

# PreciousSeed

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'The heron after her kind', Lev. 11. 19; Deut. 14. 18.

PS  
Magazine

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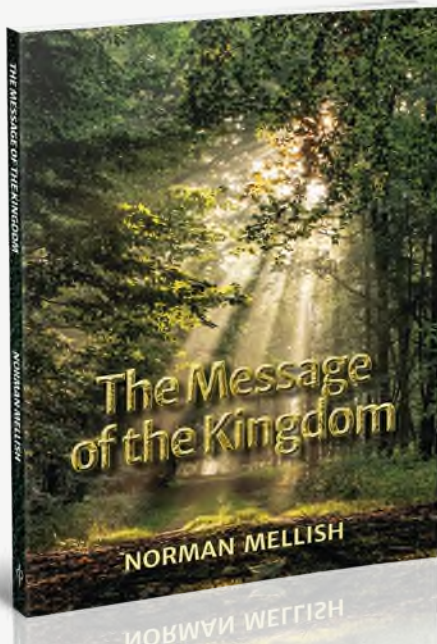
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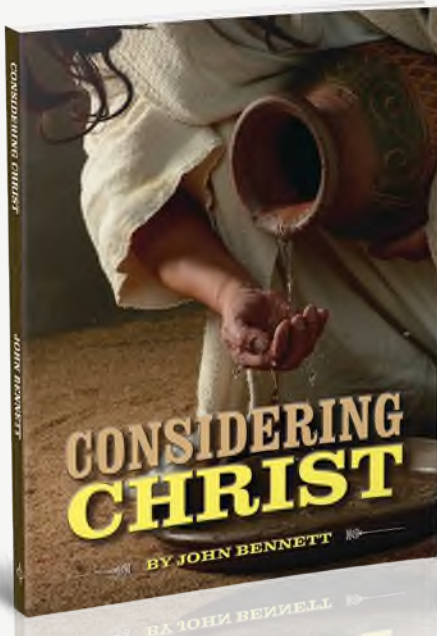


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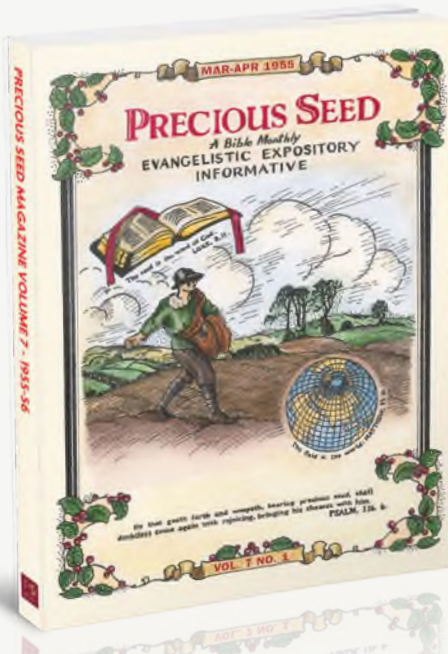


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# Book Reviews



## **Daily shall He be praised** David Gilliland A day by day anthology of Hymn writers and their work.

Paperback, 221 pages. Published by Scripture Teaching Library, Northern Ireland.

Available from Ards Bookshop, Newtownards, Northern Ireland. ISBN: 978-1-909789-55-5.

The book is the first of four volumes arranged to take the reader through the year in a daily reading format. This book covers the period January to March and each date marks the birth or death of a well-known, or in some cases, not so well-known, hymnwriter. The amount of research required to compile such a record, together with a brief biography of each subject, represents many hours of work, and that from one who is heavily committed to preparing and taking meetings on a very regular basis.

I suppose the evidence of a well written book is the

extent to which it captures the attention of the reader and compels them to continue reading. Although this book is designed to be read over a period of three months, I read it in three days! Having been brought up from childhood on many of the hymns referred to, I found it fascinating and quite moving at times to discover the background and circumstances which inspired the writers.

A very comprehensive introduction to hymnology is given under the headings: Definition; Diversity; and Development. Under this third heading, those with a taste

for history will appreciate the chronological lists of hymnwriters going back to Reformation times and beyond. These, together with those from the North American continent, 1794-1948, who made significant contributions, ensure that a broad spectrum of godly men and women are acknowledged for the spiritual legacy they have left.

Most of the biographies are accompanied by a photograph or print of the subject, which would have taken some time to obtain. I will read this first instalment again and look forward to the subsequent productions.



## **One is your master even Christ** Eckhard Bubenzer

192 pages, Hardback, Published by The Bereans Publishing Ltd., 38 Mountain Road, Kilkeel, County Down, BT34 4BB. ISBN: 978-1-913232-20-7.

As the back cover summary indicates, this book has been written 'as a handbook for all believers who desire to faithfully labour in service for Christ at home or abroad'. Chapters include: God's commission; Personal responsibility and harmony; Age and area of service; Looking after servants; A letter of commendation for full-time service; The servant's family life; Hindrances in the work; The service of sisters; Joy and suffering in ministry; and A call to service. The last forty pages are taken up by an appendix which gives further detail on references quoted and expands on some of those quotations.

Although his sources are clearly selective, the author has spent a considerable amount of

time in researching his subject. He peppers his book with lengthy quotes, some stretching over three and more pages, and from authors writing in English, German, French, and Dutch. Whilst much of what Bubenzer writes may not be new, it has seldom been brought together in this way before. The detailed contents pages enable the reader to get a quick overview of the book and also information on where they might locate material of interest. The information in chapter 4 was particularly fascinating, even though some of the names were unfamiliar. Similarly, his comments in section 5.4 on supporting servants are helpful.

However, overall, I found the book difficult to read.

Though the writer of the Foreword describes the book as 'a handbook [that could] . . . guide individuals or couples exercised about serving the Lord', its layout and structure bears too great a resemblance to a government report. Its lengthy quotations from the writings of others, which probably occupy around 40-50% of the book, could have been pruned, and some mediated for a 21st-century audience. Equally, some of the questions asked and answered seemed unusual, although they may be relevant in the circles in which the author has served. Finally, some comments seemed strange, particularly those relating to letters of commendation. The book may have some good points, but this reviewer felt it could have been better.

## ‘From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures’, 2 Tim. 3. 15.

There are many lessons that emanate from the early days of Timothy that should be carefully considered, lessons which those of us who are parents and grandparents do well to note, and to which some of us may feel we may not have paid enough attention in the past.

Perhaps the most significant statement made about his childhood days, is in relation to how he was nurtured and nourished in the word of God, ‘from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures’, 2 Tim. 3. 15. I suspect that he not only listened to them read, but he was taught to read the inspired writings, and, from that, learnt them. There is surely a simple lesson, and one that we can all learn. Timothy did not simply know Bible stories, although I am sure he listened to many! It is stated that he knew ‘the holy scriptures’. All too often, I have to admit, I mistake having a reasonable general knowledge of the Bible with that of **knowing** the ‘holy scriptures’.

I guess that is why Paul’s wise counsel to Timothy, in 1 Timothy chapter 4 verse 13, to ‘give attendance to reading’, is advice that has never become outdated. Furthermore, we do well to remember, in context, it was in relation to the public reading of the scriptures. Woe betide us if we downgrade or displace such an important element in any of our gatherings!

Returning, however, to the importance of reading the scriptures with our children, in our world, where so many mechanisms are available to educate and convey knowledge, may those with the privilege of children to raise, never lose the importance of reading **the scriptures** with them. There are many books, DVDs, and other ‘creative tools’, which can convey the essence of Bible stories, and hold their attention, but let us never for one moment allow the uninspired to displace the simple reading (and learning!) of the inspired word of God.

From that distinct and unique respect for the scriptures seen in their parents, grandparents and teachers, children will learn that there is a difference between ‘the scriptures’ and any other ‘story’. They will learn that it is not fiction nor fantasy and distinguish this holy tome of truth from all other writings. I wonder – and challenge my own practice as I write – how often do I read my **Bible** with care and love to those with whom I have opportunity to do so? When teaching children, is the learning of the text of the ‘holy scriptures’ at the centre of the learning objectives?

I am sure that all the contributors to this magazine would pray that, as you read the articles which they have written, you will find in them an encouragement to read your Bible and that you won’t treat them, or any other book, as a replacement for that most important discipline.

**SANDY JACK**

Ministry Articles Editor

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### PULL-OUTS

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# The Son of God

By **DAN RUDGE** Bracknell, England

The phrases 'Son of God' and 'sons of God' occur fifty-nine times in the King James Version of the Bible. Only six references are found in the Old Testament, most of which refer to angels.<sup>1</sup> In the New Testament, there are forty-six references to the Lord Jesus as the 'Son of God', a claim He made for Himself not only on earth, but also in resurrection, saying to the church at Thyatira, 'these things saith the Son of God'.<sup>2</sup>

Those references that remain refer to Adam, once, and believers of the church age, six times, four of these times translating *teknon*, children, and twice *huios*, sons. Thus, in summary, there are multiple sons of God by **creation** (angels) and **adoption** (believers), but only one unique Son by **nature**, that is, in essence. It should be noted that there are many other references to the sonship of the Lord Jesus in terms such as 'his Son',<sup>3</sup> 'my beloved son',<sup>4</sup> 'Son of the living God'<sup>5</sup> and 'Son of the Father'.<sup>6</sup> The name 'Son' distinguishes between the Father and Spirit, and thus helps our understanding of the biblical teaching of the Trinity.

## The meaning of sonship

Before proceeding any further, the meaning of sonship and implications of the Lord Jesus being called the 'Son of God' must be established. Being the Son of God does not imply He is the offspring or child of God; it rather signifies dignity, nature and character, or, in the words of VINE, 'the single title "Son" generally signifies that He shares in unoriginated subsistence the Father's nature, and is the revealer of His character'.<sup>7</sup> Again, western notions of 'Father' and 'Son' language can carry implications of source, superiority and subjection<sup>8</sup> but the Semitic and Oriental understanding is that of likeness, sameness of nature and equality of being. Thus, the name 'Son of God' asserts the deity of the Lord Jesus. The Jews were in no doubt that claiming God as Father was a claim to deity.<sup>9</sup> Sons are also those who reproduce the typical or distinctive traits of their fathers. Hence, Paul speaks of true sons of

Abraham, which has nothing to do with genetic descent and everything to do with acting, in genuine faith, as Abraham did, 'they which be of faith, the same are sons of Abraham', Gal. 3. 7 RV. In a unique way, the Lord Jesus has revealed the Father.<sup>10</sup>

## The subject of eternal sonship

This has been the subject of division amongst believers in the past. Exclusive brethren such as F. E. Raven, James Taylor Sr. and C. A. Coates propagated the teaching of incarnational sonship, that is, Christ **became** the Son of God at birth. If the above comments on the meaning of sonship are accepted, such a belief must acknowledge there was a time when Christ was not God! No! Scripture plainly teaches the eternal sonship of Christ. For instance, God sent 'his only begotten Son into the world'<sup>11</sup> – He must, therefore, have been the Son prior to His coming in! It is as the Son He speaks to His Father and says, 'thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world'.<sup>12</sup> In a chapter which constantly emphasizes the Father-Son relationship, John chapter 8 concludes with the glorious statement, 'before Abraham was, I am'.<sup>13</sup> He is eternally the Son. Then, of course, there is the irresistible logic of John chapter 1 which declares that the Word, which already existed in the beginning alongside God, and **is** God, distinct in person, but identical in essence, is **also** the Son, v. 18!

## The only begotten Son

A note is necessary on the phrase 'only begotten Son' used five times by John. This phrase does not refer to birth, and neither does it imply Christ is a created being. The Greek

is *monogenes*, a word that describes a unique relationship. The 'only begotten' is the only one of a kind – radically distinctive and without equal. And Christ filled that place from all eternity. As such, the word is used of Isaac for, though he was not Abraham's only son, he was his unique son of promise and dearly beloved.<sup>14</sup> John's five references to the 'only begotten' are largely used in the context of love. As one who has eternally enjoyed the place of divine affection in the bosom of the Father, He is uniquely placed to reveal that love to a world of lost sinners.<sup>15</sup> In summary, an accurate translation of *monogenes* would be **unique and dearly beloved**. Sadly, the NIV translation of the second Psalm perpetuates the false notion that there was a time when God **became** the Father of the Son. It reads, 'You are my son; today I have become your father', but the statement, as translated by the King James Version, clearly breaks into two parts. The first, 'Thou art my Son' is a declaration of eternal fact. The second, 'this day have I begotten thee' refers to an event in time when the Lord Jesus will be publicly brought forth and affirmed as such. The phrase is really a Hebraism meaning, 'This Son is mine'. In the context of Psalm 2, that day is the coronation of Christ as King on earth.

## Believers as sons of God

The Lord Jesus is the Son of God by **nature**. Believers are children of God by **new birth**, and sons of God by **adoption**. As far as nature is concerned, we are the 'children of wrath'.<sup>16</sup> Christ is the Son in a unique and exclusive sense as indicated by the double article '**the Son of the God**', used twenty-five times in the New Testament. Therefore, He is essentially and eternally the Son. Hence the Lord's careful language to Mary, 'Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God'.<sup>17</sup> True, He was **born** as a child, but **given** as a Son.<sup>18</sup>

## The Son of God in the Old Testament

Apart from Isaiah chapter 9 and

Psalms 2, there is another tantalising hint of the divine Son in the Old Testament. The words of Agur in Proverbs chapter 30 present a series of six questions, the first four of which concern the identity of an omnipotent being. For example, 'who hath established all the ends of the earth?' The obvious answer to each question is God. The fifth question is, 'What is his name?' a question which could not be answered until God revealed His name as Jehovah to Moses.<sup>19</sup> The crescendo of the final question takes the breath away, 'and what is his son's name, if thou canst tell?' The obvious meaning is that God has a Son. His name will yet await fuller and future New Testament revelation!

### The Son of God in the New Testament

Space limits our brief comments to two New Testament Epistles which emphasize the sonship, and therefore deity of Christ.

#### Colossians

The first chapter of Colossians describes the personal glory of the 'Son of his love', v. 13 RV. The succeeding verses contain a series of pronouns, all of which refer to the Son and unfold fresh glories of His person. For example, it is the Son who was manifest in the flesh and through whom 'we have redemption' and 'forgiveness of sins', v. 14. It is this same Son who is the 'image of the invisible God', v. 15, and **in** whom,

**by** whom and **for** whom all things were created, v. 16! He is 'before' all things in time, v. 17, and 'in him', that is as man on earth, was all the fulness of the Godhead pleased to dwell – and **continues** to dwell as exalted Man in heaven!<sup>20</sup> We thank God this same glorious person is the 'head of the body, the church' providing **control** or authority, and **care** or nourishment, for all the members, v. 18.

#### Hebrews

Hebrews declares the superiority of Christianity over Judaism. It is therefore essential that the majesty of Christ, the Son, is established from the beginning. What glory, then, is displayed in the opening chapter and verses! God is speaking. He once spoke in times past to the fathers by the prophets, and used various ways and means to do so, but now, at the end of these days, has fully and finally spoken in His Son, vv. 1, 2! God has nothing more to say than what has been said in Christ. All New Testament revelation will concern the glory and majesty of the Son. This One is the agent of creation, the outshining and radiance of the glory of God, the exact impress of the divine nature and character. All that God is, is seen in Christ! He maintains and sustains the order of the universe, and, after having once for all made purification of sins, He sat down on the right hand of the majesty on high, v. 3. So mighty He is, He sat **Himself**

down – it is His right.<sup>21</sup> As Hebrews chapter 4 verse 14 declares, this One is 'Jesus the Son of God'. And He ministers today as our Great High Priest. Note the careful language of the verse, 'Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession'. As 'Jesus', He has **perfect sympathy** and as the 'Son of God' He has **unlimited strength**. In the words of JOHN RITCHIE, 'Look up to heaven you crushed and burdened saints and see the mighty God engaged to bring you through. The sharpest pang you feel affects His heart; the deepest woe you bear is familiar to Him who was the Man of Sorrows. He trod the same path Himself and met with all forms of suffering that it is possible for his saints to meet and thus His sympathy is the sympathy of the perfect Man and his power the power of the mighty God. He can be "touched" because He is Man; "He is able" because He is God'.<sup>22</sup>

#### Endnotes

- 1 See, for example, Job 1. 6; 2. 1; 38. 7.
- 2 See Matt. 27. 43; Luke 22. 70; Rev. 2. 18.
- 3 1 John 5. 11.
- 4 Eight occasions, including Matt. 3. 17 and Luke 20. 13.
- 5 Matt. 16. 16; John 6. 69.
- 6 2 John 3.
- 7 W. E. VINE, *The Person and Work of Christ in Collected Writings of W. E. Vine* (Vol. IV), Thomas Nelson, 1996.
- 8 The note of W. J. HOCKING on the matter of subjection is valuable. He says, 'Subjection is a feature which is essential to the character of a *servant*, but exceptional and voluntary in the case of a *son*. A son may consent to become a servant, but a servant cannot elevate himself to become a son'. Emphasis added. In W. J. HOCKING, *The Son of His Love*, Morrish.
- 9 John 5. 17, 18.
- 10 John 1. 18.
- 11 1 John 4. 9.
- 12 John 17. 24.
- 13 John 8. 58.
- 14 Compare Hebrews chapter 11 verse 17 which quotes from the LXX of Genesis chapter 22 verse 2.
- 15 John 3. 16.
- 16 Eph. 2. 3.
- 17 John 20. 17.
- 18 Isa. 9. 6.
- 19 Exod. 3. 14, 15; 6. 2, 3.
- 20 Cp. Col. 1. 19 and 2. 9.
- 21 And also, by divine ascent, 1. 13, with the result that He remains seated, 12. 2.
- 22 JOHN RITCHIE, *The Tabernacle in the Wilderness*, John Ritchie, 1923.





