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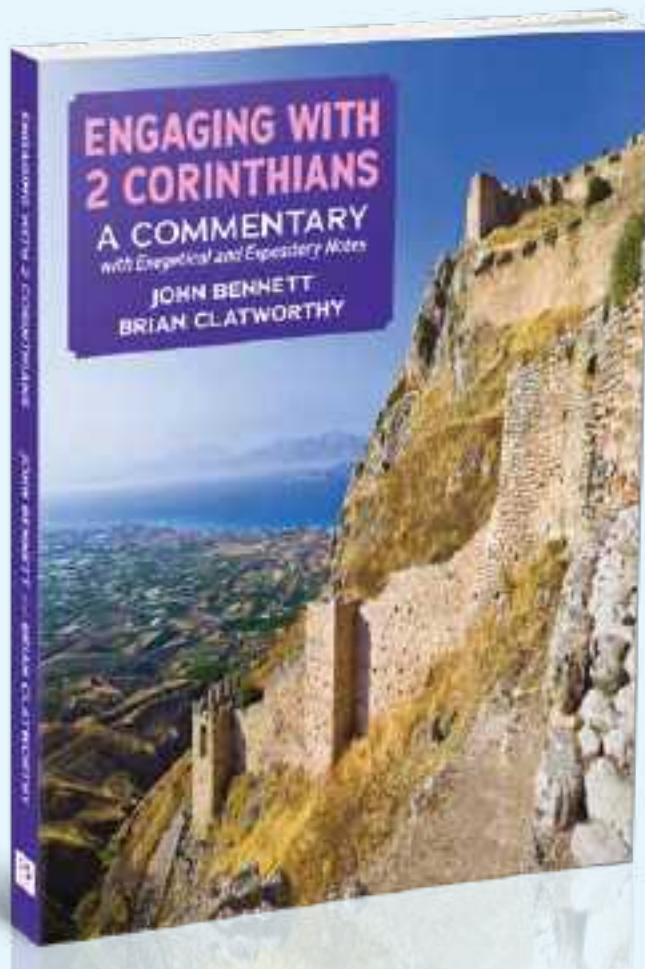
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'And there came an angel of the Lord,
and sat under an oak', Judg. 6. 11.



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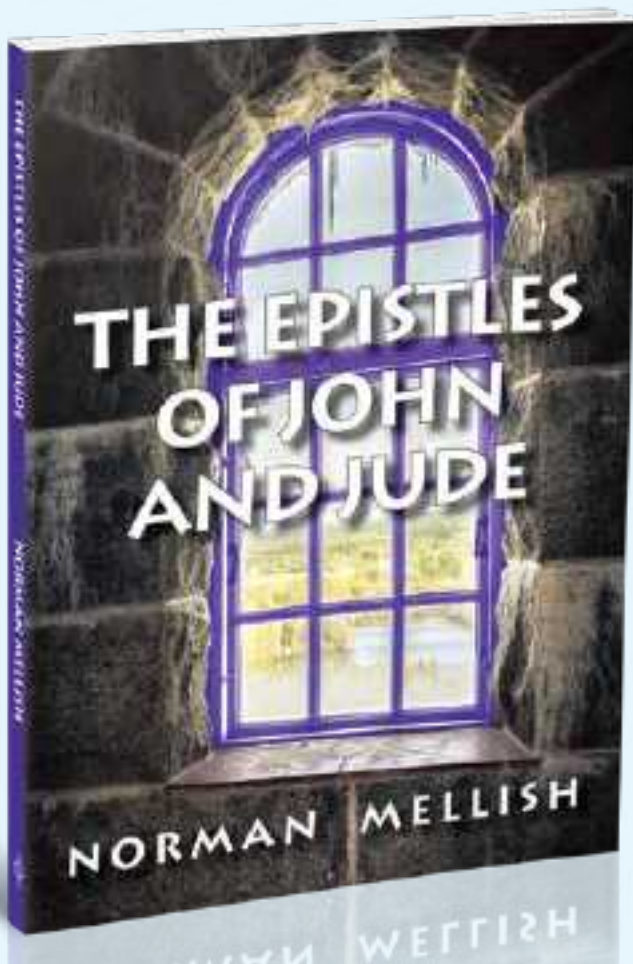
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‘What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee’, Ps. 56. 3.

Fear has the capacity to stalk the experience of every human being.

It was disobedience to God’s commands that brought fear into the experience of Adam, Gen. 3. 10. It was doubt in relation to God’s promise that caused Sarah to lie in fear, 18. 15. It was the prospect of facing the power of a wronged brother that prompted Jacob to fear, 32. 7, and, similarly, with his scheming sons in their meeting with Joseph, 45. 3.

In the psalmist’s case, though, it does not appear to be failure that brought fear. Fleeing for his life, fearful of a hostile King Saul, he finds himself in the midst of a people whose supreme warrior he had slain and in possession of the very weapon which he had used to behead him, 1 Sam. 21. 8-10. It seems that this is the context to Psalm 56, and the first two verses convey his thoughts, ‘for man would swallow me up . . . mine enemies would daily swallow me up’, and the extent of his problems, ‘they be many that fight against me’.

In our lives, where ‘fear’ or its modern-day synonym, ‘anxiety’, arises, it would do us all good to first of all allow the omniscient One to search us, Ps. 139. 1-4. For Adam, Sarah, and Jacob, there was a way to dispel their fear and that was to deal with their sin.

But not all fear is traceable back to personal sin, although even in that scenario, there is an answer. It is the same cry as that of David in Gath – ‘What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee’. It is reflected in the experience of Paul – ‘we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears. Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus’, 2 Cor. 7. 5, 6. As Paul was comforted of God through the arrival of Titus, may we ‘be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God’, 1. 4.

It is the prayer of the committee that the articles that are in this issue will

be an encouragement to the readers and, with the psalmist, provoke greater dependence on the Lord.

SANDY JACK
Eastbourne, England

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Economic parables 5

THE TWO DEBTORS

Luke 7. 36-50

By **BERT CARGILL** St Monans, Scotland

In these 'economic parables' our Lord Jesus was giving important practical lessons to His hearers, and, of course, to us. The parables were often, as here, based upon different amounts of money and their relative values. For the hearers, the actual money values were familiar and relevant, using the currency of the time. For us, the actual values can sometimes be obscured in the translation we use. For example, the word 'penny' or its plural 'pence', normally used in the King James Version, may obscure, or even trivialize the meaning, which was far from the intention in these parables. The original Latin word *denarius* has therefore been retained in some versions, allowing it to be evaluated in whatever currency is appropriate to the language of the reader, bearing in mind that, over time, inflation can dramatically change values anyway.¹ The normal benchmark is that 'a penny a day' seems to have been a labourer's wage at the time, as in the parable about labourers in a vineyard in Matthew chapter 20.

The two debts

This parable in Luke chapter 7 about two debtors was spoken directly to Simon the Pharisee at his 'dinner table' in the presence of others, with particular reference to the unnamed 'woman in the city' who came in uninvited. The Lord Jesus wanted to contrast Simon's actions (or lack of them) to her spontaneous, extravagant acts of gratitude. He was uncovering motives and highlighting real devotion.

In the parable, two debts, described as 'five hundred pence' and 'fifty [pence]', are forgiven (cancelled). Whatever the actual values of the debts were, the Lord's intention was to emphasize the large difference between them; it was tenfold. For today's English readers, in the context it would be more meaningful to contrast a debt of £500 with one of £50.

In passing, remember a corresponding but different parable at the end of Matthew chapter 18 where 'ten thousand talents' represents a very much bigger debt than 'an

hundred pence' (just one 'talent' was worth a huge number of 'pence'). That parable illustrates and emphasizes another lesson, a necessary one for us all to remember: that we who have been forgiven such a great debt by our Lord should never be unwilling to forgive others. We are reminded of this important matter in Ephesians chapter 4 verse 32, 'be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you'. Do we find that difficult to do sometimes?

The two debtors

The background to this very short but graphic parable is well known (verses 41 and 42 contain it all). You can picture the indignant Pharisee who was watching Jesus, all the time being horrified at the apparent audacity of this despised woman. You can read his inner thoughts about her, v. 39, and about the Lord, whom he imagined should have known better. His opinions about this woman, and about the Lord Jesus, were about to be exposed. His own heart and mind were about to be laid bare, in stark contrast to the evident compassion

and appreciation of Christ, and the evident devotion and gratitude of the forgiven sinner which was being so clearly demonstrated. Simon's heart was cold and empty, void of any real love for his dinner guest. Her heart was full to overflowing with love to the One who had forgiven her all her debt, just as her eyes overflowed with tears and her hair wiped His feet as she kissed them.

The devotion

How did Simon feel as Jesus broke the silence and said, 'Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee', v. 40, and then this short parable fell on his ears? How did he feel when Jesus asked him, 'Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?' v. 42, and he (grudgingly) replied, 'I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most', v. 43? Then the Lord Jesus turned to the dear weeping woman, and looking from her to Simon He itemized with evident appreciation all that she had done, so extravagantly some would think, as He contrasted one by one the serious omissions Simon was guilty of. It appears that Simon had no reply, no excuse to offer, his actions and attitude challenged but unchanged. Did he get the message when he heard Jesus saying, 'she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little', v. 47?

Jesus' words to the woman (I wish we knew her name!) that follow at the end of the chapter make it clear that she had already been forgiven at some previous encounter with the Saviour of sinners. He said, 'Thy faith **hath** saved thee', v. 50. She was not saved or forgiven by her weeping at His feet, by wiping them and kissing them. She had been saved by her faith in His word. Her many sins 'are [have been] forgiven', and He said, 'Thy faith hath [already] saved thee; go in peace'.

All this was also true in a different way about the next woman of whom we read at the beginning of the next chapter, Mary Magdalene. Her many demons were cast out, she was healed. The woman in Simon's house found a new place at her Saviour's feet, spontaneously and emotionally showing her love for Him there and then. Mary Magdalene found a new place in her new Master's company,

steadfastly following Him and practically showing her loyalty to Him for the rest of His journey to the cross and beyond. She was one of the last to leave His cross on Calvary's hill as that dreadful day ended, and first at His tomb on that dark morning three days later, on the first day of the week. That too was unambiguous devotion.

The cost

In this and other parables about debts being forgiven, there is something we often overlook. We must not forget that the one who forgave the debtors had to pay the price of the debt himself, whatever it was. Indeed, he had to suffer the loss of what was

his due. Surely, we remember that, for us to be forgiven, our debt had to be paid, and it was paid by our blessed Redeemer. Our redemption's price could not be calculated in terms of the currency of this world, in 'corruptible things, as silver and gold', or by any other means. It was paid by the precious blood of Christ shed upon the cross of Calvary, 1 Pet. 1. 18, 19. Well might we acknowledge, 'Jesus paid it all, all to Him I owe'.²

A few chapters further on in Luke's Gospel there is an interesting question repeated, spoken to different individuals, 'How much owest thou?' Luke 16. 5, 7. Although the context and the meaning of the parable in

which this is found are quite different, the question is none the less very challenging to each of us. 'How much do I owe to my Lord?' 'How much?' – and how sincere is my appreciation and my devotion today?

Many of the hymns we sing remind us of this. It is not surprising that hymn-writers of the past century thought about it, too, and put their thoughts into the words that we often use to re-echo those feelings of debt and appreciation.

ALBERT MIDLANE³ wrote this (with two more verses) –

'Lord when I think upon the love
Which Thou to me hast shown,
To die upon the cross, that Thou
Mayest claim me for Thine own.
I cannot tell why Thou didst show
Such love to one like me,
Save that it is, that I might know
I owe it all to Thee'.

Should we not all feel increasingly, and right now, the great debt we owe to Christ, our Redeemer, our Saviour, and our Lord? And should we not strive earnestly to show it devotedly in the best way we can?

ROBERT MURRAY MCCHEYNE⁴ ended his well-known hymn with this verse:

'Chosen not for good in me
Wakened up from wrath to flee;
Hidden in the Saviour's side,
By the Spirit sanctified:
**Teach me, Lord, on earth to show
By my love how much I owe**'.

Endnotes

1. Denarion. 'Considering the actual value, shilling would have been a more accurate translation, as proposed by the American translators', W. E. VINE, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, Oliphants, 1940 and 1952. Around eighty years later, shilling has dramatically lost its value and even its existence!
2. Chorus to the hymn *I hear the Saviour say* written 1865 in USA by Elvina Hall (1820-1889).
3. MIDLANE (1825-1909), born on the Isle of Wight, wrote over 1,000 hymns including *There's a Friend for little children*. Emphasis inserted.
4. In his short life and ministry, MCCHEYNE (1813-1843) was mightily used by God to reach many lost souls in the developing industrial city of Dundee. Emphasis inserted.



Son of the Blessed

By **JOHN SCARSBROOK** Killamarsh, England

It was still dark, though the promise of dawn was a faint blush in the eastern sky, heralding what would be the most significant day in the history of the universe. It was cold enough to need a fire in the courtyard of the high priest's house, but the offensive odour of hypocrisy pervaded the hastily arranged gathering of the temple hierarchy as the fifteenth of Nisan drew on when 'the Passover must be killed', Luke 22. 7.

Caiaphas, the high priest, considered the thirty pieces of silver to be money well spent as he observed the prisoner before him. At last, the Nazarene was in his grasp. It had taken some three years of plotting, scheming, and guile to finally entrap Him. But now all that Caiaphas needed was two or three 'witnesses' who could be persuaded to make an appropriate accusation, then he could close the chapter on this man who had caused him so many sleepless nights.

Then, unexpectedly, his best laid plans began to unravel. The 'witnesses', hastily subpoenaed to attend the hearing and give

conclusive evidence of guilt, could not agree! One after another came before the council, each with a concocted story of 'He did this', or 'He said that', but the required agreement of two or three witnesses failed to materialize. Increasingly frustrated, Caiaphas insisted that more witnesses be found at this unsociable hour, to convict the man who stood silently before him. Eventually, two were brought, recalling words spoken over three years before, when the Nazarene began to teach publicly. They remembered an occasion when He had single-handedly driven the money changers and all the

commercial paraphernalia from the temple precincts. He had said, one claimed, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands', Mark 14. 58. Although this distorted version was not confirmed by his fellow perjurer, enough had been insinuated for Caiaphas to call a halt to the proceedings and turn his attention directly to the prisoner. It irritated him that Jesus had spoken no word to refute the witnesses, nor to offer any defence.

Rising from his seat of office and with ill-concealed anger, Caiaphas challenged Jesus to contradict the charge. Still receiving no response, he chose to employ a legal strategy which would not allow the defendant to remain silent. By calling upon the Almighty to witness, the accused was placed under oath to give an answer, Lev. 5. 1. Carefully phrasing his question to avoid any ambiguity, in measured tones he challenged the prisoner to condemn Himself. 'Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?' Mark 14. 61. The 'thou' was noticeably emphatic, as it would shortly be in Pilate's interrogation,



John 18. 33. In each case, the ill-treatment He had received rendered recognition of either Messiah or King as doubtful.

The question posed by Caiaphas embraced two distinct titles of the Lord Jesus. Was He 'the Christ', 'the Promised One', anticipated by the nation for generations? The One who would redeem Israel, Luke 24. 21? Whom, later that same day, the rulers would mock as 'the chosen of God'? And would He claim the second title which had deeper connotations? The phrase 'Son of the Blessed' is only found here in the New Testament writings. It is adjectival or descriptive in character but is principally a noun. Such was the reticence of the Jewish psyche to speak the name of Jehovah, that alternatives were used whenever possible. Hence 'Son of the Blessed' would equate to 'Son of God', Matt. 26. 63.

In the many altercations between the Lord Jesus and the rulers, of which there were no doubt more than those recorded for us, the main point of conflict was His reference to God as His Father. The Jews were under no illusion that such claims declared

equality with God. Despite all the evidence to the contrary, their proud minds would not accept that this carpenter's son from Galilee could possibly be the promised Messiah and Son of God.

The response given to the question was a clear and unequivocal affirmation, 'Jesus said, I am', Mark 14. 62. There was no other answer He could give since the law demanded an answer and the One questioned was the embodiment of truth. His reply confirmed the substance of His teaching and manner of life, had they but listened and accepted His claims.

Jesus knew that His answer was just what Caiaphas was hoping for in order to move to a verdict. He knew also what the verdict would be and, in light of this, He issued a personal warning of judgement against the high priest, 'ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven', v. 62. This brief statement confirms the resurrection, the future return, and the reversal of roles, when Caiaphas will be the one awaiting, not a trial, but a final sentence.

