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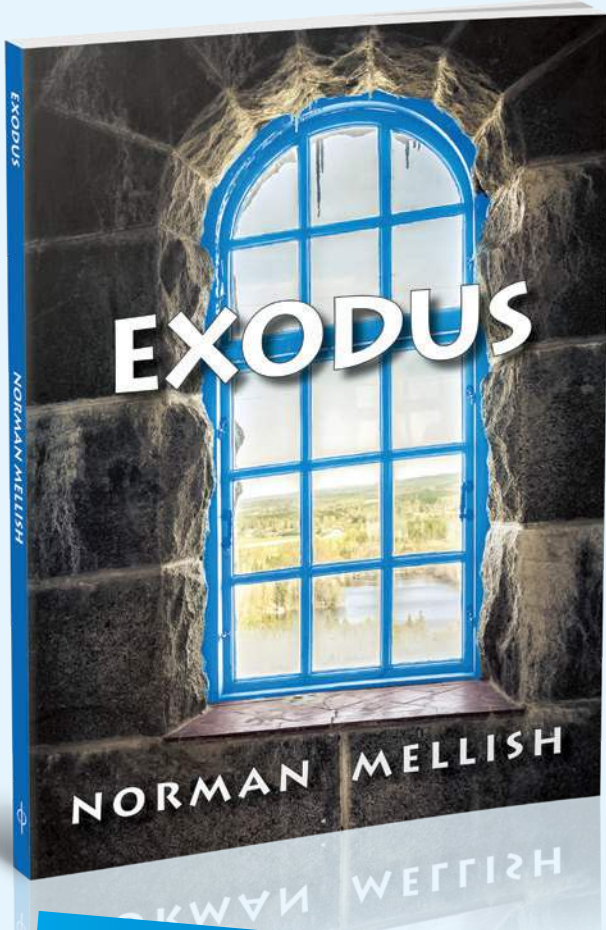
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'And their father Israel said . . . take of the best fruits in the land . . . almonds', Gen. 43. 11

PS
Magazine

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Exodus

This latest volume written by Norman Mellish is available for preorder – due for publication in early March 2024.

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Precious Seed Charts

Appearing as the centre page pull-out of the magazine up to November 2022, we have decided to make these popular charts available through our website.

They are a free download and can be accessed here:

<https://www.preciousseed.org/charts/>.

Although the magazine inserts concluded at Lamentations, additional charts covering Old Testament books will be added as they are completed.

Precious Seed Books

For our readers outside of the UK and Europe, our books are available for purchase through outlets as follows:

North America - Gospel Folio Press - <https://gospelfolio.com/product-category/books-by-publisher/precious-seed/>

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'If any man serve me, let him follow me', John 12. 26

Let us be clear, our Lord does not need our service. Yet, seeing how great a debt we owe to Him, why would we not want to 'attend to anything' that is in His interest? 'If the Son . . . shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed' – free to follow and free to serve, John 8. 36. This service is not slavery, but true liberty. It is an honour beyond any other.

In Isaiah chapter 42, among all the statements made, there are three that seem pertinent to the nature of our service for the Lord Jesus as we work out His condition for serving Him – 'let him follow me'.

'I have put my spirit upon him', v. 1

True service for Christ can only be done through complete dependence upon the leading and power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. God's work must always be done in God's power and at God's prompting. There must be nothing of self infiltrating or infecting service for Him. Such truth must cause us all, as servants and followers, to continually examine our motives. The approbation of others can be so deceptive and lead us into paths that, while they might seem right to ourselves and others, are

not of the Spirit. It is one reason why daily communion with God through prayer and reading the scriptures is the lifeblood of Christian service.

'He shall not cry, nor lift up', v. 2

The manner of service is also worthy of note. His ministry among a nation that He knew would reject Him, was one of meekness. He patiently endured the 'contradiction of sinners against himself', Heb. 12. 3. He was not one that protested injustice, but He 'committed himself to him that judgeth righteously', 1 Pet. 2. 23. We might be outraged at the sin we see so obviously around us, and angry at such dreadful unholiness, but we must never make that an occasion for angry, indignant, and personal outbursts in our dealings with our fellows. His servants have no mandate for such an approach. Preaching is not a diatribe; it is the announcing of good news, Acts 5. 42. That does not mean compromising the truth we are entrusted to communicate, but the manner of how we serve must be aligned with that of our Lord.

'A bruised reed . . . the smoking flax', v. 3

If meekness should mark our service,

then compassion should, too. We must remember that, whether dealing with believers or unbelievers, a tenderness to those who are breaking under the crushing pressure of burdens does not need cold indifference. It takes a tenderness in heart, a listening ear, an encouraging word, an approach that does not break the bruised. Similarly, those who are not burning bright as they maybe once did, need gentle wafting back into brightness, not the fierceness of a gale to put them out. The wise man noted the value of 'soft' [tender] words, Prov. 15. 1.

May it be that we continue to look daily to the great example of the perfect Servant to help us follow closer and serve better.

It is the prayer of the committee that the articles in this issue will cause the reader to hear His gentle words again to those who were feeling the weight of burdens, 'Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me . . . and ye shall find rest unto your souls', Matt. 11. 29.

Sandy Jack

Ministry Articles Editor

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THE TALENTS (2)

By **MARK SWEETNAM** Dublin, Ireland

In our previous article, we considered the earlier sections of this parable, dealing with responsibility and rebellion. Now, we will consider the events that follow the return of the king.

Return and review, vv. 15-26

Despite the citizens' rejection, the nobleman returns 'having received the kingdom'. Although we might have expected the punishment of the rebels to be his first priority, he begins by reviewing his servants. From the ten, we get a sample of three. Two of these have a substantial profit to report. The first receives a commendation (which, by implication, is shared by the second) – 'Well, thou good servant . . . thou hast been faithful in a very little' – and both are given responsibility commensurate with the profit that they have produced.

The scene here pictures the review of our service at the Judgement Seat of Christ, which will precede His return to establish His kingdom and destroy His enemies. The key criterion of this judgement is faithfulness in handling 'a very little'. That expression reminds us that what has been entrusted to us now is minute in comparison to what lies before us. If we cannot be trusted with the little, how can we expect greater responsibility? And greater there certainly is. Here the reward of the servants is responsibility in the kingdom, what 2 Peter chapter 1 verse 11 describes as an abundant entrance into the kingdom. The title of MERVYN PAUL'S classic book sums it up just about as well as possible – our time here is 'training for reigning' and our stewardship of the temporal resources of this world will qualify – or disqualify – us for the management of a far greater stewardship as we reign with Christ.

Then the third servant is summoned. He is described as *ho*

heteros, the other [of a different sort], and so he proves to be. He has no profit to report, and not even any activity, for he had stored his pound away in his napkin, a word for the sweat napkin used by the labourer. The word translated 'laid up' is used of our eternal inheritance, Col. 1. 5; 2 Tim. 4. 8. That that is untouched is a glorious truth; that the resources given to trade with should be so is reprehensible.

Equally reprehensible is the servant's excuse for his failure. He has been paralyzed by the idea that his master is an austere or stern man, impossible to please, a predatory profiteer. Based on the wider parable, this view is demonstrably false – nothing in the king's interactions with the faithful servants suggests this character. The king's response, 'Out of thine own mouth', does not suggest that he is agreeing with the servant's assessment, but rather highlights the unsatisfactory nature of the servant's excuse – if he really believed his master to be so harsh and so mercenary, then he could easily have banked the pound, thus ensuring an increase as well as guaranteeing its security more effectively than simply concealing it. 'Wicked servant' is a strong condemnation, but that is the master's assessment of this unfaithful servant.

The master's analysis reveals that there was no satisfactory explanation for the servant's failure. He has misunderstood the character of his master, the solemnity of his stewardship, and the scale of the consequences that hinged upon his faithfulness. Unlike the failing servant in Matthew's Gospel, he

is not cast into judgement but is stripped of what he had been given.

We often find ourselves where this servant stood. When we fail in our stewardship, we are at a loss to provide an explanation that will satisfy us, still less one that will satisfy Christ. The reality is that there is no explanation that we could offer, nothing that could explain or mitigate our failure. In light of all we know to be true, faithlessness is folly, and the thought of standing as this servant did, trying to explain to Christ why it is that we have failed to occupy with what He has given us should strike terror to our souls. Like this servant, we do not fear the outer darkness and the gnashing of teeth – no matter what our failures, it is well with our souls. But our place and responsibility in the kingdom, our capacity to serve and to glorify Christ can be eternally compromised by our faithlessness and folly.

Retribution, v. 27

One final strand of the narrative remains to be resolved – the fate of those citizens who rejected their rightful king. They are in a different category from the 'wicked servant'; they are described as 'mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them'. Their enmity lay in their rebellious will. Their judgement is total, and tersely described. Such, in a coming day, will be the fate of those who oppose themselves to the One who 'must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet', 1 Cor. 15. 25. God's judgement is slow but sure – His mills grind slowly, but they grind exceeding small.

