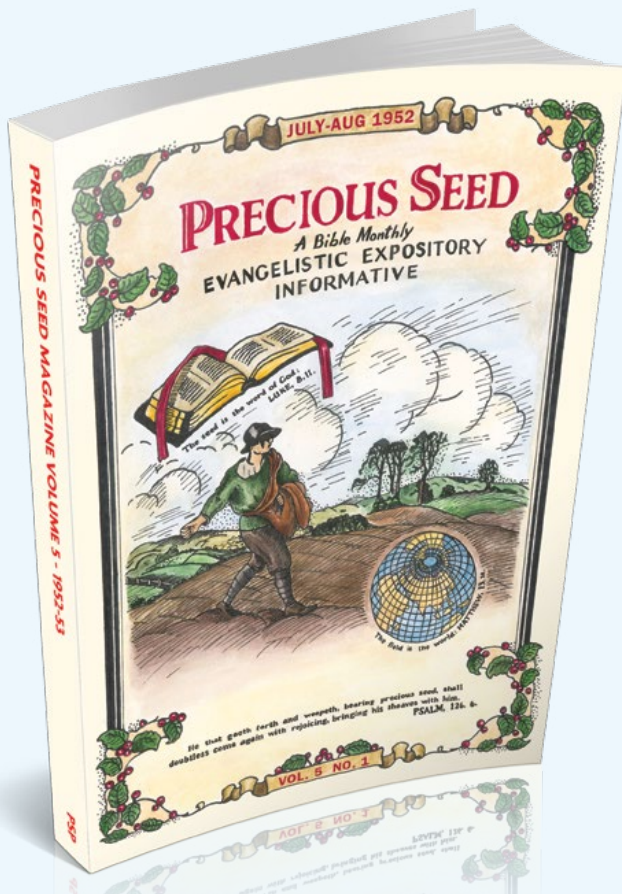
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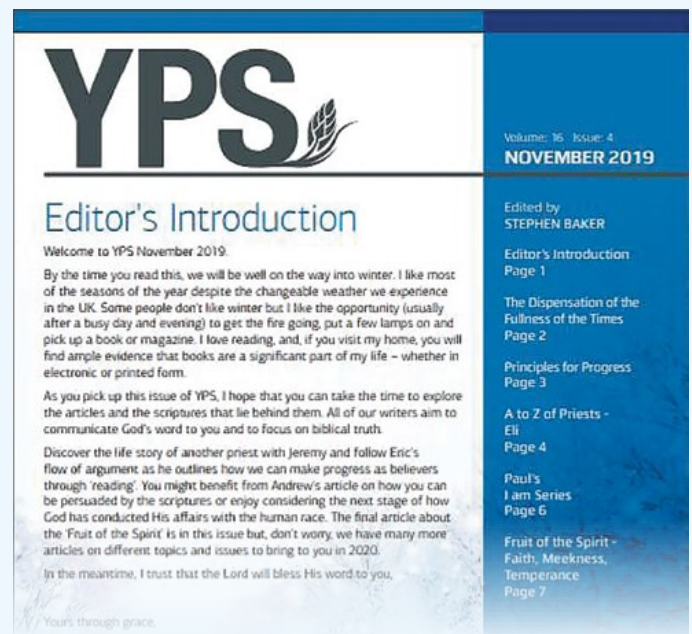
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‘The just shall live by faith’, Heb. 10. 38.

The first four ‘elders’ named in Hebrews chapter 11 have some simple lessons to teach us in relation to the nature of living by faith.

From Abel we can learn that faith enables the **worship of God**. Both he and Cain brought an offering. However, the superiority of Abel’s sacrifice is seen in that it met with the approval of God. How so? It is not so much that his sacrifice communicated righteousness to him, but rather that faith had enabled Abel to grasp something of the character and commands of God, and, in obedience, he worshipped appropriately. The expression of worship is obedience. This is underlined for us as the apostle states that the gospel is the message which is ‘made known to all nations for the obedience of faith’, Rom. 16. 26, and faith that brings salvation is faith that enables a life of obedience.

Enoch would teach us that faith

enables **walking with God**. It is faith that unlocks the enjoyment of the time spent in fellowship with the Lord. While eternal life prompts the desire for such fellowship, faith is essential in the practice of it. Such was Enoch’s practice, that God would not even allow death to separate him from the enjoyment of walking with Him. Note, too, that this harmonious walking with God was something he was known for. His walk among others was completely governed by what pleased God. How do we walk?

In Noah’s experience, we see that faith enables **working for God**. It was through faith that Noah embraced the word of God and acted. God could have simply taken him and his family through the flood, as He would do with His people when He delivered them through the Red Sea, but in Noah’s case faith is seen in up to 120 years of hard work which, eventually, provided safety for his family, but also stood

as a declaration of the nature and character of God to a rebellious world. Have we heard His call to ‘work’?

Finally, Abraham demonstrates that faith enables **waiting on God**. Abraham, left all on the basis of a call. He travelled from Ur trusting the promise of God, with his hope centred and secured in God. He travelled every day expecting the promise to be fulfilled. How do we travel in this world? Are we ‘waiting’ confidently and expectantly on the fulfilment of His promises? ‘If I go . . . I will come again’, John 14. 3.

Once again, we express our appreciation to all those who have written for this issue of the magazine and pray that the exercise of their faith will help us build up on our ‘most holy faith’, Jude 20.

SANDY JACK

Ministry Articles Editor

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YPS

The Messianic Psalms

PSALM 89

God's faithfulness during disaster

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

Sceptics love to impugn the scriptures and attack God's goodness. The eighteenth-century philosopher, David Hume, asserted that evil's existence demonstrates that God is either not omnipotent or else He is not good, reasoning that a good and all-powerful Creator would not create such a wicked world. The Bible answers this difficulty in various ways; for example, Job's and Joseph's respective stories. Yet, when circumstances appear to flatly contradict God's promises, even believers may doubt. Psalm 89 shows one such conundrum. How could the Davidic Covenant of 2 Samuel chapter 7 verses 5 to 16 be reconciled with a series of calamities that appeared to abrogate the divine promises to David and his descendants? Nevertheless, scripture is its own best interpreter, for it is the God-breathed revelation of His inviolable and perfect will. In the presence of tremendous obstacles, Psalm 89 assures us of the Lord's faithfulness.¹

God's immutable mercy and powerful faithfulness

The first thirty-seven verses of the psalm describe God's character and promises, but at verse 38 things take a hard turn with the phrase, 'But thou hast cast off and abhorred'. The psalmist questions why circumstances are completely against the covenant's accomplishment. A simple breakdown of the material looks like this:

1. The Lord's covenant with David asserted, vv. 1-4.
2. The Lord's power and righteousness praised, vv. 5-18.
3. The Lord's selection of David and promises to his dynastic line, vv. 19-37.
4. The Psalmist's complaint, vv. 38-51.
5. Closing reaffirmation of the Lord's right to praise, v. 52.

CLARKE outlines it as follows:

1. The Introductory Avowal (1-4). The Psalmist's confession.
2. The Incomparable Creator (5-18).

- The Divine Character Extolled.
3. The Inviolable Compact (19-37). The Davidic Covenant Elaborated.
4. The Incompatible Circumstances (38-45). The Distressful Contrast Emphasised. Protests of the Psalmist on Present Plight.
5. The Impassioned Appeal (46-52). The Psalmist's Cry'.²

Throughout the psalm three words stand out: 'forever', 'faithfulness' and 'mercy'/'lovingkindness'.^{3,4,5} Collectively, they present a picture of God's unwavering resolve to His covenant promises. BROWN points out the encouragement that flows from these words, saying, 'It is delightful to get out of the realm of *ifs* and *perhappses*, and *peradventures*, and just rest upon the *wills* and the *shalls* of a God who cannot lie'.⁶ The Lord promises to 'build' His mercy, v. 2, which is His covenant love.⁷ The same verse affirms that His faithfulness is established in heaven, thus assuring us of its eternal significance.

The attributes that guarantee God's fidelity

God's covenants are backed up by His incomparable holiness.⁸ That is, He is unique; no one in heaven, vv. 5-7, much less the skies and terrestrial creation, vv. 8-12, can compare with His purity, power, and love. The terms 'the heavens', 'the congregation of the saints', and 'the sons of the mighty' refer to the angelic beings, and possibly believing humans, who populate God's heavenly domain. They are infinitely far below 'the Lord God of hosts' in majesty and might, and their adoration prefigures the habitual activity of men and angels in the coming age. As BONAR writes, 'Unfallen angels, and the great congregation of redeemed men, shall yet unite in praise to the God whose mercies have been promised to David. Messiah's Second Coming will be the special season for that praise, when his gathered elect, "*the congregation of the saints*", survey the foundation of their blessedness, and review the way by which he led them on. Every time an assembly of saints now, in this time of ingathering, unites in so celebrating the Lord, we have a type of that coming day . . . And the strains that follow are a specimen to us of what may be the topics of the Song of the Lamb'.⁹ HAMILTON SMITH adds, 'The heavens declare His wonders; the saints His faithfulness'.¹⁰

The earth also displays God's creatorial power and sovereignty. He stills the proud foaming of the sea – often a metaphor for the Gentile nations in prophetic scriptures – and even quelled the vaunted pride of the ancient idolatrous superpower, Egypt, called 'Rahab' in verse 10.¹¹ Absolute power is justly dreaded in human government, but God's throne is just, as well as omnipotent, Ps. 89. 14. His power is wielded fairly, never capriciously!

The Lord's covenant, promising everlasting blessing to David and his progeny, will ultimately be fulfilled by 'the seed' of Abraham and David, who will reign on His illustrious ancestor's throne in Jerusalem during the millennial kingdom and beyond, Isa. 9. 6, 7; Matt. 1. 1. David and his sons may be disciplined for waywardness, but God would not

rescind the covenant, vv. 30-37, made with His 'firstborn', vv. 26-29.¹²

How are the mighty fallen?

At verse 38, the psalm alters its tone negatively. In light of God's faithfulness and true promises, why is the Israelite monarchy so humiliated? The context is unknown, but some have suggested Rehoboam's rupture with the ten northern tribes; others suggest Jeconiah and the Babylonian captivity. Whatever the historical disaster, it rattled the author's confidence, and caused him to implore the Lord to remember His promises by restoring His people. 'Thou . . . thou . . . thou' is his repeated refrain, as he questions why the Almighty has disciplined His chosen people – especially the Davidic royal house, vv. 38-45. Rather than enjoying intimacy, the king seems to be repudiated by God, v. 38; 'the anointed' is thrown down and his crown profaned, v. 39. Instead of divine protection, his enemies triumph over and plunder him, vv. 40-43, and he is shamed, v. 45. The author plaintively exclaims the sufferers' question throughout all ages:



'How long'? v. 46, and calls on God to 'remember' the covenant, vv. 47-50.

The psalm abruptly ends with a benediction, v. 52. Some writers believe that it is a doxology closing the third section of the Psalms. This may be so, but it is still a fitting way to close this psalm's plea for the Lord to act on His people's behalf. Having cited His holy attributes in the psalm's first half, the psalmist logically expects the immutable God to meet His covenant obligations. MACLAREN exults in such loyalty, 'That unchangeableness is a rock-foundation, on which sinful men may build their certitude. It is much to know that they cannot sin away God's mercy nor exhaust His gentle long-suffering. It is even more to know that His holiness guarantees that they cannot sin away His promises, nor by any breach of His commandments provoke Him to break His covenant'.¹³ Even when His dealings seem inscrutably unfair or impossible of fulfilment, one may trust the faithful Lord to accomplish His will and righteously defend His people. BOICE elucidates it in this way, 'If God is behind what happens, then although we may not understand what God is doing we can know that there is a purpose somewhere and that a solution to the problem will be found, if not in this life, then in the next. Some will consider this to be hiding one's head in the sand, failing to face up to reality. But the choice is not between an unfounded optimism and a bold facing of reality. It is between faith and despair. The psalmist is no Pollyanna. He faces reality, but he faces it with God'.¹⁴

We'll praise Him for all that is past and trust Him for all that's to come

Why should church-age saints care about God's Old Testament dealings with Israel? Because His credibility is at stake. If He does not fulfil the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants, then we do not know if He will fulfil His word. This same reasoning underlies Romans chapters 9 to 11. Happily, as that section demonstrates, God always does what He promises. Christ promised to build His church, and He will certainly do it, Matt. 16. 18. In the end, the Lord will fulfil His covenants and eternally

bless both Israel and the church, Rev. 21, 22. In light of this bright future, believers join the psalmist in blessing the Almighty for His steadfast love and covenant loyalty to His people in every dispensation.

Endnotes

- 1 'Psalm 89 has one remarkable character . . . reliance on the faithfulness of God according to His original word of promise, when externally all is contrary to it, but the expectation of fulfilment founded on mercy, in fact on Christ, in whom all promised mercies concentrate themselves', J. N. DARBY, *Practical Reflections on the Psalms*.
- 2 ARTHUR G. CLARKE, *Analytical Studies in the Psalms*, John Ritchie, pg. 224.
- 3 Verses 1, 2, 4, 28, 29, 36, 37, 46.
- 4 Verses 1, 2, 5, 8, 24, 33, 37.
- 5 Verses 1, 2, 14, 24, 28, 33, 49.
- 6 A. G. BROWN, *This God Our God*, Banner of Truth, pg. 46. Later he adds, 'Our God is a God of might, and a God of right, and a God of mercy, and a God of truth. On these four attributes, as on four massive blocks of granite, does the soul venture safely to build her eternal hopes'.
- 7 The concept is unpacked here: 'the word *established* . . . is literally "built", which was another of the key words in 2 Samuel 7, with its play on the theme of the house David would have built for God, and the living house God would build instead for David (2 Sam. 7. 5, 7, 13, 27)'. DEREK KIDNER, *Psalms 73-150: An Introduction and Commentary*, IVP, pg. 352.
- 8 'His purity and His righteousness, His faithfulness and His truth, His mercy and His lovingkindness, nay even His jealousy and His wrath, His zeal and His indignation; these are the different rays which combine to make up the perfect light of holiness . . . The character of God as the Holy One in His relation to Israel is expressed by the title *the Holy One of Israel*'. A.F. KIRKPATRICK, *The Doctrine of the Prophets*, Macmillan & Co., pg. 175.
- 9 ANDREW BONAR, *Christ and His Church in the Book of Psalms*, Robert Carter & Brothers, pg. 268.
- 10 HAMILTON SMITH, *Psalms*, Believers Bookshelf, pg. 138.
- 11 'Rahab, the blusterer, is the nickname for Egypt (cf. Isa. 51. 9; see on Ps. 87. 4). This victory is as central to the Old Testament as Calvary to the New'. KIDNER, pg. 353.
- 12 Biblically, this term expresses rank and familial closeness resulting in inheritance; here it refers to 'the Anointed', Ps. 89. 20, i.e., David and his seed – especially the Messiah. Elsewhere it is sometimes used of Israel as a whole, Exod. 4. 22.
- 13 ALEXANDER MACLAREN, *The Expositor's Bible: Psalms to Isaiah*, Vol. 3, Scranton Co., pg. 231.
- 14 J. M. BOICE, *Psalms 42-106: An Expository Commentary*, Baker Books, pg. 733.

An Assembly of the Lord's people will be a people among whom ... PRAYER ARISES TO GOD

By **RICHARD COLLINGS** Caerphilly, Wales

Part 7

As we examine the scriptures, we discover that the churches of the first century came together for at least six different kinds of meetings. Due to the prevailing social conditions, they may not have been able to conduct services on separate days and therefore it is possible that many of these meetings followed on from each other at one session. What we do know is that those early believers met for prayer, and in Acts there are several references to the prayer life of the church at Jerusalem.

Acts chapter 2 verse 42

'They continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers'. That this is a reference to collective and not individual private prayer is evident. The breaking of bread is not a personal thing and, by definition, 'fellowship' is not a personal matter, so the prayers in this case are not personal but collective.

The word 'steadfastly' conveys the thought of continuing in or adhering to prayer; it is the opposite of being spasmodic or indifferent. Thus, a feature of the church at Jerusalem was their commitment to collective praying. Perhaps we should challenge ourselves as to the degree of our commitment to the prayer meeting. Sadly, in many places the prayer meeting is the most poorly attended of all the church services. We heartily sing, 'What a privilege to carry, everything to God in prayer', but may find it irksome to attend the prayer meeting. Truly it is an inestimable privilege to move boldly in God's presence and there to present our supplications, prayers, intercessions and giving of thanks.

Acts chapter 4 verse 31

'When they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled

together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost'. We must always remember that the book of Acts is a transitional book and therefore there are certain aspects of the narrative that cannot be replicated today. In addition, this degree of power and its impact on the place where they met did not happen every time they prayed. However, the passage of time over the last two millennia has not resulted in God's power being diminished. Neither is God any less willing to respond to the prayers of His people today.

This was a prayer meeting that was focused and dynamic. I am sure we would all desire to be part of a prayer meeting that was so potent, fresh and effective, but that is only possible to the degree that the prayer life of the individual members is characterized by these qualities. If my personal prayer time is lethargic and ineffective, then it should not surprise me if the same is true of the assembly prayer meeting.

Acts chapter 12 verse 5

'Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him'. Whilst this could infer that the individuals in the church were praying for Peter, it does not

exclude the probability that they met together. A little later in the chapter it states, 'he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying', v. 12. That which happened in chapter 2 verse 42 was still happening; the church was continuing in prayer. On this occasion, they met to pray about something specific. They would not have met to pray for Peter like this every time they held a prayer meeting, but here was a particular need.

How many assemblies adopt this same principle? In addition to our scheduled prayer meetings, do we ever hold special times of prayer for something specific? It might be a facet of the Lord's work, maybe a certain individual has a particular need and meetings are convened to pray for them. When last did we have a series of meetings just to pray about the neighbourhood around the hall where we meet? I know of an assembly that held forty-two consecutive nights of prayer for one of the elders who was seriously ill. At the end of those six weeks the brother died. Maybe a lesson that comes from this incident is that we should not think that the amount of time we spend in prayer, nor the number of people praying, brings a guarantee that we will get what we asked for.

There are those who teach that the church at Jerusalem was weak in faith. They prayed for Peter, but when he arrived at the house no one believed Rhoda when she told them that Peter was outside. In fact, they accused her of being mad. It is assumed that the church had been praying for Peter's release from prison and when it happened they did not have the faith to believe it. This assumption may not be correct, for the passage does not indicate they had been praying for Peter's release, it simply says, 'prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him'. Perhaps they were not praying that he would be set free from prison but that he would not fail in his testimony in the way he had done on the night of the Lord's betrayal.