# Old Testament women who appear in the New Testament

## THE WIDOW OF SEREPTA

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

This notable widow is directly mentioned in two passages in the word of God: 1 Kings chapter 17 verses 8 to 24, part of the record concerning the ministry of the prophet Elijah; and by the Lord Jesus in Luke chapter 4 verses 25 and 26.<sup>1</sup>

Elijah comes suddenly into the divine narrative. No details are given concerning his parents, his age or upbringing, and the first reference concerns the day when he appeared at **Samaria** in the presence of King Ahab, 1 Kgs. 17. 1.<sup>2</sup> If his appearance was sudden, we might equally suggest it was also unexpected, given the character of the days in which he lived. What those days were like is indicated in the concluding verses of chapter 16. Two statements seem to summarize the history of Ahab: the first in verse 30, 'Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him'; the second in verse 33, 'Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him'. Ahab was the seventh king of the northern kingdom of Israel. When we recall the preceding six kings were all evil men, it says much about Ahab that we are twice told he was worse than all the kings of Israel before him. Against that background, there bursts onto the scene a man who can say, 'As the Lord God of Israel liveth'. How good to notice that even in those dark days God had His servant, a man who had faith in God, who was conscious that he stood in the presence of God, and one who enjoyed communion with God. Like Elijah, we have to do with the 'living God'. Paul could say of the Thessalonians, 'ye turned to God . . . to serve **the living** and true God', 1 Thess. 1. 9, but is there practical evidence in our life of faith in God,

conduct and speech that conveys we are conscious of being in the presence of God?

From Samaria, Elijah was commanded to hide by **the brook Cherith**, (since Ahab would search for him, 1 Kgs. 18. 10) the Lord saying, 'thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there', 17. 4. If there was going to be a drought, then Elijah himself would be affected by it, and how good to see that God was concerned with the daily provision of His servant. The Lord Jesus said later, 'take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? Or, What shall we drink? Or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? . . . for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things', something well illustrated in the life of Elijah, Matt. 6. 31, 32.

After a while 'the brook dried up'. No doubt God could have sustained the flow of water in the brook had He so chosen. He could even have brought water out of a rock, as He did in an earlier day. Instead, He allowed the brook to dry up. Sometimes God does that in the experience of His people. One has commented, it might be the brook of 'good health', of 'financial resources', or of 'human friendship', but whatever the situation that might arise, we can be sure that God will have the resources to meet our need.

Elijah must have observed the decrease in the flow of the brook, yet

he made no attempt to move, until he received a further word from the Lord. It should remind us that God leads His people step by step; not until the brook actually dried up did He give further direction to His servant. Elijah patiently waited and word came from the Lord, 'Arise, get thee to **Zarephath** . . . behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee'.

### Elijah in Zarephath, 1 Kgs. 17. 8-24

Zarephath belonged to Zidon, a Canaanite stronghold, so the Lord directed Elijah to leave the land of Israel. In Zidon, Ahab's father-in-law was king, and we can assume it was a centre of Baal worship, 16. 31. But there Elijah would be sustained by a 'widow woman'.

Could we suggest that **nationally** it was not a place Elijah would readily have gone to as it was Gentile territory? **Spiritually**, it was not a location he would have considered, being, as suggested, a centre of Baal worship. Finally, **naturally** it was not a situation he would surely have chosen, to be dependent upon a widow woman, when widows are usually notable in scripture on account of their extreme poverty. Despite appearances, if God sends then the servant must go, so 'he arose and went'. We should note the prophet's obedience. The narrative regarding Elijah and the widow revolves around two events:

### 1. Divine provision in the face of dearth, 17. 10-16

In the sovereignty of God, when Elijah came to the gate of the city 'the widow woman was there gathering of sticks'. We don't know if Elijah immediately knew this was the widow, but the fact she was there, and that when she responded to the prophet's request, she made mention only of herself and her son, these intimated to him that this was the woman of whom the Lord had spoken. But what of her situation? She had fared no better in the dearth than the rest of the people. Now supposing we were not familiar with the following narrative, what impression might we have got about this woman from what the Lord had initially said concerning her? Most likely, that here was a choice servant



of the Lord, 'I have commanded [appointed] a widow woman there to sustain thee', one in possession of notable resources, more than ready to minister to a needy servant of God. If that was the impression Elijah had, then his first contact with her had every potential of being a blow to his faith. Her resources were at an end, 'an handful of meal . . . a little oil'. Her thoughts are only of cooking for herself and her son. Her expectation was just one meal that 'we may eat it, and die'.

This was the woman commanded of the Lord to sustain him.



So, he asks her to make him a little cake first, promising that God would minister to her need. Unlike the people of Israel, in faith she received the word, embraced the promise and 'went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days. And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Elijah'. In the subsequent days, the barrel and cruse were never full and yet each day they contained enough to meet that little household's need. A household, in Gentile territory, who lived each day in dependence upon God and their faith was not disappointed.

## 2. Divine power in the face of death vv. 17-24

This is the first recorded instance in scripture of a person being raised from the dead. We have seen that the Lord can minister to the daily needs of His people, and now He can equally be trusted in the face of death. He is the God of resurrection. Space forbids dealing in any detail with this incident in the life of the widow. Both were notable instances of divine intervention, but neither were specifically referred to by the Lord. His comment related merely to the fact of Elijah being sent to 'Sarepta', the Greek and Latin name for 'Zarephath'.

## The Lord Jesus in Nazareth, Luke 4. 16-30

The Lord had been brought up in Nazareth, and, upon His return, as had been His custom in earlier years, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath.

## 1. Words of grace, vv. 17-22

Having read Isaiah chapter 61 verses 1 to 2a the Lord closed the book and, sitting down, said, 'This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears'. He is the One of whom the passage speaks, and through Him salvation was offered to them. But what of their response? While they wondered at His gracious words, they said, 'Is not this Joseph's son?' He had been brought up in Nazareth, they knew Him, and, despite what He said, could not accept that in their midst was the one of whom Isaiah spoke.

## 2. Words of truth, vv. 23-29

Anticipating their reaction, He provided some evidence of His divine claims. The Lord said, 'no prophet is accepted in his own country', something He proceeded to illustrate first from the days of Elijah and then from the days of Elisha. There were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah; there were many lepers in Israel in the days of Elisha. In the days of both prophets the nation was in unbelief. To only one widow was the prophet sent, only one leper was cleansed. Both were Gentiles who simply obeyed God's word without making any prior request for some miracle to substantiate it.

In referring to them the Lord was drawing a parallel between the apostate nation in the days of the two prophets and the spiritual state of the people in His own day. The warning was clear that if they rejected Him, He would turn to the Gentiles who would receive Him.

How did those in the synagogue respond? Their unbelief was manifest. They were filled with wrath, rose up, and thrust Him out. While He was rejected at Nazareth, it is interesting that in the region of Sidon, Christ healed the Syro-Phoenician woman's daughter, Mark 7. 24-30. Again, we find many Sidonians came to Him, to hear His teaching and be healed by Him, Mark 3. 8; Luke 6. 17.

Perhaps it recalls to our mind the words of John chapter 1 verses 11 and 12, 'He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name'.

## Endnote

- 1 Though not directly named she is numbered amongst those women who 'through faith . . . received their dead raised to life again', Heb. 11. 33, 35.
- 2 Though 1 Kings chapter 17 is the first mention of Elijah in the pages of scripture, it is not the earliest insight, chronologically, into his history, for that we need to go to James chapter 5 verse 17 where we learn that before he went into the presence of Ahab he had already been in prayer before God.

# 2 Thessalonians

## Chapter 1

By **PETER DAVIES** Swansea, Wales

### Introduction

It appears this second letter of Paul to the Thessalonian church followed soon after his first letter. Some suggest it might have only been a few months later. Although a much shorter letter, it is an indication that things were continuing satisfactorily, with added information as to Christ's coming in glory and power for their encouragement and comfort.

### Greetings, vv. 1, 2

Here again, as in his first letter, there is no reference to his apostolic authority. He knew there was no need for that because they acknowledged that his word was from God. He simply introduces himself, along with his co-workers, Silvanus and Timothy, who were well known to them. Positionally, he reminds them that they were in 'God **our** Father and the Lord Jesus Christ'. They occupied a place of highest honour and privilege, even though their situation in Thessalonica was anything but conducive to such a holy calling. They were not of this world but called out of it to be His holy temple, His church in the wilderness of this dark and barren world. That is why it is so important not to forsake the gathering of ourselves together unto Him. He blesses them with two wonderful blessings – grace and peace. Grace brings to us God's enablement in our weakness and need. Peace brings the enjoyment of the calm assurance of God's rest and refreshment for each day in this troubled world.

### Gratitude, vv. 3, 4

Notice his heart is full of thankfulness to God as he recalls the wonder of what the Lord has accomplished in them and through them. Three things stand out:

1. Their faith grows exceedingly;
2. Their love abounds to each other;
3. Their patience and faith endures.

No wonder he is full of gratitude to God! The evidence of the work of

God in their lives was so real and powerful. How do we compare or measure up to this? Remember, they were pagans, idol worshippers, but God by His Spirit worked wonderfully in them, just as He wants to work in us, if we will let Him. The secret was that their faith was growing exceedingly; their love for each other abounded; and their patience, even in their persecutions and tribulations (note plural, for they were many), endured, or stood fast. They were unmoved by all the evil around them for they had confidence in God and a strong affection for one another, which empowered them to withstand all the trials and testing that came their way.

### Guarantee, vv. 5, 6

**'Which is a manifest token'**. It is proof positive that God is righteous, He is just, for in trusting Him they had become overcomers over all that is evil. Therefore, He will count them worthy of His kingdom for which they have suffered. Just as Abraham's faith was counted to him for righteousness, so too the Lord accounted them worthy of His kingdom because of their faith, love, and patience in this world. Amazing! What an assurance, promise, and guarantee for all who trust Him. Yes, we will suffer here, but He has promised we shall reign with Him one day.

But to faithfully stand for Him in the hour of trial and testing here, is a witness and guarantee to the unbeliever that the judgement that

will be meted out to them is also just; **'it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you'**, v. 6.

Paul puts it another way in his letter to the Philippians, 'And in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God', Phil. 1. 28. Paul reminds us in Romans, 'Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord', 12. 19. There is a day when all the wrongs will be put right, and we shall be rewarded for our labours. That is why he proceeds to tell them of that day of glory that is ahead, and in which they are going to share.

### Glorification, vv. 7-10

As well as a day when the Lord Jesus Christ will come **for** us, there is a day when He will come **with** us. This is the day when He will be manifested to the world, not as the meek and lowly Jesus but as the judge of all. We don't seem to hear much about this day of His manifest glory. We somehow feel that His coming for us His people at the rapture is all we want to know about. How sad, how selfish of us! When our Lord went back to His Father, after His death and resurrection, the Father said to Him, 'Sit on my right hand [my Son], until I make thine enemies thy footstool', Heb. 1. 13. This is the fulfilment of Psalm 2 verses 7 to 9. This is the day of His revelation to a wondering universe. I love the opening words of verse 7, 'to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus **shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels**'. Does this not make you look back and recall His words to the mob when they came to take Him in the garden? 'This is your hour and the power of darkness', Luke 22. 53. Then, the tables will have been turned – this will be His hour and the power of revelation, as to who He whom they crucified really was.

But notice He is coming with His mighty angels. They would have been ready, waiting for His call, when He was nailed to the cross.



He could have called upon them and they would have immediately responded to deliver Him. Remember His words, 'Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?' Matt. 26. 53, 54. But then there would have been no salvation for us. Jesus had, however, spoken of this day with His disciples when He was with them, 'For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works', Matt. 16. 27. Again, at His trial before the religious leaders He said, 'Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in

the clouds of heaven', Matt. 26. 64. How lovely that this coming day is the day His own will be able to rest. Rest from all their struggles against the forces of darkness and evil. Rest in His glorious victory over sin, death, and hell.

But he goes on to tell us that this is the day of **retribution**, vv. 8, 9, 'in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ'. Their punishment is described as 'everlasting destruction', not annihilation but loss of well-being, or ruin as far as the purpose of existence is concerned. The wineskins which the Lord Jesus described in Luke chapter 5 verse 37 were destroyed or perished (same root word as here).

They did not cease to exist, but they were ruined as far as their further usefulness was concerned.

But more, this is also the day of **reward** – 'When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe . . . in that day', v. 10. All in that day will stand in awe and wonder, marvelling at the exceeding beauty and glory of His new creation in His redeemed people. This is you and I, dear child of God. And, as an encouragement to these dear Thessalonian believers, he adds, 'because our testimony among you was believed'. No wonder Paul could write to the Corinthian believers, 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit', 1 Cor. 2. 9, 10.

### Goodness and glory, vv. 11, 12

He draws this study to a conclusion by reminding them that the Thessalonians are always in their prayers (Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy), v. 1. Three things they ask of God for them.

1. That they may be worthy of their calling. It is a high and holy and glorious calling, becoming the One who has called us.
2. That they would fulfil all the good pleasure of His goodness, and the work of faith with power. That they would seek to do those things that please Him, and prove the realization of His power as they trust Him in their service for Him.
3. That the name of the Lord Jesus Christ would be glorified in them, and they in Him.

How were these graces to be achieved in them, and also in us? 'According to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ'. We owe everything to His grace, beloved. Our salvation and the daily outworking of His purpose in and through us, is all of Him. Like the apostle and his helpers, that is why we need to be continually before the throne of grace that we 'may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need', Heb. 4. 16.





# The teenage years and the challenge of secondary education

When the eleven-year-old walks through the gates of their secondary school for the very first time, it is the beginning of the first day of a most challenging period in their lives. It is not only challenging for them, but also for their parents. There is a major leap from primary to secondary education as a huge culture change is about to take place in their education. How will they cope with what they will be taught, especially with what is contrary to the word of God? This latter issue does not simply affect a secondary school student who is saved or one who comes from a Christian home. There is the alarming consequence of unsaved teenagers being turned away from divine truth, thereby instilling in their minds an opposing attitude to spiritual matters in these impressionable years.

What is taught in Sunday schools and Bible classes is denied in the classroom. One of the main thrusts of opposition to the truth of holy scripture is the teaching of Darwin's theory of evolution and that the earth came into being by 'The Big Bang'. The creatorial glory and work of God and the foundation verse of Genesis chapter 1 verse 1 is utterly ignored and denied. Upon this basis, the young are led further into a multitude of ideas and statements which completely deny what the Bible teaches. Religious Education teaching varies enormously. Many years ago, it was Bible based, but now embraces religions from around the globe. This has broadly put Christianity in its widest sense as just another religion alongside the rest. Sadly, young people become confused with little concept of what is truth. Planting confusion concerning spiritual matters in anyone's mind is one of Satan's most powerful weapons against the word of God. Its origin goes back to the garden of Eden in Genesis chapter 3 verse 1 where the serpent uttered those words, 'Yea, hath God said . . .?'; a theme of the adversary throughout the centuries.

In most United Kingdom schools,

there is a daily gathering of all students (sometimes only in year groups) in what is described as 'an act of Christian worship'. Whilst these have varied over many years, they have now been replaced by lectures on discipline and school rules, celebrations of special events, talks by personnel from the emergency services, charity workers, careers advisors and well-known figures in the community. Some of these may have been helpful, but they have tended to replace the important value of the spiritual input. However, despite all the pressures politically and academically to sink the subject into the mire of error and humanism, there are a few Christian teachers and believers who go into schools to take assemblies trying to redress this imbalance. They need our prayers.

Political and healthcare pressure has also brought the subject of sex education very much to the fore, and the impact upon the background, sensitivity, age and culture of both the children and the desire of their parents can be neglected. Many believers would be shocked by the way in which childhood innocence has been ridden roughshod over and the way in which homosexuality and

gender identity are presented. This has had a distinct bearing particularly upon secondary school life.

There have always been problems facing Christian school students and one all too common which some often experience is bullying. Bullying, both physical and verbal, takes place despite a great deal of strategic debate over many years. It still haunts school life and has escalated with cyber bullying through the widespread ownership of personal technological devices such as mobile phones and the pressure to be part of a social media platform or closed group. This whole subject is very much in the 'hard to deal with' area. It keeps on being visited with good intentions. Sadly, a conclusive answer eludes those seeking to combat the problem. However, parents can be perceptive to changes in their child's behaviour, the small signs that all is not well.

Progress educationally can be hindered in the classroom by behavioural issues, and this is regularly tackled through various strategies, policy changes, staff training courses and the emergence of 'experts'. Teachers work hard with the problem but so often the root cause lies outside the school environment in homes and street peer groups.

Theft is another challenge. In some cases, there are students who are regularly involved in both stealing in school and selling to classmates goods that have been shoplifted locally. Scams involving mobile phones are not uncommon either. Smoking illegally obtained cigarettes together with drugs, both in dealing and taking on the premises, blight some schools. Computers now play a big part in education. Very quickly students become proficient in their use which gives them skill to expand their learning. Unfortunately, this gives them the ability to access the dreadful material so easily viewed on the screen.

The reader may question, why catalogue all these problems? Haven't there always been difficulties to overcome? To the second question

the answer is 'yes', but many in assembly fellowship went to school over half a century ago and it is easy to imagine school life based upon school stories which were avidly read in the mid-twentieth century. The rise of a freethinking, rebellious society is now reflected in every walk of life and, sadly, so often this prevails at every level of education. It is a challenge to children who are saved and those who are not saved but come from a Christian home. They can become quite fearful of students whose conduct is disruptive and threatening. They will hear and see things they have never encountered before. Ungodly influences will be brought to bear upon them.

What is the answer? What can be done to alleviate these difficulties? Some would suggest home schooling but that is very demanding. How many parents have all the virtues of academic ability, the aptitude to teach well, patience, time, resources, and suitable accommodation to successfully meet the demands of achieving a good education for their child or children. There are good private schools, at a cost beyond the means of many, some of which have an evangelical ethos, but they are few.