Having addressed the disciples' misunderstanding about what going to Jerusalem would entail, the Saviour went, not to the crown, but to the cross; He went in order to go, by death, resurrection, and ascension, into a far country. He is presently there and has received the kingdom. His return is sure, the unfolding of God's purpose can be neither diverted nor delayed. But in the time between, it is ours to 'occupy till [He] come', to labour for His profit and in His interests, appreciating that the day will soon be here when we must give an account of our stewardship.

‘GIVE ATTENDANCE TO READING’

How can we help a believer if they cannot read?

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

As you read this article a profound series of processes are taking place in your eyes and brain. Approximately four times a second your eyes make extremely rapid movements, called saccades, moving your eyes from word to word. In the quarter of a second periods in between, visual information travels from your eyes to your brain, where words are recognized and compared to the compendium of known words already stored there. While all of this is happening, your brain is assessing the location of up-and-coming words, allowing you to seamlessly move your eyes onto the next word in the sentence. Reading is a phenomenally complex process that most of us do without even thinking about it. There is something very special about reading and we, uniquely, are the only creatures God created in this world that can carry out this amazing task.

The first mention of the word ‘read’ in the Bible is in the book of Exodus, Exod. 24. 7. The book of the law mentioned here, along with the ten commandments inscribed in stone, were clearly items that could be read.¹ These, along with other written documents of the Old and New Testaments, emphasize the importance of the written word as a vehicle by which God has revealed Himself to humanity throughout history. Hence, there has always been a great need for humanity to learn to read in order to understand God’s mind and will. But what about people who have never learned to read, or experience reading difficulties such as severe dyslexia, or have suffered vision loss later in life?

In the days of the New Testament church, illiteracy would have been a big problem. For example, it is estimated that in Roman Italy at least a third of the population were slaves.² Several of the names of believers mentioned in the New Testament are most likely slave names, such as Secundus, Acts 20. 4, Tertius, Rom. 16. 22, and Quartus, Rom. 16. 23 (i.e., slave number two, three, and four, respectively). The high proportion of slaves in New Testament churches also meant there were high levels of illiteracy. Therefore, Paul instructed Timothy of the importance of publicly reading the word of God, ‘devote yourself to the public reading of scripture’, 1 Tim. 4. 13 ESV. Today, in parts of the world where literacy is low, regular and systematic public reading of the Bible is a useful strategy to help believers who cannot read.

Another way that can help is through using hymns and songs. Associating words with music can cause the words of a song to stick in our minds. Hymns and spiritual songs become very familiar to us with time and can continue to remind us of

great spiritual truth throughout our lifetime. It is one reason why key prophecies about the person of Christ are found in the form of song in the Psalms.³ Lining out a hymn (called ‘precenting’ in Scotland) is a method that is commonly used when literacy rates are low, where a ‘precentor’ provides each line of a hymn just before it is sung.

Today more facilities are available to improve accessibility to the word of God than at any other time in history. These include the availability of text in a font size of choice on electronic devices for people with low vision, audio versions of the scriptures in numerous versions and languages, accessibility tools on almost all electronic devices and the availability of Bible teaching in audio and video format. There are also organizations, such as Torch Trust,⁴ dedicated to serving blind and partially-sighted people. Christian and secular organizations also exist that aim to improve literacy around the world.⁵

One final point to make is that every New Testament believer is indwelt by the Spirit of God. An important aspect of the life of faith for every Christian is the experience-based aspect of our walk with God as we encounter the events of daily life and are guided by the Spirit of God each day. A believer who struggles to access the scriptures may put greater emphasis on more experiential aspects of the Christian life. Such a believer may need encouragement and help, when passing through difficult times, by being reminded of the unerring and unchanging truth of God. The Lord Jesus said, ‘Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away’, Matt. 24. 35.

Endnotes

- 1 Probably, Abraham could read, given that writing systems existed in Ur at that time.
- 2 W. SCHEIDEL, ‘Human Mobility in Roman Italy, II: The Slave Population’, *Journal of Roman Studies*, 95: 64-79, pg. 170, 2005.
- 3 The details of the rejection, Ps. 118. 22, death, Ps. 22, resurrection, Ps. 16, and reign of the Lord Jesus, Ps. 24, were all prophesied in the Psalms and their words would have been etched in the minds of the Jewish nation.
- 4 <https://web.torchtrust.org.uk/>.
- 5 <https://www.literacyevangelism.org/>.



THE TEACHING IN THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS

Part 4 – The Warnings (1)

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

Alongside the important doctrine of the person, offices, and work of Christ, the writer to the Hebrews weaves various warnings, impressing on his readers the significance of what has been taught. In that approach, there is an immediate and equally valuable lesson for believers today. Doctrine has practical implications! It should impact upon our Christian lives.

Prohibiting indifference and neglect, 2. 1-5

This first warning is set against the background of chapter 1 – ‘therefore’, v. 1 – and the message of the Lord’s superiority to angels. The writer emphasizes the seriousness of the message – ‘we ought’, words which are emphatic. The danger is not of rejecting but of neglecting the gospel. The picture is painted of a drifting boat that has slipped its moorings, slipped its anchor, and is in serious danger of floating away.

The significance of what has been written is found in the words ‘great salvation’ and that greatness is found in the Saviour who is its source and subject. We cannot overestimate its importance. As JIM FLANIGAN writes, ‘It is great in its scope; it is great in its power; it is great in its effects upon those who receive it; it was great in its cost’.¹

The message bears a threefold attestation:

1. It was received directly from the lips of the Lord Himself, v. 3.
2. God’s hand was seen in confirmation of the truth preached, v. 4.
3. The distribution of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote, ‘Through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God . . . I have fully preached the gospel of Christ’, Rom. 15. 19.

That attestation of the message is by all three persons of the trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Whilst an act of disobedience is failing to do what we should do, here we have the sin of omission, not doing what we ought. This is not openly and defiantly rejecting the word of God but neglecting it, whether through ignorance or indolence. Here is a challenge for every generation. Do we know the word of God and are we prepared to bow to its truth?

Procuring rest, 3. 12 – 4. 11

In this warning, a parallel is drawn between the past and the present. The generation that came out of the bondage of Egypt did not enter the promised land because of unbelief. It is descriptive of those who were active in their unbelief, whose hearts were controlled by unbelief. The warning goes out, ‘Take heed’, v. 12. The same catalogue of failure continues in chapter 4 but refers to different generations. Verse 8 speaks of the generation who went into the promised land under the leadership of Joshua. Enemies had to be ejected. But, above all, their continued presence in and rule over the land depended upon their faithfulness to God. In verse 7, there is the record of David, a man whom God honoured by making him king, and one who brought deliverance to the nation, uniting, and establishing it.

However, it is important not to underestimate the power and influence of sin. The writer warns his readers of the possibility of an evil heart. The visible and tangible systems of Judaism may appeal, but accepting and submitting to that appeal would be an irrevocable step from which there is no return. Similarly, speaking of the rest of God, the writer indicates that it is different from and greater than the rest that might have been enjoyed under the times of Joshua or David. It is a sabbath rest. It is a rest like God’s own rest following creation. The Jews to whom this Epistle is written must appreciate that the true rest lies before them and is founded, not upon the possession of the promised land, nor upon the enjoyment of that land, but in Christ alone. The true rest cannot be lost, broken, or disturbed. Do we appreciate what we have in Christ? Have we learned the lessons of ‘our examples’, 1 Cor. 10. 6?

What is the antidote to such impending and continuing danger? The writer bids his readers to be constantly watchful, 3. 12. There is also the benefit of Christian fellowship, ‘exhort [encourage] one another daily’, v. 13. Finally, there is the fellowship of Christ for ‘we are become companions of the Christ’, v. 14 JND. What a privilege is ours! Our fellowship with the Lord Himself demonstrates the reality of our faith and it is a guide to them that are the Lord’s. The promise of God’s rest is still open, and it is by faith. It is for us ‘which have believed’, 4. 3. It is not based upon ritual or Jewish legalism but on faith alone.

Progressing to perfection, 5. 11 – 6. 12

This third warning considers the condition of the people to whom the Epistle is written. They were ‘dull of hearing’, 5. 11. They were evidencing stunted growth, vv. 12-14. The figure of the babe indicates the seriousness of the condition. They ought to have moved on, but they still needed teaching those things that they had supposedly left in the ‘infant class’ of divine truth. How important to appreciate that we should not stand still in our spiritual life. The writer is looking for maturity,

discernment, spiritual perception, and discrimination. These qualities can only be gained by exercising our hearts and spiritual senses to the word of God. This should be our food, and progress should be our goal.

In chapter 6, the writer states some of the deficiencies of the old economy and how it has been superseded by the person and work of Christ. The picture, seen in 'the principles of the doctrine of Christ', v. 1, should be discarded for the reality – Christ. Immaturity should be left behind in the pursuit of 'perfection' or 'full growth' KJV mg. Jewish rituals should be abandoned for faith in Christ.