Leviticus chapter 21 verse 10 forbade the high priest to rend his clothes. Caiaphas had either not read this, or more likely chose to ignore it as he theatrically tore his outer garment in an expression of hypocritical horror at what he judged to be blasphemy.

What will eternity be for those who then began to spit on Him, to buffet Him with their fists, to mock Him and strike Him with their hands?

As seen above, the title 'Son of the Blessed' is unique to this occasion. Throughout the scripture blessing is enjoined in many and varied circumstances not particularly relevant to this article. There are, however, two occasions which merit a mention, where the word is applied directly to God, and reveals what He is intrinsically. In 1 Timothy chapter 1 verse 11, Paul reminds Timothy that the antidote to the false teachers who ignorantly professed to teach the law, is the gospel of the glory of the blessed God' RV. In his final charge to Timothy in this Epistle, Paul records in chapter 6 verse 15 an expression of praise embracing a sevenfold description of God, commencing with 'the blessed and only Potentate'.



THE TEACHING IN THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS

Part 2 – ‘Wrestling with Angels’

By **BRIAN CLATWORTHY** Newbury, England

‘A more excellent name than angels’

Have you ever considered why the writer to the Hebrews seems to pay little attention to the communication of the prophets, Heb. 1. 1, yet, by contrast, dedicates a considerable amount of space to comparing angels with the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, Heb. 1. 5 - 2. 9? Apart from the numerous appearances of angels in the Old Testament,¹ why, in fact, were angels so important to Judaism

in general and specifically to these first-century Jewish Christians?

There are at least two reasons:

1. Angels were described in the Old Testament as ‘sons of God’, Job. 1. 6; 38. 7² but Christ’s sonship is of a different kind to theirs and far superior. This argument is made by the writer in chapter 1 verse 4 by asserting that not only did the Son become greater than the angels by being

more important or superior in authority to them, but God also caused Him to inherit a name that was greater than theirs.³ This sense of inheritance has already been touched upon earlier in the chapter as the writer states that the Son will ultimately come to possess all things that rightly belong to Him, Heb. 1. 2. The inheritance given to Christ by His Father is that of a name, ‘Son’, v. 4, and the use of the perfect tense here confirms that it is a permanent possession.⁴ It is also important to appreciate that as God has created all things through His Son, Ps. 33. 6; Prov. 8. 30, this must include angels, hence their inferiority to the Son of God.

2. The association of angels with the giving of the law at Sinai was so important to Judaism. In fact, angels so affected Jewish consciousness that they could

| Hebrews | Old Testament Text | Context | Division | Argument |
|-----------|---|---|-------------------------------|---|
| 1. 5 | Ps. 2. 7 2 Sam. 7. 14} 1 Chr. 17. 13} | The enthronement of the Son of God | Writings [Former] Prophets | God has never acknowledged an angel as His Son, nor enthroned one, but He has acknowledged and enthroned His unique Son. The background to the psalm is the quotation taken from 2 Samuel chapter 7 verse 14 and the parallel text, 1 Chr. 17. 13. Both these texts refer to the anointing of David as king over Israel and the establishment of the Davidic dynasty. But these texts look beyond David to David’s greater Son who, following His suffering and death and resurrection, has been exalted and enthroned at God’s right hand, the true Messiah – the Lord’s Anointed, waiting for the day when His enemies will be made the footstool of His feet, Ps. 110. 1. If the Son is addressed in this way, then He must be superior to angels. |
| 1. 6, 7 | Deut. 32. 43 LXX Ps. 97. 7 LXX Ps. 104. 4 | The worship of the Son of God by angels as He is introduced to the inhabited universe | Law Writings Writings | The enthronement of the Son, not angels, means that He has rule over all the universe. Angels are not only therefore subject to Him but carry out His will as they serve Him. |
| 1. 8-12 | Ps. 45. 6, 7 Ps. 102. 25-27 | The eternal nature of the Son’s reign and His relationship to the universe | Writings Writings | By the very fact that the Son is eternal and has been exalted above angelic beings, He is the righteous, anointed king of the universe who will reign eternally. He brought the heavens and the earth into existence. Not only does He sustain them but one day He will fold up the material universe like clothing that is worn out, but the Son will remain eternally. |
| 1. 13, 14 | Ps. 110. 1 Ps. 104. 4(?) | The contrast between the Son’s enthronement and the service of angels | Writings Writings | God has never invited an angelic being to sit at His right hand, but He has installed His Son in that place of power and acknowledged Him to be Lord. Angels, however, have a subordinate role to the Son and have been divinely appointed to serve those who have become recipients of the Son’s saving work on their behalf. |

not think of the law without the disposition of angels. The crucial text for them was Deuteronomy chapter 33 verse 2 LXX, ‘on his right hand were His angels with Him’, thus highlighting their involvement in the giving of the law at Sinai, cp. Ps. 68. 17. In Stephen’s defence before the Jewish authorities, he refers to the angel who spoke to Moses, and the inference is that the law was being transferred to Moses from God through angelic facilitation, Acts 7. 38.⁵ Paul also makes this point in Galatians chapter 3 verse 19, when he states that the law ‘was ordained by [or through] angels in the hand of a mediator’. The Greek word for ‘ordained’, *diatageis*, refers to the way in which the law was brought in, cp. Matthew chapter 11 verse 1 where the same word is used of the appointment of the twelve disciples, and in Acts chapter 18 verse 2 explaining why Aquilla and Priscilla were in Corinth, i.e., because of the decree of Claudius expelling Jews from Rome. So, God determined that the law should be conveyed by angels to Moses, but our writer will subsequently show that Christ’s superiority to the angels made Him far greater than the law mediated by them, Heb. 2. 2, 3.

The writer uses verse 4 of chapter 1 as a sort of hinge to connect the statements he has made in the earlier verses to develop his argument that the Son has greater authority than angels, 1. 5 – 2. 9. He does this by using a chain of texts,⁶ taken from the three divisions of the Old Testament (Law, Prophets, and Writings) but mainly from the leading book in the Writings, viz., the Book of Psalms.⁷ The table (see left) brings together the wide range of texts that are quoted by the writer and shows how these are designed to prove his argument in chapter 1 verse 5 onwards as to why the Son is superior to angels.

GEORGE H. GUTHRIE suggests that ‘the difference between the allusion to Psalm 110: 1 found in Hebrews 1: 3 and the direct quote of this text at 1:

13 is that the quotation here (1: 13 - *my insertion*) includes the duration of the “sitting”: “until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet”. The recitation of Psalm 110: 1 here, moreover, anticipates the author’s use of Psalm 8: 4-6 in Hebrews 2: 5-9, which also speaks of the subjection of all things under the feet of the Messiah’.⁸

The argument moves seamlessly into chapter 2 where the writer refers to the first of several warnings, which he includes at various critical points in his letter. In verses 1 to 4, he now makes a comparison between the Mosaic law communicated by angels and the message of saving faith communicated through the Son of God. If every infraction under the Mosaic law, which had been communicated by those who were inferior to the Son of God, received due punishment, how much greater will the punishment be for anyone who rejected or abandoned the Christian faith, which God has conveyed to the habitable world in the person of His own Son?

The writer concludes his argument in verses 5 to 9 where he shows that although angels had a lofty position before God, the world to come is not to be subject to them, but to man, as originally intended by God, Gen. 1. 26-28.⁹ Man was given dominion over the whole creation of God, Ps. 8. 6-8, but, because of the fall, man’s sovereignty was diminished, Heb. 2. 8. It therefore needed the Son of God to be made lower than the angels, Ps. 8. 5, through incarnation. In this state of humanity, He suffered and died for the sons of men and made restoration for all that was lost by the first man, including man’s sovereignty over the earth. By tasting death for all **men**, not angels, Heb. 2. 9, 16, God has now highly exalted His Son and given him glory and honour far above all principalities and powers, as well as angelic beings.

Therefore, no angelic being can be compared with the Son of God who is ‘over all, God blessed for ever. Amen’, Rom. 9. 5.

Endnotes

- 1 E.g., Gen. 16. 7; 19. 1; 32. 1; Judg. 2. 1; 6. 12; 13. 3; 1 Chr. 21. 16; Dan. 3. 28.
- 2 ‘In most of the places LXX calls the “sons of God” angels’ (F. F. BRUCE, *The Epistle to the Hebrews, The New London Commentary on the New Testament*, Murray, fn. 55, pg. 11).
- 3 It is important to appreciate in this context that Christ’s sonship ‘rests upon prior eternal sonship . . . what the Son was in himself before all time is now contrasted with what he has become (aorist *genomenos*) after his atoning work – seated at the right hand of God exalted above angels’. (DAVID L. ALLEN, *Hebrews, The New American Commentary*, Broadman and Holman, 2006, pg. 131).
- 4 The text could be translated, ‘The name that God said belonged to him’. ‘By introducing an expression such as “belonged to him,” one can do justice to the underlying meaning of the Greek, in which “inheritance” involves the concept of “coming into one’s rightful possession.”’ (PAUL ELLINGWORTH and EUGENE A. NIDA, *A Translator’s Handbook on the Letter to the Hebrews*, American Bible Society, 1996, pg. 13).
- 5 In commenting on Acts chapter 7 verse 38, F. F. BRUCE refers to a quotation from the Book of Jubilees, chapter 2 verse 1, ‘an angel talked with Moses’ (*The Acts of the Apostles* (The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary), pg. 172). JOSEPHUS also suggests that the law was mediated through angels (or ambassadors) (*The Antiquities of the Jews* 15. 5.(136)) and PHILO (*Dreams* 1.140-44) also refers to angels in the same context.
- 6 This is known in Judaism as stringing pearls together like beads, and is based upon the Song of Solomon chapter 1 verse 10. The word for ‘pearls’, or ‘beads’, in that verse is *charuzim*, which is from the same root as ‘rhyming’, *chorez*. In the Patristic writings, these are known as a catena of texts and were used as a commentary on passages of scripture, which is precisely the intention of this New Testament writer to the Hebrews.
- 7 The writer quotes more times from the book of Psalms in his letter than any other part of the Old Testament.
- 8 GEORGE H. GUTHRIE, *Hebrews, The NIV Application Commentary*, Zondervan, 1998, pg. 71.
- 9 Jews held the belief that God had placed angels over the nations of the earth in accordance with Deuteronomy chapter 32 verse 8. In commenting on this verse, JEFFREY H. TIGAY states, ‘When God organized the government of the world, He established two tiers: at the top, He Himself, “God of gods” (*‘elohai ha-‘elohim*) and Lord of lords” (10:17), who reserved Israel for Himself, to govern personally; below Him, seventy angels “divine beings” (*benei ‘elohim*) to whom He allotted the other peoples’. (*Deuteronomy, The JPS Torah Commentary*, The Jewish Publication Society, 2003, pg. 303).

Towns and cities in the life of the Lord

Part 1 Bethlehem

By **STUART SCAMMELL** Cardiff, Wales

Among the many towns and cities of earth, some were blessed by visits from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. James Irwin, an American astronaut, had the amazing opportunity that few humans have had of walking on the moon but, being a believer in the Lord Jesus, he is quoted as saying, 'God walking on the earth is more important than man walking on the moon'. It does us good to remember that Emmanuel came near to us.

The first place that the Lord visited was Bethlehem and it is here that the nativity narrative takes place. Bethlehem, the city of David, Luke 2. 4, is referred to over fifty times in the scriptures and is of huge significance. The use of the term 'a city' might give the impression that it had a large population and a well-developed infrastructure, but this was probably not the case. The Bethlehem of the scriptures was a place that was agricultural in character and small in population. In Micah's famous prophecy it is referred to as being 'little among the thousands of Judah', Mic. 5. 2. This 'little town of Bethlehem', as the famous Christmas carol puts it, was used mightily in God's purposes. This would remind us that it is not human strength that God uses, but rather weakness. He often chooses to use insignificant things, so that His might can be seen.

Many significant events are associated with Bethlehem. Rachel died and was buried there, Gen. 35. 19. Ibzan, a lesser-known judge, was from there, Judg. 12. 8. It was also the place where Elimelech lived with his wife Naomi. It was a privilege for them to live there. Bethlehem should have been a place of blessing, for 'Bethlehem' literally means, 'house of bread'. Yet, as Elimelech enters the divine narrative, God's people are far from Him. The previous book, Judges, concludes with the sad observation, 'there was no king in

Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes'. The book of Ruth commences with the statement that there was famine in the land. This famine was not only physical, but spiritual as well. God was once again chastening His people for their own good.

Elimelech failed to look to the promise of God that in Bethlehem, the house of bread, they would all be fed. Rather, he followed his own wisdom and devised his own solution. He took his family on a disastrous move to Moab. Yet in all this we trace God's hand moving, despite the actions of man. We see the faith of a widow and her influence on her daughter-in-law and a second move of restoration back to Bethlehem. The graciousness of God can be seen even further. Ruth the Moabitess was redeemed by Boaz and came into the blessing of God's chosen nation. We see this Gentile lady, through faith in her mother-in-law's God, being blessed in another way. The book closes with a reference to a great-grandson, David – the man after God's own heart. The genealogy at the start of Matthew's Gospel includes Ruth within the family tree of the Lord Jesus Himself. What a wonderful picture of God's love to the whole world that Gentile Ruth is mentioned in this line of our Lord and Saviour. The story might have begun in Ruth chapter 1 verse 1 with disobedience, but repentance on the part of Naomi and faith on the part

of Ruth led to blessing at Bethlehem. For them, Bethlehem was enjoyed as 'the house of bread'. Centuries later, it became the birthplace of our Lord who described Himself as 'the bread of life', John 6. 35. He is the only source of spiritual life.

Joseph had a very significant role to play in the narrative of the incarnation. He was chosen to be the earthly guardian of our Lord. His roots were also in Bethlehem, this place of blessing, and yet at some point Joseph's family had moved away to Nazareth.

As God moved the heart of Caesar Augustus to determine the population of his empire, the plan of God is being enacted. Joseph, along with Mary, journeys to the city of David, Bethlehem, where our Lord was prophesied to be born. Over 500 years previously, Micah, by the Spirit of God, prophesied the place, Bethlehem Ephrathah. Now, God's providential hand is guiding the circumstances that once again the scriptures might be fulfilled.

In Luke chapter 2 verse 7, we are told of the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. All that this world had to offer to the Son of God was a manger, 'because there was no room . . . in the inn'. The word for inn is *kataluma*, which is translated more often as guest chamber, Mark. 14. 14. The circumstances probably were that the family guest chamber was already taken and all that was left was the lower level of the family home where the animals were kept, so not even His earthly family gave Him His rightful place. Once the Lord Jesus had started His public ministry, things worsened. In Mark chapter 3 verse 21, we read, 'his friends . . . said, He is beside himself'. Many translate that as His family. Even they did not understand who He was. They despised His teaching and rejected Him. Mark chapter 3 closes with a challenge to our attitude to the teaching of our Lord. He states, 'whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother'.

The slopes on the hillsides around Bethlehem still show the evidence of

the activities of grazing flocks. There are low stone walls, stone sheep dips and some crumbling watch towers. The great attractions to shepherds in using the fields of Bethlehem were the natural grottos that exist there. We are told in Luke chapter 2 verse 8 that 'shepherds' were 'living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night' NKJV. They were not going back to a cosy farmhouse to sleep. They were out among the elements. Although a good fire would protect them from the cold nights, they were still susceptible to a storm. Here, the caves gave them safety, and shelter, both for themselves and their sheep. It is a beautiful feature of the story of the Incarnation that shepherds were greeted by angels with 'good tidings of great joy', Luke 2. 10. Confronted by the glory of the Lord, the angel of the Lord and the heavenly host, the shepherds quite understandably were greatly afraid. I imagine that a pause of silence which may have lasted a while followed the angels' departure. I am sure they struggled to comprehend what they had just experienced. What a statement of faith was in their conclusion, 'Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see', Luke 2. 15. Their journey of faith from the Judean hills into Bethlehem was rewarded with sight, as they hurried and saw, 'the babe lying in a manger', v. 16.

