

PreciousSeed

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'The owl also and the raven shall dwell in it', Isa. 34. 11.

PS
Magazine

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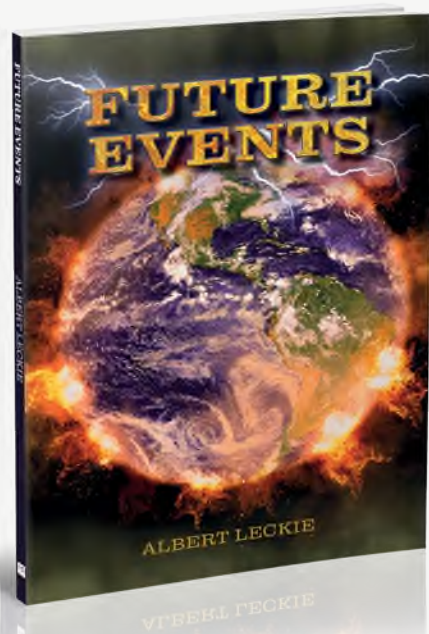
Charting the Scriptures

with Jonathan Black

We are pleased to make available these popular charts together with the book introduction and analysis that appeared on the reverse when they were first published in *Precious Seed* magazine. Each chart is laminated for strength and durability.

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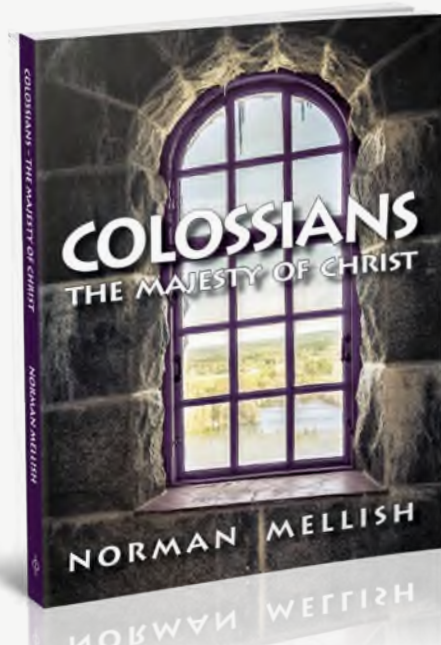


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At the author's request, this book has been revised and expanded to include his exposition of the Epistle to Philemon.

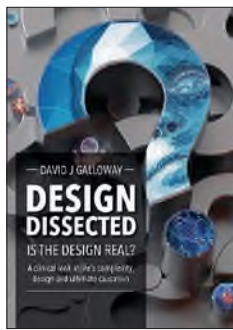
As Philemon was a Colossian and a man whose ministry to the Christians Paul was aware of, his appeal to him on behalf of Onesimus the runaway slave reveals much of the pastoral heart of the apostle.

For those familiar with the writings of Norman Mellish, this will be a welcome addition to the library.

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Book Reviews



Design Dissected – Is the design real? David J. Galloway
224 pages, Paperback. Published by John Ritchie Ltd, 40 Beansburn, Kilmarnock.
ISBN 13: 978-1-914273-00-1.

The past few years have seen a number of books published on evidence of design in nature and how this is a compelling pointer to the Creator. This book is an interesting addition to the debate, and approaches these important issues from a different angle, namely reflections from a career in medicine. The author is a highly-regarded cancer surgeon who uses his life in surgery and the medical sciences to illustrate a number of important points which are overlooked by many who deny that there is any evidence for design (and hence by extension, a Designer) in nature.

The chapters in the book are short and each in turn focuses on a particular question, including the limits of science to explain everything, and the importance of using the correct methods for determining an original cause. The chapters are richly illustrated with examples from the author's extensive and

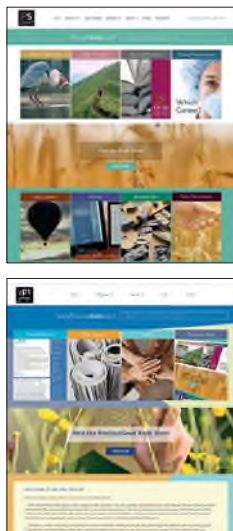
distinguished clinical career, with numerous interesting incidents and anecdotes which illustrate the points in question. In some chapters, the enthusiasm for these fascinating incidents runs away with itself, and arrival at the end left this reviewer, at times, wondering how we had got to the conclusion which is presented at the end of the chapter.

The middle section of the book, entitled 'Layers of Perplexity', discusses a number of areas of complexity within the medical and biological sciences. This includes genetics, the structure of the cells of the body, and details of how some important body systems work. This complexity is a compelling argument for design in living things. Whilst well written, the level of detail presented does require the reader to have at least some background in this area, as numerous technical terms are used (at times without explanation). As such, many readers may struggle with

the level of detail in this section.

However, it is somewhat disappointing that the final conclusion of the book is: 'The weight of evidence supporting real design brings the theistic view to centre stage', which is a little underwhelming. It almost feels like it is missing the final chapter that deals with the issue of why this matters at all. There is surely much more which can be said in this regard, as the evidence of design in nature points to the Creator, to God Himself, and, by extension, to Christ as Saviour. This emphasis is almost completely missing from the book. In fact, it is difficult to find any reference to Christ at all. Surely, to be beyond academic interest, such a book must move beyond evidence merely for a 'theistic view' to a presentation of the Creator Himself.

Thanks to Keith Hunter, Killamarsh, for this review



Precious Seed websites

Regular users of our websites – preciousseed.org and youngpreciousseed.org – will be aware of the refresh which came into effect at the end of January and the beginning of February. Our previous sites had served us well over the years, but for some time we have been conscious that a degree of modernization was required – both in relation to the technology which sits behind the sites as well as the general appearance.

The new sites are the result of many months of work on the part of our designer, Phil Jennings, to whom we express our thanks for all his effort. Phil was given the brief of producing sites which are both easy to navigate and easy to read. If you haven't accessed the sites recently, we would encourage you to take a look – we hope you will like what you see! Both sites have a fresh, clean appearance and have been designed to operate on phones and tablets as

well as desktop computers.

Precious Seed was established in 1945 for the purpose of publishing sound Bible teaching material with an emphasis on New Testament church principles. By the grace of God, the magazine has been in continuous publication since then and a large wealth of material has been generated which is still very relevant today. There are currently over 4,000 articles by 700 authors, and this is expanding with each issue of the magazine. Some issues of the magazine have yet to be uploaded and work is in progress to scan and prepare these for publication to the site.

Searches of the database can be instigated directly from the 'Home' page – simply type into the search bar and the system will return all articles where the selected word appears in the title or in the text itself. Of the 4,000+ articles, there is

material on: New Testament church truth, prophecy, Bible characters, dispensations, and types and shadows. Much has also been written which is of a devotional nature, focusing on the person and work of Christ. In addition, there are practical articles, many book reviews, and, of interest to some, the 'Reports of Gospel Work and Other Activities' which can encourage us to labour in our day and generation as well as providing snippets of information concerning different places and the Lord's people. All of this is searchable by author, title and, where relevant, by series.

The main website continues to offer a daily devotional reading taken from the Day-by-Day series (currently *Divine Titles*) and access to our shop where all of our current stock can be ordered.

We hope to continue to develop the site and our prayer is that this will be of blessing to many.

‘The cloke . . . and the books, but especially the parchments’, 2 Tim. 4. 13

Have you ever left or lost something? Sometimes, the item is not that valuable, but there are some things that are undoubtedly worth searching for and retrieving.

When Paul wrote his second letter to Timothy, he was probably imprisoned in a dungeon cell in Rome. His circumstances were considerably different from his last experience in that city, Acts 28. 16-31. Darker days had come, and Paul had been arrested and had no time to gather up all his possessions. Three of his possessions are identified in our text. The question is why these three items alone were so important to Paul? We suggest that they reflect some of Paul’s teaching in the Pastoral letters.

The cloke – The cloke refers to an outer garment made from a heavy material, circular in shape with a hole in the middle for the person’s head, like a poncho cape. Languishing in a dungeon cell during winter would not be a pleasant or a warm

experience and so the cloke would be of immeasurable benefit to him. Even though Paul knew the help of the Lord, v. 17, he did not despise the use of other means of comfort in his predicament. Throughout the Pastorals, Paul teaches that Christianity is not about extremism as evidenced by those who pervert the gospel of Christ. Nor is it resignation! When our bodies are cold, we need clothing; when we feel abandoned and our spirits are low, we rejoice in the support of Christian friends, 1. 16-18. These are not spiritual weaknesses, but the recognition that our faith is both practical and corporate.

The books, but especially the parchments – The word for ‘books’ refers to any writing in general, but in the Old Testament it means the Book of the Law, Deut. 28. 58. So, this may well be a request for copies of Old Testament scriptures to enable Paul to keep up his daily reading. This emphasis on attendance to reading scripture is mirrored throughout the

Pastorals. How much time do we spend meditating daily on scripture?

Finally, ‘the parchments’ suggests Paul’s private papers, possibly legal documents, confirming his Roman citizenship. These would be required by him to support his case before Caesar. Whilst our true citizenship is in heaven, Phil. 3. 20, and we are spiritual exiles in this world, 1 Pet. 2. 11; Heb. 11. 13, we are, nonetheless, required to show that we are good citizens by our subjection to authorities, provided it does not compromise our allegiance to Christ. This teaching on legal obligation is seen in the Pastorals, 1 Tim. 2. 1-4; Titus 3. 1, and elsewhere. Believers should resist, however, any attempt by authorities to make us compliant with that which is contrary to God’s word, regardless of how it seeks to squeeze us ‘into its own mould’, Rom. 12. 2 PHILLIPS.

BRIAN CLATWORTHY

Ministry Articles Editor

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Old Testament women who appear in the New Testament

EVE

By **JOHN SCARSBROOK**, Killamarsh, England

Late in the twentieth century some very clever and highly qualified scientists proposed a theory, and it was never more than a theory, suggesting that the evolutionary descent on the female side could be traced back a vast number of years to a single individual, whom they entitled mitochondrial-Eve. They could have saved themselves a great deal of time, expense, and research if they had picked up a Bible and just read the first three chapters, which explain in remarkably simple language how the God of eternity, and of creation, formed the first man and the first woman. It would seem that Adam was so named by God as indicating his origin from the earth. Eve, meaning life or life giver, was named by Adam as being the 'mother of all living', Gen. 3. 20; *ergo*, the scientists' problem is solved, not by an alternative theory, but by indisputable historical fact!

The brief, yet complete, record of man's creation utterly refutes the atheistic conjectures of 'science falsely so called'. We stand in awe as we see Adam formed by the hand of the Master craftsman; only dust, yet 'fearfully and wonderfully made'. Both Adam and Eve were unique in their origin. No conception, no infancy, no parental home, but fully formed, able to relate to their environment and to communicate with each other and with God. There is no doubt that the Apostle Paul accepted without question the Genesis record of Adam and Eve. On more than one occasion in his writings, to which we will refer later, the apostle takes our minds back to Eden in support and explanation of both doctrine and practice. Such God-given order could hardly be substantiated by myths and legends. It would be akin to explaining the work of salvation from the writings of Homer or Euripides!

At some time during the sixth day of creation, with the universe fully functioning, the earth adorned and supporting plant and animal life, Adam was created in the image of God, entirely distinct from the existing creation. Although the animals

brought before and named by Adam were formed 'out of the ground', having many of the same chemical elements as himself, there was none found with which he could have true companionship and fellowship. In view of this, God revealed His final creation work, a suitable help, to complement the man, that together they could fulfil the divine purpose as the creator intended.

To accomplish this, a remarkable surgical operation was performed. The Almighty did not need to craft His design in this way, He could as easily have spoken a word and brought Eve into being. But in order to establish a unique bond between the man and the woman, or perhaps better, husband and wife, He took from Adam's side a part of him to complete the creation programme and endow with typical significance for all time the sanctity of the marriage relationship. Adam could now say with absolute probity, 'This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh', a statement endorsed and upheld by the Lord Jesus, when, in Mark chapter 10, He said, 'For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; and they twain shall be one flesh: so

then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder', vv. 7-9. The Apostle Paul would later take up the theme in Ephesians chapter 5, as a beautiful picture of Christ and the church, the 'great mystery' revealed, with lessons in loving submissiveness and sanctification, leading again, in verse 31, to the direct quotation from Genesis chapter 2 verse 24, thus confirming the validity and importance of the Genesis record.

Again, when seeking to establish the truth of headship to the Corinthian believers, the apostle reminds them of the relevance of creation order. 'For the man is not of the woman: but the woman of the man', Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man, 1 Cor. 11. 8, 9. However, lest this should appear to be in any way prejudicial to the woman, the apostle then states what is apparent and observable in verses 11 and 12. 'Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God'. It goes without saying that in our modern society where long and well-established standards are being jettisoned, where Christianity is vilified and immoral behaviour is promoted and legalized, that the principles laid down in scripture for the well ordering of human relationships are mocked and ridiculed or simply ignored. Yet nowhere in scripture is there any suggestion that the woman is inferior to the man, either intellectually, morally, or rationally. The only allowance made is in physical strength, which, in itself, enhances the attractiveness of the husband-and-wife relationship, 1 Pet. 3. 7.

Eve is only mentioned twice by name in the New Testament. In 2 Corinthians chapter 11, the apostle is at pains to assure the Corinthian believers that, notwithstanding the correctional tone of his first letter, they were very dear to his heart. Bearing in mind the moral, doctrinal, and practical matters dealt with in his previous correspondence, his desire for them was their purity of life until such time as they entered

the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. But the apostle was well aware that followers of Christ have an adversary, an inveterate enemy, the father of lies and the master of deception. Paul had already reminded his readers that 'we are not ignorant of his devices', 2 Cor. 2. 11. The danger was that false teachers were in the vicinity, preaching 'another Jesus', motivated by 'another spirit', resulting in 'another gospel', all of which were contrary to those things taught by the apostle.

Paul was in no doubt concerning the source of this falsehood, the serpent was just as active and subtle as in Eden's garden where he 'beguiled Eve'. It is interesting to observe the many lessons which can be learned throughout scripture by reference to the early chapters of Genesis. They serve to emphasize that the plan and purpose of the omniscient God was in place and operational from the foundation of the world; yet dismissed as allegorical or fictitious by godless minds. This, in itself, is evidence that the arch-deceiver is still fully employed, 'blind[ing] the minds of them which believe not'.

It was Eve's mind that Satan focused upon in the garden, causing her to question what God had said, casting doubt upon her interpretation of the divine decree in relation to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Eventually, the lust of the flesh, the

lust of the eyes and the pride of life took over, the deception succeeded, Eve took of the fruit, gave also to Adam, who was not deceived, but acted consciously, and sin entered the world! As Adam and Eve sewed fig leaves together in view of their new-found knowledge, it is very doubtful that they understood the enormity of what they had done. From this point on, all who would be born into the world would be tainted by Adam's fall. All, that is, except one, and He would be the seed of the woman that should bruise the serpent's head. Satan's death warrant was signed in Eden, it was sealed at Calvary, and it will be delivered in a day yet future, set by divine decree, Rev. 20. 10. It is perhaps apposite to note that deception has been the weapon of choice for the adversary throughout history. From the successful deception of Eve, down the course of time, right on until after his binding in millennial days, when, on his release from prison, the first thing he does is 'go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth'. Unrepentant, unreformed, and unchanged.

Among the instructions given by Paul to Timothy for the well-ordering of the assembly at Ephesus, the question of roles and responsibilities for both the men and the women are considered, 1 Tim. 2. 8 - 3. 16. The silence and subjection enjoined upon the woman have motivated some to accuse Paul of misogyny, and of expressing his

own opinion, detrimental to women. However, in order to substantiate his teaching, he takes the reader back once more to Eden. In chapter 2 verse 13, he states the creation order, 'Adam was first formed, then Eve'. In the following verse, it was the woman who, being deceived, took precedence in the transgression. What Eve did was to step outside of her divinely appointed sphere. There is no suggestion that Adam would not have fallen if the tempter had approached him instead of Eve, but it was Satan's intention to disrupt divine order, and this was achieved. However, the responsibility for bringing sin into the world was attributed to Adam, 'as by one man sin entered into the world', Rom. 5. 12.

As a result of the fall, changes were inevitable. For the woman, the difference would have a direct impact on childbearing, that which was her exclusive domain. Eve would not bear a child until Cain was born in chapter 4. The pain accompanying that experience would call to mind the words of the Almighty, 'in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children', a permanent reminder of her part in the fall. For the man, no longer would the ground yield produce and fruit with the bounty of Eden's garden. Toil and sweat, thorns and thistles would hinder his efforts to provide for his family.

Returning to Paul's teaching regarding the divine order, 1 Tim. 2. 15, he considers the experience of a godly husband and wife, continuing in faith toward God, charity toward others, and holiness with sobriety in their daily walk. For the wife, accepting the headship of her husband, bringing up children in the fear of the Lord, she is seen fulfilling her true purpose and, in that sense, she is revealing the outworking of her salvation. The apostle could just as easily have said that, for the man, he shall be saved through the sweat of his face, as he likewise accepts the place that God has conferred upon him. Childbearing on the part of the wife and challenging work on the part of the husband do not, of course, constitute salvation from sin. But, rather, lives lived fulfilling the roles for which each was intended may be proof of spiritual life.



The Son of the Highest

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

The Bible uses many titles to describe God the Son. In preparation for His incarnation, the angel Gabriel told Mary that the Holy One born to her would be 'great, and . . . be called the Son of the Highest', Luke 1. 32, describing Him with a venerable divine title from Old Testament history. It expresses God's sovereignty, holiness, royalty, and priesthood. It also links two of Israel's greatest heroes, Abraham and David, whose covenants play a key role in Christ's future kingdom.¹ Only He can fulfil the promises that were made to Israel. The expression 'Son of the Highest' unites the greatness of His person and offices, assuring us of the completion of God's purposes for this world.

In Melchizedek's school

In unpacking this name, we must first examine 'the Highest' and its importance in the history of the Lord's interaction with mankind. Genesis chapter 14 verse 18 abruptly introduces the mysterious king of Salem, Melchizedek, identified as 'the priest of the most high God'. For the first time, the Bible uses the Hebrew name *el elyon*, which occurs four times in the chapter, vv. 18-20, 22; its New Testament equivalent is 'the Highest'.² One linguist defines it this way, 'To call God "the Most High" emphasizes that, contrary to all other gods that humans create, the God and Father of Jesus Christ is the only true reigning God. There is nothing or no one greater than he, and therefore, humans are called to humble themselves before him'.³ Another adds, 'This name . . . is used of persons or things to indicate their elevation or exaltation: of Israel, favored above other nations, Deut. 26. 19, of the aqueduct of "the upper pool", Isa. 7. 3, etc. This indicates that its meaning when applied to God is the "Exalted One," who is lifted far above all gods and men. It occurs alone, Deut. 32. 8; Ps. 18. 13, or in combination with other names of God, most frequently with El, Gen. 14. 18; Ps. 78. 35, but also with Jehovah, Ps. 7. 17; 97. 9, or with Elohim, Ps. 56. 2 AV; 78. 56. Its early use, Gen. 14. 18f, points to a high conception of Deity, an unquestioned monotheism in the beginnings of Hebrew history'.⁴ In another declaration of majestic power, the Lord is associated with 'the

highest heavens', Deut. 10. 14; see also Job 22. 12.

