



PreciousSeed

May 2021 Vol. 76 | No. 2



'The same is Hebron in the land of Canaan', Gen. 23. 19

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Magazine

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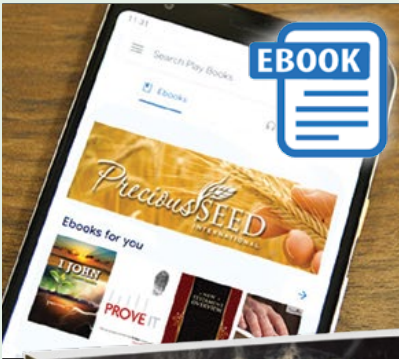
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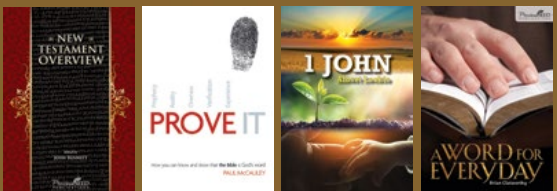
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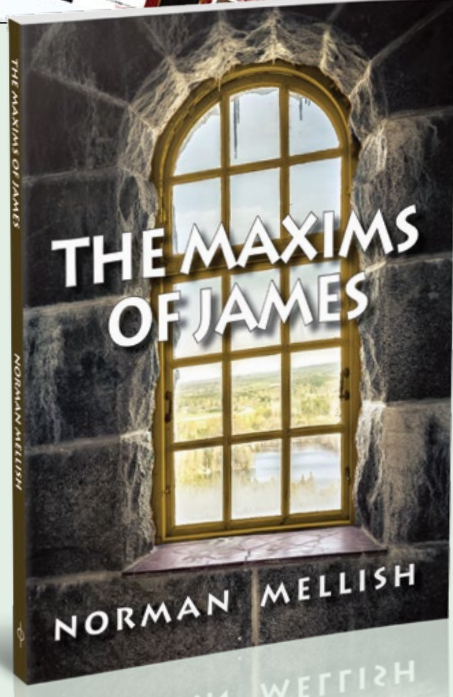
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This letter has a very definite bearing upon the Christian life, although particularly written to those people of the Jewish nation. That James has these believers primarily in mind is clear from the opening verse.

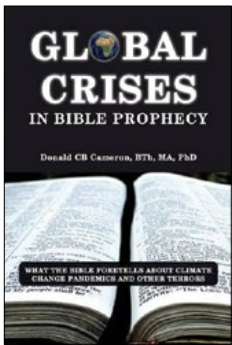
It is also apparent that the various writers of the New Testament laid emphasis upon different aspects of Christian living in their writings. James was the man of faith and works, Paul was the man of faith and love, Peter was the man of faith and hope, and John was the man of faith and truth, but all insisted upon personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

This volume opens up this often neglected book and is a helpful addition to its understanding.

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Book Reviews



Global Crises in Bible Prophecy Donald Cameron

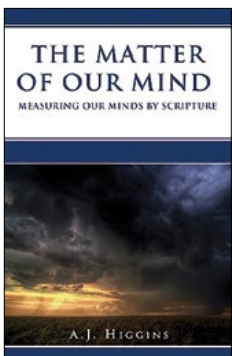
Paperback, 75 pages. Published by Crimond House Publications, 48 Francis Street, Newtownards, Co. Down, BT23 7DN. ISBN 978-1-908618-25-2.

The author notes that this book was intended to be available by mid-2020, but publication was delayed in view of the uncertainties generated by the Coronavirus pandemic. It was maybe thought that as the year progressed the havoc wreaked by the virus would be receding. However, at the time of writing this review (December), the infection and, indeed, the death rates are still stubbornly high, thus the book retains its relevance to the present situation and to global crises in a more general sense.

Donald Cameron has written quite extensively on subjects relating to biblical

prophecy, and I was a little unsure at first of the target readership for this present publication. The subject matter, linked consistently to scriptural teaching and prophetic truth, makes it eminently suited to younger believers, untaught in the detail of scripture regarding the future. Alternatively, it could well be passed on to one, maybe not yet saved, but having an interest in and an intelligent desire to know the truth. This is not to say that more mature and well-taught believers would not find help and encouragement in this book, but for them it would be more as a primer on prophecy than as a comprehensive explanation.

Apart from the Coronavirus problem, the writer considers subjects such as the present environmental debate and the global warming issue, which has reached panic proportions in some minds. He also highlights the political and economic instability, which is increasingly being seen on a global scale. Above all, the message of the book is, 'There is a God in heaven' who is overseeing and controlling the events on earth, working 'all things according to the counsel of His own will'. In His own good time and in His own way He will bring all things to a conclusion. A thought-provoking book for anyone looking for answers to troubling questions.



The Matter of our Mind A. J. Higgins

Paperback, 115 pages. Published by Scripture Teaching Library, Northern Ireland. ISBN 978-1-909789-52-4.

The sub-title of the book is 'Measuring our minds by scripture', and that very adequately sums up the contents of this latest work by Sandy Higgins. It is not an academic treatise on psychology, though the author is well qualified to undertake such a task, but rather an examination of the way in which scripture can, and does, provide the answers to many of the problems which challenge the believer's mind in our twenty-first century society.

Taking the reader back to the purposes of God in creation, we learn that the complex mind given to man sets him apart from the animal creation as being rational, reflective, relational and

responsible. A mind which operates within the sphere of intelligence, emotion and will. Having established that the mind is the dynamic which determines our behaviour, our manner of life and our interaction with others, the author outlines the factors which influence our minds. He shows the pernicious impact that certain forces have – the media, music, and peer pressure, among others. It is clearly seen that, within a generation, matters once considered sinful have now been normalized in the secular world and are not just tolerated but accepted and expected. Truth has become a subjective matter, with mankind accepting the devil's word that 'you will be as gods', determining their own

standards of 'good and evil'. The author also suggests, and verifies, that the descent of morality within society has not been a steady drift, but rather a determined torrent, all of which impacts upon the mind of the believer when actions and decisions must be taken. He points out that whereas we cannot necessarily control the thoughts which challenge our minds, we can, however, determine how we deal with them.

Scripture references abound throughout the book, dealing with marriage and family life, financial pressures, and depression and stress in our modern world. I recommend this book to everyone as it is concise, challenging and contemporary.

‘My brethren, these things ought not so to be’, Jas. 3. 10.

There is a famous children’s rhyme which suggests that ‘Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words shall never hurt me’. The rhyme was intended to be used as a defence mechanism against name-calling and verbal abuse, and specifically to encourage non-retaliation on the part of the victim. However, as we all know, perhaps from bitter experience, words can have a devastating effect upon individuals. The general letter of James lists a number of sins that are still widespread in society, including sins of the tongue, which he deals with in chapter 3. Sins of the tongue are particularly apparent today in the realm of social media, which is often used by many people to gain a reputation, either by internet trolling or ingratiating themselves with others. Believers should therefore be circumspect in the use of these forms of communication and avoid being drawn into such exchanges. James highlights this danger by reminding us that, although faith without deeds is totally useless, deeds cannot simply be restricted to actions, as words

provide the means whereby things are achieved in life. Words leave an indelible impression upon people for good or evil, and control of the tongue is an indicator of the way in which our hearts have been transformed through and by Christ. It is not good enough for us as believers to say that we can’t help ourselves or to excuse ourselves by saying that that’s how we are. In Christ, everything has changed, 2 Cor. 5. 17, and the control of our tongue, i.e., the words that we say and communicate to others, must reflect our changed lives. Our Lord reminds us that it is ‘out of the abundance of (that which fills) the heart the mouth speaketh’, Matt. 12. 34. If I have a censorious and carping spirit, then that will be reflected in my words and actions towards other believers. Paul writes that we should concentrate our minds upon things that are honest, just, lovely and of good report, Phil. 4. 8. Therefore, we should always look to find the very best in our fellow believers. These are individuals for whom Christ died, 1 Cor. 8. 11.

When the tongue is not restrained, the rest of the body is likely to be uncontrolled and undisciplined as well. Our hearts will be filled with bitter jealousy and rivalry exhibiting a sensual wisdom characterized by continuous conflict, disharmony, and all other kinds of evil. No other member of the body can wreak so much havoc on a godly life. Human beings can tame an entire menagerie of animals yet fail to tame the tongue, which is always restless and toxic. It is totally inconsistent in that it can both bless and curse and can often act contrary to the laws of nature. Hence James’ command that our lives should be different.

Those who control their tongues, however, show that they have embraced a wisdom that comes from above – evident by their purity of thought, gentleness, approachability, and sincerity. What sort of wisdom have we embraced?

BRIAN CLATWORTHY

Ministry Articles Editor

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STREET PREACHING

By **STUART SCAMMELL** Cardiff, Wales

Street preaching is not an easy task, but it is one that can be clearly seen in the New Testament. No doubt when Paul met people in the 'market daily', in Acts chapter 17, he would have preached and certainly, in Acts chapter 8 verse 40, 'Philip . . . preached in all the cities'. Quite how they did this we are not told but I know that neither of these men, who were greatly used for God's glory, would have been shy about telling out the gospel. In fact, Paul describes it as, 'the power of God unto salvation'. With something so precious that is designed to save the 'whosoever', we must be careful how we handle it and be zealous to share it.

I have been blessed with a loud voice, but I must be careful how I use it. A message of love shouted at people gives a mixed message. We need to be winsome, yet heard!

There is no set way to go about street preaching. Some preachers are happy to go alone into the town centre but, while I admire their courage, I would always prefer to go in a group. A group shows that there are a number of people who are likeminded. It allows some to distribute tracts to the passers-by, while another preaches.

People make choices about whom they will approach. They may base these choices on age, gender and so on. When I go preaching, there is a lady present who is in her eighties and she is excellent at engaging people in initial conversations, far better than I could ever be. If the conversation has an in-depth question, she will often ask me to field the question and then go back to what God has made her very good at, namely, giving out literature and engaging others in conversation.

Street preachers have different styles. No one style is right or superior to another. The vast majority of people don't have half-an-hour to stop and listen. Most may stop for a minute or two, some for five as they eat a sandwich in a rushed lunch hour;

some may stop longer on a bench as they wait for a fellow shopper. My advice is to be short and use an obvious gospel verse, such as Ephesians chapter 2 verse 8, where we can focus on the words grace, saved and faith. This should mean that we quote the verse repeatedly, that some may remember it (at least in part), that we don't complicate the gospel, and we get to the point.

The first time I went to preach on the main street in Cardiff, I went early and walked up and down the crowded pedestrianized street in trepidation, praying. I didn't feel that I was equipped to preach on the street, although I had felt called to do so. I stood there feeling totally inadequate. Some of the older ladies that regularly support the work appeared. They greeted me warmly and there was a real sense of togetherness, and this made me feel that I was part of a group that loved the gospel. I felt ready to preach.

Using a board is good as it is a focal point for the preaching; a magnetic board allows a verse of scripture to be displayed that is appropriate to the simple message being preached. This is useful, as some people can't stop to listen but do read the verse as they walk past. Some people, out of curiosity, will come over, photograph the verse using their

smartphones, and walk on. This is great because on their phone they now have a verse from the 'holy scriptures', which 2 Timothy chapter 3 states are able to make them 'wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus', v. 15. It is worth ensuring that contact details are on the board, as they may wish to enquire further at a later date.

We need to be flexible, and carefully consider how we are going to answer any questions. Some people are excellent at dealing with heckling. We must remember that God has enabled people in different ways. Some listeners will raise questions designed to disrupt the preaching, while others will be genuinely seeking answers. Discernment is needed; getting into an argument is not always the best way, as we could win the debate and lose the person. Often, genuine questions or statements link back to something that someone has been taught in the past.

I remember one day waiting to preach. The preacher didn't have a verse to display, so someone put John chapter 3 verse 16 on the board. The word 'begotten' was omitted. As the man was speaking, a lady came striding towards the board. At first glance it was obvious that she had a life full of difficulty. She paused for a moment and declared that this was 'wrong!' The preacher told her that it was true, as it was the word of God. The preacher tried to continue. The lady insisted that it was wrong and that there was a word missing. She quoted the verse loudly and inserted the word 'begotten'. She explained that it meant that Jesus and God were exactly the same in character, and this was so important, otherwise He could not go to the cross for us. By this time, she had attracted a crowd, and many were listening. The preacher agreed and talked with her for a few minutes before she hurried on her way. I felt very encouraged, not just that many had heard something of the gospel, but that the lady had recalled the verse that someone, maybe many years ago, had explained to her, and she had recalled it perfectly. The Spirit could use that for the salvation of the crowd who had listened.

It is important that we have literature to give out. It needs to be chosen carefully. It needs to be simple, as more complicated issues may well be for a later date. A tract that some accept may be the only Christian literature that they will ever read. We must assume nothing, and the word of God must be quoted in it. The Spirit will use the 'sharp sword' to cut where He will.

It is important that we understand our target audience, as we live in a multicultural society. Literature in different languages is very often useful. This is readily available through various sources. We live in a country where people are searching for something, although they don't know what, and the 'world' has rejected God. When we stand in the city centre supporting the preaching and handing out literature, we can expect many rejections. Some people find this hard. It is important to remember that we are experiencing what the Lord experienced in a far more extreme way. The very people who witnessed His miracles and had benefitted from them stood in a crowd and bayed for His blood. He taught in Luke chapter 10 verse 16 that when people listen to us explain the scriptures, they listen to Him, and so, when they despise the word of

God, they despise or reject Him, and through doing that reject the Father also. Yet He was willing to go to the cross, so I should, at least, be willing to go to the street and suffer some ridicule for Him.

Once, while preaching in Cardiff, I had just opened with the words, 'I'd like to tell you something from the Bible, which are words from God!', when a man in his sixties, very middle-class, started shouting at me using foul language. He persisted so much that I thought it not honouring to the Lord to shout over him. When I spoke to the man, I pointed out that I had said very little, and that it was just the mention of the Bible that seemingly had provoked this alarming reaction from him. I also pointed out that however loud my voice was, it would not be heard ten or so shops away. I asked why he got so angry and had not just walked on. Once he had calmed down, he was embarrassed about his reaction. It turned out that he had been brought up in a Christian family and actually knew the truth but had walked away from it all his life. He was, as the man described in Romans chapter 1, one who did not want to 'retain God in his knowledge'. A good conversation ensued. I have often found that those that want to talk don't know how

to and start with an aggressive line. There will be thousands that walk by! There will be those that seem totally indifferent! It is generally the ones that must comment and make a derogatory remark, that are closer to the Kingdom as something has touched their conscience.

I would like to encourage you to consider this work. If you don't feel equipped for preaching or speaking to others, you can give out tracts or stand facing the preacher helping to form a crowd. This makes it acceptable for others to stop. Just being there is a great encouragement. We don't think of the Apostle Paul as someone who needed people standing at his side to achieve what he did for the Lord, yet he could talk with great affection in Philippians chapter 4 of 'yokefellow' and 'fellow labourers', especially the women. These are a great example that we can all follow and be part of truly 'going . . . to preach the gospel'.

Thumbnail

Stuart Scammel is in fellowship in Bethesda, Rhiwbina, Cardiff. After a career in education, he was commended to serve the Lord full-time in gospel preaching, children's work and a regular prison Bible class.



Old Testament women who appear in the New Testament

TAMAR

By **JOHN SCARBROOK** Killamarsh, England

Tamar is not one of the more prominent characters of scripture; she is afforded one chapter in Genesis, a verse in the book of Ruth chapter 4, a reference in 1 Chronicles chapter 2, and a mention in Matthew chapter 1. Her importance, however, is not determined by the amount of space allocated to her in the word of God, but rather that each occasion marks her out as having a vital role in the line of descent along which Messiah would be born.

There are two women in scripture called Tamar. The one under consideration is not to be confused with Tamar the daughter of David and sister of Absalom, 2 Sam. 13, though both were shamefully treated by members of their own families.

Genesis chapter 38, in which we find the story of Tamar, is essentially a parenthesis. In the previous chapter, we are introduced to Joseph in the family home of Jacob, and the chapter closes with Joseph, having been sold by his brothers, now purchased from the Midianites by Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's guard. Chapter 39 takes up the story of Joseph again without any break in the narrative.

The intervening chapter follows the footsteps of Judah, the fourth son of Jacob and Leah, as he leaves the parental home and journeys into Canaanite territory. The land at this time was occupied by tribal nations which would not be removed until Joshua's day, a further two hundred and thirty years or so, until 'the iniquity of the Amorites' was full, as made known to Abraham. Jacob was simply a tent dweller as Abraham and Isaac, Heb. 11. 9.

Before we are quick to censure Judah for his actions, we need to appreciate something of the problem faced by Jacob's sons in finding suitable wives. Abram had entered the land already married to Sarah. He was most

insistent that Isaac did not take a wife from the Canaanite tribes, but rather from his own people. Jacob was also found providentially in Padan-aram where he married Leah and Rachel. Now, however, the question of wives for Jacob's twelve sons was not so straightforward. Joseph would later marry an Egyptian from which union two of the tribes of Israel would issue. We know from Genesis chapter 46 and the genealogies in 1 Chronicles that all the sons eventually had families, so can only assume that the wives, though not named, were from the indigenous tribes and prepared to leave their idolatry and embrace, at least in a measure, the rule of Israel's God, as later, Ruth the Moabitess wholeheartedly did.

It would seem from the tone of the narrative that Judah's purpose in going to Adullam, not a particularly long journey, was to find a wife. By verse two of the chapter, he has achieved his goal and an unnamed Canaanite woman becomes the mother of his three sons, Er, Onan and Shelah. It is a point of interest that, although Judah was the son of Jacob through whom Messiah's genealogy was established, none of these three sons was deemed suitable by the Spirit of God to continue that line. Genesis chapter 38 explains how the sovereignty of God preserved the line of promise, in a most unexpected way. Enter Tamar.