First, there is one major contribution which every believer can be active in and that is to pray daily for the welfare of everyone they know by name who is at school. Whether it is family, children of friends and neighbours or any other child one is acquainted with. The throne of grace is the place to petition for their spiritual welfare, safe keeping, and blessing. Do not forget to tell them that you are praying for them too. For many children, an interest in their progress at school is also a great encouragement. One may have to listen to an explanation of photosynthesis, what makes up the periodic table, why the Romans built their roads straight, and a vast multitude of other subjects. So be it. If you are interested in their learning, you are interested in them. Being interested in their life, their welfare, and their needs without being judgemental is a giant step to

helping them along the pathway of life. A listening ear may well also pick up on issues such as bullying and enable you to work with them to do something about it.

Is not this how the Lord Jesus Himself met the needs of so many whilst He was here on earth? Observe, in John chapter 4, how He graciously converses with the woman at the well. Think of the way He compassionately spoke with the woman who touched the hem of his garment,<sup>1</sup> His response to the roadside cry of blind Bartimaeus, Mark 10. 46-52, and the sweet fellowship with the despondent couple on the road to Emmaus, Luke 24. 15-32.

Second, the challenge of school life should be counterbalanced by a calm, loving, supportive and secure home life. For believers, a loving, caring home life is a prime responsibility. In an age of defiance, you cannot tell a child something is wrong if they cannot see that which is right being practised in their own home and family. Teenagers are encouraged to inquire widely, listen to diverse ideas, and arguments and ask questions, some of which are very challenging. In former days, some adults would dismiss these with the remark that 'we do not talk about things like that' or 'you do not need to know such things'. Teenagers in the 21st century cannot have their questions brushed aside. If parents will not answer them, then they will most likely get the answer from worldly-wise students at school. These types of questions cannot be ignored behind the skirts of 'preserved respectability' or an air of moral superiority. They may not agree or like the straightforward spiritual or moral answers, although it may surprise some adults that often teenagers accept and even respect a straightforward clear answer even if they do not personally agree.

Third, providing a biblical perspective on some of the topics taught will also be a help, offering guidance on the social and moral ills our children encounter. The Bible gives many sad accounts of the outcomes of such behaviour and the fact that the consequences were far-reaching. There are also a multitude

of very helpful sources that present the truth of creation and that use able and often distinguished scientists to do it. Elders may be able to tackle some of the issues through Bible Class topics or in the home.

There are no instant fixes. Parents cannot assume that their teenage children will have the same strong beliefs and convictions as themselves. That is why there is a need for scriptural principles to be practised and nourished in every realm of life. The Lord Jesus loves children, which is so beautifully illustrated throughout the Gospels.<sup>2</sup> He displayed a compassionate interest in their welfare. So should every believer. It is important to state that there is a multitude of very able, caring and committed schoolteachers who may not necessarily agree with everything which they are required to teach, but work hard to ensure that those in their charge receive a good education and are shielded from unrighteous conduct. They need the prayers of all God's people.

Pray earnestly for all who pass through the school gates each weekday morning that God will be glorified through every teacher and that each student will be blessed with that which is profitable for their wellbeing whether spiritually, morally, or physically. Above all, every believer should take to heart that the parents of teenagers do not need your criticism, they need and will value your prayers. Take the example of Epaphras, whom Paul commends as one who is 'always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God', Col. 4. 12. It is easy to quote but do we fully understand the immense value and privilege of a fervent prayer life? May the Lord give us compassionate, concerned hearts of love for the teenagers in these dark and evil days.

*[Editorial Note: The author spent a number of years working in secondary education]*

#### Endnotes

- 1 Matt. 9. 20; Mark 5. 25; Luke 8. 44.
- 2 For example, Matt. 19. 13-15; Mark 10. 13-16; Luke 18. 15-17.

# Albania

By **ENRIS NASE**

Albania is a beautiful country, situated in South-eastern Europe bordering Montenegro, Kosovo, Northern Macedonia, and Greece. The population<sup>1</sup> within its border is only three million, but in an ethnically rich region known as the Balkans, there are up to six million Albanian-speaking people. Tirana, with a population of more than one million, is the capital and is the centre of business, education, services, and governance.

## The past

Following fifty years behind the 'Iron Curtain', Albania saw the dawn of religious freedom just thirty years ago, when the light of the glorious gospel arrived again in the country, making true what the scripture affirms, 'The people which sat in darkness, saw great light', Matt. 4. 16. Since then, although the population is loosely divided as 70% Islam, 20% Orthodox, and 10% Catholic, the number of evangelicals has risen to 0.5%, significantly higher than the neighbouring countries which had much more freedom during the communist years. The main concentration of believers is in the greater Tirana area, with more than sixty evangelical churches scattered across the city, varying from large churches with 300 members, to small house groups.

## The assembly work

The assembly testimony started when missionaries from the Italian assemblies arrived in Albania in November 1991. A team of a dozen, led by brother Salvatore Corcelli, immediately started a pioneering work in the main cities and towns, while receiving regular visits by other brethren from Italy, UK, and elsewhere. Later, other missionary couples from Italy, Australia, and the USA joined the original team to help with outreach and to disciple new believers. Soon a work was established, and outreach efforts commenced in neighbouring villages. Today, there are around fifteen assemblies in Albania, which are led mostly by indigenous believers, as most missionaries have now left. The assemblies are actively involved

in their local communities and with ministries such as a children's home, prison work, two radio stations, a Bible school, and several student ministries in universities. The assemblies are also involved in producing high-quality Christian literature, and translating Bible commentaries and other books, which are highly appreciated by the entire body of Christ.

## Our ministry

Sylvia and I were both saved in 1991, at an early age, and were actively involved in our respective local assemblies. I moved to Northern Ireland in 2004 for our wedding and in October 2008 we were commended to the work in Albania and Kosovo by the assembly at Ballymagarrick.

We made our base in Tirana, and, with an exercise to do outreach in the local area, we commenced a weekly Bible study in our home the following spring. Within a few months, the first couple that started attending were miraculously saved by God's grace and there was good interest from others attending. In September 2009, we found a place close by to rent and started a weekly gospel meeting in addition to the regular Bible study. The Lord was blessing the work and souls were being saved.

In May 2011, following much prayer and consideration, and in fellowship with other local assemblies, we gathered for the first time to break bread in accordance with the biblical principles of a New Testament Church. The joy of that meeting and the establishment of a new assembly

was overwhelming, despite the many challenges that lay ahead.

Soon we had the first baptisms and new additions to the little fellowship. Presently, there are twenty-five believers in fellowship, with an additional group of students who fellowship with us during term time. Unfortunately, we have lost three couples and their families due to emigration over the years. We feel the loss keenly but are encouraged to see others taking on responsibility and stepping up to fill the gaps that have been left by their departure. Prior to Covid-19, between forty and fifty were in attendance for the preaching of the gospel each Lord's Day. Due to restrictions, we cannot facilitate this at present, but the smaller Bible study groups continue throughout the week.

Following many months of research, editing and design, the first Albanian Bible Exhibition was completed a few years ago. It is composed of approximately forty panels and alongside them are glass displays containing replicas of manuscripts, scrolls, artefacts, a model of the tabernacle, and some old Bibles. As this is just part of the ministry, we are only able to put on a limited number of exhibitions each year. To date, thousands have visited the exhibition and we have had many profitable conversations with interested individuals about 'the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus', 2 Tim. 3. 15.

Printing is another aspect of the ministry, albeit a very time consuming one. Over the years we have been able to: translate and print a dozen Emmaus courses; design and print thousands of calendars which are distributed freely around the country each year; write and print thousands of gospel leaflets for our weekly Saturday morning street work as well as other outreach activities throughout the year; translate excellent Christian books by various authors, such as David Gooding, John Lennox, Ronald Diprose and Ralph Shallis.

We continue to be involved with the children's home in Gjirokastër. There



are eleven children in care at present and a lovely sister from the assembly in Vlore manages the work there, liaising with government officials, managing the staff, and seeking the best interests of each child.

As well as bringing up the children and helping with various aspects of the ministry, Sylvia volunteers as a General Practitioner at the ABC Health Foundation, where she is also the Medical Director. The foundation runs a fully functioning Primary Care Health Centre with medical doctors, treatment room, community nurses, physiotherapists, a speech and language therapist, an audiologist, and administrative staff. In 2018 they were recognized by the State as a licensed accreditation centre for medical education, which followed the accumulation of many years of hard work and effort by the

staff in their quest to be a beacon of light in an otherwise corrupt and bureaucratic system. Two years ago, they opened and furnished an outpatient palliative care centre. This is an area of medicine that is much neglected here, but one where holistic care is essential, and it not only addresses the physical needs of patients but also the emotional, social, and spiritual needs. With no limitation on religious expression, the staff can openly discuss their faith with patients, and pray with them during the consultation.

### **The challenges**

The recent pandemic has affected the assemblies here as it has elsewhere, placing the Lord's people in a challenging position, as they felt they could not fulfil the role for which they were called, Acts 2. 42-47. Some believers were infected with Covid-19,

and some have gone to be with the Lord because of it, but we look to Him for guidance and protection as we try to encourage the saints, and witness to unbelievers around us.

As first-generation Christians, the Albanian believers face a number of different challenges – the lack of experience being a significant one. Although mission workers carried out a great work, passing on 'all the counsel of God', Acts 20. 27, there are still many areas in which local Christians have to take decisions according to their own convictions and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The average age among the assemblies is mid to late thirties, but life experiences have made them grow quickly, and cling more to the Lord and His word.

Migration is another challenge. The local churches outside of Tirana face constant waves of emigration, especially as young people leave to study in the capital and then settle there, while churches in Tirana experience a constant haemorrhage of those emigrating abroad. At times, local peripheral churches struggle to maintain a testimony and continue the work, though it appears that there is more openness towards the gospel in these areas than in the capital.

Presently, the Albanian church appears to be going through a phase of consolidation. Local elders need wisdom in finding a balance between Bible teaching and pastoral care, while not losing sight of a renewed and fresh vision for the lost.

As we have seen from history, where God is at work the enemy is active also. In order to leave a legacy for the next generation and a continuing testimony for Christ here in Albania and the surrounding Balkan area, it is vital that we all endeavour 'to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace', Eph. 4. 3.

### **Endnote**

- 1 This article deals with the work of the Lord among the Albanian population exclusively within the Republic of Albania and any reference to 'Albanian' should be understood as such.



**Tirana, Albania**

# Pauline Metaphors

## Part 1 Citizenship

By **MICHAEL BUCKERIDGE** Grantham, England

'For our conversation [citizenship] is in heaven', Phil. 3. 20; 'Only let your conversation [walk as citizens] be as it becometh the gospel of Christ', Phil. 1. 27.

Are you a good citizen? In the UK, the National Curriculum states, 'A high-quality citizenship education helps to provide pupils with knowledge, skills and understanding to prepare them to play a full and active part in society'.<sup>1</sup> If earthly governments consider it important to teach their young people how to be fully fledged members of society, how importantly do we view our 'citizenship [which] is in heaven' ESV?

In Roman times, citizenship was highly prized and brought special privileges.<sup>2</sup> Received primarily through birth or appointment, it afforded rights to the protection of the law, voting, holding public office, and serving in the military. They were deemed as those who could responsibly partake in society and represent and defend the empire.<sup>3</sup> An article on modern citizenship<sup>4</sup> says, 'The usual responsibilities of citizenship are allegiance, taxation, and military service'. Citizenship determines where our loyalties should be, whom we represent, where we use our resources, and whose battles we fight.

In writing to the church at Philippi, Paul had a ready audience for this kind of imagery. As a colony of Rome, they understood the fact that, no matter how far from home, a citizen could be identified through his lifestyle.

### Priorities of the citizen

Before speaking of their citizenship, v. 20, Paul had encouraged his readers to use himself, and others who walk like him, as an example of how to live the Christian life, v. 17. The intervening verses describe those who

live so completely contrary to what should be expected that Paul stops to warn the saints, as he had done 'often', v. 18. This affords a powerful understanding, by way of contrast, as to the things that the citizen should prioritize.

**The cross** – those in verses 18 and 19 are described as 'enemies of the cross of Christ', and 'whose glory is in their shame'. What a contrast to the Apostle Paul, who could say to the Galatian believers, 'But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ', 6. 14. Throughout Paul's writings, we understand that the citizen of heaven glories in the cross, for it is essential to our:

- Salvation, 1 Cor. 1. 18;
- Reconciliation, Eph. 2. 16;
- Forgiveness, Col. 2. 13, 14.

For the heavenly company in Revelation chapter 5, the cross is central to their theme of eternal praise. The Lamb appears 'as it had been slain', v. 6, and the multitude sing, 'Thou art worthy . . . for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood', v. 9.

**The Christ** – in contrast to those of verse 19, 'whose God is their belly', and who 'seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's', 2. 21, the Apostle makes clear whom he desired to get the praise from his life and death. In chapter 1, he rejoices that, 'Christ is preached', v. 18. Verse 20 expresses his hope that 'Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death', because 'to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain', v. 21. Through his ministry, he desired that the

rejoicing of the people of God 'may be more abundant in Jesus Christ', v. 26. He counted 'all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord', 3. 8. Paul made clear his allegiance; is ours as obvious?

**The coming** – there is no minding 'earthly things', 3. 19, for Paul. As a citizen of heaven, he looked for the coming of 'the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ', v. 20, and the glorious future that this event will bring: the change of body, v. 21; the crown for faithful service, v. 14; the completion of God's work in His people, 1. 6. This coming is to impact the choices we make, 1. 10, and our attitude towards others, 4. 5. Truly our affections should be 'on things above, not on things on the earth', Col. 3. 2.

### Perspective of the citizen

The perspective of the citizen is also rooted in the prospect of the Lord's coming. This principle is found in the lives of the faithful in Hebrews chapter 11. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were prepared to live in tents, because they were looking for a city 'whose builder and maker is God', v. 10. They desired a 'better country' and were therefore not tempted to return 'from whence they came out', vv. 15, 16. The greater our appreciation of the heavenly, the more our ambitions and actions will be shaped on earth.

In the well-loved section of Philippians chapter 2 verses 1 to 11, Paul encourages the assembly towards unity. The problem was those seeking to promote self. The answer is found in the principle of Christ's humbling **Himself**, and **God** glorifying Him. Hebrews chapter 12 verse 2 makes the point clearly: Christ endured the cross because of the glory that was to follow. The heavenly citizen understands that position and glory is God's to bestow, not ours to grasp after.

In Philippians chapter 4, Paul writes of things that should characterize the perspective of the saints.

- Towards others: humble and gentle, vv. 1-3, 5. Paul speaks directly to two in the assembly regarding their need of unity and encourages others to support them. The two verses are saturated with references to working together and are grounded



in the common bond of having our names 'in the book of life'. The imminent return of the Lord and the subsequent Judgement Seat of Christ should ensure gentleness towards others.

- Towards circumstances: joyful, v. 4. To rejoice always might seem impossible. The instruction, however, is to 'Rejoice **in the Lord** always'. Joy is rooted in relationship, not circumstance, as Paul demonstrates in this letter, 1. 18; 2. 16-18; 4. 10.
- Towards life and its needs:
  - Prayerful and thankful, v. 6. The heavenly citizen understands who is in control, and, when anxiety comes, they go to God. The throne of most earthly kingdoms is not freely open to all its citizens, but for us it is, Heb. 4. 16. Thanksgiving is vital to this exercise in ensuring we understand what God has done.
  - Peaceful, v. 7. Citizens in a colony could expect the protection of their leaders. As we engage in prayer and thanksgiving, the God of peace promises a garrison of peace around our 'hearts and minds through Christ Jesus'.
  - Trustful, vv. 10-20. Notice the apostle's contentment, v. 11, his strength, v. 13, and confidence, v. 19. He knew the God of the country to which he belonged



was able to give just what he needed, when he needed it.

### Partaking in the community of citizens

As the Romans moved out into different places, they left their mark. The local people would be in no doubt as to what the colonists' home was like, and that they thought it was superior!

Paul challenged the Philippians to 'let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ', 1. 27. They were to 'behave as a citizen'.<sup>5</sup> Their beliefs and something of the character of God should have been evident to those they lived among.

Paul was encouraged by his remembrance of them in chapter 1 verse 5, 'For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now'. They had participated in 'the defence and confirmation of the gospel', v. 7. As citizens living in a foreign – and enemy – country, we are called to be 'ambassadors for Christ', 2 Cor. 5. 20. Is our enthusiasm for the laws, language, culture, and king of our homeland evident to all?

The way citizens of a country treat each other will do much to recommend it – or not. As we come together as a community in the local church, what are we communicating to the world? Paul wanted them to be 'citizens worthy of the gospel'.<sup>6</sup> That gospel is a message of reconciliation, is for 'the whosoever', and brings all who believe into an equal relationship with God, Gal. 3. 28. No wonder Paul was concerned over the lack of unity at Philippi. A divided church does not represent on earth the heavenly vision of John, where will be gathered a united multitude 'out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation', Rev. 5. 9. What opportunity has the church missed to transfer something of the atmosphere of heaven to a warring, fractured world?

This fellowship will be:

- In suffering – united in our desire to please Christ, we will be prepared to suffer for Him, for one another, and with one another, 1. 29, 30
- In service – note the mentions of

'fellow' throughout the letter: 1. 5; 2. 25; 4. 3.

- In supplication for one another – Paul leads by example, 1. 3-11. Praying for one another will lead to unity.
- In sacrifice – it is no coincidence that the foundation upon which Paul pleads for unity is the willingness of the Son of God to give up what was rightfully His, on behalf of others, 2. 5-11. He follows this up with other examples:
  - Paul was prepared to be 'offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith', v. 17.
  - Epaphroditus who, 'for the work of Christ . . . was nigh unto death, not regarding his life', v. 30.
  - The Philippians' sacrifice for Paul, 'But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God', 4. 18.

The Lord Jesus told His disciples, 'By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another', John 13. 35. Is this attitude characteristic of our assemblies?

### Heavenly citizens

Revelation chapters 21 and 22 give us a glimpse of the heavenly city. There we see God dwelling with His people, 21. 3; a people unashamedly linked with Him, 22. 4; a people engaged in worshipful service, v. 3; a people reigning with Him, v. 5. May something of the delight and dignity of that place mark us as citizens now.