They were among the first to see

the Saviour of the world. They were shepherds who went 'with haste' to see the Great Shepherd. For our eternal safety and care to be established, this tiny infant, who was truly God, had to come to demonstrate the ultimate shepherd qualities. Shepherds could face dangers. David in the fields around Bethlehem had to defend his flock against the attacks of a lion and a bear, 1 Sam. 17. 34. The Lord Jesus went even further. He could say, 'I am the good shepherd', John 10. 11. He demonstrated the ultimate care of the shepherd. He did not just risk His life for the welfare of His sheep, He gave it!

The shepherds could not keep quiet about what they had seen and heard, and it had its impact on Bethlehem's community. We have experienced the joy of sins forgiven. Do we contain this joy, or do we also impact the communities where we live?

By the time we reach Matthew chapter 2, some time has passed. According to Matthew, our Lord is not in swaddling bands, but now is a 'young child', 2. 8, and Mary and Joseph have acquired a house in which to live. Magi from the east arrive, mistakenly in Jerusalem, searching for the 'King of the Jews', v. 2. They have seen His star and desire to worship. They need to

be informed of Micah's prophecy and are redirected to Bethlehem. Our appreciation in worship is not from ourselves, but about being close to God. It comes out of our appreciation of who and what God is. They brought gifts to the house in Bethlehem, where the young child was, and worshipped with gold, frankincense, and myrrh. All were of great significance, telling us of His kingship, His deity, His worthiness of our worship, and the death that He would die.

The wise men, being warned by God in a dream, did not return to Herod, and Herod, realizing that he had been deceived, became enraged and sought to destroy his young rival. He brutally slaughtered those males under two years. Remarkably, this also was prophesied, on this occasion by Jeremiah in chapter 31 verse 15. Although here is a huge tragedy for the mothers of Bethlehem, God's Son, Jesus Christ, is protected from the slaughter and ushered to Egypt. Nothing would keep God from His purposes. 'The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world', 1 John 4. 14. In fact, Herod with all his earthly power, his rage, and determination was powerless to remove Jesus Christ, for He could say, 'I lay down my life . . . No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself', John 10. 17, 18.



Pauline metaphors Sowing and reaping

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

Part 7

Introduction

The idea of sowing and reaping may be unfamiliar to someone living in a non-rural community in the 21st century, but it was a normal part of everyday life in the ancient world. The Apostle Paul would have been very familiar with this as most people in his world grew their own fruit and vegetables or visited the marketplace regularly to buy food. This food was, in the main, grown locally and probably still had a healthy sprinkling of soil on it. There was no such thing as 'food miles' or 'pre-washed' and packaged produce.

Lessons drawn from the regular activities of life are common in the Bible and the process of sowing and reaping is particularly useful when explaining the principle of cause-and-effect, actions, and their consequences, which God has built into all spheres of life – both natural and spiritual. This principle applies to everyone, both believer and unbeliever, though we will be focusing in this article on what believers can learn from it.

But let us define our terms for those who are not familiar with the concept. The term 'sowing' refers to the act of planting a seed and 'reaping' refers to harvesting, gathering in, or collecting, what grows from that seed.

Initially, we are going to look at what the Old Testament says about sowing and reaping as this is the Bible that Paul read, and his teaching is saturated with pictures and principles from it. These portions of scripture will provide evidence that Paul's teaching is in complete harmony with the rest of scripture. Then, we will briefly consider how the Lord Jesus used the concept and conclude by reviewing the passages where the

Apostle Paul teaches his readers lessons from this principle.

Old Testament references

When Noah and his family disembarked from the ark, 'the Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake . . . While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease', Gen. 8. 21, 22. From this we can see that the process of sowing and reaping was one of the normal cycles of life. Later in Genesis, we are reminded that the farmer expects to reap far more than they sowed. 'Then Isaac sowed in that land, and received in the same year an hundredfold: and the Lord blessed him', 26. 12. This is one of four main lessons we learn about sowing and reaping:

1. Sowing and reaping is a set principle. When sowing is not followed by reaping it is exceptional. Sometimes, it is as a result of God intervening in judgement, Jer. 12. 13; Mic. 6. 15.
2. You always reap what you sow. A farmer does not expect to reap maize if he has sown a field of rapeseed.
3. You generally reap more than you sow.
4. Reaping always takes place at a later date.

The wisdom books of the Old Testament mention the principle of sowing and reaping a number of times.

In Job chapter 4 verse 8, Eliphaz, one of Job's three friends, makes this statement – 'Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same'. It is a sobering lesson as Eliphaz is telling us, the same as Paul does in Galatians chapter 6 verse 7 – you reap what you sow.

On a more positive note, we learn in Psalm 126 verses 5 and 6 that despite the circumstances of sowing being hard and tearful at times, if you sow the right seed, you will eventually reap with shouts of joy. Again, this confirms that truth that Paul brings to the churches of Galatia.

In Proverbs chapter 11 verses 18 and 19, we read, 'The wicked man does deceptive work, but he who sows righteousness will have a sure reward. As righteousness leads to life, so he who pursues evil pursues it to his own death', NKJV. And, in Proverbs chapter 22 verses 8 and 9, Solomon states, 'He who sows iniquity will reap sorrow, and the rod of his anger will fail. He who has a generous eye will be blessed, for he gives of his bread to the poor', NKJV. I cannot highlight this principle more vividly than these verses do.

When the prophet Hosea is called to denounce the sin of Israel, he uses expressive language and graphic metaphors. In chapter 8 verse 7, he says, 'For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind'. Continuing with this theme, Hosea writes, 'Judah shall plow, and Jacob shall break his clods. Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the Lord, till he come and rain righteousness upon you. Ye have plowed wickedness, ye have reaped iniquity; ye have eaten the fruit of lies: because thou didst trust in thy way, in the multitude of thy mighty men', Hos. 10. 11-13.

This is striking language, reminding us of the danger of sowing sinful seeds and of how it could be so different if they sought the Lord. The lessons are still pertinent for us today and may have influenced Paul's thinking as he penned his letter to the Galatians.

Lessons from the Lord Jesus

The Lord Jesus refers to this principle on a number of occasions. Matthew chapter 13 and John chapter 15 specifically highlight

the principle. One key passage where the Lord Jesus refers to the principle is Matthew chapter 7 verses 15 to 20. The key phrases are, 'You will know them by their fruits' and 'by their fruits you will know them', NKJV. The Lord Jesus is clearly implying that the type of fruit that is harvested is clear evidence of the nature of the seed that was sown.

All the following passages serve to illustrate and underpin Paul's use of this metaphor in his letters.

The Pauline Epistles

There are three passages where Paul directly refers to the concept of sowing and reaping, Gal. 6. 7-9; 2 Cor. 9. 6-11; and 1 Cor. 15. 37.

The **Galatians chapter 6** passage on this topic has a warning – 'Be not deceived; God is not mocked'. At the beginning of this chapter, Paul has been teaching the believers how to react when another believer has been overcome by sin. He has been appealing to godly believers to be gentle and humble in how they handle this type of situation, bearing in mind that the ultimate aim is to help that person back on to the right path. He also wants these believers to be aware that they too are vulnerable to temptation. The emphasis in the passage is on the responsibility of the believer to care for others by sharing their burdens and yet at the same time being aware that we as individuals are ultimately responsible for our own conduct. Among the issues that the apostle raises is the need to provide practically for those who have looked after our spiritual needs, see also Rom. 15. 27.

Now, Paul writes, remember:

1. God is in control, you cannot catch Him out, do not doubt or mock His sovereign authority;
2. You will sow what you reap so be careful how you behave;
3. This is not just a principle in the physical world, it applies to your spiritual life;
4. There are two types of grounds and seed – the flesh (that which

satisfies your sinful nature) and the Spirit (that which is of God);

5. There are two types of results when the harvesting takes place – that which is marked by and reflects the old nature, it is corrupt, decayed, and destructive, and that which reflects the qualities of eternal life.

It is not that the believer gets eternal life by how they live (this is clear from many other passages of scripture) but that how they live reflects the fact that they have eternal life, and the fruit of the Spirit is seen in how they behave, 5. 22, 23.

The closing injunction in this respect is, 'As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith', 6. 10.

In **2 Corinthians chapter 9 verses 6 to 11** the apostle highlights the same principle but this time he is teaching them about their attitude to giving. There will always be believers in the world who are suffering and impoverished. Christians who are not suffering, at that point in time, have an obligation to provide for needy believers. In verse 6 of this passage, Paul highlights principle number three which is stated above, that is, that you generally reap more than you sow. This principle means that believers should understand that God is no man's debtor and will compensate those who, out of a grateful heart, sow the seed of generous giving for the glory of God and for the benefit of His people. The Macedonian believers were a great example of this, 2 Cor. 8. 2.

The final passage I want to consider is found in **1 Corinthians chapter 15**. This chapter is all about resurrection. It deals with the fact of resurrection and establishes a very clear case for the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ based on eyewitness evidence. In the second part of the chapter, Paul focuses on what the believer's body will be like at the point of resurrection. To do this he highlights the principle of sowing

and reaping, see vv. 37, 42-44, showing that the resurrection of a believer's body is not simply the coming back to life of a dead body, but the re-creation of a new, glorified, body.

Paul is counteracting the false teaching that believers have spiritual life but no physical future. The scriptures teach very clearly that believers enjoy both spiritual life in Christ and will in a future day be raised in a physical body to enjoy life in His presence.

The body that God resurrects will not be the same type of body that died, even though it is identified as the body of the same person. Paul proceeds to demonstrate this from the sowing of grain. Effectively, life in a new form springs forth from death, vv. 36-37. So, the body we live in today will be different from the resurrection body, as in the example of seed and grain. If God can do this with grain, so He can do it with humans.

The question is – Is what grows the same as what was sown? No, but there is an essential link between the two. Without the seed there would have been no crop. Also, the plant gets its characteristics from the seed, and so it is with the resurrection body. The glorified body of the believer will be cleansed from corruption, with no more experiences of dishonour or weakness. It will be incorruptible, glorious, powerful, and spiritual. It is the same body, but it is sown in one form and raised in another. What a wonderful truth!

Conclusion

I have found the lessons Paul teaches from sowing and reaping very challenging and a sobering reminder that we need to think about what we do and say as we will reap what we sow. Thankfully, the grace of God in salvation has dealt with the consequences of our sin but, as we live for the Lord, we are sowing seed that will be harvested in the future and our desire is that it might be for His glory at His coming, 1 Thess. 2. 19; 2 Thess. 1. 10; Rev. 19. 8.

Hope by the roadside

By **PAUL JENKINSON** Galston, Scotland



The work of 'Hope by the roadside' began in May 2016. Our desire was simply to display the word of God to as many precious souls as possible and to provide free Bibles and literature to any who requested them. Romans chapter 10 verse 17 tells us, 'faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God'. Equally, Hebrews chapter 4 reminds us, 'For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword', v. 12. In the scriptures, the word of God is likened to a seed. There is life in a seed; there is power in a seed. The seed that we have is soul-saving seed. It is intended to be shared and not stored, planted, and not pocketed. Haggai chapter 2 verse 19 asks a very pointed question, 'Is the seed yet in the barn?' Six years ago our desire was to go and sow the life-giving seed, and this continues to be our desire.

'Hope by the roadside' first displayed God's word on a billboard trailer beside the very busy M77 motorway in Ayrshire, Scotland. We are still renting this billboard and the

Lord has been incredibly faithful and allowed the work to grow considerably since then. 'Hope by the roadside' currently has billboards or trailers in Scotland, England, Wales, Ireland, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Canada, and, most recently, St Lucia. Each day it is estimated that in excess of 4.5 million people pass our billboards!

In 2018 we placed a mobile billboard trailer in the field of a believer in Renfrewshire, Scotland but, unfortunately, after not too long there was a complaint made by a member of the public and the council ordered it to be removed. Thankfully, this has been the only complaint we have received in six years! Receiving this complaint made us think about the future of 'Hope by the roadside', and, subsequently, in 2019, we purchased four new box van trailers and had God's word displayed on them. They are general purpose trailers which anyone with a driving licence can tow. Two are with full-time workers in Wales, the third is with an assembly in Manchester,

and the fourth is with the assembly in Culloden, in the Scottish Highlands. We also purchased an ex-supermarket delivery van which we have had fully vinyl-wrapped with God's word, and we take it to as many different places as possible to reach many souls with the gospel. In summer 2020, we were delighted to take a Bible verse billboard trailer to a brother who owns land beside the busy A9 road from Perth to Inverness.

In late 2020 we were contacted by our brother Denis Noon from Airedale, Yorkshire. He had been faithfully displaying God's word on billboards in England for many years but is now in his nineties and had been praying for someone to continue this work. We gladly agreed to take it over and in May 2021 we took on the three sites in England, all of which are forty-foot-long articulated lorry trailers. We have fitted new Bible verse banners to the three sites and receive regular requests for Bibles and literature.

We first visited Uganda in 2013 and return regularly to visit the believers there to assist with Bible teaching and gospel preaching. In 2018, 'Hope by the roadside' began displaying God's word on billboards in Uganda also. We currently have eight roadside, double-sided billboards throughout Uganda.

In November 2019 we began a ministry with Boda-boda riders (motorbike taxis) in Uganda's capital, Kampala. We purchased several high visibility vests, had Bible verses printed on the back and





distributed them to the Boda-boda riders, trusting that they are of both physical and spiritual blessing to them and their passengers. Those who received them were incredibly grateful and even some Muslim men took one and happily wore a vest displaying the words of the Bible. We have purchased 1500 more of these vests and plan to distribute them on our visits throughout the next couple of years. We hope this will be the start of a real outreach to these men who are from very poor backgrounds and are in desperate need of Christ.

We were also able to assist in acquiring some high visibility vests for our brother and sister, Josh and Keri Kaye, to use in the Democratic



Republic of Congo (DRC). Josh and Keri kindly offered to assist us to expand the work of the billboards into DRC and there are now three billboards displaying God's word in very busy areas of Lubumbashi.

In spring 2022, we were delighted to see two billboards go up in County Limerick, Ireland: one in Limerick city centre, and the other in the small market town of Croom.

In October 2021, I was invited to share in a series of gospel meetings in Manitoba, Canada. Whilst there we began exploring the possibility of renting billboards to display God's word and in May 2022 the first billboard went up beside the very busy trans-Canada highway. While in Canada, I met brother Phil Gould and his wife, who are full-time workers in St Lucia.¹ We have been working together to design a billboard and in June 2022 it was wonderful to see the billboard erected and displaying God's word.

When COVID restrictions came into place in early 2020 and all

the usual ways of preaching the gospel ground to a halt, 'Hope by the roadside' commenced drive-in gospel meetings in a carpark outside the town of Ayr. These were also held over the summer of 2021 and were very well supported by local believers. These have recommenced and were held each Saturday and Sunday evening throughout the summer of 2022.

In December 2020 we, as a family, moved to a house with space to erect a storage shed. As the work grows so do the storage needs! We have erected a 45-foot by 30-foot (13.7 metres by 9 metres) steel shed which houses the van, trailers, gospel tent and chairs, a large array of outreach material, John chapter 3 verse 16 bags and high visibility vests. There is an upper level where the literature is stored and packed for posting. We receive regular requests for Bibles and literature, and were very glad to free up our spare room from all the boxes!

We are very conscious that in the near future the work of 'Hope by the roadside' could be severely hindered by governments both regional and national, so we are eager to maximise the opportunity to publicly display God's word while we can. With this in mind, we are continually looking to grow the billboard coverage in the United Kingdom and abroad. We are incredibly grateful for your interest and ask that you continue to remember us in prayer as we seek to grow this work for the Lord's glory.

Endnote

- 1 See *Precious Seed*, Volume 77, Number 1 – found here: <https://www.preciousseed.org/articles/the-island-of-st-lucia/>.



The Gospel Tent – opening a door

By **BRYAN STEWART** Strathalbyn, Australia

Australia, like most westernised countries, is quickly turning away from the light of the gospel and opportunities for public witness are less and less available. This was the case in 2016 when we found that Adelaide City Council would not allow the Gospel Tent into any of its parks for the preaching of the gospel. So, we proposed a Bible Exhibition during the day, with 'seminars' in the evening, i.e., gospel meetings. This approach was deemed a cultural and educational event and so it aligned with council strategy for use of parkland. We were able to have gospel meetings in the evenings as was our burden, but now we needed to plan, prepare, and produce an exhibition – we then had three months to do this! Thankfully, we were able to call on quite a few to help us, both with content and graphic design.

