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'The way of an eagle in the air', Prov. 30. 19.



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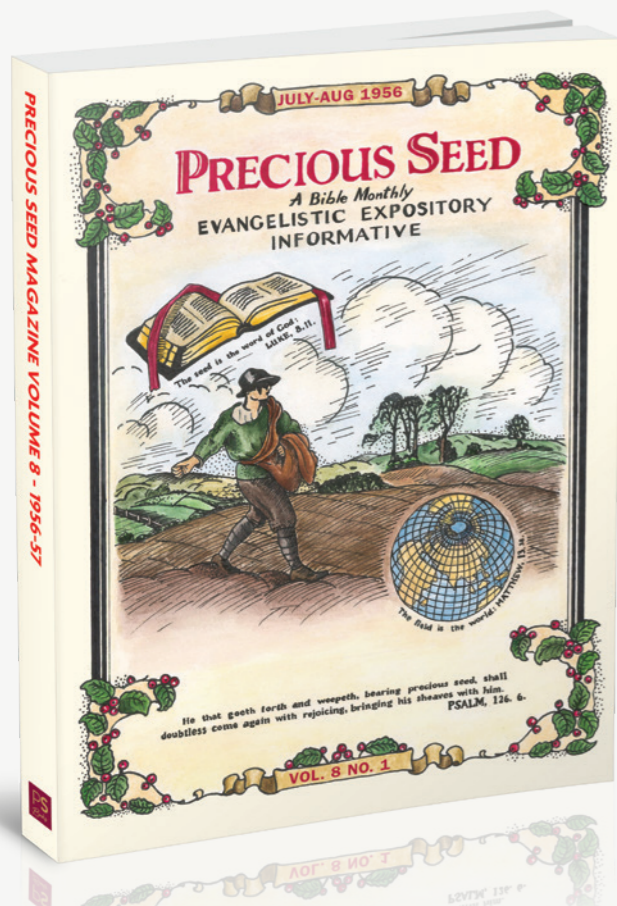
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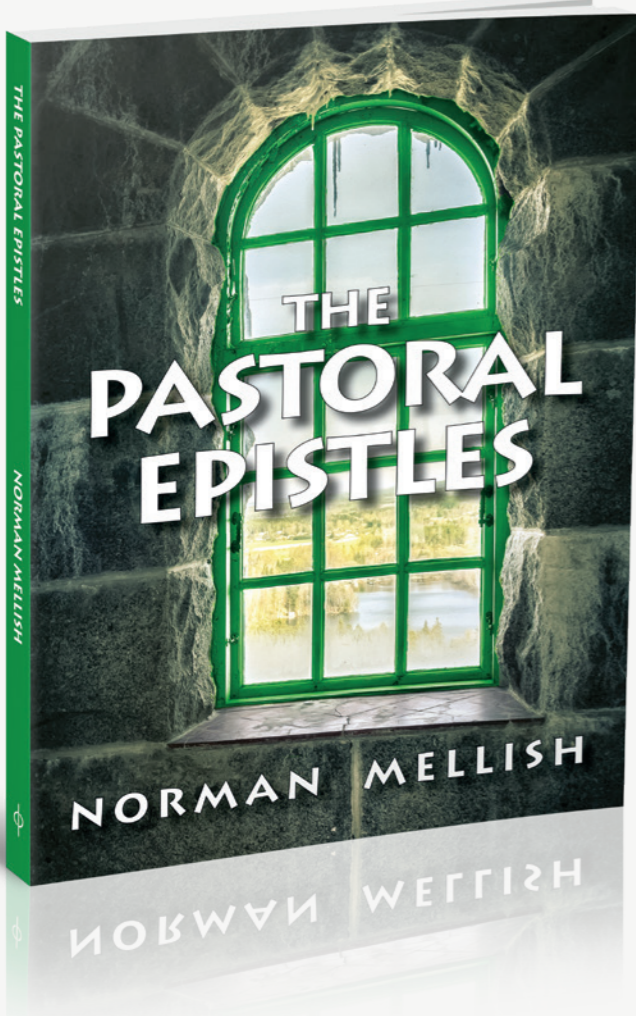


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# Book Reviews



**Christian Experiences and Spiritual Growth** Winston G. Litchmore  
161 pages, Paperback. Published by Austin Macauley Publishers, 1 Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5AA. ISBN: 978-1-398467-89-7

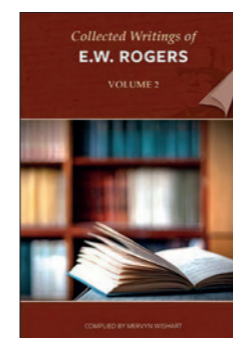
Winston Litchmore and his wife served the Lord as missionaries in their native Jamaica for twelve years. Since 2018, they have been in fellowship with the assembly at Kirkby in Ashfield, Nottinghamshire. This book is clearly born out of a desire to encourage believers of all ages to grow and progress in their Christian life. The chapter headings present basic and fundamental subjects commencing with 'Who is a Christian?', and, building from there, on the importance of Baptism, Fellowship, the Scriptures and Prayer. Attention is also given to any practical and challenging aspects of the Christian life.

A number of subjects are presented in tabular form to show the comparison between a particular truth as seen in the Gospel records or the Epistles. Throughout the book, each topic and subject are fully endorsed with scripture references which the reader is encouraged to consider. Also included by the author are several reflections of personal experience.

This reviewer would see the book as an ideal gift to one newly converted, or on the occasion of their baptism. For one who is determined to 'grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ', 2 Pet. 3. 18, these chapters will

give much encouragement and provide a foundation of teaching to build upon.

There is no doubt that the author and his family have proved the value of these fundamental principles of scripture and have a desire that others too may benefit from their experience.



**Collected Writings of E. W. Rogers - Volume 2** Compiled by Mervyn Wishart  
412 pages, Paperback. Published by John Ritchie Ltd, 40 Beansburn, Kilmarnock, Scotland. ISBN 13: 978-1-914273-16-2.

We are grateful to Mervyn Wishart for undertaking the work of compiling a second volume of the writings of E. W. Rogers. The first volume was reviewed in Precious Seed Vol. 75, issue 2 in 2020 and is available to view on the Precious Seed website.

This publication commences with a comprehensive and appreciative foreword by Jim Allen, in which he recalls his own memories of 'E. W.' from the time he first heard him, an Englishman no less, taking part in the Lurgan conference in 1946!

Notwithstanding his nationality, Mr. Allen, together with many others, learned to value the ministry

of E. W. Rogers, not just in his home country, but further afield in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and India.

Brief but instructive subjects have been included in this volume, together with more detailed studies of Matthew's Gospel, the Epistle to the Ephesians, the Pastoral Epistles and the Epistle to the Hebrews. A survey of this book cannot fail to appreciate the Christ-exalting quality of the ministry, whether it is the Sovereign as seen in Matthew's Gospel, or the Great High Priest of the Epistle to the Hebrews. There is truth to encourage the believer in the exposition of the Ephesian letter, and practical words

to challenge in the Pastoral Epistles.

It may be that some readers already have in book form much of the material included in this volume. However, to have them bound and well presented, as in this current publication, may allow those books already owned to be passed on to others with an interest in the word of God.

## ‘Now some are puffed up’, 1 Cor. 4. 18

Despite the centuries that have now passed since the KJV translation came into existence, it is interesting that many more modern translations have retained ‘puffed up’ in the text of this verse. It is an excellent description of a problem endemic in the Corinthian church – pride and arrogance caused by inflated egos. Whilst it would be easy to condemn the situation at Corinth, we should pause to consider the damage that has been done to Christian testimony in the 21st century by the same issue. The warning given by the apostle later in this Epistle is timely, ‘Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall’, 10. 12.

However, as certain groups in society take ‘Pride’ as their mantra, and we are all encouraged to develop our self-esteem, it is important for us to appreciate the dangers of such a path. In chapter 4 verse 6, Paul reminds his readers of the dangers of following a particular person, in this case Paul or Apollos. Apollos might be the orator who can persuade his audience by his grasp of language and powerful argument, but, says the apostle, what

ability he had was given to him by God. Similarly, the apostle’s dramatic conversion and perceived learning should not single him out in any way. Our spiritual gifts are no basis for arrogance.

As we come into chapter 5, we see another issue – immorality. Rather than view this dreadful matter from the divine standpoint and appreciate the damage it was doing to the testimony, the Corinthians were glorying in it, v. 6. To them, it was a symbol of their tolerance and enlightenment. Down through the ages of Christian testimony, different forms of sinful behaviour have become accepted on the same principle – tolerance. Let us learn the lesson that a casual attitude to what the Bible calls sin is a recipe for spiritual shipwreck.

As we grow in our spiritual lives and progress in our study of the scriptures, we should gain a greater understanding of the word and ways of God. That knowledge should inform and shape our behaviour. Nevertheless, our personal liberty does not sanction a disregard for the sensitivities of others.

Chapter 8 emphasizes that ‘knowledge puffeth up’, v. 1, but love seeks the spiritual welfare and progress of others – ‘charity edifieth’! It is a principle repeated in chapter 10, ‘all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. Let no one seek his own, but each one the other’s well-being’, vv. 23, 24 NKJV, cp. Phil. 2. 3, 4.

In that context, it is good to remind ourselves of what the apostle also says about true biblical love, ‘love does not parade itself, is not puffed up’, 13. 4 NKJV. Indeed, this verse commences a list of seven verbs that indicate how love does **not** behave. If love is to be a true fruit of the Spirit, Gal. 5. 22, we need to exhibit its characteristics, and pride is not one of them!

As we look back over the past year, we would like to thank our readers for their continued support. Looking forward, and seeking to live for God in challenging times, let us all avoid worldly influences and ideas.

**JOHN BENNETT**  
General Editor

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# The Son of Man

By **BRIAN CLATWORTHY** Newbury, England

## Part 2

For the sake of ease, these eighty-four self-references can be clustered into three main groups of texts:

### Cluster 1

This is concerned with the work and activities of our Lord as the Son of Man on earth. These texts reinforce the idea that our Lord was not only part of the human race, i.e., He exercised the normal functions of a human being, but above and beyond that He shows Himself to have an authority that is supramundane. In other words, it is only God who can forgive sin, and ultimately save those who are spiritually lost.

See Table 1.

These texts clearly suggest that when Jesus used this title within this cluster, the synoptic writers understood Him to mean **Himself**.

### Cluster 2

This is concerned with the sufferings and resurrection of the Son of Man. These texts highlight the fact that the Son of Man had to suffer and die to fulfil Old Testament prophecy, and that His subsequent resurrection confirms that He is eternal.

See Table 2.

There are other texts that could be included here, Mark 9. 12; 10. 33. These texts suggest that not only did Jesus use this title about Himself, but others recognized His claim.

### Cluster 3

This is concerned with the future glorification of the Son of Man. These texts act as the glue to cement all the other claims that He was truly the Son of Man.

See Table 3.

There are other texts that could be included here, Mark 13. 26; 14. 62.

These texts suggest that the statements being made, especially

we find that it reveals significant agreement with the synoptic sayings concerning the title 'Son of man'. For lack of space we have only included a small number of texts in the table below. What John's narrative also reveals to us is a filling out of the title of 'Son of man'. Never think that the Gospel writers simply straight-jacketed themselves. For example, most people suggest that John's main purpose is to emphasize the title 'Son of God', but actually he emphasizes both titles.

Matthew chapter 26 verse 64, confirm our Lord's claim to be the eternal world ruler predicted in Daniel chapter 7 verses 13 and 14 – **'The Son of man'**.

When we turn to the Gospel of John,

**Table 1**

Text	Synoptic parallels	Context
Mark 2. 9, 10.	Matt. 9. 6; Luke 5. 24.	<b>Authority to forgive sins</b> Dispute with the religious leaders who <b>must</b> have recognized that Jesus was claiming this title for Himself.
Mark 2. 26-28.	Matt. 12. 8; Luke 6. 5.	<b>Authority to be Lord of the Sabbath</b> Dispute again with the religious leaders who <b>must</b> have recognized that Jesus was claiming this title for Himself.
Matt. 11. 18, 19.	Luke 7. 33-35.	<b>Human activity</b> Our Lord speaks to the crowd about the identity of John the Baptist. John lived ascetically and was falsely accused. Our Lord is accused of eating with publicans and sinners, rather than strict separation from sinners.
Matt. 8. 19, 20.	Luke 9. 57, 58.	<b>No settled dwelling place</b> Our Lord explains to a scribe the true cost of discipleship. His self-disclosure as Son of Man <b>reveals</b> the heavenly nature of His calling.
Matt. 12. 31, 32.	Mark 3. 28, 29; Luke 12. 10.	<b>Authority to forgive sin</b> Another dispute with the religious leaders who, again, <b>must</b> have recognized that Jesus was claiming this title for Himself.
Matt. 13. 36, 37.	None	<b>Identification of the sower with the Son of Man</b> Our Lord both plants the seed and directs the harvest. These activities are exclusive to God in the Old Testament so the inference from the title is that He is God/God's Messiah.
Luke 19. 9, 10.	None	<b>The earthly mission of the Son of Man</b> This statement about salvation reflects God's self-description in Ezekiel chapter 34 verse 16.

### John's witness

See Table 4.

There are a number of other texts that could be included.<sup>1</sup>

**Table 2**

Text	Synoptic parallels	Context
Mark 8. 31.	Luke 9. 22.	<b>The Lord's death predicted</b> The fact that Peter rebukes the Lord for His statement shows that he understood that Jesus was the Son of Man.
Mark 9. 9, 10.	Matt. 17. 9.	<b>The resurrection predicted</b> The majesty of the transfiguration was a glorious foretaste of the kingdom of the Son of Man.
Mark 9. 31.	Matt. 17. 22, 23; Luke 9. 44.	<b>A second prediction of the Lord's death</b> Our Lord clearly identifies Himself with the title Son of Man.

**Table 3**

Text	Synoptic parallels	Context
Mark 8. 38.	Matt. 16. 27; Luke 9. 26.	<b>Follows immediately after the prediction of the Lord's death</b> A clear statement of identification by the Lord that He is the Son of Man. Slight echoes of Daniel, chapter 7 verses 13 and 14.
Matt. 26. 62-64.	Mark 14. 60-62; Luke 22. 69.	<b>The statement before the council</b> The High Priest and the council would have been in no doubt that our Lord was identifying Himself as the Son of Man in Daniel chapter 7 verses 13 and 14. This is why they then accuse Him of blasphemy, and, in their view, He deserves death.

**Table 4**

Text	Synoptic parallels	Context
John 3. 14.	None	<b>Part of the discussion with Nicodemus</b> This refers to how Christ would die, confirming the synoptic emphasis on the sufferings of the Son of Man.
John 5. 27.	None	<b>Dispute over healing on the Sabbath</b> Dispute again with the Jewish authorities over the healing of the paralysed man on the Sabbath day. Although the narrative has more to say on the title 'Son of God', it is significant that the reference to the title 'Son of man' resonates with Daniel chapter 7 verse 14.

These texts suggest that the statements being made not only confirm the synoptic sayings, but also expand upon the title 'Son of man' as to His pre-existence, the source of His authority and His ultimate destiny. This is all within the ambit of John's theological perspective.

Drawing the threads together, when our Lord Jesus used the title 'Son of man' it was because He thought of Himself in terms of the heavenly Messiah formulated from the imagery of Daniel chapter 7 verses 13 and 14. That, in our view, is the only way in which you can properly understand this title. It is not simply to emphasize His perfect humanity, but to make us conscious of the fact that the 'Son of man' is a heavenly person who will one day rule this world in equity and righteousness. In the words of ISAAC WATTS:

'Great God, whose universal sway  
The known and unknown worlds obey,  
Now give the kingdom to Thy Son,  
Extend His power, exalt His throne'.



### Endnote

<sup>1</sup> John 1. 51; 3. 13; 6. 27, 53, 62; 8. 28; 9. 35 ESV; 12. 23, 34; 13. 31.

# Pauline metaphors Slavery and Manumission

By **BRIAN CLATWORTHY** Newbury, England

Part 4

Even though we have seen public demonstrations against those individuals and institutions that have benefited in the past from the slave trade, slavery remains an ugly feature of most societies in the 21st century.<sup>2</sup> The institution of slavery has featured in many civilizations,<sup>3</sup> some dating back into antiquity, including the Roman Empire, where it was an integral part of the Roman way of life. It has been estimated that a quarter of the people living under Roman rule were slaves, and the historian FINLY once observed, that 'Romans could not imagine a civilized existence to be possible' without slaves.<sup>4</sup> While this does not justify any form of slavery, which remains an unacceptable human institution, there was a vast difference between slavery in the ancient world and later periods in history, especially in America. As MALINA and PINCH state, 'Ancient slavery was not based on race, for example, one could become a slave by being born into slavery, being captured in war, falling into debt, selling oneself [or family members] into slavery'.<sup>5</sup> In fact, slaves in the Roman Empire could obtain freedom much more quickly than in later periods of history and many were well educated, often holding important positions within a Roman household. This, then, was the world of the New Testament where Christianity flourished despite Roman imperialism and a slave economy.

Perhaps we should ask ourselves what is a metaphor? A metaphor is by its very nature a literary technique or an aid to the perception of a truth – it helps us to 'get a handle' on a truth. But always beyond the metaphor there lies a reality that is, critically, far more important than the metaphor. Using metaphors, therefore, enables Paul to point us beyond the physical to that which is spiritual and of eternal value, 2 Cor. 4. 18.

Paul's use of the noun 'slave', *doulos*, both literally<sup>6</sup> and metaphorically<sup>7</sup> throughout his letters is not without significance. He lived in a world where slavery was not only a fact of life but many of his fellow believers were either slave owners or slaves.<sup>8</sup> Paul's letter to Philemon is perhaps the classic example of such a relationship. The power of ownership in a Roman household meant that slaves were part of the property rights of the head of

the household. Slaves could be bought and sold with impunity, but frequently the slave was put in a position of authority over the master's household and would reflect his status and authority. The release of a slave or manumission was also a common feature in Paul's world and both the institution of slavery and manumission provided Paul with two significant metaphors that he uses to provide us with positive Christian teaching in this context.