What can we pray for?

There is a possibility that in our

personal praying and in the assembly prayer meetings we can become very parochial and limit our prayers to what is immediate to us. In examining various sections of the New Testament, we learn that there should be a broad scope to the things which we pray about. In 1 Timothy chapter 2, the apostle writes, 'I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty'. In his letter to the church at Thessalonica, Paul exhorts, 'brethren pray for us', 1 Thess. 5. 25, and James in his Epistle writes, 'pray one for another', Jas. 5. 16. To summarize the verses in these various Epistles, we may say that we should pray for the sovereigns (kings), the statesmen (those in authority), sinners (all men), saints (one another) and the servants (pray for us).

This list is not exhaustive and also within each of these groupings there will be a diversity of things to pray about. For example, if there were a disaster or major incident somewhere we would pray for it and in so doing we would be praying for the unbelievers as well as the Lord's people. Other matters we could incorporate in prayer are **school governors**; they help shape what goes on in schools, including school assembly and other opportunities for the gospel to be preached to children. How often do we pray for **social workers**? They

are involved in formulating the social policies of our country. Do we pray for **organizations** that distribute relief to areas devastated by famine, drought or other disasters? The list is vast so we should never be at a loss as to what we can pray about in our prayer meetings.

Although we may not get involved in politics, we ought to be aware of what is happening, for separation does not mean we bury our heads in the sand. We cannot pray intelligently for those in authority unless we have some awareness as to what is going on. Equally, how can we pray for the unbelievers if we do not get to know them and the issues they have? We need to retain our separation without turning that into isolation. What a witness we can be within our locality if, as a fellowship, we are known for 'good works' then when we tell people we are praying for them it will mean a lot more to them.

Who should pray at the prayer meeting?

The direct answer is everyone, brethren and sisters. Even before there was an assembly at Philippi, the women met at the riverside to pray. In Acts chapter 1, we read of the apostles that they 'all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brethren', v. 14.

However, there is a distinction to be made. In the church prayer meeting, only the brethren are to pray publicly.

In 1 Timothy chapter 2, Paul refers to men in verses 1, 4 and 5. In those three instances the word 'men' means everyone, males and females; it equates to our word 'mankind'. In verses 8 and 12, the word 'man', or the plural form 'men', is a different word to that in verses 1, 4 and 5; it refers to males as distinct from females. The teaching of the New Testament is unequivocal; only the males are to pray publicly.

Some practical issues

There is much more that could be written on this subject, but, to conclude, it may be beneficial to highlight some practical matters. It should not be expected that **every** brother will pray for all the things listed above in one meeting, nor is it expected that **one** brother will pray for all these issues. When we meet for collective prayer, we will pray about a few matters, but, collectively, we will cover many matters.

It is a good practice for brethren to come to the prayer meeting prepared, knowing before they start praying publicly what they are going to pray about. This will help ensure our prayers are focused and not protracted. Long meandering prayers stifle and spoil a prayer meeting and make it burdensome for sisters. The longest prayer in the Bible was Solomon's at the dedication of the temple; it can be read in less than six minutes. Brethren also need to remember that sisters also need time to pray inaudibly.

The assembly prayer meeting should not be utilized for dropping hints or giving exhortation. That may appear to be a bizarre statement to make, but many readers will know that there have been occasions when brethren have expressed in prayer matters they actually aim at the ears of the saints more than the ear of God.

Truly, it is a privilege to 'carry everything to God in prayer'. He is able to do 'exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think' and we have 'boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus'. The church at Jerusalem was a praying church; let us also be similarly engaged.



THE EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

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

Part 9

Warnings and answers, 2. 4-19 (continued)

The idol worshipper vv. 18, 19 – defrauding by ‘worshipping of angels’ – mysticism

The problem addressed in this warning is the possibility of being beguiled [only found here in the New Testament] of reward. It means to be misled, submitting to wrong judgement, being disqualified or defrauded of due reward.

The features of the idol worshipper, v. 18

The apostle lists four features that mark the disturber. The first is a feigned humility. The word ‘voluntary’ means delighting in – indicating an expression of supreme pride – calculated to seduce the Colossians. The second feature is a worshipping of angels. Good angels repudiate worship, Rev. 22. 9. These are false teachers worshipping elemental and cosmic forces under the sway of ‘the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience’, Eph. 2. 2. The third feature is an intrusion, a penetrating, into the unseen world – a claim to have special visions and initiation into mysteries – but spurious, cp. 2 Cor. 12. 3, 4. Finally, they have a fleshly mind being puffed up with pride; unimaginable conceit dominated by the mind of the flesh.

The unqualified importance of the Head, v. 19¹

The false teacher has no relationship with Him, ‘not holding [fast] the Head’; they were heretics.² They did not appreciate the infinite resources in, and the glory of Christ, who is the source of all nourishment for the body, cp. 1. 18. This is administered through His people, referred to here as ‘the joints and bands [ligaments]’, cp. Eph. 4. 11. This ministry is the source of the mystical unity of the body; ‘knit together’, Christ as the

Head in heaven and His members as the church on earth, cp. 1 Cor. 12. 12-14. This unity is the source of spiritual growth – nourishment and unity resulting in spiritual growth – the kind that God intends – ‘the growth of God’! Don’t submit to the idol worshipper; hold fast to the Head!

The practical significance of our baptism, 2. 20 – 3. 4

The apostle has indicated to the Colossians the doctrinal significance of baptism in chapter 2 verses 11 and 12, viz. death in verse 11, burial and resurrection in verse 12. He is now going to show the practical implications flowing from it involving a definite link with the death and resurrection of Christ. In verse 20, he indicates that they ‘died with Christ’ JND, and in chapter 3 verse 1, that they were ‘raised with the Christ’ JND. In both cases, the aorist tense is used, referring to the fact that when Christ died they died, and when Christ was raised, they were raised. Both of these bring important practical outcomes. The overall section is introduced with ‘wherefore’ in chapter 2 verse 20, and each of the sub-paragraphs with the telling word ‘if’ [since]: since you died with Christ, 2. 20-23 and since you were raised with Christ, 3. 1-4. The past facts have abiding consequences! Note that in the section as a whole, the essential relationship ‘with Christ’ is emphasized by the repetition of this phrase or its equivalent four times.³

Interestingly, burial is not mentioned in this section. It was seen to be the evidence of death in chapter 2 verse 12. The apostle is now showing the features of the new life (we don’t stay buried practically!) that have to be seen as a result of our abiding link ‘with Christ’. The fact of this link is assumed and used as the lever for the exhortations.

The significance of death with Christ, 2. 20-23 – ‘ye died with Christ’ JND

In this section, the practical implications of the fact that we have died with Christ is explored. The former bondage to the world’s forces has been terminated; these forces cannot control someone who is dead!

The fact of our death with Christ is simply assumed by the apostle, ‘ye have died with Christ’. The same truth is emphasized in Romans chapter 6 verse 8 (indeed in verses 1 to 14) and in Galatians chapter 2 verse 20. The evidence of this fact was seen in their baptism, since only dead people are buried, 2. 12!

The effect of it is anticipated in the balance of verse 20. The believer should be separated ‘from the rudiments [“elements” JND, “elemental spirits” ESV, “forces” FFB4] of the world’ – all that the world has to offer, its prosperity, power, prestige and position. In many cases, these features have become a passion in our 24/7 society. The priority given to them is sapping the spiritual life of many, and affecting assembly life adversely. Families of believers are suffering, in many cases with both parents pursuing ‘professional’ careers and children being cared for elsewhere. The wise words of DAVIDSON, while commenting on Exodus chapter 2 verse 9, should be heeded, ‘Don’t let grandmothers or someone else rear the child. [The] formative years are short and precious. A mother’s keeping at home is more important than earning money’.⁵ We have witnessed the sad consequences and heartbreaks that have ensued by failure to comply with this wise counsel.

The examples of Noah, Joseph, and Daniel who lived godly lives in a godless society should be emulated. The grace of God teaches us, ‘that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world’, Titus 2. 12, separated from its sin and ‘elemental spirits’.⁶ It is many years ago that TATFORD averred, ‘that it is virtually impossible to distinguish believer

from unbeliever'.⁷ If it was true in 1969 how much more so now!

The transience of the world's 'regulations' is demonstrated in verses 20 to 22

They 'perish with the using'. It is a 'passing world'. Submitting to its value system is the antithesis of spirituality. Indeed, it is incongruous behaviour for the believer, 'as though living in the world'. The contrast with the imperative in Romans chapter 12 verses 1 and 2 is marked, 'be not conformed'! But the believer is not to emphasize mere, negative ascetic behaviour, 'touch not; taste not; handle not' – 'don't, don't, don't' – but to emphasize the positive, 'holding the head', v. 19, and growing with Christ, 2 Pet. 3. 18. While the negative exhortations quoted have particular applicability to the Jewish background, the principle is clear for the believer today; the present world is not the ultimate reality! It is '[perishing] with the using'. The believer should be emphasizing the eternal, 2 Cor. 4. 18, and asking the question 'which world am I living for'?

The true nature of the world's system is exposed in verses 22 and 23

In both their source and their features. Their **source** is affirmed

as 'after the commandments and doctrines of men'. They are not divinely ordained like baptism and the Lord's Supper, otherwise obedience would be obligatory – see Mark 7. 6, 7. Their **features** are outlined in verse 23. They have 'an appearance of wisdom' JND, bringing a false accolade and resulting in a false worship, *viz.* 'will worship' (used only once in the New Testament), 'promoting self-made religion' ESV; BRUCE translates it as 'faked religion'.⁸ It is adding to divine requirements! In addition, they lead to the promotion of self in a false humility, 'insufferable spiritual pride'.^{9,10} Indeed, the false worship is a demonstration of utter hypocrisy, 'neglecting [once in New Testament] of the body', unsparing treatment. However, none of the above factors have the ability to check the indulgence of the flesh; in fact, they support and abet it; they are not a realistic ('honour' = 'of any value') remedy against it; they result in rebellion against God!

The significance of being raised with Christ, 3. 1-4 – 'ye have been raised with Christ' JND

The 'if' is again not an 'if' of doubt but the basis of an argument; it means 'since'. The argument is fairly straightforward, 'since . . . seek . . .

set . . . for . . . when . . . then'. The focus of attention is made clear by repetition: 'things . . . above', v. 1, and 'things above', v. 2; and 'with Christ', v. 1, 'with Christ in God', v. 3, and 'with Him in glory', v. 4. It is altogether fitting that the paragraph ends in glory! Surely, seeking things above, setting affections on things above, being risen with Christ and hid with Christ can only lead to one conclusion – appearing with Him in glory! Our 'life is hid . . . our life shall appear'!

The paragraph is pivotal – a fitting conclusion to the doctrinal section of the Epistle and, at the same time, a fitting lever for the exhortations in verse 5 onwards. The supremacy of Christ in every sphere has been unequivocally demonstrated, in relation to God, creation, the universe, the church, the principalities and powers, the Gnostics, the Judaizers, the legalists – He is supreme, preeminent! Surely, it is fitting that He will appear in glory! But what a wonder – He will not appear alone – those who died with Him and who were raised with Him will share together 'with Him' in the day of His manifested glory.

The paragraph is also a fitting introduction, along with chapter 2 verses 20 to 23, to the practical ministry to be given in the balance of the Epistle – ye shall 'appear with Him **in glory**'. Mortify therefore your members which are **upon the earth**'. Anything other would surely be inappropriate and incongruous.



Endnotes

- 1 Cp. Eph. 4. 15, 16.
- 2 Contrast 2 Thess. 2. 15; Rev. 2. 13; 3. 11.
- 3 2. 20; 3. 1, 3, 4.
- 4 F. F. BRUCE, *The epistle to the Colossians*, William B. Erdmans, 1984.
- 5 J. A. DAVIDSON, *Family life*, An Assembly Testimony Publication, 2015.
- 6 Cp. Rom. 7. 5, 6; 8. 4; Gal. 2. 19.
- 7 F. A. TATFORD, *The Patmos letters*, Prophetic Witness Publishing House, 1969.
- 8 F. F. BRUCE, *op. cit.*
- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 Cp. Prov. 16. 18; 29. 23, and contrast Phil. 2. 5-11.

THE SACRIFICE OF THE SON

Part 2

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

Certain things may be established forensically, while not touching one's heart. If newly-weds spoke exclusively about their marriage's legality, including the licence, the officiant's credentials, or the couple's standing before the law, one might wonder if they could not do with a little more romance in their lives! Scripturally, divine salvation rests on the unassailably legal basis of Christ's perfect sacrifice. Nonetheless, His saving work is not merely judicial; it also demonstrates the Almighty's incomparable loving and holy character. The Father's gracious gift of His Son, and the Son's willing obedience in laying down His life, unveil the Godhead's heart as nothing else can. Though he was intellectually brilliant and impeccably erudite, Paul never got over the fact that Christ is 'the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me', Gal. 2. 20. A classic hymn rightly called His redemptive work, 'the gift of gifts, all other gifts in one'.¹ One cannot fathom what it meant for the Father, the Son, and the Spirit to go together to Calvary, nevertheless, plumbing the depths of God's love for mankind is valuable.

Unutterable sorrow

Losing a child is a horrific experience. The widow of Nain was a notably sad case – at least until the Lord Jesus broke up the funeral procession, Luke 7. 11-16. When a son dies under God's wrath, the tragedy is compounded. Though his demise was fitting, Absalom's death wrenched this piteous lament from David's lips, 'And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son', 2 Sam. 18. 33.

That is why the Lord's request for Abraham to offer his son, Isaac, on Mount Moriah was so momentous.² Must he kill the promised child for whom he waited for so long? One teacher elucidates the patriarch's difficulty, 'How is it that the man who is now called "the father of many nations" is asked to offer

up the only heir he had as a burnt offering? Who would then carry on the promised seed? Also, how about the covenant that God made with him regarding the land? How will all the nations of the earth be blessed without the promised seed? Abraham never put these questions to the Lord. He obeyed, never seemingly for a moment doubting the purposes of God'.³ The great faith chapter reveals that he concluded that the Almighty would raise Isaac from the dead, Heb. 11. 19.

The Son of His love

The divine instructions acknowledged Abraham's affection for his beloved son, 'Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest', Gen. 22. 2. 'Only' can have the sense of 'unique' in Hebrew⁴ and the Greek Old Testament translation renders the entire phrase, 'your beloved son whom you love'.⁵ The terminology is similar to John chapter 3 verse 16 when it refers to Christ as 'the only

begotten Son'.⁶ A Jewish translator also points out that in Genesis chapter 22 verse 2 in Hebrew, Isaac 'is left until the end of the phrase, to heighten tension'.⁷ Another commentator explains, '[T]he order and accumulation of the terms ... [are] calculated to excite the parental affection of the patriarch to the highest pitch, and to render compliance with the Divine demand a trial of the utmost severity'.⁸ The young man, the apple of his father's eye and centre of all his hopes, was now demanded by the living God. Isaac was Abraham's irreplaceable son, yet the patriarch was now called to slay his darling. The resemblance to God's affection for His own Son is evident. The Father publicly declared His esteem for Christ, saying, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I have found my delight', Matt. 3. 17 JND.

Yet for us He did not spare Thee

2 Peter chapter 2 verses 5 and 6 declare that God spared neither the fallen angels nor the antediluvian world of Noah's day. It is extraordinary, therefore, to think that He did not spare His own Son the cross, Rom. 8. 32. Viewing this, HORLOCK exclaims, 'We have no problem in understanding why God spared not the angels who sinned, but we do well to ask why He spared not His own Son who never sinned'.⁹ Of course, Romans cites this gift as the standard of lavish divine generosity, affirming that no good thing could be withheld from the saints in view of God's donation of His precious Son.

DARBY further notes God's expansive munificence, saying, 'God has bestowed unnumbered blessings on man; but there was one thing which He had in heaven greater than all His other gifts: that one gift He gave, and having given this, shall He, or can He, refuse us anything else that is for our good? Christ is ours, and then it follows, all is ours; "for ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's". God, therefore, gives us all things with Christ; not as man gives, for God gives freely – "He freely giveth us all things"'.¹⁰

They went together

One must also remember, that while the Father gave the Son, other

scriptures assert that the Son came in willing obedience. The recurring phrase, ‘they went both of them together’, demonstrates the unity of purpose between Abraham and Isaac, which, in turn, pictures God the Father and the Son in their joint work of salvation, Gen. 22. 6, 8.¹¹ The son carried the wood and, by implication, permitted himself to be bound to the altar, vv. 6, 9.¹²

While it is true that, as the universe’s righteous judge, God poured out wrath on Christ for human sin, nonetheless, in another sense, as the Son He was never more precious to God the Father than when He was accomplishing the perfect will of the triune godhead.¹³ All enjoyment of divine protection was removed from Him as indicated by His cry of dereliction, ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’ Matt. 27. 46. But the fact remains that the Trinity was fully at work in His sacrificial work, 2 Cor. 5. 19. Though the heavens were silent at the crucifixion, the Father registered His

love and acceptance of His Son by the resurrection, Acts 2. 31-36; Rom. 6. 4.

Our motivation for sacrifice

The angel of the Lord spared Abraham the agony of killing his son, but God gave Himself no reprieve in providing ‘the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world’, John 1. 29; Gen. 22. 14. He gave the most costly and greatest gift ever given, as GRANT observes, ‘God has given His Son, and His heart has been declared to us once for all. If He try us too, as He tried Abraham, how blessed to think that in this carefully measured cup of his, God was saying, as it were, “I know – I know it all: it is My Son, My Isaac, My only one, I am giving for men”. The tree is cast into these Mara-waters thus that sweeten all their bitterness’.¹⁴ In light of this unparalleled love, can anything be too great for Him to ask of us? As Romans chapter 12 verse 1 exhorts, ‘I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your

reasonable service’. Believers were purchased at this great cost, so that they might completely give themselves to God for His glorious service. Does He possess our hearts? His offering ought to impel us to great sacrifices for His sake. In this manner, the missionary WILLIAM CAREY passionately urged his fellow-saints, ‘Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God’.