Some years had passed since the

birth of Judah's sons, and Er was now of marriageable age. It would seem that Judah chose a wife for his son, and that may have caused some resentment. For, without giving any details or account of his actions we simply read that Er, 'was wicked in the sight of the Lord; and the Lord slew him'. The word 'wicked' is used throughout scripture as an adjective to describe a variety of actions, thoughts, people, and nations. The Apostle John, in his first Epistle, identifies the source of all such behaviour as from 'the wicked one', the enemy of all that is good and of God. Er is the first of only three named individuals who are rightly described as 'wicked'. 'Athaliah, that wicked woman', 2 Chr. 24. 7; and the 'wicked Haman', Esther 7. 6, complete the evil trilogy.

Responsibility then fell to Onan, to marry Tamar and provide a child who would take precedence of inheritance over Onan in place of his deceased elder brother. This arrangement was later enshrined in the Sinai law, Deut. 25. 5, 6, but was apparently accepted practice in Patriarchal days. The outworking of this and of the verses which follow in Deuteronomy chapter 25 are clearly seen in the actions of Boaz and the nearer kinsman in Ruth chapter 4.

Onan expressed his rejection of this procedure by making sure that Tamar did not conceive. The tense suggests a repeated action, not just a single occasion, thus compounding his refusal to obey the instruction of Judah his father. Had Onan been obedient, he could have taken his place in the ancestry of Messiah. But he forfeited that privilege by his selfish actions, the Lord's patience was exhausted, and Onan joined his brother in the graveyard.

All now, it seemed, depended upon Shelah who was not yet old enough to marry Tamar. Judah appears to have laid at least some of the blame for the death of Er and Onan upon Tamar and took the opportunity to sideline her by sending her back to her father's house, possibly hoping that, in time, she would find another husband. However, he reckoned without the resourcefulness and determination of Tamar.

Several events now came together.

Judah's wife died, and, maybe with a view to helping him to recover from her passing, Hirah the Adullamite, Judah's friend, accompanied him to Timnath at sheepshearing time. Each year this was an occasion for celebration, drinking and general carousing, cp. 2 Sam 13. 23-29. News reached Tamar of Judah's whereabouts and she swiftly put her plan into action. Shelah had now reached a reasonable age for marriage, but Judah, it seemed, had no intention of marrying his third son to Tamar, so, divesting herself of her widow's garments, she dressed as a woman of easy virtue, covering most of her face with a veil, and sat in a place where she knew Judah would pass by.

It may seem strange to our western, puritanical minds, that no moral judgement or comment is made concerning the actions of either Judah or Tamar. The Levitical law would prohibit sexual activity between a father-in-law and his daughter-in-law, with death for both as the prescribed punishment, Lev. 20. 12. The catalogue of sins involving family members, and other more unnatural relationships, are given in detail in Leviticus chapters 18 and 20. In both chapters, the concluding summary adds that, 'all these abominations have the men of the land done, which were before you, and the land is defiled', Lev. 18. 27. These sins of the Canaanite nations provided God with a sound reason for casting them out and destroying them.

For Tamar, then, it may not have seemed such an unusual or scandalous undertaking, since such relationships

were accepted among her people. She could also have reasoned that both she and Judah were widowed so that no living partner was affected or offended by their action. However, although Judah acted unwittingly, the implication drawn from his later response of anger and embarrassment reveals that conscience was at work within. It was the law that exposed the fact, the nature and the reality of sin, Rom. 7. 7.

For the believer, the New Testament sets out clearly the manner of life and behaviour which should characterize and motivate the Christian. Not by law observance, but through liberty in Christ we have a sure guide that monitors our actions in all circumstances, in order to be pleasing to Him.

Judah, having fallen for Tamar's charms, without too much resistance, enters a bargaining situation to pay for services rendered. The agreed payment was a kid from the flock, but Tamar demanded a pledge, a security, until Judah sent the kid. She was astute enough to persuade Judah to part with personal possessions which were of value to him and would clearly and unambiguously identify him later. Then she waited.

Judah, meanwhile, attempted to fulfil his part of the bargain by sending a kid by the hand of Hirah to retrieve his belongings. Hirah asked around and made careful search, but obviously to no avail. On his return, Judah, no doubt reluctantly, accepted the loss of his goods and dismissed the episode.

Three months later, the news came to Judah that Tamar was expecting a child. Judah, without any compassion, demanded her death by burning. The moment had arrived for Tamar to play her master card! Brought out to suffer her fate, she produced the tokens of the transaction, leaving Judah no option but to acknowledge them. He also admitted that he had wronged Tamar by withholding Shelah from her as a husband.

Judah's statement, 'She hath been more righteous than I', merits a mention. Righteousness is an absolute concept, the very nature of deity. There cannot be degrees of righteousness and though we may compare ourselves with others, we conveniently forget that 'all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags', Isa. 64. 6. Judah may compare his actions with those of Tamar and consider her to be 'more righteous', yet the actions of both parties in the previous verses leaves much to be desired.

Tamar is mentioned no more in the chapter, but attention turns to the twins which she had conceived. Possibly the most detailed description of any birth in scripture follows, with the child regarded by the midwife as taking precedence, in fact being born second. Yet another example in scripture of the first being last and the last first, e.g., Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, Manasseh and Ephraim, among others.

When we come to chapter 42, Judah is back in Jacob's family home with all his brothers. Chapter 46 confirms that no family, other than that recorded in chapter 38 is linked with Judah, suggesting that he never married again.

So, in the sovereignty of God, Pharez, the son of Tamar, takes his place in the royal dynasty, preserved, and privileged to be the ancestor not only of David the king, but of Joseph, and 'of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ', Matt. 1. 16.

Sovereign grace! o'er sin abounding,
Ransomed souls the tidings swell.
'Tis a deep that knows no sounding.
Who its breadth or length can tell?
On its glories
Let my soul for ever dwell
(JOHN KENT (1766-1843))



THE GOSPEL OF MARK

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

14

As we draw to the close of chapter 4, these verses are the final section marking the end of the first phase of the Lord's Galilean ministry. Of this, HIEBERT comments, 'Four separate withdrawals from Galilee by Jesus and His disciples marked . . . the great Galilean ministry. Prompted by His desire for relief from the pressure of the crowds, Jesus' first withdrawal was of short duration'.¹

The passage across the sea, vv. 35-41

Although this event is recorded in all the synoptic Gospels, Mark's Gospel contains details pertaining to this journey which are unique. Furthermore, it is not just detail about the journey across the Sea of Galilee but, also, a hint as to the reason that the journey was made.

The circumstances, vv. 35, 36

It is only Mark who tells us the time, 'when the even was come', and the circumstances preceding this event. Whilst Luke tells us that 'it came to pass on a certain day', Luke 8. 22, Mark tells us what day, 'the same day', and all that had taken place within that day. The business is laid out for us chronologically:

- He had been blasphemed by the Pharisees when they said of Him, 'He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils', 3. 22.
- His brethren and His mother had then come to take Him, thinking that He was, 'beside himself', 3. 21.
- He had been involved in further public and private teaching throughout the day. The size of the crowd is indicated by the boat that He borrowed as His pulpit from which to teach.

Now, as the day draws to a close, He wishes to set sail over Galilee.

We have, in Mark, a further

manifestation of the true Servant of God. He is ever busy, never still, always about the Father's business.

But we have noted, too, that it was 'when the even was come', v. 35. The last vestiges of light would be fading as the disciples took the Lord into their boat and set sail across the water. Nothing is likely to generate additional fear than a storm upon a lake in darkness. There would be no navigational aids – no stars or moon – visible to guide them, and nothing visible from the water with the size of the waves.

The Lord gives His disciples the instruction, 'Let us pass over unto the other side', v. 35. On this instruction, ST. JOHN observes, 'The Lord's proposal . . . should have been taken seriously by His companions; the idea of perishing or of going to the bottom of the sea was in their minds, not in His'.²

Mark tells us the disciples 'took him even as He was in the ship', v. 36. They were the owners and navigators of the boat and, hence, they took Him, although it soon becomes obvious that He is in control. However, in that phrase, 'even as he was', we have a picture of the poverty of the Saviour. There was no elaborate preparation for the journey, He merely accompanied His disciples in the ship.

The storm, vv. 37, 38

It is interesting to see the different

details recorded by the Gospel writers in respect of this storm. Luke tells us that 'there came down a storm of wind on the lake', Luke 8. 23. He describes it meteorologically – as the weather front coming down from the mountains that surround the sea. Matthew tells us that 'there arose a great tempest in the sea', Matt. 8. 24, describing what came up from below and within the water itself. Mark, however, tells us that 'there arose a great storm of wind', v. 37.

We can note:

- Its suddenness, 'arose', v. 37. It was not expected.
- Its ferocity, 'a great storm', v. 37, 'a great tempest'; Matt. 8. 24.³
- Its variety, 'a storm of wind on the lake', Luke 8. 23; 'a great tempest in the sea', Matt. 8. 24. Forces from above and below seem to combine to make this a storm of significant proportions.
- Its physical effects, 'the ship . . . was now full', v. 37; 'the ship was covered with the waves', Matt. 8. 24; they 'were in jeopardy', Luke 8. 23.
- Its emotional effects; 'Lord, save us: we perish', Matt. 8. 25; 'Master, carest thou not that we perish?' Mark 4. 38. They were exceedingly afraid and expecting to die.

It is for these reasons that these seasoned fishermen, who knew something of this spot and its weather changes, were afraid for their lives.

Throughout all this initial period of the storm, the Lord has been asleep in the stern of the boat. WIERSBE comments, 'Jonah slept during a storm . . . though he was running from God. Jesus slept in the storm because He was truly . . . in God's will'.⁴ We have here a testimony to the true humanity of the Lord. John would tell us that He stopped and sat upon Sychar's well, 'being wearied with his journey', John 4. 6. The pressures of the busy day meant, at this time, the Lord needed physical rest, and He slept.⁵

It is only Mark who mentions 'asleep on a pillow', v. 38. Matthew mentions the Lord's words in the verses preceding his account of the storm, 'The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man

hath not where to lay His head’, Matt. 8. 20. Mark demonstrates how true that was!

The censures, vv. 39, 40

Awakened from sleep, the Lord speaks two forms of censure: ‘he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still’, v. 39; ‘And he said unto them, ‘Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?’ v. 40.

In dealing with the wind and the sea, the Lord issues a command, ‘Peace, be still’, v. 39. The word for peace is one that we might use to a distressed child, sobbing and crying. We would say, ‘hush, be calm’. The words ‘be still’ have the idea of muzzling, closing the mouth that threatened and endangered. In issuing this command the Lord leaves no opportunity for an immediate repeat, for His command effectively means ‘be still and remain that way’.

It is important to see that the Lord

issues a separate command to each element, and only Mark records this detail. To the wind, He says, ‘Peace’. To the sea, He says, ‘be still’. It is for this reason that Mark, alone, indicates that ‘the wind ceased, and there was a great calm’, v. 39. Each element obeys His command. Each element is subject to His will. What was once a great storm becomes ‘a great calm’. The transformation and the immediate nature of that transformation wrought by the command of the Saviour fills the disciples with awe for here we see a display of the power of His deity.

But there is a second censure – a censure of the disciples. Having considered something of the ferocity of the storm, it might seem that the Saviour is somewhat strong in His condemnation. But they had seen Him perform numerous miracles. He had power in respect of disease and demons. In the physical and spiritual realm, He was in control.

In verse 35, He had said to them, ‘Let us pass over unto the other side’. It would appear that they did not have faith. They were not prepared to take the Lord at His word. They did not believe that what He had said He was also able to accomplish, that His word would come to pass. Like Peter, on another occasion, they had looked at the circumstances, the wind and the storm, and taken their eyes off the Saviour.

Fear dispels faith and fear brings doubt. These two ingredients led them to ask the question, ‘carest thou not that we perish?’ v. 38. A moment’s thought would have enabled them to remember many occasions when the Saviour had displayed His care for and compassion upon His own. But they had forgotten! For this reason, the word of censure is issued.

The summary, v. 41

Mark tells us that ‘they feared exceedingly’. This was not the fear of the storm that they had displayed a few moments earlier. This was a deep reverential awe in the presence of the supernatural. MACARTHUR writes, ‘The only thing more terrifying than having a storm outside the boat was having God in the boat’.⁶

The psalmist had written, ‘Thou rulest the raging of the sea: when the waves thereof arise, thou stillest them’, Ps. 89. 9. Although the psalmist spoke those words of Jehovah, the Lord had demonstrated the same power in the presence of the disciples. Hence, their question, ‘What manner of man is this?’



Endnotes

- 1 D. E. HIEBERT, *op. cit.*, pg. 123.
- 2 H. St. JOHN, *op. cit.*, pg. 57.
- 3 WUEST comments, ‘The verb is *epiballō* to throw upon. The waves were throwing themselves into the boat. The tense is imperfect. They were repeatedly doing so’. K. S. WUEST, *op. cit.*, pg. 97.
- 4 W. W. WIERSBE, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, Logos software resource.
- 5 WUEST comments, again, ‘The noise of the storm, the violent pitching of the boat, and the sting of the cold water as it came beating into the boat, did not awake Him’. K. S. WUEST, *op. cit.*, pg. 97.
- 6 JOHN MACARTHUR, *MacArthur Study Bible*, Logos software resource.

The Fatherhood of God in the Old testament

By **DAVID E. WEST** Leicester, England

There are several instances in the Old Testament where God is called the Father of the Jewish nation and to the special representatives of the nation, David and Solomon. The chosen nation owed its origin and continued existence to His miraculous power and special care. As their Father, He loved, pitied, disciplined, rebuked and required the obedience of His people.

The Father of special representatives of the nation

a) Of Solomon

Several scriptures may be cited: 'I will be his father, and he shall be my son', 2 Sam. 7. 14; these words are recited in Hebrews chapter 1 verse 5, where they are applied to the Lord Jesus as proof that He is superior to angels, but initially the application is to Solomon; 'I will be his father, and he shall be my son', 1 Chr. 17. 13. If verse 12 speaks of Solomon as a sovereign with a throne, verse 13 refers to him as a son with a Father; 'he shall be my son, and I will be his father', 1 Chr. 22. 10; 'I have chosen him to be my son, and I will be his father', 28. 6. Solomon was not only chosen 'to sit upon the throne', v. 5, but he was chosen 'to be my son'.

b) Of David

The Lord promises the same fatherly care to David himself, 'He shall cry unto me, Thou art my father', Ps. 89. 26. However, nowhere in the Old Testament do we read of David addressing God as 'Father'.

The Father of the nation

a) In the Pentateuch

The first passage where God presents Himself as the Father of the nation is Exodus chapter 4 verses 22 and 23. Moses is told to say to Pharaoh, "Thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son, even my firstborn", v. 22. The command to Pharaoh was, 'Let my son go'; the threat accompanying refusal was, 'I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn', v. 23. Israel was in a relationship with

the Lord so close that it is expressed in terms of sonship. But more than a son, Israel is 'my firstborn', a position of honour, normally held by the firstborn son, the inheritor of the birthright.

There are four allusions to the fatherhood of God in Deuteronomy. In the opening chapter, Moses uses a metaphor, 'thou hast seen how that the Lord thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son', v. 31; this had been their wilderness experience. Then Moses compares the wilderness experience of the nation with a man disciplining his son, 'as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God chasteneth thee', 8. 5. Later, Moses clearly states, 'Ye are the children ["sons" JND] of the Lord your God', 14. 1. In the context, Moses is warning against idolatry and against practising pagan rituals of mourning the dead. Those of Israel, in special relationship, are distinct from the nations. Here the plural, 'sons' is employed; Jehovah was not only the Father of the nation, but also to each person in the nation.

b) In the Major Prophets

In the second part of his prophecy, Isaiah alludes to the fatherhood of God to the nation. He speaks of the love of the Lord for Israel, 'I have loved thee', Isa. 43. 4. The Lord then expresses His desire to gather them again from the foreign nations, to bring them back to Himself, 'bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth', v. 6. This projects our thoughts on to a coming

day when the remnant of the nation will be regathered.

It is interesting to observe that, in Isaiah chapter 63, several fatherly features of God are brought before us: lovingkindness and goodness, 'I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the Lord . . . and the great goodness toward the house of Israel', v. 7; love and pity, 'in his love and in his pity he redeemed them', v. 9; providing rest and guidance, 'the Spirit of the Lord caused him to rest: so didst thou lead thy people', v. 14; showing tenderness and compassion, 'the sounding of thy bowels and of thy mercies toward me', v. 15. It is in this context that we read, 'he said, Surely they are my people, children that will not lie: so he was ["became" JND] their Saviour', v. 8. Here the nation calls upon Him as their Father, 'Doubtless thou art our father . . . thou, O Lord, art our father, our redeemer', v. 16. Then, as the nation casts itself upon the mercy of God, they say, 'But now, O Lord, thou art our father', 64. 8. In His love, He could restore and bless them.

The fatherhood of God is also seen in the prophecy of Jeremiah. In chapter 3 of the book, Jehovah is twice called Father and three times the nation is addressed as children (sons). Thus, the Lord says, 'Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, My father?' v. 4. The nation came with the right language, but that was all, for they are then accused of saying, 'thou art the guide of my youth' – these were empty words. As was so often the case, the nation was right 'in lip', but far from right in life. The plea of Jehovah was 'Turn ["return" JND], O backsliding children', v. 14. The promise of God was clear, 'I will take you . . . and I will bring you to Zion'; however, such a promise was dependent upon Israel's confession, 'Only acknowledge thine iniquity', v. 13. The verses that follow tell of the future restoration of Israel, but verses 19 and 20 give God's interjection which has been translated, 'I myself said, "How gladly would I treat you like sons and give you a desirable land, the most beautiful inheritance of any nation." I thought you would call me "Father" and not turn away from following me', NIV. As a father, Jehovah desired the very best for

His children. Consequently, there is a further appeal, 'Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings', v. 22.

