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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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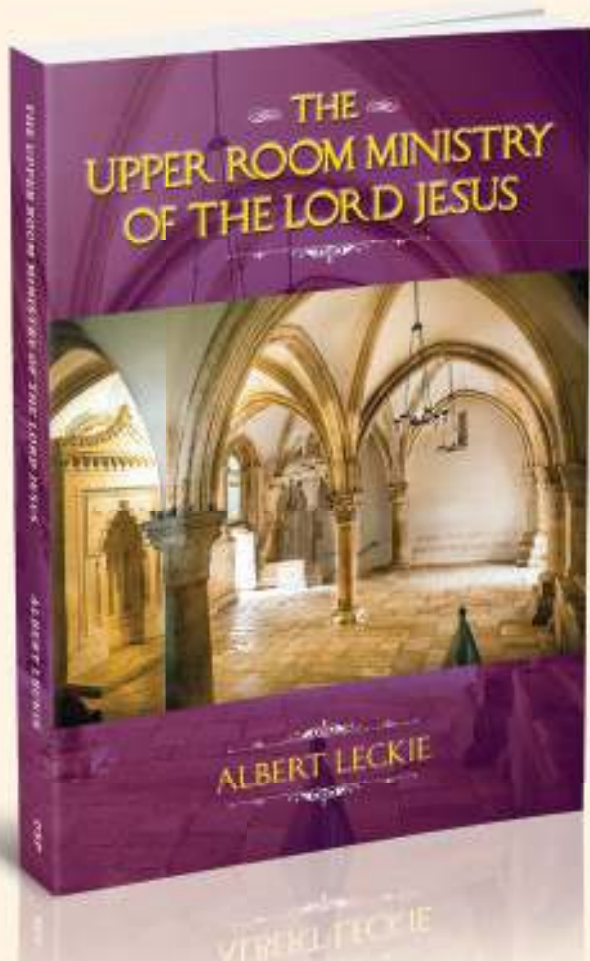
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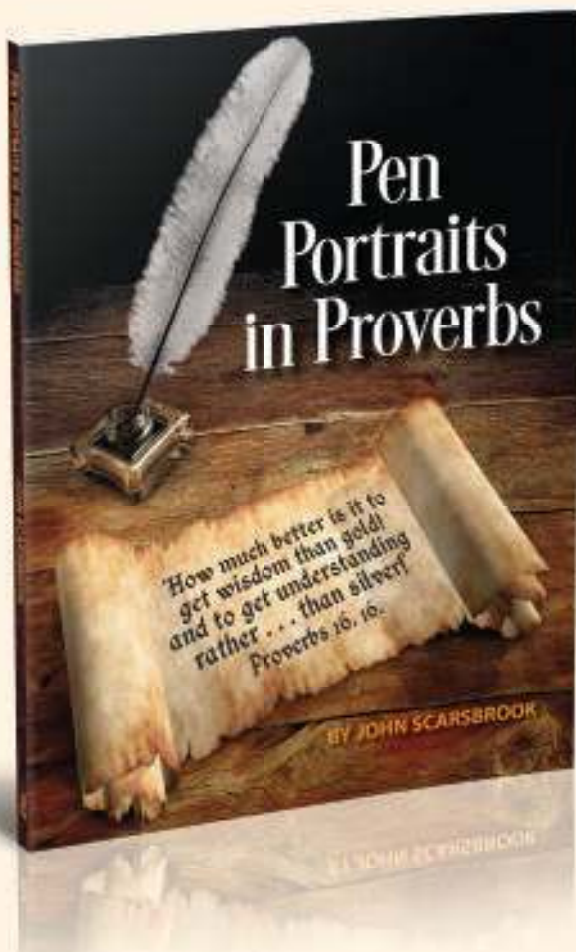


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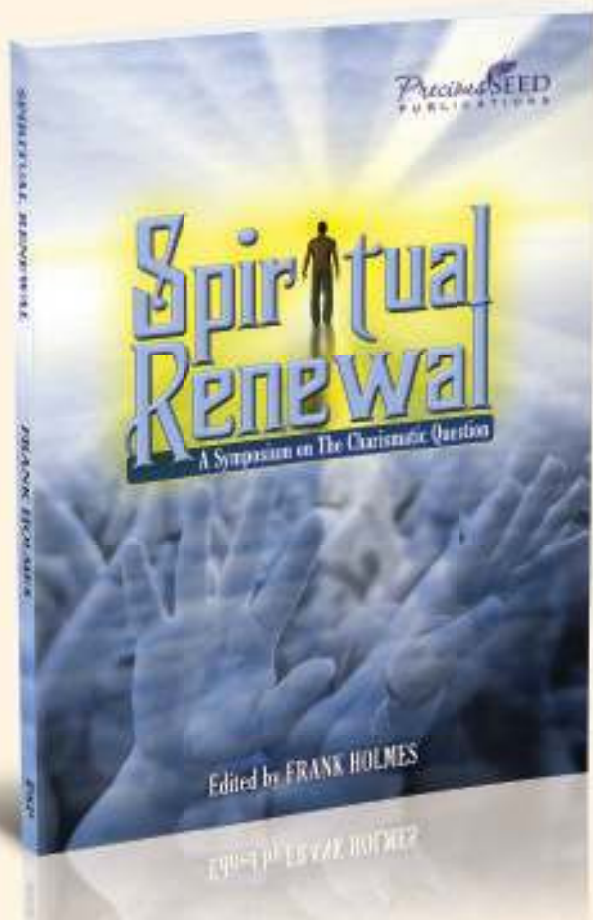
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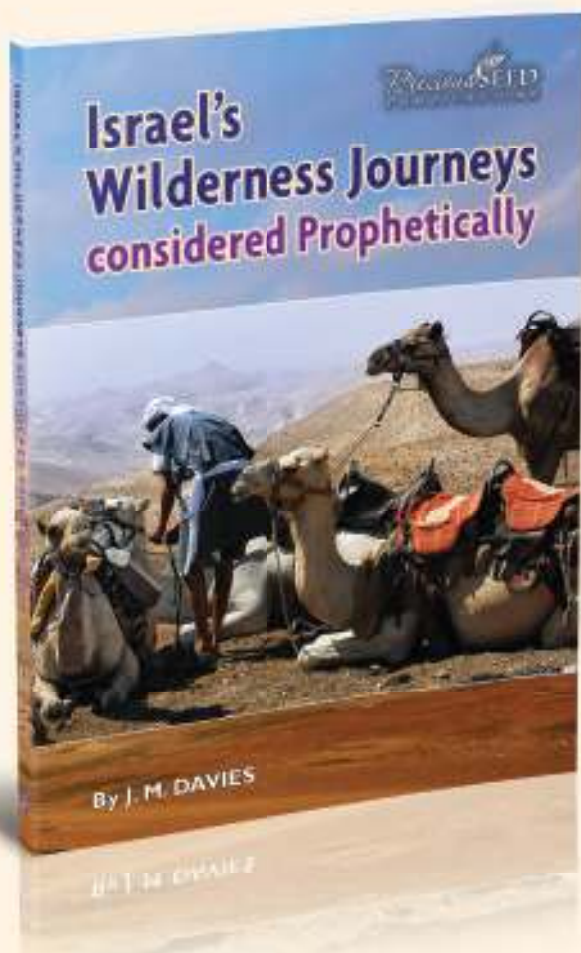
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‘We . . . sailed into Syria, and landed at Tyre . . . and finding disciples, we tarried there’, Acts 21. 3, 4

As we read through the narrative of the Acts of the Apostles, it is often perplexing to know why the inspired writer should record in places the minute detail of Paul’s journey. The opening verses of this chapter are an example. As we know that ‘all scripture is given by inspiration of God’, 2 Tim. 3. 16, it is worth pondering what the Spirit of God would have us learn.

One simple and, perhaps, obvious point is that here Luke, the writer of the narrative, is with the apostle. Noting when the writer says ‘we’ or ‘they’ enables us to see whether Luke was present or not. Such detail adds eye-witness credibility to events and that is particularly important when we come to the account of the raising of Eutychus, Acts 20. 9, 10.

Another simple point that we might note is the journey, the route taken and the distances travelled. As many of us have the benefit of our own vehicle, as well as public transport, we might not appreciate what it meant to Paul and his companions to travel thirty or sixty miles, or how long it would

take. Neither, I suspect, would most of us think of the dangers of such a journey. It is when we read Paul’s own account that we get a glimpse of the reality, ‘In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in peril of robbers . . . in perils of the wilderness . . . in weariness and painfulness’, 2 Cor. 11. 26, 27. Here was a man who could write to that same church, ‘And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you’, 12. 15. He did not count the cost to himself as he ventured forth in the service of his Lord.

Whilst we have noted when Luke was present with Paul and the obvious fellowship they had in the work of the Lord, it is also important to note Paul’s priority as he travelled. Our verses tell us that he found disciples. We do not believe that ‘he stumbled across them by chance’ but that he sought them out. Fellowship with the Lord’s people was a necessity rather than an interesting option. The true spiritual character of that fellowship is when the believers, together ‘with wives and children . . . kneeled down on the shore, and prayed’, v. 5, as Paul was about to leave. As many of us have known

something of the isolation of lockdown measures, our prayer is that we might have a deeper appreciation of Christian fellowship and hospitality than we had before!

As we seek to continue the work of Precious Seed during these unprecedented times, there are a number of changes that we are making. Richard Collings has decided to retire from the work after eleven years. His contributions have been significant, whether assisting the editor, writing a regular Questions page, or compiling a book of past questions. He has been a valued supporter of myself and others and we will miss him. As a consequence of Richard’s departure, Brian Clatworthy will become joint editor alongside Sandy Jack, Frank Proudlock will take on the Questions page, and Tom Merriman of the Treorchy assembly in Wales will join us in the work. We would value the prayer support of fellow believers as we look to the Lord for His help.

JOHN BENNETT

Chairman and General Editor

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The Messianic Psalms

PSALM 102

The Messiah, afflicted yet victorious

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

People sometimes feel overwhelmed by life's struggles. Amid physical, emotional, and spiritual difficulties, they wonder where to turn. The Lord Jesus promised, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven', Matt. 5. 3. Psalm 102 is written from this perspective, for the title declares, 'A Prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed, and poureth out his complaint before the Lord'.^{1,2} Amid suffering, believers should emulate the psalmist by taking their troubles to God. Yet, the multitudinous trials detailed in this chapter may speak particularly of 'the Man of sorrows' who fully experienced these things, Heb. 5. 7-9.

The messianic nature of the psalm is clearly set forth in its latter part, vv. 23-28, cp. Heb. 1. 10-12, yet its theme throughout is Messiah's sufferings and subsequent glory, Luke 24. 26, 27, 44. One nineteenth-century preacher said, 'Amongst all the Psalms, there is none more full of mourning and lamentation than this'.³ Another asserts, 'It is a Psalm of very touching beauty and grandeur. It is like Jesus in Gethsemane, exceeding sorrowful even unto death, going away and praying again, saying the same words, and yet again and again heard – the angel from heaven strengthening Him there, the answer of Jehovah assuring Him here'.⁴ CLARKE offers that 'this psalm shows something of the depth of Messiah's humiliation – the Deathless One as death-stricken'.⁵ Although the psalm is about Christ, believers may also derive comfort and applications from its lessons.

Here are two outlines:

A thematic outline:

The suffering Servant identifying with His people, vv. 1-11.
The sovereign Lord illuminating His people, vv. 12-22.

The Saviour's immutable life on behalf of His people, vv. 23-28.

A content outline:

The psalmist's plea to the Lord, vv. 1-11.
God's endurance and activity on the destitute Jews' and Gentiles' behalf, vv. 12-22.
Messiah's cry to God the Father, vv. 23, 24
The Father's answer to Messiah, vv. 25-28.

The suffering Servant's supplication

The opening prayer calls on God to 'hear', v. 1, using the same Hebrew verb as in Israel's foundational creed in Deuteronomy chapter 6 verse 4. When one is in a covenant relationship with the Almighty, one may cry out to Him for help in times of distress. Believers today possess strong scriptural assurances of His attentiveness to their prayers, Matt. 7. 7-11; 1 John 5. 14, 15. The opening verse borrows words from other biblical passages.⁶ Like Jonah's desperate prayer in his prophecy's second chapter, the psalmist exudes scripture, demonstrating his deep familiarity with it. When saints hide

God's word in their hearts they are preparing themselves for future perseverance in trials.

Physical and emotional challenges

Verses 3 to 5 concern humanity's frailty, depicting severe physical sufferings including burning, heart pain, and dryness. Collectively, these symptoms are so intense that natural impulses like eating are neglected and His appearance becomes skeletal, v. 5; compare the similar imagery in Psalm 22 verses 14 and 15. Verses 6 and 7 turn from Messiah's physical to His emotional sufferings. The avian imagery highlights His extreme loneliness, for it uses solitary birds which mostly inhabit desolate places. This abandonment is augmented by His enemies' taunts, v. 8. BOICE observes, 'Suffering is a difficult enough burden to bear all by itself. But when enemies also mock you for it, it is virtually intolerable. Yet they do! These cowards would have been afraid to mock a strong man when he was on his feet fighting, but they attacked the author of the psalm when he was down and unable to fight back'.⁷ Like Job, ashes and tears mingle as symbols of His mourning, v. 9; Job 2. 8.

Messiah's horrible treatment by man is dwarfed by the divine punishment as the sin-bearer, Ps. 102. 10. One commentator writes of its enormity in these words, 'The saints would find it no hard task to bear the reproaches of men, if they could always have the sensible, gracious presence of the Lord; but when his *indignation and wrath* are manifested, the best of men cry out in their anguish'.⁸ Beginning with His agonizing prayers in Gethsemane and continuing through His crucifixion, the Lord first suffered mentally, then spiritually on the cross as He died for sins. The last phrase is particularly chilling, 'for thou hast lifted me up and cast me down'. As PEROWNE explains, 'Thou hast taken me up . . . God's wrath has seized and whirled him aloft, only to cast him, as worthless, away'.⁹ It was bad enough that men cast Him away, 1 Pet. 2. 7, but to be forsaken by the Judge of all the earth was the

epitome of spiritual trauma.¹⁰ Verse 11 concludes His catalogue of woe using ‘smoke’ and desiccated grass to graphically express life’s transience.

Suffering yields to glory

In verse 12, the tone changes radically with the inspiring comparison of God’s eternity, ‘But thou O Lord’. Like the phrase ‘but God’ in Ephesians chapter 2 verse 4, the scene is instantly changed from wrathful gloom to glorious mercy. His impassioned opening prayer for help is answered, ‘Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion: for the time to favour her, yea, the set time, is come’, v. 13. God remembers and answers prayer; the resolution of this world’s massive problems merely awaits His perfectly appointed time. The Messiah will reign from Jerusalem, regathering His Israelite people and adding believing Gentile nations to His millennial kingdom, vv. 13-16.¹¹ Rather than thwart the divine plan, His sufferings actually became the foundation of His triumph, and so the Sufferer becomes the Sovereign, Isa. 52. 13 – 53. 12.

Since the kingdom will be administered by someone ‘afflicted’, v. 1, it stands to reason that ‘He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer’, v. 17.¹² This regime will be marked by freedom for the oppressed – people like the ‘sons of death’, vv. 19, 20.¹³ The kingdom’s centrepiece will be the revelation of the Lord’s glory and name, causing praise and service of His redeemed people, vv. 21, 22.

A conversation between God the Father and the suffering Servant

The psalm’s third and final section begins with a flashback to Messiah’s sufferings in verse 23. The nuanced back and forth of the conversation is hard to discern in Psalm 102, but the New Testament quotation makes it clear that the Father and Son are conversing, Heb. 1. 10-12. The Son is addressed as ‘Lord’, Heb. 1. 10, and the promise is linked with Psalm 45 prior to it and Psalm 110 afterwards. Besides affirming Christ’s deity and superiority, these quotations tell the story of His

future glorious wedding day and His complete conquest of evil.

In essence, the Son asks, ‘Are my days to be shortened? Am I to be cut off in weakness?’ v. 23. The first clause of verse 24 reminds one of Isaiah chapter 53 verse 8. He was cut down in His prime, full of strength and vigour. Yet His resurrection demonstrates that He has a glorious future. In the second half of the verse, the Father responds that the Son is the eternal and changeless creator, who will outlast the passing material creation, vv. 25-27. Verse 28 is like Psalm 22 verses 26 to 31. Under His leadership, the renovated earth of the millennium is populated by a new believing generation, and, eventually, a future new heavens and new earth will supersede the current fallen world. The closing of the psalm is also akin to the Lord Jesus’ promise, ‘Because I live, ye shall live also’, John 14. 19. Because of Christ’s continuance, His people of every age will continue as well.

GOODING sums up the glorious future that awaits God’s people, ‘The Creator himself has become human, has entered our temporary world of space and time, with authority to give us eternal life; has prayed to be saved from death, to be glorified in the Father’s presence with the glory he had with the Father before the world began, John 17. 1-5. And his prayer has been answered! God has raised him from the dead, and he has carried his humanity to the very bosom of the Godhead. The eternal Creator who is eternally the same, Ps. 102. 27, has for ever become Jesus, the man, “the same yesterday and today and forever”, Heb. 13. 8. And God the Father has assured him in the words of Psalm 102. 28: “The children of your servants will live in your presence; their descendants will be established before you”. Or in the words of the New Testament: “God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus”, Eph. 2. 6-7. For this is what God had in mind when he chose us in Christ before the creation

of this temporary world, Eph. 1. 4 . . . none of those who have believed in him, and have lived and worked for his coming kingdom, will miss it, no matter in what distant century they lived and died. For those that are Christ’s shall be made alive at his coming, 1 Cor 15. 22-23; and when the Lord appears in his glory, and sets up his kingdom, them also will God bring with him, 1 Thess. 4. 13-18’.¹⁴

Endnotes

- 1 The ‘afflicted’ is translated as ‘poor’, ‘humble’, or ‘lowly’ in other passages, e.g. Pss. 9. 12; 72. 2; Prov. 3. 34, NKJV. Psalm 22 verse 24 assures this individual of God’s care, ‘For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; Neither hath he hid his face from him; But when he cried unto him, he heard’.
- 2 For similar language, see Asaph’s complaint in Psalm 77.
- 3 CHARLES SIMEON, *Horae Homileticae*: Vol. 6, Samuel Holdsworth, 1836, pg. 203.
- 4 J. G. BELLETT, *Short Meditations on the Psalms*, Rouse, 1892; electronic ed. accessed here: <http://www.stempublishing.com/authors/bellett/Psalms.html#a102>.
- 5 ARTHUR G. CLARKE, *Analytical Studies in the Psalms*, John Ritchie, 1949, pg. 248.
- 6 E.g. Pss. 27. 9; 39. 12; 54. 2; 61. 1; 64. 1; 66. 14; Job 19. 7.
- 7 J. M. BOICE, *Psalms 42–106: An Expositional Commentary*, Baker Books, 2005, pg. 827.
- 8 W. S. PLUMER, *Studies in the Book of Psalms*, J. B. Lippincott Company, 1872, pg. 910. Italics original.
- 9 J. J. STEWART PEROWNE, *The Book of Psalms*, Vol. 2. George Bell and Sons, 1882, pg. 220.
- 10 The word that Peter uses graphically describes our Lord’s treatment: “‘Reject” (after scrutiny), “declare useless”, **to regard as unworthy/unfit and therefore to be rejected**’. WILLIAM ARNDT et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, University of Chicago Press, 2000, pg. 110. Boldface original.
- 11 See also: Isa. 2. 1-4 and Zech. 2. 4-13.
- 12 ‘In Hebrew, the *naked* one, the most utterly destitute and helpless. When his people have this feeling and come before God in conscious want and conscious weakness, yet taking hold of his strength as their legitimate hope, God will never despise their prayer’. HENRY COWLES, *The Psalms, With Notes, Critical, Explanatory, and Practical*, D. Appleton & Company, 1879, pg. 414. Italics original.
- 13 Literal rendering of the Hebrew expression behind the KJV’s ‘appointed to death’.
- 14 D. W. GOODING, *An Unshakeable Kingdom: The Letter to the Hebrews for Today*, Myrtlefield Expositions, 2013, pp. 67, 68.

