

# PreciousSeed

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'I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house top', Ps. 102. 7.

PS  
Magazine

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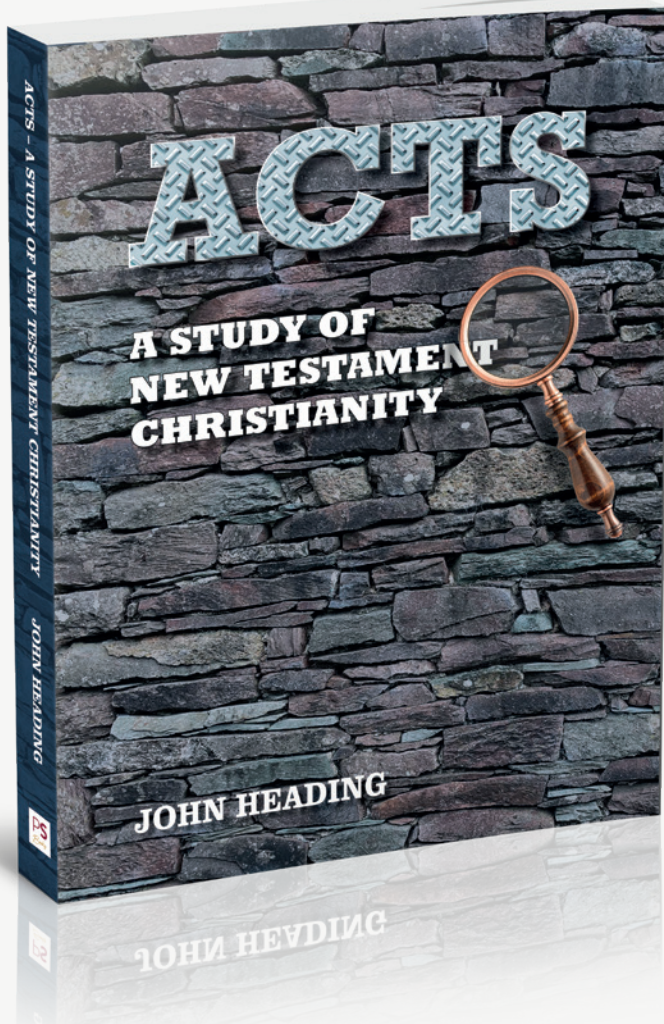
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with Jonathan Black

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# Book Reviews



## **Penned for His Praise** Joanna Daniel

Hardback, 106 pages, Published by Moriah Ministries, PO Box 7193, 31-33 Water Tank Road, MMDA Colony, Arumbakkam, Chennai 600 106, India.  
ISBN 978-81-938892-9-9.

Poetry, like a Picasso painting, attracts different emotions and varying levels of appreciation. For example, Picasso's *Guernica* is, to some, an intensely powerful masterpiece, valued in excess of \$200 million. To another eye, it is a combination of images which could readily be produced by a fifth-year art student. Poetry to some, the reviewer included, means Masfield and Wordsworth, Keats and Tennyson, with rhyme, metre and alliteration; while in the spiritual realm, the hymns of Isaac Watts, Fanny Crosby and Charles Wesley come to mind, consistent compositions which are easily committed to memory.

The English dictionary allows that a poem can be 'a literary composition not necessarily in verse but exhibiting an intensity of imagination and language'. The book under review qualifies as poetry firmly within this definition. It is an anthology of prose poems, rather than poetry in the traditional English sense. Taking, among others, subjects such as life's experiences and creation and nature, together with works in appreciation of the grace and love of God, the writer has sought to engage the mind of the reader in a spirit of thanksgiving, in order to generate praise, as the title suggests. As a book of poetry,

this is not for me, but rather for others to enjoy. As the foreword suggests, scriptural poetry as found in the Psalms, allowing, of course, for translation, expresses thoughts without the form of conventional verse, and this book endeavours to do the same.

The book is beautifully illustrated photographically throughout, but the binding is a little suspect if the book is opened fully.



## **Ezekiel – Coming back from exile** John Riddle

576 pages, Paperback. Published by John Ritchie Ltd, 40 Beansburn, Kilmarnock, KA3 1RH, Scotland.  
ISBN-13: 978-1-914273-15-5

This latest in a series of books taken from notes made available by the author is a welcome addition to the library of any serious student of the scriptures. John Riddle is well known throughout the UK and further afield for his lucid exposition of scripture, both oral and written.

The back-cover commendation of this book suggests that it is an 'easy-to-read' commentary. That in itself should recommend it to those wishing to have a clearer grasp of this important prophecy, so often neglected by many. However, at 576 pages, it is not simply an overview, but deals in some detail with each chapter under four main headings, Ruin,

Retribution, Restoration and Return. Commencing with a helpful outline of the book, each chapter then corresponds to those of the prophecy, making it easy for the reader to locate any particular part of interest very quickly. Chapters are divided up under appropriate headings, without, thankfully, being bound by forced alliteration. The author calls freely upon the works of others to explain and substantiate his own exposition and he does not shy away from notoriously difficult passages. Chapters 33 to 39 give clear teaching on the restoration and regathering of Israel. This is in keeping with the whole tenor of scripture which emphasizes God's faithful plans for the

nation, in contradiction of more recent suggestions which would have us believe that there is no longer any divine purpose for the earthly people of God.

A portion of the book dealing with the millennial temple still leaves this reviewer with questions regarding the recommencement of blood sacrifices. Readers of this book, and of the scriptures, must draw their own conclusions.



## ‘Then Jesus six days before the passover came to Bethany’, John 12. 1

One of the few places on earth where the Lord was received and where He was honoured was in this little village of Bethany, and there are four specific events associated with this location that we might consider.

First, we might recall the event in the home of Martha and Mary, recorded in Luke chapter 10. Although it is described only as ‘a certain village’, we judge from other scriptures that this is Bethany. In verses 38 to 42 of the chapter which describes the busyness of the house, we are told, ‘Mary . . . sat at Jesus feet, and heard his word’, v. 39. In the Saviour’s presence in Bethany, it was **a place of learning**.

Second, and we have it mentioned in John chapter 11, we are told that ‘a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany’ and so the Lord proceeds to Bethany, albeit after some delay. It is during that purposeful delay that Lazarus dies and, as the Lord arrives in the outskirts of the village, Martha goes out to meet Him to tell the Lord

of her distress and sorrow. Soon after, Mary meets the Saviour and we read that remarkable verse, ‘Jesus wept’. As we know from the chapter, Bethany here was **the place of mourning**, but where mourning was ultimately turned to joy.

Third, and this particular event is mentioned in Matthew, Mark, and John’s Gospels, we have the Lord’s visit to the house of Simon the leper. Mark says of it, ‘And being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious’, 14. 3. Although we might see Bethany here as **the place of anointing**, it is also the place of a singular and significant act of worship that is exemplified in this anointing.

Finally, we come over to Luke chapter 24 which mentions the final occasion. We read, ‘he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them’, v. 50. Although the Lord didn’t enter Bethany, as He

ascended into heaven His immediate vision would be of Bethany, **the place of blessing**. As Luke continues his account into the Acts of the Apostles, we might remember the question of the two angels, ‘Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven?’ 1. 11. Thus, whether we think of Israel and the return of the Lord to the same Mount of Olives, or the church in a more general sense, Bethany is **the place of a watching and waiting people**.

If we might draw a practical thought from this brief meditation, what challenges does it offer for us as companies of the Lord’s people? Are we known as places of learning, where the truth of God is presented? Are we places of mourning, telling forth the consequences of the fall yet rejoicing in those that are brought to newness of life? Are we a worshipping people, watching and waiting for the Lord?

**JOHN BENNETT**

General Editor

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# Economic Parables

## Part 1 – The parable of the unrighteous steward

### – Luke 16. 1-18

By **ANDREW WILSON** Brisbane, Australia

The parable of the unrighteous steward is possibly the most puzzling of all the Lord's parables. The story concerns a steward who wasted his master's goods. Being called to account, he decided to engage in some creative accountancy. Calling in the debtors, he asked them to amend their bills, so that instead of saying that they owed one hundred measures of oil, the bill now read fifty or eighty. When shown the records, the master was relieved that the situation was not as bad as had been reported. But the steward also calculated, by writing off a large percentage of the debts, that he would be welcomed into the debtors' homes if his master eventually put him out of a job.

#### Getting the story straight

Before we come to what the parable is teaching, we need to clear up three puzzling elements in the story itself. First, some commentators argue that the steward, instead of fraudulently falsifying the bills, merely decided to forego his own commission, taking a hefty pay cut. However, this attempt to paint the steward in a more commendable light is unconvincing, for the steward is described as 'unjust', i.e., crooked, in verse 8. Additionally, a 50% commission seems improbably generous for any steward.

Second, the KJV in verse 8 says that the lord commended this steward. However, the word 'lord' here is the same as in verses 3 and 5 and refers to the steward's master in all three verses. It is not our Lord Jesus who is commending the dishonesty of the steward.

This raises a third question: why would his master commend him if he has just cheated him out of substantial sums of money? The answer of some commentators is that the master was impressed by the man's shrewdness. But this does not ring true to life – no one commends a conman when they themselves

have been swindled and must bear the loss. Instead, it is more likely that the master is still 'in the dark' at this point and impressed that his losses are not as severe as first thought.

WORDSWORTH writes, 'In some expositions of this Parable, it is taken for granted that the landlord discovered the artifice of the steward described vv.5-7. But the supposition seems to impair, if not destroy the beauty of the parable; How could the steward be said to have acted prudently, shrewdly, ... if his device was detected and exposed? Is it probable that his Master would have allowed him to profit by the fraud, or that the debtors, who would be forced to pay the sums due, and perhaps be punished in person, would receive him into their houses? Is it likely, that in such a case our Lord would have propounded the steward as an example of *worldly wisdom*? No, it is nowhere said, or hinted in the parable, that the landlord discovered the mode by which the steward had ingratiated himself into the affections of his tenants'.<sup>1</sup>

#### Interpretation

Some spiritualize the parable, taking the unjust steward to represent Satan, or Israel dispensationally, or

Judas Iscariot or Pontius Pilate or the Pharisees or the tax collectors historically. Most modern expositors swing to the opposite extreme and despiritualize the parable, teaching that the story merely urges the prudent use of earthly wealth. Christians are to spend their money on gospel resources for the salvation of the lost rather than living in pampered opulence and palatial luxury. The souls thus won for the Lord by our generous giving will one day welcome us into heaven. Virtually all modern commentators adopt this view, and its lesson is in perfect keeping with the personal example and teaching of Christ elsewhere.

The Lord's words in verse 13 support this interpretation by warning against materialism ('No servant can serve two masters . . . You cannot serve God and mammon' NKJV). In verse 14, the Pharisees, who loved money, respond with contemptuous ridicule. The Lord also warns in verses 10 to 13 that we should not follow the corrupt and fraudulent example of the steward in our use of earthly money, doing business in ways that are not entirely above board.

Yet the wise use of earthly wealth is not the full meaning of the parable, nor its true import. Verses 10 and 11 hint at a deeper meaning, with the Lord describing money as that which is 'very little', ESV, by comparison with that which is of 'much' value, contrasting 'unrighteous wealth' ESV with 'true riches'. The Lord is seeking 'faithfulness', v. 10, in relation to true riches.

The true meaning of the parable is clearly seen in verses 15 to 18, which constitute Christ's own commentary upon it. Verse 17 says that, 'it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail' NKJV. In other words, God's laws and His truth are of everlasting value and veracity, and we should not discount or dilute them, lowering God's standards to fit in with the world. In verse 18, the Lord gives the example of the way the Pharisees condoned divorce and remarriage, which the Lord condemned as adultery, v. 18.



PLUMPTRE argues that the unjust steward pictures ‘when men lower the standard of duty to gain support or popularity . . . when a Church or its teachers adapted themselves to men’s passions or interests at the expense of the Truth’.<sup>2</sup> WILLIAM BUNTING writes, “Those who seek to make man’s indebtedness to God less than it really is, as the steward does in vs 5-7, are always likely to become popular. And this cutting down of God’s claims is exactly what the scribes and Pharisees had been doing with the law (see Matt. 15:3-6)’.<sup>3</sup>

The main difficulty for most interpretations is verse 9, ‘make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail,<sup>4</sup> they may receive you into an everlasting home’ NKJV. The ‘prudent use of money’ interpretation takes this to refer to heaven, (baselessly) translating ‘unrighteous mammon’ as ‘worldly wealth’ NIV, NLT, NET, to diminish the element of fraud and

obtain a pleasing moral. However, there are good reasons to think that neither the steward nor tenants end up in heaven as their ‘everlasting home’. They collaborate together in defrauding the master, show no repentance, nor are they forgiven – their debts remain outstanding. In verse 8, the steward is counted among the ‘sons of this world (age)’ NKJV, as opposed to the ‘sons of light’ – i.e., the saints. He is shrewd ‘in their generation’, not for eternity, and his career eventually ‘fails’, v. 9.

There is no happy ending here. Rather, as the story of Lazarus and the rich man which follows teaches, there is another eternal destination awaiting people like this wicked steward. In verse 9, Christ is using irony (as elsewhere, e.g., Luke 12. 14; 22. 36); He neither encourages unrighteous dealings nor wishes hell upon anyone – but warns the wicked of the end of those who are unfaithful to God.

If we may compare this parable with that of the prodigal son just before it, neither the prodigal, i.e., wasteful steward nor the master’s debtors are finally welcomed to live in the master’s house (as the prodigal son is); instead, the wicked steward is cast out of the master’s house, and that eternally.

### Application

The Lord is warning against a dangerous tendency that has frequently shown itself down through the centuries, particularly in the pulpit: preachers, stewards of God’s truth, 1 Cor. 4. 1, must not dilute God’s moral standards or the teachings of God’s word to make friends with the world. They must not change God’s word so that it says something more palatable.

Over a century ago, liberal theology made great inroads. Ministers preached that the miracles of the Bible were mythical, not true, and that the Bible was not God’s inspired word – it contained human errors. They even denied a literal resurrection – the very foundation of the Christian faith. Hoping to gain more adherents from an unbelieving world by telling people exactly what they wanted to hear, they only hastened the failure, v. 9, of their liberal denominations. Still today, it is possible for us to stop preaching about sin, judgement and the reality of hell (which the Lord tells us plainly in Luke chapter 16 verses 19 to 31), and instead preach a prosperity gospel or something to entertain people or boost their self-esteem.

The lesson for us is found in Jeremiah chapter 26 verse 2, ‘Thus says the Lord: “Stand in the court of the Lord’s house, and speak to all the cities of Judah, which come to worship in the Lord’s house, all the words that I command you to speak to them. Do not diminish a word”, NKJV.

### Endnotes

- 1 CHRISTOPHER WORDSWORTH, *The New Testament in the Original Greek*, Rivingtons, 1881, Vol. I, pg. 228.
- 2 E. H. PLUMPTRE, *St. Luke*, ed. C. J. Ellicott, Cassell and Co., pg. 262.
- 3 Private Notes.
- 4 Or, as some manuscripts read: ‘it fails’ – either way, the steward’s scheme collapses (and he with it).



# The Son of Man

By **BRIAN CLATWORTHY** Newbury, England

## Part 1

In a powerful discourse recorded for us by the Apostle John, our Lord indicates how, as the Son of man, He would be glorified by the Father through being lifted up upon a cross, John 12. 23-36. This disclosure totally perplexed the crowd around Him who responded by stating that their understanding from the law was that Christ would be an eternal figure and not die in this way. In fact, it was quite alien to their Jewish tradition. What then accounted for this 'Son of man', v. 34, and why was Jesus so different from Jewish expectations as the 'Son of man'?

The title 'Son of God' is used in the New Testament by both the Lord Himself and other third parties. The title 'Lord' is used of Christ by His followers, but the title 'Son of man' is used exclusively by the Lord about Himself in the Gospel narratives. However, this comment needs to be qualified because there are occurrences in those narratives where someone else uses the phrase 'Son of man' as in the text above, but the difference is that they are simply posing a question, they are not making a direct assertion that Jesus is the 'Son of man'.

Outside the Gospels, the phrase 'the Son of man' with the definite article occurs only in Stephen's apology in Acts chapter 7 verse 56, where he refers to Christ as '**the** Son of man'. This would have resonated with the Jewish authorities present at the time, because they undoubtedly made the link with the person referred to in Daniel chapter 7 verses 13 and 14 – we will consider the implications of this passage from Daniel chapter 7 later. The other two occurrences are in Hebrews chapter 2 verse 6, which is a direct quote from the Septuagint (LXX) translation of Psalm 8 verse 4. That text has a primary reference to Adam as humanity in its innocence, but the main testimony, as the writer develops his argument, concerns Christ as the true Son of man, impervious to sin.

There are two other references in the book of Revelation to this title. In Revelation chapter 1 verse 13,

there is a reference to 'one like the Son of man' in John's vision in which we are clearly obliged to identify this title with the risen Christ. He is seen as Lord of the church with the attributes of a judge. Here again, the vision draws down heavily on Daniel chapter 7, but is also supplemented by allusions drawn from Daniel chapter 10, in particular verse 6. Later, in chapter 14 verse 14, we read that John saw, 'a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown' *lit.*, which again draws on the imagery of Daniel chapter 7. In this latter context, only the judicial aspect of the Son of man's role is in mind as He dispenses judgement, because the sins of humanity have reached their full measure.

We turn, then, to the usage of the phrase/title 'Son of man' elsewhere in the Bible, and, as a start, we will look at various occurrences of the phrase in the Old Testament. This climaxes in Daniel's prophecy in chapter 7 of his book, which is the central point or the coherent force that drives the usage of the title in the New Testament.

In the Old Testament, the usual Hebrew phrase for 'Son of man' is *ben adam*. In the Aramaic portions of the Old Testament, such as parts of the prophecy of Daniel, the singular *bar enash* occurs once only in Daniel chapter 7 verse 13 and the plural twice. Basically, the phrase, whether it is used in

Hebrew or Aramaic languages, is a typical Semitic locution or a style of speaking or phraseology denoting a member of a class, and in this case a human being. For instance, we read in Numbers chapter 23 verse 19, the following, 'God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind' ESV. When the plural of the term is used, it often denotes human beings without regard to gender. For example, in Genesis chapter 11 verse 5, we read, 'And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded'. But sometimes the singular is often collective and refers to humanity at large, as for example, in Psalm 8 verse 4, referred to earlier.