Endnotes

- 1 HORATIUS BONAR, ‘Blessed be God our God’.
- 2 ‘Here, as nowhere else, are we shown the *Father’s heart* . . . Oh! how the Spirit of God lingers on the offering and the offeror, as if there must be a thorough similitude in the type of the antitype – “*thy son – thine only son whom thou lovest!*”’. A. W. PINK, *Gleanings in Genesis*, Bellingham, 2005, pg. 222. [Italics original].
- 3 BOUSHRA MIKHAEL, ‘Altars in the Life of Abraham, part 2’, in *Precious Seed*, 59. 2; another adds, ‘The life of faith is ever a life of testing, and very often the fire that tries increases in heat as life advances. The worst conflicts are not always at the beginning of the war’, ALEXANDER MACLAREN, *Expositions of Holy Scripture: Genesis*, Bellingham, 2009, pg. 161.
- 4 DAVID J. A. CLINES (ed.), *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, Vol. 1, Sheffield Academic Press, 1993–2011, pg. 200.
- 5 RICK BRANNAN, KEN M. PENNER, ISRAEL LOKEN, MICHAEL AUBREY, and ISAIAH HOOGENDYK, (eds.) *The Lexham English Septuagint*, Lexham Press, 2012.
- 6 “‘His own Son, His only Son’ . . . there is an obvious reference to Gen. 22. 2’. B. F. WESTCOTT, *The Gospel According to St. John*, J. Murray, pg. 55.
- 7 EVERETT FOX, *The Five Books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy; a New Translation with Introductions, Commentary, and Notes*, Word Publishing, 1995.
- 8 THOMAS WHITELAW, *Genesis, The Pulpit Commentary*, Funk & Wagnalls, pg. 283. [Brackets mine].
- 9 MALCOLM HORLOCK, ‘His Own Son’, in *Precious Seed*, 53. 4.
- 10 JOHN NELSON DARBY, ‘God for us’, in *Notes of Sermons*, pg. 91.
- 11 Like creation, resurrection, and other works of the triune Godhead, all three members of the Trinity performed various functions related to the sacrifice at Calvary; Christ offered Himself by ‘the eternal Spirit’, Heb. 9. 14.
- 12 To my knowledge, the only other reference in the Old Testament to a bound sacrifice is messianic, Ps. 118. 27.
- 13 Isa. 53. 6; 2 Cor. 5. 21; John 5. 20; 14. 31; Ps. 22. 21.
- 14 F. W. GRANT, *Genesis: In Light of the New Testament*, Galaxie Software, pg. 138.



THE GOSPEL OF MARK

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Part 10

Although we have moved into chapter 3 of the Gospel, this chapter continues the theme of the Galilean ministry of the Lord. There is continuing opposition and conflict from the religious authorities of the day and further scenes in areas where the Lord has worked before. He is in the synagogue. He is by the seaside. He is in the house.

Before we consider the verses in any detail, we might divide the chapter into five sections:

- The synagogue, vv. 1-6
- The seaside, vv. 7-12
- The servants, vv. 13-19
- The scribes, vv. 20-30
- The standard, vv. 31-35

First, then, we will consider the synagogue scene.

The synagogue, vv. 1-6

We have seen other synagogue scenes in chapter 1 verses 21 and 39, where the Lord was present to heal those that were sick and to deliver those possessed with demons. Here, as before, there stands a marked contrast between the activities of the Lord in bringing blessing and the activities of the religious leaders as they 'took counsel . . . against him, how they might destroy him', v. 6.

The Lord's compassion, v. 1

Mark's detail about the man with the withered hand is limited. He tells us only that the man was in the synagogue and that his hand was withered. Luke adds the detail that it was the man's right hand. Yet, in Matthew's Gospel, the exchange between the Lord and the Pharisees is revealed.

They asked the Lord whether it was lawful to heal on the sabbath day. It was that question that brought

from the Lord the reminder of the provision that was made in the law. The law allowed a man or woman to act in a compassionate manner in the case of an animal that had fallen into a pit; to leave the animal might well be fatal. To bring it out of the pit was allowed in order to preserve life, or the quality of life. The Lord asked the question, 'How much then is a man better than a sheep?' Matt. 12. 12. It is clear that the Lord looked at the man and saw his need; the Pharisees looked at the man and saw an opportunity to trap the Lord. The Lord sought to bring healing to the man in his need. The Pharisees sought grounds whereby they might accuse the Lord.

Their condemnation, v. 2

As we have seen, their motivation in watching the Lord was 'that they might accuse him', v. 2. WUEST comments, 'The verb is in the imperfect tense, speaking of continuous action. They kept on watching Him, bent on finding our Lord at fault with reference to the Sabbath'.¹ The word 'accuse' carries with it a suggested plan to bring the Saviour before a tribunal and to accuse Him publicly.

There was no compassion in their heart for the man's need. There was no appreciation of the opportunity that was afforded to this man whilst the Saviour was present to heal. Their religious ritualism had resulted in the 'hardness of their hearts', v. 5.

They watched. Maintaining aloofness from the proceedings in order to maintain their status and independence, they observed closely the actions of the Saviour in respect to the man. It says something of their knowledge of the Saviour's character. They expected Him to heal, but that brought in them no appreciation of the compassion of the Saviour or any respect for His obvious power and ability.

The Lord's command, v. 3

The Lord did not shrink back from doing that which was good because of the obvious antagonism of the Pharisees. He commanded the man to 'stand forth', in the midst of the assembled company.

There are two possible reasons for this command. In stepping into the midst of the company, the man was clearly acknowledging his need. He could have remained hidden from the view of most, but in obeying the command of the Saviour he was accepting the need of his heart and showing a willingness to be healed. There was in the command of the Saviour also a desire to issue a challenge to those that sought grounds for an accusation against Him. Unlike the Pharisees, whose motives and ideas were hidden to the people, the Lord's ministry was not hidden. It was manifest to all.

The Lord's challenge, v. 4

The challenge is issued to those that would seek grounds to accuse. 'Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill?' The Lord shows that to fail to do good is to do evil. To fail to heal this man would be an act of evil. But worse than that, the Lord was challenging the heart of the Pharisees. He planned to heal on the sabbath. They were planning to destroy Him on that sabbath. Which would they judge to be evil?

'They held their peace'. WUEST comments, 'The verb is imperfect. They kept on being quiet. There was a painful, embarrassing silence'.² They had no answer!

The confrontation, v. 5

They had looked, spying closely upon Him, to find something by which they

could accuse Him, v. 2. Here, He looks round about on them. His penetrating gaze finds only the hardness of their hearts, a hardness that is common to them all.

The Lord's response is twofold. He is angry, and this is the only explicit mention of His anger in the New Testament. It is the response of the Saviour to their sin and lack of repentance for that sin. He is also grieved but, whereas the anger was but momentary, the grief was a more prolonged distress. GRASSMICK comments, 'It was non-malicious indignation coupled with deep sorrow, grief, at their obstinate insensitivity'.³ All of these characteristics of the Saviour reveal something of His feelings – compassion for the man, anger and grief at the impenitent Pharisees.

A second command is issued by the Saviour, 'stretch forth thine hand'. How cleverly the act of healing is accomplished. To have touched the man would have been to invite accusation of healing on the sabbath. There was no visible means used that anyone could construe as work on the sabbath. In stretching out his hand, the man expressed his obedience and his faith in the ability of the Saviour to heal. The reward of faith was that 'his hand was restored'.

The counsel of the Pharisees, v. 6

It is Luke that tells us the state of their mind at the action of the Saviour, 'they were filled with madness', Luke 6. 11. This fury, or loss of reason, was the extreme reaction of these religious leaders when confronted with the Saviour's healing of the man.

Mark uses that word characteristic of his Gospel, when he tells us that they 'straightway took counsel with the Herodians against him'. Their sabbath scruples are cast aside as, in their fury, they seek 'how they might destroy him'. The warring factions are suddenly united in a common desire and bid to rid themselves of the Saviour. HIEBERT comments, 'They regarded as a terrible crime Jesus' healing on the Sabbath, but

they had no qualms about plotting murder on the Sabbath'.⁴

This brings us to the second scene in the chapter.

The seaside, vv. 7-12

In chapter 1 verse 16, chapter 2 verse 13, and here, we see the Lord by the sea of Galilee. We will see further references to the Lord's movements by the seaside as we progress through this Gospel.

The Lord's fellowship, v. 7

Withdrawing from further confrontation with the Pharisees, the Lord is found at the seaside 'with his disciples'. The phrase suggests that His disciples felt and shared the Lord's sense of alienation from and rejection by the religious leaders of the day. HIEBERT comments, 'With His disciples, placed emphatically before the singular verb in the original, suggests that they intimately shared His alienation from the Jewish leaders'.⁵

It will be noted, later in this chapter, v. 14, that the Lord, in calling the twelve, had the desire that, first, they should be with Him.

The Lord's following, vv. 7-9

Mark tells us 'a great multitude' gathered and followed the Lord. They came from all parts of the land and 'beyond Jordan; and . . . Tyre and Sidon', v. 8. How long the multitude took to gather Mark does not tell us but, considering the distances some must have travelled, it would have taken time.

What brought the crowd together? Mark tells us, 'they had heard what great things he did', v. 8. The sentence suggests that the stories were continually circulating and growing. Mark has told us already of how the fame of the Saviour spread, 'throughout all the region round about Galilee', 1. 28. It would appear from these verses, vv. 7-9, that His fame had spread much wider than that.

The size of the crowd and their desire to reach the Saviour caused a problem. The safety of the Lord could never be in question, but the

safety of the disciples could. They are the ones instructed to make ready a small ship and bring it along the seashore parallel with the Lord's movements.

The Lord's forbearance, v. 10

What forbearance was shown by the Saviour! The crowds pressed and pushed. Their desire was to touch Him and be healed. The small ship could have been used to enable the escape of the Lord, but He chose not to use it. What compassion and care He displayed to those around Him.

The idea that but a touch of the Saviour would bring healing had grown, for, 5. 28, the woman with the issue of blood said, 'If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole'. The power of a touch of the Saviour was evident here, for all those with plagues came to find healing. The eager throng, jostling for position and access, would have presented a frightening scene, but one in which the Saviour was in complete control.

The Lord forbidding, vv. 11-12

We see that power and control of the Saviour evident also in His handling of those possessed with unclean spirits. The spirits were powerless before Him. They fell down, prostrating themselves before the Lord. They had to acknowledge who He was and their subjection to Him. Of their cry, WUEST comments, 'They kept on constantly crying. What horrible confusion this was, deep throaty, raucous voices from the Satanic world'.⁶ However, the Lord does not seek the testimony of demons to further His cause. Thus, He forbids the witness of the unclean spirit world as incongruous with His own impeccable character and person. COLE adds, 'the Lord wanted men to find out who He was by listening to His words and by watching His deeds'.⁷ The challenge to our hearts is – what do our words and deeds reveal of us?

Endnotes

- 1 K. WUEST, *op. cit.*, pg. 62.
- 2 K. WUEST, *op. cit.*, pg. 64.
- 3 JOHN. D. GRASSMICK, *op. cit.*
- 4 D. E. HIEBERT, *op. cit.*, pg. 87.
- 5 D. E. HIEBERT, *op. cit.*, pg. 89.
- 6 K. WUEST, *op. cit.*, pg. 69.
- 7 A. COLE, *op. cit.*, pg. 78.

What does the Bible tell us about the future?

The re-emergence of Israel

Part 7

By **RICHARD CATCHPOLE** South Norwood, London, England.

As early as the 8th century, the prophet Hosea said, 'the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim' and such is the position with the nation today, following their rejection of the Lord Jesus and then the destruction of the temple in AD 70, Hos. 3. 4. As to national and judicial life, no king nor prince. As to spiritual and religious life, no temple, no sacrifice, no priesthood and no ephod. And neither image or teraphim, i.e., a standing idol and household gods. But although they have lost the distinctive national features of king and prince, their distinctive spiritual features of temple and priesthood, they still 'abide', distinct from the nations, and so it has been for 'many days' as Hosea prophesied. What Balaam prophesied centuries before respecting them is still true, 'the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations', Num. 23. 9.

Some 200 years after Hosea, the prophet Ezekiel saw in a vision a valley of 'dry bones', bones bleached in the sun, disconnected the one from another, Ezek. 37. 1-11. As to its significance, Ezekiel was informed 'these bones are the whole house of Israel'. Another graphic illustration of their present position, dispersed and scattered amongst the nations. Against that background, we might consider three basic themes:

1. A remnant of the nation

For the present, God has imposed upon Israel, nationally, a state of spiritual blindness. Speaking of it, the Apostle Paul says, 'According as it is written God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, ears that they should not hear'. Though that is again the present situation with the Jews, nationally, nevertheless the apostle indicates that even today there is a remnant composed of individual Jews saved, 'according to the election of grace' of which Paul himself was an

example. Believing Jews who, with believing Gentiles, are members of the church, the body of Christ, Rom. 11. 5-8; Eph. 3. 1-6.

2. A restoration of the nation

In view of their current diminished state, is there a future for the nation in divine purpose? The prophet Ezekiel was asked, 'Can these bones live?' To human view, this is an impossibility and so Ezekiel cautiously answers, 'O Lord God thou knowest', an acknowledgement that apart from divine intervention there was no hope, Ezek. 37. 3. Present-day exponents of Covenant Theology and Replacement Theology would have answered 'No', but the scriptures testify to the contrary.¹

The verse quoted earlier from Hosea chapter 3 is followed by the promise, 'Afterward [i.e., after the "many days" of verse 4] shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the

latter days'. So, there is an 'afterward'. In Romans chapter 11, Paul raises a key question relative to Israel's future, 'have they stumbled that they should fall [i.e., fall irretrievably], God forbid?' He says later, 'I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so, all Israel shall be saved: as it is written. There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob', 11. 11, 25, 26. The blindness is not total but in '**part**', some being saved in the present day according to the election of grace, as we have seen. The blindness is not permanent but '**until**' the fullness of the Gentiles be come in, then 'all Israel shall be saved'.² Could there be a clearer statement? 'All Israel shall be saved'. Following the rapture of the church, God will turn again to the nation of Israel to resume His dealings with His ancient people and fulfil His purpose concerning them.

3. A regathering of the nation

For the fulfilment of end-time prophecies regarding Israel, it is necessary for the people to be back in their own land, dwelling in an independent Jewish state. It is now a matter of history that in the late 19th century a Jewish, Austro-Hungarian journalist and political activist Theodor Herzl founded the Zionist Organisation to encourage the immigration of Jews to Palestine with a view to forming an independent Jewish state. Though he died before its establishment, he is credited with being the father of the State of Israel.³ On the 2nd of November 1917, the British Government issued the Balfour Declaration supporting the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine. In Tel Aviv on the 14th of May 1948, the Chairman of the Jewish Agency, David Ben-Gurion, proclaimed the founding of the State of Israel. Today, it is estimated that the current Jewish population worldwide is about 14.7 million, 45% of whom are living in the State of Israel. That percentage will undoubtedly increase as the end times approach.

The Bible speaks of a two-fold future return of the Jewish people



and it is necessary to distinguish between them: the first, a return in unbelief, intimately related to the tribulation and to judgement; the second, a return in faith related to the millennial reign of Christ and to blessing. It is the former of the two that we are concerned with in this article.

Returning to Ezekiel chapter 37, the prophet is exhorted, 'Prophesy upon these bones', and, as he did so, there was a noise, and a shaking, the bones came together, sinews and flesh came upon them but there was no breath, no life in them, vv. 4-8. So, for Israel, after the years of dispersion, there will be a coming together and a return to the land, but in unbelief – the nation void of spiritual life.

This gathering of the people in unbelief is intimately connected to the still unfulfilled week of Daniel's prophecy regarding the seventy weeks divinely determined upon the people and the holy city, Dan. 9. 24-27, seventy 'heptads' or groups of seven, spanning 490 years. These seventy weeks are divided into three periods. The first seven weeks, or forty-nine years, began with a commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem. There followed sixty-two weeks or 434 years, which concluded with Messiah being cut off, leaving just the seventieth week or a final period of seven years remaining to be fulfilled.

That final week is divided in the prophecy into two periods of three-and-a-half years. This will commence with the ratification of a covenant with a Gentile ruler, identified in Daniel chapter 9 verse 26 as 'the prince that shall come'. He is the first beast of Revelation chapter 13

verses 1 to 8 and the 'man of sin' of 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 verses 3 and 4. 'Many', no doubt those who have returned in unbelief, will readily enter this covenant, v. 27, a covenant which, **politically**, seems to promise a recognition of Israel's borders, stability and security **militarily** and, **religiously**, despite the prevailing spirit of unbelief, the restoration of the temple and its sacrifices. But it is a covenant called in Isaiah chapter 28 verse 15 'a covenant with death', an agreement 'with hell'.

It appears that with the ratifying of the covenant the seventieth week commences with a period of peace and tranquillity, but it will be short lived, 'For when they shall say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them', 1 Thess. 5. 3. In Matthew chapter 24 verses 4 to 14, the Lord Jesus spoke of the general conditions that develop during the first half of Daniel's seventieth week. Days of spiritual deception, political unrest, natural catastrophes and the persecution of those who follow Christ. Verses that closely correspond to the opening of the seal judgments in Revelation chapter 6 verses 2 to 11. Fearsome days, but just 'the beginning of sorrows'. Worse is to come as the final week of Daniel's prophecy proceeds!

Ezekiel chapter 20 is another passage that speaks of a return in unbelief, the people being gathered out from the countries whither the Lord has scattered them, into the 'wilderness of the people' where He will in His wrath commence the process of eliminating from their number those who have rebelled against Him.⁴ The language the prophet employs has an historical backdrop, recalling the time when,

following the Passover, God, with a mighty hand, brought the people out of Egypt into the wilderness. There, He spoke with them in the giving of the Law, a wilderness where in subsequent years a generation fell because of their unbelief. With that same mighty hand, God will yet bring them forth from the countries in which they are dispersed into another wilderness, to speak to them in His wrath. The process being likened to sheep passing under the shepherd's staff as he seeks to count and divide the sheep. Applying the figure, the people will pass under the rod of divine judgement to separate the godly from the wicked. The wicked to be removed and the godly preserved to enter the blessing of the millennium age.