### Endnotes

- 1 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-citizenship-programmes-of-study/national-curriculum-in-england-citizenship-programmes-of-study-for-key-stages-3-and-4>.
- 2 E.g., Paul's warning to the Roman soldier about to scourge him, Acts 22. 24-29.
- 3 <https://www.britannica.com/topic/civitas>. It should be noted that there were some limitations, generally based on wealth and land ownership.
- 4 <https://www.britannica.com/topic/citizenship>.
- 5 J. THAYER, *Thayer's Greek Definition*, E-sword Resource.
- 6 M. R. VINCENT, *Vincent's Word Studies*, E-sword Resource.



# BALAAAM

## Part 7: Numbers 23. 27 - 24. 9

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

As we mentioned in the last article, Israel's influence will yet be worldwide, as a channel of blessing to others, 'And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem'; 'The remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men', Mic. 4. 2; 5. 7. Of this time Zechariah wrote, 'Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and . . . 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 is with you', 8. 22, 23. What of our testimony? A people so abundantly blessed by God, but are we an avenue of blessing to others? Are any coming into the assembly likely to confess 'God is in you of a truth' and likely to desire to go with us, 1 Cor. 14. 25?

Although at that time Israel had no royal monarchy, Balaam next spoke of their king and his kingdom, 'his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted', Num. 24. 7. 'Agag' is a general title of the kings of Amalek, just as Pharaoh for the rulers of Egypt. Agag is mentioned here because it was the first nation to attack Israel following their Exodus from Egypt and, as such, stood as representative of all the Gentile powers opposed to God's people. It should be noted that it is not Israel who is exalted in this verse, but Israel's king, the first direct mention in Balaam's parables to their promised Messiah. Balaam's words might remind us of the language of Psalm 89 verse 27, 'Also I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth'. However, in context, the psalmist is speaking not of Christ but of David. Commenting on the verse, W. MCBRIDE helpfully remarks, 'Whilst David in his lifetime did not see fulfilment of this honoured role, he will enjoy being a future firstborn in the coming kingdom'. He then adds, 'However, this respected status falls well short of

the peerless role held exclusively by the Lord Jesus of being '**the** Firstborn, **the** Prince of the kings of the earth', as spoken of in Revelation 1 verse 5.<sup>1</sup> Then, as to the dominion of Israel's king, Balaam says, 'his kingdom shall be exalted', perhaps reminding us of the dream of the great image given to Nebuchadnezzar, culminating with a stone cut out without hands that smashed the image and which became a great mountain that filled the whole earth. This all looks on to the future day when the God of heaven will set up a kingdom, 'which shall never be destroyed . . . shall not be left to other people . . . and shall stand for ever', Dan. 2. 34, 35, 44.

For the second time in his parables Balaam spoke of the Exodus from Egypt, expanding in this third parable truth initially introduced in the second parable, Num. 24. 8, 9; 23. 22, 24. The power that God displayed in bringing the people out of Egypt will again be manifest for the people's deliverance in the end times. Looking on to those days, the prophet Jeremiah says, 'Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that it shall

no more be said, The Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; but, The Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the lands whither he had driven them: and I will bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers', Jer. 16. 14, 15. Balaam's next words, 'he couched, he lay down as a lion', echo Jacob's blessing of the tribe of Judah, Gen. 49. 9, but what is there said of a tribe, the royal tribe, is now applied to the whole nation in the day of its ascendancy. In his second parable, Balaam said the people 'shall rise up as a great lion'. In this third parable, the great lion lies down. Their enemies defeated, the 'great lion' is at rest having devoured its prey and satisfied its hunger. Just as one would desist from disturbing a lion at rest, so none will dare disturb the nation's peace in that day.

In the first parable, Balaam confessed that he could not curse those whom God had not cursed. In the second, that God had blessed the children of Israel and Balaam could not reverse it. As the third parable concludes, echoing the promise given to Abram in Genesis chapter 12 verse 3 respecting his seed, Balaam says, 'Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee'. One cannot miss the warning for both Balak and Balaam contained in these closing words, a warning still relevant considering the increasing spirit of antisemitism evident today.



### Endnote

- 1 W. MCBRIDE, *Meditations in the Messianic Psalms*, Crimond House Publications, pg. 358.

# Solomon's Temple

By **JEREMY GIBSON** Derby, England

**PART 2**

## The temple courts

Solomon's temple and palace were part of a large complex of courtyards and buildings, linked by guarded gates and built upon a foundation of large, carefully hewed stones.<sup>1</sup> The other buildings included: 'the house of the forest of Lebanon' – which doubled up as an arsenal, Isa. 22. 8, and a storehouse for the golden targets and shields;<sup>2</sup> a porch of pillars, 1 Kgs. 7. 6, the porch of judgement – where Solomon placed his extravagantly constructed throne;<sup>3</sup> and the house which Solomon built for Pharaoh's daughter.<sup>4</sup> The 'winterhouse', where Jehoiakim burnt God's word, Jer. 36. 22, 23, was probably 'not a separate dwelling, but a warm apartment in a sheltered part of the palace facing the winter sun (cf. Amos 3:15)'.<sup>5</sup> There was a prison, where Jeremiah was held.<sup>6</sup> When Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians, Zedekiah and his men of war fled by the king's garden, near to the pool of Siloah.<sup>7</sup>

## The inner court

The temple was immediately associated with two main courts, whose doors were overlaid with brass.<sup>8</sup> The first was called the inner court, the middle of the court that was before the house of the Lord, the court of the priests, and the higher court (as it was elevated).<sup>9</sup> This court held the temple, its brazen altar, the sea, ten brazen lavers, and, when Solomon dedicated the temple, a three-cubit high brazen platform. 'The covert for the sabbath', which Ahaz removed, 2 Kgs. 16. 18, was possibly 'a covered place, stand or hall in the court of the temple, to be used by the king whenever he visited the temple with his retinue on the Sabbath'<sup>10</sup> or 'for the comfort of the outgoing *Kohanim* (Priests) . . . whose duties ended on Sabbath morning, but who could not travel to their homes until after the Sabbath'.<sup>11</sup> When Jeremiah saw 'two baskets of figs were set before the temple of the Lord', they were probably in this inner court, Jer. 24. 1.

The inner court was enclosed by a wall 'with three rows of hewed stone, and a row of cedar beams', 1 Kgs. 6. 36, within which were chambers. It had at least **three** gates, the **first** and most prominent being the north facing 'higher gate of the house of the Lord', built by Jotham, 2 Kgs. 15. 35; 2 Chr. 27. 3. This was also called the 'high gate of Benjamin' – where Jeremiah was pilloried, Jer. 20. 1, 2 – and 'the new gate' – where priests and prophets vilified him, Jer. 26. 1-11. It was 'the gate of the altar' and 'the inner gate that looketh toward the north; where was the seat of the image of jealousy', Ezek. 8. 5, 3, and 'the higher gate, which lieth toward the north', through which six destroying angels entered and 'stood beside the brazen altar', 9. 1, 2. King Zedekiah sat in this 'gate of Benjamin' when Ebedmelech appealed to save Jeremiah from the dungeon, Jer. 38. 7. Jewish women wept for Tammuz at this gate, Ezek. 8. 14. **Second**, 'the king's gate eastward', 1 Chr. 9. 18, was where Ezekiel prophesied against twenty-five of Judah's leaders, Ezek. 11. 1-13. The **'third'** entry that [was] in the house of the Lord' was where Zedekiah met Jeremiah secretly, Jer. 38. 14.

## The brazen altar<sup>12</sup>

The brazen altar was twenty cubits square and ten cubits high, 2 Chr. 4. 1. When the ark was brought into the oracle, Levites 'stood at the east end of the altar' praising and thanking the Lord, 5. 12. During his dedicatory prayer, Solomon knelt before this altar on a brazen platform, 1 Kgs. 8. 22-54; 2 Chr. 6. 12, 13; afterwards, 'fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices', 7. 1. At the dedication of the temple, Solomon temporarily hallowed the middle of the inner court for sacrifice; 1 Kgs. 8. 64; 2 Chr. 7. 7.

When collecting money to repair the temple, Jehoida set a chest 'beside the

altar, on the right side as one cometh into the house of the Lord . . . without at the gate of the house of the Lord', 2 Kgs. 12. 9; 2 Chr. 24. 8. Between the temple porch and this altar, Zacharias was slain, 2 Chr. 24. 21; Matt. 23. 35, and Ezekiel saw twenty-five men (perhaps the high priest and representatives from the twenty-four priestly courses) worshipping the sun, Ezek. 8. 16.

The centre of Jewish worship became a place of murder and idolatry. Even a Christian's devotions to the Lord can be marred by angry thoughts, (which are the first seeds of murder, Matt. 5. 21-24), and 'covetousness, which is idolatry', Col. 3. 5. God help us to keep our minds pure when we praise Him.

## The brazen sea<sup>13</sup>

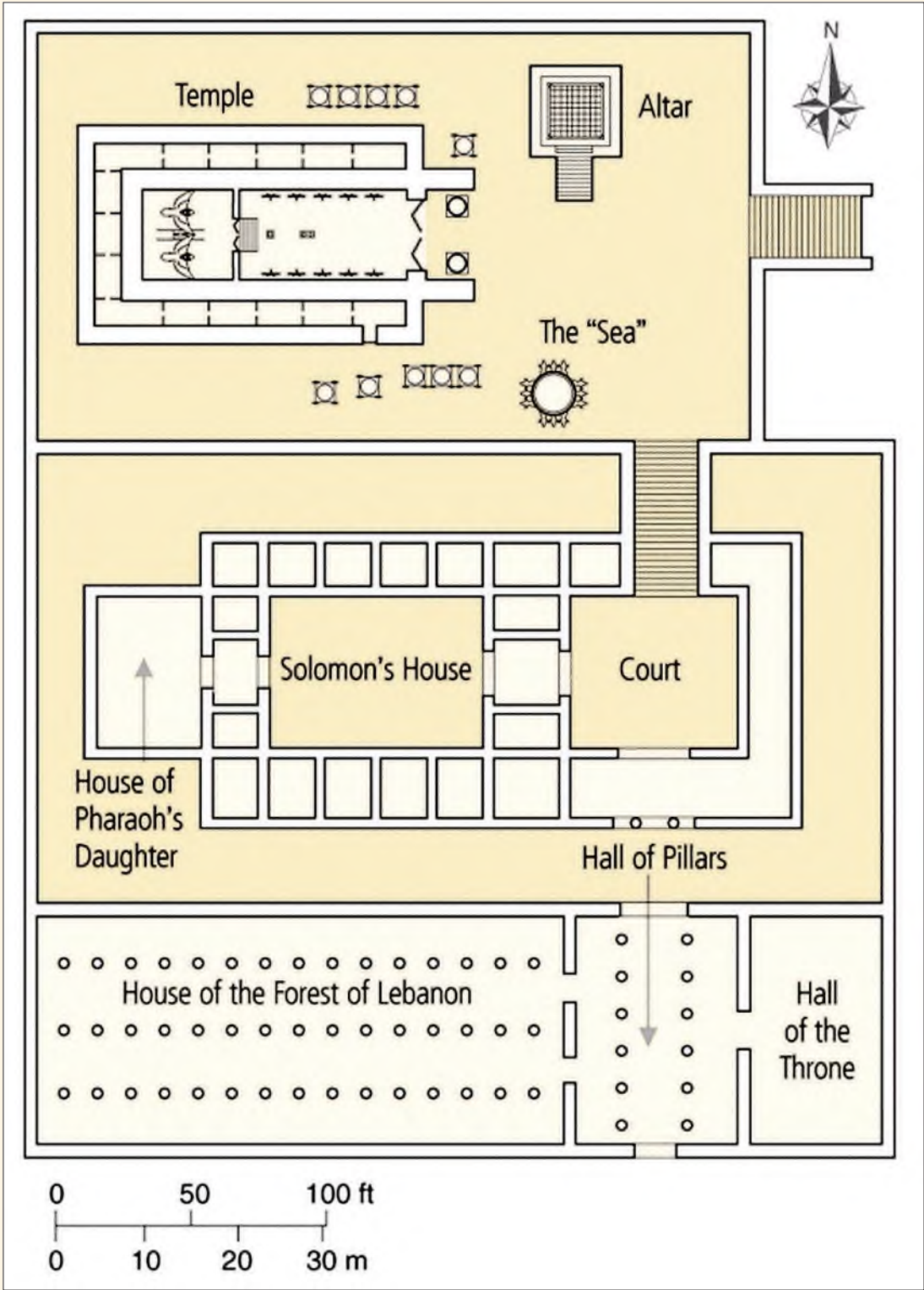
The round brazen sea, which had a capacity of 3,000 baths (66,000 litres), usually contained 2,000 baths (44,000 litres) of water. Its brim was a hand breadth thick, widening at the top 'like the brim of a cup, with flowers of lilies', 1 Kgs. 7. 26. The ten-cubit diameter and thirty-cubit circumference were likely measurements at different levels of its five-cubit height, not a mathematical error. Its outer surface had ten shapes per cubit in two rows, either 'gourds', 1 Kgs. 7. 24 NASB, or oxen, 2 Chr. 4. 3. The sea rested southeast of the temple, 1 Kgs. 7. 39; 2 Chr. 4. 10, upon twelve oxen, three facing each cardinal direction, their hinder parts being inward. Its water, with which the priests cleansed themselves, typifying priestly sanctification, could have come out of the oxen's mouths, v. 6.

## Ten brazen bases (*mechonah*) and their lavers (*kiyor*)<sup>14</sup>

Sacrifices were washed in ten brazen lavers, five being on the right [south] and five on the left [north] side of the temple, 2 Chr. 4. 6. Their bases were constructed of a robust brass frame (translated 'ledges', 1 Kgs. 7. 28, 29), four cubits square and three cubits high, v. 27. Within this frame was inserted brass panelling (translated 'borders', vv. 28, 29), upon which was engraved lions, oxen and cherubim; 'beneath the lions and oxen were



# Solomon's Temple and Palace Complex







*Image taken from the ESV Study Bible  
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wreaths of hanging work', v. 29 NASB. Four vertical 'supports . . . part of the stand [base] itself', v. 34 NASB, one at each corner, seem to have extended upwards to support the laver, v. 30, and downwards to form feet, which projected below the panelling, v. 32, for its four wheels and their axles. Every part of these one-and-a-half-cubit high chariot-like wheels, 'Their axles, their rims, their spokes, and their hubs were all cast', v. 33 NASB.

The lid of the chest was possibly 'dome-shaped'<sup>15</sup> (translated 'a round compass', v. 35), half a cubit high. In its centre was a one-and-a-half-cubit diameter hole ('mouth', v. 31) into which fitted a one-cubit high circular pedestal ('round after the work of the base [*kēn*, pedestal]', v. 31), on which the laver rested. This pedestal appears to have been encased within four square brazen panels ('their borders, foursquare, not round', v. 31), which were engraved with 'cherubim, lions and palm trees . . . with wreaths all round', v. 36 NASB. 'Rods' ('ledges' KJV) with strengthening 'tablets' ('plates' KJV) of brass between them, also engraved with cherubim, lions, palm trees and wreaths, provided additional support, v. 36 TANACH.

While the structure of these brass lavers and bases is exceptionally difficult to decipher, their robust structure and sheer size emphasize just how physically demanding Jehovah's worship was. Priests worked in harmony to move these massive devices (which were used to wash the bloody carcasses) about the court. Christian worship also demands spiritual exercise and can either be conducted in unison with other believers or on an individual basis. Furthermore, every spiritual sacrifice offered to God should be clean.

## The great court

The outer, lower lying, great court was surrounded by a wall of 'three rows of hewed stones, and a row of cedar beams', 1 Kgs. 7. 9, 12. When Jehoshaphat prayed 'before the new court', 2 Chr. 20. 5, it may have been in a newly 'enlarged or beautified' great court.<sup>16</sup> At Joash's coronation, one-third of the priests and Levites guarded 'the gate of Sur

[or the foundation]', 2 Kgs. 11. 6, 2 Chr. 23. 5, possibly 'a gate in the outer court of the temple, at the hollow of either the Tyropoeon or the Kedron' valleys.<sup>17</sup> One-third guarded 'the gate behind the guard', 2 Kgs. 11. 6, 'which probably formed the principal access from the palace into the Temple [see 2 Kgs. 11. 19]'.<sup>18</sup> Athaliah was forcibly removed from the temple precincts, before being slain at the horse gate by the king's house.<sup>19</sup> And the newly crowned Jehoash was brought down 'from the house of the Lord: and they came through the high gate into the king's house, and set the king upon the throne of the kingdom', 2 Chr. 23. 20.

## Endnotes

- 1 2 Chr. 23. 19; 2 Chr. 35. 15; 1 Kgs. 5. 17, 18; cp. 7. 10.
- 2 1 Kgs. 7. 2-5; 10. 16, 17; cp. 1 Kgs. 14. 27, 28; 2 Chr. 12. 10, 11.
- 3 1 Kgs. 7. 7; 10. 18-20.
- 4 1 Kgs. 7. 8; 9. 24; 2 Chr. 8. 11.
- 5 CHARLES L. FEINBERG, Jeremiah in F. E. GAEBELEIN (ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary Vol. 6: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel*, Zondervan, 1986, pg. 607.
- 6 Jer. 32. 2, 8, 12; 37. 15, 21; 38. 6, 7, 11, 12, 26, 28.
- 7 2 Kgs. 25. 4; Neh. 3. 15; Jer. 39. 4; 52. 7.
- 8 2 Kgs. 21. 4, 5; 2 Chr. 4. 9; 33. 4, 5.
- 9 2 Chr. 4. 9; Jer. 36. 10; cp. 1 Kgs. 8. 64; 10. 5; 2 Kgs. 20. 4.
- 10 C. F. KEIL and F. DELITZSCH, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Hendrickson Publishers, 1996, Volume 3, pg. 289.
- 11 TANACH footnote.
- 12 1 Kgs. 8. 22-54, 64; 2 Chr. 4. 1; 5. 12; 6. 12; 7. 1, 7.
- 13 1 Kgs. 7. 23-26, 39, 44; 2 Chr. 4. 2-5, 10, 15.
- 14 1 Kgs. 7. 27-40, 43; 2 Chr. 4. 6, 14.
- 15 C. F. KEIL and F. DELITZSCH, *op. cit.*, pg. 78.
- 16 R. JAMIESON, A. FAUSSET and D. BROWN, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Zondervan Publishing House, 1961, pg. 323.
- 17 C. F. KEIL and F. DELITZSCH, *op. cit.*, pg. 255.
- 18 A. EDERSHEIM, *Bible History Old Testament*, Hendrickson Publishers, 1995, pg. 839.
- 19 2 Kgs. 11. 15, 16; 2 Chr. 23. 14, 15.