Paul uses the metaphor of the slave-market in Romans chapter 6 verses 15 to 23, where he compares the Christian life before and after conversion. Before conversion, and irrespective of ethnicity, Rom. 3. 9, we were, by nature, not only in service to sin, 5. 21; 6. 6, 12, but were slaves of sin; we could not exercise freedom, and sin was our legal master, v. 14. Whatever our master required of us, we complied with and had no power to resist. We were unable to free

ourselves or buy our way out of this state of bondage. But, as believers, we have been set free in Christ, we therefore no longer place ourselves at the disposal of sin, v. 16. The consequence of serving a new master means that we now place ourselves at the disposal of righteousness, v. 16. As CRANFIELD writes, 'The Roman Christians have been freed from the slavery of sin and made slaves of God; and they must act accordingly and not try to combine incompatibles'.<sup>9</sup> This idea of being slaves to God, however, should not be understood as meaning that we now serve God slavishly or that we slave for Him. In fact, the freedom from the tyranny of sin that we now enjoy in Christ means that instead of serving God as slaves, we now serve as sons in a filial relationship with Him through Christ.<sup>10</sup> Paul also makes it quite clear that the result of bondage to sin is death, vv. 21, 23; Jas. 1. 15, but our slavery to God means the beginning of holiness in our lives and ultimately eternal life, Rom. 6. 22.

Depending on a slave's circumstances, there was even the possibility of earning money in some Roman households. The Roman philosopher SENECA records the following comment in this context, 'He is but a slave; his wage is five measures of grain and five denarii'.<sup>11</sup> Paul sees this analogy when he states that not only were we slaves to and of sin in our unregenerate state but the ultimate wage that sin paid to us was death, v. 23.

The question that then arises is how have we been freed from the tyrannical slavery of sin? How have we changed or exchanged masters? In the Greco-Roman world, a slave became the possession of a new master either by inheritance, because the former master had died, or by being sold on the open market. Paul uses the language of both when he describes our change of ownership. This interchange of masters took place when a ransom price was paid for us by Christ through His death upon the cross.<sup>12</sup> Through Christ we have become dead to the tyranny of sin and been transferred into God's ownership.<sup>13</sup> We were purchased from the slave market of sin by

being 'bought with [or at] a price', 1 Cor. 6. 20; 7. 23. Slaves were often branded to identify ownership, and we too have been marked out as belonging to Christ. Metaphorically, Paul argues that the brand marks, *stigmata*, or scars that he acquired as a Christian, Acts 14. 19; 2 Cor. 11. 25, confirmed that he belonged to Christ. These were to be contrasted with the old covenant marks of Jewish circumcision, which were now redundant, Gal. 6. 17.

The metaphor of manumission, or the release of the slave by a ransom payment, is then applied by Paul to our freedom in Christ. The manumitting of slaves was common in the ancient world so this principle would have been well understood by the recipients of Paul's letters.<sup>14</sup> Since

the price for our release has been paid, 1 Cor. 6. 20, we are now called to freedom in Christ, Gal. 5. 1, 13; Jas. 1. 25. This means in practice that we are expressly forbidden to be under a yoke of bondage again,<sup>15</sup> but to exercise liberty in Christ. As Paul reminded the Galatians, this liberty is not to be confused with licence, Gal. 5. 13-18. The evidential proof of this liberty in Christ would be seen in bearing the fruit of the Spirit, the produce of an inherent energy of a living organism.<sup>16</sup> There is **no** prohibition (law) from God to prevent this abundant harvest – Gal. 5. 23!

When our Lord raised Lazarus from the dead, He told those around the tomb to 'Loose him and let him go', John 11. 44. Such is now our freedom in Christ!



'Make me a captive, Lord,  
and then I shall be free;  
force me to render up my sword,  
and I shall conqueror be'.  
(GEORGE MATHESON)

## Endnotes

- 1 The act of freeing slaves by their owners was termed 'manumission' from the Latin word meaning to free a slave. Manumission is a legal release from slavery where slavery is permitted by law. This is contrasted with the term 'emancipation' which is the act of releasing slaves after slavery has been abolished.
- 2 Although the government introduced the Modern Slavery Act in 2015, the recent publicity surrounding the trafficking of Mo Farah shows that it remains an unacceptable part of UK society.
- 3 According to WAYNE MEEKS, 'the literature on ancient slavery is enormous' [*The First Urban Christians*, f.67 on page 20].
- 4 M. I. FINLY, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology*, Brent Shaw, 1980.
- 5 BRUCE MALINA and JOHN PINCH, *Social-Science Commentary on the Letters of Paul*, Fortress Press, pg. 397. The Hebrew maid who gave such good advice to Naaman, became a slave in Syria following one of their military incursions into Israel, 2 Kgs. 5. 2.
- 6 He uses the word literally of slaves in various letters throughout the New Testament, e.g., 1 Cor. 7. 21-23; Gal. 3. 28; Phil. 2. 7; Col. 3. 11, 22; 4. 1.
- 7 Metaphorically, among other texts, in Rom. 6. 16, 17; 7. 6; Gal. 4. 7-9, 25; 1 Thess. 1. 9; Titus 3. 3.
- 8 Eph. 6. 5-9; Col. 3. 22 – 4. 1, cp. 1 Pet. 2. 18-25. 'God provided laws and judgments to monitor the institution of slavery. Still more dignity accrues to the status of being a slave in NT times if we consider the 'household duties' passages of Ephesians 5. 21-6.9 and Colossians 3. 18-4.1, where the very placement of slaves in lists with other family members suggests that their status was that of members of the household'. LELAND RYKEN, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, IVP, 1998, pg. 797.
- 9 C. E. B. CRANFIELD, *Romans*, The International Critical Commentary, Volume 1 I-VIII, T & T Clarke, pg. 321.
- 10 Rom. 8. 14, 15; Gal. 4. 7; 1 John 3. 1.
- 11 Moral letters to Lucilius/Letter 80(7). In an earlier epistle he had argued that slaves and the free born are ultimately equal (47.10). Paul, however, reflects the spiritual significance of this equality in 1 Corinthians chapter 7 verse 22.
- 12 Mark 10. 45; Eph. 1. 7; 1 Cor. 15. 3.
- 13 Rom. 6. 6, 7, 11-13; 7. 1; Col. 1. 13.
- 14 See the comments of ADOLF DEISSMANN at pp. 323-325 (*Light from the Ancient East*).
- 15 Gal. 5. 1; 1 Cor. 7. 23; 1 Tim. 6. 1.
- 16 'Like the Grapes of Eshcol carried by the spies; it is the produce of another land borne from across the seas', HAROLD ST. JOHN (in ROBERT LEE, *The Outlined Galatians*, Pickering and Inglis, pg. iv).

# PAUL'S THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY

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

Part 1

## Overview

Paul's first missionary journey consisted of a loop passing through Cyprus into southern Turkey, a region called Asia in the New Testament, then returning to Antioch in Syria. Paul's second missionary journey commenced with strengthening the young Christians in Asia that had been saved on his first journey. This was followed by a wider sweep into the areas of Macedonia and Achaia, in modern-day Greece, where he pioneered evangelistic efforts in that region. For Paul's third missionary journey, the focus was to consolidate God's work carried out on the first and second journeys with less pioneering gospel work being carried out. This third journey highlights the value of the slow and steady work of building up and encouraging God's people, especially new believers. Hence, the journey begins in Acts chapter 18 verse 23 with a single verse, no doubt summarizing extensive efforts, where we read that Paul, 'went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia [regions in Asia visited on the first and second journeys] in order, strengthening all the disciples'.

Many of the verses covering this third journey record Paul's stay of two to three years at Ephesus, Acts 18. 24 – 20. 1. He had visited Ephesus briefly on his second journey, 18. 18-21, and left Aquila and Priscilla, promising that he would return soon. Paul's extended time at Ephesus was followed by some visits to confirm and encourage the Christians in Macedonia and Achaia (called Greece here), 20. 1-5. Although brief (less than fifty days, compare chapter 20 verse 6 and chapter 20 verse 16) the return leg of this third journey is described in some detail in chapter 20 verse 6 to chapter 21 verse 17. Paul is compelled to make it to Jerusalem in time for the feast of Pentecost despite repeated warnings that he would face intense persecution and incarceration on his arrival.

Since the scriptures focus on Paul's time at Ephesus, we shall review this in detail in the remainder of this article.

## Ephesus, Acts 18. 24-20. 1

Being both a seaport and located on major trade routes, Ephesus was the political and commercial centre in the region, which is apparent today from

the extensive ruins found in Ephesus. If we compare Paul's time at Corinth, the capital city of Achaia, 18. 11, Paul appears to strategically spend extended periods of time in busy, well-connected centres to maximise the spread of the gospel. Ephesus was also the centre of a world religion, being the place where the temple of Artemis (or Diana) was found, one of the seven wonders of the world. In many ways, Ephesus was like the world we live in today – interconnected, materialistic and a place of moral darkness and confusion. To this formidable city Paul came, chapter 19, a man who by his own confession was neither impressive to look at nor hear, 2 Cor. 10. 1. Yet God would use this seemingly insignificant man to bring about a mighty deliverance in Ephesus. In this stronghold of Satan, God would plant the Ephesian church, an assembly we know more about than of any other New Testament church.<sup>1</sup> At its zenith, it was perhaps the most flourishing and enlightened church described in the scriptures. A study of Paul's visit to Ephesus highlights to us that we should not limit what God can do,

even in the hostile environment we find ourselves in today.

The letter Paul would write several years later to the church at Ephesus parallels some of the key experiences of this visit.

## Enlightenment concerning the person and work of Christ, Eph. 1. 15-23

The first mention of Ephesus on Paul's third journey is really a prologue to Paul's arrival, with Apollos coming to Ephesus in Acts 18. 24-28. This zealous, probably newly saved Christian was keen to speak to others, 'diligently the things of the Lord', v. 25. As can sometimes be the case with young Christians, the zeal of Apollos was not quite matched by his knowledge. Recognizing the potential of Apollos, the godly couple Aquila and Priscilla patiently took him 'unto them and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly'. The incident reminds us of the exhortation of the Lord Jesus to Peter to 'feed my lambs', John 21. 15, and of the importance of providing individual and often bespoke teaching to newly saved Christians specific to their needs.

The problem with Apollos was that he knew 'only the baptism of John', Acts 18. 25. When Paul eventually arrived in Ephesus, he also encountered twelve individuals in a similar position, vv. 1-7. In addition to having incomplete knowledge of the Lord Jesus, these individuals were also unaware of the arrival of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, Acts 2. 1-13. Paul brings them up to speed and speaks to them of the One whom John said would follow him, on whom they must believe, 'that is, on Christ Jesus', v. 4. On believing and being baptized, they received the Holy Spirit, v. 6, an event which was accompanied by a visible demonstration they had done so with them speaking in tongues and prophesying.<sup>2</sup>

## Deliverance from the domain of Satan, Eph. 2. 1-6

During his extended stay of at least twenty-seven months,<sup>3</sup> Paul witnessed some remarkable events at Ephesus as it became a place of an extraordinary spiritual awakening, described in Acts chapter 19. Consistent Bible-

based preaching and teaching in both Jewish and Gentile gathering places (the synagogue and school of Tyrannus, respectively, vv. 8-10), were consolidated by spectacular miracles performed by God through Paul, vv. 11, 12. This led to a great number of people believing, v. 18. Genuine faith led to action with many in the city turning to the living and true God from idols.<sup>4</sup>

A large public bonfire was held in the city with the Ephesian believers burning the books they had owned containing instructions about witchcraft and occult practices. This was a costly act, with the price of the books worth 50,000 pieces of silver.<sup>5</sup> The Ephesian Christians were nailing their colours to the mast. The bonfire was a visible demonstration to others in the city that their lives had been changed and they were new creations in Christ. Old things had passed away and all things had become new, 2 Cor. 5. 17.

## Spiritual warfare, Eph. 6. 10-20

Whenever God is at work, it invariably leads to satanic opposition. Paul and these new believers met with overt and intense satanic resistance as the work of God progressed. Two events are highlighted in Acts chapter 19 which are examples of strategies Satan frequently uses today. The first is counterfeit. Certain travelling Jewish, so-called exorcists, tried to replicate the actions of Paul in casting out evil spirits, 19. 13-17. Satan often uses imitation and is even able to transform

himself into an angel of light, 2 Cor. 11. 14. The Jewish exorcists ended up biting off more than they could chew, underestimating the power of the dark forces they were dealing with. An evil spirit they were trying to exorcise had no knowledge of them and the encounter resulted in them being overcome, wounded, and degraded as they fled from the scene naked, v. 16. We should not underestimate the power of Satan in inflicting harm on individuals and robbing them of their dignity.

The second strategy Satan uses is conflict. The loss of profits and reputation to the city as Diana-worship is hit hard, becomes the motivation for an uprising with Paul being the focal point of attack. The words of Demetrius, the idol-maker, against Paul are a testimony to the way God had greatly used him, 'Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands', v. 26. Demetrius incites a terrifying riot with the whole city being filled with confusion, v. 29, some crying one thing and some another, v. 32. A crowd can be easily incited to hatred and violence, often with those involved not really knowing why. The situation is aggravated today through social media which gives polarizing and extreme opinions a voice.

Paul's preservation comes from two places as the believers in Ephesus

prevent him from entering the fray, v. 30. Sometimes, it takes a believer with our best interests at heart to talk some sense into us.<sup>6</sup> The second is the moderate and practical actions of the town clerk causing the angry mob to be dismissed, v. 41. It is an example of how God can use government as a moderating influence on society. Paul later instructed the Roman Christians, that authorities can be 'the minister of God to thee for good', Rom. 13. 4.

Like Paul's time at Ephesus, we find ourselves in a place of spiritual conflict in the world we live in today. Paul wrote later to the Ephesian Christians that, 'we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places', Eph. 6. 12. However, Paul also points out that we have been fully equipped with the whole armour of God so that we can stand against the enemy, Eph. 6. 13-18. God is on our side and 'greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world', 1 John 4. 4.

The story of Ephesus does not end with Paul leaving the city, Acts 20. 1. On his return journey, we read of him calling the elders of the church to Miletus, vv. 17-38, as he makes his way speedily to Jerusalem. We will cover these events, along with others, in part 2 of this article.

## Endnotes

- 1 In addition to the verses here in Acts chapters 18 and 19 and his conversation with the Ephesian elders in Acts chapter 20 verses 17 to 38, the Ephesian church as described in the letters to the Ephesians, is the background to 1 Timothy, and is the first of the seven churches described in Revelation chapter 2 verses 1 to 7.
- 2 This is one of four distinct and unique times when the Spirit of God is given, with the others being: (i) on the day of Pentecost, Acts 2. 1-7; (ii) to Samaritans, 8. 14-17; and (iii) to Gentiles, 10. 44-48.
- 3 Compare Acts 19. 8, and 10.
- 4 See the words of Demetrius in verses 24 to 27.
- 5 Assuming a piece of silver was a Roman denarius silver coin or equivalent (= 4g weight) then this is about 200kg weight of silver worth over £100,000 today.
- 6 Perhaps Paul refers metaphorically to these 'beasts of Ephesus', 1 Cor. 15. 32. The believers recognized he would be 'eaten alive' if he had entered into the crowd.



# The grace of giving

By **MERVYN WISHART** Newcastle, Northern Ireland

‘Insomuch that we desired Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also finish in you the same grace also. Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also’, 2 Cor. 8. 6, 7.

Many of the words the Lord Jesus spoke during His life on earth are recorded in the four Gospels. There are only a few references to His words in other parts of the New Testament. One such reference is in Acts chapter 20 verse 35, ‘remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that he himself said, **It is more blessed to give than to receive**’ JND [my emphasis].

There are two things that every Christian, who is able, should do each Lord’s Day. One is to remember the Lord in the breaking of bread, ‘And upon the first day of the week . . . the disciples came together to break bread’, Acts 20. 7, and the second is, ‘Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him’, 1 Cor. 16. 2. This is referred to as ‘the collection for the saints’, v. 1. The command for both carries equal force.

In Philippians chapter 4, there is a fivefold view of a gift given by the assembly at Philippi to Paul.

**1 It demonstrated their care for him.** ‘But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity’, v. 10. The gift sent by the Philippians to Paul in Rome by the hand of Epaphroditus was the tangible expression of their love and care for him. Paul rejoiced, not only to receive the gift, but to have the care of the Philippians for him reconfirmed. Previously, they had ‘lacked opportunity’, but now, with Epaphroditus as their messenger, they could fulfil what they had wanted to do for some time.

**2 It was useful to meet his present need,** [his] necessity’, v. 16.

**3 It was an act of fellowship** and meant they had a part with Paul and his work for the Lord. ‘Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction’, v. 14. The word ‘communicate’ here means ‘to have fellowship’. When we send a gift to one of the Lord’s servants or to the Lord’s work, either individually or as an assembly, we have fellowship in the work and with the servant. They may work for the Lord in some distant place, which we may never visit, yet we can have part in that work as if we were there. For example, if the gift is towards the building of a meeting hall for the Lord’s people, we are actually putting bricks into the building, that is, having a part in the work, having fellowship.

**4 It ensured a rich reward for the Philippians by and by.** ‘Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account’, v. 17. The apostle’s attitude was unselfish. His first thought was not about how useful the gift would be for him, but rather his desire was that the Philippians would be richly rewarded in a coming day. It is worth noting that their reward will far exceed the value of what they had given – fruit that may abound to their account. The gift depleted their account on earth, but it would substantially increase the balance of their account in heaven.

**5 It brought pleasure to God.** ‘I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which

were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God’, v. 18. This is the highest aspect of the gift given by the Philippians to Paul.

In verse 16, Paul speaks of ‘my necessity’, his need. In verse 19, he speaks of ‘your need’, the Philippians’ need. When their coffers were depleted by their gift to Paul, God was able to fill them again from His unlimited resources. ‘But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus’, v. 19. ‘But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased’, Heb. 13. 16.

In the New Testament, there are two great chapters dealing with the subject of giving, 2 Cor. 8, 9. The teaching of chapter 8 is against the background of what Christ has given, ‘For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich’, v. 9. The teaching of chapter 9 is against the background of what God has given, ‘Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift’, v. 15.

## The prerequisite for giving

The Macedonians ‘first gave their own selves to the Lord’, 8. 5. ‘For if there be first a willing mind’, v. 12. They had given the ultimate sacrifice to the Lord; every other sacrifice was easy.