THE EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

Part 10

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

The significance of being raised with Christ, 3. 1-4 – ‘ye have been raised with the Christ’ JND. Continued.

‘Seek those things which are above’, v. 1, ‘where’; practical, external

The fact of our being raised is assumed by the apostle; ‘ye were raised together with Christ’ RV; when Christ died, we died; when Christ was raised, we were raised, cp. 2. 12, ‘through faith in the working of God’ RV; no longer finding power for living from the earth but from the ‘glory’, supplied from Him and through Him.¹ Our baptism severs from the old order and links with the new. But this has implications and Paul applies the lesson ‘seek [constantly] those things which are above’. Our life is the life of Christ and we should therefore seek His interests. We should have heart occupation with Christ.

The reason our focus of attention should be ‘above’ is quite simple; that is ‘where Christ sitteth’. His absolute and abiding authority is thus affirmed and we are there with Him; we should therefore focus our attention on Him – He is Lord and sovereign, cp. Dan. 7. 13, 14; Ps. 2. 6-9. The place of supreme honour and highest dignity are His ‘on the right hand of God’.²

‘Set your affection [mind RV] on things above’, vv. 2-4, ‘For’; intellectual, internal

The importance of the mind is emphasized in verse 2. The phrase ‘set your affection on’ is only one word in the original and only here is it translated as ‘affection’. The RV translates with ‘set your mind on’. It is an inward impulse and disposition, a use of the intellect. LIGHTFOOT puts it well, ‘you must not only *seek* heaven; you must also *think* heaven’ (his emphasis).³ Our mind is very important in the New Testament: we are to have a prophetic mind, Phil. 3. 19, 20; a renewed mind, Rom. 12. 1, 2;

one mind, a lowly mind and the mind of Christ, Phil. 2. 1-11 (see verses 2, 3 and 5).

The locations of our interest are further emphasized in the balance of verse 2, both positively and negatively; look up, not around or down. The first location is ‘things above’, where Christ sitteth and where you are too, ‘far above the world below’, the highest plane possible, higher than principalities and powers (of the air), Eph. 1. 20, 21; 2. 2. The negative is equally emphasized, ‘not on things on the earth’ – not as earth dwellers with horizontal vision, earth bound. The believer has to see things from a new perspective, 2 Cor. 5. 16.

The fundamental basis for the appeal made in verses 1 and 2 is given in verses 3 and 4. You’re dead! This is repeated for emphasis from chapter 2 verse 20, and dead people cannot respond to things ‘on the earth’. But further, ‘your life is hid with Christ in God’. Christ is our life and He has His being ‘in God’, cp. Eph. 3. 9. Our life and wellbeing depend on His in a lovely double security, ‘with Christ’, ‘in God’, but totally incomprehensible to man. Colleagues, friends, neighbours simply cannot fathom the kind of lives believers live. LIGHTFOOT explains, ‘when you sank under the baptismal water, you disappeared for ever to the world. You rose again, it is true, but you rose only to God. The world henceforth knows nothing of your new life, and, as a consequence, your new life must know nothing of the world’.⁴

The grand prospect for the believer is introduced in verse 4, ‘When . . . then’, life leads to hope. The basis of the prospect is clear; it is not enough

to say that our life is shared ‘with’ Christ; ‘Christ **is** our life’, John 1. 4; 14. 6; 1 John 5. 11, 12; we are intimately linked with Him, cp. Phil. 1. 21, members of His body; all power and energy for living comes through Him as the Head, 2. 19, and as ‘the Christ’, 1 Cor. 12. 12 JND.

The outworking of the hope is absolutely certain, ‘Christ . . . shall appear’.⁵ The wonder of it, however, is that He will not ‘appear’ (be manifestly declared) alone; we shall ‘appear with him in glory’. This will be realized in the *parousia*,⁶ is anticipated now, Rom. 8. 17, 29, 30, and will be shared with the whole of creation.⁷ It does, of course, necessitate a change, 1 John 3. 2; Phil. 3. 20, 21.

The fundamental lesson from verses 1 to 4 is clear: the need for heart occupation with an ascended Christ in glory. The readers of Hebrews were directed to a high priest in heaven, Heb. 1. 3. It was a vision of the glory of God given to Saul on the Damascus road which transformed his life, Acts 9. 3-6; Phil. 3. 10. Occupation with an ascended Christ in glory is not only an excellent definition of true worship but a practical call for its outworking in our lives.

The transformed Christian life – put off/put on, vv. 5-17

Having established the significance of baptism from a doctrinal perspective, 2. 20 – 3. 4, the apostle now shows its outworking in the life of the believer. He does this from two viewpoints: the negative and the positive – putting off, vv. 5-11, and putting on, vv. 12-17 – using two imperatives, in verses 8 and 12. These are commands to be obeyed; we are to complete the action on ourselves – we are responsible!

The sense of ‘putting off’ and ‘putting on’ in verses 9 and 10 is different. There the apostle is saying in verse 9, ‘having put off [“having stripped clean off”] the old man’, and, in verse 10, ‘having put on the new’ JND. These two references are used by the apostle as the lever for the commands in verses 8 and 12. Thus, the four references are all in the aorist tense and each has the idea of clothing either being put off or being put on.

Put off, vv. 5-11; negative – two imperatives

- ‘Mortify therefore your members’, vv. 5-7;
- ‘Put off’ all these, vv. 8-11; the ‘filthy rags’ to be discarded.

Put on, vv. 12-17; positive

- ‘Put on therefore’, vv. 12-14; an imperative – the lovely clothes to be embraced;
- The Christ-patterned life which will empower to implement the above, vv. 15-17.

‘Mortify therefore your members’, vv. 5-7

The verb to mortify is in the aorist imperative and the command is therefore to do it, and do it now! The word ‘therefore’ indicates that there is a good basis for the appeal. The doctrine of chapter 2 verse 20 to chapter 3 verse 4 must lead to duty, precept to practice, belief to behaviour, cp. Rom. 12. 1; Eph. 4. 1.

The nature of the appeal is indicated, ‘Mortify your members’; put them to death. The CEV translates verse 5 as, ‘Don’t be controlled by your body. Kill every desire for the wrong kind of sex. Don’t be immoral or indecent or have evil thoughts. Don’t be greedy,



which is the same as worshipping idols’.⁸

In the **substance of the appeal**, BRUCE indicates that Paul ‘moves from improper acts to their inner springs’.⁹ These are enumerated as:

- 1 ‘Fornication’; illicit sexual behaviour of all kinds – ‘Traffic with harlots’. When used with adultery, it has the specific meaning of pre-marital infidelity,¹⁰ but here it has its more general connotation, 1 Cor. 6. 18; 1 Thess. 4. 3.
- 2 ‘Uncleanness’; moral impurity involving, for example, character assassination.
- 3 ‘Inordinate affection’; indecent thought, vile passions, Rom 1. 26. This is in direct contrast to chapter 3 verse 2, where we are to ‘set [our] mind on things above’.
- 4 ‘Evil concupiscence’; wicked desire, evil lust akin to ‘the Gentiles which know not God’, 1 Thess. 4. 5.
- 5 ‘Covetousness, which is idolatry’; ‘greedy . . . worshipping of idols’; ‘unbridled desire’, Eph. 5. 5; Phil. 3. 19, 20.

The importance of the appeal is seen by the consequences of failing to implement it in verses 6 and 7, ‘For which things’ sake the wrath of God cometh on the children [sons] of disobedience’, cp. Eph. 5. 6. Behaviour of this nature must bring with it inevitable retribution – the ‘wrath of God’. The recipients of the wrath are wilfully disobedient, and that in spite of clear commandment, conscience and constitution. They defy the law of God. Peter shows a lovely contrast in 1 Peter chapter 1 verse 14, giving features of ‘obedient children’; children of obedience who do not fashion themselves ‘according to [their] former lusts in [their] ignorance’. Paul indicates here that this behaviour marked them in their past lives; they ‘walked . . . lived in them’ in their pre-conversion experience.¹¹ Paul anticipated that the new powers available to them would bring a complete change.

‘Put off all these’, vv. 8-11 – the ‘filthy rags’ to be discarded

The features of the old man to be discarded, vv. 8, 9.

This is another imperative with the ‘But now’ indicating an emphatic contrast. There is no possibility of continuing in the list of verse 5. The list to be discarded in verses 8 and 9, is described as having been ‘put off [as] the old man with his deeds’ in verse 9 – these are the filthy rags!¹² The list is challenging:

- ‘Anger’; described in Proverbs chapter 27 verse 4 as ‘outrageous’; that which ‘resteth in the bosom of fools’ – ‘a settled feeling of hatred’, Eccles. 7. 9.
- ‘Wrath’; ‘quick temper’; ‘violent outbursts’.
- ‘Malice’; ‘pure badness’; ‘wicked conduct towards another’.
- ‘Blasphemy’; ‘slander’; strong intemperate language against another.
- ‘Filthy communication out of your mouth’; foul, obscene, indecent speech, Eph. 5. 4.
- Lying ‘one to another’; be (wo)men of your word; don’t distort the truth; don’t make false statements against another, cp. Ps. 120. 2-4.

The apostle then gives the reason why these ‘filthy rags’ can, and must, be abandoned. The old man has been put off with his deeds, i.e., what we were in Adam before our conversion, ‘our old man is crucified with Christ’, Rom. 6. 6. Hence, he is no longer operative and capable of responding to sin. We are to be practically what is true doctrinally, a ‘renunciation of the sinful nature in its entirety’, i.e., the ‘body of flesh’, 2. 11, 12.

ENDNOTES

- 1 F. F. BRUCE, *The Epistle to the Colossians*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984.
- 2 Ps. 45. 9; 110. 1; Mark 12. 35-37; Eph. 1. 20.
- 3 J. B. LIGHTFOOT, *Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Colossians and to Philemon*, Zondervan Publishing House, 1879.
- 4 *Ibid.*
- 5 Cp. Matt. 24. 30; 1 Pet. 5. 4; Titus 2. 13.
- 6 Col. 1. 27; 1 Thess. 3. 13; 4. 17.
- 7 Rom. 8. 21; Rev. 17. 14 (contrast verse 12).
- 8 Cp. Rom. 6. 19; 7. 23; 8. 13; 1 Cor. 6. 19.
- 9 F. F. BRUCE, *The Epistle to the Colossians*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984.
- 10 E.g., Matt. 19. 9; 15. 19; Gal. 5. 19.
- 11 Cp. 1 Cor. 6. 9-11; Rom 6. 19-21; Titus 3. 3; 1 Pet. 4. 1-5.
- 12 Cp. Rom 13. 12; Eph. 4. 22, 25; Heb. 12. 1; Jas. 1. 21; 1 Pet. 2. 1.

Old Testament women who appear in the New Testament

HAGAR the slave girl who saw God

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

Hagar was a slave. She had no rights. She could not request time off for rest and recuperation. She could not express her opinion. She couldn't campaign for better working conditions. She did as she was told. Yes, she was a slave to a godly couple, Abraham and Sarah, but she was still just a poor slave girl.

We are first introduced to Hagar in Genesis chapter 16 verse 1 as the handmaid, or slave girl, of Sarah, called Sarai here but later to become Sarah, Gen. 17. 15. Hagar was an Egyptian, perhaps an acquisition made during the time that Abraham spent in Egypt, 12. 10-20. We are told little of her background, but probably Hagar had followed the many false gods of Egypt. Despite the poor behaviour of Sarah her master, at times, Hagar came to know the true and living God in whom Sarah and Abraham had trusted. Sometimes God, in His grace, uses us in spite of us, just as He did Sarah.

Hagar features mainly in two chapters in the Old Testament, Genesis chapters 16 and 21 (see also Gen. 25. 12), and one chapter in the New Testament, Gal. 4. 21-31.

In Genesis chapter 16, Sarah had lost patience with God, presuming that the Lord had restrained her from bearing a child, v. 2. Taking matters into her own hands, she requested that Abraham take Hagar also as his wife, v. 3. Sarah was attempting to do God's work for him, using human ingenuity instead of waiting on Him. How important to wait God's time instead of hastily trying to accomplish God's purpose for our lives in our own strength.

Hagar found herself caught up in Sarah's scheme as she became the mother of Ishmael, one of seven biblical characters named before they were born.¹ Although Sarah saw her plan succeed initially, it rapidly backfired as she became despised by her own servant, Hagar. Sarah's response was to treat Hagar harshly, causing her to run away.² In a touching scene described in Genesis chapter 16 verses 7 and 8, Hagar is in Shur making her way back to Egypt. God seeks out Hagar and the angel of the Lord gently cajoles her and asks, 'whence camest thou? and whither wilt thou go?' v. 8.

Sometimes, we find ourselves far away from the place God wants us to be. Like Hagar, we run away from trouble when we feel overwhelmed or hard done by. Perhaps God is challenging you with the same two questions He asked Hagar: where have you come from? or where are you going to? Like Hagar, perhaps God is encouraging you to 'return' home to the place where you really belong, v. 9.

The true faith of Hagar is expressed in verse 13, as she came to appreciate that there was One true God who looked upon her and knew all about the difficulties she faced. This Gentile slave girl came to experience

the same amazing privilege as Moses, as she was permitted to look upon the God of glory, literally she saw the 'back of him', cp. Exod. 33. 23.

The events of Genesis chapter 21 may appear to be a repetition of chapter 16, but, on closer inspection, they reveal quite a different story. A great feast is held by Abraham to celebrate the weaning of his young son, Isaac. Ishmael, now fourteen years of age, Gen. 16. 6, mocks as he looks on the occasion.

Two types of laughter are recorded in chapter 21. Spiritual laughter is mentioned in verse 6, as Sarah says, 'God hath made me to laugh'. This true spiritual joy arises from seeing God working in our lives, perhaps in situations where we may have given up hope. Sarah also says, 'so that all that hear will laugh with me'. Spiritual laughter is infectious laughter, as others can share in our joy when they hear of what God has done in our lives. The second kind of laughter is Ishmael's fleshly laughter of derision, mentioned in verse 9. Paul reminds us that Ishmael's mockery was a kind of persecution, Gal. 4. 29. This indicates that when we are laughed at for being a Christian this is, in fact, persecution. Remember that the Lord Jesus was also laughed to scorn, Matt. 9. 24.

Sarah's strong words to Abraham were to 'cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac', v. 21. Although Abraham was grieved by the situation, God confirmed he should take this course of action, since Isaac alone was the son of promise.

In the New Testament, Paul uses these events of Genesis chapter 21 to reinforce his words of warning to Christians living in Galatia, Gal. 4. 21-31. These are the only references to Hagar in the New Testament.

False teachers were imposing the Old Testament law on these mainly Gentile Christians, insisting that they needed to keep the law to be saved, thus adding works to the gospel. Paul reminds them that Abraham had two

sons born to two mothers, vv. 22, 23. Ishmael, the first son, was born after the flesh to Hagar, who was a slave. In contrast, Isaac was born according to the promise of God to Sarah, a woman who was free. In other words, Ishmael was born because Sarah, in her impatience, used human effort to provide Abraham with a son. In contrast, Isaac was born because God, true to His word, had accomplished the impossible by providing a child to a couple who were beyond the years of child-bearing. The actions of Abraham and Sarah were simply to believe what God had promised.³

The passage reminds us that Old Testament events often have a profound meaning beyond what took place at the time. They are allegories, v. 24, illustrations of deep truths that now have been revealed to us. Hagar is a picture of the old covenant, the law, which was given to Moses at Mount Sinai. She was a slave and people living under the law were in a kind of slavery. Ishmael, who was born after the flesh, is an illustration of the flesh nature within us, Gal. 5. 19-21. In contrast, Sarah, a free woman, is a picture of the new covenant, and Isaac, her son, is figurative of a New Testament believer, as Paul says, ‘now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise’, 4. 28.



The Old Testament law was like slavery in that it issued commandments, but the law did not provide the power to keep it. Striving to keep the law through human effort was, therefore, an irksome and arduous task that could never actually be achieved. The purpose of the law was to reveal the true character of the flesh nature within us. The Lord Jesus said, ‘that which is born of the flesh is flesh’, John 3. 6. The flesh can never be reformed or improved and our failure to keep the law proves that. Through His death and resurrection, the Lord Jesus delivered us, not only from the power and penalty of sin, but also from the law, Gal. 2. 19.

Paul uses the strong words said by Sarah to strike home his message, ‘cast out the bondwoman and her son’, v. 30; cp. Gen. 21. 10. He was really urging the Galatian Christians to utterly reject the teaching that keeping the law using human effort can either save a person or be the means by which they can please God. In contrast, the new nature given to New Testament believers, of whom Isaac was a picture, was empowered by God through the presence of the indwelling Spirit of God. They were to ‘walk in the Spirit’, Gal. 5. 16, and to demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit, ‘love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance’, vv. 22, 23.

Someone might say ‘how does this apply to me today? I am not Jewish and not under the law, so what does this have to do with me?’ It is possible to live today under self-imposed, ‘law-based’ principles that aim to gain acceptance by God through the flesh and not the Spirit. We sometimes call this legalism although we need to be careful. A Christian may be labelled as ‘legalistic’ when, in fact, they may be demonstrating greater spiritual intelligence and sensitivity to the mind of God, informed from a careful study of the scriptures. The Lord Jesus warned us of several features of legalism that we should beware of:

- 1 **Preoccupation with detail at the expense of important things:** The Lord Jesus said to the scribes and Pharisees that, ‘ye pay tithe of mint and anise

and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone’, Matt. 23. 23.

- 2 **Pretending to be something we are not:** The word ‘hypocrite’ is based on the Greek word for actor. How easy to pretend to draw near to God ‘with our mouth’ when our heart is far from Him, Matt. 15. 8.
- 3 **A pejorative attitude to others:** The Lord Jesus warned us against judging others who don’t meet up to our self-imposed standards, ‘and why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?’ Matt. 7. 3.

We last read of Hagar in Genesis chapter 21 as she is cast out of the family home of Abraham. Although God intended this for Hagar and Ishmael, He had not abandoned them altogether. In verses 14 to 16, we read of Hagar in a pitiful state, wandering in the wilderness, her water supply spent, sitting at a distance to shield herself from the trauma of seeing the suffering and death of her young son, v. 16. The God who saw her in chapter 16 now hears her and the Angel of the Lord again questions her, ‘What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not’, Gen. 21. 7. She may have felt abandoned and left to fend for herself and her son, but God had not forgotten them. God promised that Ishmael would become the progenitor of a great nation one day, v. 18. He also met their immediate need by revealing to Hagar a supply of fresh water, v. 19. How good to know that the Lord, who cared about a poor Gentile slave girl like Hagar, also cares for us. The Lord Jesus reminded us, ‘Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows’, Matt. 10. 21.