In true priestly fashion, Melchizedek prepared Abram for a future tempting offer from Sodom's king, Gen. 14. 21-24. Christ's ministry towards the Twelve in the Upper Room similarly prepared them to meet the difficulties that they would face after His return to heaven, John 13-16. His preparation of them is also seen as He predicted Peter's fall, but also foretold his restoration and subsequent ministry, Luke 22. 28-32. Priestly duty includes teaching people what God is like, Deut. 24. 8; accordingly, Melchizedek reveals one of the Almighty's previously undisclosed names – one especially suited to remind the patriarch of His control over world affairs, Heb. 7. 1.

Armed with a fresh reminder that God was the Most High, Abram deftly deflects the king of Sodom's temptation of entangling enrichment, Gen. 14. 22-24. More than a thousand years later, Psalm 110 mentions Melchizedek again, establishing him as the pattern of Messiah's everlasting priesthood and royal triumph over evil, Ps. 110. 4-6. He is not mentioned again for another millennium when Hebrews cites this figure as Christ's forerunner king-priest.⁵ The Most High God's Son dies and rises again to reconcile people to Himself, thereafter assuming the role of the divinely-appointed judge, Acts 17. 31. He will put away evil and 'bring in everlasting righteousness', Dan. 9. 24.

A true higher power

The Psalms describe the same sovereignty exhibited in Abram's interaction with Melchizedek, Pss. 47, 83, 97. God's awesome power and wisdom, coupled with His mercy, make Him a formidable adversary towards His people's enemies. The prophet Jeremiah later recounts this attribute, Lam. 3. 38. The Psalms also envision Messiah's future reign over the earth, Ps. 89. 27; cp. Rev. 1. 5; 19. 16. Israel experienced incomparable security flowing from His character as the Most High God,⁶ but His exalted position was often flouted by unbelieving Israel in the wilderness, Ps. 78. 56; 107. 11. Nevertheless, sovereignty is not tyranny, because the Almighty is merciful, loving, and righteous as well as omnipotent.

Israel's leaders were to reflect His holiness, even to the point of being called 'sons of the Most High', Ps. 82. 6 ESV. Sonship expresses likeness in character and action, Matt. 5. 9, 44, 45.⁷ God is righteous and requires the same conduct from His servants. His acts are just and good; thus, He deserves His people's praise and thanksgiving. As David said, 'I will praise the Lord according to his righteousness: and will sing praise to the name of the Lord most high', Ps. 7. 17.

A despot meets the Most High

Nebuchadnezzar was an absolute monarch, possessing the power of life and death over his subjects, Dan. 5. 19. Over a period of years, God systematically revealed Himself to this megalomaniacal ruler, Chh. 1-4. Witnessing the miraculous deliverance of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the fiery furnace, he referred to them as 'servants of the most high God', 3. 26. God warned him through a dream that his pride would result in his humiliation. He soon forgot the message and so was reduced to the level of a beast until '7 times' passed over him. Both his sanity and office were restored when he realized 'that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will', 4. 32. He subsequently proclaimed to Babylon that the Most High raises up and deposes rulers at will. One

of his successors – Belshazzar – ignored this historical lesson, and deliberately blasphemed the Lord by sacrilegiously using some of the temple’s vessels, 5. 2-4, 18-28. Consequently, God decreed his death and gave his realm to the Medo-Persians. Verses 18 and 21 remind the reader that the ‘most High God’ orchestrated these events. In chapter 7, when Daniel saw the vision concerning God’s future kingdom, the angel repeatedly calls God’s people ‘the saints of the most High’, vv. 18, 22, 25, 27. This offers them great security as they contemplate the future convulsions of the last days. Even amid tumultuous political upheaval, God’s people are sheltered by the highest being in the universe, Ps. 91. 1, 9, 10.

The entrance of the Son

In view of this title’s illustrious history, calling Jesus ‘the Son of the Highest’, Luke 1. 32, unites sovereignty, priesthood, and royalty, as well as deity, in His marvellous person. Speaking of His greatness, HENRY asserts, ‘He *shall be great*, truly great, incontestably great; for he shall be called *the Son of the Highest*, the Son of God who is *the Highest*; of the same nature, as the son is of the same nature with the father; and very dear to him, as the son is to the father’.⁸ Christ’s

deity is further revealed in verse 35, where the process of incarnation occurs within the virgin womb by the Holy Spirit’s power. He would be David’s illustrious descendant and simultaneously the Bethlehem shepherd-king’s Lord. The angel proclaimed His enthronement on ‘the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end’, v. 32. The Davidic covenant of 2 Samuel chapter 7 would be fulfilled in Christ, who is destined to reign over the nations from His capital, Jerusalem. Zacharias’ son, John, would enjoy the honour of serving as ‘the prophet of the Highest’, Luke 1. 76, but Jesus would possess the greatness of incarnate deity as ‘the Son of the Highest’. By saying ‘He . . . shall be called’, v. 32, Gabriel’s prophecy alludes to the day when every knee will bow and every tongue shall confess Christ’s Lordship, Phil. 2. 9-11.

How should we then live?

What difference does the Lord Jesus Christ’s identity as ‘the Son of the Highest’ mean to believers today?

- We should consciously worship His person, and praise and thank Him for His royal and priestly protection, Pss. 50. 14; 56. 2.
- We ought to daily seek His

guidance, for He possesses ‘all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge’, Col. 2. 3; cp. Ps. 73. 11; Num. 24. 16.

- We may cast all our care on Him, knowing that He is our great High Priest, compassionately interceding for us moment by moment, Heb. 7. 21-28.
- We should serve in view of the fact that the Son of the Highest is establishing the church and His kingdom for all eternity; therefore, our labours will not fail and will produce fruit for God’s glory throughout the future ages to come, Eph. 2. 7; 3. 10. Moreover, no temporal or spiritual forces can successfully oppose the Most High God, Ps. 83; 1 Cor. 15. 24-28.

With such a God as our Saviour and Lord, we may join Paul in saying, ‘O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory forever. Amen’, Rom. 11. 33-36.



Endnotes

- 1 Matt. 1. 1; Rom. 1. 3; 2 Tim. 2. 8.
- 2 Numerous modern translations render ‘the Highest’ as ‘the Most High’, Luke 1. 32, e.g., ASV, NAS, ESV, NIV’11, and NET.
- 3 He goes on to write, ‘For those who walk humbly and righteously before the Most High God, there is the incredible promise that they will become the children of the Most High, Luke 6. 35’. WILLIAM MOUNCE, *Mounce’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words*, Zondervan, 2006, pg. 334.
- 4 EDWARD MACK, ‘God, Names Of’, JAMES ORR (ed.), *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Howard-Severance Company, 1915, pg. 1267.
- 5 Heb. 5. 6, 10; 6. 20; 7. 1, 10, 11, 15, 17, 21.
- 6 Pss. 21, 57, 87, 91.
- 7 This is also evident in New Testament nicknames like Boanerges – ‘sons of thunder’, Mark 3. 17 – and Barnabas – ‘son of consolation’, Acts 4. 36.
- 8 MATTHEW HENRY, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Hendrickson, 1994, pg. 1823. [Italics original].

2 Thessalonians

Chapter 2

By **PETER DAVIES** Swansea, Wales

Introduction

In the first chapter Paul has been encouraging the dear believers to look up and look on to that blessed day that is coming, when God will deal with this world in judgement, when our wonderful Saviour is going to be glorified in this scene where He was crucified, and when we too who have believed on Him shall share in that glory, to the admiration of all. What a contrast to the dark days through which these saints at Thessalonica were passing, and during which they were suffering much persecution. In this chapter, he is reminding them that there are two comings, and they are not to confuse them, because they are two separate events.

The appeal, vv. 1, 2

In these opening verses he is appealing to them. It is a strong word he uses, 'we beseech you, brethren'. He wants them to be clear in their minds concerning these future events, for it is important that they do not confuse these two comings. Sadly, there is a lot of misunderstanding concerning Christ's return, which has even caused division among the people of God. So, he stresses the importance of knowing the distinctiveness of His coming to gather His own to Himself. I love that phrase 'together unto him', v. 1, and the day he speaks of here as 'the day of Christ', v. 2, will be Messiah's Day, when all the promises of God to Israel in the Old Testament will be fulfilled and when Christ will come to set up His glorious kingdom for 1,000 years. This is the day he is now going to speak about in more detail, for there will be very clear indications, and manifestations that will take place leading up to that day of glory. He is beseeching them not to be deceived, not by any means, not by spirit, word or even letter supposedly from Paul and his companions (so subtle is the enemy that some were claiming that Paul has said that the day of Christ had already come!). How we need to be on our guard, beloved.

The antichrist, vv. 3-5

He shows here that after the rapture of the church and our gathering together unto Him, one of the outstanding proofs that the day of Christ's coming in power and glory is drawing near is that there will be 'a falling away first, and that man of sin [shall] be revealed', v. 3. There is a great falling away even now as we look around us. But this is nothing compared to the total breakdown of all law and order that will take place after the church has gone, and this man of sin, also called the son of perdition, is revealed. This is the antichrist.

The titles that are given here are sufficient in themselves to describe what kind of man he is. He is 'that man of sin', v. 3. He revels in sin and lawlessness and opposes everything that is good and of God. What a contrast to our blessed Lord and Saviour, who loved righteousness and hated iniquity. Antichrist is spoken of as the son of perdition, that is, son of destruction, and this is his business and destiny, like his master Satan, to kill and destroy, and be destroyed. But not only does he oppose everything that is of God, he also exalts himself 'above all that is called God', v. 4, that is, anything that God has His name upon. So that he alone is to be worshipped as God.

Even to the extent of sitting 'in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God', v. 4.

600 years before Christ came, Daniel the prophet spoke of this very thing, He 'shall do according to his will; and he shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak marvellous [monstrous or unheard of] things against the God of gods, and shall prosper till the indignation be accomplished: for that that is determined shall be done', Dan. 11. 36. Our Lord taught His disciples of this very thing, showing this would be an awful turning point in the history of His people, Matt. 24. 15, 16, 'When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place (whoso readeth, let him understand;) then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains'. Our Lord goes on to say, 'For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened', Matt. 24. 21, 22.

The apostle then says, 'Remember . . . that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things', v. 5.

The appointed time, vv. 6, 7

What is holding back this great swell of rebellion against God that we see already in this world today? For if antichrist has not yet appeared surely the very spirit of antichrist is all around us, even in the United Kingdom, once a so-called Christian country. Well, says Paul, you know what the answer to that question is! The One who is holding back this invasion of evil, headed by the antichrist, until the time appointed, is the Holy Spirit, who is restraining this evil until the day God has appointed for its arrival. Remember it was, 'when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son', Gal. 4. 4. It will all happen in God's time and not ours, nor Satan's. The mystery of iniquity does already work, we see the evidence all around us, but God, by His Spirit, is withholding this deluge of evil, for,

in His great mercy, He is still giving humanity the offer of salvation through His Son. But when this Day of Grace has run its course and the Holy Spirit of God has completed His wonderful work, then the church, which has been salt and light, will be snatched away, and the Spirit of God too will be taken. 'My spirit shall not always strive with man', Gen. 6. 3. Then the terrible day of tribulation will begin.

The activities of Satan, vv. 8-12

This section opens with the words, 'then shall that Wicked be revealed', v. 8. The word translated 'Wicked' here means 'lawless one', without regard for God or mankind. Little wonder we are immediately told that his time is short, and that he will be destroyed by the very One who gave the law he totally disregards, 'whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming'. Interesting to observe that the One who by His word brought creation into being is the same One who will destroy this lawless one by His word at His coming. Lovely to see that the coming of our Lord to earth is described as brightness. What a contrast to the scene to which He will come, so dark. He truly is the Light of the world, and then all mankind shall see it.

We might ask ourselves, who is this lawless one? We are told in verse 9, 'whose coming is after the working of Satan'. He is Satan's stooge, front man, so to speak, one of the trinity of evil, namely Satan, Antichrist and the False Prophet. We are also told here his methods of working, 'with all power and signs and lying wonders'. Notice the signs are all a con; a pretence – lying wonders to delude.

Who, then, are those who are going to be taken in by him? Those who 'did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved', v. 10 NKJV. 'God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap', Gal. 6. 7. Remember this is not the Day of Grace but the day of vengeance of our God. So, for not laying hold of the truth that would bring them salvation, 'God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie', v. 11. It is not simply that they did not believe the truth, but they 'had pleasure in unrighteousness', v. 12. They loved evil, wilfully turning from God's goodness in the way of righteousness that was set before them. They will receive the due reward of their deeds – God's judgement upon them.

The appreciation of Paul and his companions, vv. 13, 14

They rejoice and give thanks to God that these dear believers are

not included in the foregoing company. It is not God's judgement that is going to fall on them but salvation, sanctification, and glory. Notice they are spoken of in endearing terms, 'brethren beloved of the Lord', v. 13. How did they come to this place of being beloved? 'Because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation'. But how? 'Through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth'. But how did that happen? 'He called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ', v. 14. Paul makes it very clear in Romans chapter 8 verse 29, 'For whom he did foreknow, [He knows the end from the beginning] he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son'. The image of His Son – the glory that is His, is going to be ours too. Says the Apostle John, 'we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is', 1 John 3. 2.

The admonition, vv. 15-17

In view of the wonder of their and our sharing in this glory of our Lord, they are now encouraged to 'stand fast, and hold the traditions [instructions] which ye have been taught', v. 15. Do not be moved from the things you have been taught from us by word or letter. Paul is emphasizing the utmost importance of the scriptures we now have in our hands. They are the very oracles of God. Writing to Timothy, Paul states, 'All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works', 2 Tim. 3. 16, 17.

Here, he then draws to a close with a beautiful doxology of praise and prayer, thanking our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God, even our Father, for their love towards the Thessalonians, their abiding consolation, and good hope through grace. Praying also that their hearts may be comforted, and that they might be strengthened 'in every good word and work', v. 17. What an all-sufficient provision has been made for us by our God.



SOLOMON'S TEMPLE Part 3

By **JEREMY GIBSON** Derby, England

THINGS DONE TO THE TEMPLE DURING THEIR REIGNS

Judean king	Reign (BC)	Good	Bad
David	1062-1023	Once established king in Jerusalem, 1055 , 2 Sam. 2. 11; 5. 3-5; 1 Chr. 29. 27, wanted to build temple, 2 Sam. 7. 1, 2, began to prepare, 1 Chr. 22. 5; 29. 2.	
Solomon	1022-983	Began to build temple in fourth year of his reign, 1019 , 1 Kgs. 6. 1; 2 Chr. 3. 2, finishing it in eleventh year of his reign, 1012 , 1 Kgs. 6. 38.	
Rehoboam	983-966		Shishak, king of Egypt, removed the temple treasures, 1 Kgs. 14. 25, 26; 2 Chr. 12. 9.
Abijam	965-963		
Asa	963-922	Renewed the altar before the porch, 2 Chr. 15. 8. Brought treasures he and his father had dedicated into the temple, 1 Kgs. 15. 15; 2 Chr. 15. 18.	Gave temple treasures to Benhadad, king of Syria, when threatened by Baasha, king of Israel, 1 Kgs. 15. 18, 19; 2 Chr. 16. 2.
Jehoshaphat	922-897	Prayed in the temple, before the new court, 2 Chr. 20. 5.	
Jehoram	905-893		
Ahaziah	894-893		
Athaliah	893-886	Joash hidden in a temple bedchamber, 2 Kgs. 11. 2, 3; 2 Chr. 22. 11, 12.	Athaliah's sons broke into the temple and its dedicated things, 2 Chr. 24. 7.
Joash	886-847	Jehoiada covenanted in the temple to make Joash king, 2 Kgs. 11. 4; 2 Chr. 23. 3. Joash anointed king by the side of one of the pillars, 2 Kgs. 11. 12-14; 2 Chr. 23. 13. Athaliah slain beyond the ranges, 2 Kgs. 11. 15; 2 Chr. 23. 14. Repaired the temple, 2 Kgs. 12. 4-15; 2 Chr. 24. 4-14.	Gave to Hazael, king of Syria the hallowed things and the temple treasures, collected by previous generations, 2 Kgs. 12. 17, 18. Zechariah stoned in the court, between the porch and the altar, 2 Chr. 24. 21; Matt. 23. 35.
Amaziah	846-818		Jehoash, king of Israel, took gold, silver, and vessels from the temple to Samaria, 2 Kgs. 14. 13, 14; 2 Chr. 25. 23, 24.
Uzziah	806-755		When he went to burn incense, priests resisted him, and God smote him with leprosy, 2 Chr. 26. 16-20.
Jotham	854-739	Did not enter the temple in the way that his father did 2 Chr. 27. 2. Built temple's higher gate, 2 Kgs. 15. 35; 2 Chr. 27. 3.	

Judean king	Reign (BC)	Good	Bad
Ahaz	739-723		<p>Paid temple money to Tilgath-Pilneser, king of Assyria, 2 Chr. 28. 21.</p> <p>Cut in pieces temple vessels and shut its doors, 2 Chr. 28. 24.</p> <p>Replaced altar of burnt offering with the copy of a Syrian altar, 2 Kgs. 16. 10-16.</p> <p>Defaced the bases, removed their lavers; took the sea off the oxen, 2 Kgs. 16. 17.</p> <p>Gave to the Assyrians the temple's covered place for the Sabbath, 2 Kgs. 16. 18.</p>
Hezekiah	725-696	<p>Opened and repaired temple doors, 2 Chr. 29. 3, 7.</p> <p>Cleansed the house, the altar, and the table of showbread, returning all the vessels Ahaz had cast away; restarted the burning of burnt offerings and incense and the lighting of the lamps, 2 Chr. 29. 5, 7, 16-19.</p> <p>Stored the priests' tithes in the temple, 2 Chr. 31. 4-14.</p> <p>Prayed in the temple, 2 Kgs. 19. 1, 14-19.</p> <p>Went up to the Lord's house after he was healed, 2 Kgs. 20. 5.</p> <p>Restored the Passover, 2 Chr. 30.</p>	<p>Gave silver and gold off the temple doors and pillars to Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, 2 Kgs. 18. 15-17.</p>
Manasseh	696-641	<p>Removed the idol and altars he had made in the temple mount, 2 Chr. 33. 15.</p> <p>Reopened the temple doors, 2 Chr. 33. 16.</p>	<p>Built altars in the temple and its courts, 2 Kgs. 21. 4, 5; 2 Chr. 33. 4, 5.</p> <p>Set a graven image in the temple, 2 Kgs. 21. 7; 2 Chr. 33. 7.</p>
Amon	641-639		
Josiah	639-608	<p>Cleansed the temple from idols, 2 Kgs. 23. 4, 6.</p> <p>Broke the sodomites' house, next to the temple, 2 Kgs. 23. 7.</p> <p>Repaired the temple; found the Law in it, 2 Kgs. 22. 3-5; 2 Chr. 34. 8-15.</p> <p>Read the Law at the temple; covenanted with the Lord by a pillar, 2 Kgs. 23. 1-3.</p> <p>The Levites returned the ark to its place in the temple, 2 Chr. 35. 3.</p>	<p>God said He would cast off the house, 2 Kgs. 23. 27.</p>
Jehoahaz	608		
Jehoiakim	608-597		
Jehoiachin	597		<p>Temple's treasures and internal golden vessels cut in pieces and carried to Babylon, 597, 2 Kgs. 24. 8-16.</p>
Zedekiah	597-586		<p>Priests polluted temple, 2 Chr. 36. 14;</p> <p>Nebuzaradan burnt the temple, broke the large brass pieces, taking them and remaining smaller vessels to Babylon, 586, 2 Kgs. 25. 8, 9, 13-17; Jer. 52. 12, 13, 17-23.</p>

Nicaragua

By **TONY FLETT**

Nicaragua, the land of lakes and volcanoes as well as 6.5 million souls, is the largest country in Central America and the second poorest nation in the western hemisphere. It is bordered by Honduras to the north and Costa Rica to the south, with a central mountain range that divides the western side with its beaches on the Pacific Ocean from the white sand beaches on the Atlantic side. The more developed western half of the country contains about 90% of the population, mostly Spanish speaking, along with the majority of the cities and industry, while the sparsely populated eastern side has a more Caribbean culture with a mixture of Spanish, English and some indigenous dialects spoken. Although there have been some gospel outreaches in the east, at this point all the assemblies are located in the western half. Over half of the population of the country live in cities where opportunities for employment, education, and transportation are more abundant; over a million people live in the capital city of Managua itself. However, many Nicaraguans still live on subsistence farms not always with reliable access to drinkable water or electricity and are dependent on walking, horses, or ox carts for transportation. It is a land of many contrasts which also poses many challenges to the work.