# The Calmness of Christ

By **RODERICK BARTON** Birmingham, England

Amongst the virtues of the character of the Lord Jesus Christ, little has been spoken or written about His calmness. Sadly, calmness is not a virtue which humanity excels at. In fact, we are so often found living in a turmoil of stress, worry, and many problems. Christ, however, is so very different, whatever the circumstances. His life is a testimony to calmness, whatever the situation.

I want us to consider a few examples from Mark's Gospel. In chapter 4 verse 35, the Lord Jesus sends away the multitude and boards a boat knowing that the journey across the water will be through a tremendous storm. He has said to His disciples, 'Let us pass over unto the other side'. The word 'pass' means 'to go throughout' or 'to traverse'. Within this statement there are four promises from the Lord Jesus. First, a promise of a safe passage, for He has bid them to go on the boat. Second, a promise that they will go with Him. Third, that He will be with them to the end of the journey. Finally, the promise that any hindrance will be overcome. These are so sure because He, the Creator, who has all things in His power is with them until they arrive at the other side.

He was asleep in the boat and a storm blew up, but, although some of the disciples were seasoned fishermen, fear gripped them. They had never experienced such a storm as this before. With urgency they woke the Lord Jesus with the exclamation, 'Master, carest thou not that we perish?' v. 38. His response was to rise and stand in the storm-tossed boat, to rebuke the wind and say to the sea, 'Peace, be still'. He spoke in a calm, unhurried voice, yet with power. The result was an immediate great calm, characteristic of the One who had ordered the wild elements to cease their raging. He displayed calmness in the boat and demonstrated the power of His calmness as He subdued the restless wind and sea.

No sooner had they landed on the other side than a wretched demon-possessed man met them from out of the graveyard. Living amongst

the tombs, he was uncontrollable by any man. He was a man to fear and avoid. Scarred by frequent self-harming and rough living, he was an awful sight, controlled by demonic spirits. He cried, 'What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not', 5. 7. The demons instantly recognize who the Lord Jesus is. In calmness the Lord Jesus acted with immediate power, for there was nobody more knowledgeable than He of the devastation of satanic activity. No other could have displayed such calmness in the face of such an appalling situation. What a testimony to divine power and compassion for the local population, but they wanted the Lord Jesus to leave the area. Did not the deliverance of this man from the bondage of Satan and the misery of a wretched life mean anything to them? What was the reaction of the Lord Jesus to such rejection? He calmly returned to the boat and over the sea to the place from whence He had come.

On the other side of the lake there was a waiting throng and a man called Jairus, very troubled about his sick daughter. He was a desperate man and implored the Lord Jesus to come to his house and lay hands on his daughter that she may live. The crowd of people followed the Lord Jesus as He made His way to the house. Among them was a sick woman, at her wit's end and penniless. She had heard of the Lord Jesus and had made up her mind that if she but touched His garment she would be healed. In His sensitivity to a special touch of His garment, despite the volume of people, He displays His personal calmness telling her that her faith has

made her whole. What compassion amongst the needy!

Poor Jairus certainly did not feel calm. The condition of his daughter sorely troubled him and the arrival of news of her death must have come as a tremendous blow. It is then we see yet another example of the Lord Jesus bringing calmness to a soul, 'Be not afraid, only believe', v. 36. Taking only three of His disciples, He went to the house of the ruler of the synagogue. It was a scene of utter despair and grief, yet into such a situation the calmness of the Saviour is again brought. He took her parents into the room where the girl's body was lying and raised her to life again. He was focused upon her welfare, requesting something for her to eat.

In these few simple examples, we see the calmness of the Lord Jesus: He entered the boat knowing a great storm was coming; He slept despite the imminent danger; He stilled the storm; He faced an uncontrollable demon-possessed man and released him from such a wretched bondage; He went back in the boat after the people had rejected Him; He responded to Jairus by setting off for his house; He displayed His unique sensitivity and graciousness to a desperate penniless woman; He raised a girl to life. He demonstrated His power over creation, satanic forces, anxiety, disease, and death. What an example to believers in their daily walk in a troubled world and, above all, what a wonderful Lord and Saviour we have!



# THE FATHER OF LIGHTS

By **MERVYN WISHART** Belfast, Northern Ireland

'Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the **Father of lights**, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning', Jas. 1. 17.

On the first day of creation, God said, 'Let there be light'. These are the first spoken words recorded in our Bible, Gen. 1. 3. The result was immediate, 'and there was light'. The darkness that had brooded over the face of the waters was dispelled as the light shone. 'For God . . . commanded the light to shine out of darkness', 2 Cor. 4. 6. The source of this initial light is not revealed to us; God commanded it and it appeared. From the beginning He was the originator, the Father of lights. God always acts in accordance with His own immutable character, 'God is light, and in him is no darkness at all', 1 John 1. 5.

## God created the heavenly lights (sun, moon and stars)

On the fourth day of creation God said, 'Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven . . . And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also', Gen. 1. 14, 16. This one verse of scripture speaks of the creation of the sun, the moon and the stars. Notice the double affirmation, 'God made' and 'he made'. These celestial bodies were never the product of evolution; they are the handiwork of God.

Job, perhaps the earliest writer of all, writes, 'Which alone spreadeth out the heavens . . . Which maketh Arcturus, Orion, and Pleiades, and the chambers of the south', Job 9. 8, 9.

David, as a shepherd boy, had many opportunities at night to gaze upward and marvel, as his eyes scanned the canopy of heaven. His thoughts are recorded in Psalm 8 verses 3 and 4, 'When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him?' He wondered that such an awesome God, who created the sun, moon and stars, and sustained the vast expanse of His universe, would take notice

of puny man. He wrote in Psalm 19 verse 1, 'The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork'. His conclusion was that the glory of God, as declared in the heavens, is a witness to all men everywhere, 'There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard', v. 3.

Paul repeats this assertion in the New Testament. 'For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen . . . even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse', Rom. 1. 20.

Isaiah, in discharging the commission given to him by the Lord to 'comfort ye my people', says, 'Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number', Isa. 40. 1, 26. There is nothing more uplifting to the believer than to contemplate the greatness, majesty and power of our God.

## God counts the heavenly lights

The Milky Way is the galaxy which contains the earth and our solar system. It is only one among untold millions of galaxies in the universe. The number of planets in our galaxy has been estimated as between one hundred billion and four hundred

billion. It is amazing, even with the advancement in technology – such as the launch of the Hubble Space Telescope by NASA in 1990, and the completion of the huge China Sky Eye in 2016 – that scientists still cannot be more exact about numbers.

Our God is omniscient, and He knows all things, 'He telleth the number of the stars', Ps. 147. 4. He knows exactly the total number in each galaxy, and in all the galaxies of the universe. We can place the concerns we may have from day to day in His all-powerful hand, and say like Job, 'he knoweth the way that I take', 23. 10.

## God calls the heavenly lights by name

Not only does He know the total number, but an even more staggering thought is that 'he calleth them all by their names', Ps. 147. 4. He knows them individually. Some of their names are mentioned in scripture: Arcturus, Orion, Pleiades and Mazzaroth, Job 9. 9; 38. 31, 32. In the latter passage, Job is being questioned by the Lord as to his power to control them or to determine their influence over the earth. The comment of SPURGEON on these verses is a pertinent reminder of our limitations, 'If inclined to boast of our abilities, the grandeur of nature may soon show us how puny we are. We cannot move the least of all the twinkling stars . . . We speak of power but the heavens laugh us to scorn. When the Pleiades shine forth in spring with vernal joy we cannot restrain their influences, and when Orion reigns aloft, and the year is bound in winter's fetters, we cannot relax the icy bands'.<sup>1</sup>

God not only knows the number of His people, but He knows them individually, 'I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine', Isa. 43. 1. How intimately He knows us; the Lord Jesus said, 'But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore', Luke 12. 7.

Every star is unique. 'There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory', 1 Cor. 15. 41. How amazing that the Father of lights



ordained that no two stars are the same, no two clouds nor two sunrises or sunsets; no two flowers, blades of grass or snowflakes, nor is the DNA of two people the same. Everything and everyone that God has created is an original.

### God controls the heavenly lights in their orbits

The planets do not move randomly in the heavens. Their courses are determined and fixed by their Creator and the sun rises in the morning at His command. In the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord Jesus said, 'he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good', Matt. 5. 45. The Lord asked Job the question, 'Hast thou commanded the morning since thy days?' Job 38. 12. Some will say that it's just something that happens: day follows night; there is sunset and sunrise. The scripture says that our heavenly Father issues the command, and the sun rises and a new day dawns. He is the Father of lights.

No wonder the Psalmist exclaimed, 'This is the day which the Lord hath made', Ps. 118. 24. Each day is a gift from God; another opportunity to praise Him, another opportunity to serve Him. Moses, whose life spanned one hundred and twenty

years, speaks of 'the days of our years' and says, 'So teach us to number our days', Ps. 90. 10, 12.

The Lord caused the sun to stand still when Israel went into battle against the Amorites, Josh. 10. 13. He caused the sun to withhold its light at Calvary from the sixth hour until the ninth hour. This miraculous event is recorded by all three synoptic Gospels. To give Hezekiah a sign that he would be healed, the Lord moved the shadow on the dial of Ahaz backward by ten degrees. He did not move the sundial; He moved the sun, see 2 Kings chapter 20 verse 11.

With the time and the seasons, the position and intensity of the stars in the sky are subject to change, but our Father is immutable. He is the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. That which He ever was, He is now; that which He is now, He will ever be. He alone could say 'For I am the Lord, I change not', Mal. 3. 6. In the context of James chapter 1 verse 17, He is unchanging in His generosity towards His children.

The Lord asked Job another question, 'Knowest thou the ordinances of heaven? canst thou set the dominion thereof in the earth?' Job 38. 33, but in this realm, Job had neither knowledge nor influence. By contrast, the Lord speaks through the prophet Jeremiah, 'Thus saith the Lord, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night', Jer. 31. 35; cp. 33. 25. Every star follows exactly the ordinance planned by the Father of lights. He has ordained its position and velocity, and the intensity of its light.

What a contrast, when we read in Jude of 'wandering stars', v. 13, referring to the 'certain men' in verse 4. The inanimate creation follows the divine plan while mankind persists in rebellion against God.

### The Father of lights is our Father

In James chapter 1 verse 18 we read, 'Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth'. The God who created and controls the vast universe is our

Father; can we not trust Him to order our lives from day to day?

God made the sun, moon and stars so that they should: (1) 'give [natural] light upon the earth', Gen. 1. 17, and (2) declare His glory and show His handiwork, Ps. 19. 1. His desire is that believers today should give (spiritual) light to a dark world. Paul, writing to the Philippians, exhorted them, 'That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world', Phil. 2. 15. We are called to radiate something of the glory of God on earth, 'do all to the glory of God', 1 Cor. 10. 31, and to be living examples of His handiwork, cp. Eph. 2. 10.

Israel was forbidden to worship the stars, 'And lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars . . . shouldest be driven to worship them', Deut. 4. 19. But they disobeyed and evoked God's judgement. We do not worship the stars; we worship the Father of lights, who created and sustains them. We do not seek guidance from the stars, but rather from the One who guides them in their orbits.

Scripture sometimes speaks of inanimate creation praising the Lord, 'Praise ye him, sun and moon: praise him, all ye stars of light', Ps. 148. 3. They praise Him as Creator, 'he commanded, and they were created', v. 5. Job speaks of how the morning stars sang together on creation's morning, Job 38. 7. Isaiah adds, 'the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands', Isa. 55. 12. How are we to understand these statements? They have no voice to articulate their praise. 'They praise the Lord in fulfilling the end for which they were brought into the world, angels and men can praise Him in no other way'.<sup>2</sup>

#### Endnotes

- 1 C. H. SPURGEON, *Morning & Evening*, Whitaker House, 1997, Devotion for March 21st evening.
- 2 GRAHAM SCROGGIE, *Psalms*, Pickering & Inglis, 1948, pg. 143.



What does the Bible tell us about the future?

# THE GREAT WHITE THRONE JUDGEMENTS

Rev. 20. 11-15

Part 13

By **RICHARD COLLINGS**, Caerphilly, Wales

## Introduction

Just before beginning this article, I read about a man who the previous day had been sentenced to thirty years in prison for a particularly heinous crime. Due to his age, the probability is that the man will never be reprieved but will die in prison. His will truly be a life sentence. What a daunting prospect! Yet it is possible that at some point during his incarceration he might trust in the Lord and be saved. If that was to happen, he would be able to declare, like the Apostle Paul, 'I obtained mercy . . . And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus', 1 Tim. 1. 13, 14.

Unlike this man, the people who will be summoned to appear before the Great White Throne have no possibility of mercy. How many opportunities they had in their lifetime to obtain mercy we cannot tell but, alas, they had rejected them all. This judgement is not a trial to ascertain whether they are guilty or not guilty, it is a judgement to confirm their guilt and to consign them, not to a life sentence, but to an eternal sentence.

## The time when and the place where

It is not possible to be dogmatic as to where this Great White Throne will be located. What we can state with certainty is that it will not be on earth nor in the created heavens for verse 11 informs us that such is the majesty and authority of the throne sitter that from His face 'the earth and the heaven fled away; and

there was found no place for them'. Space, or as it is termed in Genesis chapter 1, 'the firmament', is part of the original creation, being made on day two of the creation week, so it ceases to exist at the point when this throne is set up. Therefore, whether this judgement takes place in the void created by the total dissolution of every created place, or some other sphere sovereignly chosen by God, we cannot say.

In respect of the timing of the event, we can be more prescriptive, for it occurs in the interval between the 'dissolving' of the existing universe, 2 Pet. 3. 10, 11, and the creating of the new heaven and the new earth. God's first act in time was to create the universe. His final act in time will be to burn it all up. As time is an integral part of the original creation, it too will cease to exist, as we now know it, when that creation is destroyed in God's cosmic conflagration. So, we may state that this judgement occurs in eternity.

## The people judged

All who stand before the Judgement Seat of Christ are saved people, the saved of this church age. Those who appear before the King when He sits upon His throne of glory and judges the Gentile nations at the end of the Great Tribulation will be a mix of believing and nonbelieving people. Everyone who will be judged at the Great White Throne will be unforgiven. These are people who have never repented of their sins.

In verse 12, they are described as 'the dead' and although that is true of

them spiritually it is a description of their physical state also; they have all died. The verse does not specify how long they have been dead and, therefore, as a general statement it refers to the aggregate of the wicked dead throughout the entire period of human history from Genesis chapter 4 to Revelation chapter 20. This is a vast number, and their status in society whilst living, be it substantial or inconsequential, exempted none of them, for John saw 'the dead, small and great, stand before God'. However, there are some exceptions to this general statement, including those who are cursed by the King in Matthew chapter 25, for they are cast into 'everlasting fire'. These will not need to appear before the Great White Throne for their eternal doom will have been settled over a thousand years before.

Although these people are dead, death does not place them beyond the reach of God's authority. Their bodies are exhumed by a divine fiat from both the sea and the grave, even though, in many cases, they will have lain and decomposed in those places for centuries or even millennia. BARNES in his commentary makes the point that this reference to the sea is literal not metaphoric, adding that it includes 'all such who have been drowned in the waters of it, as were Pharaoh and his host; or have died upon the mighty waters, and have been cast into them, and devoured by the fishes; and particular regard may be had to the men of the old world, drowned by the flood; these shall be raised from thence; the sea shall deliver them up'.<sup>1</sup>

## The appointed judge

Though not specifically mentioned by name, we know that the execution of all judgement has been committed to the Son of God so that here, just as in previous judgements, He is the appointed judge.

Throughout the various dispensations, beginning with the age of innocence and culminating in the millennial kingdom, man will prove himself to be utterly incorrigible. Adam and Eve were placed in paradise and failed. The millennial age will be the nearest earth will ever



get to those Edenic conditions, yet after 1000 years of the most benign rule and an idyllic environment man will once more rebel against God and align himself with the devil. Left to himself, man is an abject failure, yet despite this God has brought within the reach of all peoples the means of salvation. That salvation is possible on the basis of the sufferings, sacrifice and triumphant resurrection of the One who will sit upon this Great White Throne.

How fearful is this event, and how terrible the moment when retrieved from the sea and the grave the bodies of all the unforgiven are reunited with their souls which had been in hell and are made to stand before the very One they had rejected throughout their lives. Blinded by the god of this world, they had chosen to have nothing to do with God's Son and had shut Him out of their thinking. Now, they have no choice and no longer can they avoid Him.

Two thousand years ago men got close enough to His face to drench it with their vile spittle, close enough to rip off the hair from His cheeks and to blindfold His eyes. Now, in terror, they behold that august face, but whereas inanimate creation is made to flee away from it they are compelled to stand before it.

The throne on which the judge sits is described as great and white. This is not the first throne that John has seen in the book of Revelation. He saw one set up in heaven in chapter 4, which had a rainbow round about it. Here

there is no rainbow for there is no promise of mercy. In chapter 4, the throne is 'set', indicating permanence and in contrast to the thrones on earth which are going to be overthrown. This Great White Throne is not permanent, it is in place for one event only, the final judgement of sinners. Once that is concluded it has no further purpose.