## The principle of giving

Both the Old and New Testaments teach the principle that those who give to the Lord will be recompensed both in this life and the life to come.

‘Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine’, Prov. 3. 9, 10. The widow of Zarephath, even though she was preparing what she thought was her last meal, gave first to Elijah, the man of God. The Lord rewarded her abundantly with an unending supply, ‘the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail’, 1 Kgs. 17. 13, 16.

‘But this I say, He which soweth

sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully’, 2 Cor. 9. 6. Simon Peter lent his ship to the Lord at the sea of Galilee as a platform on which to preach the word of God to the multitude gathered on the shore. The Lord rewarded him with a great catch (multitude) of fish, Luke 5. 1-6.

## The purpose of giving

‘Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver’, 2 Cor. 9. 7. Not giving by compulsion but with an open hand. Note the reference to the ‘heart’, 9. 7, and the ‘mind’, 8. 12.

## The provision for giving

The Christian gives to the Lord from what he or she has, ‘it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not’, 8. 12. The Philippians worked and God blessed their efforts, ‘And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work’, 9. 8. ‘Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men’, 8. 21. ‘Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth’, Eph. 4. 28.

## The product of giving

It meets the needs of others, ‘supplieth the want of the saints’,

and it results in thanksgiving, ‘is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God’, 2 Cor. 9. 12.

It brings glory to God, ‘they glorify God for your professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ’, v. 13.

It results in prayer for the believers by those who receive their gifts, ‘And by their prayer for you, which long after you for the exceeding grace of God in you’, 9. 14.

## The provocation of giving

The generosity of the Corinthians had an influence on the believers in Macedonia, ‘your zeal hath provoked **very many**’, 9. 2. In spite of their affliction and poverty, they ‘abounded unto the riches of their liberality’, 8. 2. Their example had an accumulating effect.

## The widow and the two mites

‘And Jesus sat over against the treasury’, Mark 12. 41. If the Lord were seated beside the collection box today, would we give the same amount? If, instead of putting our offering in the box, we were placing it into the nail-pierced hand of Christ, would it have any effect on our giving? We read of Jesus looking, ‘[He] beheld how the people cast money into the treasury’.

The widow cast in two mites and the Lord said, ‘Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into

the treasury’, v. 43. It was ‘all that she had, even all her living’, v. 44. The rich men cast in much unto the offerings of God, but she cast in more, see Luke 21. 1-4. Not just more than any one of them, but in the Lord’s estimation, more than them all.

## Gifts that will not be accepted

‘Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift’, Matt. 5. 23, 24. The intention is good, the gift is brought to the altar, but something is not right. The offerer remembers that there is a brother who has something against him. Reconciliation with his brother must take precedence even over the offering of his gift to the Lord.

## Gifts that will not be rewarded

‘Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven . . . But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: that thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly’, Matt. 6. 1, 3, 4.

The Lord is teaching that our giving to Him should be in secret. If we reveal it to others, perhaps with the motive of elevating ourselves in their eyes, we may receive the praise of men, but we forfeit the reward from our heavenly Father.

## Gifts given in the shadow of the altar

In the days of king Jehoshaphat when money was needed to repair the house of the Lord, ‘Jehoiada the priest took a chest, and bored a hole in the lid of it, and set it beside the altar, on the right side as one cometh into the house of the Lord: and the priests that kept the door put therein all the money that was brought into the house of the Lord’, 2 Kgs. 12. 9.

As we stand by faith beneath the shadow of Calvary, can we say with reality, ‘Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all?’





# Face covered, but hopefully not hidden

By **DAVID BRAUCH** Wawatosa, Wisconsin, USA  
*Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James version of the Bible*

By far my favourite radio programme was known as the 'Lone Ranger'. Several episodes were featured every week. The storyline goes that the Lone Ranger (formerly known as John Reid) was a one-time Texas Ranger, the sole survivor of a group of Rangers killed in ambush. He wore a mask to conceal his identity as he travelled throughout the West, with a native American by the name of Tonto, fighting for law and order. Some of the comic-book pictures also showed desperadoes often wearing bandanas covering the lower part of their faces.

Throughout my life I have seen masks worn infrequently, primarily by medical or dental personnel in their respective offices or at a hospital. However, during 2020 and the start of 2021 readers, like me, have had the universal experience of wearing a mask within some physical settings during the Covid-19 pandemic.

In the scriptures, there is not a mention of a mask. However, there are some biblical references to 'veils' as well as a few to 'face coverings'. For example, Rebekah is said to have put on a veil just before she met Isaac for the first time, Gen. 24. 65. Also, Exodus records that Moses covered his face with a veil after he had met with God, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at what was passing away, 34. 33-35 – namely, the reflected glory of God.

In the history of mankind, those condemned to die frequently had their faces covered as they were dragged away from the judge's seat. That was the case with Haman, 'As the word left the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face', Esther 7. 8. He was then hung on the gallows which he had erected to hang Mordecai.

In the Messianic Psalm 69, verse 7 states, 'Because for Your sake I have borne reproach; shame has covered my face'. Our Lord would have experienced some humiliation due to His body being nailed to the cross in a naked state. Having one's body fully exposed

to others is shameful, Isa. 47. 3. Isaiah also states, 'I gave My back to those who struck Me, and My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting', 50. 6, corroborating Psalm 69. Apart from the shame of having His beard ripped from His face, the spittle of evil men was added to the sweat and blood from His face. There is nothing that is more degrading and demonstrates more



disrespect to a person than to spit on his face. Yet I believe that most, if not all, of the sense of shame came from a different source and that was because His Father 'laid on Him the iniquity of us all', Isa. 53. 6. He felt the burden of human guilt. It was only because God the Father so loved us that He was willing to deliver up His Son to such awful private as well as public suffering and reproach, John 3. 16; Rom. 8. 32.

Our Lord took upon Himself the reproach of mankind, which is also represented as a covering. Jeremiah states, 'We lie down in our shame, and our reproach covers us. For we have sinned against the Lord our God, we and our fathers, from our youth even to this day, and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God', Jer. 3. 25.

Proceeding to Psalm 69 verse 17, we read, 'And do not hide Your face from Your servant, for I am in trouble; hear me speedily'. To 'hide one's face' is to refuse to look or gaze on someone who has offended us or caused us great displeasure. A good servant desires and delights in the light of his master's countenance, and so God the Son with His Father. Our Lord could not bear to lose the presence of His God. Psalm 69 verses 18 and 19 continue, 'Draw near to my soul, and redeem it; deliver me because of my enemies. You know my reproach, my shame, and my dishonour; my adversaries are all before You'. If ever a man needs the comforting presence of God, to have the sense of seeing His face, it is when he is in distress.

In conclusion, let us return to Isaiah chapter 50 verse 7 which reads, 'For the Lord God will help Me; therefore I will **not** be disgraced; therefore I have set My face like a flint, and I know that I will **not** be ashamed'. Flint is a tough stone once used by native Americans for the making of arrowheads. It is harder than steel. Therefore, to set one's face like a flint means to harden oneself with firmness and resolution. The Lord, the Son, was totally convinced that God the Father would look again upon His face, grant Him help, and restore His reputation. And He was not disappointed.

# Quebrada Amarilla, Costa Rica

By **JOHNNY MARIN**



Costa Rica is a small country located in Central America. It is bordered to the north by Nicaragua and to the south by Panama. It has a population of about five million. Its primary language is Spanish, but due to the great amount of tourism in the country many regions have a high number of English-speaking locals. For hundreds of years, Roman Catholicism has been the predominant religion in Costa Rica, because of Spanish colonization back in the 1500s. A study shows that about 50% of the population would still consider themselves Roman Catholics. The presence of Christian churches has grown quite a bit in recent years, though there are still so many places in need of the gospel.

I was born and raised in Costa Rica; my grandparents Doug and Kathleen Reid moved here with their children to labour for the Lord in the early 1970s. As a result of that move, my mother ended up marrying a Costa Rican and my sister and I were born here. Mabel, my wife, was born in El Salvador. Her father is an elder in the assembly in Los Jotes, and both are very involved in the Lord's work in many areas on the eastern side of El Salvador. The Lord introduced Mabel and me to each other while I was on a year-long trip helping in the Lord's work in Managua, Nicaragua in 2016. Her desire to serve the Lord and willingness to go wherever He would lead her, sparked my interest. We got married in March 2019, and we moved to Costa Rica the day after our wedding. At the time I was working

online, and we weren't commended to the work full-time. However, we knew that wherever we ended up we wanted to be of service to our Lord and take the gospel to souls in need of our Lord Jesus.

We live in a town called Quebrada Amarilla, on the Pacific West Coast of the country, about an hour-and-a-half away from the nearest assembly. It is a rural, quiet town in the outskirts of the more populated towns. We started a work there by obtaining some gospel texts to distribute door-to-door and getting to know our neighbours. Thankfully, I had met Kory and Rebecca Crawford a few years before as they are labouring for the Lord in San Jose, the capital of Costa Rica. We had kept in touch, and they provided us with some literature to distribute.

In May 2019, we rented out the community gym for an hour a day for a week and invited people to a series of gospel meetings. We had encouraging support from some of the assemblies in the country – it was a great week. Although not many



came from the community, we had a good number who came because of my dad's invitation. My dad lives just twenty-five minutes up the mountain from us. He is truly unashamed of the gospel and has a passion for souls and he has been very involved in our efforts to share the gospel in Quebrada Amarilla. As a result of the series of gospel meetings in May, there were a few professions of faith, as well as an increased interest from some local believers to have meetings on a weekly basis. So, we started to rent out the gym every Thursday to share the gospel and began having Bible studies in our home on Fridays. Over time the group began to grow; we re-modelled a cabin my dad had next door to our house so that it could accommodate more people and it became our meeting place from January 2020 onwards. This allowed us to offer a small snack and coffee after meetings, which encouraged people to remain and talk. We have found this to be a great way to build relationships and encourage gospel-oriented conversations with those coming.

We were commended to the work full-time in late 2020. This has allowed us to dedicate a lot more time to visiting contacts and believers and building much-needed relationships. On Saturdays, we were able to start a children's work in a nearby lower-income neighbourhood and are looking to start another one just a few minutes down the road. We meet regularly for gospel meetings in the cabin on Thursdays and Bible Studies on Sunday nights. COVID made it difficult to be consistent with meetings and kids' work for a while, but things seem to be finally easing up here.

The assemblies in Costa Rica have become much smaller in numbers over the years and we pray earnestly for the Lord to send more labourers to the country. Our prayer is that the Lord would use us to make true disciples of the Lord Jesus, willing to put Him before all things, with a passion for the gospel and a heart for those in need, desiring to be a light to our community and serve those around us. We are encouraged by what the Lord is doing through this new work in Quebrada Amarilla. We really appreciate your prayers.

# The Widows of Luke's Gospel 2

## THE WIDOW OF SAREPTA (ZAREPHATH)

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

Sometimes we isolate ourselves from others. We may have been hurt or let down and hide ourselves away to avoid being hurt again. Some of us are happy to be alone and we are content with our own company. Some of us would much rather be alone. It may be that God has given us an introverted personality, and perhaps we struggle with social anxiety. Some of us have made up our mind that we are alone. Like Elijah in a later story, we judge that others don't match up to our spiritual standards and we only are faithful to God. We say in our hearts, 'I, even I only, am left', 1 Kgs. 19. 10.

In the background to this story, Elijah is at the brook Cherith alone, 1 Kgs. 17. Elijah was often alone. He courageously stood, a solitary figure, before king Ahab, 17. 1, and later he was by himself in the wilderness, 19. 4-18. The story of the widow of Sarepta is a lesson of how God used an unnamed vulnerable Gentile widow to teach Elijah the important lesson that 'no man is an island'. We all need others in our lives, and they also need us.

### 'Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there', 1 Kgs. 17. 9

At the brook Cherith Elijah was close to home,<sup>1</sup> with God supernaturally providing everything he needed. The brook dried up, v. 7, and God pushed Elijah out of his comfort zone, directing him to a new phase in his life. Taking the next step can be disconcerting. We may soon be going to college or university, getting married, starting a new job or moving home. It makes all the difference knowing that God is in control. One of the last places Elijah may have considered moving on to was Zarephath. This town, near to Zidon,<sup>2</sup> was where Jezebel came from, 1 Kgs. 16. 31, 32. It was almost certainly a stronghold of Baal worship.

Why Zarephath? Could a true believer ever exist in a place like this?<sup>3</sup> Here in

Zarephath was a woman who believed that Jehovah was the living God, v. 12. Her faith was weak and struggling but it was real, nonetheless. The Lord Jesus mentioned this widow woman before the audience in the synagogue at Nazareth, Luke 4. 24-26. She demonstrated that true faith can exist in some very unexpected places. In contrast, unbelief can also prevail in privileged places enlightened by the word of God. Nazareth was such a place, as the Lord Jesus had resided there for thirty years.<sup>4</sup> As a Gentile widow, her background was completely different to that of Elijah's.<sup>5</sup> Like Elijah, God may want us to share in the lives of those we would have little in common with except for the Lord Jesus. God's intention for New Testament churches is that they are communities that testify to the uniting power of Christ, bridging the divides caused by culture, race or class.<sup>6</sup>

### 'Behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee', 1 Kgs. 17. 9

It is easy to underestimate today the plight of widows in Bible times, in the days before social care and pensions.<sup>7</sup> Elijah was caused to depend on a woman whose resources were extremely limited. Similarly, the Apostle Paul, prior to being greatly used by God, was made to depend on a humble believer. In Acts chapter 9,

a man called Ananias helped Paul receive his sight again. We know little else about Ananias, but he welcomed Paul on first meeting him, 'and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul', Acts 9. 17. As the body of Christ, God has made us all different, 1 Cor. 4. 7. We all have contrasting yet complementary abilities. God has designed the body of Christ so that we need each other, 'the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you', 1 Cor. 12. 21. Indeed, God has ordered events so that we rely even more on individuals who may seem less important, 12. 22-25. The great prophet Elijah<sup>8</sup> became increasingly dependent on this humble widow as he first receives a little cake (of bread), v. 13, then, later, he is sustained from her barrel of meal (flour) and cruse of oil, vv. 14, 15. Elijah also is provided with accommodation and is hidden away in her loft, v. 19.

### 'Fear not; go and do as thou hast said', 1 Kgs. 17. 13

In addition to Elijah being helped by the widow, God also sent Elijah to help her. On being asked by Elijah to provide a morsel of bread, she replied, 'I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die', v. 12. The loss of her husband and experience of famine left her utterly overwhelmed. She was ready to give up, and Elijah's request for food was more than she could take.

Elijah encourages her in several ways. First, he assures her and tells her to 'fear not', v. 13. Fear frequently lies behind our lack of faith. We are often concerned with what the future holds. We question whether God is in control of our lives or if He knows what we are going through. Second, Elijah instructs her to put God first, v. 13. Elijah wasn't being selfish by requesting that he be fed before the widow and her son. As God's prophet and representative, v. 24, this was a test of whether she would put the things of God before the interests of herself and her family. The Lord Jesus reminds us, 'Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? . . . But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness;

and all these things shall be added unto you', Matt. 6. 31, 33. Third, she is encouraged to trust God and obey. God promises her, 'For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth', v. 14. She took God at His word and 'went and did according to the saying of Elijah', v. 15.

### 'And he took him out of her bosom, and carried him up into a loft . . . And he cried unto the Lord', 1 Kgs. 17. 19, 20

In verses 17 to 24, the widow undergoes her greatest test of faith with the death of her only son, v. 17. Losing someone we love can be the greatest challenge of all. She blames God but channels her anger towards Elijah, v. 18.<sup>9</sup> Are we angry with God? Perhaps we are diverting our resentment towards those we love or look up to spiritually. Elijah's response was not to argue with her but to identify with the widow in her suffering. He did this by taking her son to himself and praying about the situation, v. 21. How important to identify with, and to pray for, those we know who are hurting. The Lord Jesus identified with people who were discouraged and distressed. On the



road to Emmaus, He encountered two downcast individuals and 'drew near, and went with them', Luke 24. 15, later eating with them. For the isolated man whose life had been devastated by leprosy, 'Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him', Mark 1. 41. With Mary, who was broken by the loss of her brother, we simply read, 'Jesus wept', John 11. 35. Like the Saviour and also Elijah, we should identify with broken individuals who are finding the way hard.

Elijah's prayer provides us with some vital lessons. Elijah's prayer was alone before God. He took the child up to the loft space where he was living and presented the matter to the Lord, v. 19. Elijah's prayer was earnest. With honesty he prays, 'O Lord my God, hast thou also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son?' v. 20. God knows what we are thinking, and it is better to express our frustration to Him than to pretend it doesn't exist and suppress it. Elijah's prayer was fervent. He cried to the Lord, vv. 19, 20. James reminds us, 'The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly', Jas. 5. 17, 18.

Then, we read, 'the Lord heard the voice of Elijah', v. 22. This first resurrection miracle in the Bible<sup>10</sup> served to confirm Elijah as a man of God and, more importantly, 'that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth', v. 24. Some 940 years later, in the first resurrection miracle of the New Testament, we also read of another widow who had recently lost her only son. With a touch, and through just His words, the widow of Nain had her son restored to her. In doing so, the Lord Jesus confirmed that He was, not only a man of God, but the Word become flesh, the very Son of God, the Creator and Sustainer of life.