One of the most notable usages of this title occurs in the prophecy of Ezekiel where 'Son of man' is a designation of the prophet himself, always in address by God Himself – this occurs on ninety-three occasions. Ezekiel speaks as a representative of the people or a spokesman to the people. This can also be seen in the prophecy of Daniel, chapter 8 verse 17, when Daniel sought an interpretation of the vision that he had received about a ram and a goat. Gabriel is despatched by God to provide an interpretive answer to the vision because of his lack of understanding and says to Daniel, 'Understand, O son of man: for at the time of the end shall be the vision'. In both Ezekiel's prophecy and Daniel chapter 8 verse 17, it is simply the address of a heavenly being to an earthly being, the opposite of the address 'Lord'. What this phrase invariably alludes to is the weakness and incompetence of man as a creature on earth. Man's uselessness and sinfulness are the themes of the two verses that appear in the book of Job. In chapter 25 verse 6, we read, 'How much less man, who is a maggot, and a son of man, who is a worm?' NKJV. Again, in chapter 35 verse 8, we read the comments, 'Your wickedness affects a man such as you, and your righteousness a son of man' NKJV. So, in most instances in the Old Testament, the title 'son of man' is man on earth



exhibiting his fragility and showing his complete dependence upon the grace and power of God.

When we turn, however, to Daniel chapter 7 verses 13 to 14, we are in a completely different setting. Consequent upon the judgement of the fourth beast, Daniel sees a vision of the one who is like a Son of man presenting himself before the Ancient of Days to receive everlasting dominion and an indestructible kingdom. This heavenly being comes with or in the clouds of heaven to establish His universal kingdom. It is the fulfilment of Psalm 8, because all things will then be put under the feet of the Son of man. Jewish interpreters of Daniel chapter 7 have clearly understood this person to be the Messiah. A messianic use of the title 'Son of man', and the influence of Daniel chapter 7 is found in post-biblical Jewish texts.

In terms then, what we find in the Old Testament is that:

- A. The title 'son of man' speaks of humanity generally with all its inherent weaknesses and sinfulness;
- B. It also indicates the insignificance of humanity before God, and its total dependence upon the grace of God;

- C. The title reveals that humanity is the object of divine consideration;
- D. Significantly, the title points to the fact that in the vision of Daniel chapter 7, the true 'Son of man' is revealed as a heavenly being to whom all things will be put in subjection according to the divine purpose of God. Man's lost glory will ultimately be gloriously restored by this Son of man who is sinless.

Now, turning to the New Testament, we find that the title 'Son of man' occurs eighty-four times in all four Gospel narratives. Whilst in the Old Testament the majority of uses simply reflect humankind, we should not think that the title 'Son of man' in the New Testament simply points out our Lord's human nature in contrast to His divine nature. 'Son of man' is not simply the counterweight to 'Son of God', as if each point to a different 'side' of Christ's nature – the human and the divine. Both images are far more complex than that. It is interesting to note in passing that our Lord never explains this title 'Son of man' so it **must** be assumed, therefore, that its meaning was available to His hearers from normal currency. Put another way, the 'Son of man'

was a title of the Messiah in New Testament times. And if we take that idea from Daniel chapter 7 then when our Lord speaks of Himself as 'Son of man', He is invoking an image that bears with it a story of conflict and kingship. It is no accident, therefore, that our Lord's ministry, and by that we mean the gospel, is one of conflict and a proclamation of the presence and future fullness of the kingdom of God. So, it comes as no surprise to us that when we read the Gospel narratives, we find that this title functions as a self-reference by our Lord in the majority of the eighty-four occurrences.

#### Endnote

- 1 I.e., the literature of the Second Temple period. For example, there is a model for the setting up of the celestial kingdom based on Daniel chapter 7 in 1 Enoch, and the vision of Daniel chapter 7 verse 13 forms the basis of two visions in 2 Esdras.



# Pauline metaphors

By **RICHARD COLLINGS** Caerphilly, Wales

Part 3

## Introduction

The word adoption only occurs five times in the New Testament and is confined to Paul's letters.<sup>1</sup> There are indications of this doctrine in the Old Testament, e.g., Exod. 4. 22, 23; Hos. 11. 1, hence Paul's reference in Romans chapter 9 verse 4, but, principally, it is a doctrine established in the New Testament.

Strangely, the doctrine of adoption is perhaps the least taught of all the theological aspects relating to the gospel and God's dealings with men. It is strange because the truth unfolded in this subject lies at the very core of God's purposes for His people. The doctrines of salvation, reconciliation, justification, redemption, and sanctification are all profound, and the reality thoroughly undeserved, but what is revealed in the doctrine of adoption sets before us God's ultimate purpose for us.

## The meaning of the word

In general usage the word adoption refers to the legal process whereby someone is brought into a family to which it did not belong by birth. The child that is adopted becomes a fully integrated member of the family and enjoys parity with any who were actually born into it. However, whilst there might be some similarities between the secular use of the word and the biblical teaching of adoption, the two are far from identical.

One very significant difference is that the biblical use of the word as it relates to believers refers to those who are already children of God, having been born of God. Thus, we have the seemingly peculiar situation in which we are born into God's family and at the same time we are adopted by Him. This apparent anomaly is easily explained when we look at the meaning of the Greek word translated 'adoption'.

It is a compound word, the first part of which means 'son' and the second part derives from a word meaning 'to set' or 'to place'. In summary, therefore, we may say that the biblical teaching on adoption relates to our being placed as sons and this definition removes the difficulty set out in the previous paragraph. All believers are children of God and, equally, we are all sons of God, but the two terms are not synonymous.

Being a **child** of God emphasizes our relationship to God, we are part of His family by means of the new birth. Being a **son** emphasizes more than relationship for it involves having an inheritance. We are not adopted to the position of a child, but we are adopted to the position of a son. The distinction between being a child and being a son is taught by the Apostle Paul in the opening verses of Galatians chapter 4.

## Galatians chapter 4

The commencement of this chapter must be understood against the backdrop of the doctrinal error being foisted on the churches of Galatia. Judaizers were seeking to bring the Christians into an adherence to law-keeping and Paul's objective is to highlight the folly of such a retrograde step. The apostle declares in chapter 3 verse 24 that the purpose of the law was temporary and completed when Christ came. He compares Israel before Christ came to a child who is under tutors and governors even though that child might be an heir to a vast estate.

C. F. HOGG in *Gospel Facts and Doctrines* states, 'In order that those who were in the child and slave state under the Law might be redeemed therefrom, in the fulness of time God sent forth His Son that all who accept Him should have the status of sons. In Gal. 4. 5, therefore, the

idea of dignity attaches to the word adoption, a dignity manifest by the contrast drawn between the servile and infantile state of Israel under the Law'.<sup>2</sup>

## Israel's adoption

Romans chapter 9 begins a three-chapter dispensational section of the Epistle. In the opening verses, Paul expresses his grief and constant sorrow for his fellow countrymen because they had rejected the gospel and God's Son. Consequently, God had now set them aside even though they had once been so greatly privileged. Some of their privileges are enumerated in verse 4, 'Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises'.

Israel's adoption was national, not an individual matter. As a nation, God had chosen them and conferred upon them privileges and blessings far above that which He bestowed on any other people. They were a unique people and were brought into a unique relationship with God. In Exodus chapter 4, God commissioned Moses to go into Pharaoh to secure Israel's release from the Egyptian slavery and He told him to say, 'Thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son, even my firstborn: And I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn', vv. 22, 23. Though currently set aside, one day Israel will be brought into blessing and restored to the privileges of being God's firstborn.

## Paul's teaching on believer's adoption in Ephesians

If we were able to tabulate the various factors that motivated each of us to trust the Saviour, I am confident that two would outnumber all the others. Either we felt our need of salvation because we were burdened about our guilt, or because we were fearful of being left behind at the rapture. For those brought up in a Christian family, it is probably the second of these two that was the most concerning to us. Whatever the motive may have



been, I am sure that few of us, if any, fully appreciated what God had in mind when He saved us.

Even though Paul was writing this Epistle whilst in bonds under house arrest in Rome, he scales the very highest peaks in divine revelation. In chapter 1 verse 3, he states that we have been 'blessed . . . with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ'. In verse 4, he informs us that God has chosen us in Christ 'before the foundation of the world'. Then, in verse 5, he declares, 'Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will'.

The words 'adoption of children' are the translation of one Greek word which, as already noted, means 'to place as sons'. The term 'sons' is not a gender term; all believers, brethren and sisters, are classed as sons, for God's ultimate intention has always been to make us sons. That was in the mind of God from eternal ages; the choosing of us in verse 4 was the way by which that eternal plan was accomplished – He chose us 'having' determined to make us sons.

In verse 4, God elected us in His sovereignty, but the emphasis in verse 5 on His predestinating us is the good pleasure of His will. It was at the Jordan 2,000 years ago that the Father expressed His good pleasure in His Son, 'Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased', Mark 1. 11. That Father has determined to have for Himself countless people

conformed to the image of His Son and from whom He will derive eternal good pleasure.

God's love is infinite, God's ability is without measure, and in verse 5 we reach the apex of what God's love and power can do. It takes those who were once children of the devil and places them in His presence, not as children but as sons. Herein we have reached the acme of divine revelation as it relates to us as rebel sinners. Surely, as Paul wrote these words, he was unaware of the chain that bound him. He may have been in house arrest in Rome but in spirit he was soaring to the highest heaven.

That was God's will for us and the execution of it brought Him pleasure. Why God should derive pleasure from saving us is truly an amazing thought, but why He should want to make us sons and therein derive eternal pleasure is beyond comprehension. This glorious truth was captured so succinctly by J. N. DARBY in his well-known hymn:

'And is it so – I shall be like Thy Son?  
Is this the grace which He for me has won?

Father of glory (thought beyond all thought!) –

In glory, to His own blest likeness brought!

Nor I alone; Thy loved ones all, complete

In glory, round Thee there with joy shall meet,

All like Thee, for Thy glory like Thee, Lord,

Object supreme of all, by all adored'.

### Romans chapter 8 verse 23

Although all believers are sons now, there is a future aspect of adoption that is yet to be realized and this is presented to us in this verse, 'And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body'. In the previous verse, Paul shows that the whole creation groans and travails in pain; it is waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God. However, we also wait, we wait for the 'adoption', that is the redemption of our body.

Over the last two millennia, countless numbers of believers have died and even those Christians who will be alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord have bodies that are mortal and corruptible. However, whether dead or alive there is going to be a glorious day of resurrection and change for us all. Then our bodies shall be transformed, and they shall be 'fashioned like unto his glorious body', Phil. 3. 21. Then we shall be conformed to His image physically and morally, and we shall enter into the full wonder and enjoyment of that which God had planned for us before time began.

The heart is satisfied; can ask no more  
All thought of self is now forever o'er:  
Christ, its un-mingled object, fills the heart  
In blest adoring love – the endless part.

#### Endnotes

- 1 See: Rom. 8. 15, 23; 9. 4; Gal. 4. 5, and Eph. 1. 5.
- 2 C. F. HOGG, *Gospel Facts and Doctrines*, Pickering and Inglis, 1951, pg. 99.



# PAUL'S SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY

By **MICHAEL BUCKERIDGE** Grantham, England

## Part 2

Paul departed from Berea at the request of the brethren due to the problems stirred up by the Jews of Thessalonica. Sending some of their own to show the way, they brought him to Athens. Then, Paul sends them back with direction to Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible, Acts 17. 13-15.

### The devotions of the Athenians

The Acropolis was a structure that had long been a citadel upon one of the hills of Athens. For the last six centuries, however, it had been of more cultural and religious significance. The top architects and sculptors of the day had transformed it into 'a unique complex which heralded the emergence of classical Greek thought and art'.<sup>1</sup> A network of temples and religious monuments had grown up over the area. According to UNESCO, 'On this hill were born Democracy, Philosophy, Theatre, Freedom of Expression and Speech, which provide to this day the intellectual and spiritual foundation for the contemporary world and its values'.<sup>2</sup> It was a place to stir the human heart and it did Paul's. Not, however, because he marvelled at this centre of man's achievement, but because in it all 'he saw the city wholly given to idolatry', v. 16. Do we view the world around us through the eyes of God or with enthusiasm for man?

Paul later condemned the men of Athens as being 'too superstitious', even having an altar 'TO THE UNKNOWN GOD', vv. 22, 23. Such a scene could not but cause his spirit to be 'stirred in him', v. 16, and he began to dispute (reason) with all who would listen, whether in the synagogue or the marketplace, v. 17. When was the last time we were so moved by the plight of those we live among, that we reached out to reason of 'Jesus, and the resurrection', v. 18?

### The discourse at the Areopagus

Such activity aroused interest in a city

where much of the population 'spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing', v. 21. Some poured scorn, calling him a 'babbler', meaning one who had picked up scraps of knowledge and pretended thus to be a teacher. Others recognized the religious nature of what he said.

Slightly west of the Acropolis was the Areopagus, 'the highest and most ancient and venerable court of justice in Athens for moral and political matters'.<sup>3</sup> According to BARNES, this court, among other things, was 'especially attentive to blasphemies against the gods'.<sup>4</sup> 'No place in Athens was so suitable for a discourse on the mysteries of religion'<sup>5</sup> and it was to this group of esteemed men that the philosophers of Athens brought Paul.

His audience was made up of two main schools of thought, 'the Epicureans, and . . . the Stoicks', v. 18. The Epicureans were materialists who believed that pleasure was the end and aim of life. Although Epicurus would teach that 'we do not mean the pleasures of the prodigal . . . we mean the absence of pain in the body and trouble in the soul',<sup>6</sup> it is easy to see how, when combined with no belief in God and an afterlife, men could use this teaching to justify all kinds of licence. The Stoicks were fatalists, believing that the highest virtue was to remain unmoved by all external changes and circumstances and they 'speculated about ultimate problems only for the practical purpose of discovering a rule of life and conduct'.<sup>7</sup> 'They were stern in their views of virtue, and, like the Pharisees, prided themselves on

their own righteousness'.<sup>8</sup> HOWSON sums up the audience thus, 'The two enemies it [the gospel] has ever had to contend with are the two ruling principles of the Epicureans and Stoics – *Pleasure and Pride*'.<sup>9</sup>

Paul is an example of the exhortation of Peter to 'be ready always to give an answer', 1 Pet. 3. 15, and of the Lord's encouragement that, 'when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak', Matt. 10. 19. The years of preparation and study could be taken up by the Spirit of God in a message that answered the core doctrines of his audience. Are our hearts and minds laying up a store that God can use?

The unfolding of truth Paul gives is unusual among the 'sermons' recorded in Acts, for it doesn't quote scripture. However, as RIDDLE comments, 'While Paul does not quote the scriptures, he is absolutely scriptural: he begins with God the Creator of all, and ends with God the Judge of all'.<sup>10</sup> The only quotation is from their own poets, v. 28, as Paul finds something with which to connect with his audience. While the message of the gospel does not change, we do need to consider whether the way it is communicated will aid the understanding of our audience.

Fundamental to their acceptance of the gospel is their understanding of God. Do we ever consider what those we speak to understand when they hear the word 'God'? Using the altar 'TO THE UNKNOWN GOD' as a springboard, Paul presents God as:

- The Creator of all, v. 24.
- Self-sufficient, vv. 24, 25.
- The sustainer of all, vv. 25, 28.
- Sovereign of all, v. 26.
- The supreme end of all, v. 27.
- The living God, vv. 28, 29.
- The Saviour for all, v. 30.
- The Judge of all, v. 31.

The mention of the resurrection of the dead, v. 31, was a step too far. The implication that there is more than the material and a deity before whom they would be held accountable was too much for Epicurean and Stoick alike. It is in the truths of the



resurrection and accountability, that men's prejudices are challenged, for, if true, then all thought that man and his works are the chief end are destroyed. Pleasure must be within the bounds of God's standards and ultimately found in Him; pride has no place before the self-existent, self-sufficient God. The majority responded with derision or delay; only a few believed. The apostle was to write later that 'not many wise men after the flesh . . . are called', 1 Cor. 1. 26, and it is of note that we never read of a church being established in this seat of human achievement and wisdom.

### Contrasts in Corinth

Corinth had been destroyed around 148 BC, but by this time it was a thriving Roman colony, having been rebuilt by Julius Caesar around 48 BC. Commerce thrived due to its location between the Ionian and Aegean seas, and it was cosmopolitan in population but corrupt in morals. High on the Acrocorinthus stood the temple to Venus, the centre of immorality. Such was its reputation that "To Corinthianize" was proverbial for playing the wanton'.<sup>11</sup> And yet, in contrast to Athens, there would come a time when Paul could write 'unto the church of God which is at Corinth', v. 2; 'there was something pure in an impure place'.<sup>12</sup> The preaching of the cross was seen through the salvation of many to be 'the power of God', v. 18. Do we stand before our generation in the same attitude as the apostle, 2. 1?

Having been alone in Athens, it must have been a delight to have fellowship with Aquila and Priscilla, Acts 18. 2. In Athens, he spent the days disputing in the marketplace, but here, apart from the sabbath, he toiled at tentmaking. It is good to remember that work is God-given and that, while there may be times of being fully given to the preaching and teaching of the word of God, God may bring us back again to 'normal' employment. Paul could later see the wisdom of God in this, 2 Cor. 11. 9. We must ever be open to the Lord's guidance in our employment and service.

In Athens, Paul had been stirred – provoked – in spirit. Now he was pressed – constrained – in spirit as he sought to persuade the Jews that 'Jesus was Christ', Acts 18. 5. Once again, the majority of the Jews 'opposed themselves, and blasphemed', so that Paul declared that he would 'from henceforth . . . go unto the Gentiles', v. 6. In His sovereignty, however, God saves 'Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue', v. 8, an event which impacts the city for, 'many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized'. Paul, having come from the barrenness of the intellectual and religious city of Athens, then receives God's promise that He is with him and has 'much people in this city', v. 10.

Paul remains in Corinth for eighteen months during which time the

Jews tried to silence him, vv. 12-17. However, the Jews were no favourite of the Greeks, so they were silenced by the deputy. It is good to remember that 'The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will', Prov. 21. 1. God had many people in the city and He used the local leader to silence the opposition.

### Return to Antioch

Paul eventually left Corinth in company with Priscilla and Aquila and sought to return to Antioch via Jerusalem in order to complete the rites associated with the vow he had taken, Acts 18. 18-21. He stopped briefly in Ephesus, where he met with an unusually positive response in the synagogue, in that they desired him to stay longer. As the servant of God should do, he committed his future return to the will of God and left the couple who had faithfully served alongside him to continue the witness in Ephesus and, when he arrived at Caesarea, he went up to salute the church at Jerusalem before returning to Antioch.