In seeking to separate the true from the false, the believer from the unbeliever, Christians need to exercise discrimination. Those who 'were once enlightened', v. 4, had come under conviction but had not been saved. Those who had 'tasted of the heavenly gift' had, like the spies who went to spy out the land, seen its riches but were not prepared to go over into that land. There were those who were 'partakers of the Holy Ghost', seeing the Spirit of God at work, but never knowing His saving work and indwelling power. WUEST comments, 'We must be

careful to note that the Greek word translated "partakers" does not mean "possessors," in the sense that these Hebrews possessed the Holy Spirit as an indwelling Person who had come to take up His permanent abode in their hearts . . . This work of the Holy Spirit in leading them on towards faith was a once-for-all work, so thoroughly done that it needed never to be repeated. However, there was nothing permanent of itself in this work, for the work was only a means to an end. This is shown by the aorist participle used'.²

In this warning, often misunderstood, it is important to note the contrast between the wording of verses 6 and 9. In the former, the writer speaks of 'they'. In verse 9, he speaks of 'you'. He addresses his readers as 'beloved', using the term descriptive of the love of God. Unlike the opening verses of the chapter, here he is addressing believers and expressing his compassion for them and his conviction about them, 'things that accompany salvation'. In the verses that close this warning, the writer seeks the spiritual welfare and blessing of all, 'we desire that every one of you', v. 11.

Discerning between that which is genuine and that which is false is a continuing challenge for all believers, particularly those who are spiritually immature. The answer is given here – we need to know the word of God, 5. 14, and follow, or imitate, those of spiritual maturity, 6. 12.

Preserving their profession, 10. 19-39

In this warning, the writer bids his readers to 'hold fast', v. 23. It is set against the background of the threat of persecution, the intellectual opposition and reasoning of false teachers, the allurements and attractions of the world, and the adversary's activity. He reminds them that what they possessed in Christ was far superior and, because of that, they should remain steadfast. He has not and will not let them down. They should remain loyal to Him.

Those tremendous blessings include continual access, fellowship, and communion with God, v. 19. They

have a high priest, a great one, who officiates for them, v. 21. He is not a priest officiating **in** the house of God, but a great high priest **over** the house of God. He does not just go in on our behalf but bids us enter through Him, 'Let us draw near', v. 22. We can do so with full assurance of faith because the death and resurrection of Christ has fitted us for the presence of God.

A further encouragement to continue for the Lord can be found in the fellowship of the saints. In a world that is consumed by selfishness, there is sanctuary amongst the saints of God. We seek not our own interests but the welfare and blessing of our fellow saints, vv. 24, 25. Our constant desire and aim should be to stimulate each other to love and good works. This should be our practice or habit of life.

In contrast, the reader should consider the emptiness of that which was being returned to by the apostates. Their true situation is grave indeed, 'there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins', v. 26. Christ cannot and will not be sacrificed again. To have rejected the single sacrifice of Christ is to have rejected the only means of salvation. For the apostate there can be only one outcome to such a life – judgement.

Finally, in this warning, to fortify people against future trials the writer reminds them of the courage they displayed in past ones. Some of their number had suffered and endured 'a great fight of afflictions', v. 32. If they had weathered such a storm early in their Christian lives, why give up now? Call these things constantly to mind and from those thoughts take courage for the present fight. Do not waver in the face of further turmoil and strife. Do not let your hope be dimmed! Rest assured that 'he that shall come will come', v. 37. Do not be influenced or affected by others, remember, 'we are not of them', v. 39.

Endnotes

- 1 JIM FLANIGAN, *Hebrews*, in K. STAPLEY and TOM WILSON (eds.), *What the Bible Teaches*, John Ritchie.
- 2 KENNETH S. WUEST, *Hebrews in the Greek New Testament*, Eerdmans, 1958.



Telephone ministry

The idea for a telephone ministry was first conceived following the onset of Covid-19 and the national lockdowns which were imposed by government to try to restrict the spread of the virus. The inability to meet in person, coupled with the fact that many did not have access to or know how to use computer equipment, meant that many believers were isolated and unable to access Bible teaching. Thus, the work commenced following the exercise of brethren in the Midlands area to meet the need of those believers as they were kept at home during lockdown. They also had the desire to provide a gospel testimony, enabling family members and contacts to access some form of regular witness.

The organizers were keen to provide a service which did not rely on computers. They recognized that a number of people either do not possess a computer, or the necessary operational skills for internet access. However, all were familiar with telephones, whether landline-based or simple mobile. Therefore, enquiries were made, and a commercial telephone conference service was discovered which could be adapted for telephone messages, and accessed by users simply by dialling a phone number and entering a PIN number on a telephone handset.

The initial schedule provided Bible teaching on a Saturday evening using a variety of the Lord's servants. This followed the pattern of the Saturday evening meetings that had been available locally, pre-Covid. There was also a Sunday gospel message at six o'clock in the evening, again, similar to what was operating before the pandemic. Mid-week, a further



provision of ministry was available, aimed at providing consecutive teaching through one or more Bible books. Norman Mellish of Stoke-on-Trent kindly undertook the Thursday night task, and continues to do so more than two years later.

In the early stages, it was particularly encouraging to find unsaved people dialling in to hear the gospel. These were 'family and friend' contacts, together with other referrals, to whom the gospel was faithfully presented, albeit over the telephone rather than in person. Whatever the reason may have been for the individual dialling in, the opportunity to sow the good seed was grasped.

In addition, the mid-week Bible teaching has taken listeners through various New Testament Epistles, including Hebrews, James, and 1 and 2 Peter. Some of the notes from these ministry sessions have been expanded into book form.

Overall, the service has proved popular and there are users from many different parts of the United Kingdom who dial in on a weekly basis. The service has been operational for two-and-a-half years and receives an average of forty callers per session. When taking into account multiple listeners per call, the actual number is believed to be around seventy per session. Whilst the numbers may have reduced from the figures recorded at the height of the pandemic, there is sufficient encouragement to continue the work as the Lord enables.

The Lord's help is appreciated for permitting the service to continue, and also to many of the Lord's servants who have ministered the scriptures and preached the gospel, and who continue to do so.

Although some time changes have been made, the current schedule is as follows:

Saturday - Ministry 19:00hrs (a variety of the Lord's servants)
Sunday - Gospel 16:30hrs
Thursday - Ministry 19:15hrs (Norman Mellish)

This reflects the fact that many halls have reopened and reimplemented their gospel meetings, and among the organizers there was a desire not to clash with such activities. However, the service remains available to anyone with a telephone – either landline or mobile.

Many of the saints who listen to the telephone ministry have difficulties getting out to local assemblies because of age or infirmity. In some cases, since Covid and the closure of some assemblies, there are no local meetings available. It should be emphasized, however, that the telephone service is not an alternative to attending assembly gatherings.

The service can be accessed by dialing:

Phone No.: 0333 016 0300
When prompted, dial 11772233#
(the # is important)
Then dial 8948#

As the Lord enables, we trust that we might continue the work, reaching out to the lost and supporting those believers who struggle to access gatherings in their own area. Please pray for the seed that has been sown, that blessing in salvation might be brought to some.

[This article has been compiled by a number of brethren who have been involved in the work]

Endnote

This article was written and submitted in February 2023.

Samuel Ridout (1855-1930)

By **HOWARD A. BARNES** Westhoughton, England

Introduction

Anyone reading through lists of second-hand Christian books will soon come across the name of the author 'S(amuel) Ridout'. He and Frederick Grant were, in their day, the leading Bible scholars associated with the Exclusive Brethren in the USA and Canada. They were contemporary with the leading British equivalent brethren, such as J. N. Darby and W. Kelly. As we shall see below, Ridout's extensive publications are readily available today, either online or as hardcopy and are generally well worth reading.

Early life and education

Samuel Ridout was born in 1855 into a Presbyterian family in Annapolis, an Atlantic port in Maryland, USA. He was the son of Dr Samuel Ridout and his wife, Anne. Sadly, when Samuel junior was about one year old his father died, and then, about four years later, his mother also. His grandfather, a godly man, then became responsible for young Samuel and certainly brought him up 'in the nurture and admonition of the Lord', Eph. 6. 4. His childhood was spent in Annapolis until about the age of twelve, when Samuel was sent to Tennant's School, a Presbyterian boarding school in Pennsylvania. Then, he returned to Annapolis to attend St. John's College, and he finished his secondary education there when he was eighteen years old.

About this time, his state of health gave cause for concern and, perhaps surprising to us, it was arranged for him to go to sea! He finished his naval career at about twenty-two years of age, having sailed as far as the Mediterranean. Importantly, it was during his three years at sea that Samuel began to show a deeper interest in spiritual things, seeking Christian fellowship whenever possible and attending Christian gatherings at his various ports of call.

Then, for a short time, he taught in the coal mining districts of Western Maryland. Here, working among many poor and comparatively illiterate people, and often having to teach

'rough and ready' people of his own age – but far from his refined background – he learned patience and determination to get things over to all kinds of people.