### Endnotes

- 1 Elijah was from Gilead, 1 Kgs. 17. 1, on the east bank of the river Jordan, as was the brook Cherith, v. 3.
- 2 Zidon, called Sidon in the New Testament, is a large coastal city in modern Lebanon. Tyre and Sidon were the two most important cities of the Phoenician empire and are the subject of several prophecies, e.g., Ezek. 28.
- 3 The Lord Jesus encountered another woman from the same region. He described this Syrophenician woman as a woman of great faith, Matt. 15. 28.
- 4 Along with Naaman the leper, Luke 4. 27, the widow is a picture of the blessing of Gentile nations with the gospel following the unbelief of Israel, Rom. 11.
- 5 Elijah had been prepared for this event by being sustained by ravens. As carrion eaters, they were unclean animals according to the law, Lev. 11. 13-15.
- 6 Gal. 3. 27, 28; Eph. 2. 14-18; Col. 3. 10, 11.
- 7 Consequently, widows feature in many Old and New Testament accounts, for example in the book of Ruth, the widow's two mites, Mark 12. 41-44, and the provision for widows, Acts 6 and 1 Tim. 5. 1-16.
- 8 Along with Moses, he was on the Mount of Transfiguration, Matt. 17. 1-13. These two individuals represent the Old Testament revelation by God through the law and the prophets, respectively.
- 9 The technical term for this is displaced aggression.
- 10 There are ten occasions in the Bible where resurrection miracles took place. Along with, (1) the miracle here, these are: (2) the Shunammite woman's son, 2 Kgs. 4. 18-37; (3) the man raised out of Elisha's grave, 2 Kgs. 13. 20, 21; (4) the widow of Nain's son, Luke 7. 11-17; (5) Jairus' daughter, Luke 8. 40-56; (6) Lazarus of Bethany, John 11; (7) various saints in Jerusalem, Matt. 27. 50-53; (8) Tabitha, Acts 9. 36-43; (9) Eutychus, Acts 20. 7-12; and, of course, (10) the Lord Jesus, Mark 16. 1-8.

# Economic Parables 2

## The lost coin Luke chapter 15

By **RICHARD COLLINGS** Caerphilly, Wales

### The background to the story

Although representing just ten per cent of the total verses, this story is an integral component of Luke chapter 15 and therefore, to understand it correctly, it is necessary to see it within the wider context of the chapter and also its setting within the book.

Chapter 15 falls within a large section of the Gospel that is book-ended by two references to the Lord's journey to Jerusalem. The first is in chapter 13 verse 22 and the second in chapter 17 verse 11. Throughout this subsection, Luke weaves four narratives that carry a very solemn message.<sup>1</sup> In each there are those who grasped the opportunities offered to them and enter a sphere of joy and blessing; sadly, there are others who rejected those opportunities. In parabolic language, chapter 15 highlights heaven's delight when individuals respond positively to God's kindness and grace, but it also contains an indictment of the Pharisees, who are representative of the many who reject God's blessings.

### The setting in the chapter

Chapter 15 flows out of the closing phrase in chapter 14. At the end of that chapter, the Lord says, 'He that hath ears to hear, let him hear', v. 35, and chapter 15 opens, 'Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him'. In verse 2, Luke draws attention to the negative reaction of the Pharisees and scribes as they observed the Lord's willingness to receive these groups. What really rankled with them was not so much that the tax gatherers and sinners drew near to hear Jesus but that He was willing to receive them and eat with them. Observing their murmuring, Jesus spoke a parable to them, i.e., the Pharisees and scribes.

Although many see the chapter as being three separate parables, verse 3 indicates that it is one parable, but

in three segments. In each there is something lost; there is a lost sheep, lost silver, and a lost son. These three lost things portray the condition of the tax gatherers and sinners, whereas the ninety-nine sheep not lost, the nine pieces of silver not missing and the son who did not leave the father all represent the self-righteous Pharisees. These religious bigots did not draw near to Jesus to hear Him, they did not believe they had any need to repent, nor did they have any sense of being lost.

In addition to the three lost items, we read of a shepherd, a woman with a lamp, and a father. Taken together these represent the activity of the Godhead in the seeking for, and salvation of, the lost. The parallels between the shepherd and the Lord Jesus are very easy to see and require no amplification here. Similarly, the father in the third segment of the parable presents to us the readiness of God the Father to receive the repentant sinner and to bestow upon such the full blessings of salvation. Those blessings depicted in the ring,



shoes and the robe include a new relationship with God, a new standing before God and a new nature from God.

Our focus centres on the middle section of the parable and the first thing to note is the difference between the way the coin was lost and the way the sheep and son were lost. The sheep and the son were responsible for the condition they were in, but that cannot be said of the coin. The coin could not lose itself; it was lost due to the failure of another. That state is true of all mankind for we could not help being born with a sinful nature. Romans chapter 5 verses 12 to 14 teach that when Adam fell, all mankind fell with him; he became the fallen head of a fallen race.

Another distinction between the coin and the other two lost things is that, unlike them, it could do nothing to effect its own recovery. Just as it could not lose itself neither could it find itself; it was totally dependent on the efforts of the woman and the lamp. In this lady and the light she lit, we have depicted for us the work of the Spirit of God acting through the word of God to bring light and life for the lost sinner. We often think of sanctification as being a requisite feature of the life of a Christian but there are at least two verses which teach that the Spirit of God works in the lives of unbelievers, bringing them to a point of acceptance of the gospel.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the Lord Jesus informed Nicodemus that it is the Spirit of God who imparts the new birth, John 3. 5.

### Conclusion

Chapter 15 opens with murmuring but the central theme that runs throughout is that of joy and rejoicing. The shepherd rejoiced, the woman rejoiced, and so did the father, together with all the household apart from the older brother who epitomised the Pharisaic attitude. The Pharisees and scribes may have been churlish, but there is joy in heaven when lost sinners are found.

### Endnotes

- 1 Those narratives are Luke 13. 22-30; 14. 15-24; 15. 11-32; and 16. 19-31.
- 2 See 1 Pet. 1. 2; 2 Thess. 2. 13.

# Lamentations

By **COLIN LACEY** Bath, England

### Introduction

The opening words of this book prepare the reader for what is to follow, 'How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people! how is she become as a widow! she that was great among the nations, and princess among the provinces, how is she become tributary! She weepeth sore in the night, and her tears are on her cheeks', 1. 1, 2. We are being prepared for a book of tears and immense heartache. We are going to listen to the words of a man whose tears express what words can never tell. Later on, the author of this book says, 'For these things I weep; mine eye, mine eye runneth down with water', 1. 16. Although there has been much debate on the subject, it will be assumed by the present writer that the author of the book was Jeremiah. There have been many tears shed in the streets of Jerusalem, but it is probably fair to say that, with one exception, none compare with those of Jeremiah in this short book. He sat in the streets of Jerusalem within a devastated city and temple and his heart just broke. On the seventh day of the fifth month, Nebuzar-adan, the captain of the guard of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had entered Jerusalem and plundered the house of the Lord, before setting fire to it. Additionally, he destroyed the houses in Jerusalem and broke down its walls, 2 Kgs. 25. 8-10. Jeremiah sat among the rubble, and his weeping, no doubt, was heard above all others. So be prepared to shed a tear as you read and study this engaging book.

Interestingly, the voice of God is not heard directly in any part of the book. An indirect reference is made to His words, 'Fear not', 3. 57. However, He was heard, of course, through the words of Jeremiah. Nevertheless, He allowed the city, personified as a widow, and the prophet to express their grief

uninterrupted. This is not meant to imply that He was disinterested or unmoved by their laments. The very fact that He allowed them to express them proves otherwise. Sometimes we are too quick to enter into others' grief and provide glib answers that leave them feeling even more distressed. The Lord listens to the groans of His people and answers them in His own time and way.

Several hundred years later, these same streets of Jerusalem witnessed the tears of 'God . . . manifest in the flesh', 1 Tim. 3. 16, that exceeded even those of Jeremiah for their intensity, 'And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes', Luke 19. 41, 42. Jeremiah's tears looked back, whereas those of the Lord Jesus looked forward. Jeremiah had deep feelings for the city, but those of the Lord Jesus went deeper.

### Purpose of the book

Jeremiah had to deliver some hard messages to the people of the southern kingdom of Judah during its gradual, yet certain, demise. They were messages that were far from popular. He endured great hostility from the people for delivering them. However, the book of Lamentations shows him to be a compassionate man. As he sat heartbroken among the rubble of Jerusalem, he revealed his deep feelings for the city and its people. He showed that, in spite of the people's rebellion that had led to the current suffering and devastation, God 'pardoneth iniquity . . . retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy . . . he will have compassion', Mic. 7. 18, 19. His tender words have brought comfort and healing to the Lord's people down the centuries, 'It is of the Lord's mercies that we

are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness', 3. 22, 23.

The book, therefore, assured the faithful remnant among the children of Israel that the Lord had not finished with His people, even though the circumstances appeared to suggest otherwise, 'For the Lord will not cast off for ever: but though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies', 3. 31, 32. In the midst of a seemingly irretrievable and hopeless situation, Jeremiah cries, 'therefore have I hope . . . The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him . . . It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord', Lam. 3. 21, 24, 26.

### Analysis of the book

Chapter 1: Lament 1: 'How doth the city sit solitary', v. 1

Chapter 2: Lament 2: 'The Lord was as an enemy', v. 5

Chapter 3: Lament 3: 'Therefore have I hope', v. 21

Chapter 4: Lament 4: 'Desolate in the streets', v. 5

Chapter 5: Lament 5: 'Remember, O Lord, what is come upon us', v. 1

### Dates and historical setting of the book

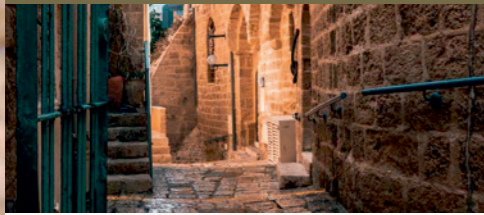
Jeremiah prophesied during the days of good king Josiah. He enjoyed a happy relationship with him; however, Josiah's reforms were only superficial as far as the people were concerned. They did not touch their hearts. Jeremiah's ministry lasted into the reigns of the final kings of Judah; namely, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah. These were disastrous times for the kingdom of Judah. Lamentations, therefore, finds its setting in the aftermath of 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.

# Grieving but grateful

## Lament 1

### Widow's grief

Chapter 1  
His grief for a city that was great



*'How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people! how is she become as a widow! she that was great among the nations, and princess among the provinces, how is she become tributary', Lam. 1. 1.*

The widow and her **great loss**, vv. 1-11.  
The widow and her **great lament**, vv. 12-17.  
The widow and her **great loneliness**, vv. 18-22.

Key words:  
'Sorrow', Lam. 1. 12, 18.  
'Sigh', Lam. 1. 4, 11, 22.

## Lament 2

### Wrath of God

Chapter 2  
His tears for a city facing God's anger



*'How hath the Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in his anger, and cast down from heaven unto the earth the beauty of Israel, and remembered not his footstool in the day of his anger', Lam. 2. 1*

Mourning God's anger towards the city, her **sanctuary** and **security**, vv. 1-9.  
Mourning the agony of the city, her **famine** and **families**, vv. 10-17.  
Making an appeal to God for the city, her **heart** and **hands**, vv. 18-22.

Key words:  
'anger', Lam. 2. 1, 3, 6, 21, 22.  
'walls', Lam. 2. 7, 8, 18.

## Lament 4

### Worthless gold

Chapter 4  
His lament for a city wrecked by sin.



*'How is the gold become dim! how is the most fine gold changed! the stones of the sanctuary are poured out in the top of every street . . . Our persecutors are swifter than the eagles of the heaven: they pursued us upon the mountains', Lam. 4. 1, 19.*

God's fury and the **carnage**, vv. 1-11.  
God's fury and the **cause**, vv. 11-20.  
God's fury and the **consequences**, vv. 21, 22.

Key words:  
'Fury', Lam. 4. 11.  
'Streets', Lam. 4. 1, 5, 8, 14, 18.

## Lament 5

### Weakness is great

Chapter 5  
His prayer for a city needing restoration.



*'Remember, O Lord, what is come upon us: consider, and behold our reproach . . . Turn thou us unto thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old', Lam. 5. 1, 21.*

The plight of the people's **devastation**, vv. 1-18.  
A prayer for God's **restoration**, vv. 19-22.

Key words:  
'Remember', Lam. 5. 1.  
'Turn', Lam. 5. 21.

Chapter 1, 2 and 4 have twenty-two verses beginning with the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Chapter 3 has three verses to each letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Chapter 5 has twenty-two verses but not alphabetically arranged. Large crowds visit the 'wailing wall' on Jewish holidays, when the destruction of the first and second temples are remembered, and mourners recite the book of Lamentations while seated on the ground.

## Lament 3

'He shuttest out my prayer', Lam. 3. 8.

### Waiting on God

'Thou hast heard my voice', Lam. 3. 56.

Jeremiah's grave condition but God's great compassion, **vv. 1-38**

Chapter 3 His grief for the nation personally.

Jeremiah's great confession before God and his confidence in God, **vv. 39-66**

*'And I said, My strength and my hope is perished from the Lord', Lam. 3. 18.*

*'This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope', Lam. 3. 21.*

### Great is thy faithfulness

*'The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him', Lam. 3. 24.*

*'It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD', Lam. 3. 26.*

*'He putteth his mouth in the dust; if so be there may be hope', Lam. 3. 29.*

## Author

The work is anonymous, but there seem to be very few compelling reasons as to why it should not be regarded as the work of Jeremiah. The style is very similar to that of the prophecy that bears his name, and it is clearly the work of an eyewitness to the fall of Jerusalem and the descent of the people into captivity in Babylon, which Jeremiah was. However, in the last resort, it matters not who the author was if God does not state it. The message and the challenge it brings are of much greater importance.

## The book's message for today

As has already been noted, Lamentations reveals the heart of Jeremiah. The uncompromising message to Judah that came from his lips and from his pen was underpinned by a deep love and compassion for the people of God. He was a prophet who understood the heart of God and thus he declared a balanced message that reflected the character of God. Preachers need such an approach today. Cold, hard, formal, and uncompromising preaching will never touch the hearers' hearts.

Jeremiah's response in the book challenges us today as to how much we really care about the Lord's work. When did a tear last stain our cheeks for the spiritual condition of the Lord's things today? When did we last feel 'emotional' about the spiritual state of the Lord's people?

The very title given to the book and the mention that, 'the Lord . . . hath increased in the daughter of Judah mourning and lamentation', 2. 5, tells us that we are beyond grief in this book. Grief tends to be the immediate outpouring of our pain. It is spontaneous and informal. Most of the Lord's people will be familiar with grief and appreciate some of the strategies as to how to deal with it. However, less are familiar with lament. Maybe our comparatively comfortable and peaceful society militates against us learning how to lament. Believers who suffer intense persecution, poverty, and loss, wherever they

might be in the world will know more about it than others. However, this book teaches us that there is a time to lament. David experienced it following the deaths of Saul and Jonathan, 'And David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and over Jonathan his son', 2 Sam. 1. 17. A lament follows immediate grief. It is a more formal expression of grief. It can be written down, as it is in Lamentations. It touches the thoughts as well as the emotions. It is the thoughtful outpouring of our grief. Jeremiah is teaching us that, both individually and collectively, we should learn to lament.

As has already been noted, the voice of God is not heard directly in Lamentations. This encourages us to share with Him the struggles that we have in reconciling faith with suffering. In a single statement, the voice of God could have silenced the laments of the book. But God, in grace and mercy, allowed the sufferers to state their case. The inclusion of the book in the canon of scripture means that God is speaking to us through it today!

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# Drive-in gospel meetings

By **CLIFFORD LAW**, Cardy, Northern Ireland

In 2020, much of the world 'stood still' because of a global pandemic! Suddenly all areas of our lives were affected, our work life, our home life, and our assembly life. Due to government restrictions, assemblies had no choice but to shut the doors of their buildings and we were confined to our homes.

At first, it appeared a tragedy that there could no longer be a Sunday evening gospel meeting in the hall. However, for many assemblies this has turned out to be a blessing, due to the success of drive-in gospel meetings.

Sadly, with reducing attendance, the Sunday evening gospel meeting was becoming a less effective method of evangelizing compared to the situation for previous generations. However, as a result of the pandemic, with restrictions on meeting in buildings in place for many months, innovative ways had to be considered to carry out the great commission of the Saviour to His disciples, 'And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature', Mark 16. 15.

Without changing the message, many assemblies were forced to change the methods of reaching out to the lost and perishing, and so emerged the drive-in gospel meeting, which has been a great success!

So, why are the unsaved, who previously would never enter through the door of a hall, willing to come to a drive-in gospel meeting?

- Many drive-ins are located in neutral venues like public car parks, or on private property, thus not associated with a 'religious' building.
- People feel more relaxed and comfortable in the confines of their own cars, not feeling they must dress up.
- The meetings are shorter, no longer than half an hour and usually with one speaker.
- On entering, people are greeted

with a friendly smile and made very welcome.

- Prior to the meeting commencing, as the cars are driving in, some assemblies play appropriate gospel hymns, thereby creating a welcoming atmosphere.
- During the height of the pandemic, it was safe for the vulnerable to come to the drive-in gospel meeting, sit in their car and hear the gospel without having to mix with other people.
- For others, it was a place to go, just to get out of the house!
- As all church services were cancelled, believers and unbelievers from different denominations willingly came along to listen to the plain, clear presentation of the gospel.

God is not limited to saving souls in Gospel Halls! Indeed, many of those who were converted in the Acts of the Apostles were saved outdoors, on the roadside, or by the riverside. Even on wet Sundays in Northern Ireland, the drive-in gospel meeting continues, as the message can be heard through the car radio. Some assemblies, having realized the great benefit of drive-in gospel meetings, have invested in Public Address systems and some have even fitted out vans for the specific purpose. Many assemblies are not only having a drive-in gospel meeting each Lord's Day but have arranged meetings every night of the week for several weeks, and these have also been well attended.

As an example of how successful and encouraging drive-in gospel meetings have been, a particular assembly in County Down has been



greatly blessed with one hundred or more cars each Sunday afternoon, with at least three hundred people hearing the gospel at every meeting. Only forty would have previously attended their Sunday evening gospel meeting, with very few unsaved present. This success has not been achieved without toil and effort on the part of the believers. Over two thousand invitation cards given out in the district, personal contact with friends and neighbours and a good testimony in the area, all contributed to the success. The Lord has not only blessed numerically, but the gentleman who lent the trailer for the gospel meetings trusted Christ as his Saviour and has recently gone home to glory. Others have been saved and baptized following the drive-in gospel meetings. Each meeting is recorded and posted on various social media platforms. In total, there are at least five hundred people who hear the message of the gospel every Sunday, either live at the drive-in, or through the recorded message later in the afternoon! It is truly amazing what God has done during a pandemic!

Not only have drive-in gospel meetings been successful in relation to the unsaved that attend, but there is an evident change in the attitude of many believers. With renewed vigour and zeal, they are reaching out to family and friends, inviting them to come and hear the message of the gospel.