There are two later references to the fatherhood of God in Jeremiah's prophecy. In the earlier part of chapter 31, there are declarations of God's love and His lovingkindness, 'Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee', v. 3, together with reference to the joy of the nation at their regathering. Then the Lord says, 'for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn', v. 9. The term 'firstborn' is here transferred to Ephraim, marking him out as the object of special favour of the Lord. The ten tribes of the northern kingdom will evidently be the recipients of particular blessing in the national restoration. Later in the chapter, the Lord says, 'Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child?', v. 20 – His love for Ephraim being beautifully expressed. It should be acknowledged that, in verses 9 and 20, 'Ephraim' may be used as a synonym for the whole nation.

c) In the Minor Prophets

The opening verses of the prophecy of Hosea set forth the conditions

that pertained in Israel and Judah at the time of writing; however, in verse 10 of chapter 1, our thoughts are projected on to a day anticipating Israel's ultimate future. The word of the Lord through Hosea is, 'it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God'. DARBY has simply, 'Sons of the living God'.

This passage in Hosea is referred to on two occasions in the New Testament where both Paul and Peter apply the blessing to believers of this present age, 'As he saith also in Osee . . . in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people: there shall they be called the children of the living God', Rom. 9. 25, 26. Peter writes, 'Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God', 1 Pet. 2. 10. It is important to emphasize that both Paul and Peter here are using the Old Testament as a matter of application, and not of interpretation.

In chapters 11 to 14 of the book, the emphasis is upon the love of God; Hosea is no longer able to dwell upon the plight which the people had brought on themselves. He recalls the

words of Exodus chapter 4 and writes, 'When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt', Hos. 11. 1. This word of Hosea found its fulfilment centuries later in the person of Christ, 'he [Joseph] took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt: and was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son', Matt. 2. 14, 15.

In the opening chapter of Malachi's prophecy, we find the same theme as in Hosea chapter 11; God has loved His people, but they have not acknowledged His love. The Lord of hosts then says through the prophet, 'A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honour?' Mal. 1. 6. The word 'honour' means to highly esteem, to be deserving of respect and obedience.

The divine complaint was against the people as a whole and, in chapter 2 verses 10 to 16, Malachi deals with the outstanding sins of his day. The first sin mentioned is that of dealing treacherously, every man against his brother; false dealing had abounded among the people. The first truth which the prophet cites as proof to expose the evil of their conduct is their common standing before God on the ground of His covenant, 'Have we not all one father?' Mal. 2. 10.

As we come towards the end of the prophecy, the Lord of hosts refers to a day when judgement would be poured out on a guilty world, but He promised that the remnant who had maintained their allegiance to Him would be spared, 'I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him', Mal. 3. 17. Thus, the last image of God as Father in the Old Testament ends with words of hope and encouragement.

While the Fatherhood of God appears to be a minor theme in the Old Testament, it becomes a major one in the New Testament.

Further reading

GORAN MEDVED, *The Fatherhood of God*, The Evangelical Journal of Theology, Vol. X No. 2, 2016, pp. 203-214.



Personal notes and final greetings

Colossians 4.7-18

13

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

Introduction

As the apostle brings his Epistle to the Colossians to a close, he wants to mention those who have been his helpers in a variety of ways. Paul valued his friends and companions and seemed always, except in a few cases, to have colleagues with him during his missionary journeys. He was very seldom alone. In this final paragraph, he mentions eleven people in addition to himself. It teaches us that in the work of the Lord there is a vast variety of individual gifts, as found in 1 Corinthians chapters 12 to 14, but, at the same time, the necessity for united action. Some of Paul's companions are well known, others are virtually unknown. There are rich and poor, public and private, Jew and Gentile, but all with an important part to play. It gives an illustration of the interpersonal relations expounded in chapter 3 verse 5 to chapter 4 verse 6.

Outline

Paul's messengers, vv. 7-9 – the bearers of the letter.

Paul's companions, vv. 10-14 – in missionary enterprise and other spheres.

Paul's messages, vv. 15-17 – final exhortations – 'salute . . . read . . . and say.

Paul's salutation, v. 18 – his final signature confirming authenticity.

Paul's messengers, vv. 7-9

Tychicus and Onesimus are the bearers of Paul's letter to Colossae, and perhaps the one to Ephesus. He is appreciative of their help and warmly commends them.

Tychicus, vv. 7, 8

Tychicus is mentioned five times in the New Testament.¹ Equally, there are five main things said about him. He was:

- Paul's confidant, v. 7 – knew 'all my [Paul's] state'.
- An esteemed co-worker, v. 7 – 'a beloved brother' – his relation to the saints.
- A dependable servant (*diakonos*), v. 7 – 'a faithful

minister' – his relation to the work.

- A co-slave in the Lord, v. 7 – 'fellow-servant' (*doulos*) in the sphere of the Lordship of Christ; the only basis of blessing, 1 Cor. 15. 58 – his relation to co-workers.
- A help to the assembly, v. 8 – in learning of conditions at Colossae and communicating it to Paul. Tychicus was also to comfort their hearts through exhortation, v. 8.

Onesimus, v. 9

Onesimus is mentioned twice in the New Testament.² He was perhaps a prison worker. There are three main things said about him.

- He was a faithful and beloved brother – the same two words as used of Tychicus. That would surely be a thrill to Onesimus, a former slave, and a consolation to Philemon. He would, of course, also need to put relations with Philemon on a right footing; adjustments are necessary after conversion. He had two good letters of commendation, one to Colossae and one to Philemon!

- His relation to Colossae – he was identified as 'one of you', cp. v. 12. This was a lovely basis of appeal. It is nice to be numbered with the saints!
- The confirmation of the purpose of his visit – to 'make known . . . all things which are done here', perhaps including his own conversion? Again, nothing is underhand.

Paul's companions vv. 10-14

Seven different co-workers are mentioned. Five of these are also mentioned in Philemon. The two omitted are Barnabas and Jesus Justus. It is good to have fellowship in the work of the Lord. The apostle used his co-workers for a variety of purposes, e.g., he sent Timothy to Thessalonica, 1 Thess. 3. 5, 'to know [their] faith'.

Aristarchus, v. 10

Aristarchus is mentioned five times in the New Testament, as given below. He was a Thessalonian who was with Paul at Ephesus on his third missionary journey and was exposed to real danger, Acts 19. 29. He accompanied Paul to Asia and Judea from Macedonia, 20. 4, and was with Paul during his treacherous journey to Rome, 27. 2. He became his fellow-prisoner, Col. 4. 10, and fellow-labourer, Philem. 24. He was presumably imprisoned with Paul on reaching Rome. Alternatively, the term may be figurative, indicating 'in captivity to Christ'.³ He salutes the Colossians, v. 10.

Marcus, v. 10

He is called 'Marcus', his Latin name, three times,⁴ Mark five times,⁵ and John, his Jewish name, once, Acts 13. 13. His mother's home was open for believers, 12. 12-17. He was with Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey, twelve to fourteen years before the reference here, but turned back, 13. 13. He was recovered, perhaps through his relative, Barnabas, who was his uncle or cousin, and became profitable again, 2 Tim. 4. 11, and wrote the Gospel of the unfailing Servant. His relationship to Barnabas was, perhaps, the reason for the dissension between Barnabas and Paul, Acts 15. 36-41. The

assembly at Colossae had ‘received commandments’ concerning him and were exhorted to receive him if he came to them.

Barnabas, v. 10

Barnabas is referred to twenty-nine times in the New Testament, but only receives a passing mention here. His name means ‘Son of consolation [or rest]’, Acts 4. 36. He was a native of Cyprus and a constant companion of Paul in the early days of his ministry.

Jesus Justus, v. 11

He was a Jewish helper. This is all we know of him unless Acts chapter 18 verse 7 is another reference. He seems to be one of three Jewish helpers along with Aristarchus and Mark. He also salutes the Colossians. Paul describes them as a comfort and fellow workers unto the Kingdom of God.

Epaphras, vv. 12, 13

Epaphras is referred to three times in the New Testament.⁶ He is one of three Gentile believers with Paul – Luke and Demas being the others – and a fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus, Philem. 23. Perhaps he is responsible for establishing the assembly at Colossae, Col. 1. 7, and those at Laodicea and Hierapolis. He has a close association with Colossae, v. 12; ‘one of you’ – a tender link, cp. v. 9. He is the slave of Christ, v. 12, ‘servant’ (*doulos*). In his absence, he remembers and salutes the Colossians.

The prayers of Epaphras, v. 12

‘Praying is working’⁷

- Their sacrificial consistency – ‘always’.
- Their fervent struggle – ‘labouring fervently’ (*agonizomai*). Other translations expand on the meaning: ‘combating earnestly’ JND; ‘always striving’ RV. It has the idea of strenuous zeal. The word is used seven times in the New Testament.⁸
- Their noble content and desire – ‘that ye may’:
 - Be able to ‘stand’ or be established, to resist error, Heb. 10. 9.

Be perfect, ‘mature’ ESV, wanting nothing.

Be complete, ‘fully assured’ RV – used five times in Colossians.⁹ ‘Abound in all the will of God’ – cp. 1. 9, i.e., similar to the prayer of Paul and Timothy.

Paul bears testimony to his ‘great zeal’, his fervour of spirit and untiring interest, v. 13. He may have heard him pray. The unselfishness of his interest is seen in that he prays, ‘for you . . . Laodicea . . . Hierapolis’. He had a large heart, cp. 2 Cor. 6. 11.

Luke, v. 14

Luke is mentioned three times in the New Testament.¹⁰ He was Paul’s personal physician and faithful companion during his missionary journeys – note the ‘we’ sections in Acts.¹¹ He was the outstanding Gentile writer of the New Testament contributing around twenty-five percent of its content.

Demas, v. 14

Demas is mentioned three times in the New Testament.¹² He sends his greetings to Colossae along with Luke. He had been a ‘fellow labourer’ but forsook Paul ‘having loved this present world [age or “opinions, maxims, hopes, thoughts, expectations” TRENCH]’, 2 Tim. 4. 10, cp. 1 John 2. 15; Jas. 4. 4.

Paul’s messages to Colossae, vv. 15-17

He instructs them to salute, that is, pay respect to, receive joyfully, the brethren in Laodicea, v. 15. They were also to salute Nymphas, v. 15,¹³ and ‘the church which is in his house’. He was using his resources for the Lord.¹⁴

He exhorts them to read the scriptures, v. 16 – ‘read’ is repeated three times emphasizing its importance. We might note that the Lord indicates its necessity by asking ‘have ye not read?’, seven times in all.¹⁵ The Colossians had to read this Epistle, cause it to be read in the church of the Laodiceans, and read the Epistle from Laodicea – a reciprocated responsibility. There

is no specific record of that Epistle, unless it is Ephesians.

Archippus, v. 17

There is a final message to Archippus referred to twice in the New Testament.¹⁶ He had to ‘take heed to [discern, keep an eye on] the ministry’, recognizing that it was a gift given in the sphere of the Lordship of Christ. He had to ‘fulfil it’, see verse 12 – minister liberally to the assembly.

Paul’s salutation, v. 18

The apostolic signature – ‘the hand of me, Paul’ – gives authentication to the Epistle, having dictated it to an amanuensis, cp. 1 Cor. 16. 21; 2 Thess. 3. 17. He concludes with an apostolic request – ‘remember my bonds’.¹⁷ He must have been so restricted, yet such bonds get only a brief mention!

The apostolic salute is ‘grace be with you’,¹⁸ and farewell, ‘Amen’, concluding the Epistle.

Endnotes

- 1 Acts 20. 4; Eph. 6. 21; Col. 4. 7; 2 Tim. 4. 12; Titus 3. 12. He was from Asia and accompanied Paul on his third missionary journey when he was going to Jerusalem via Asia from Macedonia, Acts 20. 4. He seemed to be the bearer of the letters to both the Ephesians, 6. 21, 22, and Colossae, 4. 7, 8. Paul also sent him to Ephesus, 2 Tim. 4. 12, and, possibly, to Crete, Titus
- 2 Col. 4. 9; Philem. 10.
- 3 Other fellow prisoners include: Epaphras, Philem. 23, and Andronicus and Junia, Rom. 16. 7.
- 4 Col. 4. 10; Philem. 24; 1 Pet. 5. 13.
- 5 Acts 12. 12, 25; 15. 37, 39; 2 Tim. 4. 11.
- 6 Col. 1. 7; 4. 12; and Philem. 23.
- 7 F. F. BRUCE, *The Epistle to the Colossians*, William B. Eerdmans, 1984.
- 8 Luke 13. 24; Col. 1. 29; 4. 12; 1 Cor 9. 25, ‘striveth for the mastery’; John 18. 36; 1 Tim. 6. 12; 2 Tim. 4. 7; and here.
- 9 ‘Filled’, 1. 9; ‘fulfil’, 1. 25; 4. 17; ‘complete’, 2. 10; 4. 12.
- 10 Col. 4. 14; 2 Tim. 4. 11; and Philem. 24, as Lucas ‘my fellow labourer’.
- 11 Acts 16. 10-17; 20. 5 to 21. 18; 27. 1 to 28. 16.
- 12 Col. 4. 14; 2 Tim. 4. 10; and Philem. 24.
- 13 His only mention in the New Testament.
- 14 Cp. Acts 12. 12-17; 1 Cor. 16. 19; Rom. 16. 5.
- 15 Matt. 12. 3-5; 19. 4; 22. 31; Mark 12. 10, 26; Luke 6. 3.
- 16 In Philem. 2 as a ‘fellow soldier’, perhaps the son of Philemon.
- 17 See also 4. 3; Phil. 1. 7; Eph. 6. 20; Philem. 10.
- 18 Cp. 1 Tim 6. 21; 2 Tim. 4. 22.

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

THE SCRIPTURES ARE OBEYED

By **JOHN SCARSBROOK** Killamarsh, England

Part 11

From the dawn of time, a loving God has only asked one thing of man, His supreme creation, and that one thing is obedience. Not because He desires a servile, craven humanity, languishing under a Nebuchadnezzar-style autocracy, but because He is righteous, pure, and merciful. He alone knows what is best for mankind and desires that His will is sought and obeyed in order that He can justly pour out His blessings on a people in harmony with His plan and His purpose.

In Eden's garden everything was designed and prepared for the enjoyment and blessing of Adam and Eve, with just one caveat in respect of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Because God desired an intelligent and willing subjection to His revealed will, He did not form man with a robotic mind. Rather, He endowed him with an amazing intellect, an ability to weigh up alternatives, form opinions and make decisions based on certain standards. We know that Adam exercised his will in disobedience to the commandment of God, leaving the Almighty no alternative but to act in righteous judgement. Not, however, before revealing His great plan, conceived in the eternal mind, to bring mankind into ultimate blessing, founded not on effort, reason or logic, but on simple obedience to His word.

The familiar catalogue of faith in Hebrews chapter 11 is, in essence, a record of obedience seen in the lives of Old Testament believers. Abel's obedience in bringing an approved sacrificial offering may have cost him his life, but it earned him the accolade of heaven. Enoch's obedience resulted in a walk with God, a life that pleased God and a premature entrance into heaven. We would never have heard of Noah if he had disobeyed God's instruction to build an ark; he, with

his family, would have perished in the flood. And faithful Abraham, 'when he was called . . . obeyed', v. 8, even though he had no idea where he was going!

And Moses, taught by his own mother though in Pharaoh's palace, cast in his lot with the enslaved Hebrew nation. Not because they were his own natural kin, but because they were 'the people of God', v. 25. He considered and weighed the choice before him, then 'forsook Egypt', v. 27, because the obedience of faith always looks forward, and Moses 'had respect unto the recompense of the reward'. Joshua is not mentioned by name, but, in verse 30, the results of his obedience are seen. The prophet Isaiah reminds us that God's ways and thoughts are inestimably higher than ours, Isa. 55. 8, 9. They may not always seem logical, understandable, or even reasonable to our puny minds, but obedience to them always results in blessing.

Think, for a moment, of the instructions given to Joshua as he viewed the mighty, impregnable fortress of Jericho. All the Israelite men of war were to walk round the city followed by seven priests with the ark and trumpets; one circuit for each of the first six days, then seven times on the seventh. A huge cacophony of sound was to follow, and Joshua was

assured that the walls would fall down flat. Think about it; does it sound rational, plausible, or even sensible? Not really, but because God had said it, that was sufficient for Joshua. He simply obeyed and seven days later Israel's armies marched into a Jericho reduced to rubble!

The remaining verses of Hebrews chapter 11 tell the same story, about men and women who gained victories, who triumphed in seemingly impossible circumstances, because they followed the word of God. Others, prepared to endure trials, faced hardship and even death, rather than be disobedient to the will of God as revealed to them.

But someone may be asking, quite understandably, what possible relevance does all this Old Testament history have to do with my church life in the present time? Well, first, we have adequate evidence in the New Testament to assure us that we cannot afford to ignore the Old. In Hebrews chapter 12, the faithful ones of chapter 11 are seen as a 'cloud of witnesses', not observers of us but examples to us as we run our race through life. In Romans chapter 15 verse 4, we learn that the things 'written aforetime were written for our learning'. Again, in 1 Corinthians chapter 10 verse 11, referring to the experiences of the Israelites in the wilderness, 'all these things happened unto them for ensamples [as types]; and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come'. The local church or assembly is essentially a New Testament revelation, but, because our God is immutable, there are pictures and principles in the Old Testament which help us in our understanding of His purposes for us.