Endnotes

- 1 Gen. 16. 11; see also Gen. 17. 19; 1 Chr. 22. 9; 1 Kgs. 13. 2; Isa. 44. 28; Luke 1. 13; and Matt. 1. 21.
- 2 Interestingly, the name Hagar probably means ‘to flee’.
- 3 Rom. 4. 18, 19; Heb. 11. 11. See article on Sarah in Volume 75 Number 2, May 2020.

THE GOSPEL OF MARK

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

Part 11

As we continue our studies in chapter 3 and the Galilean ministry of the Lord, we come to the choosing of the twelve.

The servants, vv. 13-19

The Lord chose those that were to be His special companions in His earthly ministry and, ultimately, those who were to be His ambassadors when He ascended back into glory. There were many that followed the Lord in the early days of His public ministry and, as John 6 shows, many that were interested solely in the blessing that the Lord could obviously bestow. It is clear from the juxtaposition of events in this Gospel that there was considerable pressure upon the Lord to heal and to deliver. However, as the opposition was to grow and the death of the Lord was to draw closer, many would be offended and would walk no more with the Saviour.

The preparation, v. 13

Mark tells us only that the Lord went up into a mountain. It is Luke chapter 6 verse 12 that records that, 'He went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God'. That prayer time is of importance to every dependent man in preparation for such a momentous decision.

It is Luke, too, that tells us that it was at the break of the day that the call went out to the disciples. It is clear, from Mark's account, that the choice of the twelve was that of the Lord Himself: He, 'callesh unto him whom he would'. The disciples did not choose or apply for their office. MACARTHUR comments, 'The Greek verb "called" stresses that Jesus acted in His own sovereign interest when He chose the 12 disciples'.¹ They were the chosen servants of God and, as

such, were 'ordained'. It means that they were appointed by the Lord and set apart exclusively for His service.

In Matthew's account, the Lord deals with the preparations the apostles would need to make as they went out in service. Clearly, the one who calls is also the one who equips and supports those who go forth in service for Him, 'Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses . . . for the workman is worthy of his meat', Matt. 10. 9, 10.

The purpose, vv. 14, 15

Mark gives us a threefold purpose in the call of the twelve. It is, 'that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils'.

It is interesting that only Mark mentions the fact that 'they should be with him', v. 14. There is, in that phrase, the idea of companionship with the Lord in His ministry. There is also the idea that in accompanying Him they would learn from His example and His teaching. This was to be their activity in the present. There is a principle for every servant of the Lord. Time spent in private with the Lord must precede any activity in the public sphere. The spiritual benefits of this truth are found in Acts chapter 4 verse 13, 'Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus'. What an impact such time had upon the ministry of these apostles and what power it lent to their preaching.

As to the future, the Lord would 'send them forth to preach'. We have seen that Mark emphasizes the truth that the Lord taught, first. His priority was to preach rather than to heal. This same priority is communicated here in this second purpose to His disciples. On the word 'preach', WUEST comments, 'The verb is *kērussō*. The word means to make a public proclamation with such gravity, formality, and authority as must be heeded'.² The content of the message is given us by Matthew, 'And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand', 10. 7.

Finally, in verse 15, Mark tells us that the Lord gave them 'power to heal . . . and to cast out devils'. What was to give credibility to these ambassadors for Christ? What was to strengthen the message preached? It was that the preaching would be accompanied with signs following. It is Matthew that adds the words, 'all manner of', telling us of the scope of the power given to the disciples. But Matthew also adds that this power was not resident in the disciples themselves but that 'He [the Lord] gave them power', Matt. 10. 1.

The people, vv. 16-19

It is interesting to see the people that the Lord chooses. There are the fishermen, but fishermen from different levels. There is Matthew, the publican and collaborator with Rome, in the same company as Simon, the nationalist zealot or Canaanite. There is Nathaniel, or Bartholomew, the man of devotion, 'an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile', John 1. 47. He works alongside Thomas, the man of doubts and fears.³

Mark does not seem to group them in any way, other than perhaps in fours, whereas the other Gospel writers match the disciples in pairs, indicating the method of service that the Lord envisages.

In each case, Simon, who receives the additional name Peter, is named first amongst the twelve. He was often the spokesman of the disciples and a man of great influence amongst the group as a whole.

The Scribes, vv. 20-30

These verses give us the record of a further event in the deepening opposition of the Scribes to the ministry of the Lord. We saw in chapter 2, and we see again here, how the Scribes plot and plan to defame and destroy the ministry of the Lord. Here they are not passive observers, seeking to catch Him in His words or deeds, but are active in their attack upon the Lord.

The background, vv. 20, 21

Gathered in the house (probably Peter's), the Lord was inundated again with those interested in His healing powers. Such was the pressure upon Him that the Lord and His disciples could not find time or space to eat.

It was this apparent neglect of the Lord's own needs that caused His family members to become concerned.⁴ Mark has laid emphasis upon the seemingly endless pressure upon the Lord and the persistent demands made upon Him to heal the sick and deliver the demon-possessed. The other children of Mary came to the conclusion that, 'He is beside himself', v. 21. Looking back over the brief span of the Lord's ministry to-date, they decided that this was not the action of a normal man. In this they were right, but in their desired action they were wrong and, in later verses, the Lord shows this.

The blasphemy of the Scribes, vv. 22, 28-30

The family of Mary came down from Nazareth to Capernaum to take the Lord by force. The Scribes 'came down from Jerusalem', v. 22. This suggests that they were, in some way, a special group of the Scribes, officials brought in to examine the Lord's teachings and actions and give their conclusion and verdict.

Their accusation was twofold.

- They impugned the Lord's character: 'He hath Beelzebub', v. 22. This indicated that the Lord was demon-possessed and, as such, this attributed His teaching to the devil.
- They challenged His actions: 'by the prince of the devils casteth he

out devils', v. 22. Those miracles that attested the Lord's teaching and the truth of His person were now attributed to the devil.

In this way their foul blasphemy sought to destroy the Lord's character and person and those acknowledgements of His deity and glory were re-defined as a demon conspiracy.

Although the family of Mary might have misunderstood the Lord's actions and devotion to service, the action of the Scribes was one of deliberate and calculated bitterness. This was not a momentary lapse of judgement. HIEBERT comments, 'said, imperfect tense, denoting repeated expression of the opposition'.⁵

The consequence of their actions is grave. God's mercy and forgiveness is indeed great. With true repentance, all kinds and classes of sins can and will be forgiven, v. 28. However, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is a sin that 'hath never forgiveness', v. 29. The gravity of their state is that:

- They had maligned the Saviour as their only means of forgiveness: 'He hath an unclean spirit', v. 30;
- They had blasphemed the Holy Spirit as the only one who, in convicting power, might bring them to repentance;
- They were settled in this condition.

Whether such a mortal sin can be committed today would presuppose similar circumstances and conditions prevailing.

The bankruptcy of the Scribes, vv. 23-27

Apart from the consequence of their chosen path, the Lord also shows the bankruptcy of their argument. He asks them a basic question, 'How can Satan cast out Satan?' v. 23. How can the power of Satan act against himself? The logical absurdity of such a situation is obvious.

To press home the point, not just to the Scribes but also to them that had heard the comments of the Scribes, the Lord uses four illustrations:

- A divided kingdom must fall,

v. 24, as rule and government will become impossible;

- A divided house cannot stand, v. 25. The survival of the family unit depends upon co-operation;
- If, as alleged, Satan has risen up against himself then his kingdom and power have come to an end, v. 26;
- A strong man's house cannot be burgled, unless the man himself is first bound, v. 27.

In each case, the point is proved. Their accusation must be groundless, logically and practically.

The standard, vv. 31-35

Within this final section of the chapter we return to the scene described in verses 20 and 21. The Lord is in the house of Peter and the crowd are, once more, pressing in upon Him seeking His blessing.

Having completed their journey from Nazareth to Capernaum, Mary and her children approach Peter's house. They cannot gain entrance because of the crowd. Standing outside they send a message in to the Lord asking Him to meet with them. As the message would appear to have been transferred by word of mouth, the multitude clearly pick up the request being transmitted.

The Lord sets the standard when He asks the question, 'Who is my mother, or my brethren?' v. 33. Natural relationships give place to spiritual relationships, the temporal to the eternal. The latter is displayed by obedience to the revealed will of God. These are the true brethren of the Lord. These are His spiritual family.

Endnotes

- 1 JOHN MACARTHUR, *MacArthur Study Bible*, Logos Software resource.
- 2 WUEST, *op. cit.*, pp. 70, 71.
- 3 HIEBERT comments, 'Bartholomew. His personal name apparently was Nathanael . . . John 1:45-51 . . . Mark and Matthew have Thaddaeus, with Lebbaeus as an alternative reading in some old manuscripts. Luke and Acts have Judas the son of James . . . Judas, not Iscariot, in John 14:22'. D. E. HIEBERT, *op. cit.*, pp. 95, 96.
- 4 'When His family, those with Him, idiom for kinsmen, not friends', GRASSMICK, *op. cit.*
- 5 HIEBERT, *op. cit.*, pg. 99.

What does the Bible tell us about the future?

Israel – The persecution of the nation

Part 8

By **MALCOLM DAVIS** Leeds, England

Introduction

The nation of Israel has often been the victim of the most bitter persecution ever since they became a nation in Egypt under the Pharaohs after the time of Joseph's administration there. As the chosen earthly people of God, 'the apple of His eye', they have always been the object of other nations' hatred and discrimination. This has not really decreased since the recognition by a majority of nations of the little State of Israel in 1948, partly as compensation for the horrors of the Nazi Holocaust during the Second World War. Several times they have had to defend their allotted territory against determined efforts to destroy them. The question which is currently being asked in the media is, 'Can there be another Holocaust against them in the future, or is their trauma now over?' Sadly, if we believe our Bibles aright, the answer is, 'Yes, the worst time of persecution for the Jews is still to come', the so-called 'time of Jacob's trouble' in the yet future Great Tribulation, but that same verse in Jeremiah also reassures us that 'he will be saved out of it', Jer. 30. 7. Israel is indestructible, but they will come very close to complete defeat just before the Lord Jesus returns to save them, Zech. 14. How, therefore, will all this come about? Scripture does tell us much, although it does not explain all the reasons why. As the Lord's obedient friends, we are privileged to know at least some of His future plans for this world, John 15. 14, 15.

How will persecution against Israel arise during the coming Tribulation?

This may seem surprising, because we know from Daniel chapter 9 verse 26 that the coming Roman prince will have made a covenant with the majority of Jews in Israel for their protection to last for seven years. Consequently, they will be living in complete security at first and will have relaxed their defence arrangements. Ezekiel chapter 38 speaks of 'unwalled villages' in Israel. However, several scriptures may help us to understand why the coming prince, who is also described as the Beast, the man of sin, and the antichrist, will so suddenly change his policy and attitude towards

the Jews at the midpoint of the seven years of tribulation, as Daniel chapter 9 goes on to predict.

First of all, Revelation chapter 12 reveals that, before the last three-and-a-half years of the tribulation, there will be war in heaven between the archangel Michael with his holy angels and Satan with his demonic hosts. Satan will then be cast out of heaven and down to earth, where he will turn all his hatred against the woman in that vision, who clearly depicts Israel, and relentlessly persecute her and all remaining believers on earth.

Second, Revelation chapter 13 reveals

that the man called the Beast, who is clearly the same as Daniel's evil coming Roman prince, will suddenly receive a deadly wound from which he will be miraculously healed, causing the whole unbelieving world to wonder and worship him. This may indicate an assassination attempt upon the Beast, from which he is healed by Satanic power. From this moment onwards, therefore, the Beast will be possessed and energized by Satan himself, even worse than before Satan had first given him his power. According to 2 Thessalonians chapter 2, the man of sin will proceed to demand universal worship as if he were God, while the Lord Jesus, in Matthew chapter 24, foretold that there would come a time when a detestable idolatrous image of the Beast would be set up in a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem, called 'the abomination of desolation', which all must worship on pain of instant death. In other words, the coming Roman prince, who will at first appear to favour the Jews and protect them with a Middle East peace settlement, will become their foremost persecutor in his evil desire to usurp the place of the one true God in mankind's hearts. It will be the deification of man and the height of Satanic rebellion against God.

Other possible factors in the world scene of the end times

A few other scriptures may prove to be relevant to this question, although we should acknowledge that not all believing Bible students are agreed about their precise timing and place in the end time events.

First of all, there is the prediction in Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39 of the end time attack upon Israel by a huge coalition of nations, all currently either atheistic or Islamic, which are located largely in the far north of the earth and led by someone called Gog. His people are called Magog. The fact that they will attack when there are apparently 'unwalled villages' in Israel suggests that they will do so during the latter part of the first half of the tribulation, which will probably be the only time when Israel is undefended and can be taken by surprise, since they will be relying on the Beast to defend them. Ezekiel reveals that,



in the event, Israel will not need to defend themselves, because the Lord will supernaturally intervene to destroy all the attacking armies by various catastrophic means. Thus, the world scene will suddenly alter, and the Beast will find himself the more complete master of the situation without waging any further war.

Second, there are the scriptures which predict the invasion of Israel from both the north and the south in the end times, namely, Daniel chapter 11 verses 40 to 45, and the references in Isaiah and Micah to a latter-day northern Assyrian enemy.

All these events could easily influence the Beast to change his policy towards Israel, especially if the nation is reluctant to acknowledge him as God. His real desire for world dominion will become evident and lead him to persecute all believers in Israel and the wider world.

How a remnant of Israel will escape imminent death during the Great Tribulation

In Matthew chapter 24, the Lord Jesus counselled the Jews to flee to the mountains as soon as they saw the 'abomination of desolation' set up in their rebuilt temple, because that would be the signal for the beginning of the Great Tribulation, which few would survive. Revelation chapter 12 says that a remnant of Jews will flee to the wilderness and be divinely protected there for three-and-a-half years, the duration of the Great Tribulation. Isaiah chapter 16 verse 4 (KJV/RV) indicates that the Lord will expect Moab to protect Israel's outcasts in the end times,

so it is likely that this wilderness/mountain refuge will be in the region of Moab, Ammon, and Edom, present-day Transjordan. Those who fail to reach this safe haven in time will become the victims of the Beast's persecution.

The role of the second Beast, the False Prophet, in supporting the first Beast

Revelation chapter 13 verse 11 introduces us to another Beast coming up out of the earth, or land of Israel, therefore probably an apostate Jew, who looks like a lamb, but speaks like a dragon. He will exercise the power of the first Beast, and cause all unbelievers on earth to worship the latter, using deceptive Satanic miracles to convince men to do so. 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 calls these miracles 'lying wonders'. It is he who by these means will persuade mankind to make the idolatrous image of the Beast, and will also compel all to receive the mark of the Beast in either their right hand or their forehead, the number 666, which will permit them to buy and sell. Those who refuse to do this will be unable to make a living and be persecuted cruelly. Mercifully, God will allow this dire situation on earth to continue for only three-and-a-half years, before He intervenes in the glorious person of the returning Lord Jesus Christ.

The climax of Israel's persecution and their miraculous deliverance and conversion at Armageddon

Zechariah chapters 12 to 14 tell us most about this. Only a third of the Jewish people will survive

the persecution and judgements of the Great Tribulation, but these will be refined by their traumatic experiences. Jerusalem will become a 'burdensome stone' to all the surrounding peoples, an insoluble international problem, and they will be gathered by the Lord against the city to destroy it. When all seems to be lost, the Lord will suddenly intervene to save His chosen people and judge the attacking nations. Christ will return in glory and Israel will find, unexpectedly, that their Saviour is the very same One whom they pierced and killed at Calvary. Immediately, their spiritual eyes will be opened, they will mourn deeply for their sin in ever rejecting Him, and be converted in a day. When Christ's feet touch down on the Mount of Olives, the mountain will split in two along a fault line already existing in an east-west direction, creating a very great valley through which the besieged Jews will be able to escape from their enemies. This event will be the climax of the Day of the Lord, the conclusion of the Great Tribulation for Israel, and the beginning of the glorious millennial reign of Christ, during which the believing remnant of Israel will assist Him in His administration.

Lessons to be learned from Israel's continual persecutions

First, so often unbelieving and rebellious Israel has simply been allowed to reap what they have sown, and so will we today if we reject Christ and His word.

Second, the Lord's chosen earthly people Israel are indestructible. He has said, 'no weapon that is formed against thee [Israel] shall prosper', Isa. 54. 17. Many hostile nations have proved this to be true to their eternal loss.

Finally, the Lord Himself is always absolutely sovereign in His control of all nations, and is able to orchestrate and use all events to further His own purposes of grace, discipline, and judgement, despite all His enemies' attempts to thwart them, even in the coming Great Tribulation both for Israel and the rest of the world. Praise His name!

An Assembly of the Lord's people will be a people among whom . . .

WORSHIP ARISES TO GOD

By **ALASTAIR SINCLAIR** Crosshouse, Scotland

Part 8

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.

Unique among God's creation, man alone displays the inclination, desire or perhaps even the need, to worship. Sadly, this is misdirected, as Paul explains in Romans chapter 1 verses 18 to 25, and we foolishly end up worshipping vain idols, heavenly objects or even ourselves and our desires. When tempted by the wicked one, the Lord Jesus quotes Deuteronomy chapter 6, which is an exposition of the first commandment. The Lord makes it clear that God alone should be worshipped. But what is worship, who can carry it out and what does it involve? Many perhaps equate praise with worship and reduce it to an expression of our emotions, but worship is much more than this. Praise is indeed one form of worship, as we shall see, but worship is really a way of life and has correctly been described as man's chief aim. While worship is often expressed in scripture as a collective activity, for example at the Old Testament feasts and New Testament gatherings, it is clearly seen to be dependent on specific conditions and genuine heart obedience.¹

In the list of activities carried out by the early Church in Acts chapter 2 verse 42, worship is not mentioned. Though mentioned on four other occasions in Acts, none of them

are in a local church context and neither are any of the mentions, of which there are only three, in all the Epistles! Yet, when scripture is considered overall, the importance of worship is clear. While less than fifty verses are dedicated to the creation of the universe, some 243 are used in Exodus alone to describe the building of the tabernacle. This portable tent is, then, the centre of Old Testament worship and huge amounts of ceremonial instruction follow in the rest of the Pentateuch and historical detail relating to it beyond that. When the details of its successor, the Temple, in its various iterations, are added, then it becomes clear how vital this subject is. Though these physical centres for worship are all superseded in the New Testament, the typology built on them in, for example, John's Gospel, Hebrews and 1 Peter clearly show the importance of worship.

To consider its inspiration and instruction, let's refer to the first mentions of worship in both Testaments. It would be helpful for the reader to have Genesis chapter 18 verses 1 to 6 and Matthew chapter 2 verses 1 to 12 in front of them. Genesis chapter 22 verse 5 is sometimes quoted as the first mention of worship but this is only true in our English

translation. The Old Testament was, of course, primarily written in Hebrew, and the first occurrence of the Hebrew word translated 'worship' in Genesis chapter 22 verse 5, is, in fact, the expression 'bowed himself' in Genesis chapter 18 verse 2. Now to whom did Abraham direct this worship? A careful study of Genesis chapters 18 and 19 will make it clear that it was Jehovah Himself who Abraham addressed with the divine title 'Lord'. Yet, verse 2 says he saw 'three men'. At the close of the chapter 'the Lord went His way', and the next chapter opens with 'two angels' coming to Sodom, although it is clear they appeared as men. This leads us to conclude that the other 'man' was God Himself, in other words, a theophany. Perhaps, more correctly a Christophany, a pre-incarnation appearing of the Lord Jesus, as He is the only one who can physically manifest God, John 1. 18; 14. 9. In Matthew chapter 2, we see a parallel; the wise men come 'to worship'; again the question is, 'whom'? The answer is clear in verse 11, when they worship the young child and Him alone because He is the incarnate God. These two initial examples of worship both demonstrate that the Lord Jesus is the inspiration for true worship; whether in Christophany or in incarnation, His appearance is responded to by even the greatest of men bowing down in worship. A further look at these two incidents will also give us instruction for worship.