The seeds for the current assembly work in Nicaragua were planted in 1993 when a younger couple from Honduras, Oscar and Nolvía Cubas, began to visit Nicaragua on a regular basis. In 1997, they were commended and moved here to continue the work of the Lord. Shortly after, the first local church was established in the little community of

New Assembly in Dolores – established 2005.



Tauquil, close to the Honduran border in the northern part of the country. After their arrival many others from Honduras followed and have been a great blessing to the work here. There are currently eight more commended workers from Honduras serving the Lord in Nicaragua with their families: Israel and Flor Ramos, Max and Lola Hernandez, Samir and Maryuri Jimenez, Josue and Jenny Castillo, Daniel and Ruth Rodriguez, Luis and Mariela Gutierrez, Sigfredo and Yocelin Rojas, and Oscar and Eveling Altamirano.

In 2002, Mark Bachert and Ross Vanstone, from Canada, came to Nicaragua for a short visit to see if it would be feasible to bring a group from North America and distribute *John 3:16 Seed Sowers* texts door to door. While visiting during that trip, many contacts were made, including a six-hour drive to the northern part of the country to meet Oscar and Nolvía and share with them the exercise for the text distribution. In 2003, I came to Nicaragua for the first time with Mark and others. The first week was spent with Oscar and Nolvía in the city of Jalapa with daily text distribution and nightly gospel meetings. God blessed in salvation and the groundwork was building for what would become a unified assembly work. We then moved on to the town of Dolores in the southern part of the country, and another series of text distribution and nightly gospel meetings. Again, the Lord blessed in salvation. By the end of the two weeks that we had planned to be in Nicaragua, one thing became clear, someone would need to stay and help these new believers. Mark Bachert, who was single at the time, decided to stay, along with another single young man, Isaiah Frazier.

The next few years brought many changes. Mark and Brenda Bachert were married in May 2004 and settled into the work in Dolores. Danelle and I arrived with our family in October 2004 to join them. In January 2005, Dolores became the fifth assembly to be established in the country. It was



New Gospel Hall in Dolores, Nicaragua.

amazing to see how God was calling different people to Nicaragua at about the same time, from Honduras, Canada, the U.S.A., and elsewhere, some for a short time and some for longer. Through the years, Nicaragua has been blessed by the energy, vision and love for the Lord of many who have had an impact on the work here, including David and Betsy Reeve, Grant and Kandy Ferrer, John and Joanne Clingen, and Kyle and Allison Wilson, just to name a few.

With the number of workers involved and the different perspectives they brought with them in terms of personality, gift, life experience, teaching, and culture, it became clear that developing and maintaining unity would be of utmost importance. The workers began to meet a few times a year to share what was going on and have a chance to pray for each other. Another way of maintaining unity was by means of an annual conference where believers from all over the country could come together and see that, even though their own assembly might be small, the Lord was working in a mighty way across Nicaragua. For many years the national conference was held in Dolores where the Christians here delighted to be able to host their brethren and sisters and serve the Lord for three days during the 'Holy Week' before Easter, but, as the number in attendance continued to increase each year, we had to find larger venues to hold the conferences and arranging transportation and meals became more complicated. Even before the pandemic, it was becoming obvious that we would probably need to be dividing into regional conferences to better serve the needs of the work, although it was hard to give up that unified gathering that we had always enjoyed.

Sometimes the conferences served as a reminder of how the Lord was working throughout the country, even while any individual assembly might not be seeing much evidence of growth. While there have been disappointments along the way, e.g., of someone that seemed to hold so much promise but then for some reason just turned back to the world, there have also been believers who have finished their race well and gone home to glory or who have followed the Lord's guidance to another area, either way, a small assembly particularly feels the loss. However, some growth is not so much a matter of numbers as it is being more deeply rooted in God's word, which is not as visual a process. We noted early on that the Christians had a hard time trusting and respecting each other, especially in any leadership capacity, although they had a great amount of respect and listened intently to the missionaries who had come among them. An ongoing priority is still the development of local gift and leadership in the assemblies in the country. Another issue throughout the country is the lack of stability within families, which leads to secondary problems including increased poverty, emotional damage, and physical and sexual abuse of children. In Dolores, almost every one of the women in fellowship has either had their husband or father leave them for another woman. Not only do they need to work through forgiveness but learn to change ingrained patterns and make the daily decisions which lead to healthy marriages and secure and happy children. It is a great but easily overlooked victory to see 'normal' families in our assemblies.

The opportunities to work among the youth are abundant as over half the



Youth camp, Tauquil.

population of Nicaragua is under 25 years old. Not only are young people more open to hearing something new in the form of the gospel, but many are looking for reasons to hope amongst all the problems they see around them. When Mitch and Lori Parent arrived with their family from Canada in 2008, they already had the experience and vision to work with young people. While they are centred in the assembly in Jinotepe (only a couple of kilometres from Dolores) where they have a robust Sunday school, their influence and enthusiasm extends much further, from inviting teens from surrounding assemblies to their property for special teaching and activities, to helping organize and run weeklong youth camps in the northern part of the country, and to holding workshops to prepare others to work with children and younger people.

In the seventeen years that we have been in Nicaragua we have had a variety of different experiences as part of the work. We've driven more kilometres than we can count, in

cities, on highways, and on dirt roads, sometimes winching ourselves from tree to tree when the dirt turned to mud. We've even travelled on foot when the road was impassable. We've preached to crowds that spilled out through doors and into the yard beyond, and we've preached to the one sole person who came to a meeting. We've shared fellowship with people around their table and around their sickbed, on their wedding day and their birthday, on the way to a conference and on the way to a burial. We've gone door to door giving out gospel texts and invitations, and every year we give out calendars so that the people will have the word of God on their walls to look at all year long. In 2022, the work in Nicaragua will be twenty-five years old, and it has come a long way, with twelve assemblies in the country. For comparison, the work in El Salvador recently celebrated fifty years and Costa Rica is almost the same, while in Honduras the assembly work stretches back over 100 years, so we are still pretty young. As we look to the future, there is a lot of promise in what the Lord can accomplish, but challenges continue from the political and social instability in the country, as well as the adversary who is always 'seeking whom he may devour'.

We value prayer for the work of the Lord in Nicaragua, specifically:

- For liberty to continue to preach the gospel;
- For personal spiritual maturity amongst the Christians;
- For the Lord to raise up godly men to care for and shepherd the believers;
- For continued unity amongst the workers and assemblies here.

Gospel Meeting held in the hall at Dolores.



Pauline Metaphors

Part 2 Guarantee

By **ERIC PARMENTER** Ynysybwl, Wales

Introduction

The concept of a guarantee, whether used literally or metaphorically, is not confined to the first-century period of the New Testament, although the Apostle Paul used the concept of a guarantee in his Epistles to the church at Corinth and at Ephesus. Both concepts are found throughout the Old Testament; for example, when the wicked Jezebel sent out letters in the name of Ahab and, in order to secure her evil intention, she sealed it with the king's ring to guarantee its legitimacy to put Naboth to death and take his inheritance. By her false accusations, Naboth was put to death, thus securing the inheritance of Naboth for Ahab, 1 Kgs. 21. 8. Another example is the pledge Judah gave to Tamar as a guarantee that he would fulfil the promise made to her, Gen. 38. 17. A further instance is found, when Jacob's sons were returning to Egypt to buy corn, taking Benjamin with them. Judah said to his father regarding Benjamin, 'I will be surety for him', 43. 9. The word is found in the book of Proverbs where it is used of putting up security or guarantee for someone, whether in a tangible or monetary sense. The idea of down payments or instalments is also suggested when one puts oneself up as the guarantee of full payment, 2 Cor. 5. 5. Our glorious future is secure for we possess the promise of it in the earnest of the Spirit, Eph. 1. 14.

The guarantee of divine acceptance

In the Old Testament, for the Israelite bringing a burnt offering without blemish unto the Lord as a sweet savour offering, God had said to Moses concerning it that the Israelite's offering would be accepted on his behalf, Lev. 1. 4. God also guaranteed that the farmer in Israel would be accepted by Him. The farmer who brought the sheaf of first-fruits of the harvest to the priest at the door of the tabernacle, when it was waved it was accepted by Jehovah, 23. 11. Similarly, the gold plate worn by the high priest was for Israel's acceptance; it guaranteed their acceptance before God, Exod. 28. 38b.

In the New Testament, the believer's acceptance has been secured by the death, and resurrection of Christ, and made good to us in Jesus, our

Great High Priest, who appears in the presence of God for us, Heb. 9. 24. In Ephesians chapter 1, Paul assures us that 'in Christ' every spiritual blessing is guaranteed, including our acceptance, for in the Beloved we have been accepted, v. 6.

Paul, in his Epistles, uses different Greek prepositions, such as *en*, meaning **in** Christ. This is invariably used by Paul, but sometimes he uses the preposition *eis*, meaning **into** Christ, 2 Cor. 1. 21; Gal. 3. 17. The preposition *in*/into Christ is the guarantee that we have been entered into an account, that is, that we have been credited to Christ. All according to the 'exceeding riches of His grace toward us through Jesus Christ', Eph. 2. 7.

The guarantee of eternal security – 2 Cor. 1. 21, 22

The commercial and legal practice

of goods on consignment being sealed by a mark of ownership was a guarantee that they had not been interfered with in transit. Likewise, shepherds would mark their flocks by a stamp put on the back of their sheep which guaranteed ownership, leaving no room for argument as to whom the sheep belonged. In the days of the Persian Empire, the law of the Medes and Persians could not be altered, as seen in the case of Daniel. Once a decree was signed it became a legal document and not even Darius the king could change the law. It was irreversible, so that the sealing of the stone of the lions' den with the king's own seal meant that no one could remove the stone that secured Daniel in the den of lions. It is this practice of ancient empires that Paul uses to illustrate the believer's eternal security. By making use of such practices, the apostle establishes the truth of our eternal security. He clearly makes the point that 'upon believing' believers are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which seal can never be broken. Consequent upon the work of Christ in salvation which He accomplished on the cross, the Holy Spirit indwelling each believer is the divine seal, and the God-given earnest, by which means the believer's security is guaranteed, for it is rooted in the eternal purpose of God, which purpose cannot be thwarted neither by man nor devil. The Apostle Paul, writing to Christians in Rome, declared, 'if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his', Rom. 8. 9. The scriptures confirm that the indwelling Holy Spirit is the divine guarantee that the believer is eternally secure. The Spirit in us is the immutable guarantee of final redemption.

The guarantee of a future inheritance – Eph. 1. 12, 14

Writing to the church at Ephesus, the Apostle Paul reminded them that the indwelling Holy Spirit is 'the earnest of our inheritance'. In the preceding verses, the apostle reminds his readers that God has abounded 'toward us in all wisdom and intelligence', v. 8 JND, that we might comprehend divine purpose for the Lord Jesus Christ. In the administration of the fullness of the ages, He will enter upon His inheritance, when all things in heaven

and all things on earth will be headed up in one, even in Him. It is in Him also that we have obtained an inheritance. At His return to earth, Christ will redeem the purchased possession, establishing the kingdom of God on earth and we shall obtain an assigned portion, for we shall reign with Him in the kingdom. The earnest, or the down payment of sharing with Christ in the everlasting kingdom, is the indwelling Holy Spirit – the pledge of God’s immutable guarantee of our future inheritance.

The guarantee of new covenant blessings – Heb. 7. 22; 8. 6

The Old Testament references noted earlier indicate how this concept was understood in early biblical times. In the letter to the Hebrews, Jesus the Son of God is seated on the right hand of the throne of the majesty in heaven, a priest forever by divine oath and the surety of the blessings of a better covenant. Centuries before the incarnation of Christ, God announced through the

prophet Jeremiah a new covenant with Israel without conditions, a covenant radically different from the Sinaitic covenant given to the nation by the disposition of angels, Jer. 31. There is not one thing that God requires Israel to do, not one condition they are called upon to fulfil. God does it all. There are three clauses in the new covenant that make it a better covenant and the writer to the Hebrew Christians draws attention to it in chapter 8 verses 10 to 13. The Holy Spirit bears witness to believers in the present church age, in chapter 10 verses 15 to 17. The first clause provides for God’s undertaking to put His law into our minds and write them on our hearts. This required nothing less than the implanting of a new nature within us, that is, a divine nature, the nature of God, 2 Pet. 1. 3, 4. God creates within us a new life that by its very nature does the law of God. The second clause in the covenant provides for the believer to enjoy the knowledge of God in personal experience. The statement ‘I will be to them a God, and they shall

be to me a people’, Heb. 8. 10, is a divine guarantee of a personal intimate relationship with God. The final clause of the better covenant guarantees that God will ‘remember no more’ our sins and iniquities, 10. 17. This magnificent truth is written into the better covenant of which Jesus is the mediator. Of the terms of the new covenant affecting believers today, the Holy Spirit is witness. The precious truth is ours to live in the enjoyment of, rejoicing in the plenary and perpetual character of the forgiveness of sins. Believers should rejoice in all that God in divine grace has guaranteed in this ‘so great salvation’: our acceptance with God; our eternal security; the new covenant blessings; and our future inheritance. It is to the praise of His glory according to the riches of His grace.

Endnote

1 Prov. 11. 15; 17. 18; 20. 16; 22. 26; 27. 13.



Micah: the God of social justice

By **NATHANAEL REED** St Thomas, Ontario, Canada

The traumatic descent of Covid-19 presented a crisis beyond what many of us could have imagined. Millions of people around the world lost their lives and countless others suffered untold hardship as they weathered one of history's bitterest storms. During such dire times, it is often difficult for those who are suffering to find comfort. Perhaps we may find encouraging words from an obscure prophet in that little-read section of the Bible. A prophet such as Micah of Moresheth.

If we were to read through the seven short chapters of Micah's book, we would find that, although the writer lived twenty-seven centuries ago, his circumstances were similar in many ways to our own. Although the nations of Israel and Judah were fairly prosperous at the time, great stresses from within and without were being placed on the people. To begin with, the Israelites were living in the shadow of the mighty Assyrian Empire, whose lingering presence posed an ominous threat to Micah and his countrymen. To compound their anxieties, the poorest people of Israel and Judah were in misery – relentlessly persecuted and even rendered destitute by the rich ruling class. Indeed, the most vulnerable citizens of these two nations were living in a time of great social and economic adversity.

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of Micah's book is how practical and helpful it is for readers of today. Of special encouragement, in fact, is the love and concern expressed for the poor, downtrodden and dispossessed.

Like most Old Testament prophets, Micah's message pulled no punches. And the writer made it perfectly clear that he was simply acting as a messenger; the words he penned were, in fact, coming straight from the heart of Almighty God.

As the book opens, Micah quickly gets to the root of the problem, and it is spiritual in nature. God's people have abandoned Him for the idols

and evil practices of their Canaanite neighbours. The Israelites also left behind the laws of the land delivered to them by God through Moses. This paradigm shift resulted in a society overrun by violence, greed and heartache, where the rich and powerful ran roughshod over those less fortunate. So evil and narcissistic were these wealthy tyrants, that Micah describes them as lying awake at night thinking up even more devious ways of taking advantage of the vulnerable, Micah 2. 1.

The prophet outlines the litany of sins of these prosperous manipulators.

They:

- Were proud, 2. 3.
- Coveted/seized the houses and lands of the poor and widows, 2. 1, 9.
- Took the Lord's splendour from the children forever, 2. 9.
- Abhorred justice, 3. 9.
- Perverted all equity, 3. 9.
- Used dishonest scales, 6. 11.
- Were full of violence, 6. 12.
- Spoke lies, 6. 12.
- Accepted bribes, 7. 3.

During this troubled time Micah emerges as an outspoken champion of the poor and oppressed, and, in so doing, makes it abundantly clear that retribution is on its way, 2. 3.

Micah's message of impending doom reminds us of Jonah's warning to the people of Nineveh. Yet the Ninevites took Jonah's message to heart, repented, and were spared. Would the people of Israel and Judah repent as well and be spared the judgement of God?

Micah, however, does not leave the guilty without hope but proposes a remedy for this horrid state of affairs. The antidote is penned with characteristic simplicity and elegance in the book's key verse, Mic. 6. 8.

Justice tempered with mercy, enacted with **kindness** in a spirit of **humility**. All three of these qualities were totally lacking among a people who spent their time defrauding

widows of their homes and casting their children into the streets.

Justice, kindness, and humility are the qualities required by the Lord of every generation, especially, perhaps, during a time of social and economic upheaval.

- **To live justly**, with personal honour and integrity.
- **To love mercy**, with special consideration to those who are feeling most acutely the devastating effects of this catastrophic pandemic, offering practical kindness to someone in need. Praying for the sick and those tasked with the responsibility of helping them . . . and remembering our leaders before the Lord.
- **To walk humbly with your God.** In humility acknowledging our own vulnerability, and looking to God to sustain us physically, emotionally and spiritually.

The pandemic provided an opportunity for many of us to remove some of the **clutter** from our lives and thereby reduce daily life to its bare bones. Is it now time to work diligently at aligning our lives more closely with the three critical qualities outlined so gracefully by the prophet?

- What does **living justly** mean to you in your present circumstances?
- What does it mean in practical terms to **love mercy**?
- What does **walking humbly** with God look like to others?

God's word provides help in answering these three questions, for it contains the perfect template as to what these three traits look like in action. In Jesus Christ we see these characteristics displayed in living colour. By getting to know Him through the four Gospels, we can boldly ask, 'What would Jesus do?', in every circumstance.

May the exhortations of Micah of Moresheth be an encouragement to us and help us to live our lives more closely aligned to the principles of justice, mercy and humility. 'But as for me, I will look to the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me', Mic. 7. 7 ESV.