The Lord Jesus said, in Matthew chapter 16 verse 18, 'I will build my church'. That work has been continuing for almost 2000 years, with the Spirit of God actively engaged in calling both Jews and Gentiles to salvation in order to form the church. This is explained and portrayed pictorially in the Epistles, as a body, a building and a bride, with the Lord Jesus as the Head, the Chief Corner Stone and the Bridegroom.

In the early years of the first century, as the gospel was preached and many souls were saved, it soon became evident that it was impossible and impractical for the entire church to meet together in one place. So, groups of Christians in a particular town or area would meet together, often in homes, as a representation of the whole church within a locality.

But though separated geographically and culturally, each group of Christians was indwelt and taught by the Spirit of God and by the apostles and teachers gifted to explain and give instruction for the correct and orderly conduct expected of those who professed discipleship of the Lord Jesus. The principles and practice, taught and imbibed, was passed on to the following generations as instructed by Paul to Timothy, 2 Tim. 2. 2.

The Lord Jesus had told His disciples that, after His return to heaven, the Holy Spirit would undertake the work of the teacher. 'He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you', John 14. 26, so providing the foundation for the gospel records. Furthermore, in chapter 16, verse 13, promise was given that, 'he will guide you into all truth . . . and he will shew you things to come', truth recorded in the apostolic writings and in the book of Revelation. By the time the apostles passed off the scene, their writing and teaching had become established and in this way the groups of believers in each locality could be sure that,

together with Old Testament writings, they had an inspired manual of truth and instruction as a foundation of their faith and upon which they could base their manner of life.

Words spoken by the Lord Jesus, just before He was taken back into heaven come ringing down the centuries, inspiring, challenging and as relevant as the day in which they were spoken, 'Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them . . . teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you', Matt. 28. 19, 20. A good soldier obeys the last instruction given by his superior. Today, we are engaged in a warfare and the instruction has not changed!

Throughout the world, groups of believers meet together with no ecclesiastical hierarchy, no ordained clergy, owning the Bible, the inspired word of God, as handbook, guide and final authority in all matters of doctrine and practice. The phrase 'all things whatsoever I have commanded you', quoted above, is not limited to the teaching and instructions given by the Lord Jesus during His earthly ministry. True it is that He made clear to His disciples their responsibility toward one another, as He spoke of love and forgiveness. But writing later to the church at Corinth, the Apostle Paul made it clear that 'the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord', 1 Cor. 14. 37, a phrase which embraces all the apostolic writings and leaves no room for any, individually or

collectively, to pick and choose their own agenda.

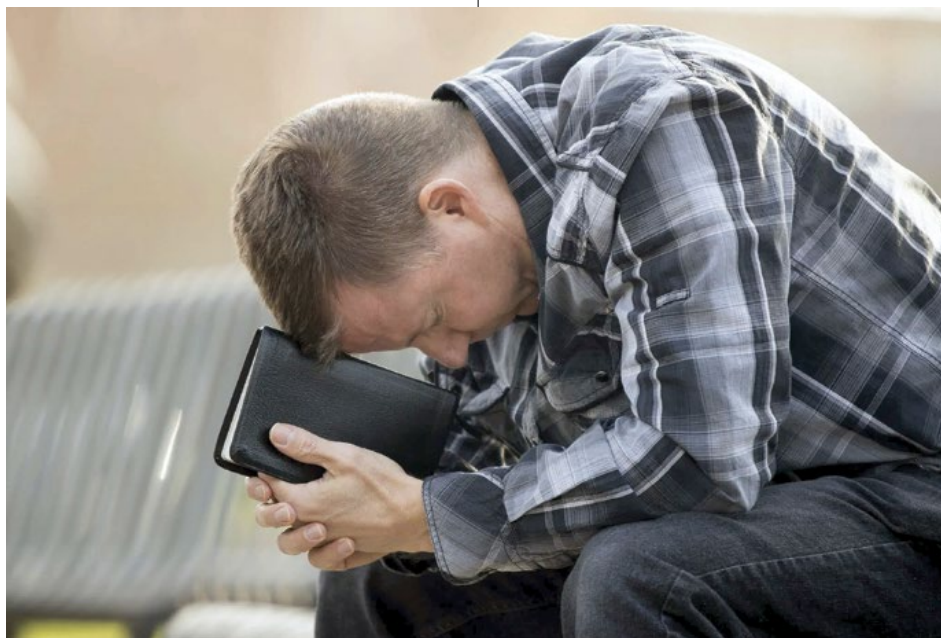
Perhaps it would be appropriate to acknowledge that, even with the best of intention and endeavour, no individual or company of believers can claim full obedience in every detail and at all times. Such an attitude would be at best presumptuous and at worst arrogant. However, within the context and structure of a New Testament assembly, every effort should be made to obey the revealed word of God and to manifest this in a practical way.

In the matter of the gospel we preach, salvation is through obedience. Paul, in Acts chapter 17, made it clear that 'God . . . now commandeth all men everywhere to repent'. To the Thessalonians he wrote of dire consequences falling on those that 'know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ', 2 Thess. 1. 8. Subsequent to salvation the Lord expects obedience in baptism, and the scriptural manner clearly taught is by immersion, signifying death, burial and resurrection with Christ.

One of the greatest privileges enjoyed by a Christian assembly is to obey the Lord's request, made in the upper room with His own, by partaking of bread and wine; simple emblems, and only emblems, of His body and blood. To hear His words, 'This do in remembrance of me' is a constant reminder of just how much we owe to Him and it should draw out worship from our hearts.

The different roles and responsibilities of men and women within the assembly are also clearly taught in scripture and obedience to these principles and the practical expression of them is honouring and pleasing to the Lord.

One of the last requests which the Lord Jesus made to His disciples, just a few short hours before He went to Calvary, is found in John chapter 14 verse 15, 'If ye love me, [ye will] keep my commandments'. John, writing later, will say, 'For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous', 1 John 5. 3.



The Tabernacle Court¹

By **JEREMY GIBSON** Derby, England

The tabernacle court, 27. 9-19; 38. 9-20, was a 100 by 50 cubit cordoned off area (about a quarter of the size of a modern football pitch). Both north and south walls had twenty silver-capped pillars, standing upon brazen sockets, with silver hooks and connecting-rods (JND); the western and eastern walls had ten such pillars. Apart from the eastern wall's twenty-cubit wide gate 'of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen, wrought with needlework' the court's fencing was a five-cubit high, fine twined linen (*shesis*, bleached) hanging, pegged into place by brazen pins. The single entrance into the tabernacle court taught that there is only one way to God: Christ Jesus, John 14. 6.

Just outside the tabernacle entrance was placed a water-filled laver, 30. 17-21; 38. 8. Of an undefined size, it was made of 'the looking glasses of the women . . . which assembled at the door of the tabernacle', 38. 8. Before entering the tabernacle, or approaching the brazen altar, the priests washed their hands and their feet in the laver (representing the cleansing effect of God's word, John 17. 17). Similarly, Christians need daily cleansing through reading scripture, Eph. 5.26, which, like those looking glasses, shows its readers their true character, Jas. 1. 23, 24.

The largest piece of tabernacle furniture, and the first to be met

on entering the eastern gate, was a blood-spattered brazen altar.² Its acacia wood boards and four horns (to which the sacrifices were bound, Ps. 118. 27) were all covered with fire-resistant brass, Deut. 33. 25; Jer. 1. 18. Brass vessels, including pots, shovels, basins, fleshhooks, and firepans were made for its service. A brazen grate reached to its midpoint, enhancing oxygenation, and intensifying its divinely ignited, never-dying fire.³ Carrying staves were slotted into this grate's four corner rings. As a most holy altar, which sanctified everything that touched it,⁴ the altar was atoned for by seven days of sacrifices, 29. 36, 37. Every sacrifice burned to Jehovah at the door of

the tabernacle was offered on this altar, including daily morning and evening burnt offerings, 29. 38-46; Lev. 1. 3, 5. This altar and its sacrifices looked forward to Calvary and pictured Christ, through whom we offer spiritual sacrifices to God, and upon whom we feed our souls every day, Heb. 13. 10, 15, 16. As the fire of the brazen altar was generated by Jehovah and never extinguished, Christians feed the fire in their hearts by meditating on Christ. The prominence of the brazen altar teaches the importance of believers keeping the cross always before them.

On the first day of the second month, when everything was completed, Moses reared up the tabernacle, anointing every item with the holy oil and placing it correctly.⁵ The day climaxed when the cloud of God's presence 'covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle', 40. 34. When that cloud, which guided Israel through 'that great and terrible wilderness', sheltered them from the heat of the sun and gave light at night, 'was taken up from over the tabernacle, the children of Israel went onward in all their journeys', 40. 36.⁶ Once the priests had carefully wrapped the sanctuary furniture, the Kohathites carried it with the staves, Num. 4. 1-20. With the help of two carts, the Gershonites moved the tabernacle, its covers, the court hangings and its gate, vv. 21-28; 7. 7. Using four carts, the Merarites transported the tabernacle boards, bars and pillars, vv. 29-33; 7. 8. In this way Israel travelled through the wilderness to the Promised Land. As the Levites expended great energy in carrying the tabernacle through the wilderness, so it takes hard work to bear a testimony for Christ in this world.

Item	Length (cubits)	Breadth (cubits)	Height (cubits)	Material
Ten tabernacle curtains	28	4	-	Fine twined linen, blue, purple, and scarlet
Eleven tent curtains	30	4	-	Goats' hair
Two outer coverings	-	-	-	Rams' skins dyed red and sea-cow skins
Forty-eight boards	-	1½	10	Acacia and gold
Fifteen bars	-	-	-	Acacia and gold
The veil	-	-	-	Fine twined linen, blue, purple, and scarlet
Four veil pillars	-	-	-	Acacia, gold, and silver
Ark	2½	1½	1½	Acacia and gold
Incense altar	1	1	2	Acacia and gold
Table	2	1	1½	Acacia and gold
Golden lampstand	-	-	-	Gold
Five entrance pillars	-	-	-	Acacia, gold, and brass
Entrance hanging	-	-	-	Fine twined linen, blue, purple, and scarlet
Laver	-	-	-	Brass
Brazen altar	5	5	3	Acacia and brass
Sixty court pillars	-	-	-	Acacia, silver, and brass
Court gate	20	-	5	Fine twined linen, blue, purple, and scarlet
Court hanging	280	-	5	Fine twined linen

Endnotes

- 1 Unless otherwise stated, references are from Exodus.
- 2 20. 26; 27. 1-8; 38. 1-7; 40. 6, 7, 29; Lev. 6. 12, 13; 9. 22; Num. 4. 13-15; 16. 36-40; Heb. 13. 10.
- 3 29. 34-43; Lev. 6. 12, 13; 9. 24.
- 4 29. 37; 40. 10; Matt. 23. 18-20.
- 5 30. 22-33; 39. 32-43; 40. 1-33.
- 6 See also Deut. 8. 15; Ps. 105. 39.

Ecclesiastes

By **WARREN HENDERSON** Chippewa Falls, USA

Introduction

The title ‘Ecclesiastes’ is found in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) and is derived from the Hebrew word *Koheleth*, found seven times in Ecclesiastes. *Koheleth* means ‘caller’ and is translated ‘the preacher’, e.g., 1. 2; 12. 8. In this largely autobiographical poem, the royal preacher, Solomon, shares with us excerpts of his weary search for the significance of human existence. He will examine science, wisdom, philosophy, pleasure, materialism, as well as living for the ‘now’ as possible avenues of satisfaction. Is it possible for man to actually enjoy his earthly sojourn, that is, his life ‘under the sun’? It seemed to Solomon that all man’s toiling was utterly meaningless, 1. 2.

Purpose

Ecclesiastes highlights the sorrowful consequences of choosing to venture down wrong paths in life. Solomon entered into many political marriages with the daughters of pagan kings, who then brought strange gods into his palace, all of which degraded his relationship with Jehovah. He forsook God’s word, which he had known from his youth, to pursue selfish interests and sensual pleasure. Now, writing in his autumn years, Solomon is disappointed, and even disillusioned because of his own carnality.

It is not necessary for us to follow the royal writer in his regretful exploits to learn their end. In Ecclesiastes, Solomon examines his own life, especially his mistakes, and reflects on a lifetime of observations in an attempt to make sense of it all: ‘Why is man upon the earth?’ and ‘How can man find satisfaction in life?’ Ultimately, he will conclude that the answer to both questions is the same: ‘Fear God, and keep his commandments,

for this is the whole duty of man’, 12. 13. Solomon’s ontological quest led him back to the Lord, and to understand that man exists to please Him. This is perhaps why Solomon uses the less familiar term ‘God’ exclusively throughout the book, until he acknowledges the importance of personally fearing the Lord at the end. Recognizing and yielding to divine authority results in personal fellowship with the Lord and the experience of His blessing.

Where Proverbs provides hundreds of wise course corrections to navigate through life, Ecclesiastes explores a panoramic view of life itself – what does it all mean and what is truly satisfying in life? Unfortunately, Ecclesiastes is penned from a foolish humanistic perspective. This is one of the great paradoxes recorded in scripture – how does the wisest man ever known play the world’s greatest fool?

Date and historical setting

Since Solomon reigned as Israel’s king from 971 to 932 BC his literary works would have been composed during that timeframe. H. A. IRONSIDE suggests the following order of his writings:

‘Presumably he wrote the Song of Solomon when he was young and in love, Proverbs when he was middle-aged and his intellectual powers were at their zenith, and Ecclesiastes when he was old, disappointed, and disillusioned with the carnality of much of his life’.¹

Authorship

The author of the Ecclesiastes does not mention his name and provides limited information about himself. Jewish tradition has long ascribed its authorship to Solomon, though today that determination is widely debated.² Solomon’s authorship was broadly accepted

throughout the Church Age until Martin Luther rejected the idea in the sixteenth century. Presently, many conservative Bible scholars do not believe that Solomon wrote this literary device, because much of its Hebrew grammatical construction did not exist until after the Babylonian captivity. However, recent studies have called into question the validity of this linguistic evidence and reopened the possibility of Solomon’s authorship on a grammatical basis.³

We do know that the author was a descendent of David and was also a king of Israel ruling in Jerusalem, 1. 1, 12. Although the word ‘son’, in these verses can mean a grandson or later descendant, the primary sense best fits the text, as there was only one descendant of David that ruled over *all* Israel in Jerusalem – David’s son Solomon. WILLIAM MACDONALD makes a case for Solomon’s authorship by correlating information found in Ecclesiastes with what we know about Solomon elsewhere in scripture:

‘Solomon was a king in Jerusalem: of great wisdom (1:16); of great wealth (2:8); one who denied himself no pleasure (2:3); one who had many servants (2:7); and one who was noted for a great building and beatification program (2:4-6)’.⁴

Given the known inspired writers of scripture, what we understand about them, and their writing styles and thematic works, it seems likely that Solomon is the author of Ecclesiastes. On this point, WILLIAM KELLY poses the following conjecture:

‘Even if the book had no such marks as Ecclesiastes 1:1, and 12, who does, who could, speak of wisdom as in the latter half of Ecclesiastes 1 but Solomon? Who could sit in judgment of all that is done under the heavens, and pronounce on its nothingness as in Ecclesiastes 2, but one with the weight of that great king? Was any one that ever lived after him in Jerusalem

CHARTING THE SCRIPTURES

ECCLESIASTES

by Jonathan

Ecclesiastes is from the Greek word: *ekklēsia* (assembly) i.e., one who addresses an assembly

'What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?' 1. 3
 'There is no new thing under the sun'; 1. 9
 'I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity'; 1. 14
 'Then I looked on all the works that are done hands had wrought ... and there was no profit under the sun'; 2. 11
 'Therefore I hated life: because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me'; 2. 17
 'And moreover I saw under the sun the place of judgment, that wickedness was there'; 3. 16
 'I considered all the living which walk under the sun'; 4. 15
 'There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, thereof to their hurt'; 5. 13

Vanity of vanity UNDER THE SUN

I have seen all the works that are done under the sun

BOOK OF PROVERBS

I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom

Consider the VANITY UNDER THE SUN

So every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose, yea, and a time to be without purpose

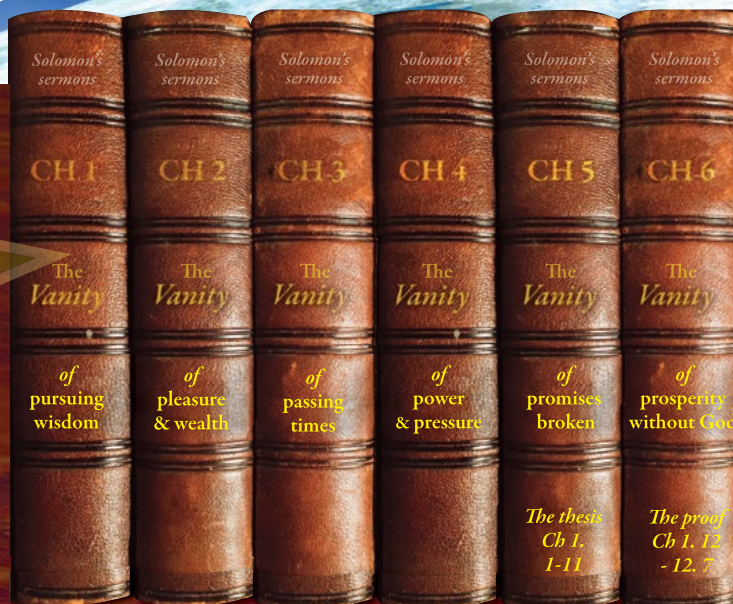
'now none but God'

Spring Summer

'I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him'; 8. 12
 'He that feareth God shall come forth of them all'; 7. 18
 'God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few'; 5. 2
 'A threefold cord is not quickly broken'; 4. 12
 'He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart'; 3. 11
 'For God giveth to a man that is good in His sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy'; 2. 26
 'In much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow'; 1. 18



'Vanity of vanities ... all is vanity'; 1. 2



'Of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh. **Let us hear the conclusion**

Vanities; all is vanity UNDER THE SUN

and behold all is vanity and vexation of spirit

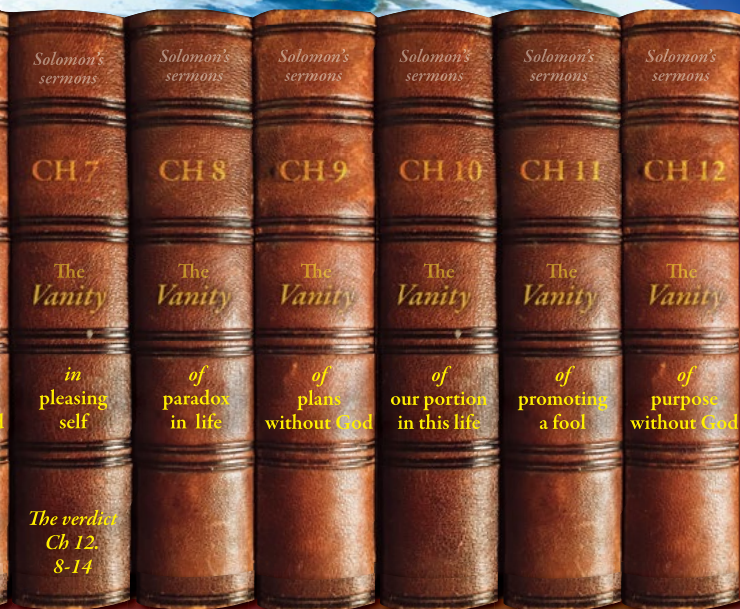
concerning all things that are done under heaven

work of God UNDER THE HEAVEN

a time to every purpose under the heaven.