Endnotes

- 1 Though both come to the same conclusion, they do so from a different approach. Put very simply, exponents of Covenant Theology, believe that the terms 'Israel' and 'The Church' are interchangeable, not distinct entities, and so view the Church as but an extension of the nation. Replacement Theology asserts that when the nation rejected their Messiah they forfeited all the blessings promised to them and the Church has inherited the promises initially given to the nation and, as the title suggests, replaced the nation in divine purpose.
- 2 The meaning of 'the fulness of the Gentiles' is not easy to determine. Some suggest it refers to the full quota of Gentiles according to the election of grace, the time when God completes His purpose as stated in Acts chapter 15 verse 14 in visiting the nations to take out of them a people for His name. If that be the case it corresponds in time with the rapture. But, since Paul is dealing with dispensational truths, it could correspond to Luke chapter 21 verse 24, 'Jerusalem shall be trodden down until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled'. If so, the 'fulness of the Gentiles' includes the vast number who will be saved in the tribulation period, Rev. 7. 9-17. In which case, the phrase goes forward to the Lord's revelation in glory, His coming to Sion as the Deliverer, at which point all Israel is saved!
- 3 3rd July 1904, aged 44 years.
- 4 Ezekiel 20. 33-44. Will news of the covenant being ratified be the motivation for these Jews to return? Here it is only the godly who will enter the land and that after the purging of the tribulation. Thus, the people of the Ezekiel chapter 20 passage must be distinguished from those resident in the land during the tribulation and mentioned in Zechariah chapter 13 verses 8 and 9.

The Twelve Tribes of Israel

ASHER

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

Happiness and blessing

We now come to Asher, so called because, as Leah said at his birth, 'the daughters will call me blessed', Gen. 30. 13.¹ Like so many of the tribes' names, Asher, meaning 'happy', was a play on words – words that were taken spontaneously from the way the mother felt at the moment of birth. Sadly, her sister Rachel was not one of the ones who called her blessed. But Rachel aside, Leah was not far wrong. Centuries later, her reputation stood strong and it was Leah's offspring, more so than Rachel's, which became synonymous with fruitfulness, Ruth 4. 11-13. For Leah, it did not matter that this was not her biological child. Legally it was, and that was enough. Although in Leah's case the means did not justify the end, she was right to esteem motherhood as highly as she did. On the other hand, it would have been better to see her derive happiness from God's favour than from her thriving reputation. We can surely identify with Leah in this; it's all too easy to take pride in the results of something we have played our part in, when it was God who enabled us to play the part in the first place.

Hope and promise

Along with Leah's and Rachel's other stepsons, Asher is implicated in Joseph's bad report which he brought back to his father, Gen. 37. 2, and along with all the brothers, he is embroiled in the actions which ultimately lead to Joseph's sale. Leaving these things aside, the early references to the emerging tribe of Asher have a far more positive tone about them. Jacob's prophetic remarks include references to the tribe being highly prosperous in food production, the cream of which would be fit for kings. In a similar vein, Moses spoke of them 'dipping their feet in oil' (olive oil), Deut.

33. 24. The people of the day would have clearly understood that as a reference to prosperity. Anyone who had enough olive oil to bathe his feet in it was clearly doing well for himself and, for reasons only known to God and His sovereign purposes, this would be Asher's portion. Moses spoke to Asher last in his blessings on the tribes, shortly before he climbed mount Nebo to be laid to rest by God, vv. 24, 25. His last words were full of hope and promise. This is what we have come to expect through this series. Not through any means of their own, but by God's sovereign grace, the final words on God's people are full of hope, promise and glory.

Luxury and apathy

The way that these prophetic promises would be fulfilled, at least initially, would come down to where the tribe was allocated land, Josh. 19. 24-31. The land northwest of Israel, facing the Mediterranean and



stretching up as far as modern-day Lebanon, was especially fertile, and modern archaeology confirms the presence of olive oil production.² Yet, despite this lucrative bounty from God's hand, the tribe failed to drive out the Canaanites, preferring to live among them, Judg. 1. 31. Once again, we can identify all too well with this set of affairs. God's blessing on us ought to make us more devoted, but in so many cases our response is one of spiritual apathy, cp. Prov. 30. 9. A case in point would be the church at Laodicea, Rev. 3. 14-18. Their attitude towards riches had made them spiritually lukewarm, an intolerable state for divine persons. God's assessment was fierce; they were wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked. What have riches done to us, what would Christ's assessment be of us and will we repent if we find ourselves wanting? It's not clear that Laodicea ever did.

In this survey of the tribes, we are tending to draw large brush strokes regarding the tribe in an attempt to understand the overall impression they leave on scripture. Asher's beginnings were full of hope, but the fullness of their riches will only be seen in a coming day because of their compromise. Amidst these broad-brush observations, however, there are small details which often challenge the overall impression. For the tribe of Asher, there were times when they rose out of apathy and engaged in spiritual endeavours: promptly coming to Gideon's aid against Midian, Judg. 6. 35; heartily backing David in his ascent to the throne, 1 Chr. 12. 36; and humbly responding to Hezekiah's call to Passover, 2 Chr. 30. 11. Even in the New Testament, amidst the spiritual lukewarmness of Jerusalem, we find a devoted Asherite, Anna. Her joy at seeing the Lord surely eclipsed even Leah's. May God help us to be like her, going against the grain of spiritual apathy around us, taking joy in the seed of the woman and His redemption, Luke 2. 38.

Endnotes

- ¹ cp. Luke. 1. 48.
- ² Z. GAL and R. FRANKEL, *An olive oil press complex at Hurbat Ros Zayit (Ras ez-Zetun) in Lower Galilee, 1993.*

An overview of Esther

By **MALCOLM DAVIS** Leeds, England

Introduction

The Book of Esther takes its name from its principal character, Esther, a young orphaned Jewess who had been brought up by her older cousin, Mordecai. The name Esther is Persian, and means 'star'. Her Hebrew name, Hadassah, means 'myrtle'. She has the role of a godly Jewish heroine who was enabled to deliver her people from annihilation during their exile in the Persian Empire. The book is listed last in the seventeen historical books of the English Bible, and eighth in the 'Writings' section of the Hebrew Bible, after Ecclesiastes and before Daniel. Chronologically, Esther is to be placed between Ezra chapters 6 and 7, that is, after the time of Zerubbabel, but before the time of Ezra. Its canonicity has been challenged because the name of God does not appear in it, although certain acrostics of the name of the Lord, Jehovah, have been noted in a few verses of the book. Although it is a very different book from those which are accepted by everyone as being canonical, yet the Jews have never doubted its right to be included in their Bible, because it relates the circumstances under which their Feast of Purim came to be celebrated annually in their month Adar, that is, February or March in our calendar. The Jews call the Book of Esther the Esther Scroll, because it is one of the five scrolls which are read at certain Jewish holidays.

Purpose of the book

This book relates how the Jews in exile in Babylonia were nearly annihilated by their enemies in the Persian Empire, and the means by which they were delivered. In a very providential way, a young orphaned Jewess called Esther was promoted to become the favoured queen of Xerxes I, whose Hebrew name was Ahasuerus, just prior to a plot by an Amalekite called Haman to massacre all the Jews within the Persian Empire. Esther used her influence

with her husband to thwart this plot, to have Haman executed, and to permit the exiled Jews to defend themselves from attack on the days when this massacre had been planned to take place. Therefore, the book proves that God had been working behind the scenes to frustrate this outbreak of anti-Semitism during the Babylonian exile. It assures the Jews that their Lord God will always act to defend them as His chosen people, that no weapon formed against them shall prosper, Isa. 54. 17. Ever since this remarkable deliverance, the Jews have remembered its circumstances during their Feast of Purim on the anniversary of these events. The book also relates how a small Jew called Mordecai, who was Esther's older cousin, encouraged Esther to seek the king's help for her people, and how, after the death of Haman, he was promoted to high office in the Persian Empire under Xerxes. Thus, the Book of Esther is intended to encourage the Lord's earthly people, Israel, with evidence that He is overruling in all their sufferings and persecutions, and will never allow them to be completely destroyed, so that He can eventually fulfil all His unconditional promises to them.

Analysis of the book

Chapters 1 to 2: The feast of Ahasuerus, the dethronement of Vashti, the rise of Esther to the throne, and the loyalty of Mordecai to the king.

Chapters 3 to 7: The rise of Haman, and his fall after his feasts with Esther and the king.

Chapter 3: Mordecai snubs Haman, and Haman plots to destroy both him and all the Jews in the Persian Empire.

Chapter 4: The Jews mourn, and Mordecai appeals to Esther to intervene for her people.

Chapter 5: Esther intercedes before the king in the presence of Haman, and Haman is filled with pride.

Chapter 6: Mordecai, not Haman, is rewarded for his loyalty to the king.

Chapter 7: At Esther's second feast with the king and Haman, Haman is exposed, condemned, and executed.

Chapters 8 to 10: The rise of Mordecai, the deliverance of the Jews, and the establishment of the Feast of Purim.

Chapter 8: The second decree of Ahasuerus countering his first decree to destroy the Jews.

Chapter 9: The Jews are delivered, and the Feast of Purim is established in their calendar.

Chapter 10: Mordecai is promoted to high office in the Persian Empire.

Dates and historical setting of the book

486-465 BC: Ahasuerus, or Xerxes I, ruled Persia.

483-473 BC: The events of the Book of Esther probably took place during these years, after the return of the Jews under Zerubbabel, but before the return of the Jews under Ezra.

The Jew's Feast of Purim dates from their years of exile under the Persian kings, and has been celebrated by them ever since that time. Note that the Book of Esther is not set in Babylon, but further east in Shushan, [Greek *Susa*] in Persia. Daniel chapter 11 verse 2 throws more light on Persian history under Ahasuerus, or Xerxes I, when he predicts that the fourth Persian king after Cyrus would be 'far richer' than all his predecessors, and 'by his strength through his riches he shall stir up all against the realm of Grecia'. Darius I had invaded Greece in 490 BC, but had been defeated by the Greeks at the Battle of Marathon. This explains why Xerxes, who was by far the richest emperor of Persia, also invaded Greece in 481-479 BC with a huge army of 2½ million men to avenge the earlier defeat. But he in his turn, at about the time when the events recorded in this Book of Esther took place, was decisively defeated by the Greeks in a famous naval battle in the Bay of Salamis in 480 BC, and again on land at Plataea and Mycale in 479 BC. Xerxes had to retreat in humiliation, and, after

Esther (Persian) meaning 'star'

SEEING GOD IN A

**Esther**

A Jewish woman God used to preserve the nation

Ruth

A Gentile woman who God used to preserve the seed.

CYRUS THE GREAT

| CAMBYSES I (Xerxes) |

DARIUS

| XERXES I |

First return under Zerubbabel 538 BC

1

Events in the book of Ezra (538-458 BC) Second return

Captivity 605 BC

550

525

500

DANIELMessage - Reconciliation
Confession of one man
on behalf of the nation**ZECHARIAH**Message - Revelation
A communication of the
future of the nation**EZRA**Message - Revival
Construction of the altar
and revival of the nationEs
Messag*The commitment of one**Persia*

The city of Shushan (Susa) is located in modern day Iran and was discovered in 1851. Its ruins are now a world heritage site.

Esther outline**The first decree 1-2**

- Ch 1 – Ahasuerus' reign
The Queen dismissed
- Ch 2 – Esther's royal crown
King's deliverance

The second decree 3-7

- Ch 3 – Mordecai's refusal
Haman despises him
- Ch 4 – Mordecai's recommendation
Esther decides to trust God
- Ch 5 – Esther's request
Haman's deceit
- Ch 6 – Mordecai's reward
Haman's disappointment
- Ch 7 – Esther reveals the truth
Haman reaps what he sows

The third decree 8-10

- Ch 8 – Ahasuerus reverses the law
Mordecai's dedication to the people
- Ch 9 – The feast of Purim remembered
The enemy must be destroyed
- Ch 10 – Mordecai's recognition
The nation is delivered once more

KING AHASUERUS*Power & precept*

His wealth, 1. 4
His women, 1. 9; 2. 17
His wrath, 1. 12; 7. 7
His worry, 6. 1
His writing,
1. 19; 2. 23; 3. 9; 10. 2

QUEEN ESTHER*Faithful & favoured*

in her family, 2. 7
in her favour, 2. 17
Her fear, 4. 11
Her faith, 4. 16
Her feasts, 5. 5; 7. 1; 9. 19

'and who knoweth whether thou art come to

Years of King's reign

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

Feasts in
Palace of
King and
Queen, 1. 3

Esther
enters
Palace,
2. 16

Haman's
plot,
3. 7

Esther and the Chiastic structure

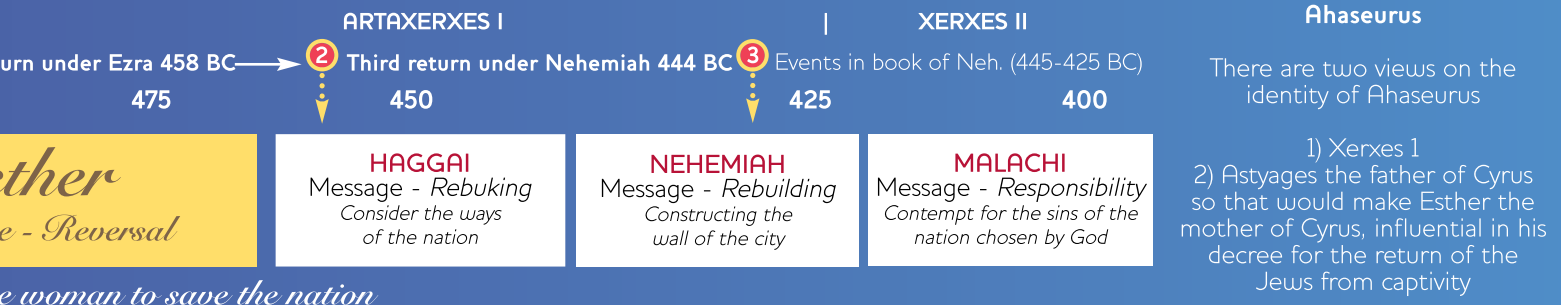
- A. The King's glory and two banquets, 1. 1-8
- B. Esther is Queen and Mordecai saves the King, 1. 9 - 2. 20
- C. Haman is promoted, 3. 1-6
- D. Haman's plot to kill Jews, 3. 7-15
- E. Esther and Mordecai's plan to overrule the decree, 4. 1-17
- F. Esther's banquet 1, Haman plans Mordecai's death, 5. 1-14
- < Haman hangs >
- < Mordecai exalted >
- F. Esther's banquet 2, Haman is executed not Mordecai, 7. 1-10
- E. Esther and Mordecai's plan to overrule the decree, 8. 1-8
- D. Mordecai's plan to save the Jews, 8. 9-14
- C. Mordecai promoted, 8. 15-17
- B. Esther is Queen and Mordecai saves Jews, 9. 1-19
- A. Mordecai's glory and two feasts, 9. 20; 10. 1-3

The Persian Empire*'Blessed are they that have not seen,*

Key words: power, pleased/pleaseth, Jews, seed, written, feast **Writer** Mordecai ?

SECLAR SOCIETY

Hadassah (Hebrew) meaning 'Myrtle'



ther
e - Reversal

e woman to save the nation

HAMAN

Proud & Presumptuous

- in his promotion, 3. 1
- in his plot, 3. 9
- in his pride, 6. 6
- in his presumption, 7. 5
- in his punishment, 7. 9

MORDECAI

Walking with wisdom

- in his approach, 2. 5
- in his attention, 2. 11
- in his attitude, 3. 4
- in his advice, 4. 12
- in his advancement, 6. 11; 10. 2

the kingdom for such a time as this', Esther 4. 14

→ 12th Year of King's reign			
Month - 1(Nisan).	3(Sivan)	12(Adar)	12 (Adar)
Haman's plot, 3. 7	Haman's post, 3. 13	Jews to be killed on 13th overruled, 8. 12	Jews kill 300 on 14th in Shushan & make 2 feast days, 9. 17

re (559-530 BC)



Purim

5 things you might not know



Purim is still celebrated today by Jews 2500 years later on the **14th** and **15th** days of Adar, the twelfth month of the Jewish Calendar which usually coincides with March. Many dress up as the characters of Esther, Mordecai or the King, Haman being a favourite!

- 1) It celebrates the bravery of Esther.
- 2) They gather at the synagogue and shout and hiss when Haman's name is mentioned.
- 3) The costumes worn are meant to symbolize how God is hidden in our lives.
- 4) The name Purim refers to the lottery system that Haman used to decide the massacre.
- 5) On the eve of Purim, Jews do not eat or drink from dawn until dusk to remember Esther's three-day fast in preparation to meet the King.

, and yet have believed', John 20. 29

this, the Persian Empire was never so strong again. This, therefore, is the international background against which the story of Esther was played out. Clearly, the Ahasuerus of Esther was immensely rich, and ostentatious with it, but there is no hint of tragedy or defeat in the account given here. But that was the reality of the historical background of the book. The Persian Empire had reached its peak, and was now beginning to decline.

Author

The Book of Esther gives no clue as to who wrote it, but whoever it was knew the Persian culture well. The account has all the hallmarks of an eyewitness. The author was most probably a Jew. Some commentators have attributed the book to Mordecai, on the basis of chapter 9 verses 20 and 32. Certainly, Mordecai's royal records would have been a primary source for the author to use. Some have suggested that either Ezra or Nehemiah wrote the book, but no clear evidence supports that view. The book as it stands was probably written after 465 BC, since Esther chapter 1 verse 2 strongly implies that the reign of Ahasuerus has ended. Perhaps an otherwise unknown author wrote it during the reign of Artaxerxes I, that is, during the latter half of the fifth century BC. Beyond that we cannot be sure. It has always been considered to be anonymous.

The book's message for today

The book illustrates the truth that God has always exercised complete providential control of human history, and overruled all the machinations of the enemy of our souls. He will bring to pass His divine purposes for His chosen people! Most of all, it proves that His chosen earthly people, Israel, can never be fully annihilated by their enemies, but will always be delivered to fulfil His purposes for them. The survival of the Jews, despite all the pogroms and holocausts which have been perpetrated against them, is certain, and assures us that God will one day fulfil all His unconditional promises to the believing remnant of them. In short, the survival of Israel to this moment of time is proof of the existence, almighty power, goodwill, and wisdom of God. It assures us

today, members of His parallel heavenly people, the Church, that God is both willing and able to work together all things for our blessing. History is not going out of His control, but will result in His glory being maintained, and His people blessed with eternal life. What peace and assurance this book of Esther should give us as believers today!