Isaiah

By **SIMON SHERWIN** Leven, Scotland

The four great prophets, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Micah, were active in the last days of the northern kingdom of Israel. At this crucial period, during which the final appeals of the Lord to that nation are heard, the Lord has His men in place, who will speak for Him.

It is interesting that at key periods in history the Lord has two witnesses who testify for Him. At this time, Amos and Hosea are sent to the northern kingdom, whilst the ministries of Isaiah and Micah are directed towards the southern kingdom of Judah. In the last days of the kingdom of Judah, before the destruction of Jerusalem, we have Jeremiah and Ezekiel; Jeremiah, in Jerusalem, for the forty years leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, and Ezekiel, in Babylonia, having been taken into captivity with Jehoiachin, for the final seven-and-a-half years.

Date

Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah date their writings over a long timeframe: Hosea and Isaiah to the same period from Uzziah to Hezekiah, kings of Judah, Hos. 1. 1; Isa 1. 1. Micah is a slightly later contemporary, beginning in the reign of Jotham, Uzziah's successor, Mic. 1. 1. Neither Isaiah nor Micah mention any Israelite kings, and this is understandable, given that their ministry is directed specifically towards the kingdom of Judah. The general timeframe we are dealing with, then, is the 8th Century BC, and principally the late 8th Century. Whilst many biblical scholars would split Isaiah into two or three segments, to do so breaks up the threads that can be traced throughout the book and raises more questions than it actually supposedly solves. Although the book naturally falls into two sections – the first thirty-nine chapters dealing largely with the present and the immediate future, whilst the last twenty-seven chapters, are, on the whole, dealing with the more distant future, that is,

the first coming of the Lord Jesus, as well as events that are still future – there is a clear cohesion to the whole. In addition, it is clear that the New Testament sees Isaiah as a whole, 'spoken' by Isaiah the prophet.

Introduction

In the scriptures the prophets stand, not altogether in chronological order, but in canonical, or spiritual order. This is not just the fact that the longer works of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel are grouped together, followed by the shorter works of the rest of the prophets (in the Hebrew Bible the book of Daniel is not included with the prophets) but, in these three books, with the book of Daniel giving specific details, the course of prophetic history is outlined, reaching far beyond the immediate future into a time which is still future, namely the millennial reign of the Lord Jesus, and beyond that into the eternal state. The prophecies that follow these three great witnesses corroborate and reinforce their message and fill in some of the details.

Isaiah stands at the head of the prophets, and in his sixty-six chapters he encompasses the whole of the scriptures that follow, including the New Testament, for his message includes: judgement on Israel and the nations in the immediate and more distant future; the coming of the forerunner, John the Baptist, and of the Lord Jesus Himself; the birth, death, resurrection and glorification of Christ; the setting up of the kingdom and the final judgement. In fact, Isaiah ends where the book of Revelation itself ends with new heavens and a new earth, the eternal blessing of the redeemed, and the eternal judgement of the lost. There is no other book that has such scope. Not surprisingly, then, apart from the Psalms, it is the most often quoted Old Testament book in the New Testament.

There are four principal pictures of Christ in the book: in chapters 7-11

we see Him as the Son; in chapters 32-35 as the Sovereign; in chapters 42-53 as the suffering Servant; and in chapters 59-66 as the Saviour. As so often in scripture, these can be seen to correspond with the fourfold picture of Christ that we have in the New Testament in the Gospels, in John, Matthew, Mark, and Luke respectively.

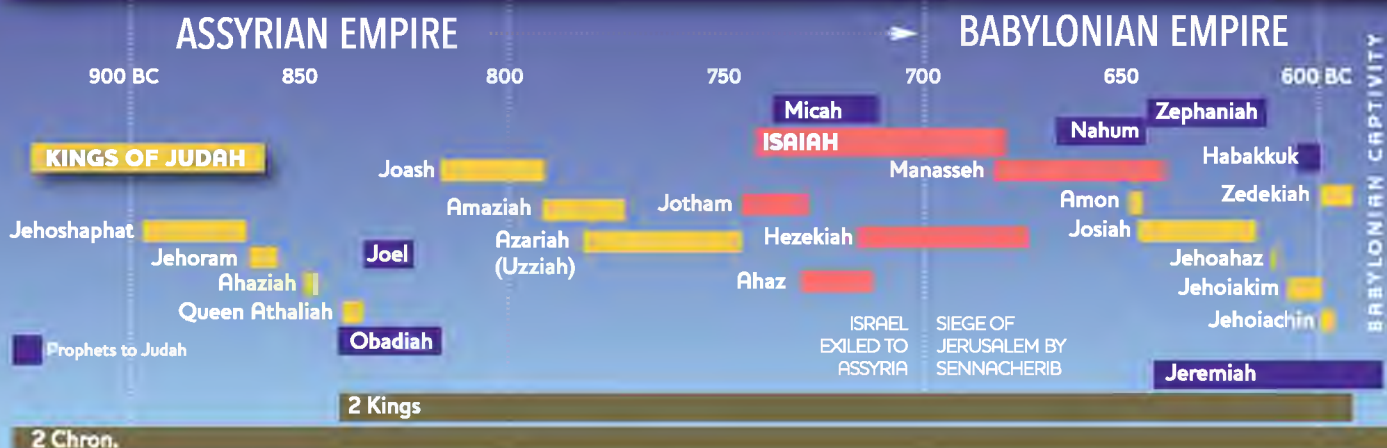
However, there are also other, miniature pictures of Christ that include the Stone, 8. 14; 28. 16; the shining Light, 9. 2; 42. 6; 49. 6; 60. 1, 19; and, the Shepherd, 40. 10, 11; 62. 11.

There are other themes that can also be traced through. For example, we have a number of references to a highway. In the first part of the book there are three references to a highway: for the remnant to return from Assyria, 11. 16; for the Assyrians and Egyptians to come together to serve the Lord, 19. 23; and, for the ransomed of the Lord to return, 35. 8. These references to a future day are sandwiched between two references to the 'highway of the fuller's field', 7. 3; 36. 2, both of which relate to a time when Judah is being attacked by her enemies. The message of hope is clear, as contained in the name of Isaiah's son: Shear-Jashub – 'the remnant will return'. Enemies might come and go, but the purpose of the Lord stands firm. In the second part of the book there are two references, the first in chapter 40, where the way is being prepared in the desert for the Lord to come, 40. 3, the second in chapter 62, where the way is instead being prepared for the people to return, 62. 10. In between these two references we have brought before us the suffering Messiah, the Saviour, who Himself prepared the way.

Another theme that is prominent, particularly in the latter section of the book, is the idea of the Lord as 'Redeemer'. The majority of references are the Lord reminding Israel of this great truth. Seven times over the Lord speaks of Himself as 'thy Redeemer', 41. 14; 44. 24; 48. 17; 49. 26; 54. 5, 8; 60. 16. This is what the Lord is in relation to His people, despite their waywardness. They are His by virtue of redemption. It is lovely to see that there eventually

CHARTING THE SCRIPTURES ISAIAH by Jonathan Black

'BEHOLD, A KING', 32. 1.

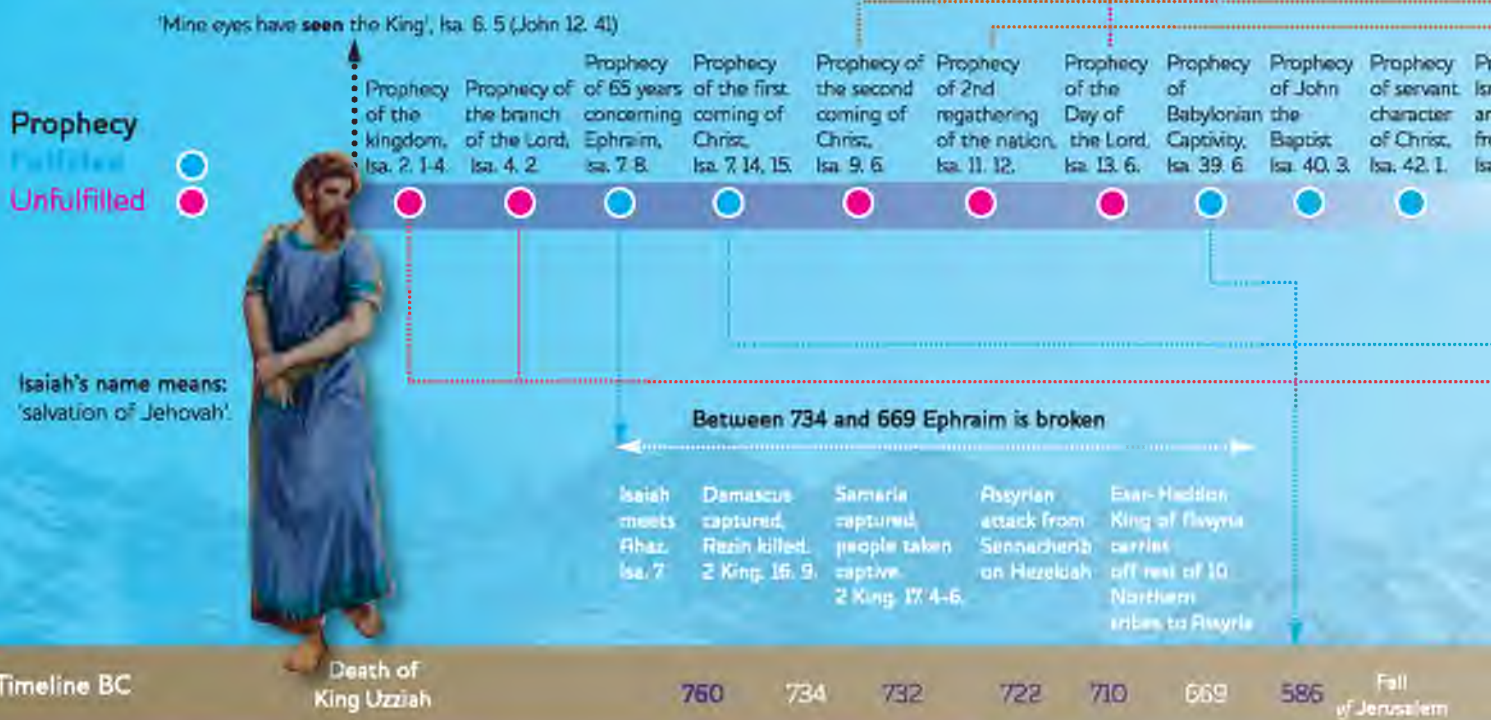


'BEHOLD, A VIRGIN SHALL CONCEIVE', 7. 14.

'BEHOLD, GOD IS MY SALVATION', 12. 2.

'BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION FOR A FOUNDATION A STONE', 28. 16.

MOUNTAIN PEAKS in ISAIAH'S PROPHECY



ISA. 1-35 [PROPHETICAL] Condemnation of Zion and Judah through Assyria/Babylon pre-exilic. / **ISA. 36-39 [HISTORICAL]** Crisis for

SONG OF SOLOMON

Ch 1-12 HORROR AND HOPE FOR JUDAH AND JERUSALEM

Ch 1-6 A wounded nation - Diagnosis and denouncement

Ch 1 - The wounds and the warning - for Judah

Ch 2 - The majesty in the mount - Jerusalem's coming glory

Ch 3 - The demolishing of Jerusalem - suffering and glory to follow

Ch 4 - The branch and His beauty - Jerusalem's future glory

Ch 5 - The song of the vineyard - It's fruit, failure and fall

Ch 6 - The commission of Isaiah - the glory of the King

Ch 7-12 A wonderful incarnation - Assyria used in Anger

Ch 7 - A wonderful sign - Immanuel, God with us

Ch 8 - A warning of Assyria's approach - Great darkness ahead

Ch 9 - A wonderful counsellor promised - The throne is secure

Ch 10 - Assyria - the great Axe will face the axe - a tree felled forever

Ch 11 - A wonderful branch shoots forth from Jesse - Christ the King

Ch 12 - A wonderful salvation - Praise the Lord!

Ch 13-35 HORROR AND HOPE FOR GENTILE NATIONS

Ch 13-19 The wayward Gentile nations - Trouble then triumph

Ch 13-14a - The overthrow of Babylon - 13. 19

Ch 14b - The oracle against Philistia - Assyria's threat, Lucifer's fall.

Ch 15-16 - The oracle against Moab - No escape

Ch 17a - The oracle against Damascus - Syria's ruin

Ch 18 - The oracle against Ethiopia - The nations chased

Ch 19 - The oracle against Egypt - A day of conversion

Ch 20-23 The warning of the Assyrian threat - Tribulation ahead

Ch 20 - Assyria attacks Ashdod - A sign of the times

Ch 21 - Babylon's fall - The image is smashed

Ch 22 - Valley of Vision - Jerusalem's danger of self-sufficiency

Ch 23 - Trouble ahead for Tyre - Only itself to blame

Ch 24-27 The worship of God in the city - Tribulation and triumph

Ch 24 - The earth shaken - but Christ reigning

Ch 25 - A refuge from the storm - and the feast prepared

Ch 26 - The song of the city saved - the song of the dead raised

Ch 27 - The return of the Lord to Zion - the regathering of Israel

Ch 28-35 The woes and wars - Rejecting God's word

Ch 28 - A rebellious Ephraim - but a precious corner stone.

Ch 29 - A rebellious city, Ariel - but a promise of joy in the Lord

Ch 30 - A risky alliance - but this is the way, walk ye in it

Ch 31 - A rebellious scheme - don't go down to Egypt for help

'Then Philip opened his mouth and preached unto

Key words: salvation / holy / earth / servant / glory / in that day / Zion / King **Writer:** Isaiah

'BEHOLD MY SERVANT', 42. 1.

SERVANT SONG 1

The suffering servant
His call, 42. 1-9.

The choice of servant, v. 1.
The character of the servant, vv. 2-4.
The call of the servant, vv. 5-7.
The chorus of the servant, vv. 8-12.
NB. The contrast of the servant, v. 19.

SERVANT SONG 2

The suffering servant
His commission, 49. 1-22.

The servant called from the womb, vv. 1-3.
The servant committed to his work, vv. 4, 5.
The servant commissioned to the world, vv. 6, 7.
The servant's conquering way, vv. 8-22.

SERVANT SONG 3

The suffering servant
His courage, 50. 1-11.

Forsaken by men to suffer, vv. 1-3.
Fully submissive in suffering, vv. 4, 5.
Facing the shame of suffering, v. 6.
Fellowship with God in suffering, vv. 7, 9.
Faith in the midst of suffering, vv. 10, 11.

SERVANT SONG 4

The suffering servant
His cross, 52. 13 - 53. 12.

His success will be seen, 52. 13-15.
His sorrow being smitten, 53. 1-4.
His sentence is severe, 53. 5, 6.
His submission is silent, 53. 7, 8.
His sacrifice is sweet 53. 9, 10.
His satisfaction is sure 53. 11, 12.

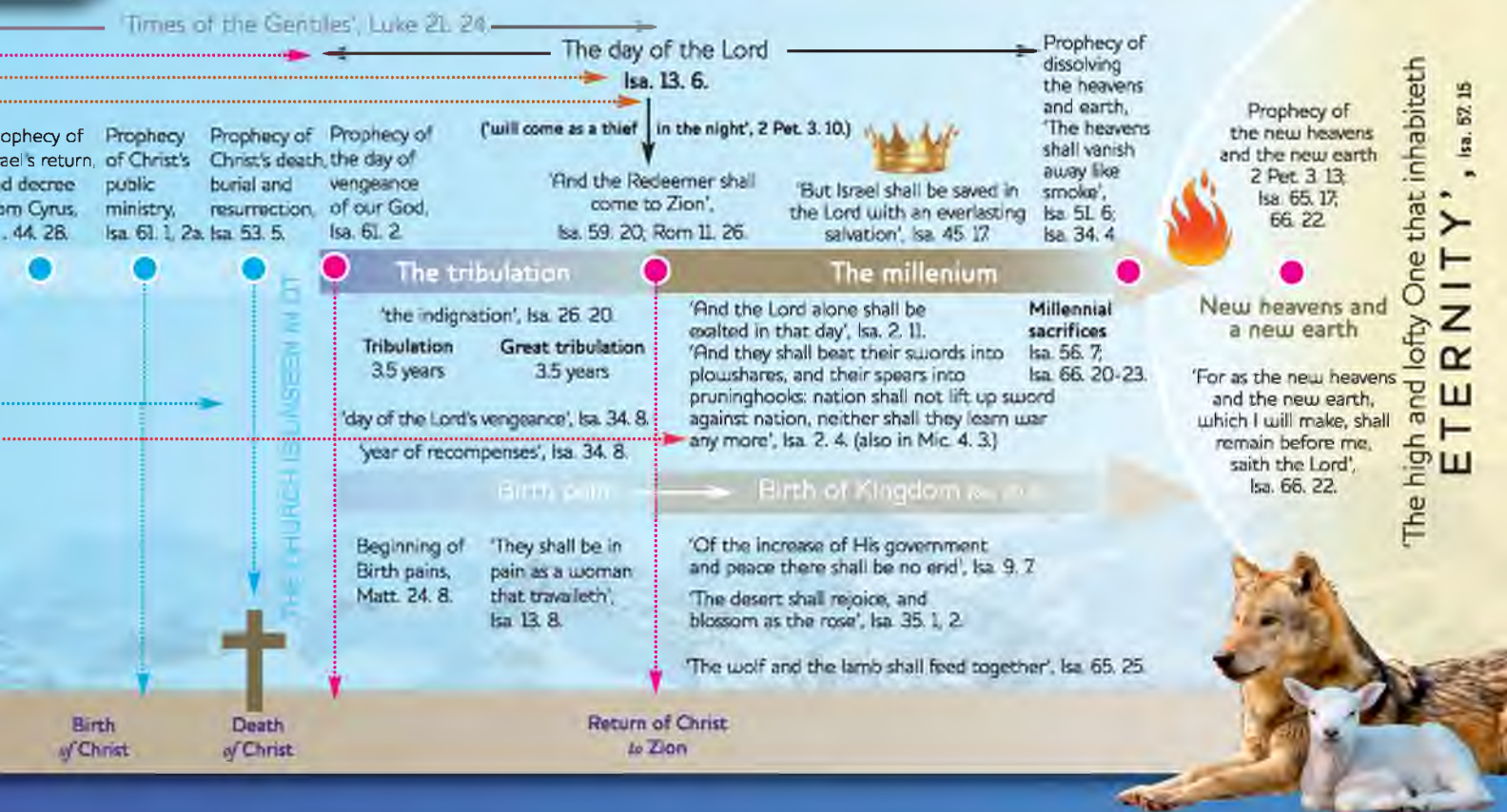
The great Isaiah scroll

Housed in a museum in Jerusalem, the oldest copy of Isaiah dates to 125BC. Found in a cave near the Dead Sea at Qumran in 1947, this scroll was 1000 years older than any previous manuscript yet almost identical, proving how accurately scripture has been copied and preserved.

'BEHOLD, MY SERVANT SHALL
DEAL PRUDENTLY', 52. 13.

'BEHOLD, THY
SALVATION COMETH', 62. 11.

'BEHOLD, I CREATE
NEW HEAVENS', 65. 17.