### **The basis of the judgement**

One of the final descriptions of the Lord that the Apostle Paul makes is found in 2 Timothy chapter 4 verse 8, where he describes Him as 'the righteous judge' and the rightness of His justice is displayed here at the Great White Throne. There is a reference in verse 12 to 'the books' and to 'another book' and the sentence imposed is based on the records found in the books and the absence of an entry in the book.

No title is given to any of the books, but the verse makes it obvious that they are the record of the lives of each person standing before the throne, 'the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works'. All that these people have done that was contrary to God, or that they failed to do that He had required them to have done, will be laid out as a condemnatory documentation of their guilt. This divine record will neither be overstated nor diluted but will be a precise record of every sin. MELLISH states, 'It is not how a man is born that is judged, but how he lived. It is not the root, but the fruit of his life that is brought into judgment'.<sup>2</sup>

There may have been a time when a similar catalogue of our sins existed, but the moment we got saved that record was removed and hence Paul can state in Romans chapter 8, 'Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us', vv. 33, 34.

As though to doubly verify their guilt, there is another book. It is the Book of Life, but whereas there is much written about them in the books there is nothing written about them in the Book of Life. Eight times in the New Testament we read about this book; on one occasion it is called the 'Lamb's book of life', Rev. 21. 27. It contains a record of all who have eternal life, life obtained on the basis of being redeemed by the blood of the Lamb of God.

### **The sentence**

Having been judged, everyone is banished to the same place. They are cast into 'the lake of fire'. However, although all are in the same location, they are each punished according to their works, indicating that there must be different intensities of punishment, each receiving what is appropriate for them. However, no matter what the degree of the punishment is, it is relentless, inescapable, and eternal.

This is the judgement we also deserved, but with wonder and thanksgiving we can say like Paul, 'the Son of God . . . loved me, and gave himself for me', Gal. 2. 20. How sweet the words of the hymn of the 1904 Welsh revival,

'Here is love vast as the ocean,  
Loving kindness as a flood,  
When the prince of life our ransom,  
Shed for us His precious blood'.  
[WILLIAM REES]



### **Endnotes**

- 1 ALBERT BARNES, *Notes on the New Testament: Explanatory and Practical*, Online Bible Resource.
- 2 NORMAN MELLISH, *Revelation: From Tribulation to Triumph*, Gospel Folio Press, 2008, pg. 403.

# The Council at Jerusalem and its lessons for us

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

Being a Christian, and in fellowship with other Christians, will expose us all to difficulties and problems. The Acts of the Apostles is an honest testimony of such problems and difficulties in the early church, and many of those troubles have continued down the centuries to the present.

Initially, the early Christians faced problems that were external and physical; in chapters 4, 8, and 11, the church faced persecution: chapter 4, Peter and John were set upon by the religious leaders in Jerusalem; chapter 8 tells us of the zealot Saul of Tarsus and the havoc that he sought to wreak; chapter 11 tells us how God used that persecution for the furtherance of the gospel.

However, there were also internal difficulties. In chapter 5, the problem was moral. Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Ghost in trying to deceive the apostles as to the level of their giving to the Lord's work. The couple came under the discipline of God. In chapter 6, the problem was practical. The murmuring among the Grecians was in respect of the daily ministration and the care of the poor among the gathered company of believers. Seven men were chosen to undertake this work and ensure its equity before the Lord. In chapter 10, the problem was developmental. The gospel that had initially been preached to Jews was now preached to Gentiles and Gentiles were saved – the gospel reached out beyond national and racial boundaries and Peter was brought to appreciate the scope of the work of God.

As we come to chapter 15, we see a problem that was doctrinal – whether the Gentiles should be made subject to the Law of Moses – and, later in the chapter, a problem that was personal – the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas that led

to them splitting up and going their separate ways.

Why do we face problems and difficulties? It may be that such difficulties and problems are the means that God uses to shape and mould us. They can confirm us in our faith, and they can, and should, bring us to our knees, 'Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby', Heb. 12. 11. However, challenges can also be the outcome of carnality. The Apostle Paul reminded the Corinthians, 'For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?' 1 Cor. 3. 3.

But the purpose of this article is to explore the fundamental challenge that was launched against the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles, Acts chapter 15. DEFFINBAUGH summarizes it, 'Up until this time . . . there was no need to agonize about a few Gentiles (most of whom were God-fearers or Jewish proselytes) who came to faith in Jesus as the Messiah. But now large numbers of heathen, pagan, Gentiles were being saved'.<sup>1</sup> This was a significant test of Jewish sensitivity, illustrated by Peter's experience in chapter 10, and one that exposed false teaching on the matter. Verse 1 indicates the gravity of the matter, 'certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren'. That these false teachers

came from Judea gave an appearance of credibility to their teaching. Their doctrinal onslaught was protracted; they 'began to teach and kept it up'.<sup>2</sup> It also seemed to have some biblical basis, stressing 'after the manner of Moses'.

How important to realize that error seldom comes accurately labelled! This was a fundamental issue. Was the work of Christ sufficient in the salvation of the soul, or was there a need to add something from the law of Moses to that work? The answer is clear – the work of Christ is sufficient. But how did these early Christians resolve the difficulty over false teaching? 'They determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question', v. 2.

Whilst we don't have apostles today, we do have elders within a local assembly and, when a problem arises, we should take the matter to the elders, men to whom the assembly can turn to find wise counsel and guidance. But this has a double edge. We need men of spiritual experience and wisdom to handle difficulties, but they too must be men whom we can approach easily and discuss issues with freely, knowing that what is discussed will go no further than the elders themselves.

As the company from Antioch arrived at Jerusalem they were welcomed and given the opportunity to declare 'all things that God had done with them', v. 4. It is to be noted that stress is placed upon what 'God had done'! As BARCLAY observes, 'They were prepared to let the facts speak for themselves'.<sup>3</sup>

However, the false teachers were not going to concede without a battle. It is interesting that Luke describes them as 'the sect of the Pharisees', v. 5. 'Sect', *haireisis*, is the word from which we derive the English word 'heresy'. It is indicative of those who not only have different aims and objectives but who are prepared to pursue them to division.

Having listened to both sides of the matter, the apostles and elders convened a private meeting. There



is wisdom in privacy. Not only does it avoid open debate within the assembly, which often generates ‘more heat than light’, but it also thwarts the opportunity for division, as opinions might polarize. In the support of such a meeting, it is important for the saints to have a degree of trust in those men that God has raised up to shepherd the flock. It is also to be noted that they ‘assembled with one accord’, v. 25. Whether this refers to the elders’ meeting, or to the whole assembly, this is not uniformity, where we are all made to say the same thing, but a unity of purpose, a desire to find a spiritual solution to the problem.

Within this private meeting we are told there was ‘much disputing’, v. 7. This may suggest something noisy and heated, but the opposite is really the truth. In reality, the apostles and elders had a deep ‘discussion’, JND, or ‘debate’, ESV. The purpose of the reasoning and questioning was to find a solution to the problem. It is important that the discussion showed mutual respect. What a contrast with human nature which seeks its own way – that is what sin is essentially. This is where godly elders should be different.

‘Peter rose up’, v. 7. He sought to summarize the discussion, bringing his experience and weight to that discussion. After all, Peter had been the one who had been chosen of God to communicate the gospel

to the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius and he asked his brethren to appreciate what God had done in the past regarding the matter under discussion. God is ordered and consistent in His actions. Jew and Gentile were saved by grace, v. 11, through the same exercise of faith, v. 9. Both were given the Holy Spirit, v. 8. As the law could not help the Jew, why should it now be applied to the Gentiles, v. 10?

As Peter had stilled discussion, Paul and Barnabas were able to give a report of the Lord’s blessing on their work amongst the Gentiles. The emphasis is upon the ‘wonders God had wrought’, v. 12. As DEFFINBAUGH comments, ‘These signs and wonders were God’s “Amen” to their message and ministry’.<sup>4</sup> Finally, James speaks, asking those present to search the scriptures. In essence, the same theme is emphasized, ‘God at the first did visit the Gentiles’, v. 14. What Paul and Barnabas had described was not new, but a continuation of the work begun in the house of Cornelius. It was also a fulfilment of scripture. As ANDERSON states, ‘The NT fulfilment is in harmony with the OT prophecy’.<sup>5</sup>

This is crucial. If we are to find a solution to the problems of assembly life, we need men who can and will search the scriptures for that solution. Equally, when an answer is found, these elders will be able to stand up before the assembly and say from the scriptures, ‘as it is written’, v. 15. It is

interesting to note that the passage that James refers to is Amos chapter 9. How important to have men who have a wide knowledge of the word of God.

The decision was to write letters to the churches in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia, setting out a resolution to this challenge that was made upon the purity of the gospel, vv. 23-29. Although such a situation would be difficult to replicate in our day – there are no longer apostles in existence – what this outcome does teach us is a need for transparency. In certain situations, it would be right and proper to ensure that discussion is minuted and records are kept. Certainly, those who have responsibility in relation to a building and its trust must do that. For matters that are of a personal and delicate nature, those affected ought to be kept up to date with actions taken. As in the case of this chapter, men of spiritual standing and integrity should be used to communicate the message.

In summary, if we have a desire to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the companies of the Lord’s people, let us endeavour to:

- Maintain a dialogue amongst us – particularly with the elders;
- Give the elders time and prayerful support when they meet to discuss matters;
- Allow elders to discuss constructively;
- Recognize those whom God has raised up and the experience they may bring to the discussion of spiritual issues amongst us;
- Keep the scriptures ever before our minds and hearts;
- Communicate decisions to fellow believers to ensure that there is a corporate acceptance of the decision and a desire to carry it out.

### Endnotes

- 1 ROBERT DEFFINBAUGH, *Acts, Christ at work through His Church*. Found here: <https://bible.org/series/acts-christ-work-through-his-church>.
- 2 A. T. ROBERTSON, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, electronic edition part of e-sword resource.
- 3 WILLIAM BARCLAY, *Daily Study Bible – Acts*, St Andrew Press, electronic edition part of e-sword resource.
- 4 ROBERT DEFFINBAUGH, *op. cit.*
- 5 JAMES ANDERSON, *Acts, What the Bible Teaches*, John Ritchie, 1992.



# The four beasts of Psalm 22

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For some years four impressive life-size, bronze statues/sculptures stood together in the plaza between the law school and the main library of Regent University in Virginia Beach, Virginia. They represented the four horses of Revelation chapter 6 – white, red, black, and pale – each of which symbolizes a different aspect of God's future working in this world.

But there is another biblical chapter which describes a set of four animals that were to play a role in the history of the Christian church at the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. These are the four beasts mentioned in Psalm 22. Some 1,000 years earlier, David the king records some painful events. Some of the vocabulary in this psalm describes unpleasant happenings in his own life, but all of it relates to his greater Son.

When people in general reflect on the sufferings of Jesus Christ that were experienced during His passion, they tend to focus on His excruciating physical agonies and His spiritual torment upon assuming mankind's accumulated sins as His own. It is my observation that not as much reflection is given to the emotional pain our Lord suffered as a result of verbal abuse. King David did not just mention that the Son of David was going to be harassed by 'beasts' in general. Under the influence of the Holy Spirit, he specifically mentions four species of beasts as adversely affecting our Lord mentally in addition to His extreme physical sufferings.

It should be noted that the Godhead had created each of these four species of beasts, each of which had been gentle in the Garden of Eden up to the time that Eve and then Adam bought into Satan's lies and then sinned. After that, a curse was placed on all of creation. Romans chapter 8 verse 22 states, 'For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now'.

Regarding the kingdom age yet to

come, God says, 'in that day will I make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven, and with the creeping things of the ground: and I will break the bow and the sword and the battle out of the earth, and will make them to lie down safely', Hos. 2. 18. '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 the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them', Isa. 11. 6.

In the case of our Lord Jesus Christ, the situation was far worse than any similar plight of a human as He hung on the cross in excruciating agony for six interminably long hours. It is undoubtedly extremely disconcerting to face a situation with impending trouble when confined/held in place in a way that no defence or shielding is humanly possible. That would preclude putting one's hands over the ears to muffle hurtful comments directed at Him.

Note that King David used metaphors of four beasts to describe these categories of enemies who will engage in verbally abusing our Lord.

## Beast one: bulls of Bashan

Verse 12 states, 'Many bulls have compassed me; strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round'. The country of Bashan embraced the territory which was on the east of the Jordan River, north of Gilead, and which had been given to the half-tribe of Manasseh. Bashan was distinguished for having rich pastureland. Its trees and breed of cattle are frequently referred to in the scriptures. The bulls of Bashan are here

alluded to as remarkable for their size, their strength, and their fierceness. Here, they represent those that were savage and violent.

There is substantial evidence to note that Bashan was the headquarters for the worship of the god 'Baal'.<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that Baal was represented by a bull. Recall that worship of this heathen deity was also carried on by the inhabitants of this region, the Amorites, whose king was Og. They resisted the Israelites, who, being led by Moses, defeated them just before Joshua led the Israelites across the river Jordan into the land of Canaan. We recall that the worship of this same 'deity' was also carried on by the Philistines, including the legendary Goliath. It is interesting that Og was also a giant as well as Goliath, Deut. 3. 11. Hence, what could be construed by the bulls of Bashan can refer to evil spirits (demons . . . pagan deities) who had been the foes of Jehovah for thousands of years.<sup>2</sup>

## Beast two: lion

Verse 13 reads, 'They [the bulls of Bashan] gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion'. A lion is mentioned also in verse 21, which reads, 'Save me from the lion's mouth'. Fierce and threatening as the bulls were, some of Christ's adversaries were as ravenous as roaring lions. They 'gaped . . . with their mouths', eager to devour, ready to spring on the prey (our Lord) and crush Him in their monstrous jaws. Like roaring lions, these enemies of Christ howled out their fury, longing to tear the Saviour in pieces.

*Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* states, 'Most Hebrew and Greek words for "lion" are used in a figurative sense, nevertheless we can draw a number of inferences regarding the perceived characteristics and behavior of literal lions. They are, (as stated in the following verses), among other things, strong (Prov. 30:30) – especially in their teeth (Job 4:10) and paws (1 Sam. 17:37), fearless (Prov. 28:1; 30:30), stealthy (Psalm 17:12), frightening (Hosea 11:10; Amos 3:8), destructive (1 Sam. 17:34; Micah 5:8)'.<sup>3</sup>

Scripture symbolizes the tribe of Judah as a lion. On his deathbed, Jacob made



this prophetic statement regarding his son, Judah, and his descendants, ‘Judah is a lion’s whelp [pup]; from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion . . . who shall rouse him up?’ Gen. 49. 9. Rabbinic tradition states that when the Israelites camped in the wilderness between Egypt and Canaan, the tribe of Judah was assembled east of the tabernacle under a banner with a lion on it.<sup>4</sup> Also, frequently, leaders both secular and spiritual, are characterized as being ‘lions’. The leaders that were present at the cross were, for the most part, the Jewish spiritual hierarchy: priests, scribes, and elders.<sup>5</sup> Matthew records, ‘Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God’, 27. 41-43. Our Lord’s emotional stamina must have passed through a most severe conflict while He found Himself abandoned to the ‘tender’ mercies of these vile and cruel Jewish religious leaders.



### Beast three: dog

Note the two verses from Psalm 22: ‘For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet’, v. 16; ‘Deliver my soul from the sword; my darling from the power of the dog’, v. 20.

‘The word dog is used many times in scripture, but it’s not talking about cute house pets. When the word is used, it’s usually talking about unholy people or half wild or wild dangerous animals who usually roam the streets in packs for food. They are dirty and are not to be messed with’.<sup>6</sup> GILL’s *Exposition of the Bible* states that ‘dogs’ here refers to Gentiles, so called by the Jews by way of contempt, because of their ignorance, idolatry, and impurity, by whom are also meant wicked men, as the following clause shows.<sup>7</sup> It may very well be that the Roman soldiers, who were Gentiles, were chiefly intended, whom the Jews used to call ‘dogs’. After they had crucified Him, they gambled over our Lord’s seamless tunic and divided up the rest of His clothes into four parts – one part for each soldier, John 19. 23, 24. In addition, they resorted to verbally berating Him. Luke chapter 23 verses 36 and 37 states, ‘the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar, and saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself’.

### Beast four: wild oxen, NIV

The evidence for this association of Ephraim with wild oxen is as follows:

Genesis chapter 48 verses 11 to 20 states that when Jacob was about to die, he gathered his sons from Leah and Rachel about him and made a declarative statement about each. Joseph was given the double portion of the firstborn instead of Reuben, 1 Chr. 5. 1. Moreover, Jacob deliberately gave Ephraim the firstborn right and blessing over Manasseh, who was really the firstborn of the two.<sup>8</sup>

Jewish tradition says that the four ensigns (standards) under which Israel encamped about the tabernacle during their wilderness journey from Egypt to Canaan were a lion for Judah on the east, an ox for Ephraim on the west, an eagle for Dan on the north, and a man for Reuben on the south.<sup>9</sup>

Mark chapter 15 verse 32 goes on to state, ‘they that were crucified with him reviled him’. Our Lord even had to endure hurtful verbal jabs directed at Him from the two criminals who were ‘in the same boat’ with Him as far as punishment was concerned.

It is important to stress that our Lord was not in a position where He could close off these malicious invectives directed at Him; He couldn’t stop up His ears with His hands. Instead, He had to fully endure their words as well as the emotion behind them, which in combination, as the scriptures seem to reveal, hurt Him deeply.

However, perceptively, MEYER points out, ‘In the middle of Ps. 22:21 there is a remarkable change from the plaintive to the triumphant: supplication and entreaty break out into exultation; hope saves the broken harp from the hands of despair, restrains it, and extracts from it strains to which angels, on their way home to God, are constrained to listen’.<sup>10</sup> Note the last sentence of verse 21, ‘thou hast heard me’. It would be interesting to know what constituted the answer to His prayer that began as recorded in verse 19. For the rest of the chapter, the Son of David is engaged in praise and worship. Perhaps our Lord was able to experience a glimpse of a sure, definite lessening of His physical, emotional, and spiritual sufferings that would be His within a relatively short time.