There is also a lesson to be derived from the fact that God's name does not occur overtly in the book. The reason why God is not mentioned may be that the Jews, who were still in exile, were regarded as under God's discipline. This especially since none of them had responded to Cyrus' call to return to Jerusalem, either to rebuild the temple, or to repair the city walls. Because of this failure, the Lord was, in measure, disowning them publicly, but still watching over them, and caring for them behind the scenes. He was ensuring that they would not come to serious harm, and silently preparing the way for the still future restoration of the faithful remnant. Thus, He is assuring us that, should we fall into sinful ways, like Israel, and need to be disciplined, He will still overrule all our circumstances to prevent us suffering final ruin, until such time as His discipline has done its work and we can be restored to full fellowship with Him and our fellow-believers. In judgement He remembers mercy. What a God of recovery He is!

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Chairman's Notes

In such unprecedented times, it seems apt that these brief comments should be set alongside MALCOLM DAVIS' introduction to the book of Esther. In it he states, 'The book illustrates the truth that God has always exercised complete providential control of human history . . . History is not going out of His control, but will result in His glory being maintained, and His people blessed with eternal life'.

As this magazine arrives in your home, some countries will be reaching what the authorities hope will be the apex of a pandemic that is the worst for a century. The extent to which we, as believers, will be able to return to anything like normality and when is uncertain. Similarly, some assemblies will have been closed for weeks or months and fellowship will have been by telephone or restricted access to the home. We hope that this magazine will provide some spiritual food for those in such circumstances and we would also draw your attention to:

- Audio files available in the *Precious Seed* App;
- Written material and links available on the *Precious Seed* website;
- Material that can be viewed or listened to here: www.seekthetruth.org.uk.

We would also add that the pandemic has seriously affected distribution outside of the UK. We trust that you will understand if your magazine has arrived late.

Finally, we have experienced some problems with *Precious Seed* email addresses. If you have sent an email to me, the secretary or the treasurer between the dates of 10/02 and 10/03/20 and have not received a reply, it is likely that they have been lost. Please resend them as we are unable to retrieve any email communications over that period.

JOHN BENNETT

Chairman and General Editor

The work in Southern Brazil

By **HARRY WILSON** Brazil

In this land of religious liberty, all religions are represented and active. Most profess to be Roman Catholic but Spiritism in two distinct forms influences the thinking and practices of millions. Evangelicals, especially Pentecostals of every shade, have increased very much in latter times, but the results of their work are very unsatisfactory.

The work in this southern part of Brazil began when Mr and Mrs John McCann moved here in September 1950. When I arrived in March 1952, there were no assemblies and no Brazilian believers that we knew. The state of Rio Grande do Sul has an area of 285,298 km² with a population of 11.29 million. Together with the neighbouring state of Santa Catarina, these two are about the size of Germany.

Over the years, others joined us and presently Mr and Mrs T. H. Matthews, Mr and Mrs J. McCann Jr., Mr and Mrs G. Buchanan, Mr and Mrs J. Armstrong, Mr and Mrs L. Carswell, Mr and Mrs N. Fleck, Mr and Mrs J. Davison and the writer and his wife are engaged in it. Others also have shared in the work. There are five Brazilian full-time workers with their wives.

We have sought to make known the word of the truth of the gospel and see sinners drawn to Christ but progress has been slow. The gospel entered Osório in 1953 and the first to be saved was a young man in his early twenties called Alécio Freitas. Another lad about fourteen years of age called Laudelino dos Santos was contacted shortly afterwards. He showed a good interest and read his New Testament diligently, but suffered very much opposition from his father. However, he got saved and he and Alécio are still in the assembly in Osório after more than sixty years. Laudelino's father later professed to be saved and preached the faith he once sought to destroy. His mother

got saved and was in the assembly until she went to be with Christ. He has three brothers and a sister in assembly fellowship and a nephew in full-time service for the Lord.

Series of gospel meetings are held in homes, rented rooms or buildings of different kinds and meetings are held four, five or six nights per week for five or six weeks or more. The area is visited with tracts and invitations but usually large numbers of visitors do not attend. However, the use of the word of God enables useful contacts to be made which lead to salvation. We do not often see immediate results but have proved that, 'your labour is not in vain in the Lord'.

As in other lands, there is always opposition to the truth of the gospel. There is no persecution, but religious leaders, relatives, workmates and others unite to show their disapproval. Not all who are impressed with the truth are prepared to pay the price of obedience to it. Equally, not all who profess to be saved prove to be genuine and we have had our share of disappointments. However, over the years, souls have been saved and there are many who give evidence of God's workmanship.

Adão Fialho was a Catholic when he heard the gospel. He was convinced of its truth and soon professed to be saved but there was something lacking. He resisted, but God was merciful and opened his eyes to understand his lost condition and

the danger and to see in the Lord Jesus, God's salvation. New life in Christ was evident and I cannot think of any other who was prepared to sacrifice himself for the Lord and the gospel as he was.

Antonio Knevez was a Lutheran and I often heard him say that he was sixty-one years in the dark. God saved him and kept him for another thirty years and he never seemed to lose the reality and joy of God's salvation. Most who had contact with him heard a word in the gospel. Most did not appreciate it, but Roberto Ploia, as a careless young man in his early twenties, was really awakened through Antonio speaking to him. He was saved shortly afterwards and has been a useful full-time worker for many years.

José Matos was introduced to the Bible by a cult and was a member of that cult when he heard the gospel. He got saved and has been an appreciated full-time worker for nearly forty years.

There are now twenty-one assemblies and each of these is the result of years of patient sowing. In eight or nine other places a regular gospel work is carried on and we trust that in each the work will grow and that assemblies will be planted. The largest assembly is in Porto Alegre, the capital of the state of Rio Grande do Sul, and it has almost sixty in fellowship. At the annual conference on Good Friday between 500 and 600 spend the day around the good word of God. Several other similar one-day conferences are held during the year in different places.

Our brother Lindsay Carswell is the editor of a twenty-four-page magazine which is published quarterly.

'There remaineth yet very much land to be possessed', Josh. 13. 1. There are large cities yet unentered, and many towns and villages that need to be revisited. There are open doors and needy fields on every hand but 'the labourers are few'. We do need and value the prayers of the Lord's people for the work and workers and their families in this vast, needy land.

The Father sent the Son

[Unless otherwise stated, scripture quotations are taken from the New Kings James Version of the Bible]

By **MALCOLM HORLOCK** Cardiff, Wales

In all, our Lord is given the title 'Saviour' sixteen times in the New Testament. I want us to consider the last but one of those references – the words of the Apostle John in chapter 4 of his first Epistle: 'We [we the apostles, that is] have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world'.¹

'The Father sent the Son'. Did John, I wonder, have in his mind² the parable told by the Lord Jesus just before His death concerning the vineyard owner who sent a succession of servants to collect the fruit of his vineyard from his tenants – all of whom (his servants) were either beaten or killed. 'Last of all', Jesus had said, 'he sent his son to them'.³ 'They took him', Jesus added, 'and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him'.

The meaning of that parable was not lost on the chief priests and Pharisees for whose benefit the Lord had told it.⁴ But neither, I suspect, was it lost on the Apostle John in later days. He knew well that, over many centuries, God had sent a succession of prophets who had received very rough treatment at the hands of the leaders of the nation – a succession of prophets which terminated in the person of John the Baptist. 'There was', the apostle wrote, 'a man sent from God, whose name was John'.⁵

But we know that God had 'sent' not only men. But that, over the centuries, He had 'sent' angels also – and that on a wide variety of missions.⁶

There was the case of Sennacherib's assault on Jerusalem,⁷ concerning which we read that King Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah prayed 'and cried out to heaven'. Following which, we read, 'the Lord **sent an**

angel, who cut down every mighty man of valour, leader, and captain in the camp of the king of Assyria. So he returned ashamed to his own land'.⁸ '**The Lord sent an angel**'.

Then, there was the case of Daniel's three companions (Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah), who, on account of their refusal to fall down and to worship the colossal golden image erected by Nebuchadnezzar, were thrown into his blazing fiery furnace.⁹ At which time, Nebuchadnezzar leapt to his feet exclaiming, 'I see four men . . . walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods'.¹⁰

And, when the three young men emerged from the furnace unharmed, with hair unsinged, with cloaks undamaged, and without so much as the smell of smoke on them, Nebuchadnezzar responded, 'Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has **sent His angel** and delivered His servants, who trusted in Him'.¹¹ '**God . . . sent His angel**'.

Then, there was the case of Daniel himself many years later, who, because of his persistent and undisguised praying,¹² was thrown¹³ not into a fiery furnace, but into a den of lions late one evening. When, at first light the following day, King Darius rushed to the den and found

Daniel alive and well, 'Daniel', we read, 'said, "O king . . . my God **sent His angel** and shut the lions' mouths, so that they have not hurt me'.¹⁴ '**My God sent His angel**'.

And then, turning now to the New Testament, there was the case of the Apostle Peter in Acts chapter 12. We are now in the days of King Herod Agrippa the First (grandson of Herod the Great), who, on account of his strong Jewish feelings, first had the Apostle James put to death with a sword, and then had Peter imprisoned with the stated intention of having him executed in the near future.

But God had other plans, and, following the earnest prayers of the church, Peter was delivered. Peter, Luke says, 'did not know that what was done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision'.¹⁵ Yet, having passed two sets of guards and having witnessed the iron gate which led into the city open for them of its own accord, Peter, we are told, 'came to himself', and said, 'Now I know for certain that the Lord has **sent His angel**, and has delivered me from the hand of Herod'.¹⁶ '**The Lord has sent His angel**'.

Oh yes, angels could be sent from God to 'deliver' men from the army of Sennacherib, from the furnace of Nebuchadnezzar, from the lions of Darius, and from the sword of Herod Antipas.

But no angel¹⁷ could deliver men (in the words of the New Testament Epistles) from the power of darkness,¹⁸ the fear of death,¹⁹ or the wrath to come.²⁰

No angel could deliver men from their sins. Which is why, as John had written, 'God . . . **sent His Son** to be the propitiation for **our sins**'.²¹

None of the missions performed by angels involved **them** in any cost – in any loss or suffering. But we know that it was very different for our Lord Jesus – that, as John expressed it back in his first chapter, it is 'the blood [the sacrificial death] of Jesus Christ His

Son' which alone 'cleanses us from all sin'.²²

No angel could be 'the Saviour of the world' – of the human race – in part because no angel could ever become a man.²³ Oh yes, an angel could **look like** a man,²⁴ an angel could **speak like** a man,²⁵ and an angel could even **eat like** a man,²⁶ but in no way could an angel ever **become** a man – as He did.

And then, no angel could be 'the Saviour of the world' because no angel could ever die – and thereby 'take away the sin of the world'²⁷ – as He did.

In our Lord's dispute with the Sadducees about resurrection, He made it clear that, when men rise, they cannot 'die anymore, for they are equal to the angels'.²⁸ As we have noted earlier, angels can **slay** men . . . and we learn from the Book of the Revelation that angels can loudly proclaim the worth of the One who **was slain** to redeem men²⁹ but they cannot themselves **be slain**.

An **angel** could be **sent by God** to bring Jesus' name (meaning 'the Lord is salvation') for Him from heaven to the virgin Mary.³⁰ An **angel** could be **sent by God** to explain the significance of that name³¹ to Joseph – that He (Jesus) was to 'save His people from their sins'.³² And an **angel** could be **sent by God** to proclaim His coming as a Saviour to humble shepherds.³³ But no **angel** could ever be **sent by God**, as John wrote concerning our Lord, 'to be the Saviour of the world'.³⁴

Let us remind ourselves that the Son whom the Father '**sent**' to be a Saviour, Himself 'came' willingly and gladly. As He told Zacchaeus, 'the Son of man **has come** to seek and **to save** that which was lost'.³⁵

'I cannot tell why He whom angels worship
Should set His love upon the sons of men . . .
But this I know, that He was born of Mary . . .
And so the Saviour, **Saviour of the world**, has come'.³⁶



Endnotes

- 1 1 John 4. 14 KJV. The only other occurrence of the title 'the Saviour of the world' is in John 4. 42.
- 2 John 14. 26.
- 3 Matt. 21. 37.
- 4 Mark 12. 12.
- 5 John 1. 6.
- 6 Cp. Luke 1. 19, 26; Rev. 22. 6, 16.
- 7 In spite of his famous claim on his Prism (saying of Hezekiah, 'I made a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage. I surrounded him with earthwork') it seems clear that Sennacherib did not actually besiege Jerusalem, 2 Kgs. 19. 32; Isa. 37. 33.
- 8 2 Chr. 32. 20, 21.
- 9 Their principled refusal got them into more than 'hot **water**'!
- 10 Dan. 3. 25 ESV.
- 11 Dan. 3. 28 ESV.
- 12 'It is not, as with his three companions in chapter 3, a question of a positive **sin** which he will not **commit**, but of a positive **duty** which he will not **omit**', S. R. DRIVER, *The Book of Daniel*, pg. 71.
- 13 The same word is used in Daniel chapter 6 verses 7, 12, 16 and 24 as it was in Daniel chapter 3 verses 6, 11, 15, 20, 21 and 24.
- 14 Dan. 6. 21-22.
- 15 Acts 12. 9.
- 16 Acts 12. 7-11. For the background to Agrippa's actions, see <https://readingacts.com/2013/02/19/acts-121-2-why-did-herod-kill-james/>.
- 17 Although unquestionably great in power, Ps. 103. 20; 2 Pet. 2. 11.
- 18 Col. 1. 13.
- 19 Heb. 2. 15.
- 20 1 Thess. 1. 10.
- 21 1 John 4. 10.
- 22 1 John 1. 7.
- 23 Angels are 'spirits', Heb. 1. 14.
- 24 E.g., Gen. 18. 2, 16, 22; 19. 1.
- 25 E.g., 1 Kgs. 19. 5.
- 26 Gen. 19. 3.
- 27 Note the Baptist's word about 'the Lamb of God who takes away the sin **of the world**', John 1. 29.
- 28 Luke 20. 36. The Lord Jesus was capable of dying (unlike fallen angels, Luke 20. 36), but He was not subject to death (unlike fallen man, Heb. 9. 27).
- 29 Rev. 5. 8-12. His wounds are the memorials of death which no angel will (or can) ever carry.
- 30 Luke 1. 26, 31.
- 31 In terms of His **mission**; cp. His '**office**' as Saviour.
- 32 Matt. 1. 21.
- 33 Luke 2. 10, 11.
- 34 There was – and is – no more salvation to be found 'from angels' than there was – or is – salvation to be found 'for angels'. Their only 'deliverance' was into chains, pending judgement, 2 Pet. 2. 4; cp. Matt. 25. 41. Jesus did not don the nature of angels, Heb. 2. 16, 'because He was not to be a Mediator for them, a Saviour unto them. Those of them who had sinned were left unto everlasting ruin; and those who retained their original righteousness needed no redemption', JOHN OWEN, *Works*, Volume 1, pg. 86. 'From heaven the sinning angels fell, And wrath and darkness chain'd them down; But man, vile man, forsook his bliss, And mercy lifts him to a crown. Amazing work of sovereign grace That could distinguish rebels so! Our guilty treasons call'd aloud For everlasting fetters too'. [ISAAC WATTS]
- 35 Luke 19. 10; cp. 9. 56.
- 36 The full first verse reads:
I cannot tell why He whom angels worship
Should set His love upon the sons of men,
Or why, as Shepherd, He should seek the wanderers,
To bring them back, they know not how nor when.
But this I know, that He was born of Mary,
When Bethlehem's manger was His only home,
And that He lived at Nazareth and laboured,
And so the Saviour, Saviour of the world, has come.
[WILLIAM FULLERTON]

1 Thessalonians Chapter 3

The marks of a true shepherd

By **PETER DAVIES** Swansea, Wales

This is a subject of great importance. In these days when there is such a scattering among the sheep of His pasture, our greatest need is for shepherds, true shepherds, godly shepherds. Of course, our supreme example is the Lord Himself, who said, 'I am the good shepherd', John 10. 11, 14. He is truly the Chief Shepherd and all who would serve His flock must serve under His control, ever seeking to follow His steps. But, in case we might think His example is too high and lofty, He has given us the example of others who have been true and faithful shepherds, though themselves mere mortals like us. Such a shepherd we have before us in this chapter; someone has described him as 'the ideal shepherd'. This is true inasmuch as he could say, 'Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ', 1 Cor. 11. 1. It is lovely to see the features of the Good Shepherd being lived out in this devoted servant of Christ. Let us see, then, how he bares his heart, and shares his concerns and longings for the flock of God.

Present with the sheep

Every true shepherd knows his place is **with** the sheep and that is where he desires to be. Is that what marks this shepherd? Paul was at Athens and this flock was at Thessalonica about 200 miles away, but that did not come about by Paul's choosing. Chapter 2 verse 17 shows that he had been taken from them – torn away violently and suddenly. The facts are found in Acts chapter 17, where, after a three-week mission at Thessalonica, the Lord had blessed His word in the conversion of many. Following a serious riot in the city, Paul and Silas were forced to leave and go on to Berea and though he had endeavoured to return to see them and be with them, his every effort had been hindered. It is interesting to note that he attributes this to the work of Satan, 2. 18. While he was not able to be with them in person, he was in heart. It was his great longing to be with them, 'Night and day praying exceedingly . . . [to] see your face', 3. 10. This chapter opens with the pain he felt at the separation; being deprived of their

fellowship was just too much for him to bear. What a heart, what an affection for God's people, he had; they were just babes in Christ, with so much to learn of God and His ways and just to be present with them was what he longed for more than anything. Do we delight to be among the people of God? Is their fellowship more to us than even family ties? Peter touches a very tender cord when he writes, 'The elders which are **among you** I exhort', 1 Pet. 5. 1.

Provides for the sheep

If Paul could not be with them to assess their needs and provide for them, then he would send someone who could – Timothy. Why Timothy? Because he was the most suitable. Paul had every confidence in this younger man that he would fulfil the task. God give us more young men like Timothy! What a lovely commendation he gives him. '**Our brother**' – I don't believe that he is simply saying he is a Christian. I believe Paul was saying he is brotherly in a practical and positive

way, that the relationship in the family of God was very real and precious to him. You will find him approachable, understanding, and helpful as a brother should be. But more a '**minister of God**' – he is committed to the service of God. He is not merely a servant of men, but of God; not serving or living for himself but God; occupied, engaged in that higher, nobler service. Obviously, his daily prayer would be, 'Lord, what will you have me to do?' It is only he who serves God that can serve His people, and Paul knew this. Again, he describes him as '**our fellowlabourer**' – not afraid of work, not one who left everything to others. So many are like that today, not wanting to become involved, though having all the time for their own interests. Timothy was a labourer; one prepared to work hard and long for God. But more 'fellow'; he could, and did work with others. Not a loner, not one who did his own thing to the exclusion of others. Partnership in the gospel is a very necessary thing. Striving together, standing shoulder-to-shoulder is what is required of us. We see this was the kind of person Timothy was. No wonder the apostle had every confidence to send him to Thessalonica.