King Hezekiah from Assyria / **ISA. 40-66 [PROPHETICAL]** Comfort of salvation through Cyrus and suffering servant of Jehovah post-exilic

Ch 32 – The coming King – 'the shadow of a great rock in a weary land'.
Ch 33 – A returning King – everlasting burnings or everlasting life.
Ch 34 – The return of the Lord – the war to end all wars
Ch 35 – The coming Kingdom – the way of holiness

Ch 36-39 SALVATION FROM ASSYRIA AND SENNACHERIB
Ch 36-39 The walk of King Hezekiah – Praying about problems
Ch 36 – The worry of Sennacherib in a day of terror
Ch 37 – The wisdom of prayer in facing public trouble
Ch 38 – The wisdom of prayer in facing personal trial
Ch 39 – The word of prophecy and the Babylonian captivity ahead

Ch 40-66 A HIGHWAY FOR OUR GOD

Ch 40-48 The way of the suffering servant – Israel restored
Ch 40 – The comfort of God's word, 'Prepare ye the way of the Lord'.
Ch 41 – Israel, God's chosen servant will not be forsaken
Ch 42 – Jehovah's suffering servant called – a song to sing
Ch 43 – The restoration of Jehovah's servant Israel – called by name
Ch 44 – Israel God's redeemed servant will return from captivity
Ch 45 – Justification and salvation for Israel – 'Look unto me'.
Ch 46 – Babylon, weighed down by false gods
Ch 47 – Babylon, wickedness and weakness before God
Ch 48 – Babylon, go and tell the world God has redeemed Israel

Ch 49-57 The wound of the suffering servant – Israel redeemed

Ch 49 – The suffering servant and His commission
Ch 50 – The suffering servant and His courage
Ch 51 – The song of the redeemed – awake

Ch 52 – The suffering servant and His cross
Ch 53 – The suffering servant and His cross
Ch 54 – The saved servants and their chorus
Ch 55 – The great invitation – an everlasting covenant
Ch 56 – The great gift – an everlasting name
Ch 57 – The great God of Eternity – a view of two beds

Ch 49-57 The word of salvation – Israel regathered

Ch 58 – The hypocrisy of the Sabbath – pleasure or precept?
Ch 59 – Put on the helmet of salvation
Ch 60 – Looking forward to wells of salvation
Ch 61 – Clothed with garments of salvation
Ch 62 – Zion's lamp of salvation
Ch 63 – God is mighty to save – the day of vengeance in my heart
Ch 64 – Thou art the potter – we are the clay
Ch 65 – Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth
Ch 66 – Behold, the Lord will come

comes a point in the book in which Israel, in repentance, acknowledges this fact, 63. 16.

Purpose

Isaiah is faced with two major problems among the people to whom he is writing: rampant idolatry and a lack of reality. These two issues are addressed throughout the book. In doing so, he brings before the people the incomparability of the true God. He is the One who raises up successive kingdoms, Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, and brings down kings; He is the Lord of history who can and will use whom He wills to accomplish His purposes. He is the Lord of the nations, who can and will deal with them in judgement when it is His time to do so. He is the Lord of creation, the upholder and sustainer of all things. He is the Lord of the future who can tell exactly what is going to happen, even naming kings who will reign before they have even been born. He is the Lord of His people, who cares for them, preserves them, and disciplines them for their good and His glory. He is the Lord of salvation and redemption, who will establish them. He will not abandon them, but will, in His own time, bring about conditions of everlasting peace and prosperity. Isaiah wants, therefore, to open the eyes of the people, cp. 6. 10, to understand that the Lord is God, the only one worthy of worship and trust, to realize that He is active on behalf of His people and deserves more than just lip service, but genuine devotion.

Integral to the accomplishment of divine purpose is the coming of the Messiah. Through suffering and death, He will deal with sin; He will bring judgement upon His enemies, including Satan, and will reign in righteousness. It is clear, then, that the Lord, through Isaiah, wants Israel to understand the big picture of divine purpose. He is working to a timetable, and this timetable is defined in later books, particularly the book of Daniel, but, in essence, it is all here in Isaiah. Today, the Lord, too, wants His people to be aware of the big picture. We have the great privilege of having the complete canon of scripture, and, therefore, much more detail than was available to Isaiah. From it we understand that

world events are not haphazard or random, but that they are under the control of the God of heaven, who is working to a timetable. There is no doubt that His ultimate purpose will be accomplished, and we can rejoice in the certainty of the prospect that lies ahead of us. Not only so, but a clear understanding of divine purpose will strengthen and establish us in the present, cp. 2 Thess. 2. 2.

Endnotes

- 1 For example, chapters 1-39, 40-55, and 56-66, written at different periods in time ranging from the 8th Century to the post-exilic period.
- 2 For example, the range of quotations from Esaias (Isaiah) in Matthew's Gospel: 3. 3; 4. 14; 8. 17; 12. 17; 13. 14; 15. 7.



A MAN WEEPING IN HEAVEN

By **RODERICK BARTON** Birmingham, England

In Revelation chapter 1, we find the Apostle John on the Isle of Patmos on the Lord's Day. He is evidently alone, but spiritually he is 'in the Spirit'. That which concerns the Lord Jesus Christ occupies his mind and heart. He is in the heavenlies when he hears a great voice, v. 10. He is to 'write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter', v. 19. A solemn responsibility! Chapters 2 and 3 are taken up with the letters to the seven churches.

Chapter 4 marks the end of this present church age with the words, 'After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven'. This is a defining moment. John is told to, 'Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter'. The 'hereafter' clearly means after the history of the church has ended and the saints have been raptured to heaven, 1 Cor. 15. 15-58; 1 Thess. 4. 13-18.

John is then introduced to the glorious sight of Christ upon the throne with the seated elders, seven lamps of fire, and four beasts saying, 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come', v. 8. This scene of pure worship is the acknowledgement of absolute holiness, deity, and the immutability of the One on the throne.¹ John had walked with the Lord Jesus through His public ministry, witnessed His death upon the cross and been with Him after the resurrection, but he had never seen Him like this before. The throne room of heaven could not be more different from the scene of earth. As John surveys this glory, his attention is drawn to the book in the right hand of the One upon the throne. It is interesting to observe that the scroll is written within and on the backside. In ancient times, parchments were written on the inside, and, if full, the outside was also used.² This scroll was filled and what is written thereon has been described as the title deeds of earth, God's programme for the future. It is

crucial, and the identity of the one who can open to read it is also of paramount importance. It is sealed with seven seals and can only be opened by One with the absolute authority to do so.

There is a strong angel proclaiming to all, 'Who is worthy to open the book [scroll], and to loose the seals thereof?' 5. 2. There is no man in heaven, the earth, or the underworld able to undertake this task. This brings such distress to John for he says, 'I wept much', v. 4. The strength of the statement in the original text suggests that he sobbed with a broken heart.³ What an amazing reaction! A man weeping in heaven of all places. Surely the human mind asks 'why?' Heaven is the perfect place – no sorrow, no pain, all things eternally in order. Here in the throne room of heaven, the heart of John breaks with disappointment. What has motivated him to weep? Although by the Spirit he is in heaven, he is still a mortal man inhibited by the limits of the flesh. In addition to his years with Christ upon earth, it was he who was given the task to pen the gospel record of the Lord Jesus as the eternal Son of God, and three most valuable Epistles. He knew something of the immensity of the value of the scroll. He realized it needed someone very special to both open and read it. He wanted a glimpse at God's programme for the future. This weeping man is a testimony to how a mortal being can live in such communion with Christ.

His weeping reflects his spirituality, his commitment to the things of God, and is a witness of what he had learnt whilst he was with Christ on earth.

Can John continue to weep? No! This is heaven! One of the elders steps forward with the message of great comfort. This is a timeless place, a place of comfort, of order, of worship void of any distractions, and certainly of no disappointments. The role of the elder here is significant. We see in the elder, one who comforts, one with knowledge, one who appreciates the sobbing heart, one who gives personal attention, and one who shows concern. All these are a picture of the person of Christ. We note that it is an elder that comforts, not an angel. The elder understands the distress of a weeping mortal who is yet to permanently enter heaven. We have no record of angels weeping. They may not have the wide spectrum of emotions that mortals have, from deep sorrow to abundant rejoicing. The elder points John to the one in the midst of the throne where he sees a Lamb freshly slain who comes and takes the book. Heaven now rings with a new song, vv. 9, 10, followed by a vast multitude singing a song of exultation with a loud voice, vv. 12, 13. Is it not the task of every elder to point the saints to the person of Christ? Now, the weeping has gone. The desire of John's spiritual heart has been fully and richly met. The scroll's contents will be revealed to him. He will be privileged above all the men of earth to carry out with his pen the commission given to him, 1. 19.

Endnotes

- 1 The strict translation is not 'book' but 'scroll', see NKJV, YLT, ESV, ALFORD.
- 2 See HENRY ALFORD, *The New Testament for English Readers, Volume 2*, Rivingtons, 1872.
- 3 'I began to weep loudly' ESV, 'I kept on weeping much . . . Perhaps weeping aloud' A. T. ROBERTSON, 'wept copiously' W. MACDONALD, 'his tears burst forth in the earnestness of disappointed desire' ALFORD.

THE FATHER OF MERCIES

By **MERVYN WISHART** Belfast, Northern Ireland **2 Cor. 1. 3.**

'The Lord is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works', Ps. 145. 9

God's mercies, His compassions, extend to the whole of creation. The birds, the animals, the creatures in the sea and to all mankind. God is mindful of their need of sustenance, and He oversees the welfare of each one.

Birds: The Lord asked Job, 'Who provideth for the raven his food? when his young ones cry unto God', Job 38. 41. The Lord Jesus said, 'Behold the fowls of the air . . . your heavenly Father feedeth them', Matt. 6. 26. As to their welfare, it is God who directs the migrating birds to fly south to escape the harshness of the Arctic winter, Job 39. 26. It is God who causes the eagle to know instinctively the best vantage point, 'and make her nest on high . . . From thence she seeketh the prey, and her eyes behold afar off', vv. 27, 29.

Animals: 'The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their meat from God', Ps. 104. 21. 'He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle', v. 14; He provides shelter for them, 'The high hills are a refuge for the wild goats; and the rocks for the conies', v. 18. It is clear in scripture that God is attentive to the welfare of animals. It was forbidden to 'plow with an ox and an ass together', Deut. 22. 10. The larger animal would bear a disproportionate weight of the load. The ox treading the corn was not to be muzzled; it was permitted to eat to sustain itself in its arduous task, 25. 4. A newborn animal from the cattle or sheep was not to be taken from its mother until the eighth day, Exod. 22. 30. The Lord considered the feelings of the animals.

Creatures in the sea: Around seventy percent of the earth's surface is covered by water. Much of the seabed is still uncharted and multitudes of species of fish and sea creatures, large and small, are still undiscovered

and unnamed. Scripture speaks of, 'this great and wide sea, wherein are things creeping innumerable, both small and great beasts . . . These wait all upon thee; that thou mayest give them their meat in due season', Ps. 104. 25, 27. God provides for their welfare. 'Thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good', v. 28. 'And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind . . . And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas', Gen. 1. 21, 22. The God who blessed them at the beginning continues to bless them still.

As we consider God's provision and care for the birds, the animals, and creatures in the sea, surely it bears witness that God is the **Father of mercies**, and His tender mercies are over all His works.

All mankind: 'He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things', Acts 17. 25. 'The rain . . . watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater', Isa. 55. 10. God's mercies are lavished indiscriminately upon all mankind. 'Who giveth food to all flesh: for his mercy endureth forever', Ps. 136. 25. 'He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust', Matt. 5. 45.

God's mercy in salvation

Zacharias prophesied of, 'the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us', Luke 1. 77, 78. God demonstrated His love and mercy to a lost world in the giving of His only Son to the shameful death of the cross. Scripture was fulfilled at Calvary, 'Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other', Ps. 85. 10. This scripture will also have a

glorious fulfilment in the peace and harmony that will mark conditions on earth during the millennial reign of Christ, Isa. 2. 4; 11. 6-9.

'Mercy and truth unite,
Oh, 'tis a wondrous sight,
All sights above!
Jesus the curse sustains,
Guilt's bitter cup He drains,
Nothing for us remains,
Nothing but love'.
THOMAS KELLY (1769-1854)

There was mercy at the cross for the repentant malefactor, Luke 23. 43, for the centurion, and they that were with him, Matt. 27. 54. Multitudes have visited that sacred place by faith and received mercy from the One who suffered there.

The Lord Jesus told a parable of the publican who went up to the temple to pray. He realized his guilt before God; he knew that his sin had separated him from God, so he stood 'afar off'. He realized that the source of his problem was his own sinful heart, so he 'smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner', Luke 18. 13. The word used by the publican means, be propitious, be merciful, on the ground of the sacrifice offered on the brazen altar. Ultimately, the Lord Jesus was going to Calvary to offer Himself as the one sacrifice for sins for ever, so that all who come in repentance, seeking God's mercy, can be forgiven. Jesus said of the man in the story, 'this man went down to his house justified', v. 14.

Paul wrote to Titus about his conversion on the road to Damascus, and explained that it was, 'Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us', Titus 3. 5.

Descriptive adjectives

There are at least seven wonderful adjectives used in scripture to describe God's mercy. Solomon said to the Lord, 'Thou hast shewed unto thy servant David my father **great** mercy', 1 Kgs. 3. 6. David wrote, 'O Lord my God, thou art very great', Ps. 104. 1. His attributes are in accord with His greatness.

In Ephesians chapter 2 verses 1 to 3, we have the dark picture of man's fallen condition, 'dead in trespasses and

sins'. Then there is a beam of heavenly light, 'But God, who is **rich** in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved)', vv. 4, 5.

James speaks of the patience of Job in his great trials, and how God's dealings with him demonstrate, 'that the Lord is very pitiful, and of **tender** mercy', Jas. 5. 11. The Lord's tenderness and compassion shone through the dark clouds which overshadowed the life of Job.

'Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head'.
WILLIAM COWPER (1731-1800)

Peter reminds us of the living hope that accompanies our salvation, 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his **abundant** mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead', 1 Pet. 1. 3. God's mercy is abundant; not only in the present blessings that the believer enjoys, but in the bright prospect we have for the future.

David wrote, 'But thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and **plenteous** in mercy and truth', Ps. 86. 15. Here, it is the scope of those to whom God's mercy reaches. Moses wrote, 'The Lord God, merciful and gracious . . . keeping

mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin', Exod. 34. 6, 7. How thankful we are as believers that we can gladly sing, 'It reaches me! Wondrous grace, it reaches me', MARY JAMES (1810-1883).

'But the mercy of the Lord is from **everlasting** to everlasting', Ps. 103. 17. God Himself is eternal, as are all His glorious attributes, 'from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God', Ps. 90. 2.

'But do thou for me, O God the Lord, for thy name's sake: because thy mercy is **good**, deliver thou me', Ps. 109. 21. David's request for deliverance and blessing was based simply on the fact of God's goodness. In New Testament language, 'And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God', Rom. 8. 28.

How blessed are those who are the recipients of God's mercy. It is great, rich, tender, abundant, plenteous, everlasting, and good.

The believer's response to the mercies of God

i Praise

When we look back over our lives, we have to agree with Jeremiah, 'It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness', Lam. 3. 22, 23. Our hearts respond with grateful praise. David wrote, 'I will sing aloud of thy mercy in the morning', Ps. 59. 16.

'When all Thy mercies, O my God,
My rising soul surveys,
Transported with the view, I'm lost
In wonder, love, and praise'.
JOSEPH ADDISON (1672-1719)

ii Thanksgiving

In a day when the spirit of the age is that many are unthankful and unholy, 2 Tim. 3. 2, it is becoming for a Christian to maintain a thankful spirit for all God's mercy towards us. Psalm 136 repeats the call four times, 'O give thanks unto the Lord . . . for His mercy ['His exuberant bounty', SPURRELL] endureth forever'. The psalmist addresses God in four different ways: 'the Lord', v. 1; 'the God of gods', v. 2; 'the Lord of lords', v. 3; 'the God of heaven', v. 26. But he concludes each statement, 'for his mercy endureth for ever'.

iii Compassion

As we remember our Father's mercies (compassions) toward us, we ought to respond by showing compassion to those around us. Compassion is a rare commodity in the world in which we live.

In reply to a lawyer who asked, 'who is my neighbour?', the Lord Jesus spoke of the man who was assaulted by thieves and left for dead by the roadside, Luke 10. 29-37. We may make the gospel application of the story but let us not miss the main point. We are called to show to others something of the mercy that the Lord has shown to us. It is interesting that included in the list of spiritual gifts outlined in Romans chapter 12 is, 'he that sheweth mercy', v. 8. The Lord Jesus taught His disciples, 'Blessed are the merciful', Matt. 5. 7.

iv Consecration

Paul's reasoning in Romans chapter 12 verse 1 is that having received God's mercies in abundance, a full surrender of all that we are and have, is our reasonable service. 'I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service'.

'What glad returns can I impart,
For favour so divine?
Oh, take me, all, and fill my heart,
And make me wholly thine'.
ANNE STEELE (1716-1778)



THE ETERNAL STATE

Part 14

By **STEPHEN G. BAKER** Huyton, Liverpool, England

Introduction

Most fairy tales end with the words 'and they lived happily ever after'. Many people dream of better days, utopia and conditions that are idyllic. In response to this, the realist says, 'it will never happen', the cynic quips, 'it's just a pipe dream' and the idealist reflects, 'it's a nice idea but it's not true, so enjoy it in your head'. Some people believe that the Bible is just a fairy tale and that it promotes a view that everyone will get to heaven in the end. But the future is not nice for everyone, as we will discover, exploring the subject.

This paper is about the reality of what God has revealed in His word about the conditions that will exist when all of earth's history has run its course. For the sake of this article, we are calling it 'the eternal state'. That is because we are describing conditions which will be fixed and unchangeable by that stage. In the scriptures the future has been described for us in such detail that though we don't know everything about what life will be like beyond our present world, we can be sure that all humans will 'live to see another day' in permanent conditions and in very specific locations. However, we must be careful not to conjecture about what has not been revealed nor ignore what has.

When God made Adam, we read that He 'breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul', Gen. 2. 7. This and many other verses make it very clear that we are also not solely physical beings. The study of the subject of the soul is a very interesting one and there are sufficient scriptures to convince the present writer that the soul is not only spiritual, but that it is also eternal. For instance, in Psalm 16 verse 10 the possibility of a soul being in hell is implied as opposed to the body going into the grave. We now know that this Psalm is referring to the Lord Jesus, Acts 13. 35, and is a prediction

that not only would His soul not be abandoned in hell but that His body would not decay while in the tomb.

The eternal state for the unbeliever

I want initially to focus on the words of the Lord Jesus in Matthew chapter 25. The setting is when the Lord Jesus comes back to earth after the period of the Great Tribulation and just before He sets up His 1,000-year kingdom on earth, Rev. 20. 1-6. As the nations of earth stand before the Son of Man, vv. 31, 32, or the King as verse 34 describes Him, they see Him seated on a throne dividing people into two groups – sheep and goats. The goats are on the left, the sheep on the right. The sheep are the righteous, v. 37, those who recognized Messiah and showed kindness to His people. The goats are the unbelievers who are alive when the Lord comes in 'power and great glory', Luke 21. 27. The sheep will enter into the kingdom, but the goats are consigned to 'everlasting fire', v. 41, also described as 'everlasting punishment', v. 46. Tragically, we discover that the eternal future for the unbeliever is very bleak. They will be in a place of unending punishment. The 'eternal state' for the unbeliever will be one of an endless loss of well-being, 2 Thess. 1. 9, and endless regret, Mark 9. 44, existing in the same location as all those who opposed God and His

Son, Rev. 20. 10-15. In light of this we should be reaching out with the gospel with incredible urgency.