Encouraged by his grandfather, he then attended the Princeton Theological Seminary in New Jersey (now part of the prestigious Princeton University), which had been established in 1812 by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, making it the second oldest theological seminary in the USA. Samuel graduated in 1880 and, shortly afterwards, was ordained into the Presbyterian ministry and he subsequently took up a pastorate for a year or so.

Assembly truth

It was about this time that Samuel became aware of what we understand as 'assembly truth'. This led to much exercise as to the path he should take. He eventually separated from the Presbyterian Church to enter upon what he now firmly believed was the scriptural path for God's people. He identified himself with the Exclusive assembly then meeting in Baltimore, and took his place in a lowly, humble manner.

To finance his daily needs, he took a job as a railway clerk, and he also tutored in his spare time. However, he became 'full-time' for the last forty years of his life. In 1883, he married Anna Elizabeth Newark and continued living in Baltimore, where their three children were born. In 1903, they moved to Boyertown, Pennsylvania, and stayed there until 1912, then finally, the family moved to Plainfield, New Jersey, and lived there until his death in 1930.

Publications

Ridout began writing in Baltimore, first for magazines, but he is most well-known for his many books that followed.

Many of the dozen or so books by Ridout are still available:

- *From Genesis to Revelation: The Structure and Contents of the Bible Books*

- *How to Study the Bible*
- *The Bible: The True University*
- *The Pentateuch: The First Five Books of the Bible*
- *Lectures on the Tabernacle*
- *Job*
- *Judges and Ruth*
- *King Saul: The Man after the Flesh*
- *The Four Gospels*
- *Hebrews*
- *The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit*
- *The Church and Its Order*

Some of these can be bought new as reprints or second hand in Bible bookshops. Otherwise, they can be read online at Stem Publishing.¹

A typical quotation from his book, *How to Study the Bible*, is helpful: 'We know God through His word, not merely intellectually, but as born, cleansed and nourished by that word. We know Christ thus, also; and thus, in a special and real way, the written word is the mind of the living, the Divine Word . . . we press forward to see our Lord on high, may we also seek Him in His word, forgetting our past attainments which are behind, reaching forth to those that are before, and pressing forward ever for the prize which, while it is on high, awaits our reverent, diligent, persistent search in the precious word of God . . . God's word is so perfect that we can never grasp all its fulness here, but we shall go on to know Him and the power of His resurrection, yea, and the fellowship of His sufferings too, in that measure in which His word fills mind and heart and possesses and controls our lives.'²

Conclusion

We could do no better in ending our brief look at Samuel Ridout's life than to quote the last words of his will: 'Lastly, I gratefully declare my personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, my beloved Saviour, whose I am for time and eternity; to whose infinite grace alone I owe my all. I most affectionately press upon my beloved children to make the Lord their chief Object, to live in love and peace, and to serve Him'.

Endnotes

- 1 Available here: www.stempublishing.com/authors/S_Ridout/.
- 2 S. RIDOUT, *How to Study the Bible*, Pickering and Inglis.

Pauline metaphors Ambassador

By **BERT CARGILL** St. Monans, Scotland

Part 9

Introduction

Some of the metaphors Paul uses occur frequently in his writings, as this series of articles has shown. This one, 'ambassador', occurs only twice in the KJV; 2 Cor. 5. 20; Eph. 6. 20. It is an interesting one, however, referring to people, rather than to positions, such as 'adoption', or public events as in the marketplace or in sporting contests. This makes it very personal, 'we are ambassadors for Christ'. In a broader context, it sits alongside some of the metaphors used by the Lord Jesus, such as 'I will make you fishers of men', Matt. 4. 19, and 'ye also ought to wash one another's feet', John 13. 14.

What is an ambassador?

The Concise Oxford Dictionary gives this definition of ambassador: 'an accredited diplomat sent by a state as its permanent representative in a foreign country', 'a representative or promoter of a specified activity'.¹ These definitions are clearly in the context of modern diplomatic activity, or trade and commerce. But, traditionally, and in Bible times, an ambassador has been recognized as a trusted individual whose whole purpose in a foreign country is to represent his own country faithfully. Transferring this to ourselves, we are in this world to faithfully represent our home country, heaven, although we have not reached it yet, and promote the interests of our Lord and Master.

Ambassadors in the Old Testament

The Bible use of this word predates modern times by many centuries while being consistent with its basic meaning. The first time it occurs is in Joshua chapter 9 verse 4. Around 1450 BC, during the conquest of Canaan, men from Gibeon came to Israel's camp at Gilgal and 'did work wilily, and went and made as if they had been ambassadors'. They put on an act and lied, deceiving Joshua and the leaders of Israel into making a league with them so that their country and its people would not be

destroyed. The real problem arose because those who listened to them did not ask 'counsel at the mouth of the Lord', v. 14. They certainly had their own country's interests at heart, but their methods were underhand and were soon exposed.

Therefore, this first, but not very promising, reference to ambassadors carries one or two lessons for us today. First, we must always be transparent and honest. As ambassadors for Christ, we must never mislead others, perhaps by hypocritical appearances, by promises we cannot keep, or by glossing over difficulties. We must always match our methods and our mission with the One who sent us. Second, from the other side of the story, never forget to seek the Lord's guidance in all you do. Pray much and often.

We read about ambassadors again, later in the Old Testament, doing what such officials usually do, one king communicating with another, sometimes seeking help or carrying messages of peace. King Hezekiah unwisely received ambassadors from Babylon, 2 Chr. 32. 31; King Josiah refused ambassadors from Egypt, 35. 21. Isaiah wrote about unsuccessful ambassadors to Egypt, Isa. 30. 4, and failed 'ambassadors of peace', 33. 7, and Ezekiel also wrote about them, seeking help which never came, Ezek. 17. 15. In contrast to

this, King Solomon wrote, 'a faithful ambassador brings health', Prov. 13. 17 NKJV.

It is worth noting that the word translated 'ambassador' in Joshua chapter 9 really means 'feign to be a wanderer', which fits the story better, and, in the later references, it is 'interpreter' or 'messenger', again fitting the context.²

Ambassadors in the New Testament

In the New Testament, the Greek word translated 'ambassador' is *presbeuo*, related to *presbuteros* which is translated 'elder' as in a local assembly. That too is fitting, this time indicating responsibility and maturity, and denoting the importance of the work undertaken. One relates to caring for the Lord's people in the church; the other relates to testimony and mission in the world outside.³ The two relevant texts to consider now are from the pen of the Apostle Paul.

'I am an ambassador in bonds', Eph. 6. 20

As he closes his letter to the saints in Ephesus, he writes, 'Praying . . . for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds', Eph. 6. 18-20.

Along with three other nearby Epistles, this was written during his imprisonment in Rome, as described in Acts chapter 28. Earlier, he had described himself as a 'prisoner of Jesus Christ', Eph. 3. 1, now 'an ambassador in bonds', 6. 20. He perhaps used very similar language writing to Philemon about this time. Where the KJV gives the description, 'Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner', v. 9, the RV margin gives, 'an ambassador, and now a prisoner'.⁴

By the normal rules of diplomacy, ambassadors might be expelled from the country in which they serve, but they must never be put in prison there. This is different. Paul always looked beyond what men could do to him to what his Lord had ordained for his pathway of service. So, the Roman emperor's

edict to restrict him and the Roman soldier's presence to guard him were no obstacle to his testimony for Christ. So much so that he wrote in Philippians chapter 1 about how gospel blessing had reached out to those sharing his confinement and to many others beyond, even to 'the palace' (the Praetorium for the troops, or further up the chain of command). This is confirmed as he wrote later, 'All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar's household', Phil. 4. 22.

After his dramatic conversion near Damascus, wherever Paul went, on land or sea, to crowds or individuals, to neutral or hostile audiences, in freedom or captivity, he became a non-stop ambassador of Christ, never preaching himself, but Jesus Christ as Lord, 2 Cor. 4. 5. Wherever this remarkable man was found, he fulfilled his mission as defined by his new-found Lord, 'a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel', Acts 9. 15.

'We are ambassadors for Christ', 2 Cor. 5. 20

The spotlight turns upon us now.

Here is what Paul wrote to the Corinthian believers, 'God . . . hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God', 2 Cor. 5. 19, 20.

These words, 'in Christ's stead', are weighty. On the cross, Christ died instead of us. This verse tells us that we are ambassadors instead of Christ, to do what He would be doing if He were here – beseeching men and women, boys and girls, to be reconciled to God. He did all the amazing **work** of reconciliation, 'made peace through the blood of his cross', Col. 1. 20. We are given the privilege of proclaiming the **word** of reconciliation. As effective ambassadors of Christ, we can tell others what we have experienced, we who were once enemies in our minds by wicked works, but who are now ourselves reconciled, v. 21. God did not give this mission to angels, for they have never experienced reconciliation. He has delegated it to us who have.