First, worship requires salvation, which needs a work of God. In both these cases, God intervenes to instruct Abraham and the wise men. In Abraham's case, He spoke directly and Abraham responded.² The wise men saw the star and were spoken to in a dream; they also responded to God's call. They exercised faith without which they could not 'please' God or worship Him, Heb. 11. 6; it is clear unregenerate people cannot worship God. This salvation also involved separation. Abraham moved from Ur to Canaan, and, in a similar way, the wise men came 'from the east', moving from man's place to God's. The approach to God in the tabernacle was from the altar to the holiest where the ark was; from east

to west, a picture repeated in these two instances of worship. These were saved and separated worshippers whose sin had been removed 'as far as the east is from the west', Ps. 103. 12. We also, once saved, need to exercise separation from man's place to God's for true worship, and where better is this seen than in a local assembly of God's people? There, separated from the world, their ideas and standards, we can worship God in spirit and in truth, John 4. 23. Not only did it involve separation but also submission; Abraham bowed down and the wise men fell down. They humbled themselves; God hates pride and true worship will not display man's ideas, talents or accomplishments of the flesh, but God's. Next, notice their worship involved service; it required effort. The wise men travelled on a very long journey, overcoming the obstacles of the wicked King Herod. Abraham fetched, hastened and ran. He got Sarah to join Him and to get ready quickly, knead and make. Often, we try to distinguish between worship and service but, as we will see in more detail later, our service can, and should, be worship. This brings us to see that their worship was sacrificial, and so should ours be. The Holy Spirit emphasizes that though Abraham humbly describes what he presents as a little water and a morsel, in fact, he brought fine meal, a calf tender and good, and a young man dressed it with butter and milk. Abraham gave God the best of everything he had, a model for us to follow. Likewise, the wise men brought gifts, and the best

of gifts at that, gold, frankincense and myrrh. These were precious and costly things. Space does not permit us to look at them in more detail, but a study of scripture would show they all speak of Christ. What a lesson this is for us; true worship speaks of Him and, indeed, presents Him to His Father. This should be both in our appreciation of Him and our likeness to Him, which is God's ultimate purpose for us, 'to be conformed to the image of his Son', Rom. 8. 29. This will require sacrifice on our part.

As already observed, the physical of the Old Testament is replaced by the spiritual in the New. We no longer bring beasts, incense, wood or crops, but we are still required 'to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ', 1 Pet. 2. 5, and we still have a spiritual altar, Heb. 13. 10. Some of these sacrifices are outlined in the New Testament. The first is found in Romans chapter 12 verse 1, where, after a three-chapter parenthesis, Paul continues from his exposition of Christ's sacrifice for us in Romans chapters 1 to 8 by instructing us to 'present your bodies a living sacrifice . . . which is your reasonable service'. In the light of the truth that Christ has died for us, the least we can do is live for Him. This surrender of our life is the basis for the other sacrifices. Paul himself fulfilled his own requirement as he tells the Philippians he is ready to 'be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith', Phil. 2. 17. Showing the humility already referred to, he uses the imagery of him being

poured out as a secondary drink offering upon their primary burnt offering. This, again, confirms the need to offer our person. He also views these Gentile converts as an offering to God from his preaching, Rom. 15. 16. Further, he thanks them for their provision for him, referring to the giving of their possessions as an offering and 'a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God', Phil. 4. 18. Another sacrifice we are to offer is 'the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name', Heb. 13. 15. Notice, this is a continual thing, not just emotional outpourings on specific occasions, be those breaking of bread gatherings or specific times of singing or praise meetings. There is no doubt the New Testament churches did sing, but this has extremely limited mentions and there is no indication of any musical accompaniment. Sadly, we seem to live in a day where there is a huge emphasis on singing and music as the major manifestation of worship and little evidence of the other offerings outlined above. Even after endorsing praise as an offering, the very next verse immediately reinforces the need for the offering of our practices, 'to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased', Heb. 13. 16. This reminds us that our lives must match our lips. The supreme example of this is our Saviour. Luke, the writer whose Gospel, perhaps more than the others, presents the Lord as a man, summarizes it in Acts chapter 1 verse 1 as, 'all that Jesus began both to do and teach'. Please note that Luke places the doing before the teaching. While it is clear our primary duty to our fellow men is to preach and not merely to engage in a social gospel, it is also clear that the Lord's preaching was adorned by His love, compassion and practical assistance to those He lived amongst. In this, as in all these offerings, He is our role model. He pleased the Father in every detail and facet of His life; true worship will require us to try and emulate this individually and only then will true worship arise from us collectively.



Endnotes

- 1 1 Sam. 15. 22; Hos. 6. 6; Mic. 6. 6-8.
- 2 Gen. 12. 1; 15. 6; Rom. 4. 3.

The Twelve Tribes of Israel

ISSACHAR

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

Scripture's record of the tribe of Issachar is most interesting. There are several surprises as well as other details which are just plain obscure and difficult to unravel with any certainty.

A quick biography

What we know for sure is that Issachar's birth is recorded ninth in the list given in Genesis chapter 30. In the wilderness, they camped east of the Tabernacle alongside Judah and Zebulun, Num. 2. 5. If your Bible has maps at the back, then they might show how they inherited a small but fertile stretch with Jordan on the east, Manasseh to the south and west, and Zebulun and Naphtali to the north. As well as being joined with Zebulun in camping order and land allotment, Moses' blessing seems to be a joint one. We shall look at Zebulun in our next article. These are by no means minor details – nothing in God's word is – but they do not help us particularly in distinguishing Issachar as a tribe.

For this we should note that:

- Moses anticipated a role for the tribe in calling the nations to enjoy the blessings of the land, Deut. 33. 18, 19.
- Deborah's song recalls the valiant assistance of Issachar's chiefs in the battle against Jabin, Judg. 5. 15.
- Issachar provided a judge named Tola, Judg. 10. 1.
- Men of Issachar supported David's bid for the throne; they understood 'the times', 1 Chr. 12. 32.
- The Jezreel valley which partly lay inside Issachar's territory was highly strategic. This may explain why Ahab had a palace in Jezreel itself.
- Ahab's neighbour, Naboth, stood his ground, quite literally, claiming the promises of God regarding his inheritance.¹
- Elisha's father was from Abel-

Meholah, thought to be inside Issachar's territory.

An intriguing history

Two other matters bear special attention. First, the tribe of Issachar actually rose to power over the northern kingdom. Their first king was Baasha. He ended the dynasty of Jeroboam, 1 Kgs. 15. 27, and was followed by his son Elah. Like all the northern kings, they were bad kings. Yet the point remains that this is something which nobody would have seen coming.

Second, Judges chapter 1 verses 18 to 36 provides a list of all the tribes west of Jordan that failed to completely drive out the inhabitants. Issachar is not mentioned. In our previous article on Asher, we noted that many tribes opted for compromise. Was Issachar the exception? Perhaps they fought for their inheritance, like Naboth, though that is making an argument from silence.

A curious prophecy

But hadn't Jacob prophesied that they would opt for an easy life in Genesis chapter 49? Most translations lean that way, though the original Hebrew is very complex; 'Issachar . . . saw that rest was good, and the land that it was pleasant; and bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a servant unto tribute'.



Commentators are divided, but most follow suit and suggest that Jacob foresaw Issachar's compromise and bondage. It's easy to go from there to spiritual lessons about how we too might trade spiritual compromise for material ease. But the complexities of the original Hebrew and the fact that Old Testament history is at odds with a negative reading of Jacob's words, mean we need to be cautious. Readers will need to draw their own conclusions. It's true that Israel at large conforms to this; they most certainly did become slaves unto tribute, 1 Kgs. 15. 19.

An unpleasant identity

It is also true that Issachar's name can mean 'man of hire'. Leah named him so after hiring Jacob for one night; a deal agreed by selling some mandrakes to Rachel. Mandrake plants were superstitiously connected with improving fertility. When Rachel heard of Leah's possession of the plant, she bought them off her in exchange for Jacob. She had long forgotten God's role in it all. It's all rather messy and it pays to read the account itself and quietly ponder once again on the grace of God, intervening amidst the dreadful turmoil of this family.

Do we read this aspect of Issachar's identity into Jacob's words – that the tribe of Issachar could be bought if it meant rest in the land? Again, readers will need to draw their own conclusions. Much has been written about Issachar which is highly speculative. Perhaps one of the deductions from a survey of this tribe is that when things are not clear in scripture, we need not feel obliged to wrest a practical application out from the text. Application from speculation will not result in edification. How wonderful that we need not speculate about their future. God will preserve them through tribulation, Rev. 7. 7, and God will apportion them land, Ezek. 48. 25. When God begins a good work, He brings it to completion – that much is certain for Issachar and that much is certain for us, 'Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ', Phil. 1. 6.

Endnotes

- 1 1 Kgs. 21. 3; Lev. 25. 23; Num. 36. 7.

An overview of Job

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

Introduction

The title of the book is taken from the person whose experience it records. That Job was a historical figure is confirmed by later references to him in the scriptures. Ezekiel makes reference to Job alongside Noah and Samuel, the three men being commended for their righteousness, Ezek. 14. 14, 16, 20. In the New Testament, James refers to the 'patience of Job', Jas. 5. 11. Apart from those two passages, the only information we have about Job is the detail recorded in this book that bears his name.

In the Hebrew scriptures, the thirty-nine books of our Old Testament are divided into three groups, the Law, the prophets and the writings. The book of Job is placed in this third section of the Hebrew Bible, the third of three 'poetical books' the preceding two being Psalms and Proverbs.¹

Taking a broad survey of the five poetical books we might suggest:

- 1 In the book of Job, we see the perplexity of suffering.
- 2 In the book of Psalms, the praise of God.
- 3 In the book of Proverbs, the wisdom borne of experience.
- 4 In the book of Ecclesiastes, the vanity of life 'under the sun'.
- 5 In the Song of Solomon, the devotion of love.

J. SIDLOW BAXTER suggests that together the five books can be viewed as tracing a believer's spiritual development and progress. 'In the book of Job, the death of the self-life, through the fires of affliction and a new vision of God, Job is brought to an end of himself. In Psalms the new life in God expressing itself in praise and prayer. In Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, we are in God's school. In Proverbs learning a heavenly and practical wisdom for life on earth. In Ecclesiastes we are taught not to set our affection on anything under the sun. The Song of Solomon symbolically expresses the sweet

intimacy of communion with Christ in all the fullness of His love'.²

The book of Job is generally acknowledged to be a literary masterpiece on account of the richness of its language, its use of similes and metaphors, and the mixture of prose and poetry, monologue and dialogue.³

In reading the book we must bear in mind that Hebrew poetry is dependent upon literary structure and cadence rather than metre or rhythm. 'Its basic structure is parallelism or thought arrangements rather than word arrangements'.⁴

The book of Job is quoted twice in the New Testament, Rom. 11. 35; 1 Cor. 3. 19. But many themes introduced in the book are reflected and expanded in later portions of God's word. The only New Testament Epistle to mention Job by name is the Epistle of James and the two books can be profitably studied together.

Many issues raised in the book of Job are answered in the New Testament.

By way of example:

- Job's wish for a 'days-man' that could intervene between himself and God has its answer in 'the one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus', Job. 9. 33; 1 Tim. 2. 5.
- The exhortation of Eliphaz, 'Despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty', and the reference that Elihu made to the chastening of God find an echo in the Hebrew Epistle.⁵
- The questions of Zophar, 'Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? Deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea' are answered in the Ephesian Epistle, Job 11. 7-19; Eph. 3. 17-19.
- 'Job's cry 'Oh that I knew where

I might find him! that I might come even to his seat!' stands in contrast to the exhortation given to believers today, 'Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need', Job 23. 3; Heb. 4. 16.

The subject of the book

The book records the personal history and experiences of a godly man. It commences with a scene in heaven, where it is evident that not only has God's eye been upon Job but Satan's eye also. In response to God's question, 'Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth?' Satan suggests the commendation was unjustified, that Job's righteousness and devotion to God had never been subject to testing. Within his charge there is an assertion that Job only served God for the blessings he received, and if these were removed Job would quickly denounce God. In the permissive will of God, Satan is given liberty to prove his suggestion, and does all he can to undermine and destroy Job's faith. All his efforts are defeated and after the opening two chapters he retires from the scene.

Hearing of Job's plight, three 'friends' come to express their sympathy with him and offer solace. Shocked at his condition, they seek for an explanation, but only compound the difficulty. They came to comfort, but ended up condemning him, all three suggesting that great suffering is an evidence of great sin. Job recognizes that he is not sinless, but asserts he is no sinner to the degree they suggest. Throughout the long dialogue with his 'friends', Job adopts two positions. On one side, Job longs to reason with God, accusing Him of being too hard and stern in His ways with him. But, over against that, despite all he suffered, throughout the book Job displays implicit trust in God.

The three 'friends' were unable to account for Job's sufferings, or to answer his charges against God. A younger man, Elihu, then joins the debate and suggests that

CHARTING THE SCRIPTURES JOB

by Jonathan Black

'I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and'

Eliphaz

'God is strength'

A. The only reason a just God could allow a righteous man to suffer must be due to hidden sin.

Judgement based on powerful visions

'Even as I have seen, they that plough iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same', Job 4. 8



Bildad

'son of strife'

Judgement based on past days

'inquire, I pray thee, of the former age, and prepare thyself to the search of their fathers', Job 8. 8



Zophar

'exultation'

Judgement based on proud knowledge

'the spirit of my understanding causeth me to answer', Job 20. 3



JOB'S COMFORTERS

'Miserable comforters are ye all', Job 16. 2

JO

'perse'

Q. WHY DOES GOD ALLOW

'My serv

A perfect servant – Acceptanc

The pain of the servant – Dist

A patient servant – Endur

A prayerful servant – Repe

A proven servant – Delivera

CHRIST CRI

TRUBLE CAME but

'Though he slay me, yet will

BOOK OF ESTHER



The fact Job lived 140 years after his trial and no mention made of Israel suggests Job to be a contemporary of Abraham.

JOB'S TROUBLE Ch 1-3

- Ch 1 – Success considered yet trouble came
- Ch 2 – Satan's challenge yet comfort came
- Ch 3 – Sufferings cry yet no answer came

JOB'S TALKS Ch 3-31

TALKS ROUND 1: Ch 4-14

Eliphaz

- Ch 4 – A thing was secretly brought to me
- Ch 5 – Happy is the man whom God correcteth

Job

- Ch 6 – Weighing up his grief
- Ch 7 – Job complains to God directly

Bildad

- Ch 8 – Job is a hopeless hypocrite

Job

- Ch 9 – How should man be just with God?
- Ch 10 – Job seeks an explanation from God.

Zophar

- Ch 11 – Canst thou by searching find out God?

Job

- Ch 12 – God is sovereign
- Ch 13 – God is my salvation
- Ch 14 – God has appointed the bounds of man

TALKS ROUND 2: Ch 15-21

Eliphaz

- Ch 15 – The pain of the wicked man

Job

- Ch 16 – Miserable comforters are ye all
- Ch 17 – Not one wise man among you

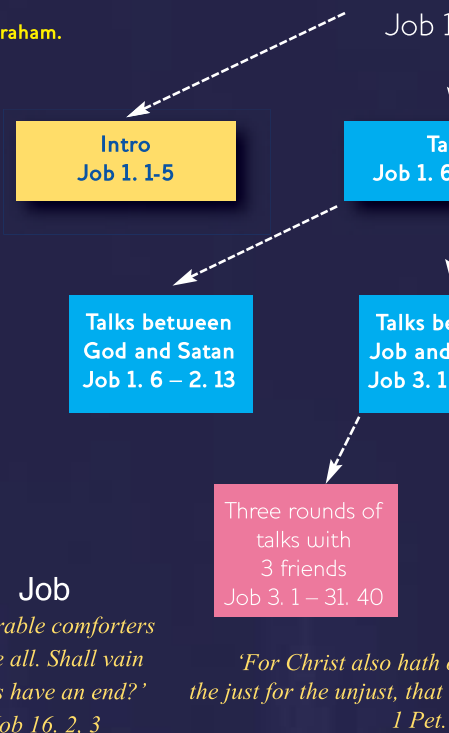
Bildad

- Ch 18 – The King of terrors

Job

- Ch 19 – My Redeemer liveth

THE STRUCTURE



'Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, And said, Naked came I out of my m

'Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and ha

Key words: wisdom, perfect, evil, trouble, comfort, just **Writer:** unknown

though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God', Job 19. 25, 26

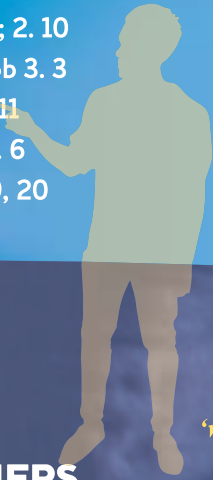
OB

'cutted'

THE RIGHTEOUS TO SUFFER?

Job'

- Onset of the crisis, Job 1. 21; 2. 10
- Turbulence in the crisis, Job 3. 3
- Repentance in crisis, James 5. 11
- Repentance in crisis, Job 42. 6
- Repentance in crisis, Ezek. 14. 19, 20



**SIANS IN
SIS**

TRUST CONQUERS

THE GOD OF ALL COMFORT

'who comforteth us in all our tribulation', 2 Cor. 1. 4

'I trust in him', Job 13. 15

Elihu

'God is he'

Elihu the youth judges Job to be self-righteous while Jehovah is sovereign and Satan is proved wrong

Judgement based on what Job has said

'I have heard the voice of thy words, saying I am clean without transgression, I am innocent... Behold, in this thou art not just'. Job 33. 8-12

God

'self-existent'

Judgement based on all knowledge

'I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee', Job 42. 2

Satan

'adversary'

Judgement based on limited knowledge

'Put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face', Job 2. 5

DISCOVERING the SCIENCE

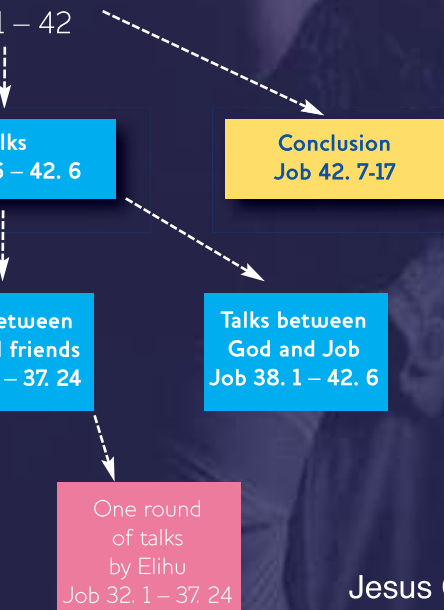
Scientists in the 1st Century would have been called natural philosophers and words like gravity were not invented until the 17th century but the Hebrew poetry of Job describes many familiar physical laws yet written 3,800 years ago. Inspired by the Creator.