What a report he had to tell of the Lord's direction, faithfulness, and power. As we have traced something of the trials and triumphs of these three years, may we be challenged by Paul's devotion and endurance, and encouraged by the Lord's ability to save souls and build His church in the most unlikely of places.



### Endnotes

- 1 Acropolis, Athens – UNESCO World Heritage Centre.
- 2 Acropolis, Athens – UNESCO World Heritage Centre.
- 3 GEORGE, A. MORRISH, *A Concise Bible Dictionary*, Kingston Bible Trust, pg. 68.
- 4 ALBERT BARNES, *Notes on the Bible*, e-Sword resource.
- 5 R. JAMIESON, A. R. FAUSSET, and D. BROWN, *Whole Bible Commentary*, e-Sword resource.
- 6 GEOFFREY BROMILEY, *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, e-Sword resource.
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 ALBERT BARNES, *op.cit.*
- 9 Quoted in R. JAMIESON, A. R. FAUSSET, and D. BROWN, *op. cit.*
- 10 J. M. RIDDLE, *The Acts of the Apostles*, John Ritchie Ltd, pg. 282.
- 11 A. R. FAUSSET, *Fausset's Bible Dictionary*, e-Sword resource.
- 12 J. M. RIDDLE, *op. cit.*, pg. 287.

# The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ

By **RICHARD CATCHPOLE** South Norwood, England

Some six times in the New Testament, reference is made to ‘the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ’.<sup>1</sup> In each verse, a two-fold relationship is in view; His ‘God’ and His ‘Father’, and we need to distinguish between them. As ‘the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ’, the focus is upon the essential deity of the Lord Jesus, and the eternal relationship that existed between the Father and the Son. As ‘the God of our Lord Jesus Christ’, the focus is upon the relationship that existed, commencing with the incarnation, when He ‘made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men’, Phil. 2. 7, and in that connection several verses might readily come to mind:

- ‘But thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother’s breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb: **thou art my God from my mother’s belly**’, Ps. 22. 9, 10.
- ‘Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, **O my God**: yea, thy law is within my heart’, Ps. 40. 6-8. When referring to this passage in Hebrews chapter 10 verses 5 to 7, the writer says of Christ; ‘Wherefore **when he cometh into the world**, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: in burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) **to do thy will, O God**’.
- Following His resurrection, the Lord’s word to Mary Magdalene was ‘go to my brethren, and say

unto them, I ascend unto **my Father**, and your Father; and to **my God**, and your God’, John 20. 17.

Added to those the verses we mentioned earlier from the Epistles, which speak of the two-fold relationship of the ‘God’ and ‘Father’ of the Lord Jesus, all relate to the Lord as He is now, a glorified man, risen and exalted to God’s right hand. By contrast, as we have said, the specific title ‘Father of our Lord Jesus’ has in view the essential deity of the Lord Jesus, His relation to the Father as His Son.

## An eternal relationship

The Lord Jesus did not become the Son at His incarnation. He was eternally that before ever He came into the world. The prophet Isaiah wrote, ‘unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given’, Isa. 9. 6. Careful note should be given to the language, not a son **born**, but ‘a son **given**’. The Apostle Paul said, ‘when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law’, Gal. 4. 4. He was already the Son when God sent Him forth. Likewise, the Apostle John says, ‘In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him’, 1 John 4. 9. Who was sent? ‘His only begotten Son’; as applied to Christ the title is unique to the writings of John, and comes four times in his Gospel,<sup>2</sup> denoting the uniqueness of the One sent, and the intimate relationship existing between the sender and the One sent. Just five verses later in his first Epistle, John says, ‘the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world’, v. 14. A relationship that was intimated by the Lord in the parable of the wicked husbandmen when the householder, having sent to the husbandmen his servants whom they beat, killed and stoned, last of all ‘he sent unto them his son, saying, They

will reverence my son’, Matt. 21. 37. Again, in His prayer in John chapter 17, the Lord Jesus, addressing His Father, speaks of the ‘glory which I had with thee before the world was’ and, yet again, ‘thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world’, vv. 5, 24.

He was manifest in flesh at His birth, but He had existed eternally as the Son. John chapter 1 verse 18 refers to Him as the ‘only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father’. Commenting on the verse, W. E. VINE said, ‘The phrase “in the bosom of the Father” describes a timeless state, an eternal condition and relation of the fullest intimacy, affection and fellowship, and implies the unbroken continuation of that in the days of His flesh’.<sup>3</sup> This is the eternal character of the relationship between the Father and the Son.

## An equal relationship

Although the Lord is spoken of as being the ‘Son’, we must exclude from the title the idea of ‘generation’, and also any thought of the Son being in some way inferior to the Father. In John chapter 5, following the healing of the impotent man on the Sabbath day, the Jews sought to kill the Lord because of what He had done. In response, He said, ‘My Father worketh hitherto, and I work’, the Son a co-worker with His Father in the healing of the man, v. 17. So, to condemn the Son for healing on the Sabbath was to equally condemn the Father. The Jews understood the implication of the Lord’s statement and verse 18 says, ‘Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he had not only broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself **equal with God**’. Far from denying what they said, the Lord proceeded in the following verses to assert His unity and oneness with the Father, vv. 19-29. A unity so complete that the honour of the Father is inherently linked to honouring the Son, v. 23.

In John chapter 10 verse 24, the Jews accosted the Lord Jesus and said, ‘If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly’. The Lord asserted that His works bore testimony to the fact that He was sent by God, ‘works that I do in



my Father's name', v. 25. The Jews did not believe that, and the Lord gives this reason, 'because ye are not of my sheep' – 'sheep' to whom He gives eternal life and whom the Father has given as a love-gift to Him, vv. 26-29. The Lord then states plainly, **'I and my Father are one'**, a statement that asserts not simply one in purpose and work but one in nature, two distinct persons, co-equal, co-eternal, co-existent. Again, the Jews understood the weight of the Lord's words and 'took up stones again to stone him'. The Lord then challenged them, 'Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me?' They reply, 'For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, **makest thyself God**', vv. 30-33.

It is instructive that when speaking to the disciples the Lord carefully distinguished between His and their relationship to the Father, cp. John 20. 17. He would speak of 'your Father' and 'my Father'; not once, on

account of the unique relationship that was His, did He include them with Himself in saying 'our Father'.<sup>4</sup>

### An expressed relationship

Many passages could be referred to, but consider some of the statements made by the Lord Jesus Himself:

- He was sanctified (set apart) and sent by the Father into the world, John 10. 36; 5. 36; 6. 57.
- He came in His Father's name, and through the Son the Father is revealed, John 5. 43; Matt. 11. 27. In the temple at Jerusalem when twelve years old, He said, 'I must be about my Father's business' and this was said many years before His public ministry commenced. To the disciples He said that His meat, that wherein He found sustenance, was 'to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work', Luke 2. 49; John 4. 34.
- He lived by the Father, in total trust and dependence upon Him,

John 6. 57. He spoke as He was taught by the Father, 7. 16; 8. 28; 12. 49, 50; 15. 15. He was loved by the Father, 10. 17. The Father was always with Him, for He always pleased His Father, 8. 29.

- The Father gave Him a commandment to lay down His life and to take it again, and a cup that the Lord drank of to the full, 10. 18; 18. 11. With the cross before Him, He said, 'that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence', 14. 31.
- On the cross, at the end of the three hours of darkness, He commended His spirit into His Father's hands, Luke 23. 46.
- He came from the Father and has returned to the Father, John 13. 1; 16. 10, 28.

Surveying the verses, we must surely say that, like Abraham and Isaac of old, 'they went both of them together', Gen. 22. 6, and to reverently bow in worship and adoration of both the Father and the Son.

But through the finished work of the Lord Jesus every believer has been brought into that circle of divine love and fellowship; His Father is our Father, and we expectantly await the Lord's return to take us to His Father's house that where He is, we may be also, John 14. 1-3. This is truth that every believer surely rejoices in, but are we busy in our 'Father's business', obedient and pleasing to Him?

### Endnotes

- 1 Rom. 15. 6; 2 Cor. 1. 3; 11. 31; Eph. 1. 3; Col. 1. 3; 1 Pet. 1. 3. Ephesians chapter 3 verse 14 KJV refers to the 'Father of our Lord Jesus Christ' but many authorities accept a shorter reading omitting the words 'our Lord Jesus Christ'.
- 2 John 1. 14, 18; 3. 16, 18.
- 3 W. E. VINE, *John, his record of Christ*, Oliphants, pg. 13.
- 4 Matthew chapter 6 verse 9, and Luke chapter 11 verse 2 are no exceptions to this. Though often called 'the Lord's Prayer', it is, in reality, the disciples' prayer. 'After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven'; 'When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven'.



# Some remarks on testimony in Quebec

By **MARK FENN** Ontario, Canada

The deliberately modest title of this short article reflects the writer's disinclination to make sweeping statements and a conviction that anything he says on its subject will be limited in scope. It will also mean that much of the work in Quebec that is good and worthy of the prayers of the Lord's people will, of necessity, be omitted. Readers are asked to bear in mind that the essential aim is the encouragement of their prayers for testimony in Quebec.

A simple, general statement which could be made about some assembly testimony in Quebec is that the words in the Prophecy of Malachi chapter 3 verse 16 apply particularly to situations where local testimonies are beleaguered by relative depletion and isolation, 'Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name'. While the prophet is indeed referring to the faithful remnant under the Old Economy, yet their vital application to the present day in Quebec can be very apt in the sense that fellowship links can be at a premium when some regions of Quebec seem to have little discernible, scriptural assembly testimony.

While it is a truism to say that Canada is vast, yet Quebec itself may also be so described. Extensive areas of Quebec may be said to be characterized by a situation of great remoteness. Its highest point – Mont d'Iberville<sup>1</sup> – was, according to records, first climbed only in 1973 and its rural population is dispersed over a truly enormous area. To give some idea of its size, the area of The Netherlands – among Europe's most densely populated countries – would fit well over thirty times into the area of Quebec. A significant part of Quebec's population is centred in and around Montreal; testimony has been maintained in both French and English

from several assemblies over many years. In 2016, the *Montreal Gazette* reported on the life of William Craig Baynes (1809-1887), secretary at McGill University, who was identified with assembly testimony in the city and known for vigorous activities in the gospel; it would seem that the focus of his ministry was through the medium of English.<sup>2</sup>

A valuable literature ministry is that of Librairie chrétienne de Québec,<sup>3</sup> led by Jean-Paul Gosselin; this ministry, and others, including International Bible House, Brampton, Ontario, are much appreciated sources of French gospel literature, for which support in prayer commends itself.

Thanks are due to various brethren in one way or another active in French testimony and gospel activity in Quebec who have kindly supplied prayer points.

A brother, who meets with the Sainte-Foy assembly, reports that the pursuit of personal contacts among those in local fellowship, and among those who have written in as a result of a broadcasting ministry, has continued against the background of disruptions from the consequences of Covid. He writes with the conviction that such work of French testimony will go on because, 'he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ', Phil. 1. 6.

David Hunt reports that work – much of it being by way of literature – continues on the Quebec North Shore. Over the years, meetings have been held at La Tabatière, Harrington Harbour<sup>4</sup> and Chevery and he has been encouraged in the news of a profession of faith by the relative of a Christian lady who is a regular contact. Stressing the importance of prayer and in confidence that the Lord continues to bless His word, brother Hunt has continued in work over a wide area with gospel calendars and children's items.<sup>5</sup>

Murray Pratt sends an encouraging report of recent gospel meetings in Venosta, a locality north of Gatineau/Ottawa, where a total of nineteen people attended at least some of this series; prayer is earnestly sought that the Lord will graciously bless this seed sowing among local residents, not a few of whom are from an Anglophone (English-speaking) Irish background. He has engaged repeatedly in such efforts over several years, with meetings sometimes being conducted in both English and French, reflecting local demographics.

Peter Lansing, who has been active in French ministry, with a few other French-speaking brethren, has had repeated opportunities for involvement in French gospel testimony via the website of an assembly in Ottawa, which, being close to the Quebec border, is ideally situated for facilitating such exercise, for which prayer is indeed opportune. After some easing of Covid restrictions, regular onsite gospel meetings continued monthly in French and, as a result, several Francophone people, who had not visited previously, attended the meetings; these meetings were also broadcast simultaneously.

Over the years during the summer months, Christian camps have been held at sites near the Quebec-Ontario border. These camps, at sites situated on both sides of the border, have likewise been attended by members of families living both in Quebec and Ontario. Some believers living in Quebec have attended an assembly in Renfrew, which is itself situated close to the border and which has been involved in considerable prayerful and practical exercise for summer camp work, which continues.

It needs to be remembered, particularly by readers outside North America, that Quebec is overwhelmingly French speaking. For assembly testimony in many areas of Quebec, not taking this into account would run up against deep-seated cultural barriers. In the past, the militant activities of different religious and quasi-religious groups in conflict with one another have, at times, served to work against a receptiveness to the biblical gospel. It would be another truism to say that, in the past, a perceived cultural polarization between the Roman Catholic church and the Orange Order – as it has done



elsewhere – has informed widespread indifference to the presentation of the scriptural distinctives of gospel testimony. While no comment is intended about the Orange Order today, in the 19th century a series of unedifying events involving Orangemen and their antagonists was widely publicized in Quebec and susceptible also to sometimes widely differing interpretations. For example, the Parliament in Montreal was burned down by Orangist rioters, and a prominent historian claimed that in practical terms Canada's armed forces found their origins in volunteer militias raised in the mid-19th century in order to quell rival Orange and Roman Catholic mob violence in Canada West (the name by which the Province of Quebec was known immediately prior to 1867).<sup>6</sup> An added historical anomaly in the mid-19th century consisted in the fact that documented gospel testimony activities were, at times, even opposed less by Francophone members of the Republican 'Patriote' movement than they were by Anglophone Orangemen. While these unappetizing events are well in the past, yet it is undoubtedly the case that even during earnest witness activities any perception that people are being shouted at in English can still leave an unhelpful impression among many Francophone people. Particularly for those coming from outside Quebec, a prayerful exercise to bear a respectful tone in witness – and, in many areas, also the preferable use of French – does strongly suggest itself.

Despite the smallness of some existing assembly testimony in parts of Quebec, there is a sense in which this situation may be said to offer much opportunity for local believers to be exercised

before the Lord, dependent on Him as their risen Head, even as relative isolation and depleted numbers may inform a lower level of contacts with other assemblies than may be the case among assemblies in parts of Anglophone Canada. SHAWN ST. CLAIR, writing in *Truth and Tidings*, has issued a timely exhortation for believers in assembly fellowship to respect and enhance the scriptural practice of local assembly autonomy. Referring to several scripture passages, including Acts chapter 20 and the first three chapters of Revelation, he writes, 'Each assembly is called upon to make its own decisions before the Lord regarding the associations it has with other assemblies . . . We undermine [assembly autonomy] by involving ourselves in issues that are not our own, or by allowing the decisions of other assemblies to override what we would have done before the Lord'.<sup>7</sup> Applied to the background of some assemblies in Quebec, the heeding of scriptural exhortations – indeed, warnings – of such a nature would bode well for the stability and well-being of local assembly testimony, with its distinct culture in Quebec, which is less likely to be seen as part of any perceived 'circuits' of assemblies in Anglophone Canada. Stated differently, perhaps, the relative isolation of some believers in Quebec can also serve to diminish the possible influence of strife originating from elsewhere. In any case, among those who are truly exercised to help relatively isolated believers in the testimony, as BRIAN GUNNING has aptly stated, most preachers – known to him – are usually only too willing to travel distances to help small and isolated companies of believers with the ministry of the word.<sup>8</sup>

Briefly also, there are the present writer's activities,<sup>9</sup> including French gospel literature work and visitation of isolated believers among whom ministry in French is regularly possible. Prayer is currently being made by the present writer and his wife for a lady from the Montérégie region who wrote in after receiving literature, in turn followed up by suggestions of further scripture reading and contacts with assembly sources of French ministry.

Back to Malachi, to the keyword 'vast' and to the article's central purpose of seeking to motivate readers to pray for work in Quebec. May the Lord's people indeed be encouraged to pray regularly for testimony in this still vast corner of the Lord's vineyard, that from Quebec at the Lord's return there may be yet many more jewels for the Saviour's crown, Mal. 3. 17!

## Endnotes

- 1 Not to be confused with the town of Iberville, on the outskirts of which a little assembly, which over many years has met at different venues, has been regularly visited by the present writer. Before moving elsewhere, Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Green, who formerly served the Lord in France, were associated with this little assembly for several years.
- 2 JOHN KALBFLEISCH, 'Second Draft', *Montreal Gazette*, 14.10.2016.
- 3 For a history of this particular French literature ministry, commenced many decades ago by the late Jean-Paul Berney, see (in French): <https://bibliothecrethienne.ca/notre-histoire>.
- 4 Harrington Harbour is sometimes remembered as the location of a hospital founded by Sir Wilfred Grenfell (1865-1940).
- 5 While English-speaking readers might regard the Quebec North Shore area as being adjacent to Labrador, Francophone people and strict cartographers might tend to view this area as being part of Labrador itself; indeed, in the 19th century the whole of Labrador was theoretically included in an ephemeral Republic for which members of the 'Patriote' movement strove.
- 6 DESMOND MORTON, *A Short History of Canada*, 3rd Ed., McClelland & Stewart, Inc., 1997, pg. 60.
- 7 SHAWN ST. CLAIR, 'Assembly Autonomy', *Truth and Tidings*, September 2021, pg. 266.
- 8 BRIAN GUNNING, *The Church at Work*, Gospel Folio Press, 2000, pg. 32.
- 9 Residing in Canada, Mark Fenn is engaged in full-time French and Spanish ministry as a personal exercise. [Editor's note]



# Drive-in gospel meetings – in South Wales

By **HUW REES** Carmarthen, Wales

## Introduction

In bringing Covid 19 to the shores of the UK, Amos 3. 6, the Lord has provided many and varied ways for the gospel to go beyond its usual precincts. 'The word of God is not bound', 2 Tim. 2. 9, is a text that has had special poignancy for the past year or so.