As ambassadors for Christ we will need to keep in mind what

any nation's ambassadors have to remember today:

- whom we represent – Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords, Rev. 19. 16;
- what our home country is and what its standards are – 'our citizenship is in heaven', Phil. 3. 20 NKJV;
- keep in touch regularly with our home base – 'pray without ceasing', 1 Thess. 5. 17;
- keep out of the politics and systems of this world – ambassadors must not interfere with the internal affairs of their assigned country;
- our mission time is limited – we could be 'recalled' at any time – our Lord is coming soon.

The hymn entitled *The King's Business*⁵ expresses it nicely:

'I am a stranger here, within a foreign land;
My home is far away, upon a golden strand;
Ambassador to be of realms beyond the sea,
I'm here on business for my King.
This is the message that I bring,
A message angels fain would sing:
"Oh, be ye reconciled,"
Thus saith my Lord and King,
"Oh, be ye reconciled to God"'.⁵

Here is our real business in this world, ambassadors for Christ, not make-believe but genuine and faithful, not in chains but willing and ready to go and to be where we are sent by our gracious Lord and King until we are called away.

Endnotes

- 1 DELLA THOMPSON (ed.), *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, Oxford University Press, 1996.
- 2 R. YOUNG, *Analytical Concordance to the Holy Bible*, 8th Ed., Lutterworth Press, 1939, pg. 31, 32.
- 3 Luke 14. 32, and 19. 14 refer to 'ambassage' and 'message', contextually and grammatically related, both from *presbeia*.
- 4 W. E. VINE, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, Oliphants, pg. 43, commends this other reading based on the Greek word used, again *presbeutes*. It is also followed in the RSV 1952, and in *The Amplified New Testament*, 1958.
- 5 *Redemption Songs*, No 75, by ELIJAH T. CASSEL, 1902.



The darkest hour

By **RODERICK BARTON** Birmingham, England

It is said that the darkest hour is the one before dawn, and how welcome is the emerging light of the sun as it begins its journey to the peak of noon on yet another day. Yet the darkest hour often seems so long and forbidding, not just in a physical sense but also in the experiences of life's journey. So many have felt their burdens, tragedies, and disappointments in the darkest hour. Fears, depression, nervousness, and even mental illness appear more intense. We yearn for those streams of golden light on life's horizon to comfort, assure us and answer the questions that besiege our troubled minds.

How can we cope with enduring whatever besets us in the darkest hour? There is only one real answer and that is found in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Nobody, however, should think that Christ is the instigator of any 'easy fix', or the performer of a string of instant miracles to generate a happy, carefree roller-coaster ride of emotionally charged experience. The subject of the darkest hour is a very serious and sobering one, that should never be treated lightly.

How many on the pages of the scriptures have experienced the darkest hour in their lives? Some of the most faithful knew very well what the darkest hour meant. Job, a man who lived in ancient times, whom the



scriptures describe as perfect, upright, despising evil and fearing God, came to face the devastating loss of family and wealth. Noah, the preacher of righteousness, faced the continual rejection of his preaching and ridicule from the ungodly for years as he built the ark. Jonah, who was running away from the work God had given him, experienced the utter loneliness and horror of being in the belly of the great fish. The Apostle Paul so often lived through many dark hours in which he overcame so much.¹

In spiritual terms, however, the darkest hour can be the learning sanctuary whereby we come to discover the character, ways, and sovereignty of God. The darkest hour is when we come face to face with the realities of life, the weakness of our humanity, the hopelessness of men's ideas, and the sole need of divine help. We must be honest with God; He never fails to be so with us. There must be no feeble excuses but a heartfelt desire to seek the help, comfort, compassion, grace, love, and mercy from the One who has an unlimited store of such precious blessings. Often, we quote, 'he careth for you', but to live in the experience of such a momentous statement of truth and assurance in the darkest hour; how rich that is, 1 Pet. 5. 7.

We may be driven to our knees in the darkest hour, tears flowing in a sense of loneliness and despair. Yet amidst it all there is access to the throne of grace. There is the One who never sleeps, the ever-open ear to the most distraught, weak cry of a soul pleading

for help in the darkest hour; and a loving heart that delights to answer, 'You are not alone. I am with you, I will hold your hand', and 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee', Heb. 13. 5. This is no helpline that we hope someone, in a faraway place, will be there at the other end, someone who just might help.

In the book of Hebrews, the writer presents four thrones. The first, in chapter 1 verse 8, reveals the Lord Jesus Christ upon the throne of eternity as the Son of God. In chapter 8 verse 1, there is the throne of majestic authority for Christ, our great High Priest and minister of the sanctuary. The third throne, in chapter 12 verse 2, is the throne of God, with Christ at the right hand. Then, with these three thrones, stands the throne of grace, 4. 16, all together on the same holy ground of divine, unchanging, eternal supremacy, for the throne of grace is no backwater of heaven. Its value is beyond measure. So, praise His name, by the finished work of Christ at Calvary, every saved soul, whoever they are, has been told to come boldly, not timidly, to find help in time of need. Here, with help, mercy is to be obtained and grace is to be found. Whatever the situation, the need, the heartache, the disappointment, there is help.

This is the unfailing answer to the burdens of the darkest hour. No need is too insignificant or too great, help is available from the highest authority in all heaven. The lovely Lord Jesus Christ looks in His love upon the dear one so distressed, anxious, and exhausted. He is there with the everlasting arms, the blessed assurance of His presence, and His unique undivided attention for any of the redeemed. Even His silence is as powerful as His actions. There are caring, gracious hearts of those believers who will do all to help in the darkest hour, that are a great blessing, but there is nothing to compare with the 'secret place', unburdening the soul, before the One who loves you and me with an everlasting love.

Endnote

¹ Job 1; 2 Pet. 2. 5; Gen. 6, 7; Jonah 2; 2 Cor 11. 23-27.

Leonard Strong (1797-1874)

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

The story of Leonard Strong is remarkable in that whilst working for the Lord in Georgetown, British Guiana, he was breaking bread without any connection with similar meetings convened in Dublin in 1830. For some, the so-called 'Brethren' movement began in Dublin, but Strong is a testimony to a movement of the Spirit of God that was far wider and that caused many in the denominations of Christendom to reexamine their position in the light of what they read in scripture.

Leonard Strong was born in 1797, the son of the rector of Brampton Abbots in Herefordshire. Whether there was any Christian influence in the home is difficult to determine but the young Strong joined the Royal Navy at 12 years of age and became a midshipman. This was a time of considerable military activity and Strong saw action in the American and French wars, 'being present at several engagements'.¹ He was mercifully preserved and whilst serving in the West Indies he had a narrow escape from drowning that ultimately led to his salvation.

Following this incident, Strong left the navy and went to Oxford to study. AS STUNT comments, 'the university records [show] that he matriculated in 1823 as an undergraduate at Magdalen Hall'.² It was early in 1824 that Strong expressed his desire to be a missionary. Although unclear as to where he would like to serve – he told the Church Missionary Society (CMS) that 'he did not think a warm climate would agree with him'³ – it was initially thought that he would go to New Zealand. In preparation, he was told to pursue his studies at home, and he was later ordained as a priest of the Church of England in May 1826.

It was Strong's engagement to the daughter of Mr Reed that was the catalyst for a change of direction. Pressure from the Reed family, including their friend W. E. Gladstone, a British Prime Minister, meant that Strong must go to Demerara if he wanted to marry Reed's daughter. As STUNT comments, 'The CMS bowed to

the vested interests involved and resolved that if the Bishop of Barbados would license Strong, and if Gladstone would undertake to build the church, then that was where Leonard Strong would go'.⁴

Although these political machinations had sown seeds of doubt in Strong's mind, he set sail for the West Indies in late 1826. His desire was that he might preach the gospel and 'promote the spiritual profit of the slave population'.⁵ However, Strong's activities generated some disquiet amongst the slave owners. Apart from preaching the gospel, exactly what he had done is unclear, but he was forced to relocate parishes.⁶ In the providence of God, this was a further challenge to his position within the established church. As he was inducted to his new parish, he was obliged to assent to the tenets of that church. He wrote, 'I yielded, but with a bad conscience. I was installed, and I returned to my Christian wife, saying, "I am rector of this parish; I have now a field for labour in the gospel, but I am a liar". I could never shake this off from my conscience . . . I never taught the Catechism or allowed it in the parish. I did not baptize the children of unconverted persons . . . I never read the whole of the burial service over the unconverted dead. Indeed, I never used the Prayer Book when I could help it'.⁷

Finally, in 1837, Strong handed in his resignation and seceded from the Church of England. The challenge of this decision is outlined by HENRY PICKERING, 'he gave up his living,

worth £800 per year, and his manse [home], and met simply for worship amongst his converts . . . The first meeting was held in a large shed used for drying coffee, about 2000 being present'.⁸

The work established and prospering, Leonard Strong left British Guiana in 1849, returning to the United Kingdom to settle in Torquay. This was fifteen years after the commencement of the assembly in the town and it was beginning to outgrow the building in which it met. Thus, Strong threw himself into the work to build a new hall on Warren Road. Finding that other areas of the town offered opportunities in the gospel, he was also instrumental in the opening of an off-shoot company in the St. Marychurch district. Apart from this practical work in support of the gospel, Strong taught the word of God across the local region and beyond.