God is blessing many drive-in gospel meetings in the salvation of the lost in this part of the United Kingdom and to Him alone is ascribed all glory, honour, and praise!

In these strange and unprecedented days in which we live, as we await the soon coming again of our Lord and Saviour, may we allow the Holy Spirit to reignite in our hearts the flame of evangelism, as we reach out to a world of perishing sinners in need of our Saviour!

Maybe the drive-in gospel meeting is a method that others could use for the furtherance of the gospel, for the encouragement of the believers, for the salvation of the unsaved and for the glory of God.

# THE POWER OF HIS WORD

## Part 3

By **MALCOLM HORLOCK** Cardiff, Wales

In the previous two articles, we pondered first the power of our Lord's word in creation in the distant past,<sup>1</sup> in providence in the present<sup>2</sup> and in judgement in the future.<sup>3</sup> We then focused on the irresistible power of our Lord's word during 'the days of His flesh'.

We considered the power of His word over:

- **Disease.** We instanced the cases of (a) Simon Peter's mother-in-law<sup>4</sup> and (b) Bartimaeus.<sup>5</sup>
- **Distance.** We instanced the cases of (a) the centurion of Capernaum<sup>6</sup> and (b) the nobleman of Capernaum.<sup>7</sup>
- **Demons.** We instanced the cases of (a) the man with the unclean spirit in the synagogue of Capernaum,<sup>8</sup> (b) 'Legion',<sup>9</sup> (c) the lad at the foot of the Mount of Transfiguration<sup>10</sup> and (d) Mary Magdalene.<sup>11</sup>
- **The devil.** We instanced the effect of our Lord's command, 'Get . . . hence'.<sup>12</sup>
- **Death.** We instanced the cases of (a) the daughter of Jairus,<sup>13</sup> (b) the son of the widow of Nain<sup>14</sup> and (c) Lazarus.<sup>15</sup>
- **The natural elements.** We instanced the storm on the lake.<sup>16</sup>

As we saw, none of these were a match for the Saviour's powerful word.

**Ah, but there was one thing** (just one thing) **which lay altogether outside the range of His powerful word.** And that 'one thing' was my dire spiritual need.

For, as one who had grievously sinned against God, I needed that which would cost the Lord Jesus much more than His word. I needed that which would cost the Saviour His very life . . . that which would cost the Saviour the shedding of His blood.

The writer to the Hebrews explains that 'almost all things<sup>17</sup> are by the law purged with blood; and **without shedding of blood is no remission**'.<sup>18</sup> We recall the words of the Lord through Moses, 'the life of the flesh is

in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for **it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul**'.<sup>19</sup>

And we read, therefore, that 'we have redemption **through His blood**,<sup>20</sup> the forgiveness of sins'.<sup>21</sup>

We might well apply the words of the psalmist, that those who 'trust in their wealth and boast in the multitude of their riches; none of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him: (for the redemption of their soul is precious ["costly", "valuable"] . . .) that he should still live for ever, and not see corruption'.<sup>22</sup>

In context, the psalmist is making the point that it is folly to trust in wealth for no amount of riches can protect anyone from death.

I have read that, 'The French atheist and scourge of Christianity, Voltaire, was a very rich man . . . Yet, when Voltaire came to die, it is reported that he cried to his doctor in pained desperation, "I will give you half of all I possess if you will give me six months more of life". But, of course, it was beyond the doctor's ability to do that, and all Voltaire's great wealth could not slow death's advance. He died despairing'.<sup>23</sup>

It has been well commented that 'the rich is powerless, when he would prolong life, his own or his brother's, by means of earthly possessions. It is even more vain to offer gold as a ransom, atonement or expiation for the guilty soul, our own or a brother's . . . It cost God nothing to make the world. He spake and it was done. But to redeem it required the incarnation,

sufferings and death of Jesus Christ'.<sup>24</sup>

Truly, 'you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot'.<sup>25</sup>

Make no mistake; you and I have been redeemed, not by **the powerful word** of Christ, but by **the precious blood** of Christ.

It is for this reason that we read our Lord's 'imperatives of His suffering' in the Gospel narrative. By way of example, we hear Him say, 'the Son of man **must** suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be slain'<sup>26</sup> and 'as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so **must** the Son of man be lifted up'.<sup>27</sup>

Twice the apostle Paul informed the saints at Corinth, 'you were bought with a price'.<sup>28</sup> And what a 'price' it was!

Our Lord's experience and prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane just prior to His suffering and death provide us with a window through which we can gain some little insight into the 'price' of our salvation.

Ponder the opening words of His first prayer, 'O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me'.<sup>29</sup>

I know of no other recorded instance when Jesus addressed God as 'my Father'. Oh, yes, on very many occasions, He spoke **of** God in those very terms. Indeed, between them, the four Gospel narratives record the words, 'my Father', coming from the lips of our Lord no less than forty-five times. But, as I say, this is the only time of which I know when He prayed using the words.<sup>30</sup>

We remind ourselves that earth rejects Him, men despise Him, His nation disowns Him, and His own disciples are shortly to fail and forsake Him. Now it is that He turns to the One (to the **only** One) who understands what it means for Him to take from Him the cup (brim-full with judgement and suffering) and to drain it.<sup>31</sup>

Oh yes, His Father understands! And it is to Him that He turns. 'Father', He cries, 'all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me'.<sup>32</sup>

Surely, this should stir us to the very depths of our beings as we see the Son of God (no less!), fallen on His face<sup>33</sup> with His breast to the ground, crying out, in tears, sweat, and agony,<sup>34</sup> 'take away this cup from me'.

Does it startle you that the Lord Jesus prays as He does? Does it shock you to hear the Son of God pleading that the 'cup' (which clearly was the Father's will and purpose for Him to drink)<sup>35</sup> might pass from Him<sup>36</sup> . . . that the Father would take it away from Him?<sup>37</sup>

Well, frankly, it ought not! For, please remember, this is 'the Holy One'. This is the sinless Son of God, who loathes and detests sin with every particle of His being. And He knows that, within less than twenty-four hours, He is to be plunged into the most fearful abyss of suffering imaginable, when God Himself will make 'him to be sin for us, who knew no sin'.<sup>38</sup>

Again, please remember, this is God's 'beloved Son'.<sup>39</sup> And He knows that, within a matter of hours, He, who has never known anything but the unreserved love of His Father<sup>40</sup> and who has ever enjoyed His eternal embrace,<sup>41</sup> is to be utterly forsaken and abandoned by God,<sup>42</sup> when He will lay 'on him the iniquity of us all'.<sup>43</sup>

From the prospect of such experiences, our Lord, unsurprisingly, recoils.

How blessed we are that the Saviour followed His 'O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me' with His 'nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt'.<sup>44</sup> For, rest assured, if the Lord Jesus had stopped at His opening expression and simply added His 'Amen', there would have been no Golgotha and there would have been no salvation for you or me, or for anyone else.

But He knew that no word of power (nor, indeed, anything less than His suffering and death at Golgotha) could ever suffice to pay the price required to procure for us the salvation which we sorely needed.

I was interested to read some time ago in the apocryphal First Book of Maccabees how, in the period between our two Testaments,<sup>45</sup> Eleazar, a brother of Judas Maccabaeus, rushed to certain death during a battle in an attempt to kill an elephant. The reason was that Eleazar believed (wrongly as it proved) that this particular elephant was carrying the infamous Greek king and persecutor of the Jewish people, Antiochus IV Epiphanes.

'Eleazar', the historical record runs, 'saw that one of the animals was equipped with royal armour. It was taller than all the others, and he supposed that the king was on it . . . he courageously ran into the midst . . . killing men right and left, and they parted before him on both sides. He got right under the elephant, stabbed it from beneath, and killed it; but it fell to the ground upon him, and he died'.<sup>46</sup>

'**He gave his life to save his people**' was the narrator's comment.<sup>47</sup> And, in one sense, that was true. But Eleazar failed; he did **not** 'save his people', and effectively died to no purpose.

But, thank God, our Lord Jesus stands in marked contrast to Eleazar. For, before He was even conceived in the womb of Mary, an angel of the Lord informed her betrothed husband, Joseph, 'you shall call His name Jesus, for **He will save His people** from their sins'.<sup>48</sup>

Unlike Eleazar, our Lord Jesus did not fail. He did not die in vain.

Let us, therefore, praise Him today for our enjoyment of **the 'great salvation'**<sup>49</sup> **which lay altogether outside the range of even His powerful word, but which was secured for us by His suffering and death.**

I close with verses from an 18th-century hymn which contrasts some of the 'wondrous' works which the Lord called into being by His powerful word with that one far greater work which cost Him His very life.

How wondrous are the works of God,  
Displayed through all the world  
abroad!

Immensely great! Immensely small!

Yet one strange work exceeds them all.

He formed the sun, fair fount of light;  
The moon, and stars to rule the night;  
But night, and stars, and moon, and sun,  
Are little works compared with one.

He rolled the seas and spread the skies;  
Made valleys sink and mountains rise;  
The meadows clothed with native green;  
And bade the rivers glide between.

But what are seas, or skies, or hills;  
Or verdant vales, or gliding rills,  
To wonders man was born to prove?  
The wonders of redeeming love!

'Tis far beyond what words express,  
What saints can feel, or angels guess;  
Angels, that hymn the great I AM,  
Fall down and veil before the Lamb.

Almighty God sighed human breath,  
The Lord of life experienced death;  
How it was done we can't discuss;  
But this we know, 'twas done for us.<sup>50</sup>

### Endnotes

- 1 John 1. 3 with Ps. 33. 6, 9.
- 2 Heb. 1. 3; Col. 1. 17.
- 3 Isa. 11. 4; 2 Thess. 2. 8; Rev. 19. 15, 21.
- 4 Luke 4. 38, 39.
- 5 Luke 18. 35-43.
- 6 Matt. 8. 5-13.
- 7 John 4. 46-53.
- 8 Mark 1. 23-27.
- 9 Mark 5. 1-20.
- 10 Mark 9. 14-29.
- 11 Mark 16. 9.
- 12 Matt. 4. 1-11.
- 13 Mark 5. 21-24, 36-43.
- 14 Luke 7. 11-16.
- 15 John 11. 38-44.
- 16 Matt. 8. 23-27; Mark 4. 35-41; Luke 8. 22-25.
- 17 'But not absolutely everything; there are certain exceptions. For example, an impoverished Israelite might bring a tenth of an ephah (four pints) of fine flour to the priest as his sin offering instead of a lamb or even instead of two turtledoves or young pigeons (Lev. 5. 11). In Num. 16. 46 atonement was made for the congregation of Israel, after the destruction of Korah and his company, by means of incense; in Num. 31. 22, 23 metal objects captured in war were to be purified by fire and "the water of separation"; in Num. 31. 50 the Israelite commanders in the fighting against Midian brought the gold objects which they had captured "to make atonement for our souls before the

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

## Mark 15. 33-47

### Part 2

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

#### The death

The Lord Jesus Christ cried with a loud voice and ‘gave up the ghost’, v. 37. The word for giving up the ghost used by Mark and Luke translates as ‘expired/exhaled’, while Matthew uses a word which means ‘released/dismissed’, and in John, ‘surrendered’. This was the moment the sacrifice was complete. God was satisfied with the sacrifice and His righteous wrath against sin was extinguished by the death of One who had no sin in Him.

The veil of the temple was torn from top to bottom; the imagery and the import of such an occurrence is a study all on its own. TIDBALL notes, very succinctly, that this graphically underlies opening up of the way to God to a plurality of people: “The old private access road of Judaism was now closed. The new access route (“public”) was through the cross. All along that way tread men and women, Jews and Gentiles, black and white, rich and poor, all on a level footing, carrying their own crosses, and enjoying restored communion with God”.<sup>1</sup> The veil had symbolized the gateway to God and this was being dispensed with. Jew and Gentile would henceforth have direct access to God and be able to stand in His holy presence based on the completed work on the cross.

#### The witnesses

Each of the people mentioned here have a part to play in the care of the Lord Jesus Christ, the fulfilment of prophecy, in being multi-account witnesses to the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

#### The centurion

The manner in which Christ died proved to the centurion that this was no ordinary prisoner. All the events that had occurred, the darkness, the earthquake, had been supernatural enough. The dignity and the grace with which the Lord handled Himself

in the face of such an onslaught of suffering had made an impression on him. He had heard Christ interceding on his behalf for what they were doing to Him. He had seen how the Lord Jesus would not take the wine mingled with myrrh but would die without His senses or faculties diminished and he heard how all His utterances were of a sound and sharp mind, not the incoherent ramblings erupting from an intoxicated and hallucinating mind.

Twice the Lord cried out with a loud voice: once to signify His loneliness and another to give up the ghost. To a hardened soldier, this was confounding. A human being who does not die suddenly from a quick blow, but rather in a slow and gradual manner, loses strength and becomes weak. Crucifixion was designed for this. Towards the end, the centurion would have expected a prisoner on the verge of death to be extremely feeble. Not so the Lord. He cried with a loud voice! Although weakened, He summoned all His strength and then died, in complete control of death just as with life. HENRY says that the centurion was convinced about the divinity of Christ because He was dignified and in complete control of His own death at all times.<sup>2</sup>

The centurion then exclaims, “Truly this man was the Son of God”, v. 39. For an outsider to proclaim this publicly, in the presence of all the priests and Jewish leaders who had condemned Him to die, would be an uncomfortable truth. We do not know what the centurion’s religious beliefs were. If he was Roman, he would believe in a plurality of gods. However, he did not claim that Jesus was a son of the gods, but that He was **the** Son of God!<sup>3</sup>

The centurion confirmed to Pilate that Christ had indeed died. When the chief priests asked Pilate for the prisoners’ bones to be broken, Pilate would

have given this centurion the order to do so. And yet, in the fulfilment of prophecy (of which the centurion was totally unaware), he was instrumental in not breaking a single bone of the Lord Jesus. This was forbidden from being done, ‘A bone of him shall not be broken’, cp. Ps. 34. 20, John 19. 36. To all those who would still claim that Christ had not died, he would have witnessed, and probably ordered, the piercing of the Lord with a spear to ensure He was dead. In the process, he ensured the fulfilment of Zechariah chapter 12 verse 10, ‘they shall look upon me whom they have pierced’. Pilate marvelled that Jesus had died so soon. Crucifixion was meant to be a long, drawn-out affair. He wanted to make sure it was not just a case of being unconscious. Pilate would release the body of Christ to Joseph of Arimathea on the certification and word of the centurion.

#### The women

Mark records for us that Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the less and Joses, and Salome were there. None of the disciples except John are recorded as being at the cross of Christ. They were afraid of the authorities and what the rest of society would say. They were disheartened. The women there were not afraid to show their allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ in public.

The women were witnesses to the death of Christ. They witnessed the body of Christ being taken down and placed in the tomb. Noting the location, they would go to prepare spices. Although there were various other women, these have been recorded for us in scripture.

Mary Magdalene, whose devotion to the Lord is recorded in the pages of scripture, owed her life and her sanity to the Lord’s actions. On the first day of the week, even when everyone else had gone from the grave site, she was still looking for her Master.

#### The counsellor

Seemingly out of nowhere, Joseph of Arimathea appears on the page of scripture, never to be mentioned again anywhere. He had been a secret disciple and when those who were closest to the Lord were nowhere to

be found, God raised up a man to take care of the body of the Lord Jesus.

He was a rich man, an honourable man, and a counsellor, patiently waiting for the Kingdom of God. He was most likely a member of the Sanhedrin and was probably summoned to the trial of the Lord Jesus the previous night, but Luke tells us that he ‘had not consented’ to all that was taking place.

The dead bodies of prisoners executed were the property of the Roman state. On many occasions, they were disposed of in an open pit. The hatred of the religious leaders was such that they would have relished the thought of the dead body of Christ being desecrated by wild animals or being ignominiously disposed of with the other prisoners to show the people that Christ was a nobody.

God had other plans. He would not allow His Son to be so disrespected, ‘And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death’, Isa. 53. 9, had to be fulfilled. Also, there was the resurrection to look forward to. Christ’s body would be separated, sealed in, guarded and after all this, there would be no question or doubt that He had risen.

For all this, it needed someone to boldly go into the presence of Pilate and crave the body of Jesus. Joseph nailed his colours to the mast that day, knowing that this would be the end of his high position amongst the Jewish leadership. The tomb was near the place of crucifixion. This was not a hastily dug pit. Joseph had prepared this tomb, maybe as a memorial. It was hewn out of rock and time and resources had been spent. It was given up for the Lord.

Like everyone else, it is unlikely Joseph had expected the resurrection of the Lord. If this is the case, then when all was lost and there was nothing to look forward to, Joseph boldly went and begged the body of Christ and gave his own personal tomb and memorial to the Lord. This was publicly known and noticed because the chief priests would demand the tomb be guarded and soldiers be placed there. Joseph, this rich counsellor, a member of the

Sanhedrin, was no longer a ‘secret’ follower of the dead Messiah from Nazareth.

BORLAND quotes HAROLD ST. JOHN as saying that Mark uses two words for the body of Christ. Joseph of Arimathea begged for the body, *soma*.<sup>4</sup> When Pilate had verified the death with the centurion, he delivered the corpse, *ptoma*, to Joseph. In the grand will of God, Pilate acceded to this strange request of a man from the Sanhedrin for the body of a criminal that was delivered to Pilate by the Sanhedrin.

Very lovingly, Joseph buys new linen, carefully wraps Him in it and, with help from Nicodemus, respectfully lays the body of the Lord in his own tomb. Risking all his worldly possession and position, he rolls the stone to close the tomb.

#### Conclusion

The Lord Jesus Christ underwent the agony of His soul for our sakes. He did it for you and me. ‘Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds’, Heb. 12. 2, 3.