## Live streaming

During the first official lockdown of 2020, we began live streaming the gospel meeting each Sunday. Especially in the early days, the numbers of viewers on Facebook were very encouraging. Long lost friends who would not dream of coming to the hall heard the gospel from the virtual pulpit. Although Facebook has a very loose definition of what constitutes 'a view', hundreds of people heard something of the gospel. The Lord is good!

We also conducted a fortnight of virtual gospel meetings during this period. Unsaved friends and relatives continued to listen in. The saints were also encouraged to hear the word of God. Time and again, gospel outreach has proved to warm the hearts of God's people and unify them in prayer. Evangelism is a preservative of sorts.

Live streaming via Facebook is a two-edged sword, however. Although

it brings the gospel to where people are, it also awards a woefully short attention span. After all, Facebook records 'three second views' as a metric. Many people flicked by for a few seconds, whilst others stayed for minutes and full sessions. As weeks and months continued, we enjoyed the virtual attendance of many different people. Eternity alone will show the fruit of this work.

## Drive-in meetings

As lockdown eased and people made their way out again, we were prayerful in the matter of gospel outreach. The psalmist ably summarizes our experience on the commencement of drive-in gospel meetings, 'Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it', Ps. 127. 1. It was not methods or programmes or special ingenuity that began this work. Rather, it was the sovereign hand of God, bringing many divergent people and opportunities together for drive-in gospel meetings to commence. This is the essence of it all – apart from the Lord we could do nothing.

After time in prayer, we began making enquiries for car parks via email and phone calls. Some flatly refused whilst others presented bureaucratic hurdles. In the end the Lord provided a Morrison's and a Happy Home Furnishers car park to us. He opened the door and made it very easy.

Around the same time, Stuart Scammell had an exercise to obtain a trailer and use it for potential drive-in work. Stuart has generously lent the assembly the trailer for many months and we stand in his debt.

People were invited to hear the gospel via word of mouth, leaflets and 'virtual seed sowing' (Facebook advertising). Without exaggeration, thousands have been invited and had the opportunity to hear the gospel. The Lord is longsuffering.

Over the course of weeks and months, we have met dozens of different unbelievers that have come to hear the gospel. Some only came once whilst others attended regularly. We have sought to be faithful in the commission and now wait for the Lord to bless in salvation. We sow and He saves. We gladly rest in this.

## Conclusion

Whilst Covid has impinged on assembly gatherings, it has provided fertile conditions for the spread of the gospel. The commission, after all, implies that we are to go out with the gospel. There has been a freshness and enthusiasm in the work as a result, and we pray that this will continue. Whilst the commission says, 'go out', the word of God reminds us that the assembly must gather together, Heb. 10. 25. Zoom meetings had their place for a short time, but they are not a long-term option. Perhaps Covid is teaching us two very elementary lessons – go out with the gospel and gather together as an assembly. This has been our imperfect but happy experience.





# Jeremiah

By **COLIN LACEY** Bath, England

## Introduction

When Manasseh and his son were on the throne, the southern kingdom of Judah arguably went through its darkest period. They took the nation to appalling depths from which it never really recovered. Nevertheless, in these dark days there were at least two bright spots that lightened the increasing gloom. Firstly, Josiah was born into the wicked family of king Amon, Manasseh's son. He was destined to be an influence for good in years to come, when he sat on the throne. Elsewhere, probably a little later, a boy was born into the priestly family of Hilkiah, who did not follow his father into the priesthood, but was called to be a prophet of the Lord. Jeremiah was to be one of the most influential prophets to leave his mark on the page of Israel's history, both in word and in writing. When these two were working in tandem there was hope for the kingdom; however, when Josiah passed away it was clear that his reforms had not touched the hearts of the people. Jeremiah lived on to see the tragic end of the kingdom. He shed many tears during his ministry and the book of Lamentations shows that the final fall of Jerusalem broke his heart. Later, he was forcibly taken to Egypt by a fleeing remnant of Jews. An ancient tradition says that he was finally stoned to death, but there is no conclusive proof for this.

## Purpose of the book

First, Jeremiah impressed upon his readers the truth of the sovereignty of God. There must have been many times when the faithful remnant of Jews in Jerusalem and Judah seriously questioned whether the Lord was in control of events. When Babylon was at the height of her powers, it must have seemed as if she was invincible and that she controlled the affairs of Judah. It would have taken great spiritual discernment to see the hand of the Lord behind the events. Jeremiah was, of course, one such person. He saw that the Lord was using Babylon to chasten His

people and her ultimate fall would prove this to be the case.

Second, a leading theme in the prophecy is the judgement of the Lord. Jeremiah showed rebellious Judah that they could not play fast and loose with God and escape the consequences. He made it abundantly clear that they would reap what they sowed. In His sovereignty, He used the Babylonians to chasten them. This did not, of course, absolve the Babylonians from responsibility and that, ultimately, they would experience 'the vengeance of the Lord'. Indeed, they went too far, and the Lord condemned them for so doing.

Third, even though Jeremiah's prophecy is predominantly dark with judgement, he was exercised to show that there was a future for Israel and Judah. The Lord always has a faithful remnant, however dark the days become. Even though Judah had given up on Him, He would never forsake them. After the pain, suffering and tears, there was hope. He spoke about the new covenant that the Lord would write upon the people's hearts. He looked forward to the millennial reign of the Lord Jesus, when Israel would be the head of the nations again, and not the tail, Deut. 28. 13. He spoke of the Lord's mercies; indeed, He gave the nations space for repentance. He would even have healed Babylon, but she would not be healed.

Fourth, Jeremiah's prophecy is replete with honesty about his spiritual journey. He did not 'pull the wool' over his readers' eyes. He told them of his struggles and heartache to make sense of it all. He wrote about his periods of depression, when he felt that it was impossible to go on. He portrayed a God who does not save us from trials and tribulation, but delivers us out of them, cp. 2 Tim. 3. 10, 11, and cares for us through them.

## Dates and historical setting of the book

Jeremiah prophesied during the days of good king Josiah. He enjoyed a happy relationship with him. His ministry also continued into the reigns of the final kings of Judah, namely, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah. These were disastrous times and culminated in the defeat of Jerusalem in 587 BC at the hands of the Babylonians, and the carrying away of the people into seventy years of exile.

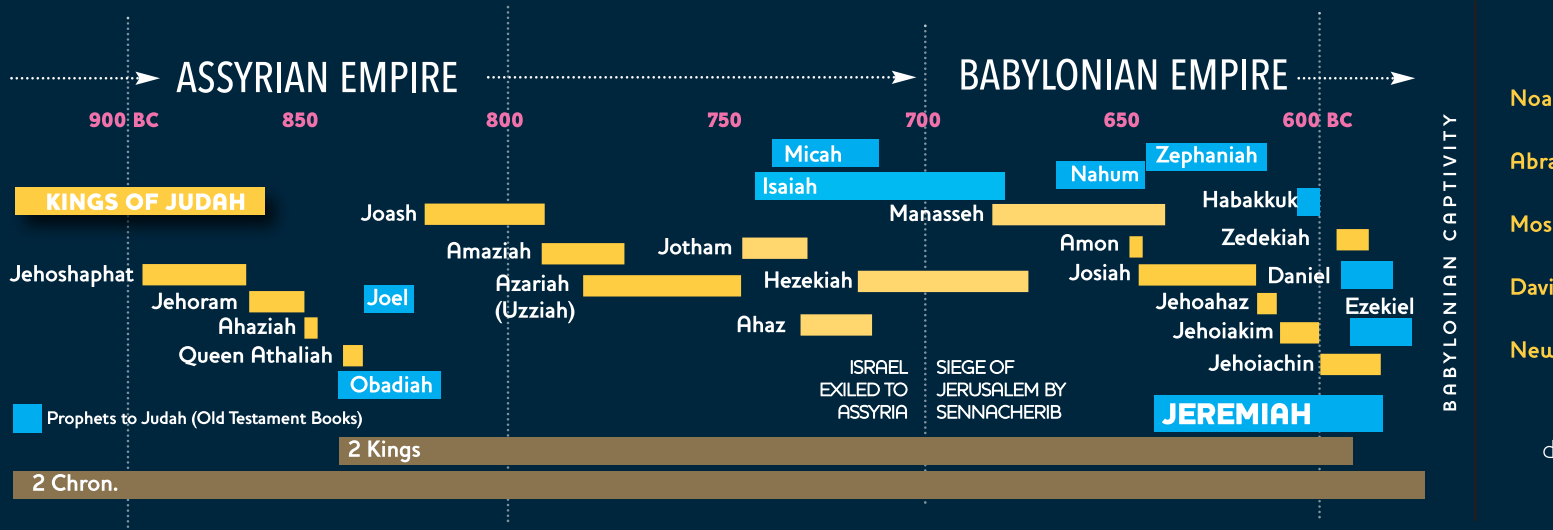
## Author

There are no legitimate grounds for challenging the fact that Jeremiah was the author of this prophecy. It would be difficult to read the first chapter of the book and disagree with this fact. He was of priestly descent, 1. 1; however, there is no evidence that he ever functioned as a priest. His home was in Anathoth, which was a Levitical town. He was not permitted by God to marry, 16. 2. A survey of his life and times will show conclusively the reasons for this command by the Lord. The unpopularity of his message with most of the kings and the people meant that he often lived a very lonely life, accompanied only

## Analysis of the Book

Chapter/s	Theme
Chapter 1	Jeremiah's call
Chapter 2 to Chapter 20	Prophecies during the reigns of Josiah and Jehoiakim
Chapter 21 to Chapter 39	Prophecies up to the fall of Jerusalem
Chapter 40 to Chapter 45	Prophecies after the fall of Jerusalem
Chapter 46 to 51	Prophecies about the nations – Egypt, Philistines, Moab, Babylon
Chapter 52	Postscript: Zedekiah and the fall of Jerusalem Jehoiachin's freedom – hope for the future

# CHARTING THE SCRIPTURES JEREMIAH by Jonathan Black



‘Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a *new cove*

## Jeremiah key message

As the international superpowers like Assyria began to weaken, king Josiah, Jer. 1. 2, took advantage of the opportunity to expand Judah's independence. But, as Babylon began to dominate Mesopotamia, Assyria entered into an alliance with Egypt in 664-525 BC. Egypt tempted Judah to join but Jeremiah's key message is that unholy political alliances are not the way to spiritual security only faithfulness to Jehovah. Jeremiah advised Jehoiakim to accept Babylonian supremacy, believing God was working out His will through the nations, but Jehoiakim ignored him and was killed and cast outside the walls of Jerusalem. Jer. 22. 19.

*‘go down to the p*

‘O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the Lord. Be

The words of Jeremiah came after the reforms of King Josiah, in the days of King Jehoiakim and the final King  
Ch 1 - The prophet called and commissioned | Ch 2 - 45 The prophecies against Judah and Jerusalem |

### Under Josiah

Ch 1 – The prophet is called and commissioned  
Ch 2 – Sermon 1, Israel's past glory but broken cisterns  
Ch 3 – Sermon 2, Jeremiah is sent to backsliding Israel  
Ch 4 – Sound the alarm, return O Israel  
Ch 5 – Israel have overstepped the mark out of bounds  
Ch 6 – Ask for the old paths and walk therein  
Ch 7 – Sermon 3, God's house made a den of robbers  
Ch 8 – The harvest is past, the summer is ended  
Ch 9 – Glory in the Lord but judgement is coming on all  
Ch 10 – Empty customs and signs or the God of truth?

Ch 11 – Sermon 4, breaching the covenant  
Ch 12 – How wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?  
Ch 13 – Sermon 5, Judah's revived relationship  
Ch 14 – Sermon 6, the drought and the lying prophets  
Ch 15 – Calling Moses and Samuel won't avert judgement  
Ch 16 – Sermon 7, Jeremiah is not to marry  
Ch 17 – The heart is deceitful above all things  
Ch 18 – Sermon 8, the potter's house, a marred vessel  
Ch 19 – The potters gate, Israel is a broken vessel  
Ch 20 – The smiting of Jeremiah, delight and despair

### Under Zedekiah

Ch 21 – Sermon 9, against Judah's kings  
Ch 22 – The love of money is the root of all evil  
Ch 23 – Sermon 10, the lies of pastors and prophets  
Ch 24 – Sermon 11, the baskets of figs, good and evil

### Under Jehoiakim

Ch 25 – Sermon 12, the seventy year captivity  
Ch 26 – Jeremiah receives death threats

‘Thus

is mentioned 147 times in Jeremiah more than any other old testament

root out | pull down | destroy |



**Key words:** backsliding / thus saith the Lord / forsake / return **Writer:** Jeremiah

**Abrahamic covenant** - A covenant providing preservation ... *for the planet*. The sign – a rainbow

**Mosaic covenant** - A covenant promising a nation ... *the nation and the nations*. The sign – circumcision

**Deuteronomic covenant** - A covenant providing education ... *the law as a tutor*. The sign – the sabbath

**Davidic covenant** - A covenant promising coronation ... *the kingdom and the throne*. The sign – the throne?

**New covenant** - A covenant proclaiming salvation ... *the forgiveness of sins*. The sign – the cup

'But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people', Jer. 31. 33

'Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called,

**THE LORD OUR  
RIGHTEOUSNESS;**

Jer. 23. 5, 6

**Covenant** with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah', Jer. 31. 31



*'Potter's house', Jer. 18. 2*

'Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand', Jer. 18. 6

## Jeremiah his profile

**His call** – from the priestly city of Anathoth, two miles north of Jerusalem, this young man was called to proclaim a message of doom for forty years to the stiff-necked and backslidden people of Judah and at the same time 'a prophet unto the nations', Jer. 1. 5.

**His commission** – A contemporary of Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Daniel and Ezekiel. His ministry spans 627BC – 580BC when Judah were threatened by Assyria, Egypt and besieged by Babylon.

**His character** – heartbroken and sensitive, he was not permitted to marry and have a family, Jer. 16. 1-4.

**His cry** – Jeremiah's first twelve sermons including his temple sermons, proclaimed coming judgement resulting in death threats and a scroll being burned. He is often called the weeping prophet, his lamentations follow his prophecy mourning for the nation.

**His courage** – Despite being thrown in a pit and beaten up Jeremiah had courage to continue and ended up taken to Egypt against his will, Jer. 43. 6, where it seemed he died around 570BC.

**His covenant** – Jeremiah more than any other prophet is conscious of the broken covenant relationship of the people with God, Il. 1. but reveals there is coming a new covenant written on the heart.

LAMENTATIONS

of Judah - Zedekiah. The book doesn't follow a chronological order but can be broadly divided in four sections:

**Ch 46 - 51 The prophecies against nine Gentile nations** | **Ch 52 - The fall of Jerusalem and exile to Babylonia**

### Under Zedekiah

Ch 27 – A warning against listening to false prophets  
Ch 28 – The fall of Hananiah, a false prophet  
Ch 29 – Letter to the captives, Shemaiah a false prophet  
Ch 30 – Writing a book, the time of Jacob's trouble  
Ch 31 – The new covenant means forgiveness of sins  
Ch 32 – Jeremiah in prison, Is anything too hard for the Lord?  
Ch 33 – Certainty in God's covenants, day follows night!  
Ch 34 – Uncertainty in man's covenants, broken words

### Under Jehoiakim

Ch 35 – Obedient Rechabites, keeping our word  
Ch 36 – Jehoiakim burns God's word but cannot bind it

### Under Zedekiah

Ch 37 – Zedekiah wants it every way, rejecting the word  
Ch 38 – Zedekiah afraid of mockery, trusting the word  
Ch 39 – Zedekiah and Judah carried into captivity  
Ch 40 – Jeremiah returns - the plot to kill Gedaliah  
Ch 41 – Gedaliah killed but Ishmael escapes  
Ch 42 – Egypt is never the answer

Ch 43 – Running from God but Egypt to be smitten  
Ch 44 – God's word against the Jews in Egypt  
Ch 45 – The lesson of Baruch, don't seek position

Ch 46 – The destruction of Gentile Egypt by Babylon  
Ch 47 – The destruction of the Philistines  
Ch 48 – The judgement of Moab - lazy and spoiled  
Ch 49 – Ammon, Edom, Damascus, Kedar, Hazor and Elam  
Ch 50 – The judgement of Babylon – Defeat  
Ch 51 – The judgement of Babylon – Destiny  
Ch 52 – Fall of Jerusalem, God's house burned

**'Thus saith the Lord'**

book. As the nation faces God's judgement it is with the word of God ringing in their ears.

throw down | build | plant (Jer. 1. 10)

by Baruch, his scribe. He, no doubt, knew and had some fellowship with Zephaniah and Habakkuk. One of the remarkable features of his prophecy is, unlike other writing prophets, he 'wore his heart on his sleeve'. He reveals the struggles that he had, even during times of great despondency, 20. 7-9.

### **The book's message for today**

First, Jeremiah teaches us how important it is to be called to specific service for the Lord. He could so easily have 'drifted' into the work of a priest. It would have fitted in to what he knew by growing up in a priestly family, and, probably, it was expected by his family that he would follow this pathway. Indeed, it would have been a much easier track to tread. However, he was sensitive to the Lord's voice and made the life-changing decision to be where He wanted him to be. He challenges us to be exercised about where the Lord would have us to be, and what He would have us to do in service for Him.

Second, Jeremiah inspires us to be faithful in our preaching, whoever the audience might be. His audience ranged from kings on thrones to the ordinary man and woman in the street; however, he never ceased to declare the whole counsel of God. He could so easily have 'tickled people's ears', gone along with the crowd and had an easy life. However, he could have said with Paul, 'For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God', Acts 20. 27. It might not be palatable to people today to preach sin, repentance, and judgement, but Jeremiah teaches us that these are vital ingredients of the Lord's message to rebellious men and women.

Third, Jeremiah's journey through life reveals that 'all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution', 2 Tim. 3. 12. He was abused verbally and attacked physically. Are we prepared for such a journey? We will only be prepared to suffer for him tomorrow, if we are prepared to live for Him today!

Fourth, the word of God is timeless; therefore, the major themes in Jeremiah's teaching are as relevant

today as they ever were. The godless world in which we live needs to hear of a God of judgement, who calls upon men and women to repent, or face the consequences. Believers also need constant reminders of the need to walk in obedience to His word, or else they too will feel His chastening hand in their lives. The call to repentance is not to the sinner alone! Arrogant and proud men and women need to be told, time and time again, that God is in control of the affairs of men. However, the message must always be tempered with grace, mercy and hope for the future for those who walk in obedience to Him.