Strong died in London in 1874. He had served the Lord in Georgetown, and Torquay, but was buried in his beloved Torquay. BEATTIE summarizes his contribution, 'he gave up a lucrative living . . . [to] devote his life and energies on lines which . . . the Scriptures had shown him to be the true way. Thus, Leonard Strong . . . was not only meeting, in like manner as we are today, with native Christians whom he had led into the light but was laying the foundation of a missionary work which spread through the West Indies'.⁹

Endnotes

- 1 DAVID J. BEATTIE, *Brethren, the story of a great recovery*, John Ritchie, 1944, pg. 66.
- 2 T. C. F. STUNT, *Leonard Strong: the motives and experiences of early missionary work in British Guiana*, published in *Christian Brethren Review*, 1983, pg. 95.
- 3 *Ibid.*
- 4 *Ibid.*
- 5 Quoted from L. STRONG, *Personal Testimony*, cited in T. C. F. STUNT, *op. cit.*
- 6 BEATTIE suggests, 'he sought to liberate from sin's bondage as well as lighten the oppression of the cruel taskmasters', *op. cit.*, pg. 66.
- 7 L. STRONG, *op. cit.*
- 8 HENRY PICKERING, *Chief Men among the Brethren*, Pickering and Inglis, 1968, pg. 23.
- 9 DAVID J. BEATTIE, *op. cit.*, pg. 316.

Why assemblies of the saints do not have one pastor

By **JAMES GRAY** Augusta, Georgia, USA

MARTIN LUTHER stated, 'In truth thou canst not read the Scriptures too much; and what thou readest, thou canst not read too well, and what thou readest well, thou canst not too well understand; and what thou understandest well, thou canst not too well teach; and what thou teachest, thou canst not too well live'.¹

Local churches that I have been associated with have never had a one-man 'pastor'. This article seeks to explore what scripture says concerning one-man ministry. Some of this may appear strange to those who are unfamiliar with Christian testimony in the 1800s in England and Europe.

First, let us observe some important details in Matthew chapter 16 verse 18. The Church of Rome took Jesus' statement to Peter to mean that Peter was the 'rock' upon which the church was built. This was to promote the idea of a pope, father, or papa. The claim is that Peter [*petros*] held a position in the church that was more important than the common folk, called the laity. Thus, a special class of clergy was promoted to distort what scripture really said about 'this rock'; the Lord Jesus, [*petra*].²

'Pastor' was a common expression for the Greek word *poimen*, which is translated seventeen times as 'shepherds' and once in the KJV as 'pastors'³ and this is a frequent metaphor in both testaments. The 'shepherds' were to care for and tend to the needs of the flock of God, whether referring to Israel in the Old Testament or the church in the New Testament.

Second, we might note Ephesians chapter 4 verse 11, 'he [Christ] gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers', v. 11. Only here

in the New Testament is the Greek word *poimen* translated 'pastors' KJV, and it is not the same word, as is translated 'elder' elsewhere.

According to Ephesians, the responsibilities of these gifted men were the edifying of the body of Christ through ministry/teaching with a view to perfecting (maturing) the saints.

Third, on the subject of gift, we should note that it was:

1. Not a right granted by authority of men. There were no ecclesiastical orders such as priests or clergy.
2. To be exercised within the whole church (in contrast to an elder who functioned in a specific local assembly).
3. To build up the body of Christ by equipping the saints for the ministry.
4. To mature and prepare the saints to do the work of the ministry. So, a gift was not a professional position in the church gained by means of one's education or training, vv. 12, 13.
5. To be exercised as the Spirit of God directed, not for personal gain or acclaim, Acts 20. 28; 1 Cor. 12. 8-12.
6. One that required no official title bestowed by men. These were God-given capacities. The word 'office', 1 Tim. 3. 1, is unfortunate, but the translators reflected the practices of the times in which they lived. There was no 'reverend', 'vicar', 'father', 'pope', 'his holiness' in biblical times.

Some translate 'pastors and teachers', as the ESV, with a footnote that pastors and teachers could be a combination of 'pastor-teacher', emphasizing the fact that the role of pastors was primarily dealing with teaching. *The New American Standard Version, Holman Christian Standard Bible*, WUEST, TYNDALE, and others use a similar expression. WUEST says, 'pastors who are also teachers'.

Fourth, elders were to have a similar role in a local assembly to teach the doctrines of Christ and shepherd the flock under their care. When Paul and Barnabas went about the Gentile world, they designated certain ones in a local church that the assemblies recognized as functioning in the role of elders, with instruction in mind. There is no indication that the apostles or their delegates (Timothy and Titus) were to appoint apostles, prophets, evangelists, or pastor-teachers. The elder was a local charge and not a gift to the whole church. There was always a plurality of elders to guard against the spirit of Diotrophes, 3 John 9, and serve as a check on divisiveness.

Fifth, we will list some possible abuses to the exercise of the gift of 'pastor':

- One man rule could enable a tendency to lord it over the flock, or to fleece the flock as Diotrophes. We might mention the work of the Nicolaitans that God hates, Rev. 2. 6, 15.
- A 'resident-teacher' or 'presiding elder' is no substitute for gifted men in the assembly. Some assemblies have succumbed to this practice anyway.
- A dominant personality could stifle the exercise of truly gifted teachers. Satan has already planted the false in the church, 1 John 4. 1, 2; 2 Pet. 2. 1.
- A 'pastor' could also be the cause of factions, cliques, and divisions within the church. There was no 'calling of a pastor', no voting in or out; the assembly is not a democracy, but one body in Christ!

Finally, the things which last and those that are past:

1. We no longer have ‘apostles’ in the biblical term.⁴
2. We no longer have ‘prophets’ in the same sense as apostles. There are those who claim to be apostles or prophets but who lack the biblical test of a true gift, see the earlier comments.
3. We still have ‘evangelists’ who spread the gospel, but the apostles and prophets were the ‘foundational gifts’ in the church, Eph. 2. 20.
4. We still have pastor-teachers for the building up and equipping of the saints.
5. Apostles, evangelists, and prophets were not the same as elders, nor were the pastor-teachers necessarily so. A similarity of function does not mean that those functions are exercised by the same persons.
6. The idea of one-man ministry grew out of early heretical teaching as far back as AD 109 with teaching from some ‘church fathers’, such as IGNATIUS, who wrote, ‘look upon the bishop

even as . . . [you] would upon the Lord Himself’.⁵ Roman Catholic teaching has a long history of falsifying the real. Some have fallen into this practice of one-man ministry opposing the one body of Christ, either through ignorance or deliberately. We all have one body with many members. So is Christ’s body, the church.

7. There is no such division of the body of Christ into a select group called ‘the clergy’ and the rest of us called ‘the laity’. Scripture knows no such division! We are all believer-priests before God in Christ.⁶
8. A gift is not a ‘natural talent’. Some take great liberty with the term ‘gift’ and include anything to seating people, taking up the offering, cleaning, or visiting the sick. These are not gifts but areas of ministry.

In summary

- Let us thank the Lord Jesus that He Himself has given gifts to His

church (the body of Christ) for the equipping and edification of the church to function in multiple areas of ministry, Rom. 12. 4-8.

- We reject the idea of one-man ministry that separates the body of Christ into an elite group, called the clergy, and the rest as the laity. We also reject ‘every man a teacher’ putting anyone into the pulpit to teach, gifted or not.
- We encourage each member of the body to examine what gift/ gifts God has bestowed upon them for the edification of the church to the full-grown state, until He comes, Eph. 4. 13.
- We exhort all to resist the promotion of any man by his training at some institution, however valuable that may be. There are numerous men and women whom the Lord has used over the centuries in teaching ministries that never had formal training at some school of higher learning.

Remember that a man’s training does not always indicate giftedness of God. Only the Holy Spirit can enable a gifted teacher. May we honour them as such!

Thumbnail

As this is his first article for *Precious Seed*, James Gray lives in Waynesboro, Georgia, and fellowships at Believers Gospel Chapel, Augusta, USA. He is married, with four children, and nine grandchildren. He is now retired after forty-three years in both public and Christian education.

Endnotes

- 1 Quoted from IRVING JENSEN, *Independent Bible Study*, Moody Press, 1963.
- 2 See 1 Cor. 10. 4.
- 3 See, for example, John 10. 11, 14; 1 Pet. 2. 25; 5. 4; and Heb. 13. 20.
- 4 See SCOFIELD on Matthew chapter 10 for an excellent note on apostles, C. I. SCOFIELD, *The Scofield Bible*, Oxford University Press, 1917.
- 5 IGNATIUS, *The Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians*, see here: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epistle_of_Ignatius_to_the_Ephesians, or here: <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/seven-epistles-of-st-ignatius-of-antioch-20957>.
- 6 The reader is encouraged to make a careful study of 1 Peter chapter 2 verses 1 to 6.