Christ can satisfy'

Autumn Winter



'Then I beheld all the work of God, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong', 9. 11
 'I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is and it seemed great unto me', 9. 13
 'Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun', 9. 9
 'Then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun', 8. 17
 'Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry', 8. 15
 'Then I have seen, and applied my heart unto every work that is done under the sun', 8. 9
 'All this have I seen, and applied my heart unto every work that is done under the sun', 8. 9
 'Wisdom is good with an inheritance: and by it there is profit to them that see the sun', 7. 11
 'for who can tell a man what shall be after him upon the sun', 9. 12

SONG OF SOLOMON

'Then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun', 8. 17
 'Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days', 11. 1
 'Thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all', 11. 5
 'Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth', 12. 1
 'Or ever the silver cord be loosed and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it', 12. 6, 7
 'Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man', 12. 13
 'For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil', 12. 14

'Vanity of vanities ... all is vanity', 12. 8

of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man', 12. 12, 13

entitled so truly as he to speak of great works that he made, of building and planting with every accessory; of servants within and without; of such possession of herds and flocks and on such a scale of grandeur; of wisdom remaining, notwithstanding vast accumulations of silver and gold and the peculiar treasure of kings? There is no real ground to imagine an anonymous writer personating Solomon: an idea quite alien to scripture, though reasonable in the eyes of worldly men used to fiction. Here all is intense and solemn reality, as he had proved too well who could speak beyond any'.⁵

Accordingly, this author will proceed on this assumption and that the book was a sorrowful reflection of Solomon's life resulting from many poor choices – now his regrets.

Reoccurring phrases and ideas

Because Solomon confines his quest to understand the meaning of life to the material world, much of his efforts frustrate, even torment him. The answer to this important question cannot be found through 'under the sun' reasoning or experiments; one must get above the sun – contemplate divine revelation. Therefore, many of the reoccurring words and phrases throughout Ecclesiastes convey a general tenor of sadness: 'labour' occurs twenty times; 'evil' eighteen times; 'vexation of spirit', KJV, or 'grasping for the wind', NKJV, nine times; words such as 'oppression', 'sorrow', 'grief', and 'mourning' are plentiful.

The following is a list of key repetitive phrases and a brief explanation of their meaning:

'Vanity of vanities' – Vanity describes the emptiness of life apart from God and His purposes. That which is futile has no lasting value and will only cause man frustration.

'Under the sun' – In short, this phrase refers to life on earth

from man's perspective: man is born, he labours, he suffers, he experiences brief moments of fleeting joy, he dies and leaves behind all that he gained in his brief existence.

'Eat, drink and be merry' – Throughout scripture this idea conveys natural man's propensity to satisfy himself through sensory stimulating, which has no lasting enjoyment or worth. This is temporal man behaving temporally – he disregards what is eternal, ignores accountability to his Creator, and, instead, indulges himself and lives for the moment.

'I perceive' – This is natural man trying to make sense of the material world without the aid of divine revelation, which means he cannot accurately reckon what is spiritual, intangible and eternal.

In order to perceive the meaning of this book properly, it is important to understand that much of what Solomon concludes during his ontological journey is not correct, or is only partly true. This reveals the futility of the 'under the sun' perspective, that is, the fallacy of human reasoning apart from divine revelation. His dismal outlook is that life is 'vanity and grasping for the wind', 1. 14, that is, not worth living. The material world will never be able to explain the spiritual significance of life. One must get above the earthly viewpoint, that is, of being under the sun and seek and accept what God reveals about our existence to enjoy it – this is Solomon's point! Nothing on this earth will ever satisfy the deep longing of the human heart to be in communion with one's Creator – without Him, life is meaningless.

Endnotes

- 1 C. I. SCOFIELD, *The New Scofield Study Bible, KJV*, Oxford University Press, 1967, pg. 672.
- 2 WILLIAM MACDONALD, *Believer's Bible Commentary*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989, pg. 791.
- 3 SID BUZZELL, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, edited by J. F. Walvoord and Roy Zuck, Victor Books, 1986, pg. 902.

The Twelve Tribes of Israel

BENJAMIN

14

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

We have come to the end of our series on the Twelve Tribes of Israel. Along the way we have seen the hand of a gracious, sovereign God working out His purposes in spite of human failure. It is the same for the last tribe in our consideration, the tribe of Benjamin, named after the baby of the family. Benjamin was born to Jacob some way past his one-hundredth birthday and was named Ben-oni by Rachel as her soul departed. Ben-oni means 'son of my sorrow'.

Sorrow

Throughout the Old Testament, the tribe has an unpleasant habit of being at the eye of national storms. Proper low points! Take, for instance, their hideous acts recorded in Judges chapter 19. Acts which clearly correspond with Genesis chapter 19. Acts which led to a bitter civil war and near extinction for the tribe. Sons of sorrow indeed! Jacob had spoken of Benjamin as being a ravenous wolf, Gen. 49. 27, and, for the most part, we might see this being played out in their unique military capabilities. Left-handed sharpshooters, bowmen and fiercely courageous, they emerge from the Old Testament with a reputation for prestige in warfare.¹ Sadly, they only avoided extinction from the Judges chapter 19 episode by yet another nauseating show of ravenous savagery, this time conducted by the other tribes, the slaughter of fellow Israelites in exchange for virgins, Judg. 21. 14. They become embroiled in civil war again under Abner's manoeuvring to prolong the Benjamite monarchy. It is so painful to read; such turmoil amidst the people of God. It is always painful to see God's people tearing themselves apart.

Stature

Mercifully, there are positive things to say. Rachel's naming was overruled by a highly unusual intervention by Jacob. Benjamin means 'son of my right hand', a place of privilege and blessing. In the passage of time, Benjamin would quite literally occupy

a privileged position at the right hand of another tribe.

For a moment in the history of the nation, it looked like the tribe of Benjamin would be less the right-hand man, more the head. But the nation soon learnt that what they needed was not a tall ravenous warrior but a ruddy shepherd with a sling.

Consider the parallels between Judah and Benjamin's relationship in Genesis with their cooperation after the kingdom was divided. In the first case, Benjamin's life was at stake. You will recall the story recorded in Genesis chapter 44. And it was Judah who pleaded Benjamin's case in a remarkable show of self-sacrifice. In the latter case, David's ascendancy was at stake. The bond began via Jonathan and David's camaraderie. Ultimately, Benjamite warriors would defect to support the once ruddy shepherd boy and his ascent to the throne.

Benjamin stood with Rehoboam in 1 Kings chapter 12, and the mutual attachment of these two tribes was



thus set for good. When reading thereafter about the events of the southern kingdom, we should have Benjamite territory and peoples in mind.

Notwithstanding Benjamin's awful low-points, and his geographical proximity to both Judah and Ephraim,² his relationship at Judah's right-hand ultimately trumped his attachment to his blood-brothers.

How beautiful this is, that two equally capable tribes, in human terms, find themselves able to cohabit in the same physical and spiritual territory. This is not how things work on the shop floor or in the board room. Equals fight for the right to be top dog. But not in the company of God's people.

There should be no nemesis in the assembly. If you have a nemesis, then pay attention to Jonathan and David, Benjamin and Judah. There were low points as we have noted, cp. 2 Sam. 16. 5, but grace prevails and pulls us together so that the whole is more than the sum of the parts.

Salvation

This tribal collaboration carried the nation forward through dire days. Days when you would ask, 'has God cast away his people?' Well, let us ask three Benjamites that question. First, Esther, and then Mordecai, Ahasuerus' right-hand man, Esther 10. 3. Esther chapter 10 reads as a resounding 'no'. And, last but not least, let us ask the Apostle Paul. Writing after his conversion had taken his ravenous soul and transformed it by grace, he replies, 'God forbid'. But what could possibly redeem a tribe like Benjamin with its sorrowful past? The same thing, dear believer, that has redeemed you and me – the Son at God's right hand. 'For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen', Rom. 11. 36.

Endnotes

- 1 Judg. 20. 16; 1 Chr. 12. 2; Cp. Judg. 3. 15; 5. 14; 1 Sam. 4. 12; 13. 2; 14. 6; 1 Chr. 8. 40.
- 2 Cp. Joshua chapter 18 – Benjamin is wedged between Judah in the south and Ephraim in the north.

BALAAAM

4

Numbers 23. 13-26

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

Just as Balak was not a man to accept the answer 'no' when he first sent messengers to Balaam, neither was he a man to give up at the first disappointment. Balaam's failure to curse the children of Israel at the first attempt did not deter. We might take a lesson from that for it is sadly not unknown for the enemies of God's people to be more determined in pursuing their plans than many believers are in their devotion and service to the Lord.

The context is different but in the parable of the tares the Lord said, 'while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat', Matt. 13. 25. Undeterred by the initial setback, Balak said, 'Come . . . with me unto another place, from whence thou mayest see them: thou shalt see but the utmost part of them, and shalt not see them all: and curse me them from thence', v. 13. A question is raised as to how much of Israel's camp Balaam could see from the new vantage point. In the previous article, we suggested that Balaam saw but a fourth part of the camp at his first attempt to curse the people, v. 10. For the second attempt, while the language of verse 13 suggests Balaam still saw only part of the camp, EDERSHEIM following KEIL¹ favours the reading, 'Come I pray thee unto another place from whence thou mayest see them in their totality, only the end the uttermost part of them seest thou, but the whole of them thou seest not and from thence curse them me'. Did Balak consider that Balaam's inability to curse the people thus far was due to the unfavourable location, and, to be successful, Balaam needed to see the whole camp? So Balak 'brought him into the field of Zophim', i.e., 'the field of watchmen', a place where, in days of national unrest, sentries would stand watching over the land. It was located on the 'top of Pisgah'; from that same mountain range Moses was later permitted to view the land, Israel's promised inheritance, before he died. Moses saw the land, Deut. 34. 1; Balaam, the people to whom the land was promised.

The sequence of events is repeated: the altars, the sacrifices, Balak standing by his burnt offering, Balaam going forth to seek enchantments against the people of God, and, once again, the Lord put a word in Balaam's mouth, Num. 23. 14-16. There is, however, a significant difference. On the first occasion, 'God (*Elohim*) met Balaam', but on this second occasion, 'the Lord (*Jehovah*) met Balaam'. Noting the difference, TATFORD commented, 'On the first occasion . . . the record describes the One who met Balaam as "Elohim", although stating that "Jehovah" put a word in his mouth. In the second case it was "Jehovah" the covenant-keeping God of Israel that He met the prophet'.² In the first parable, Israel is viewed from the standpoint of divine purpose, a people separated from the nations, God's exclusive possession. But in the second parable they are seen as a people justified before God, standing in covenant relationship with God. In the first parable a chosen people and in the second a cleansed people.

The second parable begins with a specific call to the king, 'Rise up, Balak, and hear; hearken unto me, thou son of Zippor', v. 18. Since Balak was already standing 'by his burnt offering', this was a call to pay attention, to listen carefully, to understand. Why the emphasis? Clearly, Balak had not paid any attention to the first oracle; if he had he would surely have abandoned all further thought of seeking to curse those whom God had not cursed. The first oracle had been ignored, hence

the two-fold call to hear with which the second parable begins. How is it with us? How attentive are we to the word of God?

Three basic themes are developed in the second parable:

1. The infallible God

'God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?' In respect of His eternal counsel and purpose, God repents of nothing, 'For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance', Rom. 11. 29. 'He cannot be manipulated by enchantments he cannot be dictated to by seers, even one with the reputation of Balaam'.³ Not one word He has spoken can fail, for He doesn't lie. Nothing He has determined can be altered, and that is so whether we think of His word regarding blessing or His decrees concerning judgment.⁴ He is as faithful and sure in His judgements as in His grace.⁵ In Hebrews chapter 6 verses 13 to 18, the writer says, 'when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee . . . Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things [i.e., His promise and His oath], in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us'. What God says He makes good. But what had He said regarding the nation Balak wanted to curse?

2. The immutable purpose

Balaam says, 'Behold, I have received commandment to bless: and he hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it'. They were a people blessed of God, and none could rob them of that. We know that since the days of Balak and Balaam the Jewish people have suffered a chequered history of persecutions and pogroms against them. Today, we see an increasing rise of anti-Semitism, and we know from the scriptures there are awesome

days that yet lie ahead for that nation but, despite all, God's purpose to bless them will be realized. In the opening verse of Romans chapter 11, the question is raised, 'Hath God cast away his people?' Paul hastens to add, 'God forbid', and he indicates in verse 5 that despite the current, judicial, setting aside of the nation there is a remnant today 'according to the election of grace'. At verse 11, the apostle raises another question, 'Have they stumbled that they should fall?', that is, 'fall irretrievably?' Again, he says, 'God forbid', and looks forward to the day when, in fulfilment of divine purpose, 'all Israel shall be saved', v. 26.

3. The indestructible people

Four things are noted about the people, each the result of divine blessing, Num. 23. 21-24.

a. The divine pronouncement, v. 21

'He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness

in Israel'. What a blessing, especially when we remember the bulk of their history thus far had been marked by iniquity and rebellion. Moses will later say, 'Ye have been rebellious against the Lord from the day that I knew you', Deut. 9. 24. We could think of the broken tables of the Law, the way they despised the manna or their rebellion against their divinely appointed leaders, and yet here 'no iniquity' beheld, 'no perverseness seen'. It is suggested that 'iniquity' refers to what is inward, and 'perverseness' to what is outward. Remember, Balaam was beholding the whole camp when he said this, and observe that in all the parables he uttered there is not one mention of the people's sins. How could that be? They were certainly not without sin, but God was looking at them from the standpoint of His covenant, and their standing on redemption ground, perfectly justified before Him. In the midst of the camp, there stood the tabernacle with its blood-stained mercy seat, graphic foreshadowing

of the cross-work of the Lord Jesus Christ, the only ground of their acceptance before God, the nation an object lesson of God's abounding grace to cover all their sins. So it will be with the nation in a coming day. Regarding the regathered nation, the Lord has said, 'Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you', and in respect of the New Covenant He will yet make with the nation, He said, 'I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more', Ezek. 36. 25; Jer. 31. 34. What Israel will enjoy in that future day is the blessed portion of all believers in Christ in this present day of grace, 'Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus', Rom. 3. 24. Well might David say, 'Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity', Ps. 32. 1, 2.

b. The divine presence, v. 21

'The Lord his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them'. We can think again of the tabernacle with the cloud over the Holy of Holies, the visible symbol of God's presence among them. On account of the abiding presence of God, 'the shout of a king is among them'. The word for 'shout' often denotes the sound of a trumpet blown in time of war or a religious festival and there might be here the idea of the people, in worshipping the Lord, joyfully acclaiming His presence in their midst as their King. Looking on to the future, the prophet Ezekiel speaks of the millennial day when 'the name of the city from that day shall be, The Lord is there', Ezek. 48. 35. But consider the privilege that belongs to believers today, 'Christ in you [i.e., you Gentiles], the hope of glory', Col. 1. 27.



Endnotes

- 1 ALFRED EDERSHEIM, *Bible History*, vol. 3, pg. 26; KEIL, *Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, pg. 313.
- 2 F. A. TATFORD, *Prophet from the Euphrates*, pg. 41.
- 3 G. J. WENHAM, *Numbers*, pg. 175.
- 4 Num. 23. 19; 1 Sam. 15. 28, 29.
- 5 W. W. FEREDAY, *Jonah and Balaam*, pg. 59.

THINGS THAT CONCERN US

PHILIPPIANS

By **FRED WHITELOCK** Warrington, England

3

Your affairs, v. 27 – concerns

In this expression, we find the apostle is taking a keen interest in the saints and their progress in the things of Christ. It is not the idea of being nosy, trying to find out about secrets in their personal affairs, but rather he is concerned about their standing and unity in the gospel. Their unity was of great concern to the apostle for he knew that there were other assemblies having problems in their unity with one another. For example, to those in Corinth he writes, 'Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment', 1 Cor. 1. 10. The expression 'perfectly joined' may be better rendered 'perfected', or 'furnished completely in the same mind and judgement'.