- 1) The water cycle – Job 36. 27, 28
- 2) Gravity – Job 26. 7
- 3) Ocean currents – Job 38. 16
- 4) Air has weight – Job 28. 25*
- 5) Earth's hot interior – Job 28. 5*
- 6) Metallurgy – Job 28. 1, 2*
- 7) Astronomy laws – Job 38. 31

*Dr. Johnson C. Philip Dr. Saneesh Cherian
Creation Research and Apologetics Society of India

BOOK OF PSALMS

THE ORDER OF THE BOOK



Zophar

Ch 20 – The triumphing of the wicked is short

Job

Ch 21 – Why do the wicked live so long?

TALKS ROUND 3: Ch 22-31

Eliphaz

Ch 22 – Is not thy wickedness great?

Job

Ch 23 – Oh that I knew where I might find Him!

Ch 24 – Some get away with wickedness.

Bildad

Ch 25 – How can man be justified with God?

Job

Ch 26 – God is powerful in His works

Ch 27 – God is a just judge of wicked

Ch 28 – God is the author of wisdom

Ch 29 – Job was respected in the past

Ch 30 – Job is reviled in the present

Ch 31 – Job's desire for Almighty to answer

ELIHU'S TALKS: Ch 32-37

Elihu

Ch 32 – Elihu's youthful confidence

Ch 33 – Elihu's prosperity gospel

Ch 34 – Elihu - Job is self-righteous

Ch 35 – Elihu - Job's words are empty

Ch 36 – Elihu speaks on God's behalf

Ch 37 – Elihu says God is unreachable

GOD'S ANSWER: Ch 38-41

God

Ch 38 – Origins, order and ordinances

Ch 39 – Buffalo, birds and horses

Job

Ch 40 – Job's vows to keep silent

God

Ch 40 – is behind Behemoth's strength

Ch 41 – is like Leviathan in sovereignty

JOB TURNS & TRIUMPHS

Ch 42 – Job's repentance and blessing

Jesus Christ

'I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none', Ps. 69. 20

'... because he suffered for sins, the one who might bring us to God', James 5. 11

'... mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord', Job 1. 20-21

'... we have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy', James 5. 11

suffering is not always to be linked to punishment for sin, but, often, is God's way of chastening men with a view to their instruction and benefit.

Finally, God Himself answered Job, revealing His glory and total sovereignty in creation. The attitude of Job immediately changes. Enlightened by God's manifestation, Job confesses his own unworthiness and his folly in seeking to reason with God.

The book concludes as it began with an account of Job's blessings and God describing him as 'my servant Job'.

The purpose of the book

We cannot do better than quote from a series of articles on Job by the late W. W. FEREDAY, 'It is wonderful that God should devote so large a book to His dealings with one soul. The book of Esther, where the deliverance of a nation is in view, contains 167 verses, while the book of Job contains 1,071 verses. What comfort to our hearts to know that our God is interested in all our individual sorrows and exercises'.⁶

From the book of Job, we learn:

- God is sovereign in His government of the world and in the life of His people.
- Satan is limited in what he can do, being subject to the permissive will of God.
- Satan seeks to undermine faith and must be resisted.
- Godly people are not exempt from suffering.
- Suffering is not necessarily because of sin.
- The inability of man's wisdom to explain the sufferings of the righteous.
- Something of God's ways in the chastening of His people.
- The Lord is full of pity and tender compassion.
- The ways of the Lord with His people culminate in the defeat of Satan, the righteous being vindicated and God glorified.

The plan of the book

1. Introduction: 'My servant Job', 1. 1-5.
2. Accusation: Job and Satan, 1. 6 - 2. 10.

3. Disputation: Job and his friends, 2. 11 - 32. 1.
4. Intervention: Job and Elihu, 32. 2 - 37. 24
5. Revelation: Job and the Lord, 38. 1 - 42. 6.
6. Conclusion: 'My servant Job', 42. 7-17.

The author and date of the book

The author and date of the book are unknown.

Broadly speaking, most commentators favour either Moses or Solomon to be the author. Moses because internal evidence suggests that Job lived in the time of the Patriarchs and there are striking similarities with the book of Genesis. Such suggest that the book of Job could have been the first book of the Bible to be written. Those who favour Solomon as the author draw attention to the similarities between the book of Job and the wisdom literature, namely Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. But whoever wrote the book and whenever it was written we know the author was divinely inspired and the book has a legitimate place in the canon of Holy Scripture.

That the author and time of writing are unknown imparts to the events of the book a particularly timeless character, a reminder that in every generation the righteous are not immune from suffering.

Several things suggest Job lived in the days of the patriarchs.

- 1 The length of his life corresponds to that era. Following the events recorded in the book, Job lived for another 140 years, 42. 16. Since he had ten children before the trials came, and his sons were clearly adults, each with his own house, we might speculate that Job was around 200 years old when he died.
- 2 In the presentation to God of 'burnt offerings according to the number' of his sons, Job acts in a priestly capacity as the head of the family, consistent with the pattern of patriarchal priesthood.
- 3 Several events referred to in the book recall the early chapters of

Genesis. For example, Eliphaz makes reference to the flood, 22. 15-17. Job in his initial outburst mentioned 'kings, counsellors and princes', 3. 14, 15. These offices only existed after the division into nations at Babel.

- 4 There is an absence of any reference to the Exodus, the Law, the Levitical priesthood, the Tabernacle or the Feasts of Jehovah, all things connected with the ministry of Moses.

W. W. FEREDAY commented, "There is nothing of the pilgrim character noticeable in Job. It is recorded of Abraham and others that they "confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims in the earth . . . they desired a better country that is a heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city", Heb. 11. 8-16. Although Job has an honourable place in Ezekiel and James he has no place in Hebrews 11. The principle of separation which makes all who receive it strangers and pilgrims here, had not been introduced while God was dealing with His servant Job'.⁷ There was no idolatry before the flood. This suggests that Job lived somewhere between the flood and the call of Abram.

[Selected from *Beginnings*, Volume 1 of the Old Testament Overview series published by Precious Seed Publications]

Endnotes

- 1 As found in the canon of the Hebrew Scriptures, there are twenty-four books not thirty-nine.
- 2 J. SIDLOW BAXTER, *Explore the Bible: The Poetical Books*. Quoted from an e-book.
- 3 R. B. ZUCK, *Everyman's Bible Commentary, Job*, Quoted from an e-book.
- 4 M. F. UNGER, *Bible Handbook*, pg. 267. For a more detailed consideration of the various styles of Hebrew poetry see: W. HENDERSON, *Old Testament Overview, Volume 6: Lessons for Life, Introduction to the poetic books*, Precious Seed, 2015, pp. 9-14.
- 5 Job 5. 17; 33. 16-19; Heb. 12. 5-11.
- 6 W. W. FEREDAY, 'Job and His Book', *Believer's Magazine*, March 1948, pp. 52-54.
- 7 W. W. FEREDAY, *op. cit.*, pg. 29.

The storm on the lake

By **MALCOLM HORLOCK** Cardiff, Wales

References are from the NKJV unless stated

Although violent storms were common on the Sea of Galilee, clearly this was no ordinary storm. Even experienced fishermen were filled with fear, Mark 4. 40.

We read of three ‘great’ things.

A ‘great storm’, v. 37

Each of the first three Gospels lends its own emphasis to the incident. **Matthew** traces the storm to a violent ‘movement to and fro’ in the sea bed beneath the surface of the lake, causing great turbulence to **come up** to the surface above, Matt. 8. 24.¹ **Mark** describes graphically how ‘the waves were beating **into** the boat, so that the boat was now filling’, Mark 4. 37 lit. That is, Mark is saying, the waves, churned up by the strong wind, were cascading over the side of the boat, as a result of which the water level inside was rising frighteningly fast. For his part, **Luke** says, ‘a storm [the word signifying a whirlwind or hurricane²] of wind **came down** on the lake’, Luke 8. 23.

Later, when Jesus cried out in the face of the cross, the disciples slept, Mark 14. 37-41; now, when the disciples cried out in the face of the storm, He slept. And, in words once spoken of ancient mariners, the disciples ‘were at their wit’s end’, Ps. 107. 27.

A ‘great calm’, v. 39

Confronted with all that came **up** from **below**, with all that came **in** from **outside**, and with all that came **down** from **above** (not to speak of twelve terrified disciples), the rudely woken Lord ‘arose and rebuked the winds and the sea’, Matt. 8. 26, with the words, ‘Peace [“hush”], be still [“be muzzled”³].’

Now it was the turn of the winds and the waves to go to sleep,⁴ and the ‘great storm’ became a ‘great calm’.

A ‘great fear’, v. 41 lit

The disciples underwent a great ‘fear transfer’, from fear of the storm⁵ to

fear of Him who with His word had subdued it, Mark 4. 40, 41.

Small wonder that, having witnessed the very elements of nature report to Him, the disciples were awestruck at His authority, and questioned, ‘Who is this,⁶ that even the winds and the sea obey him?’

Perhaps they recalled that, long before, a psalmist had addressed ‘the Lord God of hosts’ with the words, ‘Who is a strong Lord like you?

... you rule the raging of the sea ... when its waves rise, you still them, Ps. 89. 8, 9.⁷

In the face of Jesus’ seeming indifference, the disciple asked, ‘Do you not care?’ A little over thirty years later, one of those disciples was able to assure believers who were going through another storm (in their case, that of persecution) that, yes indeed, although at times He may **seem** to be remote and unconcerned, most certainly He **does** care . . . that it really does ‘matter to Him about you’, 1 Pet. 5. 7 lit.

I suspect that, to all who are tempted nowadays to echo the disciples’



question, Peter would say, ‘Why don’t you **cast your cares where your sins were once laid?**’ 1 Pet. 2. 24; Isa. 53. 6.

Jesus had spoken clearly to the disciples of their **destination**, Mark 4. 35. And, in due time, ‘He brought them to their desired haven’, Ps. 107. 30; Mark 5. 1. But He had not promised them **a smooth crossing** . . . any more than He has promised us one!⁸

Let us trust Him. Today, we can enjoy (and possibly sing) the words of the children’s chorus, ‘With Christ in the vessel, we can smile at the storm’.⁹

Endnotes

- 1 W. E. VINE’s *Expository Dictionary*, article ‘Earthquake’. The word translated ‘tempest’ occurs fourteen times in the New Testament, and is rendered ‘earthquake’ on every other occasion.
- 2 WILLIAM F. ARNDT and F. WILBER GINGRICH, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*.
- 3 The same word as is used of muzzling an ox, 1 Cor. 9. 9.
- 4 The picturesque word translated ‘ceased’ indicates toil and weariness. ‘The sea sank to rest as if exhausted’, M. R. VINCENT, *Word Studies in the New Testament*.
- 5 Jesus asked, ‘Have you still no faith?’ Mark 4. 40. Clearly, they lacked faith, not only in His word, Mark 4. 35; cf. 5. 1, but in His person. For, if He truly was the Son of God, it was absurd to suppose that a storm could kill Him. Their panic betrayed an inadequate grasp of who Jesus was. They should have realized that, though the presence of Jonah in the ship had once endangered the lives of those with him, Jonah 1. 4, 12, 15, the presence of Jesus in the boat guaranteed the lives of those with Him.
- 6 This was not the only time that men asked, ‘Who is this?’ See (1) Luke 5. 21; (2) Luke 7. 49; (3) Luke 9. 9; (4) Matt. 21. 10. And compare, at His second advent, Isa. 63. 1.
- 7 Ponder the mystery of the person of Christ. He slept, yet calmed the storm. He hungered, yet withered the fig tree. He was weary at a well side, and yet knew the details of the Samaritan woman’s life. He wept at a graveside, yet raised the dead.
- 8 ‘He has never promised you an easy passage, only a safe landing’, quoted by MRS L. B. BOWMAN in ‘Streams in the Desert’, for 31 March.
- 9 It may well be that this chorus was based on the two last lines of the first verse of JOHN NEWTON’s hymn, ‘Begone, unbelief, my Saviour is near’.

The resurrection and ascension of Christ

By **ALASTAIR SINCLAIR** Crosshouse, Scotland

The resurrection is central to Christianity. Every fundamental of our faith depends on it. Put simply, if there is no resurrection Christianity falls apart and is just another false, dead religion. In 1 Corinthians chapter 15, Paul confirms this. In the opening five verses he declares it to be the pinnacle of the gospel message. In verses 12 to 19, he addresses the issue of some suggesting there is no resurrection and confirms that this would negate Christ's resurrection and would make our preaching and faith vain. We would be false witnesses, still in our sins, dead believers, would have no hope and would be the most miserable, deluded people. But he confirms that 'Christ is risen' in verse 20 and He is the first of myriads who will also rise from the dead. It is clear from these verses that it is not possible to be a genuine Christian unless you believe in the resurrection.

The centrality of the resurrection to the gospel message is confirmed throughout the book of Acts. Peter refers to it when choosing Matthias to replace Judas in chapter 1, at Pentecost in chapter 2 and in relation to the miracle performed in chapters 3 and 4. In Acts chapter 5 verses 30 to 32, he preaches it to the high-ranking Jews who were Sadducees and did not believe in resurrection. He also proclaims that Christ is seated with God and so has ascended to heaven. In chapters 6 and 7, Stephen refers to Christ's second coming and sees Him in heaven about to receive his spirit. Peter again preaches it to Cornelius in chapters 10 and 11. In chapter 9, the risen Christ appears to Saul of Tarsus who, as the Apostle Paul, then proclaims the resurrection in all his preaching throughout the rest of the book. He does this at Antioch, Thessalonica, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus and Jerusalem before the Jewish leaders. He also declares it to Felix, Festus and Agrippa before arriving in Rome where he refers to 'the hope of Israel'. A study of all these sermons will show the message is greatly adapted considering the background and understanding of the various audiences but in every

case the resurrection is central to the gospel preaching as it should also be for us.

Resurrection is not only a New Testament truth but central to the faith of all believers including the Old Testament saints. This is established by the Lord's teaching to the Sadducees recorded in Mathew chapter 22 verses 23 to 33 and in Mark and Luke. Hebrews chapter 11, listing the many Old Testament believers saved by faith makes it clear. In the case of Abraham, the father of the faithful, he had faith in a resurrection, vv. 17-19. Wonderfully, this resurrection was seen figuratively in Isaac being received again, despite going to the altar. This 'raising' of an only-beloved son is clearly a picture of Christ's resurrection which all others are dependent on. This is perhaps why Christ's resurrection provokes so many reactions and opinions. It is true some are indifferent, rationalizing or doubtful, but many are totally unbelieving and even hostile. Now, as can be seen above, while saving faith is required for true belief, it is still worth considering the evidence for the resurrection and the alternative explanations.

The explanation offered by some, including Islam, is that the Lord merely swooned on the cross and later revived. Apart from all the issues of getting out of the tomb, the most compelling evidence against this is that three days later He walked seven miles to Emmaus, Luke 24. This would be ridiculous for a man who had recently been beaten and lashed until His bones were visible, had his hands **and** feet nailed through and the sac around His heart pierced with a Roman spear! Others, like a former Bishop of Durham, claim the resurrection is a spiritual rather than physical event, but the eyewitnesses talk of seeing, hearing, touching, holding and even eating with the Lord. However, the most common explanation of unbelief is that put out by the Jewish authorities in Mathew chapter 28 verses 11 to 15. This claims the soldiers were asleep and the disciples stole away the body. Of course, there are no witnesses for this, except the soldiers who were supposed to be asleep even though they had four watches of only three hours each through the night. Amazingly, there was no subsequent investigation and no evidence that the Lord's body has ever been found. Equally, there has been no explanation of why these disciples removed the grave clothes from the dead body in their stealth.

In contrast to all this, evidence for the resurrection is overwhelming, especially from the eyewitnesses. Piecing together the accounts of the four Gospels, Acts chapter 1 and 1 Corinthians chapter 15, there are records of at least eleven witness occasions. These include individual appearances to Mary Magdalene, Peter, James the Lord's half-brother and Saul of Tarsus. The last two were, up to that point, unbelievers. In fact, even those who were believers did not yet believe in or expect a resurrection, John 19. 9-13. Clearly, this was also the case for the two travelling to Emmaus, the ten in the upper room, especially Thomas who was absent but is there when the Lord appeared to all eleven of them. He also appeared to seven at the Sea of Galilee, 120 in Acts chapter 1 and 'over 500' recorded in 1 Corinthians chapter 15. In general, these witnesses

were afraid, deflated, lacking belief, looking only for a body, too poor to bribe soldiers and had nothing to gain but much to lose. Sadly, over time many of them did lose their lives for their faithfulness to the risen Christ whose appearance to them utterly transformed their lives, including both Peter and Saul of Tarsus who, as the Apostle Paul, constantly referred to, explained and affirmed the resurrection. When all these, together with the 'over 500', are included, it is ludicrous to suggest they colluded and none of them ever broke ranks, especially in the face of persecution and hostility. Why die for a lie?

It is these witness accounts which have caused many legal authorities to conclude that if tested in a court of law their witness statements would be overwhelmingly conclusive proof. Yet the scepticism, apathy, denial and hostility persist. Why? Perhaps the answer lies in the implications of a real resurrection and its twin truth of the ascension. We will see many positive implications for the Saviour, His Father and His people, but what about for others? The resurrection has huge implications for the wicked one; he is defeated, Heb. 2. 14, and judged,

John 16. 11, by the resurrection and, in the ascension, the Lord went right through the domain of the wicked one demonstrating His total victory, Eph. 4. 8. Sadly, the defeated father of lies wishes to deceive men and women regarding the consequences for them. The Lord Jesus Himself warns that those who rejected Him will one day see Him exalted and coming in judgement, Matt. 26. 64. Among many other scriptures, Peter confirms that the risen, ascended Christ will one day judge all, whether alive or dead, Acts 10. 41, 42, and, considering this, appeals for them to believe, v. 43. The reluctance of many to believe in a resurrection is because its implications are coming judgement and, therefore, a need for repentance and saving faith which brings a change of life and behaviour. This is a serious and potentially sad implication of the resurrection and ascension, but we should conclude with the many positive ones.

Firstly, the implications for the Lord Himself are being reunited with His Father after His work is complete, John 16. 5. He is now exalted after His humiliation, Phil. 2. 8, 9, and will one day be acknowledged rather

than rejected, vv. 10, 11. He is now on a throne rather than a cross, Heb. 12. 2, and the scriptures have been fulfilled, John 10. 18. But there are also immediate implications for us, His people. Romans chapter 4 verse 25 confirms He was raised for our justification. In other words, His resurrection enables us to be declared righteous and not only that but enables us, in the light of that resurrection, to walk in newness of life and so live a resurrected life, Rom. 6. 4, 5. Further to this, the Holy Spirit has been sent into the world, John 16. 7, as a direct consequence of the Lord returning to heaven. We are, in fact, living proof of a resurrected, ascended Christ as we display Spirit filled lives, John 15. 26 – 16. 5. So we now have a comforter or advocate indwelling us on earth and another one with the Father, 1 John 2. 1, who having passed through the heavens is now our High Priest representing us before God. This, along with a finished work and completed scriptures, is why there has never been a better age to be a child of God.

These are all present blessings, but the resurrection and ascension also provide future blessings. John chapter 14 verse 3 promises us we will go to be with Him where He is, and, in chapter 17 verse 24, His final request in prayer is that this might be so. Both the promise and the prayer are now certain because of His resurrection and ascension. 1 Corinthians chapter 15 verse 23 confirms He is the firstfruits; He was raised first but many more will be raised at His coming. Not only raised but taken to heaven, just like Him as He is the 'forerunner', Heb. 6. 20. These lovely pictures are of a harvest and an athlete. The Lord is seen as the first sheaf of a great harvest to follow, being raised from the dead and the first runner home of a great company of those who have 'finished the race', 2 Tim. 4. 7, and are going home to their reward, v. 8.