Fifth, Jeremiah's experiences encourage believers to be honest with the Lord. Like him, we often do not feel 'on top of things' and, on occasions, depression can set in. Jeremiah travelled a lonely path, which was often devoid of fellowship with others. He lived in the real world, and he 'was a man subject to like passions as we are', Jas. 5. 17. However, when he was perplexed and depressed, he took it to the Lord, and found 'grace to help in time of need', Heb. 4. 16. We must do the same!

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# EL SALVADOR

By **KEVIN FLETT**

In April of 2019, we had a national conference in San Salvador to commemorate fifty years of assembly testimony in El Salvador.

El Salvador is the smallest country in continental America, bordering Guatemala and Honduras, with a population just under seven million. We are thankful for what the Lord has done in this small and very populated country over the past fifty years. The following is a bit of history bringing us to the present day.

In 1969, when the Sawords arrived in El Salvador, war had broken out between Honduras and El Salvador. Because of the war between the two countries, all Salvadorans living in Honduras had to leave and return to their native land. There were those that while living in Honduras had heard the gospel, been saved, and were taught the truth of gathering in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Assembly testimony started in the late 1800s in Honduras. Honduran brethren contacted Jack Saword regarding different believers that had moved to El Salvador and desired Christian fellowship. Jack and Craig Saword have several amazing stories of how they found some of these Christians living as refugees scattered throughout El Salvador.

It was not long before at least three assemblies were established in different parts of the country, one in the east, one in the west and one in the centre. Over the next five years, several missionary families and a few single women moved to El Salvador from New Zealand, Canada and the United States. Some moved to the east of the country, others went west and some stayed in the centre. The gospel was getting into areas that not even the Catholic priests would go. My dad, Jack, and others tell of how they would go to some of these places on horseback.

In 1979, political instability began to shake the country, and by 1980 El Salvador entered a twelve-year

civil war. Beginning in 1979, the missionaries began leaving El Salvador and a few years later the only assembly missionaries still in El Salvador were Jack and Ellen Saword and Hazel Brownlie. During the 80s, the assemblies that were planted continued to move forward, but it was not an easy time. As the civil war intensified, several were forced to move into bigger cities and several migrated to the United States and Canada, leaving huge gaps in some of these new works. It was during this time that Craig Saword got his pilot's licence, and a plane was purchased to be able to travel from one end of the country to the other. As the war escalated, all major bridges were destroyed, and it was not safe to try to travel about the country by car. Craig would fly his dad out east, and Jack would try to visit as many of the assemblies as possible before Craig would come back to get him.

Prior to the signing of the peace treaty in 1992, missionaries once again started moving to El Salvador. The assemblies were again visited on a regular basis and the gospel was brought to new areas. As of today, there are twenty-one New Testament Assemblies in El Salvador.

There are several outreaches where the gospel is being preached that have no assembly as yet. Gotera is in the eastern part of the country and Christians from San Miguel and Santa Rosa have been going there on a regular basis for the past few years.

Several have professed to be saved and have obeyed their Lord in baptism. We trust that a New Testament assembly will soon be formed.

Pasaquina, also in the east, is a town where for years different Christians have had some contacts. In January of 2020 we were able to go door to door with John 3.16 texts, calendars, and VIA magazines. During the ten days, we had children's meetings in the mornings and gospel preaching in the evenings. Craig Saword was able to get permission to use the local school for these activities. During the meetings, several of the teachers and the director of the school were in attendance. At the end of the ten days, a building was rented so we could continue preaching the gospel in Pasaquina. By the middle of March, restrictions due to the pandemic were put in place but Christians from the nearby assembly of Los Jotes continued to keep in touch with those that were coming to the meetings. Once restrictions were lifted, preaching resumed in the rented house twice a week. We trust the Lord will continue to work in this town.

The missionaries currently living in El Salvador are Jack Saword, Hazel Brownlie, Helen Griffin, Craig Saword, and Kevin and Patricia Flett. The assembly of San Miguel, in the east, has commended Antonio and Edith Guzman and Raúl Aguirre; in the west, the assembly of El Amatal has commended Mario Cañas, and the assembly of Scandia, in San Salvador, has commended Israel and Elizabeth to full-time service.

*Gospel meeting in Pasaquina*



# THE POWER OF HIS WORD

## Part 2

By **MALCOLM HORLOCK** Cardiff, Wales

This is the second of three articles which focus on the power of our Lord's word. In the first article we considered a few instances of the power of His word over: (i) disease; and (ii) distance. We turn now to the power of His word over:

### iii. Demons

This time, I draw your attention to four cases recorded by Mark where the Lord Jesus 'cast out the spirits with his word'.

#### a) Ask the man with the unclean spirit in the synagogue of Capernaum, Mark 1. 23-27

Listen to the first recorded miracle in the Gospel of Mark:

'And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God. And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace and **come out** of him!' The unclean spirit, having convulsed the man, '**came out** of him'. Mark records, 'And they were all amazed . . . saying . . . with authority . . . commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him'".

#### b) Ask 'Legion', Mark 5. 1-20

The pitiable demoniac named 'Legion' is mentioned along with a fellow sufferer in Matthew's account. But, for our present purpose, we will concentrate on Mark's account. We note that the event took place in the country of the Gadarenes.

Mark records, 'When he saw Jesus from afar, he ran . . . and he cried out with a loud voice and said, "What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God that You do not torment me." for He said to him, "**Come out** of the man, unclean spirit!"' vv. 6-8 NKJV.

As the men of the city came out to see what it was that had happened, they saw the one who had been demon-possessed, sitting and clothed and in his right mind. Their reaction was that they began to plead with Him to depart from their region.

Jesus had only to speak His liberating word to set Legion free, not from his chains and shackles (the man had proved himself adept at doing that without any outside help), but from the demonic powers which 'for a long time' had held him in bondage.

#### c) Ask the father at the foot of the Mount of Transfiguration, Mark 9. 14-29<sup>9</sup>

Even the exceptionally strong demon at the foot of the Mount of Transfiguration was altogether unable to withstand the might of Jesus' word. I say, 'exceptionally strong demon', because the Lord's statement, '**this kind** does not come out except by prayer',<sup>10</sup> singled out **this** spirit as no ordinary, run-of-the-mill demon. This was a particularly nasty, strong and malicious spirit, who had successfully defied the combined attempts of nine helpless and embarrassed apostles to expel it.

But when the Lord came and issued the order, 'mute and deaf spirit, **I** command you, come out of him and never enter him again', v. 25 ESV, the demon 'came out' and it did so 'instantly'!<sup>11</sup>

#### d) Ask Mary Magdalene, Mark 16. 9

'Mary called Magdalene'<sup>12</sup> was one of 'many women' who 'followed Jesus from Galilee'<sup>13</sup> and who 'ministered unto him of their substance'.<sup>14</sup>

But Mary was distinguished from the other women, not only (a) in that she was the first person **to** whom the Lord appeared 'when He rose early on the first day of the week', but also (b) in that, **from** her, He had previously cast out no less than 'seven demons'.<sup>15</sup>

But, if disease, distance and demons were no match for His word, neither was the **devil** himself.

### iv. The Devil, Matt. 4. 1-11; Luke 4. 1-13

When tempting our Lord in the wilderness for forty days,<sup>16</sup> Satan finally came out into the open with his final temptation.<sup>17</sup>

Each of the three recorded temptations was staged at a higher elevation than the one before:

First, our Lord was 'led up' from the Jordan into the wilderness.<sup>18</sup>

Second, He was taken up to Jerusalem and there set on the pinnacle of the temple, several hundred feet above the valley below.<sup>19</sup>

Third, He was transported to 'an exceedingly high mountain',<sup>20</sup> where the tempter showed Him all the world's kingdoms 'in a moment of time'.<sup>21</sup>

Let me attempt a paraphrase of the tempter's gambit, 'There, do you see them? And "all this authority will I give you, and the glory of them: for that is delivered to me; and to whomever I will I give it. If you therefore will worship before me, all shall be yours".<sup>22</sup> To state it simply, if **God** says, "I will give you the heathen for your inheritance"<sup>23</sup> . . . someday, **I** say, "all these things I will give you" and I will give them to you **now!** Yes, I can offer you a short-cut. I can offer you the kingdom on the cheap. Just think of it, to gain the kingdom without facing the cross – to enjoy the glory without enduring the suffering. So, what about it? Go on, worship me!'<sup>24</sup>

And it is at this point that our Lord drew Satan's temptations to an abrupt end with His firm rebuff and sharp rebuke. 'Get . . . hence ["begone", "go"]', Satan'.<sup>25</sup> To which Matthew adds, 'then [no surprises here!] the devil left Him'.<sup>26</sup>

'Go' – one short, pointed word<sup>27</sup> from Jesus was sufficient to expel and banish the overlord of darkness. Just one word from our Lord and the



mighty monarch of evil was on his way!<sup>28</sup>

But, if disease, distance, demons and the devil proved no match for the power of Jesus' word, neither did 'the king of terrors',<sup>29</sup> **death**.

## v. Death

Let us consider three cases where our Lord's word proved more powerful than death.

### a) Ask Jairus and his wife, Mark 5. 21-24, 36-43

Jairus and his wife would never forget the Saviour's all-powerful word addressed to their twelve-year-old daughter – their **only daughter**<sup>30</sup> – addressed to one who had died just a short time before, '**Young woman**, I say to you, arise',<sup>31</sup> and who immediately 'rose up and walked'.

### b) Ask the widow of Nain, Luke 7. 11-16

The widow of Nain would never forget the Saviour's all-powerful word addressed to her **only son** – to one who had died some time before and who was being carried out for burial.<sup>32</sup> '**Young man**, I say to you, arise', and who sat up and began to speak.<sup>33</sup>

### c) Ask the family of Bethany, John 11. 38-44

Neither Mary, Martha nor Lazarus would ever forget the Saviour's powerful word (His 'loud voice') addressed to one who had been dead (not for just a few hours or for some little time but) for four days.<sup>34</sup> 'Lazarus, come out'.<sup>35</sup>

For His commanding word had then battered down the stronghold of death and the grave, and (as John reported), 'the man who had died came out'.<sup>36</sup> Truly, Lazarus had heard the voice of the Son of God and had come out of his tomb, just as one day all men will hear that same voice and come out of theirs!<sup>37</sup>

Noticeably, the Lord Jesus restored (a) Jairus's daughter to her parents, (b) the young man of Nain to his mother, and (c) Lazarus to his sisters.

Make no mistake, all (whether (i) disease, (ii) distance, (iii) demons,

(iv) devil or (v) death) were unable to resist the power of the Saviour's word.

But neither could the **natural elements** withstand the power of His word.

## v. The natural elements

On one occasion, faced with 'a great tempest'<sup>38</sup> and twelve fearful disciples,<sup>39</sup> the Lord Jesus 'arose',<sup>40</sup> and rebuked the winds and the sea'<sup>41</sup> with the words, 'Peace ["hush", "be quiet"], be still ["be muzzled"]'<sup>42</sup>.<sup>43</sup> As a result, the 'great tempest'<sup>44</sup> became a 'great calm'.<sup>45</sup>

All three synoptic Gospels record this incident, and each writer makes his own distinctive contribution:

### a) Matthew, Matt. 8. 23-27

Interestingly, the word rendered 'tempest' or 'storm' in most English translations is the Greek word<sup>46</sup> normally rendered 'earthquake'.<sup>47</sup>

Matthew reports that the 'tempest/ earthquake' was '*in* the sea'<sup>48</sup> (not '*on* the sea'), thereby indicating that there was a 'shaking', a 'movement to and fro'.<sup>49</sup> Seemingly, there was a disturbance below the surface of the lake, a violent movement in the seabed, causing great turbulence above. The trouble, that is, is traced to that which **came up**.

### b) Luke, Luke 8. 22-25

Luke says that 'there **came down** a storm [the word for "a whirlwind" or "a hurricane"]<sup>50</sup> of wind on the lake'.<sup>51</sup>

### c) Mark, Mark 4. 35-41

For his part, Mark describes graphically how 'the waves were beating **into** the boat, so that it was now filling'.<sup>52</sup>

That is, Mark is saying, the waves, churned up by the strong wind, were cascading over the side of the boat and the water level was rising frightfully fast.

### Combining the three accounts

Putting the three accounts together, the evidence is that, on account of (i) that which, according to Matthew, came **up from below**, (ii) that which, according to Luke, came **down from**

**above**, and (iii) that which, according to Mark, came **in from outside**, the disciples were, to use Luke's language, 'in danger'.<sup>53</sup>

But the disciples were 'in danger' only until our Lord's commanding word sounded, to lull the fierce storm to sleep.

Confronted with such a demonstration of Jesus' authority over the natural elements, it is hardly surprising that the disciples posed the question, 'Who then is this?'<sup>54</sup> 'Who', indeed!

In response to the disciples' question, you and I may well recall the words of Ethan's psalm, 'O Lord God of hosts, who is a strong Lord like you? You rule the raging of the sea . . . when its waves rise, you still them'.<sup>55</sup>

In concluding this 'Natural Elements' section, let me remind you that both Moses and Elijah (who later stood with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration),<sup>56</sup> had long before controlled mighty waters.

But Moses had needed his rod<sup>57</sup> and Elijah had needed his robe,<sup>58</sup> and that simply, in each case, to divide the waters.<sup>59</sup> Our Lord needed neither rod nor robe; His powerful word was sufficient, and it was sufficient, not to divide, but to master and control the unruly sea.

## Endnotes

- 1 Matt. 8. 16.
- 2 'Today we might express the same thought by saying, "Why are you meddling with us?"' THOMAS CONSTABLE, *Expository Notes*, on Mark 1. 24. In effect, 'Mind your own business!'
- 3 'Be silent'. This is the word used for muzzling an ox.
- 4 Matt. 8. 28-34.
- 5 'The locale seems to have been in the district controlled by the town of Gadara, near the village of Gerasa', D. A. CARSON, *Matthew (Expositor's Bible Commentary)*, Zondervan.
- 6 'They preferred pigs to persons, swine to the Saviour', D. A. CARSON, *op. cit.*
- 7 Mark 5. 17.
- 8 Luke 8. 27 NKJV.
- 9 Cp. Matt. 17. 14-18; Luke 9. 37-42.
- 10 Literal translation.
- 11 'From that hour', Matt. 17. 18 (literal translation).

[Endnotes continued overleaf] ►

- 12 Luke 8. 2.
- 13 Matt. 27. 55.
- 14 Luke 8. 3.
- 15 Mark 16. 9 NKJV; Luke 8. 2 NKJV.
- 16 Mark 1. 13.
- 17 Matt. 4. 8, 9. My expression 'his final temptation' follows the order of Matt. 4. 3-9, rather than that of Luke 4. 3-12. 'Luke reverses the order of the last two temptations for topographical reasons. Matthew's order is almost certainly original', D. A. CARSON, *op. cit.*, introductory comments on Matt. 4. 1-11.
- 18 Matt. 4. 1.
- 19 Matt. 4. 5; Luke 4. 9.
- 20 Matt. 4. 8.
- 21 Luke 4. 5.
- 22 Luke 4. 6.
- 23 Ps. 2. 8.
- 24 Matt. 4. 8, 9; Luke 4. 5, 6.
- 25 Matt. 4. 10.
- 26 Matt. 4. 11 NKJV.
- 27 Greek, *hupage*.
- 28 Yet the devil left only 'for a season' ('for a time'), Luke 4. 13; cp. Luke 22. 53; John 13. 27; 14. 30.
- 29 Job 18. 14; '*rex tremendus*'.
- 30 Luke 8. 42.
- 31 Mark 5. 41 (literal translation).
- 32 Luke 7. 12.
- 33 Luke 7. 14, 15 NKJV.
- 34 John 11. 39.
- 35 John 11. 43 ESV.
- 36 John 11. 44 ESV.
- 37 John 5. 28, 29.
- 38 Matt. 8. 24.
- 39 'Why are you afraid', Matt. 8. 26; Mark 4. 40.
- 40 Jesus 'arose' from sleep, Matt. 8. 24; Mark 4. 38; Luke 8. 23. When the disciples cried out in the face of the storm, Jesus slept; when Jesus cried out in the face of the cross, the disciples slept, Matt. 26. 40-45; Mark 14. 37-41; Luke 22. 45, 46.
- 41 Matt. 8. 26.
- 42 The word of 1 Cor. 9. 9 and 1 Tim. 5. 18: 'You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain' NKJV.
- 43 Mark 4. 39.
- 44 Matt. 8. 24.
- 45 Matt. 8. 26.
- 46 The Greek word, *seismos*, means 'shaking'; from it we derive the English words, 'seismic', 'seismatic' and 'seismology'.
- 47 The word is rendered 'earthquake' on every one of its thirteen other occurrences in the New Testament.
- 48 Greek, *en to thalassa*, Matt. 8. 24.
- 49 See W. E. VINE, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, Oliphants, the article 'Earthquake'.
- 50 See F. W. DANKER (based on W. BAUER, W. F. ARNDT and F. W. GINGRICH, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, article), pg. 515.
- 51 Luke 8. 23.
- 52 Mark 4. 37 (literal translation).
- 53 Luke 8. 23 ESV.
- 54 Mark 4. 41 ESV.
- 55 Ps. 89. 8, 9 (literal translation).
- 56 Matt. 17. 3; Mark 9. 4; Luke 9. 30.
- 57 Exod. 14. 16, 21.
- 58 2 Kgs. 2. 8.
- 59 Of the Red Sea, Exod. 15. 4, 8; Ps. 136. 13, and the River Jordan, 2 Kgs. 2. 7, respectively.

# The Widows of Luke's Gospel

## ANNA

By **JOHN SCARSBROOK**, Killamarsh, England

The day dawned like any other day for most of Jerusalem's residents. As the sun rose over the ancient hills of Moab to the east of Jordan, its first rays reflected from the gilded pinnacle of Herod's temple, still under construction. The early market traders began to set out their stalls, preparations were being made for the morning sacrifice, and there, as always, in the court of the women, the aged figure of Anna knelt in silent prayer.

Anna was well known to all who regularly visited the temple in Jerusalem. When the daily ceremonials were ended and the priests and Levites had fulfilled their responsibilities, Anna would often still be there with the night watch who stood 'in the house of the Lord', Ps. 134. 1. She was there again as morning broke and the dark shadows receded, taking her usual place as near to the holy sanctuary as the courtyard allowed.