But what really is the apostle's concern in this? It certainly includes the aspect of being firm in standing for the faith of the gospel despite those who are opposed to it. However, there is another important factor that may often be overlooked, and which causes the enemy to rejoice; that is the saints fighting among themselves. Hence the reason for the apostle's concern that they should strive together (labour together; united together) in their stand for the gospel of Christ. As Jude writes, 'Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints', Jude 3.

Sadly, many an assembly testimony is marred by bitter fighting, envying, and strife among the

saints. It was ever the Lord's desire that we should be one, even as He is with the Father, John 17. 21.

Your adversaries, v. 28 – contenders

Boldness in the face of opposition condemns those who are the instigators of the trouble, for God will judge them at the right time, as well as in the coming day. More than that, it gives evidence of the salvation that is ours, which is yet to be manifest in that future day. The enemies of Christ will be destroyed, and we will be saved.

In His upper room ministry, the Lord had forewarned, 'If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you', John 15. 18. And so, the expression here in verse 28, 'an evident [pointing out] token of perdition'. This expression is used in law of a writ of indictment; a demonstration or proof that their adversaries will be without excuse in that day of judgement.

Hence, we can take encouragement from the Apostle Paul as he wrote to the believers at Thessalonica in view of their persecution, 'Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer: seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our

testimony among you was believed) in that day', 2 Thess. 1. 5-10.

When Christians stand strong against intimidation, against the world, the flesh and the devil, it shows those spiritual enemies that their ultimate destruction is certain. When our spiritual enemies fail to make us afraid, they have failed completely because they really have no other weapon than fear and intimidation.

Furthermore, when Christians are not in any way terrified by their adversaries, it is also evidence of their own salvation. In the Lord, we can surprise ourselves with our boldness. Even though there are those who oppose us, we are not only exhorted to pray for them, but to also show kindness to them in order that we may 'heap coals of fire' on their head, Rom. 12. 20.

Paul himself knew the experience of what they themselves were going through and could sympathize with them, 'Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me', v. 30.

Your salvation, 2. 12

The very fact that we are saved is a wonder in itself and we must never lose sight of the fact that it is entirely of the grace of God. The day we heard the gospel of Christ and trusted Him as Saviour and Lord, we were made the children of God by faith, John 1. 12. And, as Paul states in Ephesians, 'In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise', 1. 13. That salvation will one day be fully realized at the coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, but in the meantime, the Lord is preserving us in the midst of many trials which we face. Additionally, God is working His sovereign purpose in each of our lives so that we may be conformed to the image of His dear Son.

The context of 'salvation' here is not that of the salvation of the soul, but rather that of deliverance

from the problems that were evident among them. The apostle has already emphasized that they should exemplify the mind of Christ and that nothing is to be done through strife or vainglory, vv. 2, 3. The constraints placed upon each believer is that we should not only exemplify Christ in His humility in being a servant, but also in showing love to all saints.

In other words, the apostle is saying, 'Make your salvation real in your life!' The lessons learned from these things is evidence that God is working out His own sovereign purpose in our lives. The idea here is to go on walking by the same rule, and minding the same thing, as he exhorts and gives of Christ, vv. 5-11; himself, vv. 16-18; Timothy, vv. 19-23; and Epaphroditus, vv. 25-30. God, who, in wondrous grace saved us, made us His own, has an end product in view, and that

is that we will 'be conformed to the image of his Son', Rom. 8. 29, and that we should 'not be conformed to this world: but . . . transformed by the renewing of . . . [our] mind, that [we] may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God', Rom. 12. 2. Therefore, our lives should show all that is of His heart and desire, as Paul states in Ephesians chapter 2 verse 10, 'For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them'.

In much the same way, the writer exhorts the Jewish believers as follows: 'But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak. For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints,

and do minister. And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: that ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises', Heb. 6. 9-12.

Furthermore, we should be thankful for that which God is doing in our lives, remembering that it is not only for our good, but also for His glory. We also notice that the apostle states that we be blameless before the world, in order that we be not ashamed before the Lord, when He comes, 1 John 2. 28.

May the Lord help us in our daily walk with Him to exemplify and glorify Him in all our ways, and to take courage that the day will come when He will say to us, 'Well done, good and faithful servant . . . enter thou into the joy of thy Lord', Matt. 25. 21.



What does the Bible tell us about the future?

Israel – What is the nation's role in the 1,000-year reign of Christ?

By **MALCOLM DAVIS** Leeds, England

10

The Old Testament prophecies are full of references to Israel's regathering from all parts of the world and to their full restoration to the Lord under the New Covenant. These events will immediately follow their supernatural deliverance from annihilation by the glorious second coming of Christ to the Mount of Olives to rescue them at the climax of the campaign of Armageddon around Jerusalem. Then, the survivors of the nation will deeply repent of their rejection of their true Messiah as they recognize Him 'whom they have pierced', Zech. 12. 10, and be converted as a nation in a day, Isa. 66. 8. Only the believing remnant of the nation will survive the judgements of that time and enter Christ's kingdom on earth in their mortal bodies. All apostates and unbelievers among them will die at its beginning, judged by Christ in a wilderness location near the Promised Land, Ezek. 20. 34-38. The righteous, believing dead of Israel from all ages of time will be resurrected in the last stage of the first resurrection of the just at the end of the tribulation, Rev. 20. 4-6. They will be rewarded, and then enter the earthly kingdom of Christ in glorified bodies, Dan. 12. 1-3. The New Testament confirms these truths, especially in Romans chapter 11, which clearly concerns God's earthly people, Israel, and not the New Testament Church.

The unconditional New Covenant made with the houses of Israel and Judah will be the basis for the Lord's restored relationship with them, see especially Jer. 31. 31-34. This will replace the former covenant of Moses; a conditional covenant of Law based on their works of obedience. The nation always failed to keep the covenant of law and thus lost occupancy of their Promised Land. Under the New Covenant, God will freely forgive them, the Holy Spirit will come to indwell every believing Israelite, and thus enable them to keep God's laws. In the same way today, Christians are enabled to serve Christ acceptably; for we have come into the spiritual, though not the material or earthly,

blessings of this future covenant with God's earthly nation many years before they will do so.

Throughout the millennial kingdom, Israel will occupy the whole extent of their Promised Land for the first time, from the brook of Egypt to the River Euphrates. Then will be fulfilled Moses' prediction that Israel will be the head, or chief, of the nations, not the tail, as has happened throughout much of history, Deut. 28. 13. They will bask in the reflected glory of their great Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who will sit on the throne of the whole world. It will be the day of their greatest blessing, and all other nations will benefit from this.

The role of Israel in the administration of the millennium

First and foremost, their true Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, whom the nation decisively rejected and crucified at His first coming in grace, will reign upon His throne from Jerusalem. He will be without a rival as the prophesied Son of David and acknowledged as King of kings and Lord of lords. He will receive His rightful due from earth's inhabitants, being the object of universal worship and obedience, until all His enemies are subdued.

Second, other faithful believers, from both Old Testament and New Testament days, will be enlisted to share His rule as part of His civil service. Despite some uncertainties in interpreting some of the relevant scriptures, we can probably name a few of these favoured believers. Some will serve as resurrected saints while others, as survivors of the tribulation, will serve in their mortal bodies. It is likely that the resurrected King David will be chief among these, an honoured prince, as is predicted in many scriptures, and they may not all be understood to refer only to Christ Himself as 'great David's greater Son'. Daniel will have a place in Christ's kingdom, Dan. 12. 13; also, probably Zerubbabel, Hag. 2. 23. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will be there, Matt. 8. 11, while the twelve apostles will sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel, Matt. 19. 28. Members of the New Testament Church and resurrected tribulation martyrs are also promised that they will reign with Christ with varying degrees of responsibility.¹

Less clear are the scriptures concerning an unnamed prince, mentioned only in the final chapters of Ezekiel concerning the millennial temple. He will offer sin offerings for himself and will have sons who can inherit from him, so he must have been married and be still a mortal believer, not a resurrected one, Ezek. 45. 22; 46. 16-18. More probably, he will be a faithful survivor of the tribulation, not a glorified saint. This seems to rule out the possibility that he will be King David

in resurrection, since resurrected saints neither marry nor are given in marriage, Matt. 22. 30. He will be a privileged believer representing the Lord to the people and the people to the Lord and will be given a special area of the central part of the Promised Land as his portion of Israel's inheritance.

The role of Israel in witness to the Gentiles during the millennium

The Lord has always desired that the nation of Israel should be His witnesses to the Gentile nations that He is the only true God and Saviour, Isa. 43. 10-12. In this responsibility, the nation has until now signally failed, misrepresenting the Lord badly by their wrong conduct and idolatrous practices through the centuries. They have selfishly reserved all of their privileges and blessings for themselves, rather than using them to bless the other nations, as God intended them to do. Salvation was intended to be of the Jews for everyone else too, not exclusively for themselves alone.

However, during the millennium this regrettable situation will become radically different for the better, once the remnant of Israel has become a saved nation. They will witness faithfully to all nations throughout the rest of the world, propagating the knowledge of the glory of the Lord in the way that He had always intended, because they will all know the Lord and His will and word from the heart as never before. Several scriptures confirm this truth. Both Isaiah and Micah spoke about it, saying that many nations would voluntarily encourage one another to go up to the mountain of the Lord in Jerusalem to the millennial temple to learn there concerning His ways and word, Isa. 2. 2; Mic. 4. 2. Zechariah later confirmed this in his post-exilic prophecies of Israel's restoration, saying that many peoples and mighty nations from the Gentiles would grasp the garment of a Jew, and plead with him, saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you', Zech. 8. 22, 23 NASB.

At last, the Jews will become good witnesses for their Lord, fulfilling their mission faithfully. Hallelujah for His grace to them!

The role of Israel in the worship of the millennial temple in Jerusalem

Soon after the exodus from Egypt, the Lord had said to Israel that, if they would obey His voice and keep His covenant, they would be to Him 'a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation', Exod. 19. 5, 6. In this desire of His they failed very badly from the outset. They worshipped the golden calf image at the foot of Sinai so that only the tribe of Levi was allowed to engage in priestly service in the tabernacle and, later, the temple. Even this tribe became confused between the families of Eleazar and Ithamar, and the later Levites were largely unfaithful in their responsibility, many of them becoming idolatrous and apostate, unfit for their service to the Lord and His people.

However, in the millennial temple all will be put right. Only Levites from the priestly line of Zadok will be allowed to serve as priests then, because they alone in their tribe remained faithful to King David during the dark days of the rebellion of Absalom, Ezek. 44. 15, 16. All other Levites will be assigned less prominent duties, and will not be permitted to serve at the new enlarged altar of sacrifice. This will be situated in the very centre of the temple complex, unlike the old brazen altar in the tabernacle or temple, thus forever reminding mankind of the centrality of Christ's sacrifice on the cross in the Lord's purposes of grace.

Several of the Old Testament feasts with their sacrifices will be celebrated regularly during the millennium: namely, the Passover, the basis of all redemption; the subsequent Feast of Unleavened Bread, emphasizing the necessity for holiness of life; and the Feast of Tabernacles, which illustrated the blessings of the millennial kingdom. However, some of the other feasts will not be celebrated, because their significance will have been fulfilled,

either in Christ's resurrection (the Feast of Firstfruits), or in Pentecost and the Church by then in glory (the Feast of Weeks), or in the regathering of Israel (the Feast of Trumpets), or in Israel's repentance and conversion at Christ's glorious appearing (the Day of Atonement). The weekly Sabbath, not the present Lord's Day, will be regularly kept. The animal sacrifices offered then will be memorial offerings, pointing back to Calvary, just as the present-day Lord's Supper points back to Christ's sacrifice there, but will not add anything to His unique, unrepeatable sacrifice for sin. They will illustrate gospel truth for those generations.

Finally, the Shekinah glory cloud of the Lord's presence will return at the beginning of the millennium to dwell once again in the new temple, so that the city of Jerusalem is called Jehovah-Shammah, 'The Lord is there', Ezek. 48. 35.

The advantages of New Testament Christians over Israelite believers in the millennium

The Church is the Bride of Christ, and will be nearest to Him throughout eternity, whereas restored Israel is the wife of Jehovah, and her blessings are largely earthly and material, although they will enjoy a close spiritual relationship with their Messiah.

Today, in the day of grace, Christians enjoy a closer relationship with their Lord than believers in Israel ever will during the millennium. Even the most privileged Israelites then, such as the priests and the unnamed prince, will have restrictions placed upon them which we do not have now.

Therefore, how good it is to live in the present age; we enjoy such great blessings from our gracious Lord's hand which others will never know in the same way! Praise His Name! Do we fully appreciate this?

Endnote

1 Matt. 25. 14-23; 1 Cor. 6. 2; Rev. 20. 4.

The Son – His Rule on Earth

By **RANDAL AMOS** Oregon, USA

9

In the past we have the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of the Son of the living God, Christ Jesus. In the present, we have the intercession of the Son of God, the Lord Jesus, as our Great High Priest and helper. In the future, we have the salvation by Christ the Son in His coming again to deliver the believer from coming wrath. And then we also have the kingdom of God where the Son will be ruling as King with peace on earth and good will towards men.

The Lord Jesus Christ is God's elect and chosen. As Psalm 2 verse 7 teaches, 'the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee'. And the Lord further promises His Son that He will be given the whole earth for His possession. God His Father thinks that much of Him.

I would like to consider ten features of the Son's kingdom on earth through the lens of the prophet Isaiah. Many of these features are what the unrepentant world is striving for now. But these ten longings will only come to pass when our Lord Jesus Christ sits on the throne of His glory in Jerusalem. And it is only the righteous that will inherit this kingdom. The unrighteous will not be allowed in, for then it would not be a peaceful and just kingdom, would it?

1. Weapons disarmament and military defunding

Gone will be the military of all nations. It, with its training programmes, will be defunded. Weapons of war with their materials will be converted into tools of agriculture for the sustaining and nourishment of all peoples. Isaiah reminds us, 'And he [the Son] shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more', Isa. 2. 4.

Because it is only those who are righteous through the gospel who

inherit the kingdom, these weapons will not be necessary, unlike today where the heart of man is wicked and unrighteous.

2. Lasting peace – the Son is the Prince of Peace

To know Him is to know peace. But, no Him, no peace! 'For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder . . . Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this', Isa. 9. 6, 7.

3. Religious unity

There will be a world religion as all humanity will believe and love the same God and His beloved Son. No more religious wars and divisions. For only the righteous, blessed by the Father, will be allowed in. The wicked will be cursed in everlasting fire, Jesus taught – therefore leaving a world of righteous ones, Matt. 25. 34, 41.

Isaiah the prophet proclaimed, 'all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he [the Son] will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his [the Son's] paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem', Isa. 2. 2, 3. 'The earth shall be full of the knowledge of

the Lord, as the waters cover the sea', 11. 9. 'The God of the whole earth shall he be called', 54. 5. Zechariah adds, 'And the Lord shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one', Zech. 14. 9.

4. Middle East crisis solved/ anti-Semitism gone

Israel will finally be at peace. And the Jewish people will be honoured, as their Saviour and Lord, Messiah Jesus, is ruling out of Jerusalem. Israel will be the capital of the world.

'Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise', Isa. 60. 18. 'Thus saith the Lord of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God [the Son] is with you', Zech. 8. 23. 'Jerusalem shall be safely inhabited', 14. 11.

5. Justice for the poor and oppressed

The world is crying out for justice – at least as they perceive it for themselves. This will be the reality of the righteous Son's kingdom. Equity conveys a level and fair judgement for all, rather than the imbalance of prejudice and discrimination. And it will be based on God's good and righteous standards to which the Son will be true.

'But with righteousness shall he [the Son] judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth . . . And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins', Isa. 11. 4, 5.

6. Law and order/ crime controlled

Because of the righteous character of the Son, crime will not pay. The wicked will not be exalted and protected but punished and removed when necessary. This will control crime and therefore bring freedom and joy to society. Isaiah states, 'he [the Son] shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked', 11. 4.

7. Ecology restored

Creation itself will be released from sin's curse and brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God. From plant life to animal life, major changes will occur. Little children will be safe in the company of large animals and have a lion for a pet. And the animal's diet will go from carnivorous to herbivorous. In relation to the animal kingdom, 'The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and fating together; and a little child shall lead them . . . the lion shall eat straw like the ox', Isa. 11. 6, 7. In respect of the earth, 'The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and shall blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing . . . in the wilderness shall waters break, streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water', 35. 1, 2, 6, 7.

8. Joy for all nationalities without discrimination

Blessing will not be reserved for one country or part of the world, but the whole earth.

There will be equal joy, blessings, and liberty for all. 'The whole earth

is at rest and is quiet: they break forth into singing', 14. 7. 'And the ransomed of the Lord [the Son] shall return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away', 35. 10.

9. Health care plus

In this kingdom age, the Son of God will reveal His messianic powers which for over three years Israel saw in His earthly ministry. There some, 'tasted . . . the powers of the world to come', Heb. 6. 5. 'And the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity', Isa. 33. 24. 'Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing', 35. 5, 6.

10. Perfect government

In the Son's kingdom there will be no competition of earthly ideologies represented by various political parties. There will be no opposition to veto a good idea, which has often led to gridlock in the present age. The reason being that the righteous, loving, faithful, holy, merciful, all-wise and just Son of God, the blessed Lord Jesus Christ, will administer

three branches of government. Isaiah reminds us, 'Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment', 32. 1.

Note, the Lord will be:

- The executive branch – the king
- The legislative branch – the lawgiver
- The judicial branch – the judge

'For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king; he will save us', 33. 22.