We continue to view the exhibition as a means of opening doors for the preaching of the gospel – we are convinced that the declaration of the word of God through preaching is the primary way of making the gospel known. We were hopeful that the exhibition would introduce people to the gospel and encourage them to come to the meetings. This has proved to be the case. One of the benefits is that the public come to us and so are wanting to engage. About 80% are religious, the vast majority unsaved.

We usually use a postal drop around the area, advertise in the press or social media, and email local contacts, as well as erecting banners. Obviously, the tent (12 metres x 6 metres) is an advert in itself.

Our approach to a Bible Exhibition was to assert the authenticity of what we have today as the inspired word of God and, therefore, the eternal relevance and importance of its message. We have 70 square metres of cloth-printed 'banners' and several tables of exhibits, with replica and authentic items.

We introduce visitors to the exhibition by telling them a little of how the Bible came to Australia and its reception. This is followed by a brief pictorial overview of the spread of the gospel message in Australia and provides an opportunity to highlight some of the great truths that were taught, as well as very quickly ascertaining where visitors are at in their response to the Bible.

We then take them through the writing, copying and canonization of the Bible, its translation into English, and how we can be so confident that what we have today is indeed the word of God. As a way of keeping people engaged, we have a number of items of interest, including pages from old Bibles dating back to 1549. Our oldest complete Bible is a 1723 KJV. We have also a miniature reproduction of The Ten Commandments section of the Dead Sea scrolls.

This is followed by a section on the features of deity, of the triune God, focusing on the deity of Christ. We then have a very large gospel chart, 6 metres x 3 metres. This traces the gospel message from eternity to eternity. This is the key section that we aim to get folks to. Normally, by this stage, we have a fair idea of a person's spiritual position regarding the gospel.

When speaking of the cross, we will show people replica coins of the thirty

pieces of silver, a crown of thorns, and a replica scourge. We then follow up the message by going through the uniqueness of the gospel and how it stands in contrast with all the meritorious systems of world religions.

We also have several other replica items and authentic old coins to look at and touch, which we encourage folks to examine at their leisure. The next section deals with ten points relating to the created world, which show that the Bible contains scientific facts which have only been discovered as true by science in relatively recent times. We have not focused on this deliberately, as we were concerned it might deflect conversation from the gospel.

The final two sections consider the fulfilment of prophecy and the certainty of future fulfilment. We then close with a section on the challenge of the Bible. We give people a summary booklet of the exhibition and there are free Bibles, tracts, booklets, memory cards, and picture plaques. Visitors generally take over an hour to go around and most opt for a guided tour. This means we need to have helpers who are 'grounded in the truth', are godly, and are able to discern the needs of the attendees.

We do find that quite a few will subsequently attend the meetings. However, we have had the privilege of seeing the blessing of God directly through the exhibition. On one occasion, one dear lady came to take a picture of the sunset nearby. She never got her picture, but she went home with the peace of God in her soul. On the other hand, I have vivid memories of talking to one man who acknowledged he was not the atheist he claimed to be, but, in distress, told me that the price of trusting God was too much!

COVID obviously caused a break in much of the outreach gospel work. We are thankful that in recent months we have been able to go out again with the Gospel Tent, proclaiming the good news of the grace of God. What a privilege to go out into all the world and preach the gospel, knowing it is 'the power of God unto salvation'! May the Lord preserve to us the privilege of preaching Him to a perishing world! www.BibleExhibition.net

Fellow worker: Len Walker, QLD





Edited by
STEPHEN BAKER

YOUNG PRECIOUS SEED

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Fascinating Facts – Evidence from nature of a Creator's touch

PHIL ARMSTRONG, LIVERPOOL, ENGLAND

One of the few places I find my emotions occupying the small overlap between excitement and fear is the bat cave at the zoo. Knowing that bats use sophisticated echolocation to build a detailed picture in complete darkness helps settle my nerves a little. Yes, they can see where they are going, and they are not going to fly into me . . . unless they want to! It has been suggested that this amazing echolocation system allows a bat to build a mental image of its surroundings that is close to the detail of the visible image from eyes of daytime animals. The bat sends out ultrasonic clicks, which reflect off surrounding objects back to the bat's ears. When scanning for insect prey, bats may send out around ten clicks per second, and then increase this to over 100 per second when they locate an in-flight meal.

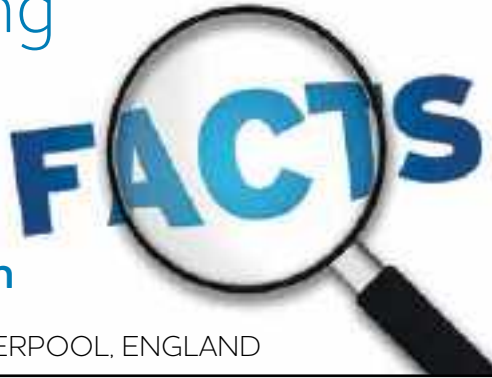
God has, however, given humble insects a range of impressive strategies to give them a fighting chance, even at the low end of the food chain. Many can detect bat sonar and react with evasive flight techniques. For example, when the hawk moth picks up the slower, scanning clicks of the bat, it will fly in the opposite direction. If it detects the faster kill clicks, and is now in big trouble, it will fly in zigzags, loops, or power dive toward the ground. The green lacewing folds its wings and freefalls in response to the slower clicks of a scanning bat. If it then picks up the rapid click rate of a bat attempting a kill, it quickly opens its wings to suddenly break the dive and confuse its predator. One of my favourite tactics used by insects is signal jamming. The tiger moth produces its own ultrasonic clicks that mix with the signals from the bat and distort them.

Recently, it was discovered that some insects have specially designed scales on their body which absorb sound waves, making them almost 'invisible' to bats. Researchers at the University of Bristol found that some moth wings absorb around 87% of all sound energy, making them about ten times more effective than the best technologies humans have engineered. Look out for noise-absorbing wallpaper inspired by moths, because we are thinking of copying this wonderful design. This is one of many examples of products for which our Creator ought to get the credit.

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Editor's Introduction

Depending on where you live in this country, or overseas, you might get this issue before you have your summer break or holiday. This summer, my advice, for what it's worth, is – take a break and do some serious reading.

Although technological advancement has brought many advantages, one of its dangers is that people are lured away from reading. GENE EDWARD VEIGH, in his excellent book *Reading between the lines*, says, 'The habit of reading is absolutely critical today, particularly for Christians. As television turns our society into an increasingly image-dominated culture, Christians must continue to be people of the word. When we read, we cultivate a sustained attention span, an active imagination, a capacity for logical analysis and critical thinking, and a rich inner life. Each of these qualities, which have proven themselves essential to a free people, is under assault in our TV-dominated culture.¹ Christians, to maintain their word-centred perspective in an image-driven world, must become readers'. VEIGH's book was written in the television era, but the same principles apply in the internet age.

I appeal to you to read widely and, in particular, the Bible. It will be your salvation as far your mind is concerned, as well as being the means of your eternal well-being and salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

Yours through grace,

Stephen Baker

¹GENE EDWARD VEIGH, *Reading between the lines*, Crossway Books, 1990.

This image shows how effectively its wings absorb sound, so it is almost invisible to bat predators



This image is a photograph of the Chinese tussar moth



Plotting your path through life – Knowing the will of God Part 2

BY PHILIP RAGGETT, PRESTWICH, MANCHESTER, ENGLAND



The prescribed will of God

This brings us to the difficult part of knowing the will of God in relation to a specific matter. It is not always easy to know God's will when it comes down to our personal decisions. What we do know, however, is that God has given us the indwelling Holy Spirit to guide us. He has given us His word to lead us, Ps. 119. 105. We should pray for His guidance, as the psalmist did when he cried, 'Teach me thy way, O Lord', Ps. 27. 11, and ask for His help to know His will.

Remember as we do so that there are a few parameters that God has given to help us. He will never guide us into anything that is contrary to the scriptures. So, for example, if it is God's will for us to be married, then two such parameters are that we are not to marry an unbeliever, 2 Cor. 6. 14, and that we should seek to marry 'in the Lord', 1 Cor. 7. 39. That is to say that both the man and the woman should be spiritually compatible in their desires for the things of the Lord. Recognition of, and submission to, His lordship in our lives is vital when it comes to the choice of a life partner.

What about what job we should do? Or what career we should pursue? God does give us varying abilities and aptitudes for certain things, and we should be willing to recognize His wisdom and guiding hand in the details of our lives. Some of us are more caring than others. Some have a better ability to comprehend complex equations! If, for example, we have an interest in a particular field we should be open to the possibility that God has given us that interest, and it is His will for us to pursue it.

Once again, though there are parameters that will be helpful in these important decisions in relation to employment or career progression, we could ask ourselves a few questions and look to the Lord to guide us to make the right choice. Will my line of work allow me to make spiritual progress? Will it prevent me from getting to meetings on a regular basis? Will I be able to honour Him while in that type of employment?

Finally, Colossians chapter 3 verse 15 tells us we should 'let the peace of God rule' in our hearts. We should pray for His guidance, seek His mind in the scriptures, and let His peace be an umpire in the decisions that we make.

Principles relating to the will of God

In conclusion, I want to mention four general principles that relate to knowing the will of God.

1. We cannot expect God to direct us in one area of our lives if we are ignoring clear commands in another part of our lives.
2. Psalm 66 verse 18 tells us, 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me'. We must endeavour to keep ourselves pure, 1 Tim. 5. 22, if we want God's guidance and direction. In His sovereignty, He can lead us despite our failures but confessing those failures to God and turning from them will better enable us to discern His will.
3. 'Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams', 1 Sam. 15. 22. Obedience is highly valued by God. 'Them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed', 2. 30. God is well pleased when we obey and when we seek to honour Him in our choices.
4. Proverbs chapter 3 verse 6 says, 'In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths'. He has promised to direct our paths, so long as we are willing to surrender to His will and put His interests first in every decision that we make.

In summary, then, God has given us a written statement of His will in the scriptures – we should seek to **obey them**.

He has given the Holy Spirit to dwell within the believer, so we should **never hinder Him**.

He delights to answer prayers for guidance, so we should **speak to Him**.



We four kings... – Lessons from some of Judah's kings

BY RICHARD SMITH, BRIDGE OF WEIR, SCOTLAND

'Those that fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it',
WINSTON CHURCHILL

(1948 speech to the House of Commons)

There is no such thing as a perfect generation. Each fails in one way or another. Our choice is whether to repeat the mistakes of the past, or to learn and change. In these studies, we will explore the first four kings of Judah: Rehoboam, Abijah, Asa, and Jehoshaphat, to see how they handled the challenges that resulted from the mistakes of their fathers.

Rehoboam

Rehoboam had an amazing heritage! His grandfather was David, the 'man after [God's] own heart', 1 Sam. 13. 14, and his father was Solomon, who asked for wisdom which God gave him in abundance, along with riches, honour, and previously unseen glory.

David wasn't perfect and Solomon lost his way badly, leading to God dividing the nation under his son. So, was Rehoboam's 'fate' sealed or was he responsible for his own attitude and actions? Of course he was! Rehoboam could have decided to follow the Lord, but he made the definite decision that he wouldn't. His father, Solomon, had counsellors who helped him make decisions for the good of the nation and himself. Rehoboam had access to the same advisors, but he only asked their opinion once.

After his father died, Rehoboam called the people to Shechem. They had served Solomon, but he had been a hard taskmaster. They were tired and fragile, and needed a leader who would be easier on them. The hard work of nation and temple building was done. Israel was strong and prospering and they needed a king who would make their life less harsh. They asked Rehoboam if he would ease their burden, and he asked for advice. His father's advisors gave him wise counsel: if you do what they say, they will serve you for ever. Then, he went to those he had grown up with and asked them. They had no experience, no wisdom and, like Rehoboam, didn't care; 'You ain't seen nothing yet' was their reply. 'Your father used whips; you will use scorpions', 1 Kgs. 12. 10, 11 paraphrased. Rehoboam followed their advice and the nation split into the ten northern tribes (Israel), and the two southern tribes (Judah). Rehoboam had been desperately weakened. Did he fall to his knees in repentance, seeking God's forgiveness? Not at all. Instead, he went to battle with Israel's new leader (Jeroboam) and brought about a crisis.

How could this happen?

Rehoboam lacked conviction. Many Christians use the word 'conviction' very lightly. They often apply it to archaic practices

that have no biblical foundation. Call an opinion a conviction, no one dare argue! We must be guided only by the authority of the word of God. As we continue our studies in the kings of Judah we will see that there are three areas of conviction that matter:

1. The word of God
2. The house of God
3. The people of God

How we behave within this triangle of convictions will determine our success for God. If we let one of them slip, we will fail in all of them. Rehoboam had no interest at all in anything that mattered to God. He was interested only in himself and his own amusement and therefore he was a catastrophic failure.

1. The word of God

Rehoboam had complete disregard for God's word. 'He abandoned the law of the Lord', 2 Chr. 12. 1, ESV.

How we treat the Bible reflects on how we view God. If we refuse to read it, we are saying that we don't want to hear God's voice. Having read it, if we then decide not to obey it, we are saying that God has no authority over us. We must treat God's word with the seriousness it deserves.

2. The house of God

When Shishak, king of Egypt, plundered the temple and took the gold treasures, Rehoboam replaced them with bronze. He had no love for the temple at all, vv. 9-11.

We no longer have a temple to worship in, and the church we are associated with is not a building but a group of people. Paul calls the church the 'house of God', 1 Tim. 3. 15. Our treatment of church truth and our acceptance of God's order reveals our attitude to God.

3. The people of God

Israel pleaded with Rehoboam to make their lives easier, promising him their loyal obedience if he went along with their suggestions. In his arrogance, he treated them very badly.

If I love someone, I will love what they love. God loves His people. If I don't love my fellow-Christians, can I say that I love God, 1 John 3. 17? John's first Epistle clearly says that I can't. How I treat the people that God loves demonstrates what I think of God, 4. 21.

Rehoboam was a failure because he lacked conviction, 'He did not set his heart to seek the Lord', 2 Chr. 12. 14, ESV.

What about us?



Saints' CVs:

Martin Luther and Katharina von Bora

BY JEREMY SINGER, BRIDGE OF WEIR, SCOTLAND

MARTIN LUTHER 1483-1546

As a young man, Luther abandoned his legal studies after being caught in a dramatic thunderstorm, during which he vowed to become a monk if he survived. He entered a monastery and devoted his life to the formal, religious routines of the Catholic church. These included frequent confessions to more senior clerics and physical penance to attempt to pay for his sins. When visiting Rome, he climbed up a stone staircase – the Scala Sancta – on his knees saying prayers on each of the twenty-eight steps. When he got to the top, he wondered whether there was any genuine spiritual benefit, asking, 'Who knows whether this is true?' LUTHER summarized his time in the monastery like this: 'If ever a monk could get to heaven by his monkery, it was I'.

Eventually, he realized the futility of his own activity, which was unable to save him. Luther was appointed a lecturer in theology at the local university, where he started teaching from the Bible. As he worked his way through Romans, he encountered the truth of justification by faith – diametrically opposed to the doctrine of the Catholic church. When Luther recognized that justification was accomplished by Christ and received through individual faith, Rom. 5. 1, he said, 'Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates'.

On 31 October 1517, Martin Luther nailed his Ninety-five Theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. This was a set of assertions about the biblical truth of salvation, refuting the errors of the contemporary church. The document started, 'When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said "Repent", he intended that the entire life of believers should be repentance'.

At that pivotal moment, Luther undermined the authority of the pope and the teaching of the Catholic church. From then on, he faced a lifetime of controversy and persecution as he taught and understood more of the doctrine of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone (Eph. 2. 8), with the Bible as sole authority.

One of the key driving forces of the Reformation was the technology of the printing press, harnessed to mass-produce copies of Luther's writings and, most importantly, his new translation of the Bible from the original Hebrew and Greek into the widely spoken German language. There is a first edition of Luther's Bible from 1534 in the British Library in London.¹

Luther wrote many hymns, of which the most famous (in English) is probably, 'A mighty fortress is our God'. My favourite lines are,

'Did we in our own strength confide,
Our striving would be losing;
Were not the Right Man on our side,
The Man of God's own choosing'.

Luther knew the 'Right Man' was on his side, despite the tremendously powerful opposition he encountered.

Several interesting biographies are available if you want to know more about Martin Luther. BAINTON² has a detailed account of Luther's life; HENDRIX³ gives a much shorter introduction.