#### ENDNOTES

- 1 D. TIDBALL, *The message of the cross. Wisdom unsearchable, love indestructible*, Inter-Varsity Press, 2001.
- 2 M. HENRY, *The New Matthew Henry Commentary: The Classic Work with Updated Language*, Zondervan Academic, 2010.
- 3 JND and YLT remove the article and translate as “Truly this man was Son of God”. WILLIAM KELLY comments, ‘In all likelihood he was a heathen, and did not mean more than to own that Christ was not a mere man . . . He felt that, though His dwelling was in flesh, yet He was a Divine being, and not the Son of man merely . . . At the same time, the Spirit of God could well give the centurion’s . . . words a shape beyond what . . . [he] knew’, *Major Works Commentary*, e-sword resource.
- 4 A. BORLAND, *Personalities at the crucifixion*, Pickering and Inglis, 1969. In the standard STEPHENS Greek text (Samuel Bagsters Edition) this is not the case – both are given as *soma*. The footnote indicates that LACHMAN, TISCHENDORF, TREGELLES, and ALFORD change it to *ptoma*. This change is reflected in the RV and ESV translations.

Lord.” But such exceptions were rare; the general rule was that ceremonial cleansing or atonement had to be effected by means of blood’, F. F. BRUCE, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Eerdmans, 1964, pp. 216, 217.

18 Heb. 9. 22.

19 Lev. 17. 11.

20 Through His sacrificial death, that is; see A. M. STIBBS, *The Meaning of the Word ‘Blood’ in Scripture*, The Tyndale New Testament Lecturer, 1947.

21 Eph. 1. 7.

22 Ps. 49. 6-9. ‘The language . . . is borrowed from the ancient law in Ex. 31. 30 . . . If a man’s neglect to keep a dangerous ox under proper control had been the cause of another man’s death, his life was forfeit. But he might redeem his life by paying a ransom to the relatives of the deceased person . . . Thus the idea of the payment of money as the equivalent of a life was familiar. There were cases in which wealth could deliver from death, when man was dealing with man. But when God claims the life, riches are of no avail . . . there is no ransom which can be paid to God; it is hopeless to think of attempting it’, A. F. KIRKPATRICK, *The Book of Psalms: Books 2 and 3*, Cambridge, 1895, pp. 270, 271.

23 J. M. BOICE, *Psalms 42–106: An Expository Commentary*, Revell, 1996, pg. 410.

24 W. S. PLUMMER, *Studies in the Book of Psalms*, Lippincott, 1867, pg. 540.

25 1 Pet. 1. 18, 19 NKJV.

26 Luke 9. 22; cp. 17. 25; 24. 7, 26.

27 John 3. 14.

28 1 Cor. 6. 20 ESV; 1 Cor. 7. 23 ESV. For the background of the expression, ‘bought with a price’, see ADOLPH DEISSMANN, *Light from the Ancient East*, Baker Book House, 1980, pp. 322, 323.

29 Matt. 26. 39.

30 We hear Him address God: (a) as ‘Lord of heaven and earth’, Matt. 11. 25; (b) as ‘Holy Father’, John 17. 11; (c) as ‘righteous Father’, John 17. 25; and, on numerous occasions, (d) as simply, ‘Father’. But now, in the Garden, it is ‘my Father’, and, to me, His use of this expression at this moment is most moving.

31 Matt. 26. 39, 42; John 18. 11.

32 Mark 14. 36 NKJV.

33 Matt. 26. 39.

34 Heb. 5. 7; Luke 22. 44.

35 John 18. 11.

36 Matt. 26. 39.

37 Mark 14. 36.

38 2 Cor. 5. 21.

39 Mark 1. 11; 9. 7.

40 John 17. 24.

41 John 1. 18.

42 Mark 15. 34.

43 Isa. 53. 6.

44 Matt. 26. 39.

45 Probably in 163 BC. See, F. F. BRUCE, *Israel and the Nations*, Paternoster, 1969, pp. 155, 156.

46 1 Maccabees 6. 43-46 (NRSV).

47 1 Maccabees 6. 44 (NRSV).

48 Matt. 1. 21 NKJV.

49 Heb. 2. 3.

50 JOSEPH HART, *The Christian’s Duty, Exhibited, in a Series of Hymns*, Leibert, 1791, hymn number CXVII.

# The hand of God

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Have you ever considered the varied ways in which we make use of our hands? We use them to feed ourselves, to minister to our needs, but likewise we might employ them to give a comforting touch or steadying hold to others in need. They can carefully handle intricate and delicate items but can equally be used in exerting strength. They enable us to operate machinery but can also be employed to emphasize and supplement our speech and emotions. It should therefore come as no surprise that although it is true that 'God is Spirit', in order that we might appreciate something of His attributes, power and work, amongst the many human terms and characteristics applied to Him,<sup>1</sup> the scriptures frequently refer to His 'hands'.

Sixteen verses in the King James Version of the Bible employ the phrase 'hand of God', but many verses, though not using that exact phrase, speak of His 'hand'. Amongst the adjectives that are used, we read of His 'strong' or 'mighty' hand and of His 'good' hand and to those we might add references to His 'stretched out' hand, the 'hollow' of His hand, the 'shadow' of His hand, His 'lifted up' hand and mention of the power and accomplishments of His 'right hand'.

## The hand of God in creation

In direct contrast to the popular and erroneous theory of evolution, the Bible asserts that all things had their source and origin in God.

- **Regarding the heavens:** In the opening stanza of Psalm 19, David, in contemplating God's self-revelation and glory, said, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his **handywork**". In Genesis chapter 1 verse 8, the word 'firmament' or 'expanse' is equivalent to 'heaven', described later in Psalm 19 as a 'tabernacle for the sun' and as the work of God's hand, a witness to what He can do and indeed has done.
- **Regarding the animal world:** In a similar vein, writing in Psalm 8 of the exalted place given to Adam in creation, David says at verse 6, "Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy **hands**", a reference, as the next two verses indicate, to the animal

creation, both domestic and wild animals, and an echo of Genesis chapter 1 verse 26.

- **Regarding man:** The writer of Psalm 119 attributes his very existence and constitution, all that he personally is, to the work and hand of God, saying at verse 73, "Thy **hands** have made me and fashioned me".

God Himself, in speaking of His essential deity and sovereignty, said through the prophet Isaiah, "Hearken unto me, O Jacob and Israel, my called; I am he; I am the first, I also am the last. Mine **hand** also hath laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand hath spanned the heavens: when I call unto them, they stand up together", Isa. 48. 12, 13. Both the laying of the foundation of the earth and the stretching out of the vast expanse of the heavens are to be traced back to the hand of God, irrefutable testimony to His eternal power and Godhead.

## The hand of God providentially

We are probably familiar with the succinct statement 'History is His-story', asserting God's control over the course and the events of each generation. It is true that in the days of Noah there were those who questioned 'what could the Almighty do to them?'<sup>2</sup> and likewise the Apostle Peter forewarned there would come in the last days, 'scorners', saying 'Where is the promise of his coming?

for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation'. But while such men reject all possibility of God intervening in affairs on earth, the former were taken away with a flood and of the latter the apostle says, 'the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night'.<sup>3</sup> A reminder of the words of David who in speaking of the wicked said, 'Because they regard not the works of the Lord, nor **the operation of his hands**, he shall destroy them, and not build them up', Ps. 28. 5.

But can we be sure that history is indeed His-story? Consider:

- **The testimony of Job** – In a context regarding God's control over nature, rulers and nations, he said, 'In whose **hand** is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind', Job 12. 10. Then we might note in verses 14 to 25 of that same chapter the fourteen references to the pronoun 'He' as Job describes the activity and actions of God, 'he breaketh down . . . he shutteth up . . . he withholdeth' etc.
- **The testimony of David** – Who, speaking of the goodness of God, said, "The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine **hand**, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing", Ps. 145. 15, 16.
- **The testimony of Nebuchadnezzar** – The powerful king of Babylon who, writing to all people, nations and languages about the dominion and glory of the Most High, confessed, 'he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?' Dan. 4. 1, 35. This from the lips of the man who once boasted 'is not this great Babylon that I have built . . . by the might of my power and for the honour of my majesty?' v. 30. But, having been humbled by God, he is careful to ascribe all honour, dominion and majesty to the 'King of heaven', v. 37, as surely we must!

## The hand of God in redemption

Isaiah, addressing the people of Judah and Jerusalem, a people who

well knew the pain of oppression and captivity at the hands of a foreign power said, 'Behold, the Lord's **hand** is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear'. As he exhorts them to trust in God, he says the ability of the Lord's hand to save was not in question; the problem lay with them, their sin and depravity had separated them from the Lord and closed His ear to their cry, Isa. 59. 1, 2.

Clear evidence of the Lord's power to save had been demonstrated in the deliverance of the children of Israel from Egypt, in the days of Moses. Commissioning Moses to go unto Pharaoh and request the release of the people, the Lord forewarned His servant, 'I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not by a mighty hand'. J. N. DARBY gives a marginal reading, 'I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not unless it be by a powerful hand', that is by divine intervention, the powerful hand of God. The Lord saying, 'I will stretch out my **hand**, and smite Egypt with all my wonders which I will do in the midst thereof: and after that he will let you go', Exod. 3. 19, 20. Later, in the book of Deuteronomy, looking back to that deliverance, some seven times Moses directly referred to the 'mighty hand' of God that brought them forth out from the land of Egypt.<sup>4</sup>

In the first of the seven references, Moses, having exhorted the children

of Israel to look back to 'the days that are past, which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon the earth', then asks, 'Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire . . . Or hath God assayed to go and take him a nation from the midst of another nation, by temptations, by signs, and by wonders, and by war, and by a mighty **hand**, and by a stretched out arm, and by great terrors, according to all that the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? Unto thee it was shewed, that thou mightest know that the Lord he is God; there is none else beside him', Deut. 4. 32-35.

The mighty hand of God was put forth for the redemption of the children of Israel from bondage, but what must we say regarding the redemption God's hand has provided for us in the giving of His own Son?

## The hand of God judicially

Having mentioned the deliverance of the children of Israel from Egypt, we might, perhaps, think initially of the severe judgement God brought upon Egypt in the destruction of Pharaoh, his land, his army and his gods. Again, our thoughts go to the final night of the Kingdom of Babylon and the 'man's hand' writing upon the plaster of the wall, God's summary of and sentence upon Belshazzar and the Babylonian empire, Dan. 5. 5, 24-28. But is the hand of God judicially only applicable to God's dealings with the wilfully unregenerate?

Doesn't the writer to the Hebrews say, 'It is a fearful thing to fall into the **hands** of the living God'? In what context does he say that? He had just lifted a quotation from the Song of Moses, 'Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people'. Though often applied to unbelievers, contextually the quotation initially concerns God's judgement amongst His own people, Heb. 10. 30, 31; Deut. 32. 35, 36.

## The hand of God personally

In Psalm 95, the writer, having said, 'the Lord is a great God . . . in his hand are the deep places of the earth . . . come, let us worship' then gives the reason, 'For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his **hand**', a hand from which the believer can never be plucked! David, speaking of a man whose steps are ordered by the Lord, who delights in His way, said, "Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the Lord upholdeth him with his **hand**".<sup>5</sup>

Every believer can say with David, "Thou art my God. My times are in thy **hand**". One writer commented, "While the times are many, the hand is one! Our times change, as we move from one phase of our spiritual pilgrimage to another, but the hand is unchanging".

May we, heeding the lessons, follow the example of the psalmist and cry, 'Into thine **hand** I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth', Ps. 31. 15, 5.

## Endnotes

- 1 The theological term is 'Anthropomorphism', a noun derived from two Greek words, the word for 'man' (*anthropos*) and the word for 'form' (*morphe*) and descriptive of referring to God's actions and character in human terms.
- 2 See Job 22. 15-17 JND.
- 3 Read 2 Pet. 3. 3-10.
- 4 Deuteronomy 4. 34; 5. 15; 6. 21; 7. 8, 19; 9. 26; 26. 8. The seven references will repay careful study, being invariably linked to very practical issues, e.g. remembering what they had been delivered from, what they had been brought into, what it revealed concerning the Lord, and the responsibility on the part of those redeemed to obey the Lord, and to recount to their children what the Lord had done for them.
- 5 Ps. 95. 3, 4, 6, 7; John 10. 29; Ps. 37. 24.





# ‘In the days of Elijah’ Thoughts on some of the ‘remnant companies’ of scripture

By **KEN RUDGE** St Austell, England

It would seem that in every time of departure and decline spiritually, God has been pleased to preserve for Himself a faithful ‘remnant’. These represent a minority that are still faithfully devoted to God, His truth, and His promises.

The word ‘remnant’ is common in scripture but most often has the practical application to the ‘leftovers’ of something. However, Isaiah says, ‘Except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah’, Isa. 1. 9. The New Testament also witnesses to the existence of these groups in our own times, ‘Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace’, Rom. 11. 5. Here, Paul is referring to Jews who had, in distinction to their fellow countrymen, embraced the gospel. These two scriptures direct our attention to a ‘remnant’ as a group of believers, preserved by God and still faithful to Him and His word by their refusal to follow the general pattern of spiritual apathy around them. They declared themselves as no longer belonging to this departing majority.

It may help to clarify their distinctiveness by considering some four characteristics that mark them out:

- They do not make themselves a sect in their society but are found within it.
- Their spiritual devotion is that which identifies them amongst the crowd in a day of spiritual decline.
- They have an open and obvious conviction as to God’s calling and commissioning of themselves for that very moment in His dealings with His people.
- Their ability to stand against the decline is clearly seen as a result of divine enabling and guidance.

Some remnant companies in scripture:

## In the days of Elijah the prophet

In His disciplinary dealings with Israel in the days of Elijah, God in grace leaves them a remnant, ‘Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him’, 1 Kgs. 19. 18. It is not recorded that Elijah ever saw a great deal of support for his ministry from these God-fearing ones, but they were there in what were the darkest days of the rule of Ahab and Jezebel, when idolatry abounded.

In a day when it is so easy to take the road of ‘popularism and fashion’ rather than that of holding to the simplicity of a scriptural pattern and to the total authority of inspired scripture for all truth, we need to value more than ever those that are prepared to hold intelligently and devotedly to scripture as their only guide and the Lord Jesus as their only centre of gathering. Our salvation and path to a fruitful testimony will only be found in that which presents the person of Christ, seen and demonstrated in devoted hearts. Legalism attains nothing for God, but He responds with delighted blessing when we ‘love’ His Son and honour His word.

## The Old Testament’s final appeal, Mal. 3. 16

Malachi’s prophecy is one of the most devastating and stringent criticisms in the whole of our Old Testament. It concerns the many failures of the returned nation, and their total disregard of the requirements of God for a true testimony to Him made it so that they could no longer call themselves ‘the people of God’.

But, and it’s a large ‘but’, at this critical moment, **there were those whose hearts were touched, and they responded to God’s word in heart and deed!** Thank God for such when we do also. How often is there now a humbled and powerful hush to our hearts at the close of hearing powerful ministry? Is there no one who will get up to say, ‘we have heard the Lord speak today, we need to leave, humbled, prayerful, and thankful’? Or who will gather a few to ‘pray the ministry in’ and so avert Satan’s vigorous efforts to snatch away the seed sown? Those who do these things are an example of a remnant in our present day, they could be described as ‘they that feared the Lord’.

## The New Testament records, Rev. 3. 18

In closing, we need to see how God had His ‘remnant’ ready and responding as the Lord Jesus came into our world. ‘And there was one Anna . . . which departed not from the temple but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem’, Luke 2. 36-38.

So there have been those characteristically seen to be ‘remnant’ companies ever since. Those looking for His return. Even in the final letter to the churches, the Lord will appeal for such, ‘I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me’, Rev. 3. 18-20. This is the Lord’s final comment in His final letter to the churches.

Do we need to look into our hearts and ways at this late day? We are here to be a remnant for Him. Will He find us looking up and ready for His call to eternal glory?

# ‘The Father, who raised him from the dead’, Gal. 1. 1

By **JOHN SCARSBROOK** Killamarsh, England

The whole edifice of Christian truth and doctrine stands or falls on the validity of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. If there is any question or doubt concerning the historical reality of the bodily resurrection of Christ as taught in the scriptures, there is no salvation, no forgiveness of sins, no heaven to anticipate, and, as Paul so forthrightly states, ‘we are of all men most miserable’, 1 Cor. 15. 19. He then asserts the great truth which echoed forth from the empty tomb and reverberates down the centuries of time, ‘But now is Christ risen from the dead’, v. 20.

The resurrection was such a momentous event that we are not surprised to discover all three persons of the Godhead actively involved in its accomplishment. The Lord Jesus spoke a number of times to His disciples of the suffering He would endure at the hands of men, leading to His death. On each occasion, however, He made known that He would rise again. In John chapter 10, the Lord made His authority in respect of His death and resurrection very clear, ‘I lay down my life, that I might take it again . . . I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again’, vv. 17, 18. At the commencement of His public ministry, responding to the challenge of the Jews as He cleansed the temple, He said, ‘Destroy this temple, He said, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up’, John 2. 19. This One, in whom was life intrinsically, 1. 4; the Son who quickeneth whom He will, 5. 21; whose voice could raise the dead, both spiritually, v. 25 and bodily, vv. 28, 29; Himself exercised that divine right in resurrection, to live ‘after the power of an endless life’, Heb. 7. 16.

Throughout the earthly pathway of the Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit was always in evidence. In that mysterious and miraculous conception, the word to Mary was, ‘The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee’, Luke 1. 35. To Joseph it was revealed that the child conceived was ‘of

the Holy Ghost’, Matt. 1. 20. The Spirit was seen at His baptism and for His time of temptation it was the Spirit who led Him into the wilderness, Luke 4. 1, from where He came forth, ‘in the power of the Spirit’, v. 14. At Calvary, it was ‘through the eternal Spirit’ that He offered Himself, Heb. 9. 14, and in resurrection, the One who ‘once suffered for sins . . . being put to death in the flesh’, was ‘quickened by the Spirit’, 1 Pet. 3. 18. There is a difference of opinion between expositors where some would question the KJV in indicating that this was a work of the Holy Spirit, rather than a reference to the Lord’s human spirit, i.e., ‘quickened in spirit’. However, it seems inconceivable to imagine that in the Spirit-filled, Spirit-controlled life of the Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit would have no part in the resurrection!

All of which brings us to our subject verse in Galatians chapter 1, where the resurrection is clearly seen as a work attributed to the Father. It is interesting to observe, that in an Epistle where the sufficiency of the death of Christ is paramount to the doctrine being taught, this is the only direct reference to the resurrection. This opening verse, however, establishes the foundation upon which the teaching of the Epistle is developed.