What should our response be now if we want to reign with the Son of God, Jesus the Lord, in His coming kingdom? Says the psalmist, 'Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him', Ps. 2. 12.

Editor's Note

Randal Paul Amos of Oregon City, Oregon passed away on November 3rd, 2020 at Providence Portland Medical Center not long after completing this article.

Randy was born on December 22nd, 1945 in Philippi, West Virginia and from 30 years old he gave his life to the study and teaching of God's word throughout the US and abroad. Over the years he has lived in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York and Oregon. We give thanks to the Lord for our brother's service.



WHAT IS IT TO LOVE LIKE JESUS LOVES?

By **RANDAL AMOS** Oregon, USA

This short article is a consideration of some of the features of the love of the Lord Jesus.

Truthful love, John 18. 37; 1 Cor. 13. 6

Love without truth is deceitful and hurtful. We might tell a person to 'have a nice trip' without revealing the dangerous truth that a bridge is out. This is friendly but is not caring love. The Lord Jesus Christ never sacrificed truth on the altar of love but sacrificed Himself in love for the truth of God's judgement. He came 'to bear witness unto the truth' – and was crucified for it. Paul wrote, '[love] . . . rejoices in the truth'.

Legal love, Hos. 12. 6 ESV; Eph. 5. 2; Rom. 3. 26

Love without justice destroys value. Hosea said, 'hold fast to love and justice'. To forgive a rapist without prosecution might be merciful to him but destroys the soul of the victim – for no value of their worth is shown if judgement's legal price is not paid. Sin offends God and merits death. For God to forgive the sinner, the legal justice of death had to be executed upon the Lord Jesus. That is why 'Christ . . . loved us, and hath given

himself for us . . . a sacrifice to God'. That is the only basis whereby He (God) 'might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus'. Legal love values God – and man.

Abhorring love, Ps. 97. 10; Rev. 2. 15

In our world, evil exists and is harmful and destructive and does not glorify a holy God. Is it holy and good to love evil? If a child was enjoying playing with a poisonous snake, would it be love not to disrupt the child's joy? 'Ye that love the Lord, hate evil'. We are told to 'Abhor that which is evil'. The Lord Jesus said, 'The doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate'. Love abhors evil because love loves good.

Timed love, 2 Cor. 2. 6-8; Eccles. 3. 8

To value righteousness, repentance comes before granting forgiveness. Christ's loving gospel actively forgives no one until they repent of sin. When one is put out of church fellowship for open sin, it is only after this

punishment one is to 'forgive him, and . . . confirm your love toward him'. Like when trying to stop a moving car in a potentially dangerous situation, timing is crucial. As Solomon reminds us, 'A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace'.

Judging love, Heb. 12. 6; Phil. 1. 9

Because we love our babies, we make a daily judgement as to what is best for them, from food for their physical development to toys for their mental development. Not making judgements and letting them do what they want is not caring. Love without judgement is reckless folly. The Lord loves His children and so makes judgements for us. And He judges (chastens) us so that we learn, 'whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth'. He tells us, 'that your love may abound yet more . . . in knowledge and in all judgment'.

Obedient love, John 14. 15, 31

Many say that they love the Lord, perhaps in prayer or song. Is it true love if a child tells his parents he loves them but then never obeys them? The Lord Jesus proved His love to His Father by obeying His will to the extent of the cross, 'that the world may know that I **love** the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do'. Love sacrifices self. The Lord said, 'If ye love me, keep my commandments'. Love without obedience is like a tree without fruit.

Meritless love, Eph. 2. 4, 8, 9; Rom. 5. 6-10

Most people love the loveable. Their 'goodness' merits our love, making it easy for us to love them. But how many love the undeserving or their enemies? A soldier might die for a good friend but not for the enemy who is trying to hurt or kill him. God's love was expressed in the giving of His only beloved Son as a perfect sin offering – for us ungodly sinners, His enemies. Saving love is a demonstration of grace. It requires no merit, 'his great love . . . for by grace are ye saved through faith . . . not of works'.

May this simple meditation deepen our appreciation of the love of the Lord for each one of us.



William Kelly (1821-1906)

By **HOWARD BARNES** Westhoughton, England

William Kelly, born two hundred years ago this year, has been called 'the last prominent survivor of the first generation of Brethren (so-called)',¹ and was widely acclaimed as an outstanding biblical scholar. For example, the late PROF. F. F. BRUCE wrote, 'It is this manifest mastery of Greek usage which makes William Kelly's New Testament commentaries, especially those on Paul's epistles, so valuable'.²

There were a number of quite distinct stages of Kelly's life.

Ireland (1821-1840)

Kelly was born into a family of landed gentry in the eastern part of Northern Ireland. He was educated nearby and eventually – like John Nelson Darby before him – entered the prestigious Trinity College Dublin and there, at the age of nineteen, graduated top of his class with a first-class honours degree in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew studies.

Channel Islands (1840-1871)

His intention had then been to enter the Anglican ministry, but he was too young by a year, so he took a short-term job as a private tutor to the family of the head of the government of the small, isolated island of Sark in the Channel Islands; it was there that he was converted. He stayed on in the Channel Islands on the larger island of Guernsey, joined an assembly, and married. Then began his lifelong work of studying the scriptures in their original languages and publishing his findings. Obviously, his financial position allowed him the freedom to do this, possibly receiving a private income at twenty-one, as was often the case in those days for young men in his social position.

Using his skill in biblical languages, he offered his help to various well-known evangelical scholars. These included Dr. S. P. Tregelles, who was working on ancient manuscripts to establish a better Greek New Testament text. Kelly was eventually asked to edit *The Bible Treasury* magazine, which was to occupy him for the rest of his life, often taking up controversial topics of the day such as the issues raised by

'Higher Criticism'. Even scholars of the established church and their like in nonconformist groups, eventually expressed their respect for this publication.

During these years he travelled little but on one rare visit to the mainland he met John Nelson Darby, whom he had come to appreciate from his writings. They became close associates, with Kelly eventually acting as editor of all Darby's works, which, it appeared, needed some editing!

During his time in Guernsey, he published much of his own material, as well as overseeing the publication of the writings of other authors in the magazine. His first major book was in 1860, a commentary on the book of Revelation, based on his own Greek text. This was to set the standard of his later publications, of which most were produced while he was in Guernsey.

London (1871-1906)

In 1871, Kelly moved his family to the very opposite kind of life, to Blackheath, then just a few miles south of London. Kelly and his family settled into a large assembly at Blackheath and he soon took the opportunity to start a series of Tuesday evening Bible



addresses at Bennett Park Hall. These went on for the rest of his life. They gained for him a great reputation around the country. The subjects usually formed the basis of later publications.

It was here that he was drawn into the mainstream of Exclusive Brethren affairs, and, although previously isolated from these things, he now found himself having to take a public stand on various issues. Given his now considerable reputation, anything he said was taken up by others. Towards the end of his life, Darby adopted certain controversial positions and a split occurred. People rallied around their champions, and it wasn't too long before there was a division into Darby Brethren and Kelly Brethren.

Kelly wrote over one hundred commentaries on individual Bible books, and also printed lectures about particular theological subjects, as well as numerous pamphlets. He was a great correspondent and was in touch with leading evangelical scholars in the UK and Europe. He remained active all his adult life, and several of his best expositions were published during the last fifteen years of his life. Over the years he had accumulated an extensive library of some 15,000 books. Concerned about what would happen to it, Kelly took the advice of his friend the Archbishop of York, and left it to the Middlesbrough Public Library, where it is until the present day!

When Kelly died on 27th March 1906, one old friend, an aged clergyman, wrote, 'He was pre-eminently "a faithful man, and feared God above many"', Neh. 7. 2'.³

Kelly's legacy

Readers will be happy to learn that all of William Kelly's works are available free online (and downloadable) at www.stempublishing.com/authors/kelly/.

Endnotes

- 1 E. E. WHITFIELD, *William Kelly, in The Brethren Writers Hall of Fame*, found here: www.newble.co.uk/writers/Kelly/biography.html.
- 2 F. F. BRUCE, *In Retrospect: Remembrance of things past*, Marshall Pickering, 1980. Ebook published by Kingsley Books.
- 3 Quoted in E. E. WHITFIELD, *op. cit.*

WORD FOR TODAY

By **BRIAN CLATWORTHY** Newbury, England

Shebo (*Agate*)

Shebuah (*Oath, curse*)

Shebuth (*Captivity*)

We usually think today of the word 'oath' or 'vow' in a number of specific contexts. This could be, positively, the swearing of an oath in a court of law, swearing loyalty to a leader, or commitment to someone through a vow, as in a marriage ceremony, or negatively, when someone uses a profane expletive or offensive language. Some of these meanings can be detected in the use of the Hebrew word *shebuah* in the Old Testament, but this needs to be qualified. The word was never used of expletives in the Old Testament, unlike the New Testament, and while it was used in both human and divine contexts, the Bible to some extent makes a distinction between a vow and an oath. An oath was sworn by at least two parties who made a solemn promise to fulfil it, with a curse attached for non-compliance. A vow, however, might bear all the hallmarks of an oath, but usually was directed towards God. This distinction has been expressed as follows, 'The vow normally includes an oath formula, but its direction is vertical. Not horizontal like the oath'.¹ But this distinction may be more apparent than real, and, like many similar concepts, ultimately the 'oath' and the 'vow' became almost interchangeable terms.²

The word *shebuah* occurs about thirty times in the Old Testament, but, combined with the synonymous word *alah*, helps us to understand the import of binding oneself by an oath. One interesting point to note in passing is that the root of the Hebrew word *shebuah* is identical to the word meaning 'seven' in Hebrew. This has led some scholars to believe that there is a correlation between the number seven and oath-taking, as illustrated in Genesis chapter 21 verses 22 to 34 when

Abraham endorses an oath with Abimelech by giving him seven ewe lambs.³

We find oaths frequently referred to in the Old Testament in a variety of situations, and the principle behind the swearing of an oath was to confirm the integrity of a person's word. God Himself had demonstrated this principle to Abraham in Genesis chapter 24, hence Abraham's comments in verse 7 that God had promised to him on oath that the land of Canaan would belong to his offspring.⁴ So, if God kept His word, then it was incumbent upon anyone who swore an oath to keep their word and call upon God to bear witness to their oath. This mandatory requirement to comply with an oath, and the consequences of not doing so, are well illustrated by VINE when he states that, 'An oath even to a heathen king was so binding that because Zedekiah violated his oath to Nebuchadnezzar, God dethroned him and gave him up to die in captivity (2 Chronicles 36. 13)',⁵ cp. Ezek. 17. 18. False oaths were also condemned by God as they constituted an affront to His name, Exod. 20. 7; 1 Kgs. 8. 31, 32. Peace treaties between opposing factions were often sealed by an exchange of oaths, as seen in the pact signed between Abimelech and Isaac in Genesis chapter 26 verses 26 to 31, cp. Josh. 9. 15. Commitment to God was also expressed through taking an oath to the Lord, as for example in the case of Asa and Judah, 2 Chr. 15. 14, 15. This resulted in God giving them a period of respite from their enemies. An oath was also used to express love for some other person, as in the case of Jonathan for David, 1 Sam. 20. 17, effectively becoming his confederate, as many nobles of Judah did in taking an oath of allegiance to Tobiah the Ammonite, Neh. 6. 17, 18.

Oaths and vows were, therefore, not to be taken lightly by the children of Israel, and Moses prescribed laws surrounding such matters that

had to be complied with, otherwise there were serious consequences, Num. 30. 2-16. Exceptionally, fathers and husbands were empowered to annul the oaths and vows of their daughters or wives, but only on the actual day that they found out about them, vv. 6, 8, 12, 13. If the husband annulled the vow or oath after the day he found out, i.e., he delayed doing anything about it at the right time, then he was deemed to bear the woman's guilt and become liable for punishment, v. 15. Essentially, the let-out clause prevented young women from making rash oaths or vows, cp. Eccles. 5. 1-5. Most ancient people used some form of oath or vow sealed by an appeal to various deities. However, as one commentator explains, 'For the Hebrews to swear (oaths) by other deities was to ascribe to them the power and position of Yahweh and thus amounted to idolatry (Josh. 23. 7; Jer. 12. 16; Amos 8. 14; Zeph. 1. 5; Jas. 5. 12)'.⁶

The Hebrew word *shebuah* is translated in the Septuagint (LXX) by the Greek word *horkos* and its related words. The verb *horkizo* is found in Genesis chapter 24 verse 37, and describes the taking of the oath by Abraham's servant to ensure that he found the appropriate bride for Isaac. It also occurs in Nehemiah chapter 5 verse 12, where Nehemiah resolves an economic crisis by making the rich nobles swear an oath to stop them from exploiting the poor. The same verb is used of the oath that Joseph had sworn to his father Jacob, which Pharaoh later acknowledges, thus facilitating Jacob's burial in the land of Canaan, Gen. 50. 5, 6.

Moving into the New Testament, we find that the Hebrew word *shebuah* finds its dynamic equivalent in the same Greek word *horkos* that was used in the Septuagint (LXX). Whilst its frequency is limited, nonetheless, it is still an important word because of the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Matthew chapter 5 verse 33, our Lord refers to the swearing of oaths in the Old Testament. It is not clear which texts from the Old Testament He is citing, so many scholars think that this is a combination of texts.⁷

Our Lord pronounces, in verse 34, His judgement on oaths in what is often termed part of a series of antitheses in the Sermon on the Mount. At first reading, our Lord seems to be deprecating the use of any form of oath, and stating that a person's word should be the binding factor. This has given rise to the notion that a Christian should never swear an oath under any circumstance. The problem with this sort of blanket interpretation is that it ignores a number of other biblical texts, including the later fact that during our Lord's appearance before the high priest, He replied to his question under oath, Matt. 26. 63, 64. Similarly, Paul invokes God's name to corroborate his statements in Galatians chapter 1 verse 20 and in 2 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 23. We also find other examples of swearing oaths in the New Testament,⁸ so, before we draw any conclusion, we need to carefully consider our Lord's words in verses 33 to 37.

First, notice the context of His pronouncements in verse 34 *et seq* – swearing or taking oaths by invoking heaven, earth, Jerusalem, or one's head. Each of these is then qualified by the Lord as to why they would be inappropriate to swear or take an oath by, *viz.*, heaven is God's throne, earth is God's footstool, Jerusalem is the city of

the great King, and our inability to change the colour of our hair on our head. Now, taken with verse 33, it is clear that the intention of the Old Testament provisions was to ensure that men kept their word by preventing them from making false or perjurious statements. Whatever oath was taken, it was within God's jurisdiction, so it was the integrity of the individual's word that was at issue, not the fact that the oath had been sworn in God's name.

The Pharisees, and later rabbis, introduced, without biblical authority, a large number of concessions in this area so that many forms of oaths or vows were not binding upon individuals.⁹ As CARSON observes, 'A sophisticated casuistry judged how binding an oath really was by examining how closely it was related to Yahweh's name. Incredible distinctions proliferate under such an approach. Swearing by heaven was not binding, nor was swearing by Jerusalem, though swearing toward Jerusalem was'.¹⁰ Thus, our Lord's rejection of oaths must be interpreted in this immediate context, cp. Matt. 23. 16-22. Whatever our view is on the subject of oaths, the salient point is that a believer's word should never be impugned by others, Jas. 5. 12. Can my word be trusted unquestioningly?

Further reading/study

Introductory

Vow, oath in LELAND RYKEN, J. C. WILHOIT, TREMPER LONGMAN III (eds.), *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, IVP, 1998, pp. 919, 920.

Advanced

Oaths and Swearing in JOEL B. GREEN, SCOT MCKNIGHT, I. HOWARD MARSHALL (eds.), *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, IVP, 1992, pp. 577, 578.

Endnotes

- 1 LELAND RYKEN, J. C. WILHOIT, TREMPER LONGMAN III (eds.), *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, IVP, 1998, pg. 919.
- 2 T. W. CARTLEDGE writes: 'Rabbinic writings such as the Mishnah reveal that, in time, the boundaries between oaths and vows grew increasingly vague. Even a casual reading of the tractates Nedarim and Sebu'ot makes it clear that the rabbis made little real distinction between the two'. NIDOTTE, pg. 34 (Vol. 4).
- 3 This pact was concluded at Beersheba, hence its meaning, 'Well of Seven' or alternatively, 'Well of the Oath', Gen. 21. 31.
- 4 Cp. Gen. 26. 3; 50. 24; Exod. 13. 11.
- 5 W. E. VINE, *Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words*, Revell, 1978, pg. 94.
- 6 LELAND RYKEN, J. C. WILHOIT, TREMPER LONGMAN III (eds.), *op. cit.*, pg. 920.
- 7 E.g., Lev. 19. 12; Deut. 23. 21-23; Ps. 50. 14, 15; Zech. 8. 17.
- 8 E.g., Acts 2. 27-31; Rom. 1. 9; Heb. 6. 17.
- 9 Mishnah *Nedarim* (Talmudic Tract) 3. 1.
- 10 FRANK E. GAEBELEIN (ed.), *Expositor's Bible Commentary, Matthew 1-12*, Zondervan, 1984, pg. 153.



THE SEIGE OF SAMARIA

This is part 1 of a two part series

By **ANDREW BENNETT** Sound, Shetland

Introduction

The period covered in 2 Kings is a period of around 300 years. The first half of the book is largely taken up with the account of Elisha's ministry, a ministry that lasted for sixty-six years, a ministry made up almost entirely of miracles. The book records sixteen miracles that Elisha performed, and, interestingly, Elijah performed only eight. We may remember what Elisha asked for when Elijah was taken up, 'And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me. And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so', 2 Kgs. 2. 9, 10.