KATHARINA VON BORA 1499-1552

Enrolled as a nun at an early age, Katharina spent her youth in a monastery. She developed an interest in Reformation teaching, and – along with several other nuns – begged Luther to assist her. The nuns escaped by hiding in a wagon full of barrels of fish. Luther organized employment and marriages for the former nuns – all except Katharina, who eventually married Luther himself, on 13 June 1525. Luther thought his marriage would 'please his father, rile the pope, cause the angels to laugh, and the devils to weep'.

Katharina became a homemaker and administrator for Luther's business affairs, as well as a mother to six children.

Speaking from personal experience, MARTIN LUTHER stated, 'There is no more lovely, friendly, and charming relationship, communion, or company than a good marriage'.



Lessons from the Luthers:

- Get back to the Bible – read it for yourself.
- Use technology to spread the scriptures.
- Trust God to keep you in trying circumstances.
- Recognize that Christian marriage is a precious gift from God.

¹<https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/luther-bible> ²ROLAND BAINTON, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther*, Abingdon Press, 1978.

³SCOTT H. HENDRIX, *Martin Luther: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, 2010.

John the Baptist Part 1

By **COLIN LACEY** Bath, England

Read Luke 1. 1-25; 39-80

‘What kind of child will this be?’

This question has been posed by many parents/relatives when a new-born child arrives in a family. We are naturally curious to know how the child will develop. Only God knows the answer and He reveals it if it is in His purposes so to do. Two such occasions are found in Luke’s Gospel, where we are introduced to the births of John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus. John’s birth was miraculous, whereas that of the Lord Jesus was divine. Both were central to God’s plan of salvation.

As we begin to read this Gospel, we might be excused for expecting to be introduced, first of all, to the birth of Jesus. After all, He said that the scriptures ‘testify of me’, John 5. 39, and He is referred to as ‘the spirit of prophecy’, Rev. 19. 10.

It was revealed in the Old Testament that there would be a **forerunner**, who would prepare the way for the coming of the **Messiah**. Indeed, there was a growing sense of expectation in Israel at this time that the arrival of the Messiah was imminent. John the Baptist believed that this was to be his divine/specific calling.

We are not left in the dark as to what kind of person the forerunner would be. As a highly trained medical doctor, Luke was accustomed to keeping accurate written records of each patient from the beginning of their treatment to the completion of it. His Gospel reflects the same skill, when following the footsteps of Jesus and John the Baptist. Indeed, he



followed them so closely that he kept a record of events and people that cannot be found in the other Gospel records.

We do not know precisely when Luke became a Christian; however, at the outset of his Gospel, written to Theophilus, he wrote, ‘It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed’, Luke 1. 3, 4.

Luke became a close companion of Paul and remained loyal to him up to the time of his execution. At this deeply moving and lonely point in his life, Paul wrote to Timothy, ‘Only Luke is with me’, 2 Tim. 4. 11. Commentators have often referred to his Gospel as one that was written by a man, Luke, to a man, Theophilus, about the perfect man, Jesus. We are also indebted to Luke for the interest he showed in the life of John the Baptist. Clearly, he observed his movements very closely and provides us with details of his birth and life that enable us to appreciate why Christ later said of him, ‘Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist’, Matt. 11. 11.

We conclude Part 1 of our study by highlighting some of the key events in Luke’s Gospel surrounding the birth of John that marked him out as a unique person, from his birth until his death:

1. **The appearance of the angel Gabriel in the Holy Place of the Temple.** Zacharias, John’s father, was of priestly descent and Luke traces his footsteps to the time when he was in Jerusalem, carrying out his priestly duties. On this particular occasion, he was chosen to burn incense on the altar in the Holy Place and only he had the right to be there. Suddenly, however, he became

aware of the presence of another person, standing to the right side of the altar, which was a unique experience for any priest before or after him. It was Gabriel, an angel of the Lord!

2. **Gabriel announces a coming miraculous birth.** Zacharias and Elisabeth had an aching void in their otherwise impeccable lives – **they were childless!** However, God had heard their prayer and Gabriel announced that, miraculously, they would have a son!
3. **Filled with the Holy Spirit.** A third remarkable thing happened in the Temple. Gabriel prophesied about the kind of person the child would be:
 - a. he would be great;
 - b. he would not be filled with wine or strong drink, but filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother’s womb;
 - c. he would bring joy and gladness to his parents.
4. **A dumb priest.** Zacharias doubted how all this could happen, given the great ages of himself and his wife. Gabriel announced that on account of his unbelief he would be dumb until the birth of the child. A ‘dumb priest’ was unthinkable and incapable of carrying out his duties.
5. **The name of the child.** Zacharias learned that the child would be named **John**, not Zacharias, as custom dictated. However, Zacharias prophesied that John would be a prophet of the Most High and go before the Lord to prepare His ways and give knowledge of salvation to His people by the forgiveness of sins.

The task of burning incense in the temple ought to have taken a brief time; however, when the worshippers outside were eventually met by a dumb priest, who had seen an angel and been promised that he and his wife would have a child, called John, they might well have wondered what this child would be like! In Part 2 of our study, we will discover the answers they received.

Four 'certain' named disciples in the Book of the Acts

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

We are aware that Doctor Luke wrote the Gospel that bears his name and its sequel the Acts of the Apostles. One word he uses frequently is the word 'certain'. Including the word certainty, he uses it over 100 times in the two books combined, whilst the remainder of the New Testament has only thirty-five.

In the first five verses of Luke's Gospel, he draws attention to the days of Herod when a 'certain priest named Zacharias' is mentioned, v. 5. Delving further into the Gospel, we read of 'a certain city', 5. 12, 'a certain Samaritan', 10. 33, 'a certain man' who had two sons, 15. 11, and many others. Only three designated uses of 'certain' are named, Zacharias, Martha, 10. 38, and Lazarus, 16. 20. However, in the book of the Acts, Luke names fifteen persons both male and female and we want to draw lessons from four in the book that are called a 'certain disciple'.

In chapter 9, we are introduced to Ananias, 'a certain disciple at Damascus'. Saul was 'knocking on the door' of the believers at Damasus to persecute those that were living there and that would include Ananias. Saul was making 'havock of the church', 8. 3, and yet 'a certain disciple', in all his humility, was used of the Lord and at the disposal of the Lord. Here is a clean vessel, v. 10, and a chosen vessel, v. 15. Saul came to know what a saint was when he met Ananias. He was no one outstanding or prominent but the Lord had him in mind to use him and we cannot but be taken aback by the first words he said to Saul, 'Brother Saul', v. 17, when we consider what

Saul had been doing amongst the early church believers. Ananias was used by the Lord to speak to another. Are we taking every opportunity to speak to others about the Saviour? Saul/Paul never forgot that encounter.

The second 'certain disciple' of the chapter is Tabitha/Dorcas. We must note that both Ananias and Dorcas were used by the Lord **in their own community**. She was a diligent Christian woman who loved the Saviour and others. The Lord Jesus claims our hearts first before our talents. What could she do? She used her fingers and her funds for the needy in her locality. Her inward love had an outward expression. Verse 36 points out that she was 'full of good works and almsgiving which she did'. We could ask Dorcas, 'what is that in thine hand?' Exod. 4. 2. A needle would be the reply. Her death is recorded in verse 37 which brings an outpouring of grief. She was mourned and missed as she had died in what seemed to be the midst of a useful life. Peter was shown a display of one woman's work which was done for the glory of God and the good of others. But the narrative points out her deliverance, v. 40, being raised from the dead to take up her work again. Dorcas was used by the Lord to

help others practically. The challenge is what are we doing for the master in our neighbourhood?

The third 'certain disciple' is found in Acts chapter 16 verse 1, where we are introduced to Timothy or Timotheus. Much can be written about him in the references we have of him in the Epistles. It is obvious that he was a young man at this stage. 2 Timothy chapter 1 verse 5 reminds us of his **childhood**, being a reference to his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice. What a godly heritage! He was Paul's **child** in the faith, 1 Tim. 1. 2. He was **conversant** with the scriptures, 2 Tim. 3. 15, and he became a **companion** of Paul and received his **commendation** from his older brother in Christ, Phil. 2. 20-22. Here was a younger man in which Paul saw the potential for the continuation of the work and it is to Timothy we have the last recorded writings of the Apostle Paul in Second Timothy. Surely, we would desire and pray to see the potential of younger men today to take the baton to the next generation should the Lord delay His coming.

The final 'certain disciple' is mentioned in chapter 21 verse 16. Whilst the word 'certain' is in italics, we are drawn to this man called Mnason as the only one named in the verse. Only recorded here in scripture, he gave hospitality to Paul. A disciple who had been on the pathway for some time, referred to as 'old', he was willing to be a help to the Lord's servants. Although he might have provided lodging for a night, the record of what he did is left on the sacred page. It is good to start well and good to finish well. The word of God would show that there is no retirement in the Lord's work. New spheres of service beckon and there is always the opportunity for those who are housebound and cannot get to the meetings. Look to and thank God for former service and pray. What an example we can be and what an impression we can make and leave with younger brethren and sisters. Take time to look at Psalm 71 verse 18.

May we feel the challenge of these 'certain disciples' whether a brother or sister, young or old, may we serve the Lord for His glory. 'There's a work for Jesus none but **you** can do'.



HEAVENLY CONVERSATIONS²

By **ERNEST ABBOTT** Singapore

[All quotations are taken from the New King James version of the Bible]

Just hours away from His arrest, one that led to His atoning death on the cross, Jesus, having spoken in metaphorical terms of His death and its consequences, John 12. 24-26, expresses something of His deep anguish at what lies before Him. He poses a rhetorical question to those with Him, 'Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? "Father, save me from this hour"?' v. 27. Analogous to this, in His prayer in the garden of Gethsemane He says, 'O my Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt', Matt. 26. 39, but here Jesus emphatically says, 'But for this purpose I came to this hour', John 12. 27. He continues, 'Father, glorify thy name', v. 28. Here, the Father replies, 'I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again'. Not everyone who was present understood what was said, however, as Jesus says to those present, 'This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes', v. 30.

John chapter 17 records the Lord's prayer. We do not have the Father's reply to the Son in the Gospel record. However, we do have the Father's reply in His actions, as was preached on the day of Pentecost, 'This Jesus God hath raised up, whereof we all are witnesses', Acts 2. 32. Similarly, Paul writes, 'concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead', Rom. 1. 3, 4. The resurrection of Jesus is the Father's demonstration of His approval of the work of His Son. The final cry from the cross, in John's Gospel, is, 'finished', John 19. 30!

Conclusion

We learn about others from their conversations. Although probably a somewhat artificial example, we can see or hear interviews of people in the public eye and glean something of their character from what we hear. At a personal level, talking to others gives us a sense of beginning to know them. In a similar vein, from these heavenly conversations, we can learn a little of the relationship between members of the triune Godhead.

The 'Us and Our' conversations are at pivotal points in human history, i.e., the creation of man, the ejection of man from Eden, and the confusion of languages. The first event shows something of the triune God. He is outside of time; He is powerful, and He places man at the pinnacle of His creation. The second event shows God guarding His holiness. The third event was a necessary one. At Babel there was an attempt to create a man-made religion. We suggest that with the building of a city and a tower to be the centre of the religion, this was the archetypal man-made religion, one of works, which is diametrically opposed to the gospel of grace. The triune God's intervention was a necessary one to preserve the line of faith and is a stark lesson that man cannot build his way to God. Salvation is not man trying to find God, but God reaching out in grace to man. Further, it was at this point that population migration started, Gen. 11. 9. Noah and his sons had been commanded to 'Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth', 9. 1, something that had not really taken place up to that point. However, with the confusion of languages, groups, no doubt speaking the same language, moved out from Babel to all parts of the earth. This

pivotal point in human history is one that is still clearly evident today.

The fourth 'Us and Our' conversation raised the question, 'Who will go for us?', and the corresponding reply can, at least devotionally, if not typologically, be seen as the Son willingly volunteering to enter creation, on behalf of the triune God, to accomplish our salvation via the cross.

The other conversations we have had before us are conversations between two persons of the Godhead: The Father and the Son. These conversations often are about some aspect of our salvation. Our salvation could not be effected under the old covenant; a new one was a necessity, with a different priesthood. As the Father declares, Ps. 110. 4, the Son is the eternal High Priest of an unchangeable priesthood of the new covenant after the order of Melchizedek, Heb. 7. 21, 24, 26.

God's plan of salvation required a servant, a perfect servant, to execute the plan. We see Jesus as the Servant of Jehovah, the one who could say, 'My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work', John 4. 34. As the bondservant He could say, 'mine ears hast thou opened', Ps. 40. 6; Exod. 21. 6; 'I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart', Ps. 40. 8. In His high priestly prayer, He says to the Father, 'I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do', John 17. 4. Although not part of a heavenly conversation, from the cross He declares to the world the triumphal cry, 'finished', John 19. 30.

The overheard conversational fragments in the Gospel narrative are for our benefit. They show the continual approval of the work of Christ by the Father and act as a confirmation, if there were any doubt, as to who He is, and what He was doing.

Although the heavenly conversations recorded for us are short and infrequent in scripture, they are of immense value as they give us an insight into the inner nature of the triune God.

Seven reasons why women should be veiled in the public gatherings of the Assembly

Part 1 – the foundation is headship, 1 Cor. 11. 2-16

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

Introduction

The distinctiveness of the roles and contributions of the male and female in the assembly is being increasingly questioned. The issues arise against the background of the call for 'gender equality' and the confusion over 'gender identity' in modern society. These matters give increasing significance to the subject of women's ministry and the need for clarity on the separate roles of men and women in the assembly. What happens in the world soon has ramifications for the assembly. Note, however, that the doctrinal subject before us is based on New Testament teaching – not the culture of the day, but the abiding and binding authority of the Holy Scriptures. Remember, too, that the important practical contribution sisters make is immense.¹ Indeed, today many assemblies depend on them for their very existence.

The subject of 1 Corinthians chapter 11 verses 2 to 16 is that of 'headship' – the word 'head' occurs nine times with five of these being metaphorical and four literal (e.g., in verse 4 the first reference to 'head' is clearly literal while the second reference in this verse is equally clearly metaphorical) – see verses 3 (three times), 4 (twice), 5 (twice), 7 and 10. In passing, note that verses 17 to 34 deal with the subject of 'lordship'. The title 'Lord' occurs eight times – see verses 20, 23 (twice), 26, 27 (twice), 29 and 32. 'Headship' denotes responsibility and accountability, not superiority – no qualitative or essential difference is assumed. It is therefore altogether appropriate that it occurs in the same context as Lordship. An appreciation of Lordship will lead automatically to the ready and willing implementation of the requirements of headship.

Two explanations have been advanced in applying the truth of headship in verses 2 to 16. **The first** is that it is individual, private and moral – e.g., it applies in the home. This may be a possible understanding of the passage, but in this case the principles involved would have an automatically wider application to assembly gatherings. **The second** sees it as applying directly to church gatherings. This latter seems the better conclusion for several reasons:

- It is in an overall context (chapters 11 to 14) where there are six references to the phrase 'come together' in relation to the church – see 11. 17, 18, 20, 33; 14. 23, 26.
- The nature of the Epistle as a whole. It has been called the 'Charter of the Church' – note references to 'church(es) of God', 1. 2; 10. 32; 11. 16, 22; and 15. 9.
- The reference to the tradition of the apostles in chapter 11 verse 2. They were the foundation of the church, Eph. 2. 20, 21.
- The fact of angelic interest in verse 10, cp. Eph. 3. 10.
- The practice delineated was the custom of the 'churches of God', v. 16.
- The subject throughout is applied to man/woman and not to husband/wife.



The burden of the apostle is, then, to deal with the evidence for headship in the public gatherings of believers. This will be seen in two particulars, viz. the men being uncovered (interestingly dealt with first) and the women being covered. Several distinct and important reasons are given. All of these reasons adduced will be outlined below. In particular, the **seven reasons for sisters being 'covered'** in church gatherings will be highlighted.

Outline of the section

Introduction and statement of the principle, vv. 2, 3.

- Introduction, vv. 2, 3
- The principle of headship stated, 'the head of' is mentioned three times, v. 3

Application of the principle, vv. 4-6.

- The act to which the principle applies – 'praying or prophesying', vv. 4, 5
- The 'covering' which implements the principle, vv. 4-7, 13, 15 (seven references)
- Application of the principle to the man, v. 4
- Application of the principle to the woman, vv. 5, 6

Explanation of the principle, vv. 7-12 – note 'For', vv. 7, 8, 10, 12.