### Endnotes

- 1 MICHAEL S. HEISER, *Supernatural: What the Bible Teaches about the Unseen World—And Why It Matters*, Lexham Press, 2015, pg. 122. Emphasis added.
- 2 See here: <https://www.bereanbiblechurch.org/transcripts/topical/divine-deception.htm>.
- 3 See here: <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/lion/>.
- 4 JOHN MACARTHUR, *Revelation 1-11: The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, Moody Press, 1999.
- 5 See: Matt. 27. 41-43; Mark 15. 31, 32; Luke 23. 35.
- 6 See: <https://biblereasons.com/dogs/>
- 7 JOHN GILL, *Exposition of the Entire Bible*, an e-sword Bible software resource.
- 8 See also: Deut. 33. 13-17.
- 9 C. F. KEIL and F. DELITZSCH, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Hendrickson, 2002.
- 10 F. B. MEYER, *Through the Bible Day by Day*, an e-sword Bible software resource.

# THE LORD IS ON OUR SIDE

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

Historically, Israel is one of the most persecuted nations. Their continued existence as an identifiable people is testimony to the truth of God's promises. The psalms of 'degrees' or 'ascents' contain many encouraging statements regarding His work on behalf of His people. As pilgrims travelled to Jerusalem for the Feasts of the Lord, they would be comforted by gems like Psalm 124, which speaks of their security in the Almighty.<sup>1</sup> In our modern uncertain times, believers may also derive comfort from this short song of thanksgiving, remembering that 'if God be for us, who can be against us?' Rom. 8. 31.<sup>2</sup>

## Where could I go but to the Lord?

VANGEMEREN breaks down Psalm 124 in a chiastic<sup>3</sup> pattern this way:

- 'A The Presence of the Lord, vv. 1–2a
- B Protection from Dangers, vv. 2b–5
- C Praise to the Lord, v. 6a
- B Protection from Dangers, vv. 6b–7
- A The Presence of the Lord, v. 8'.<sup>4</sup>

It begins and ends with the Lord, for only He can deliver from all temporal and spiritual afflictions. The opening sentence sets the tone with a question that contemplates Israel's precarious history under threat from the nations, 'If it had not been the Lord who was on our side'?<sup>5</sup> The horror of Egyptian bondage, the Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, and Greco-Roman captivities, as well as more modern atrocities like the Crusades, the Inquisition, the Czarist pogroms, and – worst of all – the Holocaust, all testify to their horrific sufferings. MACDONALD elucidates the importance of 'If', asserting that, 'It spelled the difference between deliverance and disaster. But the Lord *was* there, and that made all the difference. Probably no people have had as many narrow escapes as the Jews. According to all natural laws, they should have been extinct long ago. When you think of the sieges, the massacres, the pogroms, the gas chambers, the ovens, the bombs, it is a miracle they have survived. But survive they did – and that for one compelling

reason – the Lord was on their side'.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, believers in every age could ask themselves, 'where would I be without the Lord'? But for His grace, we would no doubt be ruined in every sense of that word!

MACLAREN declared, 'This psalm is an outgush of the first rapture of astonishment and joy for deliverance so sudden and complete'.<sup>7</sup> His contemporary, BONAR, dubbed it the 'Ebenezer' psalm, averring that it was all about God's incomparable help.<sup>8</sup> Its second phrase, 'now may Israel say', is alternatively rendered 'Say it, Israel', thus expressing a note of earnestness.<sup>9</sup> The redeemed are to urgently say so. This praise is followed by a reiteration of the opening confession that the Lord is their indispensable protector, v. 2. That no other Saviour will avail is evident from the enumeration of their varied afflictions, vv. 2–7.

## Fightings within and fears without

The battle was between 'men' and 'the Lord', v. 2. It is the age-old struggle of the fallen creature rebelling against his Creator. The serpent's seed opposes the seed of the woman, Gen. 3. 15, and His followers in every dispensation. The psalm graphically describes their comprehensive assaults with vigorous metaphors, including rising waters, violent flash floods, ravenous beasts, and

hunters' traps. Rapidity and ferocity unite in these figures, describing terrifying assaults on Israel. Yet each of these fearful attacks beats itself to exhaustion against the anvil of God's sovereign protection of His people.

The enemies' intense opposition is conveyed in the action phrases of verse 2 to 5, 'rose up against us', 'swallowed us alive' NKJV, 'wrath . . . kindled against us', 'overwhelmed us', and the twice repeated 'gone over our soul'. Clearly, these describe aggressive and repeated attacks against Israel. The enemies' goal is to swallow us alive, using a term that elsewhere speaks of the earth swallowing up Korah's rebels, Num. 16. 30.<sup>10</sup> The same word also describes God disciplining Israel through the Babylonian destruction in Jeremiah's day, Lam. 2. 2, 5, 8, as well as His vanquishing death, Isa. 25. 8. As in Psalm 124, passages like Psalm 35 verse 25 and Lamentations chapter 2 verse 16 show wicked men desiring to 'swallow up' the saints. Yet their ferocity pales in comparison with suffering God's wrath. As our Lord said, 'And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell', Matt. 10. 28. Likewise, 'overwhelmed', v. 4, also rendered 'overflowed', YLT, or 'engulfed' NASB, refers in some passages to human activity and in others to God's righteous intervention.<sup>11</sup> Whereas the lost seek to annihilate God's people, the Father disciplines His people to train them and not to destroy them, Heb. 12. 5–11. The relentless assaults are reflected by the parallel statements in Psalm 124 verses 4 and 5: 'overwhelmed', and the double statement 'gone over', yet the Lord is the One 'who hath not given us as a prey to their teeth', v. 6. Far better to be corrected by the loving Father than to face Him as the righteous and all-knowing judge, 1 Cor. 11. 32. Happily, Christ's sacrificial death and powerful resurrection provided incontrovertible protection from the wrath that is in store for this fallen world, 1 Thess. 1. 9, 10.

## Assured deliverance

After this distressing tale of the enemies' ferociously relentless



attacks, the Psalm looks Godward, v. 6, noting that the Almighty delivered them. Like a bird rescued from the hunter's snare, Israel escaped what appeared to be certain destruction. In His awesome power, God shattered the trap and freed His people from their peril. Just as in an earlier day Samuel could erect 'Ebenezer' – a monument to His saving help, 1 Sam. 7. 12 – so now, Israel could declare, 'Our help is in the name of the Lord', Ps. 124. 8. His name gives His identity as the self-sufficient sovereign of the universe. As MACKINTOSH wrote, 'Here lies the solid, the imperishable foundation of everything. Come what may, the name of our God shall stand forever. No power of earth or hell can possibly countervail the divine purpose or hinder the outshining of the divine glory. What sweet rest this gives the heart in the midst of this dark, sorrowful, sin-stricken world, and in the face of the apparently successful schemes of the enemy! Our refuge, our resource, our sweet relief and solace, are found in the name of the Lord our God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ'.<sup>12</sup>

The verse claims His unfailing aid,

adducing His omnipotence as the One 'who made heaven and earth'. The Maker and Redeemer's victory will be seen in His glorious exaltation over all the creation, Phil. 2. 9-11. In anticipation of that great day, we may exult in the exhortation to Israel on the edge of the Promised Land, 'Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the Lord thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee', Deut. 31. 6.

Believers look to the faithful God of the impossible to guard and shepherd them safely home. No matter what physical or spiritual perils they face, the Lord will save His people to an eternal and glorious life in the new heavens and new earth, Rev. 21, 22. As Romans chapter 8 verses 38 and 39 express it, 'For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord'. Mercifully, the Lord is eternally on our side and will never desert us, Heb. 13. 5.



## Endnotes

- 1 One writer explains the connection between Psalms 123 to 125 in these words, 'In each there is the same full recognition of Jehovah's grace and power as working both for the deliverance and the security of His people. In the 123rd Psalm, "The eye waits upon Jehovah, till He be gracious". In the 124th, "If Jehovah had not been on our side, men had swallowed us up alive . . . Our help is in the name of Jehovah". In the 125th, "The mountains are about Jerusalem, and Jehovah is round about His people"'. J. J. STEWART Perowne, *The Book Of Psalms*, Vol. 2, Geo. Bell, 1882, pg. 384.
- 2 BELLETT noted the timeless encouragement of Psalm 124 in this way, 'In the day of the opposition of men, this utterance may, in like manner, suit any godly soul; and may, I doubt not, be especially used by the Israel of the last days who are to endure much of this opposition from the men of the earth, who have their portion in man's world'. J. G. BELLETT, *Short Meditations On The Psalms*, W. H. BROOM, 1876, pg. 138. Accordingly, its encouragement suits David's struggles with the Philistines, 2 Sam. 5; the Gentiles' opposition to Nehemiah, Neh. chh. 4, 6; and the Babylonian-Persian captivities.
- 3 Having or denoting a structure in which words or ideas are repeated in reverse order.
- 4 WILLEM VANGEMEREN, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Psalms*, Zondervan, 2008, pg. 902.
- 5 J. N. DARBY and F. W. GRANT each render it 'who was for us'; in Hebrew it is the past tense of 'Immanuel', VANGEMEREN, *op. cit.*, pg. 902.
- 6 WILLIAM MACDONALD, *Believer's Bible Commentary*, Thomas Nelson, 1995, pg. 752. [Italics original]. Another adds, 'The danger was so great, their helplessness was so manifest, and the deliverance was so clearly the work of God, that it was proper to say that *if* this had not occurred, ruin would have been inevitable and entire'. ALBERT BARNES, *Notes On The Old Testament*, Vol. 3, Blackie, 1870–1872, pg. 242. [Italics original].
- 7 ALEXANDER MACLAREN, *The Expositor's Bible*, Vol. 3, Scranton, 1903, pg. 308.
- 8 ANDREW BONAR, *Christ And His Church In The Book Of Psalms*, Robert Carter, 1860, pg. 388.
- 9 ROBERT BRATCHER and WILLIAM REYBURN, *A Translator's Handbook On The Book of Psalms*, UBS, 1991, pg. 1063.
- 10 'The act of swallowing is a common ancient Near-Eastern motif for utter and absolute destruction, cp. Exod. 7. 12; 15. 12, . . .', JOHN CURRID, *Numbers*, Evangelical Press, 2009, pg. 238.
- 11 Compare Isa. 8. 8 and Isa. 10. 22.
- 12 C. H. MACKINTOSH, *Notes On The Pentateuch*, Loizeaux Brothers, 1972, pg. 898.

# THE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE

By **JOHN RIDDLE** Cheshunt, England

## Part 2

We now come to the **proof of inspiration**.

In this connection, we should notice that while we value the work of archaeologists, scientists and historians, and have nothing to fear from any of them, our acceptance of the word of God does not rest on external evidence. We believe the Bible **because it is the Bible**, the word of God. The Bible authenticates itself:

### By the fulfilment of the prophetic scriptures

The outstanding example of this is the fact that the Bible records the fulfilment of its own prophecies concerning the Lord Jesus. He is the unity and continuity of Holy Scripture. 'Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me', John 5. 39. Far from making predictions which can be interpreted to suit the whims and fancies of the expositor, Bible prophecy is marked by precise details as opposed to vague hints and suggestions. A selection from those which concern the advent of Israel's Messiah will serve to illustrate this statement. For example, 'The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be', Gen. 49. 10. The New Testament traces the genealogy of the Lord Jesus back to Judah, and observes, 'it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda', Heb. 7. 14.<sup>1</sup> In Revelation chapter 5, we are privileged to witness a scene in heaven, 'behold the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book', v. 5.

Then the precise place in which Messiah was born is given, Mic. 5. 2. The mode of His conception is clearly predicted, Isa. 7. 14. This complete accuracy in connection with the Lord Jesus may be observed in every part of the Old Testament. His very words on the cross, and

the mode of His death, are recorded beforehand in Psalm 22 verses 1 and 16.

We could mention the accuracy of the word of God in relation to cities and other events. For example, the fulfilment, within the compass of the Old Testament, of prophecies concerning the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions, the seventy years prophecy, Daniel 9, concerning the repopulation and rebuilding of Jerusalem, and the naming of Josiah and Cyrus, long years before their birth, emphasize the amazing accuracy of Holy Scripture.<sup>2</sup>

We have deliberately kept within the scriptures themselves, but should we look for external confirmation, the amount of material is overwhelming. The prophecy concerning Tyre is one example, 'I will also scrape her dust from her . . . It shall be a place for the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea', Ezek. 26. 3-5. The army of Alexander the Great actually used the ruins of Tyre in constructing a causeway to reach



an offshore island to which the inhabitants of the city had fled. The ruins are still in the sea, and fishermen still spread their nets on them! The destruction of Jerusalem is another example, Luke 19. 41-44. The fact that Professor Garstang found remains of foodstuffs – wheat, barley, lentils, dates, onions, olives and pieces of dough – but no metal in the ruins of Jericho, corroborates Joshua chapter 6 verse 19. The fossil remains of tropical growth in Hudson Bay territory,<sup>3</sup> and the discovery of thousands of bodies of woolly mammoths in Northern Siberia,<sup>4</sup> corroborates, together with other vast evidence, the universal flood of Genesis chapters 6 to 8. The arts and treasures of Nineveh exhibited in the museums of the world fulfil Nahum chapter 3 verse 6.<sup>5</sup> The evidence is endless!

### The way in which the Lord Jesus authenticated the scriptures

The Lord Jesus quoted from eighteen Old Testament books.<sup>6</sup> The greatest proof of the authenticity of the Old Testament is given by the Lord Jesus Himself. For example, He endorsed the opening chapters of Genesis.<sup>7</sup>

It is deeply significant that the very sections of the Old Testament most attacked and lampooned by the critics, were specifically endorsed by the Lord Jesus. To deny the Genesis record of creation, the flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, and, for that matter, the story of Jonah and the whale, is to call the Son of God a liar.

### Endnotes

1. Matt. 1. 2; Luke 3. 33.
2. 1 Kgs. 13. 2; Isa. 44. 28; 45. 1.
3. The writer has a piece of fossilized palm tree extracted from the tar sands near Fort McMurray, Alberta, Canada.
4. MICHAEL OARD, *Frozen in Time*, Master Books, 2004.
5. Visit the Department of Assyriology in the British Museum.
6. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, 1 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Hosea, Jonah, Micah, Zechariah, and Malachi.
7. See: Mark 10. 6, 7; Luke 11. 50, 51; Matt. 24. 37; Luke 17. 29.



# A reflection on John Chapter 13 verses 1 to 17

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

There is a lovely picture of advocacy in the Upper Room ministry. Indeed, we might have been a little surprised if there wasn't, bearing in mind that four times over our original word, *parakletos*, is found in that context. In John chapter 13, our Lord is acutely aware that He is leaving this world. 'Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end', v. 1. Note, it is 'unto the Father' and, of course, 'we have an advocate with the Father', 1 John 2. 1. Additionally, our Lord was aware that 'he . . . went to God', v. 3. Conversely, 'his own . . . were in the world', v. 1. An interesting picture is emerging: the Lord has effectively gone to be with the Father (or, to use the parallel language of John chapter 17 verse 11, He is 'no more in the world'), but His own are still 'in the world'. KELLY seems to have accurately assessed the situation, 'He was going to His Father on high, and here reveals what He in that glory would do for them while here below'.<sup>1</sup> It is a beautiful picture of advocacy!

He is admirably fitted to undertake the task – clothed appropriately for the occasion, vv. 4, 5. Garments of earth are laid aside. Girded with a towel and with water in a basin, He is ready to undertake the task. Garments, of course, speak of character – here is 'Jesus Christ' (earthly garments

laid aside), the 'righteous', (He alone capable of taking the towel and the water, Eph. 5. 26), cleansing defiled disciples in view of communion and fellowship, cp. 1 John 1. 6. 'It is the washing of water by the word which the Spirit applies in answer to the Son's advocacy with the Father. Of this Christ was here giving the sign'.<sup>2</sup>

The fact that there is a deeper significance in the act is evidenced by our Lord's reply to Peter's question. Peter had asked, 'Lord, dost thou wash my feet?' The Lord's answer is most revealing, 'What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter'. VINCENT has an interesting observation. He says, 'The A.V. ignores the distinction between the two words [for knowing]. Thou *knowest* not . . . of *absolute and complete knowledge*. Thou shalt *learn* or *perceive* . . . of knowledge gained by experience'.<sup>3</sup> Peter might have protested that he was perfectly well aware of what was happening – his feet were being washed! But there was something more. He did not have 'complete knowledge'. He would 'learn or perceive' the deeper meaning by experience and maturity. This was a picture then, or practical preview of what would take place 'hereafter', when the Lord would be the Advocate with the Father. It is clear that John had grasped the deeper significance when he wrote his Epistle. The involuntary defilement by walking

the streets of Jerusalem had to be removed. Otherwise, Peter had 'no part with' (not 'in'; the vital link is not broken) his Master. Communion or fellowship could only be maintained by being rid of the defilement ('if any man sin', 1 John 2. 1). No believer today can escape involuntary defilement in a world saturated with sordid sin. There is always the need for the Advocate!

It is evident too that the Lord took the initiative. Again, the link with 1 John is clear. The Advocate – the Helper, the Intercessor – moves immediately the requirement is known – maybe in many cases even before it is known.<sup>4</sup> How much have we been preserved from, without even knowing it?

There was no need, of course, for an overall washing – regeneration needs no repetition. It is 'not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost', Titus 3. 5.

The first eleven verses of John chapter 13 are thus a lovely picture of our Lord's office as an Advocate. The parallel with what we have seen in 1 John is unmistakable. Of course, we should not miss the fact that the Lord is also leaving us an example, as underlined in verse 15 – to 'do as [not what] I have done to you'. The exemplary character of His activity is emphasized from verses 12 to 17. The Lord 'had taken his garments, and was set down again'. He retakes His place with them now as 'Lord and Master' – able to resume fellowship with them, on the basis of the effectiveness of His work as an Advocate, and to bring to bear the important practical and salutary lessons of being His devoted servants, v. 16.