What a wonderful truth this is, not some cold doctrine but a vibrant living truth declaring our Saviour's past victory, our present power and future hope that we shall be with Him and like Him. May the Lord enable each of us to live in the light of this till He come.



ASPECTS OF CALVARY

The blood of Christ in Hebrews

By **STEPHEN FELLOWES** Skibbereen, Ireland

PART 2

There are twenty references to blood in the Epistle to the Hebrews, most of which deal directly or indirectly with the great matter of sacrifice. It would be impossible to embrace all the references within this short article, so what we wish to do is to consider four occasions where blood is coupled with something else.

Blood and flesh, 2. 14

Hebrews chapter 1 emphasizes the deity of the Son of God, whereas chapter 2 lays stress upon His humanity, and sits nicely alongside other great second chapters in scripture where the holy humanity of Christ is to the fore, namely Leviticus, Luke and Philippians.

As the writer comes to the last section of the chapter he directs our thoughts to the two-fold purpose of the Lord's humanity; note the two occurrences of the preposition 'that', in Greek *hina*, which could be translated 'in order that', vv. 14, 17.

First, Christ became man in order to die and deliver. Second, His humanity was essential so that He could suffer and succour. The first reason directs us to Bethlehem and Calvary, the second is seen in His holy pathway in this world and His place at God's right hand as the great high priest of His people.

He had to become a real man if He was to do both, and so we are told, 'Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same'. The children passively, without a choice, 'partook' of flesh and blood, but of our Saviour the scripture says with complete exactitude, 'he . . . took part'. This He did voluntarily and as a deliberate action of His own will. He stepped into sinless humanity; John

tells us beautifully that 'the Word became flesh', John 1. 14 JND.

His partaking was in the same way as the children partook, for the writer says He did it 'likewise', or 'in like manner' NEWBERRY, that is to say He did it by birth, but we hasten to remind our hearts of the uniqueness of His virgin birth and the distinctiveness of His sinless, unimpeachable humanity.

Quite a number of manuscripts interestingly reverse the order that we have in our King James Version, instead reading 'blood and flesh'. This may well be the more accurate reading of the text and it is translated this way by Darby. Within this great Epistle, which deals emphatically with the subject of sacrifice, with that of Christ as supreme, we can see the significance of blood being put to the fore. The hymn writer expresses the truth so well:

'Verily God, yet become truly
human –
Lower than angels – to die in our
stead;
How hast Thou, long promised Seed
of the woman
Trode on the serpent and bruised his
head!'

H. D'ARCY CHAMPNEY.

Blood and purging, 9. 14

Of the previously mentioned twenty references to blood in the Hebrew

Epistle, twelve of them are found in chapter 9, which makes it the greatest treatise on the blood in the New Testament. In chapters 9 and 10, the writer deals with the pre-eminence of the sacrificial work of Christ and how the glory of His 'once for all' sacrifice for sins has met all the demands of divine righteousness and holiness in relation to the sin question.

Our verse of interest falls just about halfway through chapter 9; in fact, along with the previous verse, it is part of one of the greatest single sentences in the whole of scripture on the death of Christ. It begins by directing us to the utter powerlessness of the ceremonial cleansing of the legal system; it reached no further than 'the purifying of the flesh'. Whether it was the cleansing on the Day of Atonement, Lev. 16, the ashes of the red heifer, Num. 19, or anything else, all could only provide an outward, temporal and imperfect cleansing.

But what they could not do, the blood of Christ did. In all the intrinsic value of His own blessed person, He has accomplished what the sacrifices of old failed miserably to do. At Calvary He offered Himself in sacrifice to God. Our verse looks at His offering from three aspects:

In person – He 'offered himself'. No less would do for God, no more is needed for sin! We scan the multiplicity of offerings upon Israel's altar; bullocks, rams, lambs, heifers, pigeons, etc. The priest handled all of these, but it was unthinkable that he himself would ever be placed on that altar. At the cross, our Saviour gloriously combined both the offerer and the offering. Calvary was a priestly work, and uniquely a place where the priest 'offered himself'.

In power – The phrase 'through the eternal Spirit' has been understood in different ways, but we take it that it refers to the Lord Jesus offering Himself on the cross in the power of the Holy Spirit to God. His whole life was lived in the Spirit's power, a life that never could for one moment grieve that same Spirit, and now in an act of climactic greatness He offers Himself in spiritual energy.

In perfection – It was also ‘without spot’; it had to be to satisfy a holy God. This is the basic requirement in every offering, and He alone fulfilled this caveat as ‘a lamb without blemish and without spot’, 1 Pet. 1. 19. Unlike the high priest of old, our Saviour never needed to offer any sacrifice for himself, Heb. 9. 7. In spite of the glory of his, the high priest’s fallen nature remained unchanged before God, but how precious to think of the holy and perfect Christ of God who presented Himself in all His intrinsic perfection.

This perfect sacrifice has purged the conscience, it has reached beyond the outward flesh and has cleansed inwardly and made men worshipping servants to ‘the living God’.

Blood and entering, 10. 19

It is essential to see the position that the Christian occupies in this unique Day of grace. If we were looking at the Roman Epistle, our standing is ‘in Christ Jesus’, 8. 1; in 2 Corinthians, we are a new creation in Christ Jesus, 5. 17; in Ephesians it is stated that we are

‘in heavenly places in Christ’, Eph. 1. 3; in Galatians we are to hold the ground of ‘the liberty’ which is in Christ Jesus, Gal. 5. 1, and others could be added.

When we come to Hebrews, we find that our position is ‘in the holiest’, and we are intended to be ‘without the camp’, 10. 19; 13. 13. This is the place where the teaching of the letter places us.

The first eighteen verses of chapter 10 speak of the pre-eminence of Christ’s sacrifice. At the commencement, we are reminded that the perpetual offering of sacrifices under the law could never leave a person with ‘no more conscience of sins’, v. 2, but at the close of the section, after having spoken of that glorious once for all sacrifice for sin, we are told that ‘there is no more offering for sin’ needed, v. 18!

And now, as a result of that perfect work, we have ‘boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus’; not into the outer court or the holy place or even the ‘holiest of all’ once

per year as the high priest on the Day of Atonement, v. 19; Lev. 16. Instead, with complete and continual freedom, we enter into the innermost sanctuary on the grounds of the accepted sacrifice of Jesus, purged and cleansed, with hearts that should be bowed in worship to the one who has made it all blessedly possible. Blessed privilege!

Blood and sanctification, 13. 12

In this last chapter of Hebrews, the writer impresses upon his audience matters of a most practical nature as he wants them to be marked by consistent Christianity. He also desires that they be fully associated with the rejected Christ, which for the Hebrews would be the great evidence of reality; they could not retain Judaism and have Jesus.

As the rejected Saviour, He is spoken of as the one who is ‘outside.’ He is outside the gate of the commercial world; He also is outside the city of the world politically, and as far as religion is concerned, He is ‘outside the camp’ of Judaism as well, vv. 12-14. But when He was on that cross in the outside place, it was there that He would ‘sanctify the people with his own blood’; it was through the shedding of His own blood and by means of His deep sufferings for sin that He would set apart a people to God, all cleansed and consecrated, the defilement of sin having been forever removed.

It is important to remember that sanctification in the Hebrew Epistle is equivalent to justification in the Roman Epistle. In Romans, the setting is forensic; we are in the divine courtroom and it is the guilt of our sin that is being dealt with; in Hebrews, sanctification is set against the background of the sacrificial order and the tabernacle, and the writer deals with the great issue of the defilement of sin and how we can approach God.

Thank God we have a Saviour who in His work sets us before God as those who are reckoned righteous with every charge of guilt eternally removed, and who cleanses us and presents us as purged worshippers within the very presence of God. Hallelujah, what a Saviour!



BALAAAM

Numbers 22. 1-38

Part 1

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

The chapter opens with the children of Israel pitched in the plains of Moab, east of the River Jordan, over against Jericho. The wilderness journey is concluded, the next movement is to cross the Jordan and enter the land of Canaan. It is at this point that we are introduced to Balaam, hired by King Balak to curse the people of God.

How did Moses come to know about the evil intentions of Balaam and Balak, for these events took place outside the range of the people's knowledge? None of the children of Israel could have known about the alliance between Moab and Midian, or the negotiations that took place in Balaam's house in Mesopotamia. None of the people could have known about the journey when the ass rebuked Balaam. None heard Balaam's parables, spoken from heights looking down upon Israel's camp. Moses and the people were unaware of what was taking place, but God knew and revealed it to Moses and that in the latter days of Moses' life. Although evil men might plot in secret, all is known by God. In Psalm 10 verse 14, in a context concerning the 'devices' the wicked imagine, the writer says, 'Thou hast seen it; for thou beholdest mischief and spite', and that is no less true today.

1. The man

Is Balaam to be viewed as a man of faith or as an apostate? If the narrative concerning him embraced only the opening thirteen verses of Numbers chapter 22, his refusal to go with the messengers of Balak and his clear assertion in verse 13, 'the Lord refuseth to give me leave to go with you', he might well have claimed a noble place in the biblical record, but the narrative does not conclude there and, reading on, a very different picture is presented to us. Because of Balaam's prophetic utterances, Peter calls him a 'prophet', but he is never so called in the Old Testament. Instead, we read of 'Balaam . . . the **soothsayer**'.¹ In his second parable, as he acknowledges his

inability to curse the people, Balaam says 'there is no **enchantment** against Jacob, neither is there any **divination** against Israel'; the three words, 'soothsaying', 'enchantment' and 'divination' identify his usual means of operation, all things the children of Israel were forbidden to resort to.² Other verses could be mentioned³ but sufficient has been said to identify where Balaam stood spiritually: no man of faith, no man of God, a man who stands as a solemn warning that a person can hear the word of God, have knowledge about God, and yet be eternally lost.

2. The messengers

Numbers chapter 21 records three victories of the children of Israel, vv. 3, 24, 34. It was, however, the victory over the Amorites that particularly unsettled Balak, king of Moab. Somewhat earlier, Sihon, king of the Amorites, had successfully waged war with the Moabites and annexed some of their land. Balak reasoned that if the children of Israel had defeated Moab's powerful neighbour, what prospect did he have of defeating them? Rallying what help he could, Balak consulted with the elders of Midian and, feeling the need for supernatural intervention, he sent messengers to Balaam, Num. 22. 3-6. Balak says, 'Behold, there is a people come out from Egypt: behold, they cover the face of the earth, and they abide over against me'. He traces the history of the children of Israel back to the Exodus which took place some thirty-eight years earlier. That he does so indicates their divine deliverance was not only widely known but remained fresh in

the memory of the heathen nations.⁴ Balak wanted Balaam to 'curse me this people; for they are too mighty for me: peradventure I shall prevail, that we may smite them . . . for I wot that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed'. The details are instructive, embracing a coalition of the 'political', represented by Balak, and the 'religious', represented by Balaam, united in their opposition to the children of Israel and just as the Israelites were about to enter their appointed inheritance. Behind these movements, surely we can see the hand of a third person, Satan, making a trinity of evil that will be replicated in the last days, prior to the introduction of the millennial age; a trinity comprising that 'old serpent the devil', a political leader 'the beast' and a spiritual leader 'the false prophet', Revelation chapter 13.

Balak sent the elders of Moab and Midian 'with the rewards of divination in their hand', Num. 22. 7. Having been informed of the purpose of their mission, Balaam says, 'Lodge here this night, and I will bring you word again, as the Lord [Heb. *Jehovah*] shall speak unto me', v. 8. Although Balaam uses the title *Jehovah*, we shouldn't read too much into that; as a soothsayer of no mean reputation we can imagine that he made it his business to be familiar with the various gods that were acknowledged by the different nations. Since he had been called to curse the children of Israel, then he would seek the God of that people. No doubt it was simply said to give the impression he was a man of spiritual stature who could contact the God of Israel whenever he chose. But, that night, 'God [Heb. *Elohim*] came' and 'God said unto Balaam, Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed', vv. 9, 12. Why did God come to him? The proposal to curse the people was a direct challenge to God's purpose and so He was pleased to intervene on His people's behalf. Do notice the Lord says, 'thou shalt not curse the people for **they are blessed**'. This is said towards the end of the wilderness journey, after all the years of rebellion, but there was no change to God's purpose.

In the morning, refusing to accompany the messengers, Balaam said, 'Get you

into your land: for the Lord refuseth to give me leave to go with you'. The messengers made no attempt to persuade him, suggesting they understood his decision was firm. In speaking thus Balaam revealed he clearly understood God's will. But, in answering, Balaam told the messengers only part of what the Lord said, namely that he was not to go with them; he omitted to mention the children of Israel were a people blessed of the Lord. In his use of the word 'refuseth' is there a hint of disappointment? He already had his eye upon the promised reward, vv. 13, 14.

Balak was not easily deterred and so another group of messengers were sent, this time a larger and more distinguished group, with the promise of promotion to 'great honour'. Again, Balaam's response was quite definite, 'If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more', v. 18. Balaam interpreted the promise of promotion to 'great honour' in terms of 'silver and gold', his covetous heart coming to the fore. He uses the title *Jehovah* again, but

now it is 'the Lord my God', and, again, we should not read too much into that. It's simply a statement he applies to himself as the one whose spokesman he professed to be. However, it is interesting that he says, 'I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more', for, whatever he intended by that, it is something that will mark the whole of his subsequent history, vv. 15-18. If he really believed he could not go beyond the word of the Lord, why did he then invite the messengers to stay overnight, since he already knew the Lord's mind? The key is in the word 'more' at the end of verse 19, 'that I may know what the Lord will say unto me more', suggesting, perhaps, that he was hoping the Lord would change His mind.

Once more God came to him, saying, 'If the men come to call thee, rise up, and go with them'. It seems to contradict the earlier message; had the Lord changed His mind? Some feel it was simply to test Balaam, to see if he would obey God or yield to his covetous desires. They note that in verse 20 the Lord says, 'If the men come to call thee, rise up', but in

verse 21 there is no reference to any call but simply 'Balaam rose up in the morning . . . and went with the princes of Moab'. However, perhaps there is a more significant reason. The Lord knew Balaam's covetous heart and, in His providence, allowed Balaam to continue, to make him an example of the folly of trying to frustrate God's purpose regarding His chosen people. But, while the Lord said, 'rise up, and go with them', He added, 'but yet the word which I shall say unto thee that thou shalt do'. It echoes Balaam's own statement in verse 18, and, whether Balaam believed it or not, the Lord asserts that it would be so. In His sovereignty, God can use whoever He will, to accomplish whatever He will.

3. The madness

The ass speaking is dismissed by some as impossible, but certainly the Apostle Peter took the account literally, saying, 'the dumb ass speaking with man's voice forbad the madness of the prophet', 2 Pet. 2. 16. As to its significance, the ass became a living parable of Balaam's pathway. Three times the ass, seeing the angel, halted, and this was now the third time the Lord had come to Balaam. Balaam said that if he had a sword he would have slain the ass; the angel had a sword drawn in his hand saying that but for the ass he would have slain Balaam, Num. 22. 33. Just as God put words into the mouth of the ass so He was going to put words into the mouth of Balaam.

The scene is now set for the narrative that follows. The issue at hand can be summarized in two key statements: the word of Balak to Balaam 'Come . . . curse me this people'; the word of the Lord to Balaam, 'thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed', vv. 6, 12.



Endnotes

- 1 2 Pet. 2. 16; Josh. 13. 22.
- 2 Num. 23. 23; Deut. 18. 10, 11.
- 3 Compare the three New Testament references and the context in which they are found: 'The way of Balaam', 2 Pet. 2. 15; 'The error of Balaam', Jude 11, and 'The doctrine of Balaam', Rev. 2. 14.
- 4 Compare Exodus chapter 15 verses 14 and 15, 'The people shall hear, and be afraid: sorrow shall take hold on the inhabitants of Palestina . . . the dukes of Edom shall be amazed; the mighty men of Moab, trembling shall take hold upon them; all the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away'.

1 Thessalonians Chapter 4

Readiness for His coming

By **PETER DAVIES** Swansea, Wales

This is a chapter of challenge on the one hand, and cheer on the other. It opens with a call to holiness and concludes with the call to heaven. In view of the fact that we are a heavenly people, the apostle gives us clear instructions as to our behaviour in the world. You would hardly think that this company of believers in Thessalonica would need this kind of exhortation, for he speaks so highly of them in his introduction to the letter. He bears testimony to the fact that there had been a remarkable change in their manner of life, 'ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God', 1. 9. He had commended them on their 'work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope', 1. 3.

But, here he is encouraging them further to know how they should continue to walk and please God. It is the pathway of separation to God from all that is unclean and evil. It is a call to **sanctification** and a call to **holiness**, vv. 3, 7. We are living in a defiled world where anything goes, and everyone is at liberty to live as they please. Little wonder, then, that we are not at home here; heaven is our home! It is in view of this that we are now to consider the apostle's second theme: the call to heaven. Let us be sure of this, 'For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry', Heb. 10. 37.

As he introduces this wonderful revelation, he first has to adjust their thinking.

The correction, vv. 13, 14

Whilst they were eagerly waiting for the coming again of their blessed Lord, they were confused and distressed by the fact that some of their number had died, and they feared that they would miss out at His coming. So, Paul lovingly dispels their fears by explaining to them that they are not at any disadvantage because they have fallen asleep. Death no longer holds any terror for us; our Lord has conquered it and is

victor over the grave. Of course, it is only the body that sleeps, for he tells them that when the Lord comes God is going to bring them with Him. So, for that to happen they must already be with Him. Oh! we need not sorrow as others who have no hope, for our hope for our loved ones, who believed Jesus died and rose again, is not lost but assured.

The certainty, v. 15

What Paul states here is clearly different to what the prophets of old had spoken. And, when we turn to the writings of Peter and John, we find that they are writing concerning His coming in glory, manifesting Himself to the world. But Paul, to whom had been given the secret concerning the church, is writing about our Lord's coming for His own, and our meeting Him in the air. The apostle is not giving us his own ideas or opinions; he is communicating what he has received from the Lord, 'this we say by the word of the Lord'. We could have no greater confirmation of the certainty of these words; they are the very words the Lord has spoken.

The coming, v. 15

He is coming, beloved. We have His very own word of promise, John 14. 3. Again, three times, in His final word

from heaven to John in Revelation chapter 22, He says He is coming quickly. This is one of the exceeding great and precious promises that Peter speaks about. The scoffers in their ignorance say, 'Where is the promise of his coming . . . all things continue as they were', but that is not true; they wilfully forget the flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, and God's intervention in the affairs of the nations even to this very day. His day of grace and salvation is drawing to its close, the day of the outpouring of His wrath is soon to begin, but 'God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ', 5. 9. He is coming for us to perfect the salvation He has already begun. It is a full and perfect salvation that He has procured for us, and He will not be satisfied until we are with Him in glory. Was not that His prayer to His Father in John chapter 17 verse 24? Are we really looking forward to His coming for us? We should be! In Matthew chapter 25 verse 6, 'Behold the bridegroom cometh!' The words that follow are not for the bride but the friends of the bridegroom, 'go . . . out to meet him'. The friends of the bridegroom, Israel, will be encouraged to go out to meet Him when He comes back to the Mount of Olives, but our meeting with Him is all arranged; it is all of His doing – 'the Lord himself shall descend from heaven', v. 16 – He is coming for us Himself! He is not sending His angels to gather us, as He is going to do when He gathers His chosen ones from all the nations at His coming to earth, Matt. 24. 31. He is coming for us, His bride, Himself. How, then, will it happen?