- In the case of man, v. 7
- In the case of woman, vv. 7-10
- The interrelation between man and woman, vv. 11, 12

Illustration of the principle, vv. 13-15

The practice of the principle as the custom of the churches, v. 16

Introduction and statement of the principle, vv. 2, 3

Introduction, vv. 2, 3

This whole paragraph may be part of the 'Corinthian correspondence'² all introduced by 'Now', v. 2. The other six references are introduced by 'Now concerning'.³ Paul takes care to praise before censuring (cp. also verse 17) and the risen Christ does this in Revelation chapters 2 and 3. The commendation is for keeping the traditions.⁴ Traditions must be kept intact, 'as I delivered them to you', v. 2, and to keep the traditions, we must be intelligently informed. Hence, Paul states, 'I would have you know', v. 3. There is no premium on ignorance! You will note that

ten times in the Epistle, Paul asks ‘know ye not?’⁵ The knowledge to be imparted here is on the subject of headship.

The principle of headship is stated in unambiguous terms, v. 3

‘The head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God’.

This affirmation will be used as Paul’s foundation for all his subsequent teaching on head covering, both negatively and positively. The principle is true universally with no exceptions. It teaches that authority and subjection pertain to the Godhead, cp. John 14. 28; Matt. 24. 36. Thus, there is no thought of personal inferiority nor inequality envisaged, but rather positional subjection. The idea is that of being ‘ordered, ranked, placed in rows’ with its origin being in God, e.g., Rom. 13. 1. As VINE⁶ points out, it is for the preservation of divine order in society.

Subjection and authority are seen in the New Testament in a variety of ways:

- ‘Citizens to civil authority – Rom. 13. 1; Titus 3. 1
- Employees to employers – Titus 2. 9
- Church members to their leaders – Heb. 13. 7; 1 Cor. 16. 16
- Church members to one another – Eph. 5. 21
- Children to parents – 1 Tim. 3. 4
- Wives to husbands – Eph. 5. 22; Col. 3. 18’⁷

Application of the principle, vv. 4-6

The act to which the principle applies – ‘praying or prophesying’, vv. 4, 5

Having laid the foundation, the apostle is now keen to apply the principles he has established to the problem in relation to head covering being faced at Corinth. He begins by establishing the act to which the principle applies. The two acts he addresses are clearly public exercises in the gatherings of the saints. It is made abundantly clear in this overall section of the Epistle (chh. 11-14) in which this paragraph is found, that

both these exercises are available for the male. The question arises – does Paul also authorize the woman to pray and prophesy publicly? These are two possible answers to this question:

1. The woman participates silently in the public contribution of the brother, as do other brethren. The saying of ‘Amen’ at the end of public praying or ministry (the current application of prophecy) indicates this (see 1 Cor. 14. 16).
2. There were two problems at Corinth – women uncovered, and women taking part publicly. Paul is a clever teacher and he always bases practical truth on a doctrinal foundation. Thus, he deals with the first problem in the context of headship, here in chapter 11, and the second in the context of due order for public contributions, in chapter 14. Therefore, his appeals are given in context!

The teaching relative to head covering is the same no matter what solution is favoured relative to the meaning of ‘praying or prophesying’.

The ‘covering’ which implements the principle, vv. 4-7, 13, 15 (seven references)

There are three words used for ‘covering’ in these verses:

- Covering, v. 4. This is essentially a preposition, *kata*, which, according to THAYER,⁸ means ‘down from, through, out, toward’. The phrase ‘having his head covered’ is thus translated as ‘having *anything* on his head’ JND. This seems to clarify the meaning in this context. The word is only used once in these verses.
- The second verb, *akatakaluptos*, is translated as ‘uncovered’ in verses 5 and 13 (negative); and ‘covered’ (positive) in verses 6 (twice) and 7. Therefore, the word is used five times (and nowhere else in the New Testament), and always of the literal ‘head’ either of the woman or the man. The fundamental meaning of the word is ‘to veil’ and always of the ‘head’ and not the hair. In addition, it should be noticed that the hair is never referred to as the covering in verses 4 to 14, the special case of verse 15 will be considered below.
- The third word for covering in the passage is in verse 15, *peribolaion*.

It is used only twice in the New Testament. The other occurrence is in Hebrews chapter 1 verse 12, ‘And as a vesture [*peribolaion*] shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail’. The word means ‘a covering thrown around, a wrapper’. It is used for illustrative purposes as a picture of long hair used to cover the body and, as will be seen, is a figure of the veil used to cover the head. If the covering referred to the hair in all the other references the man would need to have his hair shaved off to be uncovered!

Application of the principle to the man, v. 4

It is interesting that the ‘man’ is addressed first. The man is to be uncovered, unlike the priest in Old Testament times who served in the presence of God. In that case, they were covered either with the ‘mitre’, Exod. 28. 4, or the ‘bonnets’, Lev. 8. 13. The reason for their covering was because of the visible presence of God in the tabernacle. But now the man has to be uncovered because he represents the visible presence of God in the assembly and if covered he ‘dishonoureth his head’. The word ‘head’ here is clearly metaphorical and refers to Christ. In dishonouring Christ, as VINE says, he ‘practically abdicates the sovereignty and dignity with which his Creator has invested him’.⁹

Endnotes

- 1 Relevant passages of scripture include: John 12. 1-11; Luke 10. 38-42; 1 Tim. 5. 10; etc.
- 2 The Corinthians had written to Paul on a number of matters – see 1 Cor. 7. 1 – and he was answering them sequentially.
- 3 See 7. 1, 25; 8. 1; 12. 1; 16. 1, 12.
- 4 Doctrine and practice – see 1 Tim. 6. 20; 2 Tim. 2. 2; 2 Thess. 2. 15; 3. 6, cp. for Old Testament examples, Naboth, 1 Kgs. 21. 3; and Shammah, 2 Sam. 23. 11, 12.
- 5 Cp. also 10. 1; 12. 1; Rom. 11. 25; 1 Thess. 4. 13; 2 Pet. 3. 8.
- 6 W. E. VINE, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, World Bible Publishers, 1991.
- 7 *Ibid*.
- 8 JOSEPH THAYER, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, e-Sword resource.
- 9 W. E. VINE, *op. cit*.

The widows of Luke's Gospel 5

THE WIDOW WITH

THE TWO MITES

Luke 21. 2-4

By **JOHN SCARSBROOK** Killamarsh, England

It is always interesting and instructive when reading the synoptic Gospels to note the details recorded by one or maybe two of the writers but omitted by others. The brief incident which occupies our attention in this article is recorded by Mark and Luke, but not by Matthew. I find this particularly interesting, because it was costly for Matthew to follow the Saviour. The day he 'left all, rose up, and followed him', Luke 5. 28, meant that he abandoned everything associated with his former, no doubt lucrative, employment, and there was no going back. Peter and other disciples could leave their boats but still use them if occasion required. Matthew had effectively 'burnt his boats'! Maybe it is in view of this that Matthew will often take time to record what it cost others to show their appreciation of the Saviour. At His coming in, it is Matthew alone who tells us of the wise men and their costly gifts. At His going out, only Matthew tells us that Joseph was a rich man who gave 'his own new tomb'. It is noticeable too that Matthew does not lightly pass up any opportunity to take account of monetary matters in his Gospel. Only Matthew speaks of gold and silver (Luke's mention of the coins in chapter 15 is a different word). Only Matthew writes of talents, a large sum of money, and only Matthew takes time to record the coin in the fish's mouth or the thirty pieces of silver in Judas' hand.

But Matthew's burden is the nation, and he is contemplating and recording the progressive rejection of Messiah. So, at the end of chapter 23, where this brief incident would fit in, instead of the sound of offerings being cast into the treasury, we hear the broken-hearted lament of the Saviour, 'O Jerusalem . . . how often would I have gathered thy children together . . . and ye would not'. As chapter 24 opens, we read, 'Jesus went out, and departed from the temple', a truly seminal moment in His pathway to Golgotha, and Ichabod was written large over the nation of Israel.

Now, why does Mark in his busy Gospel take time to record this detail? We know that Mark is directed by

the Spirit of God to view the Lord Jesus as the perfect Servant. But, in so doing, he will draw our attention to the service of others, whether it be John the Baptist, disciples on the seashore or others in the Gospel, thus providing a rewarding study. In Mark's record of the widow, he tells us that the Lord sat and beheld, not so much **what** the people cast into the treasury, but **'how'**, Mark 12. 41; it is the motive that controlled the giving which interested Him. Remember, He is the constant observer of our service. He still sits by the treasury and takes notice of our giving, whether of our time, our ability, or our material things. He sees both the measure and the motive. Someone has said, 'It is not a question of how much of what is mine will I give to the Lord?

Rather how much of what is His will I keep for myself?' Remember, Paul posed the question to the Corinthians, 'What hast thou that thou didst not receive?' 1 Cor. 4. 7. There is nothing fundamentally wrong with wealth, nor is there any particular virtue in poverty; it is a question of what we do with that which He has given us. The Scottish poet and hymnwriter J. G. SMALL wrote, 'Naught that I have my own I call, I hold it for the Giver. My heart, my strength, my life, my all, are His and His forever'. Those are very big words!

Luke will remind us in his Gospel that although the nation at large did not welcome the Lord Jesus, there was nevertheless a remnant, a faithful few, many of them women, who both recognized and accepted Him. Others, like the widow in the temple, maybe never met the Saviour or heard His teaching. But their hearts were right and their faithfulness far exceeded the ostentatious and hypocritical piety of the Pharisees. So, Luke will take time to place on record that fleeting moment, observed perhaps alone by the Lord Jesus, when as G. CAMPBELL MORGAN wrote, 'A nameless, husbandless, penniless widow, invested a large deposit on the balance sheet of heaven'.¹

Having entered the city in fulfilment of Zechariah chapter 9 verse 9, the Saviour is found each day of the week leading up to the Passover teaching in the temple. The people came to hear Him, 'early in the morning', Luke 21. 38. Patiently He taught them, then, as day drew to a close, He 'went out, and abode in . . . the mount of Olives', v. 37. It was during this time that others came, not to benefit from His teaching, but to 'take hold of his words' and accuse Him. Matthew tells us it was the Herodians who came with their politically charged question about the tribute money. The Sadducees followed with a cynically fabricated story of seven brothers. Finally, came a lawyer who likewise failed to land a telling blow.

We can well imagine the disappointment of the Saviour as he 'looked up' and saw His erstwhile adversaries moving away from the group which surrounded Him, to

ostentatiously cast their offerings into the temple treasury. Mark says, they ‘cast in much’, doubtless with significant flair to ensure as much noise as possible. The Lord would say of such, ‘They have their reward’, Matt. 6. 2; they will enjoy the praise of men. But, suddenly, like a shaft of light, another catches His attention. She comes in silently. Swiftly she passes the open receptacles and with barely a movement of her hand, she is gone. Unnoticed by the throng but observed in every detail by the all-seeing eye of the Master.

Luke will tell us that the Lord Jesus ‘saw the rich men’, but ‘he saw also a certain poor widow’, and it is her reduced circumstances which hold His attention. Poverty is a relative term and Luke uses a word which would show this woman to be conspicuously poor, but not one who would beg for a living. It may be that when her husband was alive, they managed comfortably. Now, he was gone, but she retained her dignity and self-esteem in living her life as well as she was able. That meant regular visits to the temple, the house of God, upon whom she now depended for her support.

On this particular day she had some big decisions to make. Events had effectively reduced the few coins

she had left to insignificance, and today she would normally go to the temple. She considered her options. She could forego her temple visit today, no one would know, and who would blame her anyway? The two mites which she held in her open palm were worth a tiny fraction of the penny shown to the Lord Jesus in chapter 20 verse 24. Mark tells us that the two coins together made a farthing, and Matthew records that such a sum would only purchase two sparrows, Matt 10. 29. But there was another option open to her. She could go to the temple, give one of the mites and keep the other in the hope that she might be able to purchase something. That amounts to giving on a grand scale, 50% of everything she had! Maybe many of us should hang our heads in shame as we consider such a sacrifice. But no, she will choose the third option; she resolves to give both mites to her Lord and cast herself wholly upon Him. So, she leaves her humble little home and, upright and determined, she makes her way to the house of God.

The value of her gift would, in the eyes of men, be virtually worthless. To those ‘rich men’, it could be swept up with the dust on the floor. But the Lord weighed it in the balance of the sanctuary, which elevated its worth in

comparison to that given by the rich men as ‘more than they all’.

The temple treasury, we are told, had thirteen receptacles for individuals to give an offering. The money accumulated was allocated for three purposes: for the maintenance of the temple, for the support of the priests, and for the poor– in other words, material, spiritual, and charitable. In chapter 20, the Lord had defeated the challenge regarding the tribute money with, ‘Render [give back] . . . unto God the things which be God’s’. The widow loved the habitation of God and will give whatever she can to maintain it. The Sadducees’ questioning of the woman widowed seven times had a spiritual element (though hypocritical on their part). The Lord in reply lifts their minds away from the earthly to the heavenly. The widow gave with heaven in view; her gift had value there. The lawyer then followed in Mark’s record desiring to know, ‘Which is the first commandment of all?’, a question which, academically, was much debated during the Lord’s time, Mark 12. 28. The Lord simply referred him to the law which the man professed to know. Love for God first and love for your neighbour as yourself to follow closely. The widow in giving all, had expressed a love for her neighbour as herself. She could give no more!

The Lord, in Mark’s record, called the attention of His disciples to the widow and explained the true value of what she had done that day. He alone had the moral right to do this since, as Paul would remind the Corinthians, ‘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’, 2 Cor. 8. 9.

I would love to follow that dear lady as she left the temple that day, having no idea she had been observed. She had laid up treasure in heaven and would no doubt be amply rewarded. One day, maybe soon, we can ask her all about it.



Endnote

- 1 G. CAMPBELL MORGAN, *The Gospel of Luke*, Oliphants, 1954.

Studies in the twelve (minor) prophets

THE PROPHECY OF AMOS

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4

Author

Amos is named only in the book that bears his name and there is no record of his parentage or family. In chapter 7 verse 14, he tells us he was not a prophet or a prophet's son but a herdsman or sheep master; this is one who likely drove the flock to market rather than leading it like a shepherd. In addition to this he also gathered sycamore fruit, a lowly food of the poor. From such humble circumstances, God fitted him to be a prophet. He came from Tekoa which was a village about ten miles from Jerusalem in Judah, but he prophesied to the northern kingdom of Israel.

Background

Amos prophesied during the long reign of Uzziah king of Judah which makes him a contemporary of Isaiah. Unlike Isaiah, Amos's ministry was to Israel, not Judah, during the reign of Jeroboam II. The first Jeroboam rebelled against Solomon's son and established the northern kingdom which, after many generations of bad kings, was now ruled by its longest serving monarch, also called Jeroboam. He reigned for forty-one years of seeming prosperity and success, prior to a similar period of terminal decline, finishing with the ten northern tribes, known as Israel, going into captivity to Assyria. Despite their rebellion and a succession of bad kings, including Ahab the husband of Jezebel, and their descendants, God had not abandoned Israel but sent the great prophets Elijah and Elisha to reach out to them. In fact, Elisha had prophesied right up to the reign of Jeroboam's father, resulting in Israel subduing their principal enemy Syria, with its capital at Damascus. The even greater threat of Assyria, ruled from Nineveh, had also receded following the ministry of Jonah, another prophet to Israel immediately preceding Amos. However, Israel would have only one more prophet following Amos, namely Hosea. These two would be God's final messengers to Israel, although their

contemporaries in the south, Isaiah and Micah, would be followed by several more prophets to Judah, both prior to and after their captivity some two centuries later under Babylon.

Outline

The book opens with two verses of introduction and concludes with five verses of hope which contain the only direct quotation found in the New Testament. In between, the briefest of outlines is as follows:

Chh. 1, 2 – Eight burdens
Chh. 3-6 – Three sermons
Chh. 7-9 – Five visions

The burdens

Each burden begins with the words, 'Thus saith the Lord; for three transgressions of . . . and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof, because'. The name of the offending nation is inserted in the middle and their sin is outlined at the end followed by how God will judge them.