Nobody knew for certain how old Anna was, but they knew she had been a widow for as long as any could remember. Anna had enjoyed married life for just a brief period of seven years before sorrow entered her life while she was still young. She had never married again, but the trials of life through years exceeding the allotted span had not left her embittered. In fact, she had learned to lean upon her God for support, a God who always made provision for the widows. Her dependence had drawn her closer to the Lord, so much so, that He could commune with her and reveal to her His will as to the prophets of old. This she then made known to others of kindred spirit, a remnant who were anticipating Messiah, the Redeemer of the nation.

Anna could trace her ancestry back to Asher, the son of Jacob. Her tribe had been taken captive by the Assyrians and scattered among the other nations; their

identity seemingly lost, with only a few individuals returning to the land of promise. However, they were never out of the mind or the care of a covenant-keeping God, and the blessing given by Moses to the tribe of Asher finds a beautiful echo in the experience of Anna, 'as thy days, so shall thy strength be', Deut. 33. 25.

Heaven had been silent for almost 400 years. Silence from heaven, however, is not evidence of inactivity. Throughout those intervening years the stage was being set for the event so long anticipated by Anna, the birth of Messiah. From small beginnings on the banks of the river Tiber, the power of Rome had arisen to dominate the Mediterranean region and beyond. Unbeknown to Caesar, a greater power was at work. When Augustus issued his decree, 'that all the world should be taxed', Luke 2. 1, to his mind it was doubtless a display of authority; it boosted his ego and his income. The real reason for the decree was to make sure that a carpenter from an undistinguished town called Nazareth, would journey to a town called Bethlehem at just the right time for his young wife to give birth to her first child; the fullness of the time had come!

Anna was not alone in her temple vigil; Simeon was often there. He too would receive direct communication from the Holy Spirit, assuring him that the



appointed time was drawing near. Could it be that together they had read and searched the law and the prophets to learn something of the mind of God? Anna's ancestral homeland was far to the north, reaching almost to Tyre and bordering the sea. But she knew that the fulfilment of heaven's purpose was centred in Zion, the city of God, so she would occupy her time with 'fastings and prayers' in Jerusalem. Anna also knew that the law gave instruction for an offering to be brought forty days after the birth of a man child, Lev. 12. 1-8, and where better to bring an offering but to the temple? Both Simeon and Anna were aware of Malachi's prophecy, where, shortly before he laid down his pen for the final time, he recorded for the benefit of a waiting people, 'the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple', 3. 1. Doubtless this has a yet future fulfilment, but it served as an indication to the faithful ones in Jerusalem that their hopes would not be in vain.

Day by day Anna had watched the visitors to the temple. Now, on this day which had begun with accustomed regularity, Anna's attention was suddenly gripped. Her heart began to beat faster as she strained to hear Simeon's voice. A few others had gathered around him, but his focus was upon a family who by their appearance and dress Anna judged were possibly Galileans from the north of the country. They were certainly not dressed in Jerusalem's finest. She noticed that the man's hands were workman's hands, and he held a small cage in which were two young pigeons for sacrifice, evidence of their limited circumstances.

Anna watched as Simeon gently lifted the babe from His mother's arms. He gazed for a moment at the tiny form, then lifting his eyes heavenward, Anna saw that his face was radiant. He spoke in a reverent whisper, a prayer of thanksgiving. She could not catch it all, but she heard the words,

'mine eyes have seen thy salvation . . . a light to lighten the Gentiles . . . the glory of thy people Israel', Luke 2. 30-32. Suddenly, all the years of waiting, the loneliness, the tears and disappointments slipped from her shoulders, and she found herself thanking the Lord over and over again as the little family tried to take in what they had heard. Then, raising her voice, she addressed those who had gathered around to witness the occasion and to hear the words. Simeon had spoken of salvation, Anna, of redemption. Both were bound up in the bundle of life held in Simeon's arms.

Anna would not live to see the Lord's miracles, or hear His gracious words, but she immediately recognized in this one the fulfilment of all her hopes and she could not help but speak of Him.

Are we as eager to tell others what we know of our Saviour?



# The Finger of God

By **MERVYN WISHART** Newcastle, Northern Ireland

'For they bind heavy burdens . . . and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers', Matt. 23. 4. The Lord Jesus condemned the Pharisees for laying burdens on others that they themselves would not attempt to carry. We still use the expression when someone is unwilling to make even the smallest effort – 'he would not lift a finger to help'.

The references in scripture to the finger of God remind us that God's power is unlimited, and even the smallest exercise of it causes mighty things to happen. 'God is a Spirit', John 4. 24, so references to His finger are metaphorical.

## A demonstration of His power

'Then the magicians said unto Pharaoh, This is the finger of God: and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he hearkened not unto them; as the Lord had said', Exod. 8. 19.

The magicians in Pharaoh's court in Egypt were the first in scripture to speak of 'the finger of God'. The first three plagues had been unleashed on the land of Egypt: the water was turned into blood, 7. 20; frogs covered the land and came into the houses, 8. 5; the dust became lice and afflicted the people and the animals, 8. 16. The wise men of Egypt realized that this was something supernatural; altogether beyond their experience, and certainly beyond their ability to replicate. They expressed their conclusion to Pharaoh, 'This is the finger of God'. Despite the evidence before him of the existence of God and the power of God being demonstrated on such a scale, we are told that 'Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he hearkened not unto them', v. 19.

## An authentication of His Law

'And he gave unto Moses . . . two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God', Exod. 31. 18.

Job spoke of writing with an iron pen (chisel) to cut into the rock, Job 19. 24. The names of the tribes of

Israel were engraved on the two onyx stones, which were carried on the shoulders of the High Priest, 'With the work of an engraver in stone, like the engravings of a signet'; and likewise on the precious stones on his breastplate, Exod. 28. 11, 21.

However, the commandments on the tables of stone were not written with an instrument or tool of any kind, nor as the result of an engraver's skill, but with the finger of God, 'the tables were written on both their sides . . . And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tables', 32. 15, 16. When Moses came down from the mountain and saw the people worshipping the golden calf, 'Moses' anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount', v. 19. 'And the Lord said unto Moses, Hew thee two tables of stone like unto the first: and I will write upon these tables the words that were in the first tables, which thou brakest', 34. 1. God's first word was His final word; the tables of stone could be broken, but God's word remained the same – 'the scripture cannot be broken', John 10. 35.

## A pronouncement of His judgement

'In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaister of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote', Dan. 5. 5.

The setting is Belshazzar's palace in the great banquet hall. One thousand of the most powerful men of his kingdom had assembled for a great feast. The wine was flowing

freely, and, as he tasted it, the king commanded that the holy vessels that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken from the temple in Jerusalem should be brought in, and they would all drink from them, v. 2. To compound this act of sacrilege, as they drank, they 'praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone', v. 4.

Suddenly something happened that dramatically changed the atmosphere in the room. The king saw the fingers of a man's hand writing on the plaster of the wall, clearly visible near the candlestick. The king was physically shaken, '[his] countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him . . . and his knees smote one against another', vv. 5, 6.

When Daniel interpreted the writing, the solemn message was that Belshazzar was 'weighed in the balances, and . . . found wanting', v. 27. His kingdom was ended; the message of judgement, written by the finger of God on the palace wall, was soon to come to pass – 'In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain', v. 30.

## A vision of His handiwork

'When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained', Ps. 8. 3.

On Christmas day 2021, NASA launched into space the largest and most expensive telescope ever made, 'on a mission to study the earliest stars and peer back farther into the universe's past than ever before'.<sup>1</sup> The James Webb Space Telescope cost ten billion dollars to develop. What a contrast there is between men who probe into space, for the most part with no acknowledgement of God, and David the shepherd boy, who gazed into the night sky from the hills of Bethlehem and saw far more than scientists will ever see through their most powerful telescope. Beyond the moon and stars, he saw the Creator of it all and confessed, 'it is the work of thy fingers'.

## A miracle of His healing

'And they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech . . . And he took him



aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue; and looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, *Ephphatha*, that is, Be opened. And straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain', Mark 7. 32-35.

This miracle took place at the sea of Galilee and is recorded only by Mark. A man who was both deaf and dumb was brought to the Lord by his friends. They pleaded with Jesus to put His hand on him. Taking him away from the crowds, the Lord put His fingers into the man's ears, and after spitting He touched his tongue. Then He looked up to heaven and sighed, knowing that the man's condition was the result of sin. He said to the man, 'Ephphatha . . . Be opened. And straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain'. Those who witnessed the miracle 'were beyond measure astonished', v. 37. The incarnate Son of God was at Galilee that day, and His fingers were the fingers of God.

### **An evidence of His authority**

'But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God

is come upon you', Luke 11. 20.

On many occasions the Lord demonstrated His ability to cast out demons. The Apostle Peter recounted what he had witnessed, 'who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him', Acts 10. 38. Mary Magdalene is mentioned in Mark chapter 16 verse 9 as the woman 'out of whom He had cast seven demons', NKJV.

In chapter 5 verses 1 to 20, we read of the man from Gadara who was possessed by an unclean spirit. He lived a life of misery and self-harm, 'always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones', v. 5. The Lord Jesus knew of his plight and crossed the sea of Galilee to meet his need. He said to the demon, 'Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit'. Then He asked, 'What is thy name?' The demon answered, 'My name is Legion: for we are many', vv. 8, 9. The man of Gadara was wonderfully delivered from a multitude of demons. What a transformation! 'And they come to Jesus, and see him that was possessed with the devil, and had the legion, sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind', v. 15.

In Luke chapter 11 verses 14 to 23, the Lord answered those who said that He cast out devils through Beelzebub, the chief of the devils. He reasoned that a divided kingdom could never stand. He had released people from the power of Satan by the supreme power of the Almighty God, with the finger of God – which ought to have been evidence beyond all doubt to them that 'the kingdom of God is come upon you', v. 20.

### **A display of His grace**

'But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not . . . And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground', John 8. 6, 8.

The Lord Jesus had come early in the morning to the temple and sat down to teach. His teaching was interrupted by a group of Jewish religious leaders, scribes and Pharisees, who burst in bringing a woman taken in the act of

adultery. They quoted from Leviticus chapter 20 verse 10, the punishment to fit her crime. They said, 'Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou?' John 8. 5. Had the Lord said, 'She should be stoned', then He would have been charged with advocating that they should break Roman law, for the Jews were forbidden from carrying out capital punishment, 18. 31. If He had answered, 'No, she should not be stoned', then they would have charged Him with undermining the law of Moses. What would He do? How would He answer?

'But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not', 8. 6. We are not told what the Lord wrote, but where He wrote – He wrote on the ground, in the dust. Man was created from the dust of the ground, Gen. 2. 7. In Psalm 103 verse 14, David wrote, 'For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust'. So our Lord stood up and said, 'He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her' John 8. 7. CAMPBELL MORGAN said, 'That one sentence put me out of the stone-throwing business for the rest of my life'.<sup>2</sup>

Then the Lord stooped down a second time and again He wrote on the ground. What a dramatic effect His words had on the band of accusers, 'And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one', v. 9. For the first time, the Lord spoke to the woman, 'where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more', vv. 10, 11. The Lord did not condone her sin, He said 'Go, and sin no more'. He immediately continued His teaching, saying, 'I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness', v. 12. The finger that wrote that morning on the dust of the temple floor was the finger of God.

### **Endnotes**

- 1 See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James\\_Webb\\_Space\\_Telescope](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Webb_Space_Telescope).
- 2 G. CAMPBELL MORGAN, *An Exposition of the Four Gospels*, Oliphants, 1962, pg. 149.



# HEZEKIAH

## The man who opened the doors of the House of the Lord

By **TIM KIMBER** Crawley, Hampshire, England

In the last two years, the doors of many halls have been closed, and public meetings have stopped. Some have drifted spiritually, and even some spiritual leaders have allowed standards to slip. All of these things were true after the reign of Ahaz when Hezekiah, aged 25, inherited the throne of Judah. But what a change he made in the first few weeks of his reign! Hezekiah promptly reversed the spiritual decline that Ahaz had caused. He re-established temple worship, then organized the celebration of the Passover for the first time in many years. Hezekiah was the cause of joy and spiritual confidence, first to the priests, then Levites, the musicians, and the princes of Judah. The subsequent Passover celebration had the same effect among the people of Judah and even among the tribes of Israel.

Hezekiah offers some important lessons in how to lead the people of God out of a spiritual crisis.

### Spiritual decline

‘Ahaz . . . cut in pieces the articles of the house of God, shut up the doors of the house of the Lord, and made for himself altars in every corner of Jerusalem’, 2 Chr. 28. 24.<sup>1</sup>

The priests and Levites followed Ahaz into spiritual decline. They ceased to keep themselves ritually clean, and thus became unfit for divine service. The people of Judah became accustomed to worshipping false gods.

In our own country and society, similar things have happened. Things which ought to be revered have been first neglected, then trampled underfoot. Things are worshipped and celebrated that should instead be condemned. National religious leaders have retreated into compromise and unbelief and have entirely ceased their witness to the truth of God. ‘There is no fear of God before their eyes’, Rom. 3. 18.

In this post-Christian society, maintaining testimony has become

difficult. Genuine believers are now completely out of step with the society and culture in which we live. Sadly, just as in the days of Ahaz, the pressure has been too much for some. Spiritual standards have been forsaken, and testimony has been damaged.

What can a young man like Hezekiah do in the face of such spiritual departure? What can we do in our generation?

### Spiritual example

‘In the first year of his reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the Lord and repaired them’, 2 Chr. 29. 3.

Hezekiah gave priority publicly to the things of God. No doubt there were many other things that Hezekiah could have chosen to do – the reign of Ahaz had been chaotic and disastrous, and the kingdom needed Hezekiah’s leadership. But he put the Lord first, and he did so in the most public way possible. In doing this, he gave a clear signal to all of his servants and to all who served in the temple that the Lord must come first, no matter what else is on the agenda. We sometimes exhort one another to

‘be an example to others’. It is worth remembering that we **are** an example to others, for better or worse. We may have struggled spiritually during the pandemic. Perhaps spiritual routines and standards have slipped. Hezekiah is an example of how to be an example. Let us all (young or older) take the advice of 1 Timothy chapter 4 verse 12, ‘Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity’.

### Challenge and encouragement

Hezekiah did not work alone. He challenged and encouraged the Levites who had abandoned their spiritual duties, ‘Hear me, Levites! Now sanctify yourselves, sanctify the house of the Lord God of your fathers, and carry out the rubbish from the holy place’, 2 Chr. 29. 5. Hezekiah understood that spiritual restoration was impossible without sanctification. He urged the Levites not to be negligent, but he also set before them a positive spiritual ambition, ‘My sons, do not be negligent now, for the Lord has chosen you to stand before Him, to serve Him, and that you should minister to Him and burn incense’, v. 11. It would have been easy to write off these men as spiritual failures, but Hezekiah recognized that by God’s grace they could be the leaders of the recovery. He challenged them about their own lifestyle, but then he gave them a spiritual work and a vision for their spiritual future.

It is not difficult to identify fellow believers who are not performing their spiritual duties as they should. But how can we motivate them to recover? Spiritual men and women can follow Hezekiah’s pattern, combining words of challenge with words of hope and encouragement. Even faithful believers can lapse, but their greatest work might still be ahead of them if they respond again to the call of God.

### A heart for the people

Hezekiah could have stopped after the first sixteen days. He had already sanctified the house of the Lord, restored the priests and Levites to their proper offices and led them in a ceremony of national repentance.



He could have said, 'I've provided the impetus, now it's up to the spiritual men to take over'. But his real desire was not yet fulfilled. Like David before him, Hezekiah shared the Lord's desire to shepherd the whole nation. The work in the temple was necessary but not sufficient, because it reached only the priests and the Levites.

It is at this point that Hezekiah's stature is revealed. He wanted to call the nation to celebrate the Passover, but there were serious spiritual obstacles to this. First, the entire first month had been occupied with cleansing the temple – but Passover ought to be celebrated in the first month. Second, only a few priests had consecrated themselves, whereas a national feast such as the Passover required many priests to serve at the altar.

Many in Hezekiah's position would say, 'The time has not come', Hag. 1. 2, and turn to urgent secular matters like restoring the military or rebuilding the nation's broken

finances. But Hezekiah saw that the people of God had forgotten that they were redeemed by blood and separated to God. The Passover was essential, or recovery would stall.

### **A call to gather again**

'So they resolved to make a proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beersheba to Dan, that they should come to keep the Passover to the Lord God of Israel at Jerusalem, since they had not done it for a long time in the prescribed manner', 2 Chr. 30. 5.

The people of God had not gathered to remember for a long time! Our own memories of the pandemic are still painful to recall, and we can easily imagine the effect of this on the spiritual health of the nation. But notice the spiritual ambition of Hezekiah. This is not a call to Judah only. It is a call to the entire nation. The proclamation reads like a gospel message, 'Now do not be stiff-necked, as your fathers were, but yield yourselves to the Lord; and enter His sanctuary, which He has sanctified

forever, and serve the Lord your God, that the fierceness of His wrath may turn away from you', v. 8. Hezekiah had vision – he longed to see the people of God gathered together to sacrifice, to serve, to worship together. No king had ever attempted such a thing, but Hezekiah believed that God was able to do it.

At this point, it is enough simply to rejoice in the record of scripture. Did God reward the faith of Hezekiah? 'So the children of Israel who were present at Jerusalem kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with great gladness; and the Levites and the priests praised the Lord day by day, singing to the Lord, accompanied by loud instruments. And Hezekiah gave encouragement to all the Levites who taught the good knowledge of the Lord; and they ate throughout the feast seven days, offering peace offerings and making confession to the Lord God of their fathers. Then the whole assembly agreed to keep the feast another seven days, and they kept it another seven days with gladness', vv. 21-23.

I hope your heart was uplifted as you read those words. What an occasion it must have been! What glory for God, and what joy for Hezekiah and all the godly men and women who had endured the reign of Ahaz.

As the doors of our halls have opened again and invitations begin to go out into the surrounding communities, let us learn from Hezekiah. What kind of example are we showing to our fellow believers? How great is our faith, and how large are our hearts? Our initial efforts may seem small but let us take encouragement from Hezekiah. If we begin by putting the Lord first, publicly and visibly, then we may inspire others to do the same. We may begin by simply opening the doors. But later we may have the joy of welcoming in all who need the Lord, regardless of whether they have ever been reached before.

### **Endnote**

- 1 All quotations are taken from the New King James Bible.