Horn of plenty and salvation

By **DAVID BRAUCH** Wauwatosa, USA

At the end of the year when the holidays of Thanksgiving and Christmas are celebrated here in the United States, many single folks and families will do as my wife does. She goes to a cabinet, removes, and sets on the dining room table an object that is especially meaningful at this season. The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines this object to be ‘a curved, hollow goat’s horn or similarly-shaped receptacle (such as a horn-shaped basket) that is sometimes overflowing with flowers but especially with fruit and vegetables (such as gourds, ears of corn, apples, and grapes)’.¹ It is used as a decorative motif emblematic of **abundance**. It is also referred to as the ‘horn of plenty’ or ‘cornucopia’. It typifies God’s ability to provide generous care and supply of our need for food and to see beauty in nature.

It is not only in the **physical** realm that God has manifested abundance to believers in all places and during all times – think regarding His **spiritual** blessings that He has bequeathed to us. He is abundant in mercy, Num. 14. 18, kindness, Neh. 9. 17, justice, Job 37. 23, truth, Ps. 86. 15, redemption, 130. 7, pardon, Isa. 55. 7, loving kindness, Jonah 4. 2, along with an eternal and abundant life, John 10. 10.

The Lord is full of grace and truth, John 1. 14, rich in His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, Rom. 2. 4, grace, Eph. 1. 7, and mercy, 2. 4. Let us not forget to privately and



publicly express thanks to God for truly being the ‘horn of plenty’ in our lives.

Let us also consider the horn apart from what it contains. It is a symbol of strength. It is referred to three times in scripture as the horn of [my] salvation – by which one not only defends himself but also subdues his enemies. CLARKE writes in his *Old Testament Commentary*, ‘We have often seen that horn signifies power, might, and dominion’.²

Note that for the rhinoceros a single horn of great strength is found on the head near the end of the nose. Equipped with such a horn as described, this animal can push, scatter, and destroy its enemies, as well as protect itself. In addition, the horn is frequently used in scripture, and likewise elsewhere, to represent a ‘strong group’. Take, for example, the mention of the two tribes in the northern part of Israel, namely, Ephraim and Manasseh. These tribes are emblematic of Joseph and named after his two sons. Referring to them, Moses writes, ‘His glory is like a firstborn bull, and his **horns** like the horns of the wild ox; together with them he shall **push** the peoples [Canaanites] to the ends of the earth; they are the ten thousands of Ephraim, and they are the thousands of Manasseh’, Deut. 33. 17 NKJV (emphasis added).

2 Samuel chapter 22 verse 3 records what King David said, ‘The God of my strength, in whom I will trust; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge’ NKJV. Also in Psalm 18 verse 2, David is speaking again, ‘The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold’ ESV. Jehovah proved exactly that to the former shepherd boy, David, and on a number of occasions, as he spent

many years fleeing from the clutches of Saul who was insanelly jealous of him.

Moreover, it is possible that this phrase under consideration was symbolized in the altar which sat in front of the Jewish tabernacle/temple. On each of the four corners of this large object, there was projecting what was called a horn. They were dabbled with blood to purify them and to make them ready to provide atonement for sin, Lev. 8. 15; 4. 6. That portion of the altar also became known as the place of refuge and sanctuary for a fugitive, 1 Kgs. 1. 50. To these horns, a Jewish person could flee and grab hold of one of them for safety when in danger. An illustration of this is found in 1 Kings chapter 2 verse 28, ‘Then news came to Joab [King David’s former military general], for Joab had defected to Adonijah [David’s former advisor who had previously transferred his allegiance to Absalom], though he [Joab] had not defected to Absalom. [Being in fear of his life] Joab fled to the tabernacle of the Lord, and took hold of the horns of the altar’ NKJV.

Finally, note John the Baptist’s future father, Zacharias. Being filled with the Holy Spirit, he prophesied not regarding a son named ‘John’, who would soon be delivered by his wife Elisabeth, but rather concerning the upcoming birth of John’s cousin, later named ‘Jesus’. He said, ‘Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people, and has raised up a **horn of salvation for us** in the house of His servant David, as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, who have been since the world began, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us’, Luke 1. 68-71 NKJV.

By Him and in Him, God ‘visits and redeems His people’. The word ‘salvation’, connected here with the word ‘horn’, indicates that the strength of this mighty redeemer is abundantly able to save.

Endnotes

- ¹ *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, 2022.
- ² ADAM CLARKE, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, e-sword resource.



Edited by
STEPHEN BAKER

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YOUNG PRECIOUS SEED

is a supplement of *Precious Seed*, designed for those young in the faith. Its purpose is to restate timeless truths from the word of God for a new generation of Christians and to kindle a biblical approach to current issues in the world in which we live. YPS is published by *Precious Seed*, PO Box 10544, Grantham, NG31 0HW, UK, and is available separately from the main magazine.

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



PHIL ARMSTRONG, LIVERPOOL, ENGLAND

From late October through to March, many of us in the UK and across Europe will see an amazing phenomenon. As twilight falls, thousands of starling birds flock together and fly in large groups called ‘murmurations’. The flock constantly remoulds its overall shape and produces rippling patterns as birds change direction in unison. It is one of the most incredible displays of animal behaviour in the natural world. Check out videos of starling murmurations and watch how they transform the evening sky into living, abstract art. Researchers are still unsure exactly why starlings have this instinct; some think that it deters predators, such as sparrowhawks and falcons, and others suggest that it is an opportunity for the birds to communicate information about good places to find food.

This enchanting air show raises an obvious question: How do thousands of birds fly so close together at speeds of almost 50 miles per hour, constantly changing direction, without crashing into each other? Recent studies in Italy have helped us begin to understand, by photographing flocks from different angles and mapping the positions of individual birds in a computer program. It turns out that each bird in the flock keeps an eye on the seven birds closest to it and copies what they do. So, if one of its neighbours moves, then it moves! This means that one small change in the movement of one bird can cause every other bird around it to move in turn. The starlings respond to the changes in their neighbours in less than 100 milliseconds. Starlings in flight are compared to jet fighter pilots, who position their planes very close to each other and copy the precise movements of their nearest neighbour. However, starlings react around thirteen times faster than a human! This remarkable instinct has not developed through millions of years of unguided steps of evolution, but, rather, it shows the design flair of our Creator, who has programmed this behaviour into its DNA.

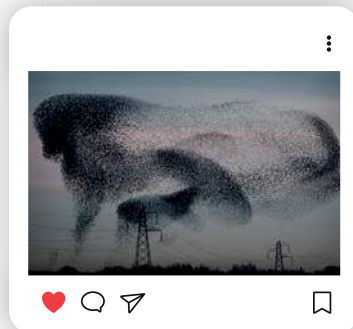
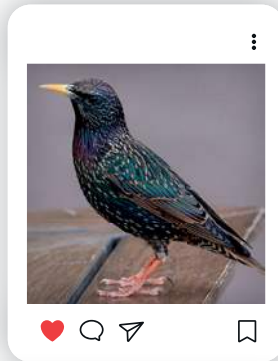
Scientists are drawing inspiration from what these starlings can do and are looking into potential applications of the idea. For example, engineers and tech developers could, potentially, use swarm robotics in micro-drones for use by the military, or for rescue missions. As we learn more about how God’s creation glorifies Him, let us praise Him for His wisdom and power.

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Editor’s Introduction

Thanks once again for reading YPS. This is the first issue for 2024, but for me, it is my final issue of *Young Precious Seed*. From the May 2024 issue Andrew Dutton will be taking over as Editor of YPS. Andrew has been involved in the work of *Precious Seed* for several years now, and will bring to the role fresh energy and ideas. He may also invite some new authors to write, so watch this space.

May I take the opportunity to thank you for your loyal support. *Precious Seed* only exists because people read what we produce. It is our ongoing prayer that both the main magazine and YPS will continue to be a blessing to many believers.

Yours through Grace,
Stephen Baker

Soul-Searching Scriptures

BY PAUL COXALL, ABERDEEN, SCOTLAND

For most people, there is a routine to the days of our life that is somewhat comforting. We make arrangements for the days, weeks, and months that lie ahead and try to organize our lives so that we can accomplish our plans. However, there are times when an event happens, or we receive news, that means life is turned 'upside down'.

In May 2014, my life took an unexpected turn. I noticed a small growth in my upper body, and I thought it may be due to my recent exercise routine at the gym. Over the next few days, the size of the lump grew, and it was increasingly evident that it was not due to my bench-press ability. After a few trips to see medical personnel, I was given the diagnosis that I had non-Hodgkin lymphoma, a type of cancer that develops in the lymphatic system.

As you can imagine, I was shocked to hear that I, a relatively young and fit man who had not smoked or drunk alcohol for over 20 years, had cancer. It seemed somewhat surreal, but I knew it was reality. The consultant told me that I would receive a course of chemotherapy and then radiotherapy. My sense of curiosity caused me to ask, 'What will happen if I do not take the treatment?'. The reply was short and clear, 'You will die'. Refusing treatment was never in my mind, but his reply underlined the seriousness of the situation.