Questions were being raised and seeds of doubt were being sown among the Galatian churches

regarding the authority of the apostle. Did he have the recognized qualifications? Had he taken it upon himself to become a teacher? Was his calling and appointment authentic? To answer his critics and refute their suggestions, Paul establishes his credentials in the opening verse. The first five verses are, in fact, one sentence, such was the passionate emotion which gripped him. We can almost see the whites of his knuckles as he grips the quill and, with his inspired thoughts running ahead, he writes with his own hand, 6. 11; no scribe needed here!

Paul commences with a direct statement of his apostleship, he was a ‘sent one’. His authority, however, was not granted by men, whatever their status, 2. 6. Neither indeed did he receive it from any individual or human agent. But, rather, it was a commission conferred upon him directly from heaven. The ‘but’ is apparently emphatic to accentuate the contrast between that which was being circulated by the sceptics and what was in fact the truth. Both the source and the means of bestowal, Paul says, were ‘by Jesus Christ, and God the Father’. The construction is such as to indicate, not a diversity of action, but, on the contrary, a confirmation of unity and equality within the persons of the Godhead.

No legalistic Jew could ever rob Paul of his Damascus Road experience. He had seen and heard the risen Christ and would recount it when occasion and opportunity demanded. But to add emphasis to the Epistle he was about to write, he reinforces his case by claiming supreme authority from God, who is also the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. Furthermore, should any continue to question the apostleship of Paul, he appeals to the ultimate confirmation of the Father’s approval of the completeness of the work of His Son – He raised Him from the dead. No need to supplement His work by circumcision or laws graven in stone. Rather, he will say, ‘Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free’, 5. 1.

# Studies in the twelve (minor) prophets – Introduction

By **BRIAN CLATWORTHY** Newbury, England

‘Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets’, Amos 3. 7.’

## A short introduction

The Minor Prophets come after the major prophetic books in the Old Testament and are a collection of twelve books. The books are Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, and follow the order that is found in the Masoretic Text (MT).<sup>1</sup> The Septuagint (LXX)<sup>2</sup> has a slightly different order but nonetheless includes all twelve books. In Jewish tradition the collection is known as ‘The Book of the Twelve’, and they were generally placed in one continuous scroll.<sup>3</sup> The whole collection is called *tere asar*, which is Aramaic for ‘the twelve (prophets)’. Later, the Patristic writer Augustine of Hippo used the term ‘The Minor Prophets’ (*prophetiae minores*) to describe the twelve, and this has been the conventional title used by Christians ever since.<sup>4</sup> In many ways, this is an unfortunate title because Augustine and other writers were simply referring to the relatively small size of each book. By using the word ‘Minor’ it can also imply that the books are in some way or other not that important compared with the major prophets.<sup>5</sup> As CRAIGIE wrote, ‘The division between major and minor prophets does not refer in any sense to the significance, or otherwise, of the prophets so designated, but only to the length of the books bearing their names’.<sup>6</sup> To relegate these books to the shadows of biblical studies is an indication that many do not see the relevance of these prophecies to today’s world. While these books do contain historical narratives contributing to our understanding of God’s dealings with various nations in the ancient world, especially Israel and Judah during critical periods of their history, they also contain important prophecies relating to the person of Christ, and the end times.

Moreover, they have many practical lessons to teach us as believers today, Rom. 15. 4.<sup>7</sup> As MCCOMISKEY states, ‘Anyone who turns from reading the Minor Prophets hearing only words of recrimination and judgment has not read them fairly. Within the dismal events these prophets describe lurks the hand of God, and beyond these events is the bright prospect of a kingdom inaugurated by One whom Zechariah portrays as suffering betrayal, piercing, and eventual death. The Minor Prophets are not time-bound as we may think’.<sup>8</sup> There is, therefore, tremendous profit to be gained in studying these prophetic books even if, at times, the various forms of texts may be difficult to understand and interpret!

## Order of the books

The Twelve Prophets are not based upon any chronological scheme or consideration, but generally represent God’s dealings with Israel and Judah during the period of the kings, and the post-exilic period covering the restoration of Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the temple. In simple terms, these twelve prophetic books divide into three units of history: before, during, and after the Babylonian exile. A grasp of the historic background to these prophecies is consequently critical in interpreting the text of each prophecy. Stock reading for the background to these prophetic books of the Old Testament should encompass 1 Kings chapter 12 to 2 Kings chapter 25.

The chart included below assigns each of the twelve prophets, plus the major prophets, to a specific historical period and includes the dates of the kings who were prominent in these periods.<sup>9</sup> There is, however, considerable uncertainty over the dating of some of these prophecies. For example, at some time or other, scholars have

dated the prophet Joel to as late as the fourth century BC, and to as early as the ninth century BC with other dates in between! The prophet Obadiah has also been subjected to similar treatment, so the charts should be read with caution because one cannot be certain about the chronology of some of these prophets.

## Openings and themes

Each of the twelve prophets begins with its own superscription, a short narrative introducing the prophet’s identity, and in most cases, the historical background to the prophecy. Additional information is provided about the genre of the writing, and the major concern of the prophet. Some of the themes that are developed throughout these prophecies are:

- The importance of Israel/Judah maintaining their covenant relationship with God.
- The election of Israel and God’s kingship.
- The sovereignty of God over nations and the call to repentance because of pending judgement.
- Social justice and righteousness.
- The significance of the Day of the Lord.
- The first and second comings of the Lord.
- The hope of the restoration of the temple and for a future kingdom with an emphasis on a faithful remnant.

In several of these books, the personal history/circumstances of the individual prophet are used to illustrate the salient point of the prophecy. For example, in seeking to restore a backsliding nation, God uses a metaphor depicting the marital relationship between the prophet Hosea and his wife Gomer. Again, by narrating the story of the prophet Jonah, God’s patience and long-suffering towards humanity is explained.

What is interesting to note in the conventional order is that it begins with Hosea, which portrays God figuratively as the husband and Israel as the wife whom He divorces because of her infidelity to the Mosaic covenant. In the last book, Malachi, God condemns divorce and encourages Israel to hold firm to the

Mosaic covenant. The importance of the law is then re-emphasized to close off the prophetic ministry of the twelve, ‘Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel’, Mal. 4. 4 NIV.<sup>10</sup> But even when this collection of prophetic books ends there is a positive statement made about the future hope of a coming Messiah, v. 2. The prophetic word then lies silent for 400 years before another prophet arises in accordance with Malachi chapter 4 verse 5, who makes a two-fold declaration, ‘Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’, Matt. 3. 2. The first aspect is the call to

repentance, which resonates with the Old Testament prophets, encouraging the people to return to the Lord. The second aspect stresses the nearness of the kingdom of heaven, linking this with the expectation in these twelve prophets of the coming of the reign of God in Christ.

The articles that will follow in this series will provide a brief exposition of each book focusing on their historical significance as they relate to God’s dealings with Israel and Judah. They will also show the correlation with future events and their relevance to us as believers today.

PROPHETS BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER THE EXILE		
Kings of ISRAEL	Kings of JUDAH	Prophets
<b>ASSYRIAN PERIOD OF CONQUEST</b> Jeroboam II 786-746 Zechariah 746-745 Shallum 745 Menahem 745-738 Pekahiah 738-737 Pekah 737-732 Hoshea 732-722  <b>Northern Kingdom Destroyed by the Assyrian King Shalmaneser [2 Kings 17; 18. 9-12]</b>	Uzziah 783-742  Jotham 742-735  Ahaz 735-715 Hezekiah 715-687 Manasseh 687-642 Amon 642-640 Josiah 640-609  Jehoahaz 609 Jehoiakim 609-597 Jehoiachin 597  <b>Judah taken into Babylonian Captivity by Nebuchadnezzar [2 Kings 25]</b>	<b>BEFORE BABYLONIAN EXILE</b>  <b>Amos /Jonah</b>  <b>Hosea</b>  <b>Isaiah, Micah</b>  <b>Nahum Jeremiah Zephaniah Habakkuk</b>  <b>Ezekiel Obadiah (?)</b>
<b>BABYLONIAN RULERS</b> Reign of Nebuchadnezzar 605-562 Reign of Amel-marduk (Evil-Merodach) 562-560 Reign of Neriglissar 560-556 Reign of Nabonidus 556-539 Belshazzar co-regent 549-539		<b>DURING BABYLONIAN EXILE</b>  <b>Daniel</b>
<b>MEDO-PERSIAN PERIOD</b>		
Babylon captured by Cyrus the Persian 539 Reign of Cyrus after capture of Babylon 539-530 Reign of Cambyses 530-522 Reign of Darius 1 Hystaspes 522-548		
	<b>Judah Returns from Babylonian Captivity (Ezra 2)</b>	<b>POST-EXILE PERIOD</b> <b>Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi Joel(?)</b>

## Endnotes

- 1 Most English translations of the Old Testament are based upon the MT. The MT was developed between the seventh and the tenth centuries AD and is still the basis of all modern critical texts of the Old Testament. When the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in a cave in Qumran in 1947, many of the Old Testament texts were found to be around 1,000 years earlier than the MT, i.e., 100 BC. When these texts were then compared by scholars with the MT, it was shown that the MT was an accurate and reliable translation of the original Hebrew text of the Old Testament.
- 2 The Septuagint (LXX), otherwise known as the Greek Old Testament, is the earliest Greek translation of the Old Testament. According to tradition it was translated in Alexandria, Egypt, around 285-247 BC, by 70 (or 72) Hebrew elders, hence its name and symbol. This translation had a major influence on New Testament writers, especially the Apostle Paul, who quotes extensively from the Septuagint in his use of Old Testament texts.
- 3 One of the findings at Qumran were fragments of a Hebrew scroll that when pieced together revealed a scroll of the Twelve Prophets. It was thought that the scroll dated back to 50 BC. (Wadi Wadi Murabba’at (Mur88, MurXII)).
- 4 *City of God, Civ. 18.29.*
- 5 In Judaism the major prophets are only identified as Isaiah (sixty-six chapters), Jeremiah (fifty-two chapters), and Ezekiel (forty-eight chapters). Although Daniel is included in English Bibles as a major prophet, Jews do not regard Daniel as a prophet but as a seer or sage. This is because in Judaism the definition of a prophet is one who has direct communication with God, and they believe that Daniel received divine inspiration from the Spirit of God without actually seeing or hearing God.
- 6 PETER C. CRAIGIE, *Twelve Prophets*, John Knox Press, pg. 1.
- 7 What Paul is doing here is validating the ongoing importance of the Old Testament text and narrative. Amid the exigencies of life, hope is realized through the scriptures. It is of great comfort to know that others have experienced similar problems to us and learnt from their mistakes.
- 8 T. E. MCCOMISKEY, *The Minor Prophets*, Volume One, Baker, pg. ix.
- 9 These charts are based principally on the findings of several scholars, including JOHN BRIGHT (*History of Israel*) and GORDON MCCONVILLE (*Exploring the Old Testament – The Prophets* (volume 4)). It does not mean, however, that they are definitive in any way, as scholars differ quite considerably in this area of biblical dating.
- 10 The famous medieval Jewish philosopher Maimonides quoted this verse in the Mishnah *Torah* as proof that prophets are not supposed to bring a new law (*Torah*), but to warn people not to trespass the law (*Torah*).

# Eliezer of Damascus

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

There are two men in scripture that we associate with the place called Damascus. One in the New Testament called Ananias, Acts 9. 10-18;<sup>1</sup> the other in the Old Testament, 'Eliezer of Damascus', Gen. 15. 2. There are some eleven Eliezers mentioned with only one in the New Testament, Luke 3. 29. The popularity of the name could, perhaps, be because of its meaning – 'my God is help'.<sup>2</sup>

Eliezer was the eldest servant in Abraham's household, Gen. 24. 2, and to him was given the important task of finding a wife for Isaac. Eliezer is referred to as 'one born in my house', Gen. 15. 3.<sup>3</sup> Eliezer would not become heir although the law at that time would regard him as such if Abraham had died childless. However, God's plan clearly sets forth that Abraham's heir would 'come forth out of thine own bowels', v. 4. Overall, Abraham's seed would be as the dust of the earth, 13. 16, as the stars in the heavens, 15. 5, and as the sand on the seashore, 22. 17. An important factor too is that in Abraham's seed, 'shall all the nations of the earth be blessed', v. 18. In all this Abraham believed God, Jas. 2. 23.

Genesis chapter 24 is the longest chapter in the book of Genesis and its importance cannot be overlooked. Thus, a broad consideration of Eliezer is worthy of note:

- **His humility.** All that he said of himself is found in verse 34, 'I am Abraham's servant'.
- **His suitability.** The work of seeking a bride had to be the task of someone who could be trusted, v. 2.
- **His duty.** He felt the responsibility keenly, vv. 9, 12-14.
- **His loyalty.** He painted a true picture of his master, vv. 34-49.
- **His honesty.** Nothing was held back. He reveals the true worth of his master, v. 35.

In taking a journey with Eliezer we might outline the chapter as follows:

## The urgency of finding a bride for Isaac, v. 1

'Abraham was . . . well stricken in age'.

Eliezer would realize that what lay before him must be accomplished before his master's death. The servant has been employed for many years and, perhaps, may have been around eighty years of age. He knew the family well. However, unknown to him, Abraham would live for another thirty-five years. However, Eliezer's desire was to return as soon as possible to Abraham, v. 56.

## The task to be undertaken, vv. 3, 4

As Abraham indicates, a bride is to be sought for Isaac. But not just any bride but one of 'my country and . . . my kindred', v. 4.

## The unwillingness of the women, v. 5

As he considered the task, the servant started to realize the instructions of his master. He was to obtain a bride for another. His concern, and rightly

so, was whether his choice of bride would return with him.

## The undoubted heir, vv. 6-8

Abraham reassures his servant if he was not able to return with a bride for Isaac. However, as God had provided a lamb in chapter 22, He would surely guide to the provision of a bride in chapter 24. Abraham recounts God's declaration that Isaac would be the heir, v. 7.

## The unknown bride, v. 8

Neither the sending master nor the servant knew who she would be, but God did. Thus, Eliezer sets off on his journey of some 400 miles to find a bride for his master's son.

## The unlimited resources of Abraham, v. 10

Such resources were in the hands of the servant and the others that went with him. This denoted the generosity of his master, v. 35, and this was seen in the gifts he was to bestow on Rebekah, v. 22, and her family, v. 53.

## The unequivocal ways of God, v. 12

The servant had confidence in God, 'I being in the way, the Lord led me', v. 27, see also verse 48. He was sure this was all of God.

## The unexpected quick response, vv. 15-20

'Before he had done speaking' the answer to his prayer came. The

servant asks later, 'whose daughter art thou?' v. 23. He had to be sure of her family connections. It must have been some task to water ten camels. Whilst Rebekah had servants, v. 61, she was prepared to do the menial work. He wondered but did not say anything. Surely, here was the very bride in the purposes of God and the answer to the servant's prayer.

## The unbelievable, v. 27

Confirmation is given and God's approval evidenced. The Lord had truly led him to the right family, the right place and the right woman, so the servant bows and worships, v. 26.

## The utterances of the servant, v. 27

They are to be noted and they are a study in themselves, vv. 5, 12-14, 17, 23, 27, 34-49, 56 and 65.

## The unfolding of the servant's errand, vv. 33-49

For Rebekah, Laban, Bethuel and others, nothing is hidden from them. He was a true servant of his master in all things. Notice the many times in the chapter the words 'master' and 'servant' are mentioned.

## The servant's ultimate revelation, vv. 65, 66

The task is complete. Rebekah sees Isaac for the first time. What a scene that must have been! 'It is my master'. Equally, he told Isaac all things.

## The union, v. 67

Nothing more is said of the servant. The mission was accomplished. He sought the Lord and with His help was able to convince a young woman to leave her home, to go to a place she had never been, to marry someone she did not know and live in a land she had never seen.

In concluding this meditation may we consider the wonderful ways of God and bow our hearts in worship. His ways are past finding out!

### Endnotes

- 1 See *Precious Seed*, Volume 69, Issue 3, 2014.
- 2 NEWBERRY has 'God my helper', THOMAS NEWBERRY, *The Newberry Reference Bible*, Kregel, 1977.
- 3 The same statement is recorded of 318 'trained servants', Gen. 14. 14.

# Chairman's notes

For many of us, 2022 has been a difficult year. Although the impact of Covid-19 infections has been lessened by the introduction of vaccines, the pandemic continues. Its impact is now being felt through the effects upon the global economy with some people struggling financially because of rising food and fuel prices, a lack of access to medical services, as well as mourning the loss of loved ones to the pandemic.

Alongside the stuttering economic recovery post-Covid, there has been the war in the Ukraine. The sight of refugees fleeing their homes and the shelling of different targets in that war have challenged us all to support believers caught up in the conflict both practically and prayerfully. For many of us, though, the war has impacted us only because of fuel supplies and prices, as well as other key commodities we use.

It is incumbent upon us all to remember fellow believers across the world. There are those who have no assembly building to go to because of the closure of some halls. There are those who are finding the rise in inflation an added pressure in affording the necessities of life, and we are aware of saints in certain parts of the world where simple food provision for their family is reliant upon the giving of others.

Against that background, it should come as no surprise to hear that these global economic factors are impacting upon the work of Precious Seed. Paper prices and printing costs have risen significantly in the last eighteen months. The cost of distribution is also now twice the cost of printing and rising. After some deliberation at Precious Seed Trust meetings, we have decided to make some changes to the magazine from the February 2023 issue to reduce our costs and continue to provide the magazine to you, our readers.

The changes will be as follows:

- The reduction of the cover size from 8 pages to 4 – this will remove the flaps in the cover.

- Removing the YPS magazine as a separate entity. It will become the A4 centre pages of the existing magazine.
- Removing the charts, which presently form the centre pages of the magazine. We are exploring the possibility of making these charts available online.
- Discontinuing the Book Reviews page.
- Removing the book order form from the magazine as we can no longer order books on behalf of customers because of two-factor authentication of transactions imposed by banks and credit card companies.
- Making the Question-and-Answer page one that occurs twice per year rather than in every magazine.
- Making 'Word for Today' an article that appears twice per year rather than in every magazine.