The commands, v. 16

There is going to be the **shout**, the **voice of the archangel**, and the **sounding of the trumpet of God**. Our blessed Lord is going to give a shout. This is the only time this word for shout is used in our New Testament and it signifies a shout of encouragement. After all the discouragements and disappointments of earth, that will be an encouraging shout. But it is the shout of the victor too, for He is coming into the very sphere that has been dominated by the Devil, who is described as the prince of the power of the air, Eph. 2. 2. But it is

surely a shout of gladness, for He is receiving us, His own blood-bought people, to Himself. Remember the last time He shouted? 'It is finished', John 19. 30. It is on the basis of that finished work that He is able to come for us. His shout on this occasion will be to His people. But the archangel is stirred to speak, 'with the voice of the archangel'. Who is he? Jude tells us, in verse 9, that Michael is the archangel, and it was revealed to Daniel that Michael has special responsibility for His people Israel, Dan. 12. 1. This surely is Michael's call to the nation of Israel to rise up and prepare for their King. Finally, there is the sounding of the trumpet of God. Is this not then God's final alarm and warning to the nations that He demands their worship, or else they will perish in His wrath, Ps. 2. 12. This is no secret rapture, beloved, for surely the trumpet of God will be heard, and the departure of millions from the earth cannot pass unnoticed.

The consequences, vv. 16, 17

What will happen when He comes? Four things are mentioned in these verses:

- Loved ones who have died will be raised first; we who are alive and remain will not go before those who have died. We will have no advantage over them. In fact, they will be prepared first. Those bodies sown in dishonour will be raised in glory; sown in weakness, raised in power; sown a natural body, raised a spiritual body! This is not a general resurrection,

neither is it the first resurrection spoken of in Revelation chapter 20 verses 4 to 6, which refers to the faithful and martyrs who have died through the tribulation period, who will be raised to enter and share in Christ's millennial kingdom. Those raised at His coming to the air, are all those who have died in Christ, every true, born again believer, all who have placed their faith and trust in Him as their Saviour and Lord.

- Those still alive will be raptured; the living will be snatched away out of the enemy's territory. One moment here in this sick world, the next gone, raptured!
- We will all be reunited. 'Together'. Beautiful, isn't it? The dead raised, the living changed and then caught up **together**. Then we shall fully appreciate the blessedness of being together. It is what the Lord has ever had in mind for us. It was so in days of old, 'Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity', Ps. 133. 1. His word to us today is, 'let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is', Heb. 10. 24, 25.
- Finally, we shall be recompensed, 'meet the Lord in the air'. Is not this the great longing of our hearts: to meet Him; to see Him; to be with Him and like Him? Peter says, 'Whom having not seen, ye love', 1 Pet. 1. 8. It is His

love that won us to Him and has overwhelmed us along life's pilgrim pathway here. How often have we sung, 'Face to face with Christ my Saviour, face to face what will it be, when with rapture I behold Him, Jesus Christ who died for me'?

The conclusion, v. 17

'So shall we ever be with the Lord'. This is not just a casual meeting. It will be an everlasting companionship. Again, the words of the hymn writer come to mind, 'He and I in that bright glory, one deep joy shall share, mine to be for-ever with Him, His, that I am there'. He, the One who has ever been the object of His Father's love and pleasure, the One in whom everything is going to find its fulfilment, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who is going to reign supreme over all creation, is to be our friend and companion for ever. What a promise He has made us, 'where I am, there ye may be also', John 14. 3.

The comfort, v. 18

We are not to keep the blessing of this revelation to ourselves; we are to share it with one another. I believe that when the early believers met, they used to greet one another with '*Maranatha*'; the Lord is coming! This church at Thessalonica lived in anticipation of this wonderful event, and what a power and testimony they were. May our meditation inspire and encourage us to go out and serve Him more faithfully and more devotedly till He comes.



Assembly work in the Northern State of Pará, Brazil

By **SAMUEL DAVIDSON** Brazil

The place

For many years, servants of the Lord in this region of Pará, Brazil, have proved the precious promise of Isaiah chapter 43 verse 2 in a very literal way, as they often have to 'pass through the rivers' to visit the local assemblies and preaching points. The town of Santarém (population 300,000) is situated on the southern bank of the River Tapajós at the point where it joins the River Amazon. There is a large island near Santarém with many villages which have proved to be 'good ground' for the gospel. There are many other towns along the banks of the River Amazon and over the past seventy years the Lord has blessed His word and established assemblies in some of these villages and towns.

The pioneers

The assembly work began in the town of Santarém, Pará in 1947 when a highly-esteemed Brazilian couple, José and Almerinda Penna moved there, travelling 400 kms down the River Amazon from Parantins in a large canoe. Through contacts which José's brother had with an assembly in the USA where he lived for a time, José had come to understand the New Testament assembly pattern and left the denominations. Little is known about those early days, but they faced many difficulties and much opposition. Sometime later John and Louise McClelland, commended from an assembly in Canada, arrived in Santarém and helped José for a time, during which some more were saved and assembly principles taught and the assembly started in 1949. The Lord blessed His word and the work grew and a good-sized Hall was built in 1953, which was later enlarged and the assembly meetings are still held in it.

José felt the need to evangelize the villages on the large Island near

Santarém and in 1960, with the help of assemblies in the USA, he got a motorboat, which he called 'Nissiel' (God is my banner). Work commenced at the village of Costa do Aritapera and the assembly began there in the early 1960s. Shortly afterwards, annual conferences were started at Costa do Aritapera at Christmas time and have continued for over fifty years, usually with speakers coming from other parts of Brazil. Due to the big annual floods, some of these believers moved to the nearby town of Alenquer and meetings commenced in their homes and later the assembly commenced in the late 1960s. Through the tireless efforts of José, and in spite of strong Catholic opposition, the work continued to spread to other villages and, during the 1970s, the Lord blessed in salvation and assemblies were formed at Campos, Surubim-Açu, and Correio and have grown steadily over the years. José, with other faithful Brazilian helpers, continued to visit these assemblies on a regular basis in 'Nissiel' until advanced age, failing eyesight and other health problems made this impossible. He was called home in 1992 at ninety-three years of age. He left an excellent example in his faithful and courageous service for the Lord.

The progress

In 1976 a Brazilian couple, Eurico and Marileia Kohls, moved north to Alenquer to help the young assembly. They presently work at the town of Santana in the neighbouring state of Amapá. In 1979 Harry and Jean Reid from Northern Ireland, moved to Santarém to help José who was then over eighty and widowed. A little later, gospel work started at the village of Igarapé do Costa on the island and Harry, with some others from Santarém, started meetings

in homes there. In spite of strong Catholic opposition, souls were saved and, later, the assembly was established. Due to heavy flooding in the village, some families of believers moved away to higher ground and some settled at the Diamantino district of Santarém. Meetings were held regularly in these homes and, with the Lord's help and blessing, the Diamantino assembly commenced in the early 1980s. Because of Jean's health, the Reids had to return to Northern Ireland, but have visited regularly and helped the assemblies significantly.

In 1983, Ann and I arrived in Santarém to help in the work and soon felt the need for more boat work to other villages on the island. A small motorboat, 'Boas Novas 1' (Good News) was obtained and, helped by brethren from Santarém, visits commenced to other villages. It was a memorable day at Piracãoera village in December 1984 when a family of four was saved and they became the start of the work there. Through time others believed and the assembly was established and, by God's grace, has grown very well.

A highly esteemed Brazilian couple, Adilio and Irene, arrived in Santarém in 1983. Formerly, he was very involved in the Catholic church in Rondônia and had never heard the gospel preached, but, reading the Bible, they discovered God's way of salvation, trusted Christ and later found an assembly. They are excellent personal workers and were very useful in the Santarém assembly, but, after about a year, decided to move out to the Transamazon Highway at Km 85 where they had acquired land and knew some people who also had moved to that area. They soon started meetings in their home and many attended, most hearing the gospel for the first time. Some from the Santarém assembly visited each month to help and the Lord blessed in salvation and in 1985 the assembly at Km 85 was established and has continued very well.

In 1984, a small start was made with literature work in Santarém in the market place, where a brother called Silvério, who had a stall selling

bananas and cheese, helped in the sale of Bibles and books. Later, this developed into a rented bookshop in the town with Brazilian helpers. For many years Ann has taken care of this work, helped by Germano, a faithful brother and my travelling companion for over thirty-five years. By God's provision, this shop continues to meet a real need for Bibles, commentaries, books, hymnbooks, etc. which go out over a wide area.

In 1987, 'Boas Novas 1' was replaced by a bigger boat 'Boas Novas 2' to enable longer trips to the neighbouring town of Óbidos, where some brethren from Piracãoera had family contacts, and meetings started in some homes. Shortly afterwards, Adilio and Irene moved to Óbidos and, helped by a Brazilian worker, Salomão Gabriel, saw the commencement of the assembly there in 1992. Then visits in 'Boas Novas 2' to the town of Monte Alegre started with meetings in some homes. Sometime later, Laurivaldo and Rosilda and Salomão Gabriel moved there to help in the new work and the assembly commenced. Another full-time Brazilian couple, Jacy and Jenilda, came to Santarém in 1992 and were a great help in Diamantino assembly for many years, until, for family reasons, they moved back to their home town.

The gospel has continued to spread out along the rivers and lakes to other villages and towns. Space prohibits more detail of how the Lord has



José Penna

used His word and His servants in the salvation of souls and in the formation of more assemblies at the villages of Boa Vista, Tapará Grande, Belterra, Curicaca, Apolinário and at the towns of Prainha, and Curuá. In 1998, 'Boas Novas 2' was replaced by a small aluminum boat with outboard motor to enable faster transport on the river, permitting more visits to the village assemblies. Another Brazilian couple, Jerson and Valda, were commended to full-time work in 2009 and they have been much used of the Lord in the gospel and in helping the assemblies. They presently live in the town of Curuá.

The present situation

Presently there are nineteen assemblies in happy fellowship in the region, most of which have grown well. The Brazilian full-time workers, Germano and Jerson, are much involved in visitation work to the assemblies. Because of Irene's failing health, Adilio and Irene have moved to Medicilândia on the Transamazon Highway, where their daughter and family live and where they continue to serve the Lord. There are many other faithful Brazilians who are very active in their assemblies and being used of the Lord. Two couples, Zenivaldo and Maisa, and Elielson and Marilene, moved from Santarém to help in small assemblies in other towns. We receive visits regularly from Brazilians from other parts of Brazil and conferences are held throughout the year at various assemblies when around 300-400 gather for the meetings and many unsaved hear the gospel.

Mention must be made of Jenair and Carla, and his parents Jair and Jerônima, who live and work about 800 kms up river at Manaus, the capital city of the neighboring state of Amazonas. They have been working faithfully for many years and have been much used of the Lord in the formation of the growing assembly in Manaus and in a growing gospel work at the interior village of Bom Jesus. Jenair is also heavily involved in visiting a number of schools near Bom Jesus each week and is greatly respected by the authorities there. Recently, another preaching point has started at the town of Castanha, about 100 kms south of Manaus.

The problems

Genuine conversions and the formation of new assemblies have slowed down greatly in recent years. One main reason for this is the 'explosion' of modern Pentecostal denominations, which appear in every corner in the villages and towns, using all types of attractions. It is unbelievable what goes on in the name of the gospel! Also, the former violent opposition which actually helped the growth in early days has been replaced by the ecumenical movement which destroys the gospel by its deadly mixture with the Catholic religion. Another serious problem is that the family situation has rapidly deteriorated to the point that even when some are saved, their complicated family circumstances often make it very difficult to see a new assembly started.

The prayer needs

No doubt the prayers of the Lord's dear people in many places have had a great part in the development of the Lord's work over the past seventy years and we are deeply grateful for those who pray for the work and workers here. Please continue to remember the many Brazilians involved in the Lord's work which was started and has been continued mainly through the faithful labours of these dedicated servants of the Lord. Pray for the preservation of the assemblies, a few of which are still very weak, and especially for the many young believers. Frequently, the young people from the village assemblies have to come to the towns for further study and work and there are many temptations, attractions and 'winds of doctrine'. Old age is creeping up on most of the full-time workers, so there is a great need for younger workers to carry on the visitation and to reach more places still without assembly testimony, such as the big town of Oriximiná where visits are being made for gospel work, Luke 10. 2. Please pray also for the new government and that the sad political and economic situation caused by corruption may improve and that the freedom which the assemblies have enjoyed will be continued for the preaching of the gospel in Brazil.

William Henry Bennet (1843-1920)

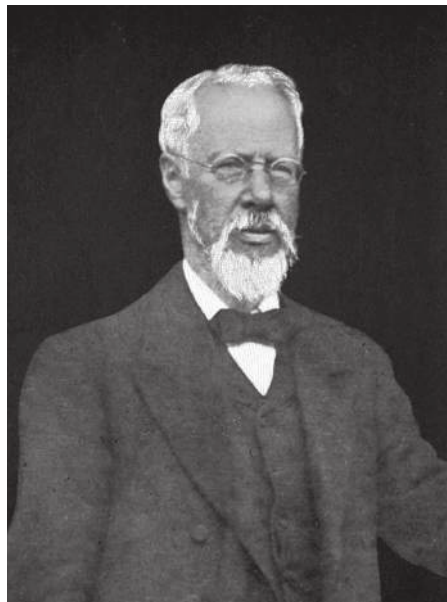
By **HOWARD A. BARNES** Westhoughton, England

The life of William Bennet is a good illustration of how God equips a dedicated soul to serve Him in ways that the individual might originally be unaware of. William Bennet eventually became one of the Men of Bath, the third editor of the *Echoes of Service* missionary magazine, and in doing so became so very helpful to the Lord's servants serving overseas. His own experiences in various aspects of Christian service, even without any of the advantages of a higher education, enabled him to do so from personal knowledge.

Bennet was born in 1843 into an Anglican family in Ashford, Kent. His father was a confectioner, making and marketing cakes and the like. Young Bennet was saved at an early age, and always thereafter had a keen interest in serving the Lord. His first employment was in finance, having passed the examination necessary to work in a Railway Clearing House, where the many railway companies running trains over the same routes worked out what they owed each other. This early involvement in business was to prove useful, initially for the family business to which he eventually returned. Outside his work life, he started distributing gospel tracts and holding gospel meetings in homes, being very concerned about the spiritual state of the town.

Then, in 1862, at the age of nineteen, having become a diligent student of the Bible, he came to realize the errors of 'baptismal regeneration' and other errors connected with the state church. As a result, he was baptized as a believer, severed his connection with the church, and became associated with a local assembly in the town.

At this time, he came into contact with truly spiritual men, and was particularly helped by the ministry of William Soltau (whose lectures on



'The Tabernacle and Priesthood' he attended), and James Harris, author of *Law and Grace, Being Notes of Lectures on the Epistle to the Galatians*.

The next stage in his spiritual development was to spend some time helping an evangelist called Robert Gribble, originally from Barnstaple, and a friend of Robert Chapman, who was working in and around the village of Merriot in Somerset. Mr. Gribble had been preaching in the Barnstable district of North Devon for seven years, and would similarly preach in and around Merriot for eight years.

During a three-month stay in Merriot in 1862, W. H. Bennet looked to the Lord in faith for his material needs. Then, after consulting with Robert Chapman of Barnstable and Henry Soltau, he moved to the village of Bow in Devon, helping in a school there and serving the Lord in the district around. Back in 1839, Robert Gribble had preached for some time in Bow and an assembly had been formed there.

In 1863, Bennet first visited Yeovil in south Somerset, and he finally settled there in 1869. In the spring of 1871,

he married Martha Amelia Softley, who was a true spiritual helpmeet for him until her death in 1919, aged 89. In 1863, the famous Yeovil Conference was commenced, and for forty-nine years Bennet guided these profitable gatherings for ministry and missionary reports.

Bennet became the co-editor of *The Golden Lamp*, which had supplied valuable ministry for twenty-one years. In 1872, Henry Groves and Dr. J. L. Maclean had first published *The Missionary Echo*, which they renamed *Echoes of Service* in 1885. When *The Golden Lamp* ceased publication in 1890, they invited Bennet to join them as their co-editor: Groves died the following year. The purpose of the magazine then (and now) was: to act as a conduit for money from assemblies and individuals at home to missionaries abroad; to publish information about work in the field; and to exercise what was referred to as a caring (not controlling) ministry for those abroad. Then, for thirty years, he took an active part in this ever-growing work, continuing to reside in Yeovil, but spending a part of each week in Bath.

In 1894, R. E. Sparks of Belfast, resigned his position as solicitor to the Ulster Bank to join the editors. Then, W. E. Vine joined them in 1909, and served as an editor for 40 years.

As a 'ministering brother', Bennet was known in most parts of the British Isles and in some parts of the Continent. The leading article in *Echoes of Service* often bore his initials 'W.H.B.', and he contributed many papers to *The Witness*, and the *Believer's Magazine*. In 1902 Pickering and Inglis published his much-appreciated biography of Robert Chapman of Barnstable.

William Bennet, in December 1920, 'after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep', Acts 13. 36.

Further reading:

HENRY PICKERING, *Chief Men among the Brethren*, Pickering and Inglis.
A. PULLENG *et al* (Ed.), *Turning the World Upside Down: A Century of Missionary Endeavour: A Record*, *Echoes of Service*.

OPEN AIR WORK

By **IAN CAMPBELL** South Shields, England

For the purpose of street preaching, I use a magnetic board, very similar in principle to the decorator's pasting table, which is hinged and can be opened out. The upper section is a black magnetic part and the lower half of the board has an attractive display of tracts, and the verse John chapter 3 verse 16 and contact details. Additional reading material is also available for any genuine seeker: John's Gospel as well as a selection of suitable booklets, such as JOHN BLANCHARD'S Ultimate Questions. The board, because of its weight, is wheeled onto site where it is mounted on three metal legs. The top half is then opened out and secured, after which it is ready to take the laminated text and graphics that make up the sermon.

A sermon example: **The Seven**

Wonders of the Cross: 1. It was the Creator of all things hanging there; 2. The fullness of God's love was seen there; 3. God's amazing grace was there; 4. Many Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled at the cross; 5. Three great physical events occurred at the cross (earthquake, the darkness lifts and the temple veil is torn); 6. Sin was dealt with once and for all; 7. Eternal destinies are decided by one's attitude to the cross.

The pieces, which are backed with strips of magnetic tape, are stuck on to the board as the address is developed, and by the end of the preaching the board is covered with all seven points. This method of presenting the gospel has two benefits: it allows someone who comes midway through the preaching to follow the preacher's reasoning; and,



it can be left up on the board even when the preacher has finished. The message is still doing its work!

Many of the UK city centres are now pedestrianized and usually offer a good number of places where the board can be set up. Care is taken not to obstruct any right of way and one needs to be sensitive to the feelings of nearby shop owners. As the board can be a hazard in strong winds, it is wise to secure it with appropriate weights or have one of the workers hold it. Public liability insurance is also strongly recommended. Generally speaking, permission to preach is not required. The use of an electrical amplification system, in my opinion, is not needed. The volume could give any would-be complainant a reason for objecting. But remember, 'How shall they **hear** without a preacher', and how shall they hear unless the preacher speaks **loudly?** – 'ye shall speak into the air', 1 Cor. 14. 9! The Open Air Mission advises their workers to use a voice recorder just in case a false accusation is made against the preacher.