Amos is very subtle in his approach, as the first six burdens are all regarding the enemies which surround Israel. The first mentioned is Syria to the north, represented by Damascus, who were probably seen as Israel's greatest enemy at that time. He then looks at the west; Israel is bordered on the west

by the Mediterranean Sea, but the Philistines of Gaza also bordered the sea to the south-west and, similarly, the kingdom of Tyre to the north-west. Amos then turns to Israel's ancient enemies on the east side, the descendants of Esau, Edom, and those of Lot, Ammon, and Moab. These last three are largely east of Jordan and it seems that most of the sins of all six enemies relate to atrocities committed in Gilead, a territory occupied by the tribes of Israel east of Jordan, or regarding Edom, also east of Jordan. The reference to 'three or four transgressions' does not seem to be literal as only one or two sins are listed in regard to these six. Rather, it seems the expression indicates that they have finally crossed a line and God will now act. This must have been music to the ears of Amos's audience in Israel as he rails against their enemies and when he then turns to the south and their former brethren in Judah in chapter 2 verses 4 and 5, they would like it even more, especially as he now refers to three transgressions, 'despis[ing] the law', not keeping 'his commandments', and 'their lies caused them to err'. However, having got their attention, he turns to Israel themselves in verse 6.

Once more, he refers to 'three or four transgressions', but then goes on to list far more. Israel has been guilty of multiple abuses of the poor, immorality, idolatry, and drunkenness. Even worse, despite God's faithfulness in giving them the land and raising up prophets and Nazarites for spiritual guidance, they have defiled the latter and silenced the former. Well, God has now sent them a prophet from Tekoa and he will not be silenced! We can learn from Amos's approach. Most people will agree if we point to the wickedness that abounds in our world today, but then less so when we point out that sin afflicts all of us.

The sermons

Just as the burdens started with a common phrase, so the three sermons commence with, 'Hear this word', in the opening verse of chapters 3, 4 and 5. In chapter 3, he makes clear his message is from the Lord and

He will bring down all the palaces and great houses which symbolize their wealth and destroy their false altar. In chapter 4, he turns to their womenfolk, who he refers to as 'cows of Bashan', NKJV. They are clearly carrying on with a form of godliness in offering sacrifices and tithing from their wealth, but God has already shown His disapproval by causing droughts, blight, and pestilence to hinder their produce and has even overthrown some of them as a warning that those who remain are 'as a firebrand plucked out of the burning', v. 11. But not having responded they must now 'prepare to meet thy God, O Israel', v. 12. The third and longest sermon goes into great detail about their sins for two whole chapters. It is in chapters 5 and 6 that we get to the crux of Israel's sin and where its painful application to us is to be found. It is clear that, above all, God hates the social injustice in their society. Amos summarizes all the sins found in between as abandoning justice and righteousness and viewing them as poison, 5. 7; 6. 12. He lists examples such as 'treading upon the poor', taking 'burdens [taxes] of wheat', 'they afflict the just', 'take a bribe', and 'turn aside the poor', 5. 11, 12. Meanwhile, they are enjoying lives of ease, feasting, music, drinking, and pampering themselves, 6. 3-6.

Amos seems to portray a society where the rich are getting richer and the poor, poorer. Isaiah, Micah, and Hosea, who also prophesy in the period leading up to Israel's captivity, contain much of the same themes, as do many more of the prophets, the Gospels and the Epistle of James. Sadly, today many Christians seem to approve of the excesses of our western capitalist societies, especially in the English-speaking world. Is this because, as honest, hard-working folk who do not waste their money on vices and addictions, we have, over several generations, become relatively comfortable materially? Therefore, we now have a vested interest in describing the clearly anti-God system we live in as 'the best of a bad bunch of alternatives'. Remarkably, throughout these two chapters, Israel is clearly continuing to come to Bethel and Gilgal with their offerings,

celebrating the feasts and even looking forward to the day of the Lord, even though Amos warns it will bring judgement, not rescue, 5. 18. There is a danger we can continue in complacent orthodoxy not realizing God's call to re-establish justice and righteousness, 5. 24. Perhaps Micah sums it all up in chapter 6 verses 6 to 8, concluding, 'What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?' Despite Amos's condemnation being interspersed with appeals to repent, he warns that captivity approaches, not from Syria, which they might expect, but 'beyond Damascus', 5. 27, clearly a reference to Assyria, confirmed in chapter 6 verse 14 where the area covered includes Syria all the way to the Persian Gulf. This is a remarkable prophecy of the extent of the, as yet, unexpected Assyrian Empire. Thus, the sermons close with impending judgement.

The visions

The closing three chapters are mainly taken up with five visions Amos received. The first two visions, locusts and fire, conclude with some hope in God's mercy, but the third, the plumbline, declares clearly that judgement is coming, and specifically identifies that it will fall on the household of King Jeroboam, 7. 9. It is this detail which seems to stir up the priest, Amaziah, to go to the king with accusations against Amos and to call



for Amos to leave Israel and return to Judah. Chapter 7 finishes with Amos pointing out that though he has none of the expected credentials, unlike the false priest and the false king, he is a true prophet of God. In the final two visions, the basket of fruits in chapter 8 and the altar in chapter 9, he reminds them of their sin, especially the oppression of the poor and their idolatry, and warns that judgement is coming, prophecy will cease, and God will speak to them no more, 8. 11, 12. The final vision offers no hope for Israel with its total destruction approaching, painfully fulfilled when the Assyrians took them away, and the northern kingdom has never been recovered since.

A hopeful conclusion

Amos is generally viewed as a severe prophet with little of the positive future prophecies of the Messiah, repentance, recovery, and return found in many of the other prophets, including his contemporaries. But, at the end of his final vision, we learn that God 'will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob', 9. 8, no doubt referring to maintaining a remnant in Judah. Even this book, taken up with sin and judgement, ends with a positive declaration for the future of the nation of Israel as a whole. Chapter 9 verses 11 to 14 makes it clear that God's promises to David, of his descendants reigning, Israel possessing the Gentiles, agricultural blessing, return from captivity and righteousness and justice ensuring all enjoy the fruit of their labours at peace in their God-given land, will be fulfilled. Part of this is quoted in Acts chapter 15 by James in response to Gentiles coming into blessing following Peter's preaching to them. This is a mere foreshadowing of blessing through and for Israel, but the fulfilment of Amos's and so many of the other prophecies in the closing seventeen books of our Old Testament requires a literal millennial kingdom set up by and under our Lord Jesus Christ. Israel, for all their failure and departure, stand as a monument to the sovereignty of God, despite the attempts of kings, emperors, Führers and Ayatollahs to wipe them out. Ultimately, under the Lord they will repent and return, showing that the promises of God are 'yea and amen'.

The Life and Times of Elijah the Prophet 3

HIS CONFRONTATION WITH AHAB 1 Kings 18

By **MICHAEL BUCKERIDGE** Grantham, England

A ready servant, v. 1

Elijah had spent three years quietly in Zarephath. He had seen God's daily provision in that 'the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail', 1 Kgs. 17. 16, and God's response to his cry in the restoration of the life of the widow's son, vv. 17-24.

Beyond this, there does not seem to have been any major interlude to the mundane daily round of life. The servant of God should always be ready to respond to the call of God, however, and as soon as 'the word of the Lord came to Elijah', 'Elijah went', v. 2.

May we never become comfortable or complacent, but always have the attitude of our Lord as described by Isaiah, 'The Lord God hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back', 50. 5.

A gracious God, v. 1

Verse 1 describes a remarkable display of the grace of God. There has been no hint of repentance from Ahab and yet God moves out to bring an end to the judgement Israel was under. It is a reminder that this is the way grace works and, by definition, none of us merit it. Although Elijah was stern and blunt with Ahab when he met him, there was no hesitation to move out to fulfil this mission to such a hard-hearted sinner. Are we ever tempted to get angry or frustrated with those who do not respond to the gospel? We need to remember that we are going to a people whose mind 'the god of this world hath blinded', 2 Cor. 4. 4, and that we were once in that position, so patience and perseverance are required. But for 'sovereign grace o'er sin abounding'¹ we too would still be in darkness.

Instruction and promise, v. 1

This pattern of God's dealings

with Elijah continues. Previously, in chapter 17 verse 1, Elijah spoke on the basis of the word of God. In chapter 17 verses 2 to 4 and then 8 and 9, God then gave further instructions, followed by a promise of what would happen upon obedience. Now, the instruction, 'Go, shew thyself unto Ahab', is followed by the promise, 'I will send rain upon the earth'. What a lovely and consistent display of the life of faith, ever moving upon the word of God towards the enjoyment of the promises of God.

The sovereign and his steward, vv. 2-6

The condition of the country was desperate, 'there was a sore famine in Samaria', v. 2. How sad to see the attitude of the king of that land in his instruction to his steward, 'Go into the land . . . peradventure we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we lose not all the beasts', v. 5. Psalm 78 verse 71 says concerning the king of Israel, '[God] brought him to feed Jacob his people'. David was taken from following the sheep so that he might care for the people. Ahab is more concerned about his livestock than the people he is supposed to care for. If God has called us to care for His people, may this be our priority rather than material or positional gain, 1 Pet. 5. 1-4; cp. Ezek. 34.

The extremity of circumstance had created a sense of need with Ahab but his priorities were wrong and he sought to meet that need by his own wisdom and activity. Far better the response of the psalmist, 'In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried unto my God', 18. 6. We may rightly criticize Ahab, but which attitude characterizes me when the

'sore famine' comes?

In contrast, Obadiah – meaning 'servant of Jehovah' – has a warm commendation from the Spirit of God. Would that over our lives could be written that we 'feared the Lord greatly', v. 3. Whatever failures may be noted of him in the rest of the passage, God first records the deep reverence that Obadiah had for Him. God takes note of the degree of things, e.g., Rom. 16. 12, and Obadiah's reverence was great.

It was an attitude that led to action. Hiding the threatened prophets was a courageous act, but for one in Obadiah's position to feed them with bread and water meant risking his life over a sustained period. The writer to the Hebrews exhorted his readers to keep serving despite the hostility around them, because they had received 'a kingdom which cannot be moved', 12. 28. What was the attitude that was to characterize and sustain them? 'Serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear'. As we remember that 'our God is a consuming fire', v. 29, all others will be reduced in their ability to intimidate or silence.

Should Obadiah have remained at the palace? Should believers serve in high places within ungodly governments? I suggest that each must be before God in his own conscience. We cannot deny that God used Obadiah in this position, as He has others through the years. However, those whom God calls must remember that they must fear God greatly in order to serve Him acceptably. For those who are not, we must pray that our fellow believers are sustained so that they are not just faithful for a little while, but continually.

The steward of the king and the servant of the Lord, vv. 7-15

Obadiah 'was in the way', v. 7, the way that Ahab had appointed for him, v. 6. How much better to be like the servant of Abraham who could say, 'I being in the way, the Lord led me', Gen. 24. 27. There, the servant

had committed his way to the Lord, and the Lord had directed his path, Prov. 3. 6. In this passage we see, again, the sovereignty of God as He breaks into the path of His servant, who is occupied in the sad affairs of his earthly master, to entrust him with a message of good tidings.

That Obadiah is trustworthy is noted through this passage:

1. The incident with the 100 prophets.
2. The fact that Ahab seems to not ask anyone else to search the land with him. Did he not trust anyone else to faithfully report back to him if they found anything?
3. Despite his objections in verses 9 to 14, Obadiah did eventually go and 'meet Ahab, and told him', v. 16. As all good stewards should be, he was found faithful, 1 Cor. 4. 2.

As Obadiah met Elijah, there was an immediate recognition of him personally, but also of the authority he had as the servant of God, 'he **knew** him, and **fell on his face**, and said, Art thou that **my lord** Elijah?' v. 7. Although 'the governor of his [Ahab's] house', v. 3, he had no problem in acknowledging the place that Elijah, a man from the village of Tishbe, should have. In spiritual things, earthly standing is

no substitute for standing before the Lord of hosts, v. 15; 17. 1.

Obadiah did have some objections to the request that God made through Elijah. How many do we recognize in ourselves?

1. Fear – for a moment the fear of the Lord deserted Obadiah and the fear of man overtook him, vv. 9-12. It is a problem that can trap even the greatest of the people of God; consider Elijah in the next chapter. The warning and encouragement of Proverbs chapter 29 verse 25 is worth taking to heart, 'The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe'.
2. Entitlement – Obadiah rehearses to Elijah what he had done for the prophets, v. 13. Was he suggesting that, having risked his life once, it was unfair to be expected to do the same again? How easy it can be when, having been busy in the service of God, we then consider that God owes us a break, or an easier time. Better rather to say, 'We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do', Luke 17. 10.
3. Wrong thinking about God – 'What have I sinned?' v. 9. Just at this moment, Obadiah was away from where he should have

been in his relationship with the Lord. Instead of recognizing the privilege of being a part of God's plan to begin working in the land again, he considered such a commission as a judgement from God. 'And it shall come to pass, as soon as I am gone from thee, that the Spirit of the Lord shall carry thee whither I know not', v. 12. Obadiah attributed dishonest motives to the Spirit of God. In the stress of the moment, let us be careful about the reasons we attribute to God for His actions and requests.

The sovereign of Israel and the servant of the Lord, vv. 17, 18

Ahab met Elijah with the age-old trick of seeking to pass the blame. Despite the three-and-a-half years of drought, his heart was hard and unwilling to confess his sin. Elijah, directly but respectfully, simply and sternly, states that Ahab and his father's house are the ones guilty of troubling (disturbing/afflicting) Israel. There are two brief lessons:

1. The actions of those in leadership will impact those whom they lead. May those who lead have the desire to be the kind of leader that is commended in Hebrews chapter 13 verses 7 and 17.
2. How willing are we to confess what we have done, or do we continually look for a way to excuse ourselves? Let us remember the lovely promise that is given to those who confess, and never hesitate to do so to the God who knows all, 1 John 1. 9; Prov. 15. 3.

The prophet who stood before his God was bold in his stand against the wicked king. 'In the enervating atmosphere of a palace, it is granted to very few to retain the spirit and power of Elijah or of the Baptist'. However, wherever God has placed us, 'Let us dare to stand for God, though we stand alone!'²

Endnotes

- 1 Hymn by J. KENT, *Sovereign grace o'er sin abounding*, found at Hymnary.org.
- 2 F. B. MEYER, *Through the Bible Day by Day*, e-Sword resource.



The Apostle Paul 2

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

Paul the prisoner

Three imprisonments of Paul are recorded in the book of Acts: in chapter 16; in chapters 21 and 22; and in chapter 24. Perhaps he never envisaged in his former life that he would be treated in such a way – all for the sake of the gospel and for the sake of his Lord and Saviour.

A man of perception

He told the Athenians, 'I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious' and what he saw became an object lesson for his preaching, 17. 22, 23. He was able to perceive issues in local church life that needed adjustment and correction and wrote to the assembly concerned accordingly.¹ Personal relationships did not escape his perception either. He urged two sisters at Philippi to be 'of the same mind in the Lord', Phil. 4. 2. How much we can learn from his teaching today!

A man of progress, striving for the prize

He told the believers at Philippi that he pressed 'toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus', Phil. 3. 14, or 'I press on towards the goal' RV. He eyed the goal and never turned back; it was his all-absorbing objective, always moving and abounding in the work of the Lord. He kept the bright reward in view.

He often wrote about the judgement seat of Christ. He does so in his last Epistle, 'Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing', 2 Tim. 4. 8. May we too strive for the prize.

A man of perseverance

He never gave up in his activities for the Lord. He was zealous before his conversion and was zealous in all that he did after his conversion. At Antioch, with Barnabas, he spent 'a whole year . . . with the church, and taught much people', Acts 11. 26. His

farewell message at Miletus, to the elders from the assembly at Ephesus, 20. 18-35, is worthy of note in this connection. He was motivated by 'the care of all the churches', 2 Cor. 11. 28.

A man who identified publicly with God's people

Acts chapter 9 verse 28 is a verse that can easily be missed, 'And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem'. This was said not long after his conversion. When the believers at Jerusalem met together, Saul met with them. He did not absent himself from those of like mind. He enjoyed their fellowship. May that be seen with us today amongst the gatherings of the Lord's people. In the Epistle to the Hebrews, the writer exhorts us not to forsake 'the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is', Heb. 10. 25. This is a necessary call to us in the twenty-first century just as Paul did in the first years of his Christian life!