The second half of the book is taken up with events leading up to the captivity and the fall of Jerusalem. Israel had nineteen kings and not one of them was good and Judah had nineteen kings and one queen, eight of them were good.

There are many key words/phrases that can be found in the book. The phrase 'the man of God' is found thirty-six times, more than any other book in the Bible. We note that even in these dark times God still had His witnesses. Perhaps one of the saddest phrases that appears in the scriptures is found in this book, 'he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord', and that appears some twenty-one times. We do, though, have the reverse of the statement, they 'did that which was right in the sight of the Lord', but that only appears eight times in the book. 'The word of the Lord' and its equivalent is found twenty-four times. Even against the dark background we have mentioned, the word of the Lord was heard and its truth was available.

Whilst Elisha continued in the footsteps of Elijah, there are differences between the two. Elijah was a solitary figure; he went about

in a similar fashion to John the Baptist. He lived a life that was largely spent in a struggle against the evils of the day. In the life of Elijah, which is worthy of a passing note, he went against the prophets of Baal, he went against Ahab and Jezebel, and was 'taken up' not seeing death. Elisha, on the other hand, was a man who led a triumphant life. He was one who was found amongst his fellow men. You will note in 2 Kings chapter 6 that he was with the sons of the prophets. He spent time with the people in the cities. He was a man who never complained about his lot and a man who never fled from his enemies.

We might divide 2 Kings chapter 7 into three sections:

- The unbelief of the lord, vv. 1, 2;
- The uninhabited camp of the Syrians, vv. 3-16;
- The unguarded gate, vv. 17-20.

The unbelief of the lord, vv. 1, 2

Chapter 6 ends in such a tragic way. The king passes by two women in the wall and hears the harrowing story of cannibalism that has taken place. The situation had got so desperate for the people that they had resorted

to killing and eating the son. It was against that background and that plight that God acts in chapter 7.

Similarly, we need to remember also that Elisha was being blamed for the situation that the nation was in and, indeed, had a price upon his head, 'Then he said, God do so and more also to me, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat shall stand on him this day', 2 Kgs. 6. 31. It is interesting to note that the king was trying to make a scapegoat of Elisha. I am sure that we can identify with this situation for whenever anything goes wrong mankind is very quick to blame God. Jehoram was well aware of the power of prayer. He had seen that evidenced during the reign of his parents when it had not rained. Here he thought the same of Elisha, that he had prayed and the siege and famine had occurred. Yet, he ignored the fact that his sin had brought them into the situation. Paul wrote, 'The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God', Rom. 8. 7, 8.

Jehoram failed to see himself as God saw him and that was as a depraved sinner. There had been kings in the past that had started out badly and turned their lives around and were forgiven, but this king failed to recognize his need. We need to be guarded that this same spirit does not mark us. There are times when we think that everyone else is the problem and fail to see that it is, in fact, we that are the issue. May we challenge our own hearts in the sight of God to ensure that we are not marked by the same spirit that we see here.

Where was Elisha whilst this was going on? We see that he sat in his house. There was a price on his head, but he still sat in his house and the elders with him. It is the wise man in the Proverbs who says, 'But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil', Prov. 1. 33. Here was a man who truly feared the Lord and, therefore, feared no man. This is so amply witnessed in chapter 6 with the Syrian army that

gathered to destroy Elisha. Whilst the Bible tells us clearly that evil men will wax worse and worse, we need to remember the promise here that those that hearken shall dwell safely.

When we come into chapter 7, the prophet speaks and declares to the people that the steep food prices that they had known and the suffering that they had gone through will come to an end. Admire, here, the remarkable faith of Elisha. 'Then' – when things were at their lowest possible ebb, when the situation was desperate beyond words, when the outlook appeared to be utterly hopeless, 'Then!' Mark the implicit confidence of the prophet in that dark hour. He had received a message of good tidings from his Master, and he did not hesitate to announce it.

In relation to the faith that Elisha had to present the message, one who received the word and spoke, are we as fearless? How often are we marked by speaking the word to our friends and neighbours? We can

see similarly desperate situations around us and yet we either ignore or walk past them not willing to speak the word that we have.

There was nothing special about Elisha. He was not some super-human character. Fellow believers sometimes say that they do not have the same faith as these men. Yet Elisha was a man just like us. Remember that it was said of Elijah, that he 'was a man subject to like passions as we are' or 'with a nature like ours', Jas. 5. 17 ESV. He was liable to the attacks of the evil one just as we are. He faced opposition to his message just like we do. The difference, perhaps, is that he acted and did not put off his responsibilities.

Elisha had received a word from He who cannot lie, and he spoke it. The limited and expensive diet that they had known was about to change.¹ They were about to have better than they had experienced for a long time. The price of food was going to drop and provision would be available to them.

We come now to the unnamed lord on whose hand the king leaned. Instead of being marked by gratitude to God for what he was going to provide, he was marked by unbelief and contempt. He argued from the basis of what he could see and to his eyes the situation was desperate with no visible way out.

Can we not see here the sinner in relation to the gospel? They are seeking something visible and the message of the gospel is a message based on faith and not sight. Peter reminds us, 'Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation', 2 Pet. 3. 3, 4.

Today's mockers display their unbelief very seriously; they reason. For them, the word of God is null and void, just as it was to Jehoram's captain, and, having no confidence in it, they trust in the stability of visible things, affirming that they will never come to an end. They are willingly ignorant – and that is the character of their mockery – of that which God has revealed to them in His word. Their judgement is at the door.

Elisha wastes no time with the sceptic and says that he will see but will not eat.

God will answer the scoffers of this age. He answered this one with judgement and so, in a future day, will scoffers suffer under the judgmental hand of God once again. Matthew records the words of the Lord, 'And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth', Matt. 8. 11, 12.

Endnote

1 Read 2 Kings 6. 24, 25.



HIS EYES

By **JOHN TINKLER** Red Row, Northumberland, England

As John comes to the end of his Gospel, he informs us 'there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written', 21. 25. We do understand that the Spirit of God does not reveal everything that the Lord did, or said, or saw on the earth, but we have that which draws our heart's affection to One whom 'having not seen' we love, 1 Pet. 1. 8.

In this meditation, whilst the Gospels record what our Lord saw, using the terms 'seeing', 'beholding', 'looked' or 'looking', there are only four instances where we read of His eyes.

We just mention some of them for contemplation in our study of the scriptures:

- The all-seeing look, Mark 6. 48.
- The caring look, John 19. 26.
- The compassionate look, John 5. 6.
- The discerning look, John 8. 10.
- The loving look, Mark 10. 21.
- The searching look, Mark 5. 32.
- The watchful look, Mark 12. 41.

In Luke chapter 6 verse 20, we read that the Lord 'lifted up his eyes on his disciples'. In the context it would appear to be a shortened version of the Sermon on the Mount, Matt. 5-7. However, here the Lord stood 'in the plain', v. 17, whilst Matthew states, 'And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain', 5. 1. Some believe that they are the same event, but we realize that the Lord preached not only to His disciples but also to the multitudes that gathered to hear Him. Both need to hear the truth and it is worth repeating to different groups in varied places.

The proclamation of spiritual truth

In John chapter 6, we have the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand – the only miracle found in each of the Gospels. Verse 5 notes, 'When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him'. However, it is Mark who reveals His compassion on the vast throng, 'because they were as sheep not having a shepherd', 6. 34. He had taught them, but now He thinks of their physical need and the lad's lunch becomes a meal for the multitude. We need to remember provision for the spiritual as well as the physical. The need is supplied in a remarkable way.

The provision of physical food

In John chapter 11, we have the amazing miracle of the raising of Lazarus from the dead. There was consternation when He told them to remove the stone, for by this time the normal corruption process had set in. However, 'they took away the stone from the place', v. 41; they did their part. Now, He was to do His, with the enabling of His Father in heaven. He 'lifted up His eyes' and prayed. He prayed that the spectators would hear the intimate words of the Saviour and

that they might believe. Many did, v. 45!

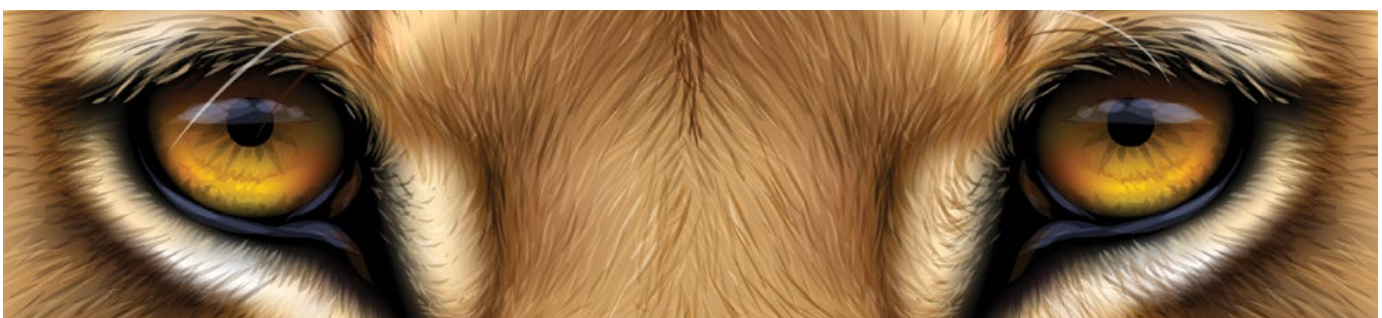
The prayer of acknowledgement

The final mention of His eyes is found in John chapter 17 verse 1. The Lord 'lifted up his eyes to heaven'. Here is the Lord's prayer. Here, as it were, we enter the Holy of Holies. He was aware that the time for which He had come into the world was drawing near. This was the prospect that lay before Him. His mission was nearing completion.

The disciples had the privilege of hearing something of the closeness of the relationship between the Father and the Son. Space does not permit us to consider all that is in this lovely prayer of accomplishment, but we know that the Lord was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

In a different sense, there is a challenge for us today. Thinking of the lovely words of the Saviour to the blind man to whom He had given sight, we read, 'Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee', John 9. 37. Praise God He has opened our eyes to His glorious person and has given us spiritual eyes to appreciate who He is, what He has done for us in the past, His care for us in the present and the preparation He is making for us in the future.

What a joyous moment it was when Isaac saw Rebekah for the first time, Gen. 24. 63-67, and when Rebekah saw Isaac. This is a foretaste for believers. We will see our Lord with our own eyes but let us remember His joy will be complete when He sees us, and that forever. In a broader sense, Isaiah states, 'He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied', Isa. 53. 11. What a day that will be when 'every eye shall see him', Rev. 1. 7.



QUESTION

Should I be concerned about the Judgement Seat of Christ?

ANSWER

In considering this question let us first state clearly what we mean by the 'judgment seat of Christ'. The expression is found twice in the scriptures, Rom. 14. 10; 2 Cor. 5. 10, although other scriptures directly or indirectly allude to this event.¹ The Judgement Seat of Christ refers to a personal interview that every believer will have with the Lord Jesus Himself, with the purpose of reviewing their life here on earth, and, in particular, the ministry in which they have been involved for Him. The result of that interview will be reward, and hence the Judgement Seat of Christ is closely linked with the numerous crowns mentioned in the New Testament for believers, which relate to different aspects of service.²

Let us also state clearly what the Judgement Seat of Christ is not. It is not the occasion where sin in the life of an individual believer is identified and the just penalty for that sin is administered, or where even a rebuke is given by the Lord. Such an occasion is described for unbelievers, Rev. 20. 11-15. It is called the 'great white throne' and so terrifying is this event that we read 'the earth and the heaven fled away' from the Lord Jesus who will sit on this throne. No true believer will ever face this great white throne judgement. This is because the penalty for our sins was borne by the Lord Jesus once and for all at the cross. The Lord Jesus faced a throne of judgement Himself as He stood before Pilate's judgement seat, John 19. 13.³ Thus, there is nothing to fear or be anxious about in relation to the judgement of our sins. They are gone and gone forever!

But should we be concerned about the Judgement Seat of Christ and this personal and detailed review of our lives? Paul describes his motivation for his evangelistic ministry in relation to the Judgement Seat of Christ, and says, 'Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men', 2 Cor. 5. 10, 11. While Paul could be referring to the terror facing the unbelievers he is trying to persuade (i.e., the judgement of God), it is more than likely Paul is describing his own reverential fear for God, a better rendering than 'terror'. Thus, Paul was motivated by both reverential fear and love for the Lord in his ministry, v. 14.

There is a sense, then, in which we should be concerned about facing the Lord Jesus personally one day, not with a cowering fear, but rather with a reverential desire to please Him, being conscious that we are accountable to Him alone.

One feature of the Judgement Seat of Christ that we should be concerned about is that it will be a time when hidden things will be made known. One aspect of this is the quality of what we have done for the Lord. Paul alludes to this in 1 Corinthians chapter 3. He describes the teaching ministry of those following him, referring to building materials of various qualities, such as gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or stubble. It will be a day in which 'every man's work shall be made manifest', vv. 12, 13. The Judgement Seat of Christ is also a time when our motives will be made known. We read that it will be a time when the Lord Jesus, 'will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God', 1 Cor. 4. 5. A parable the Lord Jesus gave illustrates the importance of motives for service, Matt. 19. 27 – 20. 16.

The Judgement Seat of Christ will be a time, therefore, when the quality of what we have done for the Lord, and our motivation for doing it, will be revealed to us. Although our sins will not be brought into question, ulterior motives, such as trying to gain the approval of others, will be revealed. Paul stopped short of making a judgement of his own ministry for the Lord before that time. He said, 'I judge not mine own self', 1 Cor. 4. 3. In Romans chapter 14, he also stressed the importance of refraining from judging the motives of others. In doing so we are judging another man's servant and usurping the place of Christ as the sole person to whom all judgement of the human race has been committed, John 5. 22, 27.

Endnotes

- 1 For example, 1 Cor. 4. 5; 1 Cor. 9. 24-27; 2 Tim. 4. 8.
- 2 See 1 Cor. 9. 24, 25; 1 Thess. 2. 19; 2 Tim. 4. 8; 1 Pet. 5. 4; Rev. 2. 10.
- 3 The same Greek word, *bema*, is used for the Judgement Seat of Christ.

Chairman and General Editor:

JOHN BENNETT

19 Alfreton Road, Pinxton,
Nottingham NG16 6JZ

Treasurer:

MICHAEL BUCKERIDGE

PO Box 10544, Grantham NG31 0HW

Secretary:

JOHN SCARSBROOK

34 Metcalfe Avenue, Killamarsh,
Sheffield S21 1HW

Ministry Articles Editors:

BRIAN CLATWORTHY,

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Editors can be contacted through the email address below or by post to the Chairman.

Other Trust Members:

**Jonathan Black, Andrew Dutton,
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*All committee members can be contacted at
secretary@preciousseed.org
or via **0044(0)1142 511700***

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- The magazine is published quarterly by the Precious Seed Trust, Registered Charity No. 326157.
 - It is distributed, without charge, to over 100 countries, many in the developing world.
 - Numbers printed are over 12,000 (50% of these going overseas) plus over 1500 in India.
 - Postage accounts for over 60% of our costs.
 - Including postage, each magazine costs around £1.10 sterling.
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 - Canada** **Precious Seed International, c/o Counsel Magazine,**
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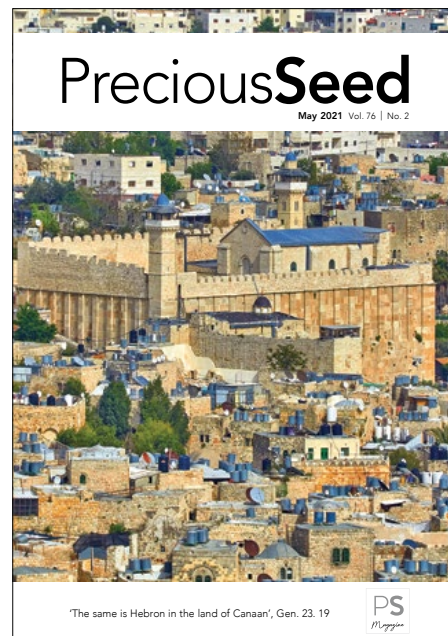
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'The same is Hebron in the land of Canaan', Gen. 23. 19

The modern city of Hebron sits in the West Bank territories and is divided into two sectors, one controlled by the Palestinian Authority and one by Israel. It is seen as a place of economic significance because of its fruit, pottery, and glassblowing, and is centred around the traditional cave of Machpelah. It is unlikely to be the place associated with most of the biblical narrative.

Formerly known as Kirjatharba, Gen. 23. 2, Hebron is a place of deep historical significance to the children of Israel. It was in Hebron that Abram dwelt by the oaks of Mamre and built one of his many altars, 13. 18. It was from here that he went and rescued Lot, 14. 13-16. It was also the place where three men stood by him in the tent door, 18. 1. Close to the final resting place of Sarah, 23. 2, 19, it was also the place where Isaac and Jacob spent much of their lives, 35. 27; 37. 14.

As the children of Israel returned to the land after their sojourn in Egypt, Hebron was associated with the exploits of Caleb, who drove out the sons of Anak, Josh. 14. 13; 15. 13, and later it became the place where David was anointed king over Israel, 2 Sam. 5. 3, and from where he reigned until he had captured Jerusalem. Sadly, it became the place from which Absalom's revolt against his father was planned and executed with the help of Ahithophel, 15. 7, 10, 12, and, as such, little is said of Hebron thereafter. It is in the return under Nehemiah that it reappears under its former name and as a place where 'some of the children of Judah dwelt', 11. 25.

This once great centre of Jewish life and seat of Israel's greatest king illustrates the truth that it is the people that make the place, and, particularly, the Lord's presence amongst His people that gives it distinction.

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