# A brief look into the death and burial of Jesus Christ

## Mark 15. 33-47

## Part 1

By **DEJICE JACOB** Bridge of Weir, Scotland

### Introduction

If the timeline of human history is imagined as an hourglass, the crucifixion of Christ would be the pinch point, the narrow part in the middle. All human history and biblical prophecy points to the death of Christ on the cross. The dispensation of grace flows and expands outwards from this singular point in time. God's merciful justification of the human race, His eternal plan of salvation and redemption flow outwards from this singular point in history to encompass every person, land and era.

Up to this point in the narrative, Mark points to the physical suffering, the mockery, and the hatred of men. Men had done their worst, physically and mentally, to vent their hatred at the Lord Jesus Christ. They wanted to weaken, humiliate, and destroy Him and His gospel. Now, the punishment heaped upon the Lord turns to the moral dimension and His bearing of our sins in His own body on the tree.

A very large proportion of Old Testament prophecy looks forward to the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the narrative now, the sheer concentration of prophecies and scripture fulfilled is worthy of mention. In the death and burial of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Gospels confirm the fulfilment of prophecy seemingly in every other verse! As we go through Mark chapter 15, fulfilled prophecy is woven into the narrative.

### The darkness

Man had committed the worst atrocities against the only begotten Son of God Himself, not recognizing that He was dying on their behalf.

Man's cruelty was already felt in His physical suffering, the taunts of men and His humiliation. Now, it was going to get much worse for the Lord Jesus. There was darkness over the whole land for three hours.

What a perfect, holy, morally upright God's wrath against sin meant for His Son, was unseen even by those at the foot of the cross. This was an act of mercy on God's part. The people at the cross would include the women who so dearly loved and followed Him. You could imagine that they did not need to see the agony of their beloved Christ suffering for their sins. However, even His enemies would not be able to bear the sight.

The three hours of darkness symbolizes a withdrawal of God's light and favour. The cold, hard reality of abandonment would be experienced by Christ. Christ Himself is referred to as 'the light', John 8. 12, and 1. 4, 5. The 'holy, harmless, undefiled' one, was bereft of the warmth and comfort that follows from the perfect unsullied relationship with God. It also signifies to the people around who were witnessing that they were putting to death and extinguishing the 'light of the world'.

The Israelites would be bereft of the warmth of their relationship with God. The darkness had already been prophesied, 'And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord God, that I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day', Amos 8. 9. The Israelites would know from their founding history, that while they were slaves, God delivered them marvellously from Egypt. The immediate precursor to the plague that set them free was

the plague of thick darkness of three days. The stubbornness of Pharaoh would ensure that the plague of darkness would be followed by the plague of the death of the first-born. Israel should have been ecstatic about the arrival of Messiah, the Son of the living God. Instead, their actions and hard heartedness caused them to lose the only begotten. SPURGEON says, 'Observe that when He was born, midnight turned to midday, and when He died midday turned to midnight'.<sup>1</sup>

It should be remembered that the punishment borne by the Lord Jesus Christ during the darkness was in addition to the physical and mental agony that He was already facing. It was not as though any of the previous pain or torment had stopped and this was a new torment. In addition to what man inflicted, the wrath of an absolutely holy God against the 'sins of the whole world', 1 John 2. 2, past, present and future was being visited upon the one who was daily His delight and the one who was in the bosom of the Father. This includes the very sinful actions that were at that very moment being perpetrated. The sheer magnitude of grace shown towards man can be seen in this – Christ was facing the righteous wrath of God against the injustice of the crucifixion which was being perpetrated against Himself! As the centurion said, 'Truly this . . . was **the** Son of God', v. 39.

### The cry

At the ninth hour, Christ cried 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani . . . My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' v. 34. This is an echo of abandonment from Psalm 22, and another reminder from scripture about what was prophesied.

This was not just muttered under His breath. This was a clear, loud voice to be heard by all standing at the site. They would all know that the Saviour felt alone and abandoned. We have no record of anguish from the Lord Jesus Christ when He was abandoned by all on His journey to the cross. Judas had betrayed Him. Peter had denied Him. His disciples had run away. His earthly family did not believe Him (until later). 'My lovers and my friends stand aloof from my sore; and my kinsmen stand afar off', Ps. 38. 11.



He was not only abandoned by the judicial system and the priestly class, but they also actively took part in crucifying Him. However, during all these times we do not have a record of Him expressing His abandonment.

God is a God of absolute justice. 'In him is no sin', 1 John 3. 5. Yet here we see Him hanging on the cross, being made a curse for us. The wages of sin is death, enmity, and exile from God Himself. It was surely of utmost difficulty for Him to be abandoned in such a manner. But here at the cross we see that Christ feels that God Himself has abandoned Him. 'The Redeemer was left *alone* with the sinner's sin'.<sup>2</sup> In quoting Psalm 22, Christ lets us have a glimpse into the torment of His soul. Lamentations chapter 1 verse 12 states, 'Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger'.

Surely, we would struggle to know how to answer such a question. As happens so often today, people would talk about the injustice of God not intervening in the unjust punishment of a righteous man. If anyone was able to question why He was abandoned, it would be Christ. Yet, we see the psalmist in Psalm 22 acknowledging the greater good that would come from this abandonment. Psalm 22 verse 3 states that God is holy. The overall objective in the redemption plan of God is also mentioned in this Messianic psalm, vv. 25-31. Christ

has already acknowledged this and is putting His Father's plan into action, and, in the process, willing to be forsaken by His God! Hallelujah, what a Saviour!

It is interesting to note the time He uttered these words. It was uttered at the ninth hour, after the three hours of darkness and loneliness. While going through dark times and difficulty, if a person has a scintilla of hope or any knowledge that he/she will get through this stage, he/she will soldier on, fight and persevere. It is when there is no hope and no chance that anguish completely overcomes a person. The Lord is omniscient. He knew that He had 'power to lay it down, and . . . power to take it again', John 10. 18. He knew He would rise up again and He said so to others. And yet it is interesting that Christ did not utter this cry at the beginning of the period of darkness but at the end of the period of darkness. His task was almost complete. He knew it and yet, the weight and effect of His separation and the punishment that He had endured at the hands of a righteous God compelled Him to cry these words out.

### The thirst

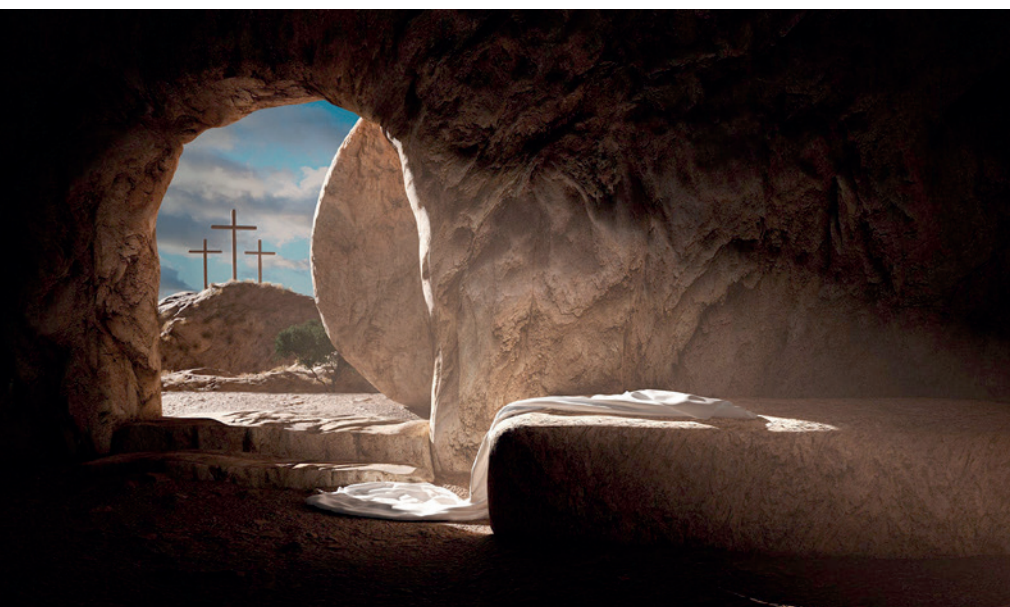
The darkness and the prophecies fulfilled had so far failed to move the hard hearts of those around the cross. The crowds mocked Him, saying He called for Elijah. Although it is John that records the words 'I thirst', Mathew and Mark record the fact that He was given a drink. At least out of sympathy for a dying man, a

sip of water to a tortured, dehydrated man would have comforted Him. Yet they chose to further humiliate Him. However, it was prescient in further fulfilling prophecy, Ps. 69. 21.

We can understand the state of His physical thirst, His tongue would cleave to His jaws, Ps. 22. 15. Christ would not use His omnipotence to slake His thirst. He had already told Satan that 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God', Matt. 4. 4. The humiliation of Christ was immense. Here is the one who would create water, divide the waters and walk on water being made a sorry spectacle; pinned to a cross with men taunting Him with vinegar. Think of the acidic vinegar touching His parched, broken and bloodied lips. When they heard Him, they mocked Him saying that this was a call for help from Elias. WRIGHT alludes to the prophetic power through which the Lord was unveiled to the world. He says, 'Just as Elijah challenged the powers of darkness to the great contest, in which the god who answers by fire was to be God, so now Jesus takes on the rulers of the world; the might of Rome, the law of Israel and behind both, the usurping and destroying power of Satan'.<sup>3</sup> It is ironic that they should invoke the history of Elijah in this context. The priests and the scribes were cold hearted and putting to death their Messiah and Saviour. Their homage and worship of God was through mechanical and superficial adherence to the law. It was not the sacrifice of the chief priests and scribes that pleased God. Instead, God was pleased with the sacrifice of Christ. Just as fire fell and consumed completely the burnt offering on Mount Carmel, the offering on Calvary was the sacrifice deemed acceptable by God. It was also a rejection and repudiation of the Cain-like sacrifice of the religious leaders of the day.

### Endnotes

- 1 C. H. SPURGEON, Sermon 3471, *Spurgeon's Sermons Vol. 61*, Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, 1915.
- 2 A. W. PINK, *The Seven Sayings of the Saviour on the Cross*, Baker Books, 2005.
- 3 T. WRIGHT, *The Crown and the Fire*, SPCK, 2009.



# 2 Thessalonians

## Chapter 3

By **PETER DAVIES** Swansea, Wales

### Introduction

We have now come to the last chapter of this second Epistle. In the two previous chapters, Paul has written about the subject of the two comings of our Lord Jesus. He now concentrates their minds and hearts on what they must do while they are waiting.

### Call to prayer, vv. 1-5

These are his last words to them, 'pray for us', and for the work of the Lord, 'that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you', v. 1. This great man of God yearned for the prayers of his children in the faith. What a challenge to us! He wants them to pray specifically that he, and his fellow workers, might have liberty to preach the word. David wrote, 'for You have magnified Your word above all Your name. In the day when I cried out, You answered me, and made me bold with strength in my soul', Ps. 138. 2, 3 NKJV.

Paul reminds them of the hostility they will have to face continually, 'from unreasonable and wicked men', v. 2. For, he says, 'all men have not faith'. What a challenge! Are our prayers mingled with faith? Do we believe our God hears and answers our prayers? 'For he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him', Heb. 11. 6 NKJV. But, then, he encourages them by reminding them that, 'the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil', v. 3. He also speaks of the confidence they have in the Lord who strengthens them and he concludes this section by praying that the Lord would direct their hearts 'into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ', v. 5. There is no greater source of strength and comfort than to know that we are loved of God, and that soon we

are going to be in the presence of Christ.

### Command to propriety, good behaviour and morals, vv. 6-15

He opens this section claiming authority from the Lord Jesus Christ for what he has to say, 'we command you, brethren', v. 6. He is now giving very clear instruction as to how they are to react to every brother who behaves in a disorderly way. He is challenging them not only to hold fast to what they have been taught, but to follow what they have witnessed in Paul and his companions, v. 7. It seems that some had not taken heed to what Paul had written in his first letter, 'study to be quiet . . . do your own business . . . work with your own hands . . . walk honestly toward them that are without', 1 Thess. 4. 11, 12. Paul reminds them that he did not look to anyone to feed him or minister to his needs, 2 Thess. 3. 8. He had given them an example to follow, v. 9.

However, even though he had commanded them when with them, v.10, there were some who were not working, but were busy-bodies, v. 11. How true that the devil has plenty for idle hands to do. So, he commands and exhorts them again, 'that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread', v. 12. He then goes on to encourage the rest to continue in doing good and not to grow weary. But he gives a solemn warning that if they find any who refuse to obey the instruction given, then they must 'note that

man', v. 14, and keep no company with him. They are not to treat him as an enemy but to admonish him as a brother, v. 15. How patient our Lord is.

### Commendation of peace, vv. 16-18

He opens this last section by requesting that 'the Lord of peace himself give you peace', v. 16. The word for peace here is the word for unity, or concord. 'Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!' Ps. 133. 1. What a happy people we would be if we were in the good of this. It is a gift from the Lord, v. 16. And He wants us to have it always, in all circumstances. It comes when we are enjoying the presence of the Lord, 'The Lord be with you all'. Would it not be wonderful if all the people of God were enjoying the daily presence of the Lord? What a witness that would be to those around us.

What a tremendous source of strength that would be to us in every circumstance of life.

The reference to 'The salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle', v. 17, some believe, was that, after dictating the letter, he would take the pen, or quill and add his signature. Others think that it is his final words written here, 'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all', v. 18. For he would know that without the supply of that daily grace not one of us would be sustained through our journey here. There is a throne of grace before which we are encouraged to draw near with boldness in order that we might obtain mercy for our sins and shortcomings and find grace to help us in every time of need. How wonderfully our Lord has prepared for us in our pilgrimage here below. May the Lord encourage us to keep looking for His coming and looking to Him for the grace and daily help we need during these dark and difficult days. 'For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry', Heb. 10. 37.



# The Twelve Apostles

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

Three times in the Gospels and once in the book of the Acts we have a record of the apostles. Much has been considered why these men were selected from a larger number, Luke 6. 13. We must remember, however, that the Lord spent all night in prayer beforehand and, although we are not told what He prayed for, surely the burden of His heart was that the right choices might be made in His selection the following day. We recall the words of the Saviour to Peter, 'but I have prayed for thee', 22. 32. Having prayed for them, in the twelve were potential for the future, and they were to be sent by the Lord personally, Matt. 10. 5. Then, in a limited way, His commission to them was to go further afield, 28. 19, 20. In this meditation I want to draw out of each passage a simple truth that was for the twelve but also a challenge for us today.

In Luke chapter 6 verses 12 to 16, having continued all night in prayer to God, in the morning, out of a larger group, 'he chose twelve', v. 13, and their names are given. Not one of them was powerful or influential. They were just ordinary men from various backgrounds and occupations, but they became the foundational apostles, Eph. 2. 20.<sup>1</sup> The Lord **chose them**. He said to His disciples, in His farewell ministry, 'Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you', John 15. 16.<sup>2</sup> What a thought! From all the millions in the world, and in all humility, He has chosen us to follow Him. As MCCHEYNE wrote, 'Chosen not for good in me'.

In Mark's account of the calling of the disciples,<sup>3</sup> he records, 'that they

should be **with him**', v. 14. The Gospels record many occasions when the Lord was with His disciples. For some three years, they watched and listened in on His movements, messages and miracles. Perhaps the stand-out incident is that of which Peter wrote, 'when we were **with him** in the holy mount', 2 Pet. 1. 18. Such occasions should have an impact upon us. Peter's associations were noted, 'Did I not see thee in the garden **with him**?' John 18. 26. Again, with John, and in a better context, 'they took knowledge of them, that they had been **with Jesus**', Acts 4. 13. Perhaps the words of CROSBY might be applied to us, 'I must have the Saviour with me for I dare not walk alone'. What a joy to know that the Lord's aim is that we will be with Him

through all eternity, 'Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be **with** me where I am', John 17. 24.

In Matthew's account of the call of the disciples,<sup>4</sup> they were 'sent forth', v. 5. The mission given to them at this time was restricted but when the Lord ascended the instruction to them was widened, Matt. 28. 19, 20. The disciples were to go out into all the world, Acts 1. 8, as ambassadors for Christ, 2 Cor. 5. 20. The Greek word, *apostello*, means 'one sent forth with orders [a commission]'.<sup>5</sup> That commission is still ours today and to fulfil it with our Lord's help and enabling. He empowers and equips those called.

The last time we read of the apostles together is in Acts chapter 1 verses 13 and 14. Having committed suicide, Judas Iscariot is missing, and he is replaced later by Matthias, v. 26. Luke points out something that we should not overlook, 'These all continued', v. 14. In chapter 2 verse 42, as the company expands, the three thousand souls '**continued** stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers'.

As disciples in the 21st century, the question that should be asked of us is, 'are we continuing in the things of the Lord?' Some of the exhortations in the New Testament are: 'continue ye in my love', John 15. 9; 'continue in the faith', Col. 1. 23; 'Continue in prayer', 4. 2; 'continue thou in the things which thou hast learned', 2 Tim. 3. 14. Over all of these, we might write, 'Let brotherly love continue', Heb. 13. 1. It is good to start well, to continue well and to finish well!

May we, His followers in the 21st century, rejoice that He has chosen us, sent us forth as He leads, and that we will be with Him. May He enable us to persevere till the end of the journey, until He comes or calls.

## Endnotes

- 1 Judas Iscariot excepted; nor were they the only foundational apostles.
- 2 And, again, 'but I have chosen you out of the world', v. 19. See also Eph. 1. 4.
- 3 Found in Mark 3. 13-19.
- 4 Found in Matthew 10. 1-5.
- 5 J. THAYER, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, e-sword resource.



# What is thy beloved more than another beloved?

## Part 4

By **ANDREW BENNETT** Sound, Shetland

### His legs

‘His legs are as pillars of marble, set upon sockets of fine gold’, S. of S. 5. 15.

As we have thought about these verses, we have noted the use of fine gold. We saw it with the head. We saw it with the hands and now we see it in the legs. But these legs ‘are as pillars of marble set upon sockets of fine gold’. We have a picture of strength, stability and security.

When we think of the person of Christ we have the same strength, stability and security. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews reminds us, ‘And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; And as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail’, 1. 10-12. He is unchanging. In a world that is changing day by day, how comforting to know that the Lord changes not. We can rest on that fact. Our Beloved remains the same. Again, we see security here – something that we can place our faith in. This is One who we shall see and gaze on at length.