We apologize to those of our readers who may be impacted by these changes. As stewards of the resources that the Lord provides by the free-will offerings of His people, we feel we should do what we can to be prudent and spend those resources wisely. **Similarly, may we encourage all assemblies to review the number of magazines they take so that our print numbers can be adjusted accordingly.**

I would also mention that Jonathan Black is stepping down from the Trust at the end of this year. He has been with us for seven years and has made a significant contribution to the work, particularly with Faith Matters, the centre page charts, and the writing of several articles. We wish him well in his continuing work for the Lord.

We trust that, as the Lord enables, we will continue to provide a magazine which is both informative and expository in 2023 in a way that previous Trustees tried to do, and as the original magazine sought to be back in 1945.

'Brethren, pray for us', 1 Thess. 5. 25.

**John Bennett**

# The meekness and gentleness of Christ

By **RODERICK BARTON** Birmingham, England

The words 'meekness and gentleness of Christ' in the first verse of 2 Corinthians chapter 10 ascend from the page as a rich and sweet fragrance to touch the heart of the believer. They cause us to look up by faith with a heart warmed and refreshed by the knowledge that Christ is truly precious. Here, His unique character is described by words which have a meaning only truly portrayed by the immeasurable depth of Christ alone.

Meekness is not weakness but describes a condition of mind and heart; the inward character which, in Christ, manifests itself because He has all the infinite resources of God within Himself, 'For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily', Col. 2. 9. It is a virtue that Titus chapter 3 verse 2 exhorts every believer to show – 'showing all meekness unto all men'.

Gentleness, on the other hand, is the outward activity of meekness. The outworking of unselfish reasonableness, not legality. Gentleness speaks of the outward dealings with others, the product of how mature the meekness is in a person's character.

The meekness and gentleness of men is but a mere, brief shadow which seems to grow darker by the years. To explore the virtues of the meekness and gentleness of Christ, so perfectly displayed in righteous harmony, absolute perfection, and complete balance, one only has to look to those many occasions particularly chronicled in the four Gospels.

In John chapter 4 verses 4 to 30, there is a delightful demonstration of the meekness and gentleness displayed by the Lord Jesus. He is alone at the well and is about to meet an immoral woman who had been totally rejected by her community. She has no idea, as she approaches with her waterpot in the heat of the day, that she is about to encounter the eternal Son of God, the Creator of the universe, the Messiah, and the one destined for

Calvary, there to become the Saviour of mankind. Yet, at Jacob's well, in His meekness and gentleness, He transforms the woman's life forever, as only He could. First, He breaks down the political and racial barriers. Then, He tells her of her need for the 'living water', v. 10, which, in verse 14, results in the provision of everlasting life. The woman, in honesty, confesses her sinful life, v. 17. The outcome of such a remarkable discourse being that she runs to those who had originally shunned her to call them to the Lord Jesus, exclaiming, 'is not this the Christ?' v. 29. Only the meekness and gentleness of Christ could have produced such a blessed outcome. No situation, however complex or hopeless, can be a hindrance to Christ.

In the early verses of John chapter 3, a man called Nicodemus comes to the Lord Jesus by night. There is no comment or sigh from the Lord Jesus



about the lateness of the hour or the question the man posed. In meekness and gentleness, the Lord Jesus was always available to all that came to Him whenever or wherever that was.

Turning to the cross, with all its violence, agony and shame, the human mind would not expect meekness and gentleness to manifest itself, yet it is displayed so openly in such a precious way. See how Christ addressed heaven with the words, 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do', Luke 23. 34. The dying thief came into the blessing of His meekness and gentleness after acknowledging that he deserved the punishment he was enduring. He, after appealing to the Lord Jesus, was promised, 'To day shalt thou be with me in paradise', v. 43. Again, we see such meekness and gentleness, this time shown towards His mother Mary as He commends her into the care of John, John 19. 26, 27. He desires that she be removed from such a violent and distressing scene of suffering into a home where He knows she will not only be loved and cared for but spiritually enriched as well.

The father's unconditional love for his prodigal son in Luke chapter 15, irrespective of the son's foolishness, or the determined searching of the shepherd for the lost sheep in the same chapter, are testimonies to meekness and gentleness seen in some of the Lord's parables.

This is such an inexhaustible subject, so many examples abound in the word of God, but there is one occasion that draws our attention very much to Christ's meekness and gentleness. In John chapter 11 verse 35, we read that 'Jesus wept'. He who has the power over death, wept with the broken-hearted and bereaved. There is no instant miracle. For, from the depths of His being He enters into the experience of their sorrow, sharing their tears, reaching out to them in perfect love and in an unselfish personal way before raising the dead to life. He reveals in His perfect way something of the beauty of His unique meekness and gentleness. What a glorious and precious Lord and Saviour He is! May we praise His excellent name.

## WORD FOR TODAY

By **BRIAN CLATWORTHY** Newbury, England

**Mana** (Deny, keep, withhold)

**Manah** (Portion, part)

**Manammim** (Dainties)

The third line of the first verse of William Williams Pantycelyn's most famous hymn 'Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah' refers to the 'bread of heaven', which the hymnist subsequently desires to be fed with 'now and evermore'. The imagery of the hymn is taken from Israel's wilderness experience as they journeyed from Egypt to the Promised Land, and the reference to the 'bread of heaven' comes from Exodus chapter 16 verse 4. When Israel grumbled in the wilderness about the lack of food, God provided them with manna as their staple diet and daily portion of bread, v. 15, until they entered the Promised Land when it 'stopped the day after they ate this food from the land', Josh. 5. 12 NIV. When they first saw the manna, they questioned what it was, as they had never encountered it before. The name 'manna' is, in fact, derived from the question posed by them in (probably) Aramaic, '*man-hu*' meaning 'What is it?', cp. Exod. 16. 31. This was not natural manna that came from the juice of the tamarisk fruit, as many modern scholars argue, but, as W. E. VINE states, this 'was of an entirely different nature'.<sup>1</sup> Since it is also described as 'angels' food', its origin is undoubtedly from heaven, Ps. 78. 25.

In the narrative of Numbers chapter 11, manna arrived with the dew during the night, and had to be collected before it was melted by the sun, Exod. 16. 21. God also instructed Moses as to how much manna had to be collected per working day, with a double portion being collected on the sixth day to ensure that there was no collection on the sabbath day, vv. 16-30. Manna is also described in this passage as 'a fine and flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground', v. 14 TANAKH translation, and 'like coriander seed, white, and

it tasted like wafers in honey', v. 31 TANAKH translation. To remind future generations about God's largesse to His people during their wilderness experience, a day's portion of manna was put in a jar and placed before the Lord in front of the ark of the covenant, vv. 32-34. The writer to the Hebrews interprets this verse as meaning that the (golden) pot of manna was lodged within the ark of the covenant, Heb. 9. 4.<sup>2</sup> Israel soon, though, became weary of their diet of manna to the extent of loathing it, Num. 21. 5, and this resulted in God punishing the nation, v. 6.

In the Septuagint (LXX) *manah* is translated by the Greek word *manna*. In Deuteronomy chapter 8 verses 3 and 16, Moses explains to the nation that God's purposes for leading them through the wilderness for forty years was to test them so that they would learn to keep His commandments. Additionally, that the provision of *manna* was an object lesson to teach them 'that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord', NIV, cp. Matt. 4. 4; Luke 4. 4. By eating manna daily, the Israelites showed that they trusted God to provide them with more manna the following day. This was not only a test of their faith in God, but their acceptance of His providential care over them. Sadly, the history of Israel reflects just how far short they fell of these ideals.

The same Greek word *manna* is used in the New Testament four other times, excluding Hebrews chapter 9 verse 4. Israel's wilderness experience is referred to by our Lord in John chapter 6, where the word *manna* occurs three times, vv. 31, 49, 58. The discourse is directly related to the earlier miracle of the feeding of the five thousand. The people who had witnessed this miraculous sign completely misunderstood its meaning and sought an even more spectacular one from the Lord when they asked the question 'What will you do?' v. 30 NIV. Since the discussion centred around food that

perished, and food that produced eternal life, v. 27, there was almost a seamless movement by the Lord to reflect upon the manna that had been provided by God for Israel in the wilderness. This showed the temporary nature of the provision even though it did come from heaven, because men ultimately died. By contrast, however, the true bread that came down from heaven was our Lord Himself who gives eternal life to all those who receive Him, John 1. 12. Finally, in Revelation chapter 2 verse 17, the church at Pergamos is promised a reward of hidden manna that would remind them of God's daily provision for Israel as they wandered in the wilderness, Exod. 16. 14-26. The hidden manna was linked to the pot of manna placed in the ark of the covenant, Heb. 9. 4, and only visible to God. What this meant was that God would sustain them through Christ, despite the external opposition, and, ultimately, they would (as did Israel) reach their promised destination. Are we daily feeding on Christ, the true bread from heaven?

### For further reading/study

#### Introductory

'MANNA' in W. E. VINE, *Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words*, Revell, pp. 86, 87.

#### Advanced

μαρνα in VERLYN D. VERBRUGGE (ed.), *The NIV Theological Dictionary of New Testament Words*, Zondervan, 2003, pp. 791, 792.

#### Endnotes

- 1 W. E. VINE, *Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words*, Revell, pg. 86. In support of his argument, VINE gives seven distinct reasons why this was supernatural manna, q.v. See also f.3.
- 2 In Rabbinic tradition neither the pot of manna nor Aaron's rod were included in the ark but stood alongside it, which is what the biblical text suggests. It may be that these items were subsequently placed within the ark for safe keeping. Later, however, when Solomon brought the ark into the temple the pot was missing, i.e., 'There was nothing in the ark save the two tables of stone', 1 Kgs. 8. 9.

# ‘We rest on thee, and in thy name we go’, 2 Chr. 14. 11

By **BRYAN CHARLES** Appledore, England

‘We rest on thee’ are the stirring words of faith uttered by Asa, in the early years of his reign, probably around 900 BC, as he is confronted by an enemy army of huge proportions. They express his positive dependence and reliance on the Lord in a day of great extremity and crisis. Here is faith in action; he prays as he goes forth to engage the enemy in the field of battle; ‘in thy name we go against this multitude’. The Lord destroys the enemy and then we read, ‘they [Judah] smote all the cities round about Gerar’, v. 14. Victory is complete. His prayer and the Lord’s answer stir and galvanize thousands of the sons of Israel.

In 1872 a girl is born whose life is to be blighted by ill-health. At sixteen months, she suffers paralysis from polio and a stroke at twelve years of age. Yet her faith is strong and finds expression partly through poetry, which she writes from early teenage years. *The Master’s Touch* is a volume of her poems, one of which is unfinished; probably the last she writes before her life’s journey ends at the age of twenty-five.<sup>1</sup> It begins, ‘What will it be to see Him  
When the journey of life is past . . .  
Whom having not seen we love?’

Edith Gilling Cherry, however, is best remembered for the poem, written in 1895 and inspired by Asa’s prayer, a hymn that has stirred many thousands of the followers of the Lord Jesus.

**‘We rest on Thee**, our Shield and our Defender!  
We go not forth alone against the foe;  
Strong in Thy strength, safe in Thy keeping tender,  
We rest on Thee, and in Thy Name we go.



Yes, in Thy Name, O Captain of salvation!  
In Thy dear Name, all other names above;  
Jesus our Righteousness, our sure Foundation,  
Our Prince of glory and our King of love.

We go in faith, our own great weakness feeling  
And needing more each day Thy grace to know:  
Yet from our hearts a song of triumph pealing,  
“We rest on Thee, and in Thy Name we go.”

**We rest on Thee**, our Shield and our Defender!  
Thine is the battle, Thine shall be the praise;  
When passing through the gates of pearly splendour,  
Victors, we rest with Thee, through endless days’.

It is about 7.00 a.m. on Tuesday, January 3, 1956. Five missionaries are in the jungles of Ecuador. They pray and then sing a hymn together, expressing their confidence and trust in the Lord. It is a critical moment for they anticipate direct contact with the notorious Auca Indians. The hymn is known by heart by at least two of them – **‘We rest on Thee’**. They sing it to the tune, Finlandia. Five days later they are violently killed by the men they have gone to help. Pete Fleming, Ed McCully, Nate Saint, Roger Youderian and Jim Elliott now await the day of resurrection; the passing through ‘the gates of pearly splendour’. Sometime later, ELISABETH ELLIOTT, Jim’s widow, writes two books about this missionary endeavour and the men who were killed, *Through Gates of Splendour* and *Shadow of the Almighty*, books that have stirred many thousands of readers.<sup>2</sup>

## Endnotes

- 1 E. CHERRY, *The Master’s Hand and other poems*.
- 2 E. ELLIOTT, *Through Gates of Splendour*, Harper Collins, 2009; E. ELLIOTT, *Shadow of the Almighty*, Tyndale, 1981.

# QuestionTime

## QUESTION

**What is the difference between the Lord Jesus acting as our intercessor and advocate?**

## ANSWER

As our Great High Priest, the Lord Jesus, has, 'offered one sacrifice for sins for ever', dealing with sins permanently. With this work completed He is now, 'sat down on the right hand of God', Heb. 10. 12. However, other aspects of the high-priestly ministry of the Lord Jesus continue every day we spend here below. These include His work as intercessor and advocate. But what do these words mean and are they the same thing?

In Romans chapter 8 verse 34, we read, 'Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, **who also maketh intercession for us [?]**'. Paul is concluding his treatise on justification by faith where he has viewed the human race as on trial and been found guilty before God, falling short of His righteous standards. Yet, through grace we can be justified, declared righteous, through faith in the sacrifice of Christ. In verse 35, Paul considers the judge, the Lord Jesus, the One to whom all judgement has been committed, John 5. 22. Who shall condemn us? Paul answers a question with a question. Shall Christ condemn us who, in the past, has died and risen again, and is, right now, interceding for us at God's right hand? Of course not! He has demonstrated unequivocally that He is committed to our welfare and cause. Hebrews further reminds us that the Lord Jesus, 'is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, **seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them**', Heb. 7. 25. In this context, He saves us by enabling us to hold fast to our faith during persecution and difficulty.

The word 'intercession' means 'making a petition or plea', meaning that the Lord Jesus is praying for us continually, individually, and specifically, while here below. This is an astounding truth that should humble us and cause us to carefully reflect on the way we live. The Lord Jesus referred to this ministry in John chapter 17. He said of His disciples 'I pray for them', v. 9, and also, 'neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word', v. 20, incorporating all New Testament believers. John chapter 17 informs us that He prays for our spiritual protection, v. 15, and sanctification, v. 17, while we live in a

Conducted by  
**Frank A. Proudlock**

harmful and hostile world. He also prays for our testimony to this world through our love for each other, v. 21.

In 1 John chapter 2 verse 1, we read, 'My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. **And if any man sin, we have an advocate with [or "towards"] the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous**'. The word 'advocate' is the Greek word *paraklētōs*, which means 'to draw alongside to help', the same word describing the work of the Holy Spirit as our Comforter.<sup>1</sup> Although this word can refer to someone providing legal aid,<sup>2</sup> perhaps it better describes the ministry of the Lord Jesus in drawing alongside us when we fail in order to restore us.<sup>3</sup>

These ministries are illustrated in the life of Peter. The Lord Jesus told Peter, 'Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: **but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not**', Luke 22. 31, 32. Peter's world was about to be violently shaken as the cross approached. Although Peter denied the Lord, the Lord's prayer for him ensured that Peter's faith did not fail. Ultimately, he came through it. In John chapter 21, we see the Lord Jesus acting as the Advocate. The Lord drew alongside Peter to gently remind him of his failure but also that He hadn't given up on him and had a ministry for him to do, vv. 15-17.

### Endnotes

- 1 E.g., John 14. 16, 26.
- 2 An alternative view of *paraklētōs* has been expressed by F. B. HOLE as, 'The risen One, Jesus Christ the righteous, has been called alongside the Father in glory for the help of His saints, if and when they sin'.
- 3 It is the view of the author that the teaching that the Lord Jesus is 'pleading with God the Father for the pardon of our sins', *Thayer's Greek Lexicon*, is at odds with the truth of justification by faith. When we sin, we need to change our minds rather than the Father. Hence, we need the Lord Jesus to draw alongside us. Also, the tone of 1 John chapter 2 verse 1 is not a judicial but rather a family setting. There is, no doubt, a Godward aspect to the advocacy of the Lord Jesus since He is our heavenly representative, Heb. 9. 24, and His advocacy is 'towards' the Father. For example, Revelation chapter 12 verse 10 may indicate that the Lord Jesus defends our cause against the accusations of Satan. However, we need to be careful about applying Old Testament passages which refer specifically to Israel and the priesthood, e.g., Zech. 3. 1-7.

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### 'The way of an eagle in the air', Prov. 30. 19.

Looking up into a clear blue sky it is possible to see the streaks of cloud that are the sign that an aircraft has passed at high altitude. These clouds are called 'contrails', which is short for 'condensation trails', and they are caused by water vapour that condenses around the soot from the plane's exhaust to form cirrus streaks. Some meteorologists suggest that they can even be an indicator of weather patterns.

In contrast, Agur, the son of Jakeh, describes the way of an eagle in the air as 'too wonderful for me', v. 18. In many countries, especially with increasing urbanization, observing an eagle in flight is a rarity but those who have seen such an exhibition may well agree with Agur. As the eagle flies, it is impossible to know where it has been. Unlike the aircraft, there are no vapour trails or similar patterns that might aid the human brain to plot its path. Equally, the bird's ability to soar and circle with relatively little effort is a testimony to the design of the Creator who has equipped it for its terrain and purpose. Holding their wings out, they rely upon rising air currents to gain altitude before gliding out of such thermals to move across the landscape. Remarkably, though some eagles are known to fly as high as 10,000 feet, the clarity of their vision and ability to pick out their prey is also incredible. As one of the animals with the sharpest vision, it is suggested that the eagle's eyesight is four to eight times stronger than the average human. For this reason, we speak of someone being 'eagle-eyed' if their ability to spot something is out of the ordinary.

Like Agur, such aspects of nature can teach us a great deal. Apart from the link between bird flight and aeronautics, they reveal something of the Creator and the miracle of creation. When the Lord answered Job, he made the remarkable statement, echoed by Agur, 'therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not', 42. 3. Appreciating something of the grandeur of creation and the Creator should cause us all to bow in humility and wonder.

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