What for? To provide for them; to tend, feed and shepherd these lambs. He uses two words in verse 2 that should be noted. To **establish** is to confirm, to strengthen so that they might know the certainty of the things they had believed, enjoy more and more the love and care of their heavenly Father, experience the blessedness of the real abiding presence of their living Lord, and the sweet communion of the indwelling Holy Spirit. To **comfort** is to cheer and to encourage in the face of so much discouragement. They were passing through the furnace of affliction; the opposition was strong, the persecution was fierce, it cost dearly to belong to Christ.

Protects his sheep

Paul was very conscious of all the dangers they were exposed to. The Good Shepherd had reminded His disciples of the dangers and troubles they would encounter, 'In the world ye shall have tribulation', John 16. 33.

Speaking of these afflictions, Paul makes a striking statement, ‘we are appointed thereunto’, v. 3. These trials and testings of their, and our, faith do not come by accident or misfortune, they come by appointment, divine appointment. Faith’s trials are intended to produce faith’s triumphs, for His grace is sufficient, His strength is made perfect in our weakness. In 2 Corinthians chapter 4 verse 17, Paul notes, ‘For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory’. Peter records, ‘The trial of your faith being much more precious than gold which perishes, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise, and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ’, 1 Pet. 1. 7. Paul, though, was not only concerned about the trials of life but the temptations of the Devil, v. 5. These are the direct attacks of the wicked one. Faith is the victory – ‘I sent to know your faith’, v. 5! He was keen to know whether they were still trusting, or had their confidence in God their Saviour been shaken? What an ideal shepherd he was, how great was his concern for their safe keeping. So, Timothy is sent to comfort, to reassure, to stimulate their faith.

Pleasure in his sheep

When Timothy returned to report on the conditions he found, was the apostle disappointed at what he heard? No, rather he was overjoyed! It was good news he received; good news of their faith and love. Not love

strong at the expense of faith, nor faith strong at the expense of love. They were living in dependence on God and devotion to God and His people. Are we simply trusting every day, being encouraged in the Lord? What about our love for the Lord and His people? This shepherd also had pleasure in knowing that he had not been forgotten, for Timothy could tell him how they treasured every remembrance of him, and how that they too were just longing for the time when they could be reunited. Reciprocal fellowship is a joy. We do need one another! That good news ‘comforted’ the apostle. The news of the continuance of these dear believers was a source of encouragement and blessing to him. It seems that a weight had been lifted from his shoulders, a burden taken from his heart, and that he could now walk with lightened step, ‘now we live if [since] ye stand fast in the Lord’, v. 8. John could say, ‘I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth’, 3 John 4, and the writer to the Hebrews tells us, ‘they watch for your souls . . . that they may do it with joy’, 13. 17. The shepherd has pleasure from the flock when the sheep are healthy and strong, and contented in his care, but pain when things are otherwise. Sometimes unhappiness among the sheep can be because of the inconsiderate impatience and hardness of the shepherds, at other times because of the rebellion and self-will of the sheep. May we learn as shepherds from the example of Paul, that to

be loved then we must love. We can only expect others to care about us if we have shown that care for others. The pleasure of the shepherd is also seen here in his thanksgiving to God on their account, ‘For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God’, v. 9. He seems to struggle to express the joy they have given him on learning of their steadfastness and faithful continuance in their faith.

His prayer for the sheep

Because he cared, he prayed; because he wanted the very best for them, he went to the source of all blessing. His praying for them was not fitful, casual, or spasmodic. He prayed at all times, not just in emergencies. He carried them upon his heart always, v. 10. It was a full-time occupation, not a part-time exercise, not just words, but the outpouring of his heart. Would to God we had more shepherds like this! His prayer was **specific**:

- ‘That we might see your face’, v. 10. Satan had been hindering, but he prayed that the hindrance might be removed.
- ‘God . . . direct our way unto you’, v. 11. Not just that he might be blessed in their fellowship, but that they might be blessed through his ministry.
- ‘Perfect [adjust, mend, make good] that which is lacking [imperfect] in your faith’, v. 10. No doubt there were amendments to be made in their understanding of the truths of the gospel, as well as in their mode of living, because of what they had been saved from, but he wouldn’t write them off. He would seek, with patience and love as well as firmness, to correct and adjust those inconsistencies.
- ‘The Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you’, v. 12.

This would have a profound effect upon their fellowship together, and help to motivate them further in their outreach to others with the result being their readiness for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints. Do we realize how important it is for us to be ready for that glorious day?



Old Testament Women who appear in the New Testament

SARAH

a woman of faith and inner beauty

By **FRANK A. PROUDLOCK** Leicester, England

We often find it easy to write off and dismiss the spirituality of others. We focus on failings rather than the strengths. Imagine you had to compile a list of words you thought best described Sarah from reading Genesis. What would you include? Perhaps topping most of our lists would be words such as: impatient, Gen. 16. 2; harsh, 16. 6; headstrong, 21. 10; cynical or unbelieving, 18. 13.

In the five passages of scripture in the New Testament that refer to Sarah, not a single negative characteristic of Sarah is recorded.¹ Only her positive spiritual attributes are described, qualities we may have overlooked. Two passages, in particular, highlight Sarah as a godly woman whose example we are to follow. These are Hebrews chapter 11 verse 11 and 1 Peter chapter 3 verse 6. Interestingly, both books were written with the express purpose of encouraging Christians undergoing persecution and hardship. Also, in both passages, Sarah is mentioned with reference to her husband Abraham. In Hebrews chapter 11, she is viewed as a woman who moved together **with him**, united in faith. In 1 Peter chapter 3, she is described as a woman who was subject **to him**, recognizing Abraham as her God-ordained head. As such, Sarah is a role model to married women who wish to honour God, although the example of Sarah's godliness and faith we can all seek to emulate.

The Epistle to the Hebrews was written to Jewish believers who were under intense pressure to return to Judaism. At the time of writing, the tangible and visible elements of this ancient religion were still evident. The colossal temple building that Herod the Great had constructed in

Jerusalem was the envy of the world. Along with its priests and sacrifices, it stood as an emblem to the Jews, consolidating their misplaced confidence in the superiority and permanence of their religion. The writer of Hebrews reminds Christians, who had rejected Judaism and were facing persecution, that 'we see Jesus', Heb. 2. 9. The surpassing greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ is laid out before them. He is 'so much better' than any of the Old Testament characters or Jewish institutions they had held so dearly, Heb. 1. 4. Yet, He is understood and apprehended by faith.

In Hebrews chapter 11, Sarah is listed among the catalogue of Old Testament heroes, whose faith is to be followed. She is one of two women recorded, along with Rahab who by faith 'perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace', v. 31. Perhaps 'woman of faith' would not be the first epitaph we would think of for Sarah. After all, she did laugh with incredulity on hearing that she would bear a son in her old age, Gen. 18. 12-14. Inwardly, she mused, 'Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old?' The Lord, looking upon her heart, 1 Sam. 16. 7, saw her unbelief, and with a gentle rebuke reminded her, 'is anything too hard for the Lord?'

Contrast Sarah with young Mary, described in the opening verses of Luke's Gospel, still, perhaps, only a teenager at that time, Luke 1. 26-35. Some 2,000 years after Sarah, Mary heard the startling news of two impending births. Like Sarah, her elderly cousin Elisabeth was, miraculously, about to bear a child. Far more astounding, however, was the miracle that God would accomplish through Mary herself. She had never known a man, yet Mary would conceive and give birth to a child, fulfilling that sign of signs heralded centuries earlier by the prophet Isaiah, 'Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel', Isa 7. 14. The child would be no less than Immanuel, God incarnate dwelling with us, the long-promised Christ and Saviour of the world. Like Sarah, Mary was reminded, 'for with God nothing shall be impossible', Luke 1. 37. How remarkable was the response of this young woman of faith? In contrast to Sarah, she implicitly accepted the promise of God. Simply believing God, she said, 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word', v. 38.

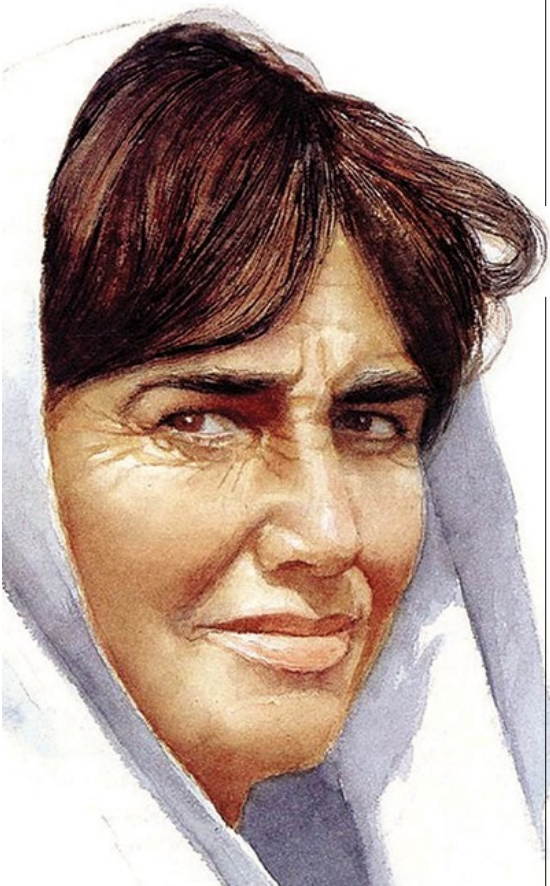
A redeeming feature of Sarah is that she promptly learned from her mistakes and was open to the loving discipline and encouragement God had provided. Hebrews also reminds us, 'For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth', Heb. 12. 6. We read of the renewed faith of Sarah in Hebrews chapter 11 as she laid hold of the promises of God. In verse 11, we read, 'through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised'.

Note the word 'also'. Sarah was united with her husband Abraham in faith. He too had laughed, except with joy as he realized that God was about to achieve the impossible through a frail old man like him, Gen. 17. 17. God had chosen 'the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty', 1 Cor. 1. 27. Romans chapter 4 describes the great faith of Abraham. Despite the deadness of

Sarah's body and his own body, as far as bringing children into the world were concerned, he 'against hope believed in hope' and 'staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God', Rom. 4. 20. This elderly couple were united together in faith and were blessed by God accordingly.

Through the goodness of God, Sarah learned to laugh again, Gen. 21. 6. This time not with the cynical laugh of unbelief, but, like Abraham, with the joy of resting in El-Shaddai, the all-sufficient God, 17. 1. Sarah soon held in her arms her 'child of promise', Isaac, whose name means 'laughter'. In fact, the Hebrew name 'Yitzhak' sounds like someone laughing! Paul uses the picture of Sarah and Isaac in Galatians chapter 4 verses 21 to 31, cp. Rom. 9. 9. Hagar, Sarah's slave, had given birth to Ishmael, a child born according to the flesh. In contrast, Sarah, a free woman, had brought the child of promise into the world. Paul concludes that 'now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise'. We are no longer slaves under the law but sons and heirs of God through Christ, Gal. 4. 7.

There is much we can learn from



Sarah's progress in trusting God. Like Sarah, we are all on a journey of faith. This journey commences **by** faith and continues **in** faith. Four times the scriptures remind us, 'the just shall live by faith'.² We all struggle, at times, on the journey of faith. Sometimes we have doubts. We may question what God has said about the past or present, or in what He has promised for the future. Like Sarah, God may need to encourage, challenge or test our faith. God sees our heart and knows our thoughts. Yet, through personal trials and His word, which is 'a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart', Heb. 4. 12, God can reveal to us whether our faith is real or not. The storms of life can bring us to the point where we exclaim, like Paul in Acts chapter 27 verse 25, 'I believe God'.

The Apostle Peter also refers to Sarah in his first Epistle. From first-hand experience, Peter knew what it was to have his faith tested in a time of crisis. Seeing his Lord being taken and crucified was such a traumatic experience that the Lord Jesus likened it to the violent shaking of wheat in the sifting process. With this crisis approaching, the Lord Jesus had strengthened and warned Peter, 'But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren', Luke 22. 32. Peter, the man of 'stone', soon crumbled. Despite his failure, Peter went on to follow in his Lord's footsteps. Throughout the centuries, the two letters written by Peter have strengthened the faith of countless believers in times of crisis. The central message in Peter's first letter is unequivocal. In the face of persecution or unjust treatment, whether in society, 1 Pet. 2. 13-17, or in the work environment, vv. 18-20, we should not react or retaliate. Rather we should imitate the Saviour, vv. 21-25, 'who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously', v. 23.

In chapter 3 verses 1 to 6, Peter writes to encourage married women, especially those suffering harshly at the hands of unbelieving husbands.

He exhorts them, not to be preoccupied with time-consuming and expensive activities in order to enhance one's outward appearance, but rather to cultivate the inner adornment 'of a meek and quiet spirit', 'a gentle and peaceful spirit, [one that is calm and self-controlled, not overanxious, but serene and spiritually mature]', Amplified Bible. Such demeanour speaks more powerfully than any words and is a powerful force in winning an unbelieving husband for the Lord. The Apostle Peter uses Sarah, in verse 6, as an illustration of this attitude. Although Sarah was marked by outward physical beauty, Gen 12. 11, she is as an example of a godly woman who demonstrated an inner beauty of heart 'which is in the sight of God of great price'.

In verse 6, we read that she called Abraham 'my lord', a common title of honour and respect in ancient times. Interesting to note the occasion when this happened, when Sarah inwardly laughed out of unbelief in Genesis chapter 18 verse 12, the occasion we have considered already. Like the writer of Hebrews, Peter also reminds us, not of Sarah's failings, but of her positive attitude of heart. Clearly, Sarah was no shrinking violet. Yet with a heart submitted to God she inwardly expressed these words, acknowledging that Abraham was the God-ordained head over her. She appreciated in part what we now appreciate fully through New Testament revelation, 'Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church', Eph. 5. 22, 23.

In summary, Sarah is an easy character to misjudge and underestimate. The New Testament draws attention to Sarah's spiritual qualities as the true complement of her husband Abraham. The two of them moved together on their journey in faith as 'joint heirs of the grace of life', 1 Pet. 3. 7.

Endnotes

- 1 Heb. 11. 11; 1 Pet. 3. 6; Rom. 4. 19; 9. 9; Gal. 4. 22, 23.
- 2 Hab. 2. 4; Rom. 1. 17; Gal. 3. 11; Heb. 10. 38.

Characters in the early years of the Lord Jesus

Zacharias and Elisabeth

By **MICHAEL WILKIE** Inverness, Scotland

In his account of the life-story of the Lord Jesus, Luke devotes a large part of the first chapter of his Gospel not to the experience of Mary and Joseph, but to that of Zacharias and Elisabeth. This elderly couple, living in the hill country of Judah, v. 39, no doubt had little idea that God would use them to bring into the world a child who would fulfil prophecy, call the favoured nation out of its spiritual slumber to prepare the way of the Lord, and become the baptizer of the Messiah Himself. There are many different ways of looking at their story, but it is interesting to consider some of the contrasting expressions that we find in Luke chapter 1.

1. 'they were both righteous ... they had no child', vv. 6, 7

The Spirit of God has given high praise to these two saints. They were meticulous in their observance of divine commands, to the extent that they are described as 'righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord'. Not only that, but they are called 'blameless', v. 6. Of course, this does not mean that they were sinless, but it carries the idea that they were beyond reproach. This is a great commendation, and, in a sense, it is something that is open to any believer; obedience to the word of God, a quietness of spirit, and a heart of love can lead to any believer being described as 'blameless', Phil. 2. 12-15; 1 Thess. 3. 12, 13. Let us challenge ourselves as to whether we could be held up as examples in the same way as Zacharias and Elisabeth were.

And yet, there was a great sadness in their home – 'they had no child'. The first thing that we learn from this is that godliness of character is no protection against sorrow of

heart. We are not told how long they had been married for, but it had been long enough for it to become apparent that their union would not be blessed with children. Perhaps their hopes slowly faded over the years, and they had to come to terms with the fact that the joy of parenthood would not be theirs. How they coped with the sadness of this is not told to us, nor is any record left of their feelings as they tried to rejoice with other families in the town as children were born into other homes while their own remained childless. It must have taken great strength of character to continue to walk blamelessly before their God when all the prayers that they offered went seemingly unanswered, v. 13, but their commendation remained – 'righteous before God'. May God give us all help to be worthy of similar praise in whatever circumstances we find ourselves.

2. 'I am an old man ... I am Gabriel', vv. 18, 19

It must have been a great day for Zacharias when the privilege of

entering the Temple to burn incense fell to him. Little did he know that in one sense it would be both the greatest and lowest day of his life. In the silence of the sacred shrine, with the prayers of the people ascending outside, he stood before the altar and offered the incense in the prescribed manner. Suddenly, there appeared an angel from heaven, bearing the news that he had long thought he would never hear, 'thy prayer is heard ... thy wife shall bear thee a son', v. 13. A literal rendering of this verse is, 'thy prayer was heard'. The idea is not that God, having ignored his prayer for many years, had now decided to answer it, but rather that the prayer was answered on the day that it was made, but the revelation of that answer to Zacharias had been withheld until the fullness of the time in the divine programme had come. We can scarcely be critical of the elderly priest, but the fact remains that when he should have been praising God for His kindness, his faith in God failed and he focused more on the earthly problem than on the heavenly promise. God had sent a messenger from His own presence, and yet all that Zacharias could think of was 'his own body, now dead', cp. Rom. 4. 19. Indeed, the fact that God had in the past wrought a similar miracle in the life of Abraham and Sarah should have been enough ground for his faith to rest on, and yet it stumbled because his focus was not on the word from heaven but on the limitations of human flesh. Consequently, the sentence of judgement was pronounced by Gabriel, and when Zacharias emerged again to meet the waiting multitude he had no blessing to give to them.

Have we not found ourselves often in a similar situation? A promise comes to us from the scriptures, but we cannot think how God will bring it to pass, so we fail to trust Him. Or, our prayers seem to have gone so long without an answer that we begin to doubt God's ability or desire to answer us. Of course, not every request will be granted; if we ask for things that are ungodly, or ask out of a selfish motive, cp. Jas. 4. 3, we cannot expect to receive what we want! Alternatively, God

may have some higher thing that He will give us, or it may be that in His wisdom it is necessary for us to wait before He moves to bless us. And yet the God that we serve is a God who has promised to answer His people's prayers! Let us, therefore, see to it that we do not, like the people of Nazareth in the Lord's day, limit His ability to work by our lack of trust in Him.