## Endnotes

- 1 W. KELLY, *Exposition of the Gospel of John*, F. E. Race, 1898.
- 2 *Ibid.*
- 3 M. R. VINCENT, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, Macdonald Publishing Company, N. D.
- 4 See, for example, 'And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren', Luke 22. 31, 32.

# What is thy beloved more than another beloved?

## Part 2

By **ANDREW BENNETT** Sound, Shetland

In our first article we considered something of the general features mentioned by the Shulamite as well as one or two features that were conspicuous. She mentioned her beloved as the standard bearer and from that we turned our hearts and minds to the person of Christ.

In this article we will see some more of the detail, starting at the crown of his head. The details, she tells the daughters of Jerusalem, are what set her beloved apart from the others – it is a glowing tribute in lovely language throughout. It seems that she has scanned the whole world as far as symbolism is concerned, from the animals, flowers, and trees, to colours, to precious metals and precious stones. Such a wide variety is used in her description.

Is it not true that there is so much variety in the features of the person of Christ? Will it not take eternity to explore the person and work of Christ? Even then, we will never plumb the depths! John wrote, 'our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ', 1 John 1. 3. What a tremendous privilege we have of being able to converse with the Father about the Son.

### His head

'His head is as the most fine gold', S. of S. 5. 11. As we are aware, gold is an exceedingly precious metal. It is a fitting symbol of the divine glory. As we think about the head of the Saviour, how remarkable that at His birth we read that Mary 'brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger', Luke 2. 7. His head laid in the manger because there was no room for Him, the One who had created the worlds. This was the same throughout the public ministry of the Saviour, Matt. 8. 20.

The culmination of it all is found

in the events leading up to and including Calvary. We can think of the crown of thorns upon His head, as well as the head that men beat with a reed, Matt. 27. 27-31.

We can recall the words of the hymn writer:  
Every mark of dark dishonour  
    Heaped upon thy thorn-crowned brow,  
All the depths of thy hearts sorrow  
    Told in answering glory now.  
[THOMPSON]

Truly, the head that once was crowned with thorns is indeed crowned with glory now. John records, 'And I looked, and behold a white cloud,



and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown', Rev. 14. 14.

### His locks

'His locks are bushy, and black as a raven'. In the word 'bushy' we have the idea of 'flowing'. Here is the emblem of youthfulness and beauty. The blackness of the locks would be an indication that there is no ageing – no signs of grey or deterioration. There is no decline and no decay.

### His eyes

The eyes are 'as the eyes of doves by the rivers of waters, washed with milk, and fitly set'. The dove would be a symbol of innocence, of guilelessness and tenderness. When we think of the term 'fitly set', it reminds us of the skill of the jeweller. There is tremendous skill in setting the gemstone in the ring in order to display its beauty. Thus, says the Shulamite, the eyes are fitly set.

How often we can think of the eyes of the Saviour as He saw the need of those around Him. How often do we read that He looked upon individuals or the multitude with compassion?<sup>1</sup> How many occasions did He observe the few disciples that followed after Him?<sup>2</sup> Think too of the occasions when His eyes were filled with tears, whether considering the grave of Lazarus, or the garden of Gethsemane.<sup>3</sup> He observed the havoc that sin had brought upon creation, yet the prophet wrote of God, 'Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?' Hab. 1. 13. However, the prospect is glorious, for Paul wrote, 'the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now', Rom. 8. 21, 22.

### Endnotes

- 1 Matt. 9. 36; 14. 14; 15. 32; 20. 34. These verses in Matthew's Gospel alone.
- 2 John 6. 66.
- 3 John 11. 35; Heb. 5. 7.



# WORDFORTODAY

By **BRIAN CLATWORTHY** Newbury, England

**phbaytron** - Terror

**phobos** - Fear

**Phoebe** - Phoebe

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (Second Edition 1989) defines the word 'fear' as 'the emotion of pain or uneasiness caused by the sense of impending danger', and these traits are vividly described by the prophet Habakkuk as he contemplated the impending judgement of God, 'When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble', 3. 16. We often view the prophets as remarkable individuals, yet, as James reminds us about the prophet Elijah, he 'was a human being, even as we are', 5. 17 NIV. Fear is therefore a natural characteristic of human beings as we engage with the world around us. It also reflects our weakness, and this vulnerability enables God to act through us as He demonstrates His intrinsic power, 2 Cor. 12. 9.<sup>1</sup> We see this exemplified in the lives of individuals such as Abraham as he experienced human fear before God, Gen. 15. 1, and of Belshazzar, as he saw the part of the hand as it wrote upon the wall, 'his face turned pale and he was so frightened that his knees knocked together and his legs gave way', Dan. 5. 6 NIV.

There are many other examples of individuals in the Bible who had this sense of terror when they were either confronted by God or human beings. In the post-diluvian period, every living creature also shares in this experience of fear as they are hunted down by man for food, Gen. 9. 2. What these examples illustrate, however, is that the word 'fear' (*phobos*) is used in the Bible in a general way either for good, as in Acts chapter 9 verse 31 and Ephesians chapter 6 verse 5, or in

a bad or evil way, as in Romans chapter 8 verse 15 and in 1 John chapter 4 verse 18, but there are several other synonyms that occur in both the Septuagint (LXX) and the Greek New Testament, which help clarify the word 'fear'.

The noun *deilia* occurs in the Septuagint (LXX) in Leviticus chapter 26 verse 36 to describe the fear or cowardice that would consume the former inhabitants of the land as they are persecuted by their captors, and which ultimately leads to their destruction. Similarly, in Psalm 55 verse 5, the Psalmist is overwhelmed by the terrors of death. This sense of cowardice is also applicable to the use of the word in the New Testament. In 2 Timothy chapter 1 verse 7, Paul encourages his young helper by stating that God did not give us 'the spirit of fear'. The Greek word used here for 'fear' is not *phobos*, but the noun *deilia*, because the word literally means 'cowardice', and although this word only occurs here in the whole of the New Testament, it is never used in a good sense elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> The connected adjective *deilos*, has the similar meaning of being afraid or cowardly.<sup>3</sup> Although the second synonym *eulabeia* can, on occasions, mean fear or anxiety, it usually refers to a pious fear or reverence especially towards God. TRENCH observes, '*phobos* is a middle term, capable of a good interpretation, capable of an evil, and lying indifferently between the two'.<sup>4</sup>

In the New Testament the verb *phobeomai* meaning 'to fear' occurs over ninety times and has a combination of meanings depending on the context. In John chapter 9 verse 22, the parents of the blind man feared the Jewish authorities. Likewise, the temple guards 'feared the people' in case they were stoned by them for their previous action, Acts 5. 26, cp. Matt. 21. 26. Conversely, when Paul

appears before the Sanhedrin and there is great dissension among the Pharisees and Sadducees over the question of resurrection etc., the Roman tribune fears that Paul's life is in danger so rescues him from the ensuing melee. By far the most important use of the word 'fear' in the Bible is in the sense of awe and reverence when one encounters God Himself. In Mary's song, she expresses this in terms of the mercy of God being placed upon all those who reverence Him, Luke 1. 50.<sup>5</sup> Peter states that fearing God is a basic commandment for a believer, 1 Pet. 2. 17. Not only is reverence shown to God Himself, but also to our Lord Jesus Christ. Men stood in awe of Him when He performed miracles, e.g., Matt. 9. 8; Mark 5. 15, and of the things that He said, Mark 9. 32; John 19. 8.<sup>6</sup>

The greatest fear of humanity is death, Heb. 2. 15, yet we as believers can 'fear not' because the Saviour has drawn the sting of death and triumphed at Calvary, 1 Cor. 15. 57.

## For further reading/study

### Introductory

'Fear and Fear Not' in HAROLD K. MOULTON, *The Challenge of the Concordance*, Attic Press, 1977, pp. 213-216.

### Advanced

Phobeo, phobeomai, phobos, in GEOFFREY W. BROMLEY, *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Abridged in One volume), Eerdmans, 1985, pp. 1272-1277.

## Endnotes

- 1 When Paul first preached at Corinth he did so 'in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling', 1 Cor. 2. 3, which should be an encouragement to all preachers!
- 2 I. H. MARSHALL writes concerning *deilia* in this context, 'It is the opposite of faith (Spicq. 709) and the weakness most to be avoided in time of war (TLNT I, 300-2). The fear is that of public witness due to a sense of shame or fear of suffering (cf. Heb. 10.32-39)', *The Pastoral Epistles*, T. & T. Clarke, 2004, pg. 699.
- 3 Matt. 8. 26; Mark 4. 40; Rev. 21. 8.
- 4 R. C. TRENCH, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, Eerdmans, 1950, pg. 33.
- 5 ALFRED PLUMMER writes, "'Fearing God" is the O.T. description of piety', *St Luke* (ICC), T. & T. Clarke, pg. 32.
- 6 Ephesians chapter 5 verse 33 refers to a wife reverencing her husband, but this is by way of respect, not awe!

# The Island of St. Lucia

By **PHIL GOULD**

## Its position

St. Lucia is a small tropical island in the Caribbean Sea located about 400km north of South America. With a very mountainous terrain, the majority of the population of approximately 180,000 live in cities and towns around the coastline. Most are of African and Indian descent along with influence from the French and British who controlled the island in past centuries.

## Its privilege

The Lord moved to bring several individuals from Canada and the UK to spread the gospel in the 1970s and 1980s. On arrival, there was a single assembly in the capital city that would trace its history and commencement back to the 1930s because of the labour of English missionaries. An open door was set before that second group of evangelists and, in the grace of God, individuals were saved in multiple communities and were willing to be taught the truths of gathering to the name of the Lord Jesus. In time, six other assemblies were established in testimony to our Lord and Saviour. Since those years, the gospel has been faithfully proclaimed in many parts of the island. This is a history to be thankful for.

## The present

In 2017, Trena and I, along with our three children, left Winnipeg, Canada, to begin serving the Lord here. For myself, it was a 'return home', having been raised in St. Lucia by my parents, Jack and Ruth Gould, who had laboured here. In praying about the work,

we had a burden both for building into the existing local assemblies, as well as working outward into towns and villages that did not have a true gospel testimony. Since arriving, we have continued in supporting three assemblies in the north of the island in their weekly meetings. Most assemblies are smaller in number, and responsibility falls on a very few. It is our desire to teach and shepherd, as the Lord allows, including personal visitation and hospitality.

Working outward in the gospel has been concentrated around a fishing village named Anse la Raye. Before COVID restrictions, numerous weeks of children's meetings saw many children come through the door of a small, rented building. These are times of continued sowing and praying for the harvest. Personal work on the streets and in homes has continued most weeks even through the past few years of restrictions. Numerous religious beliefs and practices have entered the island in recent decades, adding to what in the past had been a strong Roman Catholic following. So, while Bible texts, tracts and magazines are generally well received and appreciated as God's word, sadly the understanding of salvation simply by repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ has been distorted. In this environment, 'we preach Christ crucified', 1 Cor. 1. 23, seeking to bring the lost to an understanding of the glories of our Lord and Saviour, and the work of the cross as all that has satisfied God on account of our

sin. Through the years, the Lord has brought across our path many individuals from all walks of life. Yet we would desire true fruit for our God from good ground, as we often see evidence that the seed has fallen on the other three types of soil, Matt. 13. 1-9.

A change the Lord brought to us with the closing down of public group outreach work has meant an ability to make time to focus on the teaching of younger believers. During the 'COVID era', sets of weekly Bible Classes each Saturday have been conducted on Zoom, but also, at times, in our home, as regulations allow. We have been encouraged by the growth and interest in learning. The need for the consistent, and consecutive teaching of God's word never ends, if others are to learn and appreciate scriptural truths and make them their own. Other labours with younger believers include those newly saved, to whom biblical truths must be taught, such as baptism, gathering to the name of the Lord, being a disciple, living as a Christian and many others.

## For prayer

Our prayer is for faithful testimony to shine brightly for our Lord until He returns. In general, assemblies are older in age profile with not many of another generation willing to bow to the Lord in true discipleship. Among the few younger believers, we pray for their continued growth and guidance from the Lord in seeking to continue to teach and shepherd. We long to see many more souls saved and willing to take on the mantle of future responsibility in the local assemblies. While much has been allowed to continue over the past years with COVID, we do seek the return of pre-COVID labours, including 'in person' gospel series, children's work, summer vacation Bible Schools, and expanded personal visitation and hospitality. Finally, a new aspect of the work that began in 2021 is the on-island printing of scripture calendars, and we seek a blessing from the 5,000 that were distributed for the 2022 year.



Fishing Village of Anse la Raye



## QUESTION

### **Q&A – Is it acceptable for a Christian to get a tattoo?**

## ANSWER

An online survey conducted in 2018 estimated that 40% of responders in the UK had received at least one tattoo with similar trends being observed for other western countries around the world.<sup>1</sup> Whilst the results of this survey are likely to be an overestimate, they illustrate the increasing prevalence of tattoos today.<sup>2</sup> Tattoos can also be seen on many high-profile sportsmen and women, musicians, and media stars. This could cause a young Christian (or indeed an older one) to feel under considerable pressure to get a tattoo when it seems as if everyone else is getting them. The Bible makes it clear that a general principle governing our lives is that we are not to be conformed to this world. Read Romans chapter 12 verses 1 and 2. The idea is that we should not fashion or shape ourselves according to the world. However, is there any biblical evidence that getting a tattoo is in fact wrong?

In terms of direct scriptural teaching on tattoos, Leviticus chapter 19 verse 28 states, 'Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you [i.e., tattoo permanent marks upon you]: I am the Lord'. These Old Testament commands were given to Israel that they should be distinct from the pagan nations around them. The idolatrous nations of that day commonly practised making permanent marks on their bodies in dedicating themselves to their false gods, or for reasons such as appearing more fearsome in battle. Since such instructions are not repeated in the New Testament, one might conclude that these commands were associated with the Old Testament law and that a New Testament believer therefore has liberty to receive a tattoo. Is this teaching relevant for us today?

Whilst tattoos are not mentioned in the New Testament, there is clear teaching highlighting the fact that the way a believer treats their body is very important to God. Such arguments provide the basis for Paul's arguments in 1 Corinthians chapter 6 when dealing with the issue of sexual immorality. Our bodies are the inner temple, the Holy of Holies, of the Holy Spirit, v. 19. As places where God dwells, our bodies, therefore, are unspeakably holy. When the Lord Jesus paid the price for us on the cross, our bodies were included in that purchase. This means our bodies do not belong to us, they belong to God, v. 20. As Paul states in verse 19, 'Ye are not your own'. This profound truth attaches a dignity to the body of every believer. It also helps to answer questions over practices such as whether it is right or not to get a tattoo. Is it appropriate to take and physically mark our bodies which do not belong to us but belong to God? It is difficult to justify getting a tattoo when we take this biblical truth into account.

We need to beware of the possibility of double standards, however. If we argue that a believer should not receive a tattoo, an outward marking, because they are treating their body in a poor way, what about the way we treat our bodies inwardly? For example, a poor diet and little exercise can have a serious impact on the health of our bodies. Do we take these matters seriously as well? Being good stewards of our bodies relates to all kind of issues including health, sexual purity, and avoiding addictive or intoxicating substances as well as marking our bodies physically. We need to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, 'And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?' Matt. 7. 3.

We also need to be careful not to judge others based on external appearance. For example, it would be easy to make assumptions about the spirituality of a person because they have a tattoo. While appearance is important to God, e.g., 1 Pet. 3. 3, it is not as important as the heart of an individual before God, v. 4. We need to remember the words God spoke to Samuel, 'Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart', 1 Sam. 16. 7.

As believers, we know that our physical bodies are temporary dwellings that are perishing and that the inner man should be the focus of our attention, 2 Cor. 4. 16 – 5. 8. This gives the believer a balanced perspective over the way we view our bodies. The investment of our time and energy should be focused on the spiritual inner person rather than the outward physical person. Yet, at the same time, God views our bodies as something very precious and, ultimately, they belong to Him.

Editorial note: A Christian who may have been tattooed prior to their conversion should not, however, seek to remedy this matter after the event unless they feel compelled to do so themselves. In our view, their situation is covered by 1 Corinthians chapter 7 verses 18 to 20.

### **Endnotes**

- 1 <https://www.statista.com/statistics/941731/share-of-people-with-tattoos-in-selected-countries/>.
- 2 The self-selecting cohort used in the survey is likely to be biased towards a younger generation as an internet-based survey. It is a safe assumption that young people are more likely to receive a tattoo.

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## PreciousSeed

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'The heron after her kind', Lev. 11. 19; Deut. 14. 18.

PS  
Magazine

### 'The heron after her kind', Lev. 11. 19; Deut. 14. 18.

In the list of birds that were regarded as unclean and therefore not to be consumed by Israelites, it is relatively easy to appreciate why birds of prey should be included. As they feed upon carrion or rotting flesh, their ability to transmit disease is understandable. It is also suggested that what they ate affected their flesh and rendered them unpleasant to others that might eat them. However, when we come to the heron, it might be asked why this elegant and largely aquatic bird is included.

There are several different species of heron in Israel, the most common of which is the grey heron. But, as 'after her kind' indicates, all the different species of heron are designated unclean. Anyone who has observed the bird will know that it is noted for its ability to stand motionless in pools and rivers awaiting its prey of fish, frogs, and other water-based creatures. Perhaps this supplies the answer to the bird being labelled unclean – the heron is ultimately carnivorous. CONSTABLE suggests, 'The unclean birds ate flesh with the blood in it, something that God also forbade among His people' (*Expository Notes*).

Having birds designated clean and unclean was God's way of protecting, as well as distinguishing, His people from other nations around, and also from the environment in which they lived. Apart from a manifestation of His care, God is also teaching Israel the need for discernment – they could not just feed upon anything.

There is a lesson in this for us as Christians. As we have access to a multitude of resources at the touch of a button, are we exercising similar care over what we consume? Are we discerning in our choices, using spiritual judgement to determine that which is of profit? Peter states, 'as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby', 1 Pet. 2. 2.

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