### His countenance

‘His countenance is as Lebanon’. The mountains and the cedars of Lebanon tower above all their fellows in the region. The bride spoke in verse 10 about him being the ‘chiefest’, or the standard bearer, and we can see this again here. The language that is used would speak to us of the dignity, majesty and greatness of Christ. KEIL AND DELITZSCH wrote, ‘His look, i.e., his appearance as a whole, is awe-inspiring, majestic, like Lebanon, the king of mountains; he (the

praised one) is chosen, i.e., presents a rare aspect, rising high above the common man like the cedars, those kings among trees’.<sup>1</sup>

‘Excellent as the cedars’. Think of the word ‘excellent’ for a moment. When we think of Christ we have that repeated phrase, ‘a more excellent name’, Heb. 1. 4; ‘a more excellent ministry’, 8. 6; ‘a more excellent sacrifice’, 11. 4.

We can meditate on One who has a more excellent name, for in the future day He will be given that ‘name which is above every name’, Phil. 2. 9. Here is One who had a more excellent ministry, One who finished the work that He was given to do. No other called of God could that be said of. We can also think upon One who offered a more excellent sacrifice, ‘one sacrifice for sins for ever’, Heb. 10. 12.

### His mouth

‘His mouth is most sweet’. To the casual observer it might be suggested that this is repetition of what has already been said.



However, it is not. When we thought of the lips, we thought of the words, or the speech and the language of the Saviour. When she speaks of the mouth she is speaking of the palate, the sense and faculty of tasting. The image here is of one who desires, and delights in those things that are sweet and pure.

The Song began with the bride’s request, ‘Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth’, S. of S. 1. 2. She has desired to know sweet intimacy with the beloved, and he desires the same sweetness in her. It is exactly the same with Christ and His bride.

As the section closes, she runs out of language and her vocabulary is exhausted. She sums him up by saying, ‘He is altogether lovely’; all of him is desirable. She cherishes every thought of him and every aspect of his person. Indeed, she might say with Peter, ‘To you therefore who believe is the preciousness’, 1 Pet. 2. 7 JND.

Sadly, the nation of Israel’s present view is given by Isaiah, ‘as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him’, Isa. 53. 2.

In contrast, the Shulamite has spoken of the loveliness of his head, his locks, his eyes, cheeks, lips, hands, inwards, legs, countenance and mouth. She has brought out in symbolic language something of the purity, passion, person, pathway, permanence, pity, and his presence. In doing so, we have been brought to think of the Saviour’s preciousness to God and to His people. We have thought of His power and we shall see His ultimate pre-eminence.

In a sense, we pray that the world might ask the words that open the next chapter, ‘whither is thy beloved gone . . . that we may seek him with thee’, S. of S. 6. 1. We want to follow after Him as you do!

### Endnote

- 1 C. F. KEIL and F. DELITZSCH, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, e-Sword resource.



# WORD FOR TODAY

By **BRIAN CLATWORTHY** Newbury, England

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**ekkleio** (To shut out)

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**ekklēsia** (Assembly, congregation, church)

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**ekklino** (To turn aside, deviate)

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The Greek noun *ekklēsia*, used in the New Testament and translated as the words ‘assembly, congregation or church’,<sup>1</sup> has been highly influenced by its use in the Septuagint (LXX). As BARR states, ‘It is the special use of *ekklēsia* in the Septuagint that gives the New Testament its technical term for the Church’. The noun *ekklēsia* occurs over 100 times in the New Testament and was taken, centuries before, into the vocabulary of the Septuagint (LXX) to translate the Hebrew word *qahal*, meaning an assembly of people.<sup>2</sup> It was also in common use in the ancient Greek world prior to the birth of the New Testament, but its later use in respect of the word ‘church’ has distinguished the word for all time.

In ancient Greece, the word *ekklēsia* referred to the summoning of an army or the assembly of Greek citizens enabling them to discuss and debate political and other matters within a Greek city state – see Acts 19. 39. These assemblies, which met in an open space known as the ‘agora’, had significant executive powers within the Greek state and made critical decisions in time of war and, generally, were responsible for policymaking within the city. BARCLAY states, ‘It is interesting to note that the Roman world did not even try to translate the word *ekklēsia*; it simply transliterated it into *ecclesia* and used it in the same way; To Greek and Roman alike the word was familiar in the sense of a convened assembly’.<sup>3</sup> Some scholars argue that the etymology of the word *ekklēsia* suggests that citizens were literally called or summoned out of the general population of the city or out of their houses by the herald’s trumpet to assemble, cp., the summoning of Israel by the sounding

of silver trumpets, Num. 10. 1-10. By parallel reasoning, it could also be argued that the use of ‘church’ in the New Testament to translate the word *ekklēsia* similarly refers to those who have been called out or transferred. As LIGHTFOOT writes, paraphrasing Colossians chapter 1 verse 13, ‘We were slaves in the land of darkness. God rescued us from this thralldom. He transplanted us thence, and settled us as free colonists and citizens in the kingdom of His Son, in the realm of light’.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to the Hebrew word *qahal*, the synonym *edah* was also used to describe the congregation of Israel, as in Psalm 74 verse 2 where it refers to God’s ‘congregation’. However, when the translators of the Septuagint (LXX) came to describe the assembly of God’s people, they made a distinction between *qahal* and *edah* by translating the former by *ekklēsia* and the latter by *synagōgē*.<sup>5</sup> This change of emphasis has been put down to Judaism’s preferred use of the latter term to describe the place of its religious gatherings, i.e., the synagogue. Uniquely, though, by its use of the word *ekklēsia*, the church now assumes a separate identity from

Israel, and this important distinction is sustained in the New Testament and for ever. It also emphasizes the fact that the church is no longer restricted to an ethnic group but is universal in its comprehensiveness by including both Jew and Gentile alike. DEISSMANN states, ‘The first scattered congregations of Greek-speaking Christians up and down the Roman Empire spoke of themselves as a “(convened) assembly”; at first each single congregation was so called, and afterwards the whole body of Christians everywhere was spoken of collectively as the “(convened) assembly”. That is the most literal translation of the Greek word ἐκκλησία. This self-bestowed name rested on the certain conviction that God had separated from the world His “saints” in Christ, and had “called” or “convened” them to an assembly, which was God’s assembly, “God’s muster”, because God was the convener’.<sup>6</sup>

The word *ekklēsia* for *qahal* in the Septuagint (LXX) can be seen in the Book of Deuteronomy to describe various assemblies of the children of Israel. In chapter 4 verse 10, Moses reminds the nation that God had gathered, or assembled, them at Horeb so that they might understand the importance of hearing and obeying His word, i.e., the Decalogue, v. 13. It is used in a technical sense in chapter 23 verse 2 to emphasize



that the assembly or congregation of Israel belonged to the Lord with prescribed rules of admission, cp. Judg. 20. 2. So, in a very short circumference of texts, the assembly of Israel becomes ‘the Assembly of the Lord’, which gives it then theological meaning. Solomon blessed the whole congregation of Israel as they assembled before him at the dedication of the temple, 2 Chr. 6. 3, and Ezra refers to the congregation of those who had returned from exile, Ezra 10. 8. The word is used in the Septuagint (LXX) in Psalm 25 (26) verse 5 to describe an assembly of evil men that the psalmist disassociates himself from as he seeks to live uprightly before God.

As we move into the New Testament, the word *ekklēsia* has been translated by several English words such as, ‘church’, ‘assembly’ or ‘congregation’.<sup>7</sup> It is necessary, therefore, to look at the various contexts in which the word appears to decide whether the writer is referring to the whole body of believers as the church, or to a local assembly or congregation of believers. This distinction is evident from the word’s initial use in the New Testament. It only occurs twice in the Synoptic Gospels and provides us with a foundational statement that the church would be built upon Christ Himself, Matt. 16. 18. This first mention refers to the complete body of believers from Pentecost to Christ’s second coming. The second occurrence, however, of *ekklēsia* in Matthew chapter 18 verses 15 to 17 refers to a local assembly or congregation of believers as they exercise their collective and considered judgement in respect of a dispute between two believers following their private disagreement. This jurisdictional procedure has its background in Deuteronomy chapter 19 verses 15 to 20 and the assembling of Israel.

Moving then beyond the Synoptics, *ekklēsia* occurs throughout the book of Acts, mainly referring to local assemblies of Christians, 9. 31; 13. 1; 20. 17. But one reference stands out from the rest where

*ekklēsia* is used by Stephen in his defence before the Jewish authorities. Here he refers to the *ekklēsia* or assembly of Israel in the wilderness, Acts 7. 38, again confirming the correlation between *ekklēsia* and *qahal*.

Paul often uses the word in a comprehensive and universal way, but he too makes the clear distinction in his letters between the entire church, 1 Cor. 12. 28, and local congregations or assemblies, 1 Cor. 11. 16; Gal. 1. 2. For Paul, the whole church is not an institution or an organization, or for that matter a new synagogue, but:

- A spiritual building and the house of God with Christ as its head, Eph. 2. 20-22; Col. 1. 18; 2. 19.
- An organism consisting of many limbs interacting in unity with each other, yet one unique body in Christ, 1 Cor. 12. 12; Rom. 12. 5; Col. 1. 24.
- An unprecedented demonstration of the variegated wisdom of God, hidden in Himself, and ordained in Christ before the foundation of the world, Eph. 3. 9-11.
- A realm of blessing which has been established through the death of Christ, Eph. 5. 25-27, and where Christ continues to work on earth through His redeemed people, Matt. 28. 19, 20.

As to the local church, W. E. VINE makes an important point when he states, ‘The word *ekklēsia* is never used in the New Testament in the singular number to embrace all the believers in a country, or district, or the churches in any locality’.<sup>8</sup> It is clear therefore in the New Testament, that local congregations, or assemblies,<sup>9</sup> are stand-alone autonomous entities, but, nonetheless, share in the common life of the whole church of God.<sup>10</sup> These assemblies recognize the supreme Lordship of Christ,<sup>11</sup> are guided by local elders, Acts 20. 28; 1 Pet. 5. 1-4, and exercise

spiritual gifts for the edification of the body of Christ, Eph. 4. 12.

Lack of space prevents us from developing this study further. However, the great hope of the church is the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. This dynamic hope is anticipated every time local assemblies observe the weekly remembrance of the Lord in the breaking of bread, 1 Cor. 11. 26. May we, as members of His body, ever cry, ‘Even so, come, Lord Jesus’, Rev. 22. 20.

### For further reading/study

#### Introductory

‘*Ekklēsia* – The Church of God’ in WILLIAM BARCLAY, *New Testament Words*, John Knox Press, pp. 68-72.

#### Advanced

QUAHAL – *ekklēsia* in JAMES BARR, *The Semantics of Biblical Language*, Wipf and Stock, 2004, pp. 119-129.

### Endnotes

- 1 JAMES BARR, *The Semantics of Biblical Language*, Wipf and Stock, 2004, pg. 119.
- 2 I. H. MARSHALL states that the word *qahal* is translated by *ekklēsia* on 73 out of 123 occurrences, *New Wine in Old Wine-Skins: V. The Biblical Use of the Word ‘Ekklesia’*, pg. 360.
- 3 WILLIAM BARCLAY, *New Testament Words*, John Knox Press, pg. 69.
- 4 J. B. LIGHTFOOT, *The Epistle to the Colossians*, pg. 139.
- 5 The word *synagōgē* occurs over fifty times in the New Testament and is usually identified as a place of Jewish worship, Matt. 6. 2; Mark 13. 9; Acts. 6. 9; 17. 1. After the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in AD 70, the synagogue became the main centre of Jewish worship and communal activity.
- 6 ADOLF DEISSMANN, *Light from the Ancient East*, Hodder and Stoughton, 1911, pg. 112.
- 7 Tyndale controversially translated *ekklēsia* as ‘congregation’ rather than ‘church’ in his 1526 New Testament. He argued that the use of the word ‘church’ gave credence to the medieval church, which he viewed as essentially corrupt. Whether he would have taken the same view once the Reformation had been established in England is a moot point.
- 8 W. E. VINE, *The Church and the Churches*, Precious Seed Publications, pg. 55.
- 9 ‘The word “assembly” is perhaps the best single term, particularly as it has both a concrete and an abstract sense, i.e., for the assembling as well as the assembly’. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Vol 1), pg. 397.
- 10 Acts 2. 42-47; 1 Cor. 15. 9; Phil. 3. 6.
- 11 Eph. 4. 5; 1 Cor. 12. 3; Rev. 1. 11-20.



## QUESTION

**What should our attitude be towards environmental issues such as climate change?**

## ANSWER

To answer this question, let us first consider why this is such an important issue today. In the autumn of 2021, at the opening of the COP26 summit on climate change in Glasgow, Scotland, the well-known physicist and TV presenter Professor Brian Cox delivered the following introductory comments: 'imagine that the earth is the only place in the galaxy where intelligent life exists . . . the only place where collections of atoms as old as time have come together into improbable patterns that can think and feel and bring meaning to an otherwise meaningless universe . . . we must consider ourselves and our world to be inconceivably valuable'.

These words encapsulate both the concerns and yet the confusion underlying the powerful global movement we currently see at work to save the planet. They acknowledge that planet earth is a unique place containing the precisely-tuned conditions necessary for life to exist. For example, the average temperature on earth is that required for the oceans and rivers to exist in liquid form. The words also reveal the critical importance of the earth to a world that does not take account of its Creator or that does not have eternity in view. To this world, planet earth is all there is. Hence, it must be entirely invested in securing the future of the earth to ensure its own survival.

But what should our view be as Christians? Is saving the planet a legitimate concern? As with many other subjects, the Bible provides a holistic view prompting a balanced perspective. We see the bigger picture. Let me give you three reasons why we **should** be concerned about the planet, and three reasons why we should not be **overly** concerned about the planet.

### Reasons to be concerned about planet earth

- **Reason 1:** 'The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof', Ps. 24. 1. This earth belongs to God. It is His work of creation and hence does not belong to us. For this reason, and this reason alone, we should take care of planet earth.
- **Reason 2:** Adam was given dominion over the created world and appointed as head over it at the beginning of creation, Gen. 1. 26; Ps. 8. 6. Adam lost that dominion when sin entered the world. Climate change and the pollution of the planet result from the abject failure of fallen humanity to carry out the responsibility entrusted to them. Motivated by selfishness and greed, we have squandered the earth's precious resources.

Yet the responsibility to care for the planet, along with the life found within it, is a task we are still entrusted with.

- **Reason 3:** We are clearly instructed in the scriptures to 'be subject unto the higher powers' since 'the powers that be are ordained of God', Rom. 13. 1. In fact, the Bible informs us that authorities are 'minister[s] of God to thee for good', v. 4. If our governments set laws, for example to control emissions and limit pollution, we should obey them, especially since, in general, authorities aim to do good.

### Reasons not to be overly concerned about planet earth

- **Reason 1:** God is in control of this world with its climate and seasons. God gave His promise to Noah, 'while the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease', Gen. 8. 22.
- **Reason 2:** Our home is in heaven and not here on earth. Paul reminded the Christians at Philippi, 'For our conversation [citizenship] is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ', Phil. 3. 20. We should, therefore, set our 'affection on things above, not on things on the earth', Col. 3. 2. Spiritual and heavenly matters should be the focus of our efforts in generating the greatest impact here and in eternity.
- **Reason 3:** We know what the future holds for this earth. In the short term, we know that the planet is headed for the devastation of the tribulation period which will include cataclysmic changes affecting this world's climate, salt and freshwater systems, animal and human life.<sup>1</sup> Ultimately, therefore, the efforts of this world to reverse climate change will prove futile. The capability to restore this world to Eden-like conditions rests alone upon the One to whom the title deeds of the earth belong, Rev. 5. 9. The Lord Jesus Christ will personally restore the planet when He returns to the world at the beginning of the Millennium. Finally, we read of the very elements of this universe melting in fervent heat, 2 Pet. 3. 10-13. We 'look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness'.

#### Endnote

- <sup>1</sup> See the description of the seven seals, Rev. 6. 1-17; 8. 1-5, seven trumpets, Rev. 8. 6 - 9. 21; 11. 15-19, and seven vials, Rev. 16. 1-21.

# The Committee

Chairman and General Editor:

**JOHN BENNETT**

19 Alfreton Road, Pinxton,  
Nottingham NG16 6JZ

Treasurer:

**MICHAEL BUCKERIDGE**

PO Box 10544, Grantham NG31 0HW

Secretary:

**JOHN SCARSBROOK**

34 Metcalfe Avenue, Killamarsh,  
Sheffield S21 1HW

Ministry Articles Editors:

**BRIAN CLATWORTHY,**

**SANDY JACK**

YPS:

**STEPHEN BAKER**

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

Other Trust Members:

**Jonathan Black, Andrew Dutton,  
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*All committee members can be contacted at  
[secretary@preciousseed.org](mailto:secretary@preciousseed.org)*

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## PreciousSeed

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'I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house top', Ps. 102. 7. 

### 'I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house top', Ps. 102. 7.

The sparrow is one of our most familiar wild birds, and said to be found on every continent except Antarctica. It is perhaps most noticeable because its life is intertwined with our own, being found around most houses and conspicuous on bird feeders. Scripture reflects the fact that it is common as the Lord used it by way of example. Two sparrows were sold for a farthing, Matt. 10. 29, but, for a 'bulk purchase', five sparrows could be purchased for just two farthings, Luke 12. 6. However, though they might appear almost worthless in human terms, 'not one of them is forgotten before God'. Indeed, according to Matthew's account, their actions are noted in heaven.

The lesson we might learn from the sparrow is the value of life. When it came to human valuation, the sparrow was virtually worthless, but not to God. If God notes the fall of the sparrow, what value does He put, and should we place, on human life? These scriptures challenge the concepts of assisted dying, abortion, and euthanasia.

But in the verse before us, we find 'a sparrow alone upon the housetop'. Is it not unusual to find such a bird in its natural habitat and yet alone? It is a picture of extreme loneliness and isolation, of desolation and affliction, as the title of the psalm declares. Indeed, many see this as a Messianic psalm detailing 'the complaint of "the Man of Sorrows"', J. G. BELLETT, *Short Meditations on the Psalms*.

However, here we might also learn that the Lord's people are not strangers to difficulties or immune from sorrow and pain. In such extremities, many could identify with a smitten heart and bones that cleave to the skin. For others, victims of their own failure, they feel the heaviness of the hand of God upon them, v. 10. Whichever may be the case, we should meditate upon the 'But thou' references in this psalm, vv. 12, 27, and remember God's mercy, v. 13, His attention to the prayers of His people, v. 17, His eternity and His immutability, v. 27.

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