The eternal state for the believer

There are two aspects of the eternal state for the believer that I want to focus on – the conditions and the locations. Scripture makes it clear that the privilege of all who have been reconciled to God will be to enjoy His presence and the blissful conditions that are normal in the presence of God. Back in the garden of Eden, Genesis chapters 2 and 3, all was well until sin entered. At this point we discover that rebellion against God and His commandments changed both the conditions and location in which the first man and woman lived. First, the change of conditions is laid out by God – there will be great pain and sorrow, Gen. 3. 16, the earth will be cursed, v. 17, work will be hard and exhausting, v. 19, and death will be the end of life on earth, v. 19. Hard on the heels of this devastating description of the conditions comes the final blow – Adam and Eve were expelled from the presence of God, vv. 23, 24. What a crisis! Relocated into darkness and barred from the presence of God and the tree of life, v. 24. God has not changed, the conditions in His presence have not changed, but humans are now spiritually dead, living under the curse and far from the presence of God.

As we then journey through the Old Testament, we discover God making provision for men to approach Him. In the sacrifices of the patriarchs, the offerings of Israel's priesthood, the construction of the tabernacle or the temple, we start to see glimpses of the presence of God, His holiness, His glory, the fragrance of being in His presence, and the joy of living with God. The Psalms are a rich resource when it comes to describing and appreciating the presence of God. Come back to Psalm 16 with me and read verse 11 – 'Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore'. The key words are life, presence (relationship with God), fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore. These are the conditions

that will exist in the ‘eternal state’. Look at Revelation chapter 21. Try to ignore the ‘where’ for a moment (location). Once again, we see relationship with God, v. 3, joy, life, no sorrow, no crying, no pain, vv. 3, 4. As a result of the work of the cross, God will restore in that future day all that was lost in the garden of Eden.

But what about the ‘where’, the location? Where will we live to enjoy these conditions? My starting point, and the one I revert to when I am attempting to understand some of the discussions that take place about the location, is this – we will be ‘with Christ; which is far better’, Phil. 1. 23. The conditions will change as soon as we are in the physical presence of Christ. Today, however, the believer who dies is ‘absent from the body’ and ‘present with the Lord’, 2 Cor. 5. 8. But, when the Lord Jesus returns for His church, we will be given glorified bodies and enjoy His presence in a physical sense as well.¹ Our location at that stage is described by the Lord Jesus in John chapter 14 as ‘My Father’s house’. I take this to

be the uncreated presence of God. When the Lord Jesus returns to set up His millennial kingdom, the church will be with Him, 2 Thess. 1. 7-10, coming down from heaven to earth, Matt. 24. 30; Mark 14. 62.

The 1,000-year reign of Christ will take place in a refreshed (new) earth, Isa. 65. 17-25; 66, the characteristics of which are very similar to the new heaven and earth of the ‘eternal state’, 2 Pet. 3. 13. Peter writes about ‘new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness’. His description follows another interesting statement in verse 12 – ‘Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?’ The ESV, DARBY, and NASB translate the word ‘wherein’ as either ‘because of which’ or ‘by reason of which’. The verse is saying that the old universe will be dissolved or destroyed by fire so that the ‘the day of God’ can commence. The old world and all the unrighteousness that characterized

it will be gone forever. The term ‘the day of God’ is a description of the era that will start when the Lord Jesus Christ has brought everything under the control of God the Father, 1 Cor. 15. 24, 28. This is the ‘eternal state’ when righteousness is the norm, God is on His throne, and all ‘rule and all authority and power’ will be subjugated to the Father.

In conclusion, let’s think about where we, the Church, will be. Across the span of scripture, Israel has always been an earthly people. They were called out of Egypt, Hos. 11. 1, and given a land which they have occupied in part from time to time over their history. The church, however, despite commencing on earth, has been called to spiritual blessings in heavenly places, Eph. 1. 3, encouraged to set their affections on things above, Col. 3. 1, 2, and are described in Hebrews chapter 12 verses 22 and 23 as coming ‘unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect’. Considering this, and the teaching of Revelation chapters 21 and 22, there would appear to be a city, Rev. 21. 2, 9, 10, that is the church, the bride of Christ, Eph. 5. 23-33; 2 Cor. 11. 2, and a city which the church occupies, Rev. 21. 10-27. These are quite difficult to distinguish as we know that the ‘Lord God Almighty and the Lamb’ dwell in the city and the ‘the Lamb is the light thereof’. So, the Lord Jesus Christ is among His people. We also know that there are nations, v. 24, that come to this city that is suspended over the new earth, vv. 1, 2, 10. It is stated that nothing that defiles can enter the city, v. 27, and the curse no longer exists, 22. 3. This is the location for the believer in the ‘eternal state’. What a future we have in Christ: no wonder we hear the words, ‘Even so, come, Lord Jesus’, v. 20, in the closing chapter of holy scripture.



Endnote

- ¹ See Rom. 8. 23; 1 Cor. 15; Phil. 3. 21; 1 Thess. 4. 13-18.

BALAAAM

Part 8: Numbers 24. 15-25

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

Following Balaam's third attempt to curse the children of Israel, Balak, in his frustration and anger, dismissed him saying, 'flee thou to thy place', Num. 24. 11. Although Balak wanted to hear no more, Balaam said, 'Come, I will admonish thee what this people will do to thy people at the end of days', v. 14 JND.

Commentators frequently attribute four parables to Balaam, but a careful reading of Numbers chapters 23 and 24 indicates that he spoke seven parables, each being introduced by the phrase he 'took up his parable'.¹ Perhaps the number seven serves to emphasize the fullness and finality of the message made known through Balaam. Although there were seven parables, the last four are clustered together, for they all relate to one theme, Israel's supremacy over the Gentiles, and the latter's fall under the judgement of God.

In the first parable, Israel were a **chosen** people, in the second, **cleansed**, in the third, a **comely** people and in the final four parables a **conquering** people.

Parable 4, Num. 24. 15-19

Verses 15 and 16 are virtually a repetition of Balaam's words at the commencement of the third parable, but with one addition. Balaam is not only the man who has heard the words of God; this is added, 'and knew the knowledge of the most High'. As the 'most High', God divided to the nations their inheritance, setting the bounds of the people 'according to the number of the children of Israel'. He is the One who rules in the kingdom of men and 'giveth it to whomsoever he will'. Asaph, describing the destruction of Israel's enemies at the end times, says, 'Let them be confounded and troubled for ever; yea, let them be put to shame, and perish: that men may know that thou, whose name

alone is JEHOVAH, art the most high over all the earth'.²

The fourth parable primarily concerns two nations that were related by natural ties to Israel, Moab, in verse 17, descended from Lot, Edom, verse 18, descended from Esau. Though no longer recognized as nations today, the territory they occupied is still inhabited by people hostile toward Israel, and the two are mentioned again in Daniel chapter 11 verse 41 relative to prophetic events. Alongside those two nations Balaam also mentions 'the children of Sheth'. We are not directly told who they were, but the name means 'tumult' or 'confusion'. Some feel it is a reference to the wild, war-like character of the 'Moabites', others that it embraces all peoples rebellious and hostile towards the Jewish nation.

Moab comes first, the very nation whose king now sought to curse the people of God. Balak is informed that, far from being cursed, from them would come forth One who will 'smite the corners of Moab'. Balaam says, 'I shall see him, but not now [he has not yet come]: I shall behold him, but not nigh [it is not imminent but lies in the future, the latter end of verse 14]: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel'. While some commentators suggest the reference is initially to David, the language is unmistakably Messianic, looking forward to Christ's coming glory and sovereignty.

He 'shall smite [dash asunder] the corners of Moab [i.e., from one end

of the land to the other] and destroy [dash asunder] all the children of Sheth. And Edom [i.e., the people of Edom] shall be a possession, Seir [i.e., the country of Edom] also shall be a possession for his enemies; and Israel shall do valiantly [mighty things]'. Not Moab destroying Israel, this is Israel destroying Moab. Edom, who once refused Israel passage through their land, will become Israel's possession.³

The parable concludes, as it commenced, with the coming of the promised Messiah. 'Out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion, and shall destroy him that remaineth of the city', v. 19. The idea seems to be that every city in which a remnant of Edom is found shall be destroyed. Their enmity against Israel was persistent but in a coming day the very nation they sought to withstand will be used by God to inflict His judgement upon them.⁴

Parable 5, Num. 24. 20

While the previous parable concluded with the dominion of Israel's coming King, it seems the remaining parables trace the movements amongst the nations, that culminate in Christ having dominion and in Israel's deliverance.

Amalek was the first of the nations to withstand Israel following the Exodus from Egypt. In the third of Balaam's parables, reference was made to 'Agag', which we suggested was a general title of the kings of Amalek, and representative of all Gentile nations opposed to the people of Israel. The Amalekites were descendants of a grandson of Esau and were inveterate enemies of the children of Israel.

- They are first mentioned in Exodus chapter 17, the Lord saying in verse 14, 'I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven'.
- In Deuteronomy chapter 25 verse 19, Israel were commanded that when established in the land they were not to forget what Amalek had done to them and they were to 'blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven'.

- Although frequently defeated, they were never totally eliminated, arising to attack God's people again.

Despite their long history, their resistance to all former attempts to destroy them, and their ability to recover after defeat, in their 'latter end' they 'shall . . . perish for ever'. Balaam's words stand as a warning to all Gentile nations who seek to lift their hand against God's chosen people.

Parable 6, Num. 24. 21, 22

It seems the Kenites were a Midianite tribe who became allied to Israel when Moses married 'Zipporah', her father 'Jethro' being a Kenite, Judg. 1. 16. It is interesting that the mention of the Kenites follows the mention of Amalek, for while the latter sought to withstand Israel, the Kenites, commencing with Moses' father-in-law, are favourably associated with them, Exod. 18. 1-27.

- In Judges chapter 4, it was Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite that slew Sisera, Israel's enemy in the days of Deborah.
- In 1 Chronicles chapter 2 verse 55, reference is made to Kenites who intermarried with the line of Caleb.
- To those, we can add their descendant Rechab and the Rechabites, who likewise have a favourable link to the nation of Israel, 1 Chr. 2. 55; Jer. 35. 1-19.

The parable is not without its difficulties. It seems the generally favourable attitude they adopted towards God's people is likened in the parable to the figure of a bird building its nest in the security of a rock, their attitude being rewarded with divine blessing. In consequence of which, instead of destruction they are promised continued existence until such a time as 'Asshur', Assyria, rising to prominence amongst the nations, would carry the Kenites into captivity. Understood thus, it corresponds to the time when the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom were carried off into captivity. Because the Kenites attached themselves to the

children of Israel, they are promised preservation with the children of Israel until the rise of the Assyrian Empire.

But why, though friendly towards Israel, would they ultimately be destroyed? The answer seems to be that although outwardly associated with the children of Israel they never entered, personally, into covenant relationship with Israel's God. What was purposed to be disciplinary for God's people, that is, the carrying off into captivity of the ten tribes, would prove to be catastrophic and destructive to those who simply attached themselves to God's people and not to the God to whom that people belonged. KEIL and DELITZSCH comment that Israel itself is not mentioned in this section of the parable for the simple reason that the rise of Assyria to be a world power was, for Israel, a transitory stage in their history, not to destroy the nation but to refine it. But, for the Kenites, the rise of the Assyrian Empire was not a transitory stage in their history but would mark their end.⁶ Balaam's words stand as a warning to the Gentiles, that to be safe they need to know God for themselves, and not merely be favourably disposed towards His people.

Parable 7, Num. 24. 23, 24

The final parable appears to be a bare statement of facts regarding Gentile supremacy in the world, truth that is later expanded in detail in the writings of Israel's prophets. It begins with a question, 'who shall live when God doeth this?' The opening question suggests that ultimately the parable looks on to concluding events, the end of Gentile dominion in the earth. Two Gentile powers are prominent in the parable, 'Chittim' and 'Asshur'.

- 'Ships shall come from the coast of Chittim'. Whilst initially a reference to 'Cyprus', 'Chittim' became a general term descriptive of the western coastlands and islands in the Mediterranean.⁷ As used by Balaam, it stands as representative of Gentile, western powers.

- 'and shall afflict Asshur, and shall afflict Eber'. 'Asshur' is seen from verse 22 to be Assyria, as used here by Balaam representative of Gentile, eastern powers. 'Eber' is understood by some to be a reference to the Hebrews, though others view it as including some Arab nations, east of the Euphrates.
- 'and he also shall perish for ever'. The reference would seem to look back to the opening statement, and perhaps a powerful leader associated with 'Chittim'.

As indicated, this is but a seed-plot of future events. Considering later passages of scripture, we might tentatively suggest the ships from 'Chittim' are representative of the coming confederacy of ten kings under the leadership of the Man of Sin, Rev. 13. 1-8. 'Asshur' can be understood as representative of a confederacy of eastern powers, relating to the 'Assyrian' spoken of by Isaiah and Micah, who many identify with the 'king of the north' (i.e., north of Israel) spoken of by Daniel.⁸ The parable describes conflict between these powers in the latter half of Daniel's seventieth week, while he that 'shall perish for ever' may be viewed as the Man of Sin, the head of the ten-kingdom confederacy.

Understood thus, this cluster of four parables commences with the manifestation of Christ and concludes with the destruction of the Man of Sin. 'There shall come a Star out of Jacob . . . he that shall have dominion'.

Endnotes

1. Num. 23. 7, 18; 24. 3, 15, 20, 21, 23.
2. Deut. 32. 8; Dan. 4. 17; Ps. 83. 17, 18.
3. Cp. Isa. 25. 10; Num. 20. 18; Isa. 11. 14.
4. Ezek. 25. 12-14.
5. See J. J. STUBBS *What the Bible Teaches, Numbers*, John Ritchie, pg. 332.
6. C. F. KEIL and F. DELITZSCH, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament - The Pentateuch*, Vol. 3, Eerdmans, pg. 197.
7. Cp. Jer. 2. 10; Dan. 11. 30.
8. Isa. 10. 5, 24; 14. 25; Mic. 5. 5; Dan. 11. 40.

PAUL'S SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY

By **MICHAEL BUCKERIDGE** Grantham, England

Part 1

The context of the journey, Acts 15

- The council at Jerusalem, vv. 1-35 – essential clarification for the work among the Gentiles. Salvation is through faith alone with no need for circumcision.
- The care of the believers, v. 36 – Paul and Barnabas desired the growth and well-being of the young believers they had seen saved.
- The conflict between Paul and Barnabas, vv. 37-39 – how sad when godly men disagree, although it is important to remember that, while Paul did not have confidence in Mark at this time, he did not write him off forever, 2 Tim. 4. 11.
- The commendation to the work, vv. 39, 40 – Paul is commended to the work with Silas and they head out to confirm the churches, including passing on the outcome of the Jerusalem council, 16. 4.

The call and circumcision of Timothy, 16. 1-3

Arriving in Derbe and Lystra, Paul is reacquainted with a young man called Timothy who likely had been converted on his previous visit, 1 Tim. 1. 2. Described as a 'disciple' and one who 'was well reported of by the brethren', vv. 1, 2, Paul desires that he goes with him on this journey. Paul's disappointment with John Mark had not discouraged him from seeking those whom he could encourage in the service of God. Are those more experienced in the Lord's work similarly on the lookout for those they can mentor today?

The circumcision of Timothy may seem a contradiction of what had gone before in chapter 15. However, in this chapter, circumcision was a point of doctrinal discussion, here it seems simply to be a way by which Timothy – who came from a mixed Gentile/Jew parentage, vv. 1, 2, would

be acceptable to Jews he would be working amongst. It was an example of the principle that Paul states in 1 Corinthians chapter 10 verses 32 and 33, 'Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved'. How willing are we to put ourselves out for others that we might gain them for Christ?

The call to Macedonia, 16. 6-10

Having travelled through 'Phrygia and the region of Galatia', 16. 6, Paul and Silas seem to have planned to continue west into 'Asia' (modern-day Turkey). The Spirit of God forbade, or hindered them, so they turned north, testing whether they would be allowed to reach Bithynia, 'a highly civilised province with Greek cities and Jewish settlements'.¹ Again, the Spirit of God 'suffered them not', v. 7, so they passed through Mysia, a region to the northwest of Asia, and ended up in Troas on the east coast of the Aegean Sea.

We learn that, while everywhere needs the gospel, we must be open to God's leading as to where He wants **us** to preach. The gospel would come to Asia and Bithynia, Rev. 1. 4; 1 Pet. 1. 1, but not at this time through Paul. Why? 'To many such questions there is no answer – we can only bow to the sovereignty of God'.² The prohibition turns into positive direction at Troas as God gives Paul a vision of a man of Macedonia who said, 'Come over into Macedonia, and help us', v. 9. As with many of the heroes of faith before him, there is no delay in Paul's response and he 'immediately . . . endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them', v. 10. How quick are we in responding to the direction of

God? Note that it is likely that Luke joined them at Troas as the 'they' of verses 1 to 9 changes to 'we' in verse 10.

The characters in Philippi, 16. 11-40

Crossing the Aegean Sea via Samothracia to Neapolis, they take the short journey further inland to Philippi, once again following the pattern of seeking the chief cities to preach in. In this city, however, there does not seem to be a synagogue and therefore no obvious place to begin preaching. They took time, v. 12, during which they found that there was a place by 'a river side, where prayer was wont to be made', v. 13. It is challenging to reflect on the outreach strategy of the early believers; they looked for places where there was already an interest in the things of God, and then went to those people. Do we regularly ask God to show us with whom we should be sharing the gospel, or simply continue with the way things have been done in the past?

The work in Philippi focuses on three individuals, rather than reporting the general response to the preaching. In so doing, we are taught:

- God calls people from all walks of life. In this chapter we have: Lydia, a wealthy, religious business woman; a girl under the power of Satan; and a hardened jailor. Do we need to challenge ourselves as to who we are willing to share the gospel with?
- God works in different ways to bring people to Himself. Are we guilty of expecting uniformity of experience in God's call? Lydia's conversion was apparently a quiet event, as the Lord opened her heart. For the girl, there was the miraculous deliverance; for the jailor, an earthquake! One thing was the same, however, that of a divine work in their lives. Without a work of God, all our activity is in vain.
- The Spirit of God will produce evident fruit of new life. It is lovely to note that while Lydia and the jailor might have been poles apart socially, once they believed, the Spirit of God produced a love for the people

of God as displayed in their hospitality. This will distinguish God's people no matter their background, 'By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another', John 13. 35.

- Difference in background is no excuse for disunity in the assembly. Having described a variety of converts, it is interesting that one of the major themes of the letter to this church is that of unity. Those living in this Roman colony were to remember that they were now a colony of heaven and their lives should reflect that citizenship, Phil. 2. 1-3; 3. 20, 21.