A man of praise

When Paul and Silas were in prison at Philippi, they 'sang praises unto God', Acts 16. 25. Paul points out that 'we should be to the praise of his glory', Eph. 1. 12. How wonderful that many of our hymns today exhort us to praise our Saviour. Let us praise Him as we ought. Paul did, even in the most difficult of circumstances.

A man of planting

What a delight for Paul, as he went to the believers at Philippi, to think of the day when he first went there² and to recall their 'fellowship in the gospel, from the first day until now', Phil. 1. 5. It is always good to hear of assemblies being planted today in some parts

of the world. For Paul, in the first century, it must have been a great encouragement to know that God was blessing his labours in this way.

His pleas

In his writings, he often uses the word 'beseech'.³ His pleadings to believers in those days to walk and talk in a manner which glorified the Lord are immensely challenging to us in our day and generation.

His pioneering work

Under the Lord's guidance and with His help, he 'trail blazed' the work of the gospel in the first century. The establishment of the assembly at Philippi is a case in point, Acts chapter 16. We should take time to observe the way in which the gospel spread and find the right pattern and encouragement for our work today.

His partners in the work of spreading the gospel

In his writings, the Apostle Paul records the names of those who assisted him and expresses his appreciation of their help in the many places he had the privilege of visiting. We can recall Barnabas, Silas, John Mark, and others. His use of the personal pronoun 'my' in describing them is a lovely touch – 'my', what I possess. He speaks about 'my fellow-labourers', Phil. 4. 1-3, about Epaphroditus, 'my . . . fellow soldier', 2. 25, about Andronicus and Junia, 'my . . . fellow-prisoners', Rom. 16. 7.⁴ It is good to know that while Paul was 'a servant of Jesus Christ', Rom. 1. 1, he was appreciative of the help and support of others. Sadly, he also recalls those who once ran well, 'Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world', 2 Tim. 4. 10.

Are we supporting each other in the work of the Lord today, and praying for those who once ran well?

The perils he encountered

Life was not easy for this servant of the Lord. Some of these perils are summarized in 2 Corinthians chapter 11 verses 23 to 27. What a man! He states in verse 30, that 'If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities'. He also reveals in the next chapter that

he had a 'thorn in the flesh' lest he 'should be exalted above measure', 12. 7. Still today, many brethren and sisters encounter perils in serving the Lord.

Christ preeminent in his life

Christ meant everything to him. 'For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain', Phil. 1. 21, and, again, that 'in all things he might have the preeminence', Col. 1. 18. This was his philosophy in life since his conversion, to manifest the life of his Saviour, to pursue the interests of Christ, and, for him, to 'die is gain' – the expectation of being with his Lord and Saviour. This is the language of devotion and the longing for delight.

His prospect

This was 'to be with Christ; which is far better', Phil. 1. 23. In what we believe to be his last written words, as the end of his life drew near and, with it, entering the presence of Christ, he wrote, 'I am now ready be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand', 2 Tim. 4. 6. The One who arrested him along the Damascus road would take him to his desired haven where he would see the Lord whom he loved and served. That prospect is sure for every believer.

His personal letters

Graciously, we have in our Bible letters written to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. In these we have opened to us the heart of the apostle and the encouragement given to those to whom he wrote. Today, we too can take encouragement from these writings and the exhortations given; they are still relevant for us today.

Prophecies revealed in his writings

Some of his Epistles include revelations concerning aspects of the future which are a joy to read. For example, how often his reference to the Lord's coming in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 is read to assure us that death is not the end for the believer! All we need to say is, 'Wherefore comfort one another with these words', 1 Thess. 4. 18.

Presentation of practical and profound truth in any age

The child of God can take the scriptures for guidance and direction in the very principles and practices of assembly life, and for our daily walk as believers. Sadly, there are those who think that some of his teachings were just for the day in which he lived but Paul's writings are as inspired as 'other scriptures', 2 Pet. 3. 16. The Lord has not given us another book; we have the sacred scriptures that are God-breathed, and no new revelation is necessary. So let us heed the word of the Lord, recognizing that 'Thus saith the Lord'.

A pattern

In writing to the Corinthians, Paul said, 'Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ', 1 Cor. 11. 1. That is, 'be ye followers of me', although he did not seek his 'own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved', 10. 33. There are so many things we can learn from the example of the apostle in connection with the differing situations that he faced. If we ask, 'What saith the scripture?' so often the answer comes through the written ministry of the Apostle Paul.

His passing

According to secular history, Paul died (by execution) around AD 66. His final Epistle leaves us in no doubt that he anticipated his 'departure' with joy. He informed Timothy that he had 'fought a good fight . . . finished [his] course' and had 'kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness', 2 Tim. 4. 7, 8.

Yet, the work of God must continue, and Paul urges us to be 'steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord', 1 Cor. 15. 58. Surely, we need men of the calibre of Paul in these closing days of this dispensation.

God's plan for his life as revealed to Ananias

The revelation given to Ananias is worthy of note, Acts 9. 15, 16. Ananias was not prominent, for little is said about him. However, it is important to notice that he was a 'certain disciple' that God was able to use, v.10. The Lord's summary of Paul's future was sufficient to motivate Ananias in seeking him out, and calling him 'brother Saul', v. 17. What grace was shown here! Only one act is recorded in scripture of this man, but what an act! It illustrates Paul's words, 'and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty', 1 Cor. 1. 27, and 'The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord and he delighteth in his way', Ps. 37. 23. We do not know whether Ananias ever heard later in his life how God had used Paul.

'O use me, Lord, use even me,
Just as Thou wilt, and when, and
where,
Until Thy blessed face I see;
Thy rest, Thy joy, Thy glory share'.
[F. R. HAVERGAL]



Endnotes

- 1 See, for example, his teaching in 1 Corinthians.
- 2 See Acts chapter 16.
- 3 See, for example, 'I beseech you, therefore, brethren', Rom. 12. 1. See also Eph. 4. 1; Philem. 9, 10; Phil. 4. 2.
- 4 See also Philem. 23. He describes Epaphras as 'our dear fellow servant', Col. 1. 7.

The brides of scripture 3

RACHEL

By **JONATHAN BLACK** Bicester, England

In this series on the brides of scripture we have learned that the first bride, Eve, was linked to a 'wounded man', and the second bride, Rebekah, was impressed by a 'wealthy man'. In Genesis chapter 29, Rachel is the favoured bride sought out by a 'willing man', who was not only captivated by her outward beauty but was prepared to serve and suffer for fourteen years to claim her as his bride.

Jacob left Bethel a changed man, having anointed a pillar to mark the most important milestone in his life, and beginning to walk with God, Gen. 28. However, he would have to learn that his walk was to involve waiting upon God to provide. At Bethel, he is gripped by the reality of God's presence but, between that first pillar and the second pillar (a period of twenty years, chh. 29-31), Jacob will be under the control of a worldly man, Laban, until God intervenes and tells him to return, with his bride, Rachel, to the land of his kindred.

Rachel's flock – her shepherd bridegroom

Jacob was willing to travel a great distance in obedience to his father to find a bride from his kindred. Thus, the believer today should marry 'in the Lord', 1 Cor. 7. 39, not choose a bride out of the world. They would meet at a well and Rachel, the first shepherdess in the Bible, would be united with the good shepherd Jacob who would water her father's flock. The picture is a beautiful one: the bridegroom rolls away the stone providing the refreshment that will cause Rachel to run like the woman of Samaria and tell others of the man who told her all things, John 4. 29.

Jacob's journey of 450 miles to Haran was nothing compared to the journey the Son of God took to seek out a bride for Himself. During His perfect walk here, the Lord Jesus cried out, 'he that believeth on me shall never thirst', John 6. 35. John writes elsewhere, 'the Spirit and the bride say, Come . . .

And let him that is athirst come', Rev. 22. 17. The bride of Christ has had her thirst satisfied at the well of eternal life because of a stone that was rolled away by the good shepherd who gave His life for the sheep, John 10. 11.

Rachel's favour – her suffering bridegroom

Jacob's love is shown first of all in a physical display of affection as he kisses Rachel, the younger and more beautiful sister. But the greatest demonstration of Jacob's love is the time he was prepared to sacrifice and suffer under Laban to secure Rachel as his bride. He would be twenty years in Laban's house learning to wait upon God. Some blame Jacob for his own trouble, claiming he deserved to be deceived because he deceived his own father. But that is not how God works. Jacob may have reaped the consequences of his conduct in his father's house, but God brought him by Bethel and promised there to bless him and keep him, not curse him.

The Lord Jesus left His Father's house willingly taking upon Himself the form of a servant and at Bethlehem He kissed a sinful world with God's love. While Rachel was not without her faults – seen in her jealousy, Gen. 30. 1, and even sharing in her father's idolatry, 31. 34 – Jacob could see no fault in her, like the bridegroom, 'Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee', S. of S. 4. 7. Christ, too, will present His glorious church to Himself without spot or wrinkle, Eph. 5. 27.

The world is still, like Laban, seeking personal advancement and material gain. Laban's treatment caused suffering for Jacob but, 'they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her', Gen. 29. 20. His sacrificial love is typical of Christ, Eph. 5. 25. After thirty-three years of service in a sinful world, the stripe fell upon the Lord Jesus for our sins, but He would see of 'the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied', Isa. 53. 11. Nothing could separate Rachel from the love of Jacob,

and we might ask, with Paul, 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?' Rom. 8. 35.

Rachel's fruit – her sons of the bridegroom

Rachel was barren – which was a reproach – but 'God remembered Rachel . . . and opened her womb', Gen. 30. 22. Fruitfulness was dependent on God working, and what lasting fruit would come from barren Rachel! Joseph was her firstborn and she died during the birth of Benjamin; both are beautiful types of Christ. Joseph is the fruitful bough, 49. 22, who received the double portion and the birthright, 1 Chr. 5. 2, while Benjamin is a double type, the son of sorrow (Benoni) and the son of my right hand, Gen. 35. 18. Therefore, in this third bride we see Christ revealed in a unique way, which is the great purpose of God for the church, that it may be 'conformed to the image of his Son', Rom. 8. 29.

When Jacob came to bless Joseph's sons, he would be reminded of the day Rachel died. But notice what Jacob says, 'I buried her there in . . . Bethlehem'. Although it was through Jacob's other wife, Leah, that Judah was born, and by whom the Messianic line would lead to Bethlehem, Rachel also brings us to Bethlehem. Both of Jacob's brides direct us to Christ and both are role models for Ruth in the building of the nation, Ruth 4. 11.

While Jacob knew what it was to be bereaved of the woman he loved, we, as the bride of Christ, have a spiritual union that will never be broken by death because it is secured by precious blood. Maybe, like Rachel, we find the years long waiting on our bridegroom, but remember the words of Peter, 2 Pet. 3. 8. He reminds us that these thousands of years are but a few days for Christ. We too, like Rachel, may have to share in sorrow and suffering as a result of our links with the heavenly bridegroom, and may even die in faith not having received the promise. But, like Jacob at Bethel, by faith we have seen the gate of heaven and can say with the writer to the Hebrews, 'we see Jesus', Heb. 2. 9. By faith, we anticipate that faith will give way to sight, and we shall see the man who served and suffered that we might be His glorious bride.

QUESTION

When believers are persecuted for their faith by unbelievers, should they approach the government to raise their concerns?

ANSWER

Some of our international readers may have faced many years of persecution for their faith and will be familiar with this question. For believers in the UK, due to the acceleration in acceptance of antibiblical views in areas such as education, the workplace, mainstream and social media, this question has recently become very pertinent. Paul reminds Timothy of a general principle that 'all that will live godly in Christ Jesus **shall** suffer persecution', 2 Tim. 3. 12. Is it the Lord's will for us to accept this persecution without complaint? Or do the scriptures provide any guidance on whether it is right to approach authorities to raise our concerns?

Let us try to establish some general principles based upon the word of God:

We need to be practical

The Bible informs us that, as a general principle, God has ordained government for the good of society, Rom. 13. 1-5. Hence, making use of the authorities we are placed under, and laws it has instituted for our welfare, is a legitimate use of God-given government. For example, Paul appeals to the local authority to avoid being wrongly flogged, Acts 22. 25. He also makes use of international authorities, appealing to Caesar, so that his case can be heard at a higher level, 25. 11.¹

In the 2010 Equality Act, nine protected characteristics were introduced into UK law, one of which is 'religion or belief'.² One purpose of this law is to protect people of faith, like ourselves, against discrimination, harassment, and victimisation.³ A believer does no wrong, therefore, in making legitimate use of these, or similar laws, for their own welfare.

We need to be wise

The scriptures also provide wise advice on how to deal with persecution. Books such as 1 Thessalonians, 2 Timothy, and 1 Peter provide guidance. Individuals such as David, Elijah, Daniel, and Jeremiah in the Old Testament, and Paul in the New Testament, experienced persecution and their lives are recorded to help us. Daniel is a particularly good example, given the hostile environment he was in, and close contact he had with authorities. He was careful in selecting his objections to bring before the prince of the eunuchs, Dan. 1. 8. There were other things he could have rightly complained

about. Daniel was respectful and discreet in his approach, vv. 12-14. The spirit in which we make our objections known is important. We need to be 'wise as serpents, and harmless as doves', Matt. 10. 16.

We need to seek the support of God's people

It was in the context of James' martyrdom that Peter was imprisoned, where we read that, 'prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him', Acts 12. 5. We need the prayers of God's people when going through persecution, and we need to pray for those we know of who are experiencing persecution for their faith. Seeking guidance from Christian ministries offering legal advice,⁴ or from believers in the legal profession is another way to obtain support.

We need to be Christ-like

Our persecution is a result of the One we follow. The Lord Jesus reminded His disciples, 'The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you', John 15. 20. The Lord Jesus was unjustly treated. He appealed for the law to be brought to bear in His trial, John 18. 19-23, yet this appeal was rejected.⁵ There may be occasions when the authorities are unwilling to listen to us when we must decide that 'we ought to obey God rather than men', Acts 5. 29. Peter reminds us that it is praiseworthy to patiently suffer when wrongfully treated by the authorities we are under, 1 Pet. 2. 18-25. The Lord Jesus is our great example, 'who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously', v. 23.

Endnotes

- ¹ No doubt Paul also had in mind that in making this appeal he could be a testimony to kings and others in authority, Acts 9. 15.
- ² <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>.
- ³ It has not escaped the author's notice that there is a glaring inequality in the application of the Equality Act especially in the amount of attention given to certain of the nine protected characteristics and not others.
- ⁴ Examples include the Christian Legal Centre (<https://christianconcern.com/about/services/christian-legal-centre/>) or the Christian Institute (<https://www.christian.org.uk/support-us/ldf/info/>).
- ⁵ This was not for His own benefit since He knew Calvary was impending, but to expose the inconsistency in the leadership of Israel.

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*'And there came an angel of the Lord,
and sat under an oak', Judg. 6. 11.*

PS
Magazine

'And there came an angel of the Lord, and sat under an oak', Judg. 6. 11.

Biblical commentators suggest that there is some difficulty in determining the exact meaning of the words translated 'oak' in the Old Testament. Sometimes, evidently, the terebinth or elm is intended and, at others, the oak. However, there are a number of varieties of oak in Israel, and, along with the cedar, the oak tree is symbolic of strength and durability, 2 Sam. 18. 9; Ezek. 6. 13.

It is somewhat significant that in a time of Israel's weakness the angel of the Lord should appear sitting under an oak. The man that he comes to, Gideon, is hardly the typical warrior-leader of the people. He is threshing wheat 'by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites', the oppressors of his people, Judg. 6. 11. He says of himself, 'my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house', v. 15. He is hesitant, seeking a sign to verify the message that he receives, v. 17.

As he brings a meal back to the oak tree under which the angel of the Lord is sitting, he is brought to realize something of the symbolism. As the oak tree derives its strength from divine design, our strength should be derived from the same source – God. Israel's greatest warrior-king, David, acknowledged, 'God is my strength and power', 2 Sam. 22. 33. Hence, says the angel of the Lord to Gideon, 'The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour', v. 12. It might not have been our assessment and it wasn't Gideon's self-assessment, but the angel did not address Gideon as the man he was then. INRIG, quoted by CONSTABLE, states, 'One of the great truths of Scripture is that when God looks at us, He does not see us for what we are, but for what we can become, as He works in our lives' (*Expository Notes*, e-Sword resource).

Are we willing to let God mould and shape us to be something for Him?

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