3. 'She brought forth a son ... his mouth was opened', vv. 57, 64

While it is often dangerous to speculate regarding the reasons why God has acted in a particular way, it is certainly possible to see in this chapter the results of God's dealings with this couple. Notice some of the outcomes of what they experienced at His hand:

The people of God were helped

When Mary was visited by Gabriel, one of the things that he told her was that Elisabeth was expecting a child, v. 36. This proof of the fact that God not only could work miracles, but was at that time acting

in this way, would no doubt be a help to Mary in her acceptance of the divine message she had received. It is interesting to note that when the angel left her, Mary's instinct was to go to see Elisabeth and spend several months with her, vv. 39, 40, 56. We can only imagine the fellowship and conversations of those days as Mary and Elisabeth prepared to bring their respective children into the world. How different things might have been if the birth of John had followed the normal and natural pattern! There is a great challenge in this – would I be prepared to sacrifice some joy in life in order to be a help to someone who has a greater part to play in the things of God than I do?

The greatness of God was advertised

There is a remarkable amount of praise in this chapter; from the praise of Elisabeth in verse 25 to the prophecy of Zacharias in verses 68 to 79. Notice particularly, the twofold effect that this had on the people in verses 65 and 66; they acquired a greater reverence for

God, perhaps because of the way He had dealt with Zacharias, but they were also prepared for the future ministry of John. When he came into the countryside around Jordan there must have been those who remembered the remarkable circumstances of his birth, and were ready to acknowledge him as a prophet of the Lord, 3. 2, 3. Again, there is a great challenge in this – if my sorrow leads to the greatness of God being more widely understood and enjoyed, would I think that a price worth paying?

The grace of God was demonstrated

The months must have been long and weary for Zacharias as he sat silent in his own house. No doubt the consciousness of his own failure lay heavy upon him, as day followed speechless day. 'Thou shalt be dumb' – how tragic for a priest to be unable to pray audibly or speak to his fellow man! And yet the situation was not hopeless, for the angel had said 'Thou shalt be dumb, until', and so eventually the day came when the time of discipline was past, and his speech was restored, v. 64. Indeed, verse 67 goes on to tell us that he was filled with the Spirit, and prophesied. How gracious of God! How kind, to allow a failing man to be the channel of divine revelation! Let us take heart from this; failure is not final, and those who are willing to submit themselves to the hand of God can, despite their shortcomings, be usable once again in the hand of God.

In summary, then, what can we learn from the experience of Zacharias and Elisabeth?

- Righteousness and faithfulness in difficult circumstances attracts the praise of God;
- Failure to trust God can lead to spiritual discipline;
- God sometimes allows us to pass through sorrow so that we might become a help to others, or in some other way to be of use in His things;
- God is gracious enough to use those who have failed.

May God help us to follow the example of this godly couple!



ASPECTS OF CALVARY

PART 1

The death of Christ in Romans

By **STEPHEN FELLOWES** Skibbereen, Ireland

In this series of articles, we will consider four aspects of the death of our Lord Jesus Christ as found in some of the New Testament Epistles.

This is surely the most blessed and profound of all subjects and, as we touch upon it, may our minds be instructed as to the meaning of His death, but, more than that, may our hearts be drawn out in love to our Saviour because of His greatness.

The subjects we will consider are as follows:

Romans – the death of Christ;
Galatians – the cross of Christ;
Hebrews – the blood of Christ;
1 Peter – the sufferings of Christ.

Romans – the death of Christ

The puritan author JOHN OWEN, when writing his book on the same subject entitled it *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, and while we don't endorse all the contents of the same volume, we feel that in the title the author has struck the right note, one of supremacy and wonder.

When we come to the Epistle to the Romans, we soon discover that the Holy Spirit directs our minds to Calvary from the standpoint of the **death** of the Saviour.

At the opening, and at the close of the Epistle, Paul states that his desire was that the saints at Rome would be established, 1. 1; 16. 25. Brethren of a former generation would speak of the importance of 'becoming a good Roman'. In other words, to become well-grounded in the doctrine of the Epistle is absolutely paramount for the believer. This spiritual establishment will, of necessity, include a firm grasp of the significance of the death of Christ.

The satisfaction of His death, chapter 3

From verses 21 to 26, Paul gives us one of the greatest sentences in the whole of the word of God. In it he speaks of a manifestation, v. 21, a declaration, vv. 25, 26, and a presentation, v. 25. The righteousness that God has provided for man on the basis of faith has been made perfectly clear, and God declares His own personal righteousness in doing so. However, in order for righteousness to be provided for the sinner and the righteousness of God to be declared there must be an answer for sin. Thank God there is! That answer is found fully and finally in the One who is described as 'a mercy seat', v. 25 JND. God has 'set Him forth' to none other than the guilty world of whom He has just been speaking, v. 19.

The figure of the mercy seat takes us back to the annual day of atonement, when the blood of the goat upon whom the Lord's lot fell, was taken and sprinkled 'upon and before the mercy seat', Lev. 16. 15. This indicated the value of the work of Christ God-ward; the picture fails because of the need for annual repetition, but in it the principle is established, that only blood will satisfy divine holiness in relation to sin. We rejoice in the full satisfaction that God has derived from

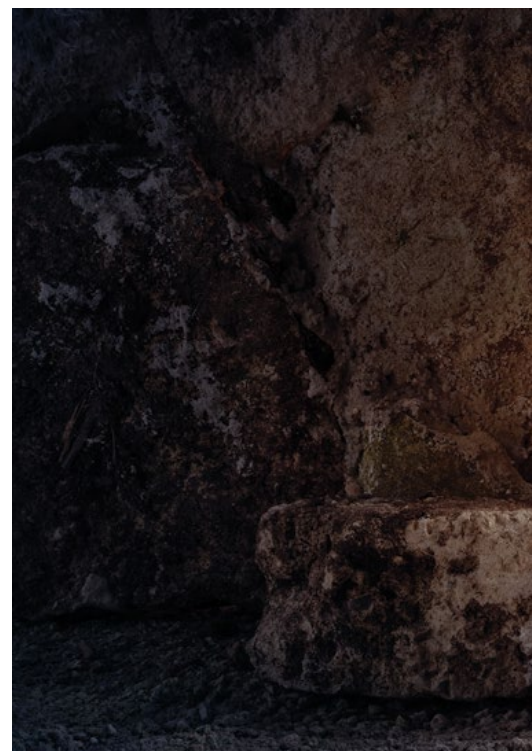
the work of Christ once for all. In the past, God passed over the sins of the Old Testament saints in forbearance with a view to Calvary, but, in the present, God puts away our sins in satisfied righteousness because of Christ's finished work!

The supremacy of His death, chapter 5

This chapter has a number of 'first references' in the Epistle. We have the first reference to the Holy Spirit, and to the love of God. It might seem a strange thing that up to now the love of God has not been referred to in the letter, but when we remember that we are viewing things from the divine courtroom and that the setting is legal we will discern the perfection of the word of God in emphasizing the righteousness of God throughout.

In the chapter, Paul enumerates the blessings or results of justification and extols the love of God that has flown out towards us. We were utterly powerless and incapable of helping ourselves, positively ungodly, hating God and His ways, and having wilfully missed the mark in our sinfulness, vv. 6, 8. We were guilty and in need of justification, and enemies, hostile in our attitude towards God, vv. 9, 10.

It was for such people Christ died!
The possibilities of human love are



limited, but the display of divine love is marvellous, vv. 7, 8. This love reaches its climax in 'the death of His Son', v. 10. The words of JOHN DICKIE caught something of the spirit of all of this when he wrote:

'Grace so vast bewilders heaven,
God to me His Son has given,
Jesus Saviour, Thou art mine!'

The similitude of His death, chapter 6

From chapter 5 verse 12 to chapter 8, the subject in Romans changes from 'sins' to 'sin', and, generally speaking, deals with the great matter of sanctification in the believer's life. The second half of chapter 5 will show me that I have links with Christ as the risen head; chapters 6 and 7 speak of freedom from sin and law respectively, and chapter 8 completes the picture by showing me how I can live my life in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Our death to sin is illustrated in water baptism, 6. 3-11. Again, it is essential to see that this chapter deals with the person who committed the sins, the criminal, if you like, rather than the crimes.

In my baptism I declare three things:

1. I am dead – this is what effectively happened at conversion – I died to sin positionally, as the master of my life;
2. I declare to all that I have, in fact,

died to sin, baptism is a matter of profession;

3. In my coming out of the waters of baptism, that I am associated with Christ in resurrection and that I am 'alive unto God', v. 11. This new life will be the ultimate proof that I have died unto sin in reality.

His death sets us free, chapter 7

If chapter 6 deals with freedom from sin as illustrated in baptism, then chapter 7 deals with freedom from law pictured in marriage, vv. 1-3.

Paul shows that just as death is the only thing that breaks the marriage bond, so the death of Christ alone sets free from the bonds of the law. Death opens the way for a new relationship to be formed, 'Ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ that ye should be married to another', v. 4. The idea is that the Lord's body was given in death, to free us and unite us in oneness with Himself for God's pleasure. Perhaps the reason that it is worded like this is to emphasize the reality of His humanity and thus the reality of His death, see also Col. 1. 22.

His death brings security, chapter 8

This is one of those great Bible chapters which constantly yields joy and help to God's people in their pathway in this world. How often we

have been reminded that it begins with no condemnation and ends with no separation, vv. 1, 39.

When we come to verse 33, the Christian is viewed as one beyond accusation, because God has justified him. No voice can be raised; no finger can be pointed; the case is eternally closed because God is eternally satisfied with the work of His Son.

Verse 34 shows us that the Christian is also beyond condemnation, that is, beyond a sentence of judgement being passed upon him for proven guilt. How can this possibly be? It can be blessedly true because Christ has died and is risen again and 'there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus', v. 1.

This brings the child of God into the good of eternal security, and sets his feet upon the firm foundation of the finished work of Christ.

'When Satan tempts me to despair,
Telling of evil yet within,
Upward I look and see Him there
Who made an end of all my sin'.

We can only touch upon these great truths in an article like this but, as we do, may the Lord help us to grasp a little bit more of the glory and profundity of meaning contained in the presentation of the death of Christ in the Roman Epistle.



The Republic of Panama

By **BYRNE FORESHAW** Panama

The promise

Joshua chapter 1 says, 'Arise, go over this Jordan . . . as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law . . . turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success . . . Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest'.

The place

It was December 2007. A past call and clear direction had now become a living reality and we were on our way to the Republic of Panama, the southernmost country in Central America, the bridge between two continents with a pathway between two seas. We felt somewhat like Joshua, going to live in a place we knew very little about and had visited but once before, but on that visit the Lord had shown us wonderful spiritual fruit. Yet it was a place where there was no known assembly or assembly missionaries. It was a land that we had visited for a few weeks the previous year, but this time it wasn't a visit, we had a one-way ticket. Leaving with eight suitcases, and arriving with only one, to begin a new life in a foreign land, with an unknown language, culture and climate, and with no assembly or family, we felt very much alone. Alone? No, we had in our hearts and hands a sure word of promise that God had given to Joshua some

many years before. A promise of an unfailing God, of success in His will according to obedience to His word and His unwavering presence with us.

We live in the newly established province of Panama Oeste, one of the most populated provinces in the country. Where we live, and where the assembly gathers, is about forty-five kilometres west of Panama City. This should normally take about thirty-five minutes, but increases to two hours and forty minutes in morning and evening rush hour traffic.

We were delighted when we heard that in 2009 Marcos and Sara Sequera, from Venezuela, were being commended to the Lord's work in Panama. They stayed with us for a few months, but had an exercise for the western end of the country, the province of Chiriqui, where they have moved to and have been ever since. They labour in Dolega, where the assembly meets, as well as in surrounding areas, such as Boquete, Dos Rios and the provincial capital of David. We labour in happy fellowship with them, even though the 500 kilometres between us makes it difficult to work together physically.

The purpose

Preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ and teaching biblical truths for Christian living and gathering, as well as meeting the many needs of the people in this land, are the main purposes for which we are here. We have complete liberty and are able to use various methods to do so. Lois is a medical doctor, which opens numerous doors as health needs are attended to, spiritual ones are touched on as well.

We have continued with Bible classes in a local boy's orphanage for the last nine years, as well as

weekly Bible classes in outreaches in Potrero Grande, about thirty minutes away. The Friday evening young people's class continues to be an encouragement. A few have professed to be saved, some are now baptized and others in assembly fellowship.

In our home, we have weekly Bible studies for young believers to help them develop spiritually and to assist them in working through the many difficulties they face in their homes, schools and workplaces. Many of the believers are the only ones saved in their family or home, so there is little encouragement for them in spiritual things.

We received permission from the Ministry of Education to give out scripture texts (Seed Sower texts) in all 400 schools in our province. Often, it takes three trips to complete a school, so it can be very time consuming, but it means that the gospel enters hundreds of homes in a short period of time.

Throughout the year we have a number of one-week Bible classes for children (VBS – Vacation Bible School), during the week off between each of the three semesters, that is, at Christmas and at the beginning and ending of the school year. This has helped to make new contacts with the parents, increase the attendance at Sunday School and provide basic Bible teaching for the children. Their lives lack so much, not just in their need of salvation, but in relation to morality, guidance and good examples to follow.

For a number of years now, we have had a group of girls from various countries come and help us for a couple of weeks. This gives them an opportunity to experience gospel work and Bible teaching in a different culture and environment. They help out with children's work, visiting hospitals, helping at the orphanage, distributing gospel texts and invitations and various other activities.

Every six to eight weeks we have a meal at the hall for anyone that would like to come. This gives us opportunity to make contacts and have conversations in a comfortable

environment. We often have barbecues at our place as well throughout the year to attract the people and provide opportunities for spiritual conversations. At Christmas, the assembly provides a community meal, where we sing hymns and carols, have a Christmas gospel message and the turnout has been very encouraging over the years.

The people

The culture lacks respect on all levels, from self-respect to respect for governments and authority. It is a selfish culture of corruption and survival, big dreams but no hope, poor education and health care, immorality and ruined lives, broken family structures with no knowledge of God's purpose in marriage nor role or commitment of husband and wife. Moral direction is lacking in the homes, schools and churches. The children are often left alone to be taught by the immoral systems of social media, internet and television. When we had our first child, the paediatrician told us that the television was a great source of teaching and development for the child. We listened, but kindly disagreed, and suggested that parental engagement and personal interactive stimulation by physical parents, accompanied by biblical principles were much healthier and more beneficial than the morally void programmes of this world. Lois has had to give classes to teach mothers

how to care for, play with, and stimulate their children. They had no idea how to engage with their own child.

Both in Dolega and Valle Hermoso, there are believers from indigenous tribes (Kuna and Guaymi, Ngöbe-Buglé). This brings many traditional spiritual beliefs that, at times, need to be corrected by the scriptures without offence to their background.

The problems

We live in a dark, spiritually blinded and morally bankrupt culture that is saturated with Bibles and churches but void of truth, God consciousness and a knowledge of right and wrong. Churches here are nothing more than corrupt businesses. They demand ten percent from the people and tell them God won't bless them if they don't pay. Friendliness and courtesy are more of a surprise than the norm. Once a soul is saved, there is much undoing of the past and much biblical teaching and guidance needs to be provided. Even the simple things like 'please' and 'thank you' are rarities. Some indigenous cultures here don't even have words to say 'please' and 'thank you'!

There are many churches here that would claim to gather according to the Bible but fail in the scriptural pattern in many ways. They preach another gospel that is not true. They want a pastor instead of plurality

of elders. They reject the truth of headship shown in the covered head of the sisters. They dismiss the truth that the responsibility of public preaching and teaching is for men and that the women are silent in the church gatherings. We are trying to teach what the Bible teaches and not the traditions and ceremonies of religion.

The prosperity

It was on April 26, 2009 when a little group of believers in Valle Hermoso, who previous to our arrival had not heard the gospel nor seen the biblical way of gathering to the name of the Lord Jesus, gathered for the first time to remember the Lord with a loaf of bread and cup of wine. After having attended so many churches in the past where they had never heard the gospel nor seen the simple biblical way of gathering, they were delighted to form part of a local assembly with Christ in the midst.

Likewise, on December 5, 2010, six and a half hours away in the village of Dolega, where Marcos and Sara Sequera labour, another small group of believers came together to break bread for the first time. This was another day for rejoicing in what the Lord is doing in this land.

These two testimonies continue by God's grace and have grown numerically and, most of all, spiritually in the few years since they were planted.

The praise and prospect

We are very much aware that this work is not our work nor about what we are doing. We have learned from making many mistakes, falling down and getting up again, that this is the Lord's work. It's done in His name, by His power, for His purposes and He alone is to be praised. The glory is His!

'Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake. But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased', Ps. 115. 1, 3. 'When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory', Col. 3. 4.



WORD FOR TODAY

By **BRIAN CLATWORTHY** Newbury, England

Ktt (beat fine)

Leb, Lebab (Heart)

Labba (Flame)

Throughout history, the heart has always been regarded as an important part of the human body. According to the Greek philosopher Aristotle, the heart was a three-chambered organ that was the centre of vitality in the body, being the seat of intelligence, motion and sensation. Similarly, the Bible regards the heart as much more than simply an anatomical or physical organism as, for example, in 2 Kings chapter 9 verse 24, but with emotions and mindset, and is regarded as the controlling centre of the whole person and their desires. In fact, the term is often used as a synonym for the mind, conscience or the inner person which represents human personality.¹ This is why we as believers are encouraged to guard the heart, because everything we do flows out from it, Prov. 4. 23; cp. Matt. 12. 34.

The noun *leb* and the almost identical word *lebab* occur throughout the Old

Testament, where they are mainly used metaphorically to describe the mind or the motivating attitudes of individuals. In the first mention of the word *leb* in Genesis chapter 6 verse 5, we read of man that ‘every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually’. This could be understood as meaning that every plan devised by the mind of man was essentially evil all the time, cp. 8. 21; 1 Chr. 28. 9. This is in sharp contrast to the heart of God described in the next verse where the writer indicates anthropomorphically the emotional suffering of God’s heart because of man’s sinful proclivity. As one translation puts it, God’s heart was ‘filled with pain’, Gen. 6. 6 NIV, or, literally, there was hurt in the heart of God.² LUC states, ‘The juxtaposition of the “hearts”, points out that God’s decision is based on people’s inner life and is at the same time out of his concerned heart’. In the natural realm, human hearts can harden through a change in some of the genes in heart muscle proteins, but the hardening or stiffening of human hearts towards God is, in

biblical terms, fundamentally an inherent weakness of human nature linked to mindset. Therefore, it is not outward appearance that is important to God, but the emotions of the heart, 1 Sam. 16. 7.