The 'concert' in the prison

The deliverance of the servant girl led to Paul and Silas being delivered to the jailor, having first been beaten. Under a strict charge that they should be kept safely, they are secured in the innermost prison. Throughout the book of Acts, the response of the people of God to suffering is challenging. Earlier we are told that the apostles were 'rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name', 5. 41, and now we hear these men singing at midnight, v. 25. Paul could write with authority to the Philippians later that they should, 'Rejoice in the Lord always', Phil. 4. 4. The secret is found in the previous phrase, 'And at midnight Paul and

Silas prayed', Acts 16. 25. This truth is stated by Paul in his letter, 'Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus', Phil. 4. 6, 7.

The comfort of the brethren, v. 40

When the message comes the next morning that they are free to go, Paul and Silas comfort the brethren before continuing on their way. It is lovely to see these mature believers supporting those young in the faith. Such an example would be invaluable to them as they would be called, 'not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake', Phil. 1. 29. May we likewise be those whose 'conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ . . . stand[ing] fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel', v. 27.

The compliment in Thessalonica, 17. 1-9

Travelling southwest 'through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica', v. 1. On a major route from Rome to the east, it was a free city, the capital of Macedonia, and a busy commercial centre. Here there was a synagogue, so, characteristically, Paul makes this his

base. Note the description of what he does:

- 'reasoned with them out of the scriptures', v. 2 – Paul made the bold claim that, 'Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus . . . is Christ', v. 3. To bring such a claim to Jews, he had to be clear from the scriptures of the truth, then be able to teach this through dialogue. Through doing this he was:
- 'opening and alleging', v. 3 – he made clear the message and set it before them for acceptance.

Later, Peter sums up what Paul is able to do, 'give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you', 1 Pet. 3. 15. While our witness is not to be 'with enticing words of man's wisdom', 1 Cor. 2. 4, there is the expectation that we are able to undergird our message coherently from scripture.

Paul's teaching leads to a number of conversions, especially of the devout Greeks. Stirred up by envy, the Jews organize a riot, centred around the house of Jason who had received Paul. In their complaint to the rulers of the city, they make an unwitting 'compliment' that we should all desire to hear about the Lord's work, 'These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also', v. 6.

The contrast in Berea, vv. 10-15

The Thessalonian believers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea where they found a most 'noble' attitude, 'they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so', v. 11. How refreshing for any teacher to find those who are willing to listen and have the right attitude to the scriptures, accepting them as the final authority. Verse 12 tells us the logical conclusion of such an attitude, 'Therefore many of them believed'. May we model such an attitude in our lives.

Endnotes

- 1 J. RIDDLE, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Ritchie, pg. 256, quoting F. F. BRUCE.
- 2 J. RIDDLE, *op. cit.*, pg. 257, quoting J. H. LARGE.



THE POWER OF THE WORD

By **MALCOLM HORLOCK** Cardiff, Wales

Part 1

Introduction

We will think briefly about the power of our Lord's word in the distant past, in the present and in the future.

The power of our Lord's word – past, present and future.

i. The power of His word in creation

The Apostle John assures us that, 'All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing ["no, not one; not even one"]¹ made that was made'² 'from the highest angel to the meanest worm'.³

And the Lord Jesus accomplished it all by His word. As it is written, 'By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth . . . For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast'.⁴ Out of nothing, that is, the universe was formed and was confirmed in existence by the power of His word.

At His voice creation
sprang at once to sight,
all the angel faces
all the hosts of light,
thrones and dominations,
stars upon their way,
all the heavenly orders
in their great array.
[C. M. NOEL]

But not only was our Lord Jesus the agent of creation, He also sustains the universe which He made.

ii. The power of His word in providence

We read that the Lord Jesus upholds 'all things by the word of his power'.⁵

His providential government both (a) maintains and sustains the vast universe so that it does not sink into anarchy or into nothing⁶ and, also, (b) carries it on to its destined end.⁷ But not only was the power of His word exercised in creation in the

distant past, not only is the power of His word exercised in providence in the present, but the power of His word will also be exercised in judgement on His foes in the future.

iii. The power of His word in judgement

When the mighty Warrior-King comes out of heaven to 'judge and make war [in righteousness] . . . out of his mouth . . . [proceeds] a sharp sword, that with it he . . . [might strike] the nations'.⁸ Then, as it is written, 'he shall smite the earth: with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked'.⁹

At that time, the armies which gather 'to make war against him'¹⁰ will find to their cost that His word carries a destructive power infinitely greater than that of any weapon conceived by man.

Having surveyed, briefly, the power of the Lord's word in the distant past, in the present and in the future, let us focus on the irresistible power of our Lord's word 'in the days of his flesh',¹¹ during that short period when 'He was in the world'.¹²

The irresistible power of our Lord's word – during His life on earth.

i. Disease

Note two examples from Dr Luke's case book.

a) Ask Simon Peter's mother-in-law

He (Jesus) rose up and left the synagogue and entered Simon's house. Now Simon's wife's mother was in the grip of¹³ a major fever, and they appealed to Him for her. And He stood over her and rebuked¹⁴ the fever, and it left her. And at once she arose and served them.¹⁵

One commentator claims, 'Every word is a medical term. "In the grip

of" is the medical Greek for someone definitely laid up with an illness. The Greek medical writers divided fevers into two classes: major and minor. Dr Luke knew just how to describe this illness'.¹⁶

The word 'rebuked' is telling us that our Lord's word was sufficient to effect the cure. And I note that, following our Lord's rebuke of the fever and its consequent departure, it was 'at once' ('all of a sudden'¹⁷) that Peter's mother-in-law's strength returned and 'she arose and served them'.

This particular detail is mentioned only by Luke, who, as a doctor,¹⁸ would have known better than any that a 'major' fever indicated a most exhausting illness, which would normally be followed by a long period of convalescence accompanied by great physical weakness. But not in this case!

b) Ask Bartimaeus

It happened, as He was coming near Jericho, that a certain blind man¹⁹ sat by the road begging.²⁰

What a wonder, that our Lord stopped and 'stood still' for the healing of a blind man, even though He was then pacing His way to Jerusalem, striding ahead of His disciples.²¹

It was around that time that He expounded in more detail than previously to His disciples what experiences awaited Him at Jerusalem, where He would be betrayed, condemned, scourged, spat on and killed.²²

And you and I know now, as He did then, that this was, indeed, the very reason He had come into the world – 'to give his life a ransom for many'.²³

And yet, although on the way to the cross to accomplish 'eternal salvation',²⁴ such is the Saviour's compassion that He stopped to **speak healing** to one blind beggar! 'Receive your sight', He said, 'And immediately he received his sight'!²⁵ It would certainly be difficult to miss that the effect of the Great Physician's powerful word was both instantaneous and complete. But, if disease was no match for

the power of His word, neither was distance.

ii. Distance

Consider two distinguished individuals from the city of Capernaum – one of whom was deeply concerned about a servant who was ‘at the point of death’²⁶ and one of whom was deeply concerned about a son who was ‘at the point of death’.²⁷

a) Ask the centurion of Capernaum

Drawing on the accounts in Matthew chapter 8 and Luke chapter 7,²⁸ we note that the centurion argued that his own authority was delegated . . . that it was derived ultimately from Caesar himself. Consequently, when the centurion spoke (in his office as a Roman centurion, of course, not when speaking to his wife. Perish the thought) he spoke with the emperor’s full authority, and his command was therefore obeyed. Anyone who disobeyed his word would be defying, not so much him as Caesar. And that was not a good idea!

The centurion was expressing his faith that Jesus was vested with the authority of God Himself and that, to heal his servant, He, the Great Physician, had no need to pay a home visit to the patient. He needed to ‘**speak the word only**’!

The Lord didn’t need to send any medication. Nor did He need to send one of His disciples with the equivalent (i) of Elisha’s staff, to lay it on the face of the sick lad²⁹ or (ii) of Paul’s handkerchiefs or aprons to heal him.³⁰ He needed ‘to speak the word only’.

And events proved that the centurion was right. Without completing His journey³¹ and without entering the centurion’s house, Jesus spoke the word (‘as you have believed, so let it be done for you’) and the centurion’s servant was healed ‘that same hour’.³²

b) Ask the nobleman of Capernaum

When Jesus ‘came again’ to Cana, He was met by a ‘nobleman’ (a ‘royal official’³³) whose home was in Capernaum. The man had undertaken the arduous journey to Cana to ask Jesus to accompany him to Capernaum and there heal his sick son. The case was urgent – his

boy was at death’s door.

Clearly, the man took it for granted that Jesus’ presence was necessary to perform a cure. Jesus’ response must, therefore, have taken him by complete surprise. Because the Lord matched the official’s request, ‘Come down before my child dies’, with His, ‘Go your way; your son lives’.³⁴

I observe that Jesus did not say, ‘your son will live’. This was no mere prophecy on Jesus’ part that the man’s boy was going to recover; it was a long-distance miracle, performed by His spoken word. And it certainly was a long distance. The official knew this very well; he had just travelled some twenty-five miles on the road which stretched from Cana to Capernaum!³⁵

The man had nothing but Jesus’ bare word. But that was enough. ‘He went his way’, retracing his steps down the road which led home. But the following day, before he reached his home, the official was met by his servants. On enquiry, he discovered that his son’s fever had left him the very same hour that Jesus had announced that his son lived.

What a discovery! The cure had been instantaneous and that (if I may put it this way) the Lord’s word had shot faster than lightning those many miles to heal his dying son, that, in the words of one commentator, ‘Jesus spoke the healing word in Cana and the boy was cured at Capernaum’.³⁶

Yes, indeed, both cases proved **distance** to be no more a match for the power of Jesus’ word than **disease**.³⁷

(i) ‘**Go your way**’, the Lord Jesus said to the centurion . . . ‘and his servant was healed that **same hour**’.³⁸

(ii) ‘**Go your way**’, He said to the royal official . . . and the official received confirmation from his servants the following day that his son was healed ‘at the **same hour** in which Jesus said to him, “Your son lives”’.³⁹

But, as we shall see in the next article, if disease and distance were no match for the power of His word, neither were **demons**.

Endnotes

- 1 A. PLUMMER, *The Gospel according to St. John* (Cambridge Greek Testament), Cambridge University Press, pg. 65.
- 2 John 1. 3 ESV.
- 3 MATTHEW HENRY, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Zondervan.
- 4 Ps. 33. 6, 9.
- 5 Heb. 1. 3. ‘This is an active and powerful word which upholds the universe’, EDWARD W. FUDGE, *Our Man in Heaven: An exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, CEI, pg. 7.
- 6 Compare the words of the Apostle Paul, ‘in Him all things consist’, Col. 1. 17 NKJV.
- 7 ‘He upholds the universe not like Atlas supporting a dead weight on his shoulders, but as one who carries all things forward on their appointed course’, F. F. BRUCE, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (The New International Commentary on the New Testament), Eerdmans, pg. 6.
- 8 Rev. 19. 11, 15; cp. ‘the rest were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of Him who was sitting on the horse’, Rev. 19. 21 ESV.
- 9 Isa. 11. 4. Compare the words of Paul, ‘the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord . . . [shall] consume with the breath of His mouth’, 2 Thess. 2. 8 NKJV.
- 10 Rev. 19. 19.
- 11 Heb. 5. 7.
- 12 John 1. 10.
- 13 ‘In the grip of’ is the rendering of The New Jerusalem Bible. The verb (*sunego*) is used in Luke chapter 19 verse 43 to mean ‘to hem in’ and in Luke chapter 22 verse 63 to mean ‘to hold [prisoner]’.
- 14 “That she “was racked” [*en sunechomeno*] . . . by this fever, which literally means that she “was held fast”, suggests that Luke understands the fever to be a force that had taken her captive. Given Jewish understanding of the disease, a great fever requires a great feat to vanquish it. Jesus “rebuked” it and forces it to “release” its hold of her. This incident illustrates the theme of Jesus’ release of the captives (Luke 4. 18)’, DAVID E. GARLAND, *Luke* (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament), Zondervan, comments on Luke 4. 38, 39.
- 15 Just as He later ‘rebuked the winds and the sea’, Matt. 8. 26.
- 16 Luke 4. 38, 39.
- 17 WILLIAM BARCLAY, *Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of Luke*, St. Andrews Press, pg. 48.
- 18 This is not the usual word translated ‘immediately’ (*εὐθέως*) in the New Testament, where it occurs eighty times. Indeed, the word used by Luke here (*παράχρημα*) is found only twice in the entire New Testament outside of Luke’s writings; namely, in Matthew chapter 21 verses 19 and 20.
- 19 Col. 4. 14.
- 20 The blind man’s name was Bartimaeus, Mark 10. 46. Matthew informs us that there were, in fact, two beggars; clearly, Bartimaeus was the more prominent of the two.
- 21 Luke 18. 35-43.
- 22 Mark 10. 32; the account of the ►

- healing of Bartimaeus follows soon after, Mark 10. 46-52.
- 23 Mark 10. 32b-34.
- 24 Mark 10. 45.
- 25 Heb. 5. 9; cf. 'eternal redemption', Heb. 5. 9.
- 26 Luke 18. 42, 43 NKJV.
- 27 'A centurion had a servant who was sick and at the point of death', Luke 7. 2 ESV.
- 28 'He went to Him and implored Him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death', John 4. 47 NKJV.
- 29 Luke tells us that the centurion approached Jesus through his Jewish friends; Matthew omits this detail and represents him as approaching Jesus directly. Commenting on the role played by the friends of the centurion in Luke's narrative, one writer has suggested, 'Perhaps we can discern something of the differing purposes of the Evangelists in their treatment of the messengers. Matthew was concerned primarily with the centurion's faith and nationality; to him the messengers were irrelevant, even a distraction. But Luke was interested in the man's character and specifically in his humility; to him the messengers were a vital part of the story', LEON MORRIS, *Luke* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries), Tyndale, pg. 151.
- 30 See 2 Kgs. 4. 29.
- 31 See Acts 19. 12.
- 32 'He was now not far from the house', Luke 7. 6.
- 33 Matt. 8. 13 NKJV.
- 34 Quite likely, the man was one of Herod Antipas's court officials. Herod Antipas 'was tetrarch of Galilee from 4 BC to 39 AD and not properly a "king" at all; but he was popularly considered one (Matt. 14. 9; Mark 6. 14)', D. A. CARSON, *The Gospel according to John* (Pillar New Testament Commentary), Eerdmans, pg. 238.
- 35 'Jesus' reply . . . is admirably glossed by Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428 AD) as, "It is not necessary for me to come down; for me, it is sufficient that I should simply speak"', J. F. MCHUGH, *John 1-4* (International Critical Commentary), T and T Clark, pg. 320.
- 36 Cana in Galilee 'is approximately 25 miles = 40 km distant from Capernaum, by a road which climbs from more than 600 feet (212 metres) below sea level to some 750 feet (250 metres) above it', J. F. MCHUGH, *op. cit.*, pg. 318.
- 37 LEON MORRIS, *The Gospel according to John* (The New International Commentary on the New Testament), Eerdmans, pg. 288.
- 38 Compare the case of the daughter of the Syrophenician woman, from whom the Lord expelled a demon when He was not present; Matt. 15. 21-28; Mark 7. 24-30. See especially, 'she went home and found the child lying in bed and the demon gone', Mark 7. 30 ESV, and 'her daughter was made whole from that very hour', Matt. 15. 28 NKJV.
- 39 Matt. 8. 13 NKJV.
- 40 John 4. 52, 53 NKJV.

THE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE

By **JOHN RIDDLE** Cheshunt, England

Part 3

How should we treat the scriptures, 2 Tim. 3. 14?

The answer is, simply, we should 'abide' in them, JND.¹ That is, we must live in the atmosphere of God's word, and let that atmosphere fill our hearts and lives. We should notice **how** Timothy was taught, and **by whom** Timothy was taught.

How was Timothy taught?

He was taught with assurance, 'But continue thou in the things which thou **hast learned and hast been assured of**'. The Thessalonians were taught in the same way, 1 Thess. 1. 5. They received it in the same way, 'For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, **the word of God**, which effectually worketh also in you that believe', 1 Thess. 2. 13.

By whom was Timothy taught?

'Knowing of whom thou hast learned them'. The omission of names here emphasizes that it is not the identity of the people concerned but their character that is important. It has been suggested that since Paul refers to Timothy's childhood in verse 15, he is probably referring to himself here.² Paul establishes his spiritual qualifications in 2 Timothy chapter 3 verse 10. On the other hand, it has also been suggested that Paul was referring to Timothy's mother and grandmother. They were certainly people of proven character. It could, of course, refer to Lois, Eunice and Paul! All of which proves that this isn't the point at all. He was taught by people of reputable character. Not by 'juggling impostors', 2 Tim. 3. 13 JND. The character of the teacher, and the character of the teaching, must be mutually complementary.

When should we get to know the scriptures, v. 15?

We should get to know them as early as possible, 2 Tim. 1. 5. The 'holy scriptures' are, literally, 'the sacred writings', and refer here to the Old Testament. The term emphasizes the sacred character of God's word. This should preserve us from ever tampering with them, altering them, disobeying them, or denying them.

The 'holy scriptures' are not just a technical handbook. They are able to make men and women 'wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus'. Compare verse 17, where the same scriptures enable the man of God to be 'perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works'. The scriptures are powerful! They 'are able'. The word 'able' expresses 'the abiding power and sufficiency of Scripture'.³ The words 'wise unto salvation' stand in direct contrast to the learning described in verse 7, and the false teaching in verse 13. The 'holy scriptures' impart the way of salvation – 'faith which is in Christ Jesus'. They point us to Christ, as the Ethiopian eunuch discovered in Acts chapter 8.

Where should we apply the scriptures, v. 16?

'All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is **profitable** for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness'; compare 1 Timothy chapter 4 verse 8, where 'godliness is **profitable** [useful] unto all things'. The four ways in which the word of God is to be applied may be set out as follows:

● It teaches us what is right

It is 'profitable for doctrine'. The word means 'teaching' or 'instruction' and is translated 'learning' in Romans chapter 15 verse 4. Please do remember that Christian conduct is based on Bible doctrine, and therefore we

must pay careful attention to the foundations of the faith.

- **It tells us when we are not right**

It is 'profitable . . . for reproof'. We have a good illustration of this in Titus chapter 1 verses 9 to 13, where the same word, *elencho*, is translated 'convince', v. 9, and 'rebuke', v. 13. 'Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers . . . Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith'.

- **It puts us right**

It is 'profitable . . . for correction'. VINE defines the word as 'a restoration to an upright or right state'.⁴

- **It keeps us right**

It is 'profitable . . . for instruction in righteousness'. The word 'instruction', *paideia*, denotes the training of a child, including instruction; hence, discipline, correction, chastening. It is rendered 'chastening' in Hebrews chapter 12 verses 5, 7, and 8 JND.

What does this involve as far as we are concerned? This gives us the opportunity to say that Bible study is basically careful reading. We must therefore read the scriptures:

- Prayerfully, see Ps. 119. 18. Notice,

also, what Ezra did when he opened 'the book', Neh. 8. 5, 6.