For obvious reasons, it is best to work in a group. Not everyone in the group may feel gifted to preach, but they can still do a tracting work, and their presence and willingness to assist brings much encouragement. If someone stops to listen, the co-worker should not approach to offer them a tract; just let them listen. Once they turn to go, that's the time to ask their opinion about the message. There's nothing more discouraging for the preacher

than when, having got the attention of the passer-by, one of his own fellow-workers breaks the listener's attention by speaking with them.

The advantages of doing a weekly work on the same day are clear. The preaching group becomes known in the town and friendships can be formed and bridges built. Sometimes a weekly work is not possible, but a monthly or bimonthly effort could be undertaken; 'your labour is not in vain in the Lord', 1 Cor. 15. 58.¹

Those who oppose the gospel usually bring up one of two arguments: 'evolution' and 'suffering'. Sadly, the theory of evolution currently dominates the thinking of the youth. Once, when preaching in Durham, a student passer-by shouted out repeatedly, 'Science, science, science!' According to his thinking, evolution had destroyed the notion of a Creator God and the gospel was, therefore, mere fiction! There are several Creation websites that provide helpful material.²

Those venturing on to the streets with the gospel can be guaranteed opposition at some time. I would suggest three ways of dealing with a heckler: 1. Answer the issue he raises, publicly, by addressing the crowd; 2. Stop preaching and speak privately with him; or 3. Have a member of your group take him to one side to answer his objections.³

Leaving our comfort zone can be a hard thing to do, but the words of JOHN WESLEY should inspire us, 'It is no marvel that the devil does not love field preaching! Neither do I; I love a commodious room, a soft cushion, a handsome pulpit. But where is my zeal if I do not trample all these underfoot in order to save one more soul?'

Endnotes

- 1 For those who feel they lack the ability or the time to create their own material, *The Open Air Mission* offers free downloads of over fifty sermon ideas - <https://www.oamission.com/resources>.
- 2 See www.creation.com and www.answersingenesis.org.
- 3 The Evangelical Alliance has produced a helpful publication, *Speak Up: The Law and Your Gospel Freedoms*. <https://www.eauk.org/assets/files/downloads/Speak-Up-FULL.pdf>.

WORD FOR TODAY

By **BRIAN CLATWORTHY** Newbury, England

anaspao (to draw up)

anastasis (resurrection)

anastatoo (to stir up, excite, unsettle)

Who would have thought that in a very short space of time, practically the entire world would be in a state of lock-down, simply because of a small, but deadly virus? Life, for most people, has now changed dramatically, and will probably never be the same again. Even for believers, corporate gatherings are no longer possible, and social distancing has become a way of life. Man's seeming invincibility has suddenly been replaced by abject fear as he views this pandemic posing an existential threat to the whole of humanity. The harbingers of doom are all around us, and even the so-called religious leaders of our day seem incapable of providing any spiritual guidance in this crisis. Yet the very silence of men reveals their almost complete ignorance of the fact that God has spoken and provided a remedy over death through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This doctrine of resurrection underpins every other Christian doctrine, and without it Christianity would be meaningless. In Paul's words, 'And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins', 1 Cor. 15. 17 ESV.¹

The Old Testament records individuals who die and are then subsequently restored to life again as, for example, the son of the widow of Zarephath, 1 Kgs. 17. 17-23. Similarly, in 2 Kings chapter 8 verse 1, reference is made to the woman whose son Elisha had revived. In both these instances, the Hebrew word *hayah* is used, and later in 2 Kings chapter 13 verse 21, the same Hebrew word is used to describe the man who came alive again after being in contact with the bones of Elisha. This idea of coming alive again, or of resurrection, is highlighted elsewhere in the Old Testament, especially where the Septuagint (LXX) directly uses the Greek noun *anastasis* as

in the extended superscription of Psalm 65(66), 'For the end, a Song of a Psalm of resurrection'. The word can also be translated as 'rising up', or 'standing up'.²

Perhaps the one picture in the Old Testament that captures the essence of a general resurrection is Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones, and the revival of Israel in a future day.³ This is further developed with the idea of a specific resurrection, as in Isaiah chapter 26 verse 19 and Daniel chapter 12 verse 2. Interestingly, this hope of resurrection was maintained in Judaism, as the Inter-testament book 2 Maccabees records the story of the martyrdom of seven brothers and their mother at the hands of the Syrian King Antiochus Epiphanes IV. As each son is brutally murdered by Antiochus, they express their trust in God, and the fourth son, as he is near to death, says to the king, 'One cannot but choose to die at the hands of mortals and to cherish the hope God gives of being raised again by him. But

for you there will be no resurrection to life!' 2 Macc. 7. 14.

In the Greco-Roman world, which was highly influenced by Greek philosophy, resurrection of the body was considered impossible, apart from the transmigration of souls. The Greeks were dualists, believing that the spirit was everything and the body was essentially evil. They rejected the biblical idea of resurrection, and held the Platonic doctrine of the immortality of the soul.⁴ Their hope was that at death, the soul would be released from the bondage of the body to soar above and become part of the divine being.⁵ The idea, then, of bodily resurrection was anathema to them because it would simply mean the continued incarceration of the soul. How could decomposed matter be brought together again?⁶ These Greek notions later became subsumed together with Judaism into a heresy known as Gnosticism that soon threatened the life of the early church. Although Gnosticism did not come to full fruition until the second century AD, an incipient form of it was already surfacing in a number of New Testament churches, including Colossae. Paul's letter to that church



is essentially a refutation of this insidious and syncretistic error. His letter not only affirms the doctrine of bodily resurrection, Col. 2. 12, but also emphasizes the spiritual resurrection that believers enjoy through faith union with Christ, Col. 3. 1. As EADIE writes, ‘The nature and results of this spiritual resurrection are detailed under Eph. 2. 6’.⁷

The single noun *anastasis* occurs over forty times in the Greek New Testament, and, apart from Luke chapter 2 verse 34, where the word is simply translated ‘rising’ as an antonym to the word ‘fall’, it usually refers to either the resurrection of Christ or to bodily resurrection in general.

Throughout the New Testament, there is a widespread distribution of the word *anastasis*, reflecting the importance that the doctrine holds within the Christian faith. The subject of the resurrection is rooted in the Gospel narratives, and provide powerful evidence of the historicity of our Lord’s resurrection from the dead.⁸ The Book of Acts and the New Testament letters develop the doctrine further, and



show the transformational effect it has on the lives of those who exercise faith in Christ.⁹ Notice how the knowledge of the risen Christ changed the apostles into a powerful and courageous group of witnesses, Acts 2. 14-36; 4. 1-12, and later the change in Paul’s life as he encountered the risen Christ, Acts 9.

In our Lord’s day, there was an ongoing controversy between the Pharisees and the Sadducees regarding the question of resurrection. The Sadducees took the view that there was no resurrection, because it was not supported by the written Law of Moses, and, therefore, that the soul was not immortal with no afterlife. When they confronted the Lord with a specious question regarding resurrection, He soon exposed the weakness in their argument, and silenced them. They were ultimately ignorant of the scriptures and the power of God, Matt. 22. 23-33. Even after losing this exchange, the Sadducees continued to maintain the same view regarding resurrection, Acts 4. 1-3.

When our Lord came to the grave of Lazarus and raised him from the dead, He referred to Himself as ‘the resurrection and the life’, John 11. 25. During His ministry, He often referred to a resurrection on the last day, John 5. 21; 6. 39, 40, but now He confirms that ‘he not only raises the dead on the last day (5. 21, 25ff.) but is himself the resurrection and the life. There is neither resurrection nor eternal life outside of him’.¹⁰ It also means certain judgement for the world in righteousness, Acts 17. 31.

There are many other instances relating to resurrection in the New Testament, but as we reflect again on the current world situation let us rejoice in the fact that death has been defeated by Christ at Calvary, and the vindication of this act is seen in His resurrection from the dead, Rom. 1. 4; 4. 24, 25. Christianity is not just about future hope, it is about present experience in the knowledge of that hope. Hope, therefore, shapes our experience as believers, so that

our lives should be different from those around us. It is that difference today, because Christ has defeated death and been raised from the dead, that enables us to face this pandemic with certain hope of eternal life. Surely this confidence ought to attract others to Christ?

FURTHER READING/STUDY

INTRODUCTORY

‘The Resurrection’, H. K. MOULTON *The Challenge of the Concordance*, Attic Press, 1977, pp. 87-90.

ADVANCED

‘*anastasis*’, W. BAUER, W. F. ARNDT and F. W. GINGRICH, *A Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, University of Chicago Press, pp. 59, 60.

Endnotes

- 1 Paul’s use of the Greek perfect tense throughout 1 Corinthians chapter 15 means, for Paul, that not only did Christ rise historically from the dead some two thousand years ago, but He remains the risen Christ.
- 2 Lam. 3. 63 (LXX); Zeph. 3. 8 (LXX); Dan. 11. 20 (LXX).
- 3 Ezek. 37, cp. Job 19. 25; Isa. 53. 10.
- 4 This is why there was such a hostile reaction from the Epicureans and Stoics in Athens when they heard Paul preach ‘Jesus and the resurrection’, Acts 17. 18.
- 5 This is clearly part of the error that Peter addresses in his second letter, 2 Pet. 1. 4. Peter uses a very loaded vocabulary in this context, and emphasizes that we are made partakers of the divine nature after escaping the world that is in rebellion against God. We do not, as Christians, take on God’s essence but His holiness and, ultimately, the likeness of Christ, cp. Heb. 3. 14; 1 John 3. 2.
- 6 The question is further subdivided by Paul in his response to the Corinthians, ‘How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?’, 1 Cor. 15. 35. As FEE Observes about the Corinthians, ‘the real concern behind their denial of the resurrection of the dead was an implicit understanding that that meant the reanimation of dead bodies the resuscitation of corpses’, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pg. 776. There were others who also misunderstood this doctrine, as, for example, Hymenaeus and Philetus, who argued that the resurrection was already past, 2 Tim. 2. 17-19. Paul regarded their teaching as not only erroneous, but damaging to the faith of others.
- 7 J. EADIE, *Colossians*, Greek Text Commentaries, Baker Books, pg. 208.
- 8 Matt. 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20.
- 9 Rom. 6. 5; 1 Cor. 15. 4; 2 Cor. 5. 15; Eph. 1. 20; Col. 2. 12.
- 10 D. A. CARSON, *The Gospel According to John*, IVP, pg. 412.

Book Reviews



Traditions to Treasure – Continuing Steadfastly

Bert Cargill and James Brown

242 pages, Paperback. Published by John Ritchie, 40 Beansburn, Kilmarnock, Scotland.

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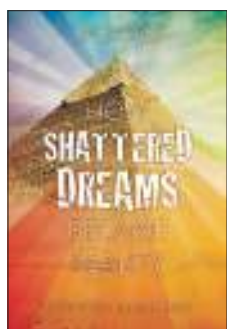
I recall as a young boy, that my father had a book called *Chief Men among the Brethren*. My memory is of grainy photographs of be-whiskered, gloomy faces, without a ghost of a smile; I did not feel encouraged to read any further in this austere looking tome. However, over the years I have learnt to understand and appreciate the debt owed to these men who were raised up by God to light a torch and raise a standard against the largely sterile state religion of their day. One unfortunate legacy of this revival is the appellation 'Brethren', which, with the arrogant definite article, has defined in the opinion of many those who have sought to benefit from the godly lives and teaching of these men and others of like mind.

This book is the third and final volume of the '*Christian Heritage Series*' tracing the history of gospel witness from the 14th century. The present volume brings into focus the work from the late 18th century and on through Victorian days. I discovered from reading this book that behind the gallery of sombre faces of childhood memory, lie the histories of men of God, who sacrificed much, travelled the world at great personal and family cost and, from backgrounds of privilege and academia, reached out to the poor and the lost both materially and spiritually.

The greater part of this book recalls the legacy of hymns left on record during this period, many of which form the backbone of our 21st century hymnbooks, and are

unrivalled by more modern writers in their appreciation of the Lord Jesus. They remain an essential aid to worship, full of doctrinal truth, memorable and uplifting.

There are also chapters given to the origin of books and printed matter to assist study of the scriptures, and a brief history of some great Christian philanthropists whose life-work lives on. In undertaking this series of books CARGILL and BROWN have provided a work of real benefit for the people of God.



How shattered dreams became reality (Lessons from the life of Joseph)

Jack Hay

139 pages, Paperback. Published by John Ritchie Ltd, 40 Beansburn, Kilmarnock, Scotland.

ISBN-13: 978-1-912522-74-3.

The life and character of Joseph has attracted the attention of many writers over the years. No doubt it is because in this narrative Genesis record the sovereign and overruling hand of God is seen; practical lessons can be drawn, and pictures of the life and pathway of the Saviour shine through. Some expositors would have us believe, because it is not specifically stated in the New Testament, that Joseph does not qualify as a type of Christ. In my opinion, one would need to take a very myopic view of the details of Joseph's life to draw that conclusion!

The content of this new publication first appeared in the *Present Truth* magazine, but has now been

made available to a wider readership in book form. The author is well known and appreciated by many for his oral and written ministry over a good number of years and in many parts of the world. This book will therefore be a welcome addition to any believer's library as the experiences of Joseph are traced in HAY's clear and concise style.

The well-loved story is told in eighteen chapters, each divided by sub-headings and developed in a similar pattern. First, the narrative is explained, then comparisons, and, on occasion, contrasts, are made with the Lord Jesus. As each chapter is opened up, the many practical lessons relevant to all believers

are made clear. A feature that marks the ministry of this author is his capacity to draw on both Old and New Testament writings to support, explain and clarify the various points made, whether doctrinal, devotional or practical; an ability which demonstrates a lifelong devotion to the scriptures. Scripture references are unobtrusive throughout, enabling the narrative to flow, and the pages are not littered with footnotes and endnotes which are often left unread!

Question Time

Conducted by
Frank A. Proudlock

QUESTION

Is it right for Christians to gamble?

ANSWER

Since there are no specific verses in the Bible that either sanction or prohibit gambling, we need to use spiritual common sense and apply fundamental principles laid out in the word of God to answer this question. Before we do, perhaps we should explore first of all what we mean by gambling.

John, in the Bible, describes a scene to us in which gambling took place. At the cross the soldiers cast lots for the coat without seam belonging to the Lord Jesus, John 19. 23, 24. More than likely, the soldiers used this activity to entertain themselves as a distraction from the horrific events of that day. Unwittingly, the four soldiers attending the cross directly fulfilled scripture, as they all received an item of the Lord's clothing, parting His garments among them, but also gambled over the costlier woven item of clothing belonging to the Lord by casting lots, Ps. 22. 18. There would be one winner and three losers in their little game that day. In this scene, we have illustrated some of the key features of gambling: risking a loss in the hope of gain; and using this as a basis for entertainment. Usually, the chance of gain is against the odds compared to losing. Gambling may also involve a skill, such as playing cards, or at least give the appearance that the player has some control over the situation.

A simple guiding principle that will settle most questions relating to gambling is that of stewardship. All that we have, materially and spiritually, is given to us by God. Paul reminds us, 'And what hast thou that thou didst not receive?' 1 Cor. 4. 7. That means that the money we earn and the things we possess all really belong to God. We are entrusted with them by God to use wisely and for His honour. Imagine you were given the responsibility to manage a budget in your employment. How do you think your boss would react if he discovered you had gambled away money that had been entrusted to your care?

Perhaps a deeper question relates to the reasons behind why many people gamble and what happens when a habit gets out of control and becomes an addiction. There are, perhaps, two main reasons behind gambling. One is the desire for money or material gain, and the other is for the thrill-seeking and escapism that arising from risk-taking.

With respect to the first reason, Paul is

very clear in his instructions to Timothy in warning us of the dangers of the love of money with respect to our spiritual well-being, 'But they that will [or desire to] be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows', 1 Tim. 6. 9, 10. Please bear in mind that, apart from gambling, there are other 'legitimate' activities that could be motivated by the same desires. These might include taking undue risks in business or overcommitting financially by taking on loans that we might struggle to pay off because we want more.

The second reason of thrill-seeking is, perhaps, even more dangerous, as it can lead to someone getting hooked on gambling. Gambling addiction is a recognized form of compulsive behaviour that has risen significantly in recent years, especially among young men. The Gambling Commission, for example, has estimated that at least 2% of young men¹ in the UK have a gambling problem.² Such an addiction can lead to debt, loss of employment, deterioration in mental wellbeing, and even family breakdown.

How do we know if we really have a problem with gambling? Paul offers some guidance concerning what we allow in our lives as Christians, 'All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient [or helpful]: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any', 1 Cor. 6. 12. Ask yourself the question: does gambling have a power over you or is it causing harm to your life? As believers, the good news is that God, through the Holy Spirit, has provided us with power and inner motivation to overcome addictive sinful habits. The Lord Jesus said, 'If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed', John 8. 36.

Is gambling a problem in your life? Here are some places where you may be able to get further help: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/gambling-addiction/> or <http://ccfwebsite.com/>.

Endnotes

1 Aged 25 to 34 years.

2 See: www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk.

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'Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men', Mark 1.17 NKJV

At the time of the creation we read that God gave man the authority to rule over the fish of the sea, Gen. 1. 26. Since then, man has exercised this prerogative by catching fish in various waters throughout the world, and generally exploiting fish stocks for food and profit. The Bible includes references to both fish, Ps. 105. 29; Matt. 7. 10; John 21. 6, and fishermen, Isa. 19. 8; Jer. 16. 16; Luke 5. 2, and the Mediterranean world was richly blessed with abundance of fish stocks, Num. 11. 5; Neh. 13. 16; John 21. 11. The worship of any graven image made in the form of a fish was prohibited under the law, Deut. 4. 18, but Israel could eat any water-creatures provided they had 'fins' and 'scales', but not other aquatic animals, Lev. 11. 9-12. Some scholars believe that this prohibition was on the basis of health, and that ordinary fish are normally free swimming whereas others tend to be mud-burrowers and so the carriers of possibly lethal parasites. There were fish markets in Jerusalem supplied with fish caught in the Mediterranean by the Phoenicians, 2 Chr. 33. 14, and when Israel became lax in its observance of the Sabbath in the days of Nehemiah, Tyrian fishermen took the opportunity to sell their catches of fish and other wares in Jerusalem, Neh. 13. 16. The fishing of the Lake of Galilee was extensive in the time of our Lord, and fish became part of the staple diet in Galilee, especially for the poorer in that society, Matt. 14. 1. The name of the town Bethsaida, which was located on the west shore of the Lake, literally means 'Fishtown'. Fishing was mainly done from a boat using a drag-net or seine, Matt. 13. 47-50, but on some occasions by casting nets, John 21. 6-8. It is unsurprising, therefore, that a number of individuals who were involved in these activities were called by our Lord to be part of His band of disciples, Mark 1. 16-20. Although the invitation and promise in Mark chapter 1 verse 17 was originally only made to Simon and Andrew, the mandate is of wider application to all those who become disciples of Christ. It has textual echoes of Jeremiah chapter 16 verses 14 to 16. Instead, however, of God now raising up fishermen who would 'fish out' His people Israel from wherever they had been driven, and restore them to their land again, we see Christ calling individuals to fish for men for the Kingdom of God's sake. Through Christ's support, disciples become or begin to develop those characteristics that so epitomize fishermen. These may well include courage, endurance, patience and flexibility as they often strove against the elements to harvest their catch. Eventually, they are rewarded through their dedication and perseverance. May we exhibit these traits as we fish in the oceans of men to win souls for Christ, 2 Tim. 4. 5, bearing in mind the promise that we shall reap if we faint not, Gal. 6. 9.

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