The classic example of this is Pharaoh and his attitude towards God’s people. Twelve times we are informed that Pharaoh either stiffened his heart or God stiffened his heart for him, and, on all these occasions, what is being emphasized is the obstinacy or stubbornness of the human heart. Effectively, it has a mindset all of its own! Even when it was pointed out by Pharaoh’s ungodly magicians that what was happening could be directly attributed to the ‘finger of God’, he still refused to change, Exod. 8. 19.³ So in the stiffening process by Pharaoh himself, Exod. 7. 13, 14, 22; 8. 15, God waited for a change of heart, but, ultimately, it did not come, so God then punished Pharaoh by depriving him of the freedom to change his mind and thus avoid punishment, cp. Deut. 2. 30. As SEIFFRID states, “Hardening” thus signifies the encounter of the rebellious human being with the word of God in judgment’.⁴ This is the main reason given for Paul’s conclusion to his argument in Romans chapter 9 verses 14 to 18. It is also interesting to note in passing that the Greek word used in Romans chapter 9 verse 18 for ‘hardening’ is *sklérunó*, which only occurs elsewhere in Acts chapter 19 verse 9 of the unbelieving Jews in Ephesus and repeatedly in the letter to the Hebrews in the context of those who harden their hearts and turn away from Christ, 3. 8, 13, 15; 4. 7. Internal human communication is often referred to as being in the heart, as in the case of Hannah, 1 Sam. 1. 13, who prayed to God to intervene in her personal circumstances or, as she expresses it to Eli, she had ‘poured out . . . [her] soul before the Lord’, v. 15. Many years later, Mary pondered ‘in her heart’ all the blessings that she had received because of the birth of the Saviour, Luke 2. 19.

In the books of Psalms and Proverbs, the writers have much to say about the heart and how it defines human motivation. Psalm 14 defines the fool and the nature of his inherent folly.

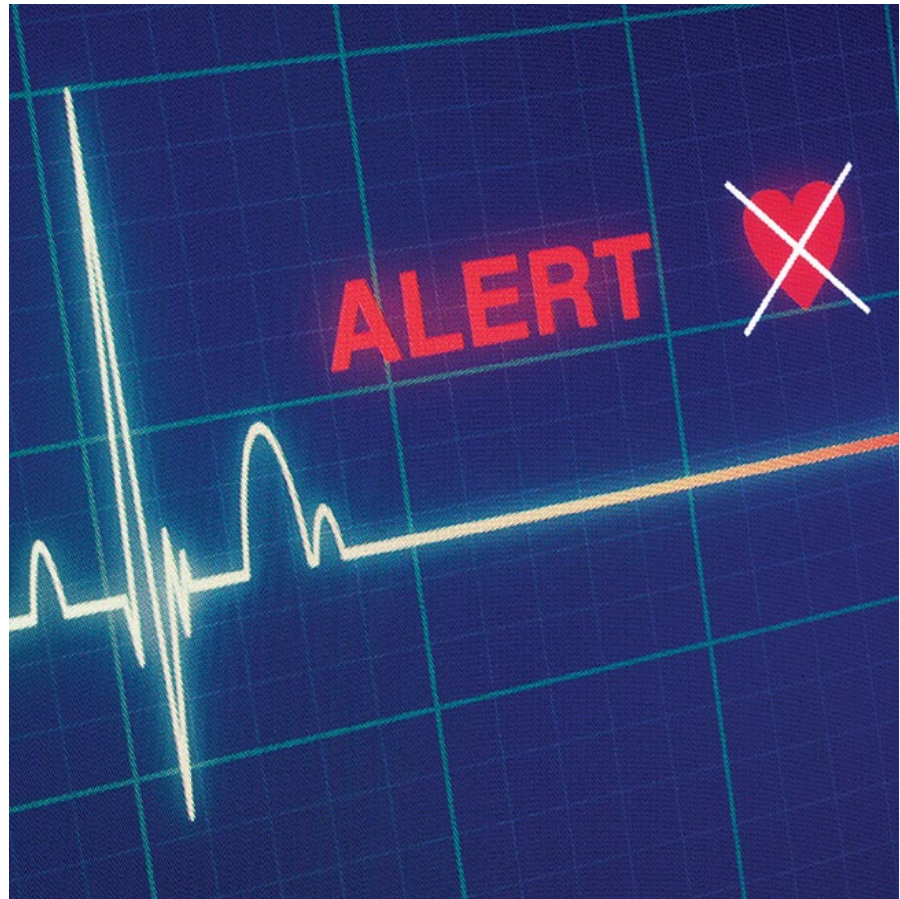


Humanly speaking, his folly is not simply a lack of intelligence, but rather the lack of direction and guidance in his life by God. The Hebrew word for ‘fool’ ‘implies an aggressive perversity, epitomized in the Nabal of 1 Samuel 25. 25’.⁵ KIDNER states that, ‘The assertion, *There is no God*, is in fact treated in Scripture not as a sincere if misguided conviction, but as an irresponsible gesture of defiance. In the context of Psalm 10. 4 it is expounded as a gamble against moral sanctions; in Job chapter 21 verses 7-15 as impatience of authority; in Romans chapter 1 verse 18 as intellectual and moral suicide’.⁶ As Jeremiah makes clear, ‘The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?’ Jer. 17. 9.

Proverbs chapter 3 verse 3 encourages us to permanently etch on the tablets of our minds (hearts) mercy and truth, cp. Deut. 6. 8, 9; Jer. 31. 33, which would stand us in good stead with both God and men. The prophets are equally consistent in emphasizing the control that the human heart has upon our lives, e.g., hardening the heart, Isa. 6. 10, perversity of the heart, Ezek. 28. 6, and so on. Jeremiah speaks of a new covenant that will one day come into existence between God and His people that will be internalized rather than based upon an external code of practice, and this will be placed upon the hearts and minds of His people thus reconciling them to Himself, Jer. 31. 32, 33, cp. Heb. 8. 10-13.

The Septuagint (LXX) usually translates the Hebrew words *leb/lebab* by the dynamic Greek equivalent word *kárza*. There are numerous examples of the use of this Greek word, as in Job chapter 37 verse 1, where it is used to explain moral life, in Psalm 104 verse 15 to refer to the centre of the whole inner life of an individual into which God looks, and in Proverbs chapter 3 verse 1 of the will and its decisions.

In the New Testament *kárza* occurs a considerable number of times. The word has both a positive and negative application depending on its immediate context. Positively,



rejoicing in God is expressed in or through the heart, Acts 2. 26, but, negatively, the sin of lust is developed in the heart, Matt. 5. 28. Basically, it covers the same ground overall as *leb/lebab* does in the Old Testament.

Before the body of the Scottish missionary David Livingstone, who died in Africa in 1873, was transported back to the United Kingdom for interment in Westminster Abbey, his heart was removed and buried under a tree near the spot where he died. His priority in life had been to take the gospel to Africa; it was where his heart was located. Our Lord once said, ‘For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also’, Matt. 6. 21 NKJV, and this text is a salutary reminder to us all of where our priorities should be focused in life as believers, bearing in mind that the same Lord searches all our hearts, Rev. 2. 23.

Further reading/study

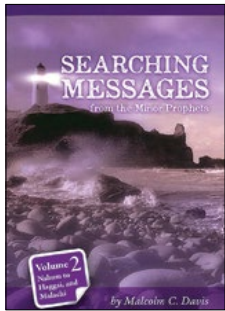
Introductory

‘Heart’ in LELAND RYKEN, JAMES C. WIHOIR, and TREMPER LONGMAN III (Ed.), *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, pp. 368, 369.

Endnotes

- 1 VINCENT states that the heart is not only the seat of the affections, but is the centre of our complex being – physical, moral, spiritual, and intellectual (*Word Studies of the New Testament* (Vol 1), pg. 219). WENHAM goes even further when he suggests that the “heart” is the centre of the human personality in biblical anthropology, where will and thought originate (Prov. 4. 23); It is not merely the source of the emotions as in English. But that sin has its root in man’s thought world is certainly a commonplace of biblical ethics (cf. “You shall not covet”, Exod. 20. 17)’, (*Genesis WBC* (Vol 1), pg. 146).
- 2 This is a poignant reminder to us that we too can experience similar feelings because we have been created in the image and likeness of God, Gen. 1. 26, 27.
- 3 In this immediate context, there are two different words used in Hebrew to refer to Pharaoh hardening his own heart and to that of God hardening Pharaoh’s heart. The former word expresses the idea that the hardening increased at every point where Pharaoh vacillated, whereas the latter word was used broadly of God strengthening Pharaoh’s heart against releasing Israel from captivity.
- 4 *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament, Romans* at pg. 644.
- 5 DEREK KIDNER, *Psalms 1-72*, Tyndale, pg. 79.
- 6 *Op. cit.*, pg. 79.

Book Reviews



Searching Messages from the Minor Prophets Malcolm C. Davis

192 pages, Paperback. Published by John Ritchie Ltd, 40 Beansburn, Kilmarnock, KA3 1RH, Scotland.
ISBN: 978-1-912522-54-5

This is the latest book from the busy pen of Malcolm Davis and is the second volume on the Minor Prophets. This volume covers the prophecies from Nahum to Malachi, with the exception of Zechariah, which is the subject of a previously published book. These are among the lesser-known books of the Old Testament, but the author throws light upon them in order to not only explain the text but to apply the teaching in a practical way for the believer today.

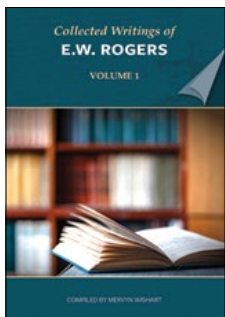
To quote from the General Introduction, the book is 'written from the conservative, pre-millennial, pre-tribulational and

dispensational standpoint, since I believe that this alone adequately explains every part of the Bible as a whole'. The historical background, authorship and date are given for each book, together with language and literary characteristics which the author is well qualified to assess. Each introduction is followed by a concise summary, before the main verse-by-verse commentary is given.

The practical lessons are clearly drawn without any undue forcing of application to twenty-first century life and society. Emphasis is given to the dealings of God with His

own chosen nation and also the Gentile nations insofar as they intrude upon, or are used of God, to discipline and educate His people. The overriding theme throughout the prophetic writings is, of course, the final, yet future, restoration and regathering of the nation of Israel, and to this end the clear Messianic prophecies are explained in their context and application.

The prevailing impression obtained from this book, as indeed from previous works by this author, is one of concise, easy-to-read exposition with an erudite presentation which believers of all ages should find beneficial.



Collected writings of E. W. Rogers – Volume 1 Compiled by Mervyn Wishart

400 pages, Paperback. Published by John Ritchie Ltd, 40 Beansburn, Kilmarnock, Scotland.
ISBN: 978-1-912522-60-6

Few people today under the age of sixty would have had the privilege of hearing the spoken ministry of E. W. Rogers. For that reason alone, this first volume of written ministry compiled by Mervyn Wishart is very welcome. It is, I suppose, a compliment and a mark of respect to our brother, who was called home in 1977, that he was always Mr Rogers when addressed directly, affectionally spoken of as Ebbie by Albert Leckie, and to the rest of us he was referred to simply as E. W.

E. W. was not a tall man, but in his day he 'walked with giants', teachers and preachers whose names resonate with an older generation. Harold St. John, J. M. Davies, Willie Trew, Albert Leckie, Harry Bell and David Craig to name but a few. He is particularly remembered for his incisive handling of the scriptures in Bible readings, often with his regular 'sparring partner',

Albert Leckie. They were two very different characters in personality and disposition, but a formidable and complementary partnership when explaining the scriptures.

I first heard E. W. at the London Convention in the late 1960s. He was the second speaker and, on taking the platform, his opening words were, 'I am pleased to see that our brother agrees with me on these verses, therefore he must be right!' There was no doubt an element of 'tongue in cheek' on that occasion, but E. W. was not a man to 'suffer fools gladly'. He was intolerant of any loose or inaccurate approach to the scriptures, and could, at times, appear abrupt or dismissive. Having said that, his ministry and knowledge of the word was consummate.

One of the first books I bought as a young believer was Mr

Roger's outline of the Hebrew Epistle. It is quite brief, by no means verse by verse, but concise, clear and a good overall base from which to work. This new publication under review covers a wide range of subjects from both Old and New Testaments. E. W. would never shy away from perceived difficulties, and several of the chosen topics deal with challenging truths. The chapters on the person and work of Christ are particularly heart-warming and the series of articles on the church very instructive.

E. W. was a regular contributor to a number of magazines including *Precious Seed*, in which he also took responsibility for the question and answer page for a number of years. Like so many good men whose voices are now silent, the value of their written ministry can still be appreciated, and this book is no exception.

Question Time

Conducted by
Richard Collings

QUESTION

What are the big issues facing assemblies today?

ANSWER

This question is not easy to answer, for many issues will be geographically specific. For example, many believers face persecution, some are restricted by abject poverty, whilst others live in very remote regions where fellowship with another assembly on a regular basis is not possible. Most of us within the United Kingdom, the USA and Canada have no personal experience of these challenging circumstances, but that does not mean that we are exempt from difficulties and hindrances to the continuation of assembly testimony.

In his final letter, the Apostle Paul highlights a number of issues that will characterize 'last days'. At the beginning of 2 Timothy chapter 3, he gives a catalogue of nineteen features that will be prevalent in the conduct of the ungodly, features that are progressively evident in society today. Increasingly, people are lovers of their own selves, unholy, despisers of those that are good and lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. Only a couple of generations ago most people had a reverential attitude towards God and a respect for Christians, but that is rapidly changing. This societal shift presents a massive challenge to God's people as we seek to maintain a testimony for the Lord.

A direct consequence of this situation is that the number of assemblies is falling, congregations are declining and the saints are aging. Many assemblies are so numerically and physically weak that they struggle to sustain any effective form of evangelism. Although they seek to be faithful to the Lord, the best they can do is to keep the door of the hall open and conduct their regular weekly meetings. This does not bode well for the future of many assemblies.

However, some of the big issues that confront us are not the outcome of external conditions but are those of our own making. How many assemblies have been decimated by internal disquiet and personality clashes? The night before His death, the Lord spoke to His disciples about a new commandment. It was that they should love one another. He then added, 'By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one

to another', John 13. 35. Regrettably, many of us might know the truth of 1 Corinthians chapter 13 theologically, but fail to display it experimentally.

As we read the historical books of the Old Testament, a lesson that stands out very distinctly is that the nation of Israel never rose above the level of its leader, whether that was a judge or a monarch. When there was a good leader, God's people would prosper spiritually, when the leadership was poor or non-existent, the nation floundered spiritually. Although we are living in a different era, the same situation prevails today. Whilst individuals can prosper spiritually, its spiritual leaders will set the collective spiritual level of a local church. One of our greatest needs, and it is conspicuous by its scarcity, is for elders who fulfil all aspects of the work required of them. Men who contend for the faith, care for the flock and comfort the feeble-minded, Acts 20. 28; 1 Thess. 5. 14.

Another issue that we face relates to us seeing ourselves as God sees us. To each of the seven churches in Revelation chapters 2 and 3, the Lord says, 'I know thy works', and that knowledge was not always in line with their own perception of themselves. The church at Ephesus may have thought it was contending for the truth, which it was, but it did not realize it had left its first love. The church at Laodicea considered itself prosperous and having need of nothing, whereas the divine assessment was that it was 'wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked', 3. 17. It is a good exercise, personally and corporately, to appraise ourselves in the light of the scriptures and to be willing to adjust where necessary.

There are other challenges that confront us, but we are not left to our own resources to overcome them. We have an unchanging God, the indwelling Holy Spirit and a great High Priest who makes intercession for us. As Paul prepared to leave the elders of Ephesus, he said, 'And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified', Acts 20. 32.

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'Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not?' Mark 12. 14

The Bible refers to both tax collectors and taxation issues. One of the disciples called by the Lord was Matthew, a tax collector, Matt. 9. 9. Matthew later invited the Lord to his house for a meal where the guests included tax collectors and other unsavoury characters. The Pharisees censured the Lord for eating with such people, especially directing their venom towards tax collectors, cp. Luke 18. 11. Tax collectors were despised because they collected taxes for the Roman authorities, and generally extracted more money than required by law – note the reparation offered by Zacchaeus, Luke 19. 8. Mark chapter 12 verses 13 to 17 and the synoptic parallels record an incident where our Lord came into conflict with the Pharisees and others over the question of taxing rights. They questioned Him with reference to taxation under the civil law, but underlying their question was the law of Moses. The Pharisees sought to entrap the Lord, but He was totally aware of their malevolence. He answers their question with a question. 'Why are you testing me?' cp. Num. 6. 16. He asks to see a coin that was used to pay the specific tax, which, characteristically, Matthew identifies as the poll tax, Matt. 22. 19. He then asks them whose head and title appeared on the coin, and their response gives rise to the Lord's saying, 'Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's', Mark 12. 17. This reply silenced all His critics! But is this saying as straightforward as it appears? The interpretation of this saying lies in both the religious and political significance of the answer from the Lord. The poll tax was a hated form of taxation and had led to all kinds of challenges to the authorities. But how does He get around this apparent difficulty? He tells them to render or give back – notice the word for 'give' (*apodidomi*) means 'to make a payment of a debt'. So, in effect, He is saying if you owe Caesar a debt then give it back to him. But *per contra* if you owe God a debt then you must give that back to Him. What really is behind our Lord's comments is Genesis chapter 1 verse 26 and the infraction of the second commandment, Exod. 20. 4. Because mankind is made in the image and likeness of God and belong to Him, then it is incumbent upon them to give themselves back to God. Additionally, by accepting coinage that showed a graven image meant that they had made for themselves graven images. When Caesar claimed what was rightfully God's, then the claims of God must take priority. In the words of Peter and the other apostles in Acts chapter 5 verse 29, 'We ought to obey God rather than men'. Our Lord was not saying that it was wrong to pay taxes, but the fundamental question was whether or not we are paying to God what is rightfully owed to Him? A very challenging question for all believers, even today.

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