- Purposefully, that is planned reading. Remember that for planned reading you need planned time. Read at length but read in detail. Take time to think, Josh. 1. 8.
- Positively, remembering that the scriptures should be allowed to inform our minds, warm our hearts, and direct our lives.
- Primarily, not letting the commentaries take over! Make your own effort to understand the Bible.

What will be accomplished by the scriptures, v. 17?

'That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works'. In the New Testament, the expression 'man of God' only occurs in Paul's letters to Timothy. He is called a 'man of God' in 1 Timothy chapter 6 verse 11, but here the expression is used as a general term for every true follower of Christ.⁵ The scriptures will accomplish three things in the lives of men and women of God.

- **It will make them 'perfect'**

Not sinless perfection. Not until we get to heaven. The word *artios* means 'complete' RV, with the idea of spiritual maturity. In view of the fact that *artios* comes from *arios*, meaning 'a limb', it has often

been rendered 'all limbs present'. A mature Christian is someone in whose life and character everything is in place. Hebrews chapter 6 verse 1 is very positive about this, 'let us go on unto perfection'. While a different word is used here, *teleiotes*, as opposed to *artios*, it has the same idea of maturity and completeness. This can only be achieved as we 'continue' or 'abide' in the things which we have learned and been assured of, v. 14.

- **It will make us 'thoroughly furnished'**

This can be rendered 'fitted out', meaning 'ready to serve'. As J. R. BAKER observes, 'Nothing else is needed if the man of God has been fully equipped in this way; He will be competent to meet all exigencies'.⁶ The scriptures prepare us for the very best purpose in life, as the balance of the verse makes clear.

- **It will make us 'thoroughly furnished unto all good works'**

This brings it within the range of us all. Paul does not say, thoroughly furnished unto all good preaching. That would exclude a lot of Christians. The word 'good', *agathos*, means 'beneficial in effect'. We have an excellent illustration in Dorcas. She was '**full of good works** and almsdeeds which she did', Acts 9. 36. It would be a strange Christian who had no desire to have a 'good effect' for God. This can only be accomplished as we read and apply the word of God to our lives.

Endnotes

1. The KJV has 'continue . . . in . . . them'.
2. See 2 Tim. 2. 2.
3. J. R. BAKER, *2 Timothy*, in K. STAPLEY and T. WILSON (eds.), *What the Bible Teaches*, Volume 3, John Ritchie, 2007.
4. W. E. VINE, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, Oliphants.
5. For its use in the Old Testament, see, for example, 1 Kings chapter 17 verse 24, of Elijah, and 2 Kings chapter 4 verse 9 of Elisha.
6. J. R. BAKER, *op. cit.*



What is thy beloved more than another beloved?

Part 3

By **ANDREW BENNETT** Sound, Shetland

The cheeks

Here is one who has a knowledge of the beloved. To know about the cheeks of the individual you need to be close to them. She appreciates the sweetness of the presence of the beloved. When asked, she was able to describe his cheeks in detail.

As we think upon Christ, we have challenged our hearts. How close are we to the Lord? Were we to be asked the question, what would we be able to say about our Saviour? Have we spent time in the sanctuary and in the scriptures learning of Him?

What is her description? 'His cheeks are as a bed of spices, as sweet flowers'. The word 'bed' means 'a raised bed of plants', and the word 'flowers' means 'banks of sweet-scented herbs'. You can imagine these 'flowers' rising like towers of perfumes. There is a fragrance about the beloved that only those who are close can know.

We might think of the Apostle John. Here was a disciple who knew the Lord closely, 'Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved', John 13. 23. Thus, there are things about the Lord that John records in his Gospel that the other writers don't cover. Perhaps, this is because of the closeness of the relationship that John had with the Lord.

When we think of those cheeks, perhaps we must also think of the words of the prophet, descriptive of Calvary, 'The Lord God hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my

face from shame and spitting', Isa. 50. 5, 6. The fulfilment of that prophecy is recorded by Matthew, 'Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy. What think ye? They answered and said, He is guilty of death. Then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him; and others smote him with the palms of their hands', Matt. 26. 65-68.

The hymn writer reminds us, 'That face, once so marred, we shall gaze on at length' (E. GRIMLEY). We shall see Him one day very soon. Let us keep that in our hearts and minds as we journey on.

His lips

'His lips like lilies dropping sweet smelling myrrh'. I would suggest that here she is thinking about his words; the dropping of the sweet myrrh is the idea of flowing, or the words of love that flowed from the lips of her beloved. The psalmist wrote, 'My heart is inditing a good matter: I speak of the things which I have made touching the king . . . grace is poured into thy lips: therefore God hath blessed thee for ever', Ps. 45. 1, 2.

When we think of the Saviour we can think of the words of compassion and comfort, words of salvation and solace, words of peace and pardon. So many different individuals were touched with the words that fell from the lips of Christ during the time of His public ministry. Even in times of suffering He was so different to the sinners. Think of the words of compassion for the thief, Luke 23. 43; the contrast is so marked. Of His experience, the psalmist wrote,

'All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head', Ps. 22. 7.

His hands

We come to the hands and we see that gold once again marks them – 'gold rings set with the beryl'. Those hands had a precious blending of tenderness and strength. Strength? The psalmist wrote, 'consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained', Ps. 8. 3.

Once again, we see the divine character in the gold, but we see the word 'rings' here too. The word means 'folding' suggesting hands that enclose. For the believer, we know the Lord's words, 'My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand', John 10. 27, 28.

But we cannot think of the hands of the Saviour without thinking of Calvary – hands that were nailed to the cross. The psalmist reminds us, 'For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet', Ps. 22. 16. After His resurrection we can recall that He showed the disciples His hands and His side. He blessed them when He took them out as far as Bethany and the nail prints which were still visible in His hands showed the cost of their blessing.

His belly

'His belly is as bright ivory overlaid with sapphires'. The belly, or the inwards, would speak of the heart. The sapphire stone is blue in colour and it has been described as a heavenly blue. Here, we suggest, are the human emotions of a heavenly man. There is much for us to think of in the Gospels regarding the feelings of the Saviour. Love and compassion, joy and sorrow, pity and grief, indignation and even anger, were all seen in the person of Christ. Human emotions were all displayed in a rich balance in the perfect man.

WORD FOR TODAY

By **BRIAN CLATWORTHY** Newbury, England

Adam (Man, man of low degree)

Adamah (Earth, land, ground)

Adamdam (Reddish)

We hear a considerable amount today about the environment and the preservation of planet earth. The green agenda has never been stronger and all of us are probably actively recycling waste. The idea of earth management is not something new, however, but was incumbent upon Adam as he was given the responsibility of dressing and keeping the garden of Eden, Gen. 2. 7, 15. When God created the earth (**adamah**), Gen. 1. 1, it was always His intention that man should serve, hence the Hebrew words **abad** for 'dressing' meaning to serve and **samar** for 'keeping' meaning to exercise great care over something, Gen. 2. 15.¹ It was from the dust of the earth that God created Adam, v. 7, and the Hebrew feminine noun **adamah** is used to translate the word 'ground'. In Hebrew, there is a play on words in verse 7 as the Hebrew word for man is **adam** who is formed from the dust of the earth **adamah**. As Paul reminded the Corinthians, 'The first man is of the earth, earthy', 1 Cor. 15. 47a. This emphasizes man's relationship to the earth, and as GORDON J. WENHAM states about man in this context, 'He was created from it; his job is to cultivate it (2.5, 15); and on death he returns to it (3.19). "It is his cradle, his home, his grave" (Jacob)'.² Ultimately though, for the believer, to slightly paraphrase the words of HORATIO SPAFFORD, 'it is the sky not the grave – that is our goal'!

The fundamental difference in the two statements made about the creation of man is that in Genesis chapter 1 verses 26 and 27, God makes man in His own image and likeness, whereas in Genesis chapter 2 verse 7 man is made from something that already exists, the dust of the earth. But it is because man is in the image and

likeness of God that makes him morally accountable to God for his stewardship of the earth and the environment.³ Even though man was given authority from God to 'subdue or master' the earth, Gen. 1. 28, our attitude towards the earth should still be one of responsible stewardship not thoughtless exploitation, because the earth belongs to the Lord, Ps. 24. 1. The fall of man brought a curse to the earth, Gen. 3. 17, and while Romans chapter 8 verses 19 to 22 outlines the effect that this has had on creation generally and its state of frustration, nevertheless, there will come a day when creation will be able to attain the goal for which it was made, Rom. 8. 20, 21.

The word **adamah** occurs more than 200 times in the Old Testament. Essentially, it refers to the land or the ground on which things move and exist, including human beings, Exod. 8. 21, and animals, of various sizes.⁴ In a broader sense, it is used of the dust put on the head of the Amalekite

to show his mourning for the death of Saul in 2 Samuel chapter 1 verse 2, and of the Israelites when they fasted and wore sackcloth, putting dust on their heads as they confessed their sins before God, Neh. 9. 1, 2. In counselling Job, Eliphaz expresses the view that 'hardship does not spring from the soil (**adamah**)', Job 5. 6 NIV, but all human beings bring hardship upon themselves, v. 7. In other words, hardship and suffering is not a product of the earth (**adamah**) but produced by man (**adam**) himself. The word **adamah** is used to describe the earthen moulds that Solomon made so that he could cast bronze items for the temple, 1 Kgs. 7. 46, compare also the clay used for the potter's wheel in Isaiah chapter 45 verse 9. Naaman pressed Elisha for two-mules of earth (**adamah**) as he was convinced that the true God could only be worshipped on the soil of the land of Israel, 2 Kgs. 5. 17. The ground is described as 'cursed' on account of Adam's sin, Gen. 3. 17, but can also change to 'holy ground' when God sanctifies it with His presence, Exod. 3. 5; cp. Josh. 5. 15.

The prized inheritance and possession of the nation of Israel was the land of Canaan, which



God gifted to Abraham and to his seed in perpetuity.⁵ So, in this context the word **adamah** is used to describe a geographical area of land, i.e., the Promised Land, ‘flowing with milk and honey’, Exod. 3. 8. For Israel, the attainment of this land was critical to their national identity, hence the prescribed delineation of this inheritance.⁶ It was when Israel entered Canaan that the respective tribes were instructed by God to claim their inheritance by lot, Num. 34. 13 *et seq.*, and thus it became their homeland. Israel’s chequered history with God might suppose that He has forsaken them, Isa. 54. 7, but this is just a temporary measure. He has not rejected them finally;⁷ the day will come when Zion will be restored, and instead of being called ‘forsaken’ and the land left ‘desolate’, her name will be changed to ‘Hephzibah’ (‘my delight is in her’) and the land to ‘Beulah’ (‘married’),⁸ Isa. 62. 4. As ALEC MOTYER states, ‘the past is gone (4ab) because of the Lord’s

delight in Zion, and there is a new, fertile land (4cd), which in turn is explained by illustrations drawn from marriage’. God’s flock will be secure in His land, Zech. 9. 16.

In the Septuagint (LXX) the Hebrew word **adamah** is translated by the Greek word **gēs** as in Deuteronomy chapter 33 verse 28 where Moses predicts that Israel will one day be ‘a land of corn and wine’. The absence of a smith in the land, **gēs**, meant that Israel could not make their own spears and swords, thus giving the Philistines a military advantage, 1 Sam. 13. 19. This same Greek word, **gēs**, is the dynamic equivalent in the New Testament of **adamah** where it is used extensively to translate words such as ‘earth’ as contrasted to heaven, Luke. 2. 14, ‘land’ in contrast to the sea, John. 6. 21, and ‘ground’ in Paul’s contrast between Adam and Christ, 1 Cor. 15. 47 – see above. There is the hope of ‘a new heaven and a new earth’, meaning that the first heaven and earth will have

passed away, Rev. 21. 1. This new earth will be the eternal home of righteousness, 2 Pet. 3. 13, and ‘shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea’, Hab. 2. 14. What a thought, then, for today that finally the will of God will be done on earth as it is in heaven, Matt. 6. 10.

For further reading/study

Introductory

‘Land’ in LELAND RYKEN *et al* (ed.), *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, IVP Academic, pp. 487, 488.

Advanced

‘Ground, piece of land, earth’ in WILLEM A. VANGEMEREN (ed.), *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, (Vol. 1), Zondervan, pp. 269-274.

Endnotes

- 1 VICTOR HAMILTON points out that ‘The same root is used in the next chapter to describe the cherubs who are on guard to prevent access to the tree of life in the garden (Gen. 3:24). The garden is something to be protected more than it is something to be possessed. The point is made clear here that physical labor (sic) is not a consequence of sin. Work enters the picture before sin does, and if man had never sinned he still would be working’. (*The Book of Genesis Chapters 1-17* – NICOT, pg. 156).
- 2 GORDON J. WENHAM, *Genesis 1-15* (WBC), Word Books, pg. 59.
- 3 This is also the reason why Peter commands us to treat everyone with dignity and respect because all human beings are made in God’s image, 1 Pet. 2. 17; cp., Jas. 3. 9. Interestingly, Peter suggests that we give the same honour to all human beings as we do to monarchy.
- 4 Lev. 20. 25; Mal. 3. 11; Isa. 30. 24.
- 5 Gen. 15. 7, 18; Deut. 4. 40; Jer. 16. 15.
- 6 Gen. 15. 18; Exod. 23. 31; Num. 34. 3-12; Deut. 11. 24; Josh. 1. 4. Many scholars take the view that the ‘rivers of Egypt’ referred to in Genesis chapter 15 verse 18, which is the southern border of Israel, is not, in fact, a reference to the River Nile, but the Wadi el Arish in the Sinai desert. WENHAM states that in his view, ‘It is not clear whether “river of Egypt” is an alternative name for Wadi el Arish (so SIMONS, *GTOT*, 27) or means the eastern branch of the Nile delta (so AHARONI, *Land of the Bible*, 59). Assuming that there is no corruption of the text and that usage is consistent with, the latter would be more probable’ (*op. cit.* pg. 333).
- 7 Isa. 14. 1; Jer. 16. 15; Rom. 11. 1, 2.
- 8 ALEC J. MOTYER, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, IVP, pg. 506.



QUESTION

Where will Christians be during the millennial reign of Christ?

ANSWER

The millennial reign of the Lord Jesus Christ is a specific period that will occur in the near future commencing with the personal return of the Lord Jesus to the earth in a visible and overwhelming display of power and glory. On His return, the Lord Jesus will defeat the enemies of God, led by the beast during the tribulation period. Following the removal of evil, the Lord Jesus Christ, as King of kings, will personally reign over the earth bringing into fruition an unparalleled time of peace, righteousness, justice, and abundance which will affect the whole world including spiritual, social, ecological, geographical, and biological spheres of life. Revelation chapter 20 verse 4 states that the period will last 1000 years. Hence the reason it is often simply called the 'Millennium'.

The millennial reign of Christ is closely associated with the unconditional, but yet to be fulfilled, covenants God made to Abraham and David. The millennium is an aspect of prophecy that perhaps receives more coverage than any other subject in the Bible with many of the Old Testament prophets describing the events of that era.¹ Given that the Millennium is primarily linked to the nation of Israel, the question has been raised as to where Christians will be and what their role will be during this period. One reason why this question is difficult to answer is because the Church, to which all New Testament believers belong, is described as a mystery in the Bible. In other words, the truth of the Church was hidden in the Old Testament, although it was planned by God before time began. This means that the many Old Testament prophecies describing the Millennium do not identify the Church or its role during this era.

It is clear from the New Testament that when the Lord Jesus returns in glory, at the beginning of the Millennium, Christians will be an integral part of His return. Paul reminds the Colossian believers, 'When Christ, who is our life, shall appear [i.e., be made manifest or visible], then shall ye also appear with him in glory', Col. 3. 4. With respect to His reign on earth, the Bible also provides the general principle that 'if we suffer, we shall also reign with him', 2 Tim. 2. 12. This suggests that believers who currently identify with the rejected Saviour will have a shared participation in His earthly reign. Paul provides further information. In correcting the Corinthian believers over

their inability to deal with issues outside of the law courts, he makes several profound statements concerning the role of New Testament believers during the Millennium. He informs the Corinthians, 'Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?' and, furthermore, 'Know ye not that we shall judge angels?' 1 Cor. 6. 2, 3. The word 'judge' means to 'give an opinion concerning right and wrong'. This indicates that New Testament believers will have administrative and leadership responsibilities on the millennial earth. Several of the parables the Lord Jesus mentioned highlight the principle that the amount of responsibility we have during the millennium will be in proportion to the quality of service we offer Him today.²

This still leaves the question unanswered, however, as to whether we as Christians will be residing in heaven or on earth during the Millennium. Following the return of the Lord Jesus for His bride, the Church, at the rapture, we read, 'so shall we ever be with the Lord', 1 Thess. 4. 17. As His bride, we will be the eternal companion of the Lord Jesus Christ. So where will the Lord Jesus be during His millennial reign? The emphasis provided by the scriptures is that He will take up residence on earth. As Priest-King He will dwell in the temple-palace complex in Jerusalem as described in remarkable detail by Ezekiel the prophet (see chapters 40 to 48). He will be the first and only ruler the world has ever seen who will provide both spiritual and political leadership to perfection.

Although these verses suggest that we will abide and carry out administrative tasks on earth, one proviso we should add is that several scriptures indicate that heaven and earth will be much more closely interconnected during the Millennium than they are today. The new Jerusalem may be much closer geographically than heaven is now, and the bidirectional flow of traffic could also be greater. This was implied by the words of the Lord Jesus to Nathaniel, 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man', John 1. 51. Hence, believers could move interchangeably between heaven and earth during the Millennium.

Endnotes

1. Isa. 2. 1-4; 11. 1-10; Ps. 72; Mic. 4. 1-5; Hab. 2. 14.
2. See Matt. 24. 45-51, Matt. 25. 14-30, Luke 19. 11-27.

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'The owl also and the raven shall dwell in it', Isa. 34. 11.

PS
Magazine

'The owl also and the raven shall dwell in it', Isa. 34. 11.

In the scriptures, as here, the owl is often associated with ruins and desolation. Indeed, the extent of desolation is portrayed graphically in this verse where Isaiah speaks of 'the line of confusion, and the stones of emptiness', where the words 'confusion' and 'emptiness' are also translated as 'without form, and void', Gen. 1. 2.

The background of this passage is 'the day of the Lord's vengeance', v. 8. Here, the once prosperous and fertile land will be occupied by the 'wild beasts of the desert', v. 14. Its cities and towns will be laid waste and become 'an habitation of dragons, and a court for owls', v. 13. The population, ravaged by plague and warfare, will have died and, says the prophet, 'there shall the vultures also be gathered', v. 15. This is God's judgement upon the nations.

Although the picture is a dark one, it is worth bearing in mind how this chapter commences. Speaking through the prophet, God says, 'Come near, ye nations, to hear; and hearken, ye people', v. 1. Before the judgement falls, God reveals what will happen, and He indicates where - 'it shall come down upon Idumea', v. 5. The warning is sounded out, v. 16. Any individual who is later caught up in it and perishes because of the predicted events must have chosen to ignore all that God has said.

But there is another point to note. Here, as elsewhere in scripture, we see the things that people put their trust in - wealth and power. They cushion themselves in their palaces and protect themselves in their fortresses, v. 13. They rely upon their own intelligence rather than casting themselves upon the mercy of God. Says the psalmist, 'It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes', Ps. 118. 8, 9.

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