It is in times of difficulty and suffering that we often reflect on the person of Jesus Christ; His character, works, and promises. Things that seemed important to us fade into the background, and those that are of eternal value come to the forefront of our minds. Although many people have passed through far greater trials and difficulties than the one I was facing, it was the most serious personal one that I had encountered.

Our beliefs are tested when we are faced with the unknown and circumstances seem outside of our control. Of course, the reality is 'you do not know what will happen tomorrow', Jas. 4. 14, NKJV. I understand that my theology, those realities I had learnt from scripture, would now be tested. Would the truth I held in my mind, find application in my life? Was it just 'head knowledge', or was there reality?

The scriptures proved to be a great comfort to me throughout my treatment for cancer. Even when I was too tired to read, or

the drugs had caused 'brain fog', I was able to meditate on God's word. There are many verses that God graciously caused me to consider, but I would like to share a particular one with you.

In the garden of Gethsemane, our Lord Jesus was about to be arrested, placed on trial, crucified, and then suffer in His body the wrath of God. He would completely propitiate God for the sins of all who would ever believe, so that they would never face that wrath. This was the work that He had been given to do. It was the path marked out uniquely for Him, yet, in the garden, He prayed:

'O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will', Matt. 26. 39 NKJV.

Of course, there was never a desire in His mind to not accomplish the work He had been given to do. There could be no conflict in the Godhead; all three persons act in perfect harmony. We can see, though, that Christ, in His humanity, voluntarily surrendered His will to the will of the Father.

No-one can equate their suffering to the Saviour's, but the lesson I learnt from my Lord's prayer was that there is a path that our loving heavenly Father has decreed for us to walk. Earlier in Matthew's Gospel, the Lord taught His followers that, 'The disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master', Matt. 10. 24, and although, contextually, that statement is regarding persecution for being a believer the general truth is still true. The believer has not been promised an easy path through life. Many of the trials and sufferings that impact non-believers will also come to the Lord's people. What should be different is how we think, speak, and act when they come.

Would I have chosen a path that meant I would have cancer and suffer a loss of health, because of the treatment? No. But, by God's grace, I was able to consider my Lord and His words in Gethsemane. There was a trial that God had ordained me to pass through. He had not forgotten me, but would use it for my ultimate good.

Our will, unlike the Lord's, is not always perfectly aligned with our heavenly Father's. So, it took me a little time to appropriate the truth of this scripture and others for myself. As I looked to Jesus and His words, I knew that I could, by God's power and grace, walk the path that He had decreed for me, not through resigned acceptance but because I was looking to Him.



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

BY RICHARD SMITH, BRIDGE OF WEIR, SCOTLAND



Asa (1 Kings 15 and 2 Chronicles 14-16)

In this series, we're looking at the first four kings of Judah after the division of the nation. We've seen that Rehoboam lacked **conviction** and that his son, Abijah, though a man of conviction, lacked **courage**. The third king is Asa.

Asa was different from his father and grandfather. From the start of his forty-one-year reign, he was determined to do 'what was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God', 2 Chr. 14. 2. You may remember the 'triangle of convictions' from previous articles:

1. **The word of God:** Asa commanded Judah to seek the Lord, to keep the law and the commandments – v. 4.
2. **The house of God:** He removed the foreign altars and the high places throughout Judah, making it difficult for idols to be worshipped, or for God to be worshipped inappropriately – Jerusalem, the temple was where people should worship.
3. **The people of God:** He fortified the cities in Judah, v. 6, ensuring the people were protected against attack.

The result of his efforts was peace, the Lord's peace, and Asa was quick to acknowledge that it was from God.

Everything seemed perfect. He had an army of 580,000. He was powerful and at peace. What could possibly go wrong? The Ethiopians came with an army of one million. Asa didn't hesitate in calling on the Lord, 'We rely on You', v. 11 ESV. The result was that, without warning, the Ethiopians fled and were pursued and thoroughly defeated by Judah, whose army returned to Jerusalem with very much spoil.

Asa was met by the Lord's servant, Azariah, who congratulated Asa on a job well done. He promised that the Lord would be with Asa as long as he sought Him, to take courage and the Lord would reward him. As soon as Asa heard these words, he took courage and continued the work, removing idol worship from the newly acquired cities and repairing the altar of the Lord. He gathered his expanding nation together (many Israelites had joined Judah when they saw the Lord was with them) and declared a time of sacrifice. They entered into a covenant to seek the Lord with all their heart and soul, 15. 12. In fact, anyone who didn't, would be executed. He removed Maacah, his grandmother, from the throne for her idolatry. Imagine how much courage that took.

But why did he do it? Was he showing off? Was he looking to make his name great? The answer is in 2 Chronicles chapter 15 verse 17, 'The heart of Asa was loyal all his days', NKJV. He brought sacred gifts of silver, gold, and vessels into the temple, and there was no war. Everything was perfect; Asa had re-established Judah as a prosperous, peaceful, God-fearing nation. His convictions were right; his courage was unquestionable.

Then a new test came from Israel, the old enemy, Baasha, the King of Israel, laid siege to Judah and, as a result, Asa was worried. He gathered silver and gold from the temple and made a covenant with the King of Syria to protect him – no prayer, no confessions of reliance on God, a completely different reaction to his previous much more powerful assailant. Hanani the seer visited Asa with a very different message from the one previously delivered by the prophet Azariah, 6. 1-7. The opportunity to defeat the King of Syria had slipped through Asa's fingers. He had not relied on the Lord as he had against the Ethiopians, although the Lord would have protected him, and wanted to protect him. The accusation came, 'you have done foolishly'. The time of Judah's peace was over.

We all make mistakes. The question is how do we respond when our mistakes are pointed out? If Rehoboam was marked by a lack of **conviction**, and Abijah by a lack of **courage**, Asa will be remembered for how he reacted to **criticism**.

Asa was furious, he went straight into a rage. The 'triangle of convictions' collapsed:

1. **The word of God:** Hanani was put in stocks in prison.
2. **The house of God:** He had already given the treasures from the house of God to the King of Syria.
3. **The people of God:** He afflicted some of the people.

The last three years of Asa's reign were spent in pain with diseased feet. The man who had travelled the country doing the will of God, spurred on by the praise of Azariah to even greater exploits, finished a bitter, angry, immobilized man who refused to seek the Lord in his need. He'd done so well but couldn't handle criticism. His heart was right – he wanted the right thing; he just couldn't handle being wrong.

Compliments and positive words are always good to hear. On the other hand, may God give us the grace to accept when we're wrong, to make the necessary corrections, and to carry on with a true heart to serve the Lord.



Saints' CVs: Selina Hastings

BY JEREMY SINGER, BRIDGE OF WEIR, SCOTLAND

SELINA HASTINGS 1707-1791 COUNTESS OF HUNTINGDON

'I am encircled in the arms of love and mercy'¹

Selina Hastings often thanked God for the letter 'm' since, she said, she would never have been saved without it. She referred to the fact that 'not many noble are called', 1 Cor. 1. 26. Certainly Selina was a member of the upper class, born the daughter of 2nd Earl Ferrers. At the age of twenty, she married the 9th Earl of Huntingdon. She was a high-ranking aristocrat in Georgian England, on speaking terms with royalty.

Soon after her marriage, Selina heard the message of salvation and put her trust in the Lord Jesus. She loved to listen to evangelical preachers of the day including the Wesleys, Augustus Toplady and George Whitefield. Whitefield preached regularly in the drawing room of her London home. In 1748 he wrote: 'Lady Huntingdon is come to town, and I am to preach at her ladyship's house twice a week to the great and noble. O that some of them may . . . taste of the riches of redeeming love.'²

One of Selina's friends, the Duchess of Buckingham, wrote her a scathing letter of complaint: 'It is monstrous to be told that you have a heart as sinful as the common wretches that crawl on the earth. This is highly offensive and insulting; and I cannot but wonder that your ladyship should relish any sentiments so much at variance with high rank and good breeding.'³ As time went by, some of Selina's acquaintances avoided her because they would not accept the gospel message.

Selina was marked by genuine kindness to others, whether rich or poor. She took great interest in her servants and often visited impoverished residents on her estates, praying with them and providing for their needs. She had a particular care for orphaned children, Jas. 1. 27.

The countess felt a burden to use her wealth to build chapels

in different areas of the country, where gospel preaching could be embedded in communities. Today, more than 200 years later, there are still twenty-two local churches in the UK operating as part of her legacy. In 1768 she established Trevecca House in Wales entirely at her own expense, intended as a college for training evangelical preachers.

King George III was aware of Selina's charity and religious activities. In conversation with her, the king said: 'I have been told so many odd stories of your ladyship, that I am free to confess that I felt a great degree of curiosity to see if you were at all like other women; and I am happy in having an opportunity of assuring your ladyship of the very good opinion I have of you, and how very highly I estimate your character, your zeal and abilities, which cannot be consecrated to a more noble purpose.'⁴

Tragedy did not diminish her enthusiasm for serving God. Like Job, Selina was stripped of her family. She had seven children, but only one of them outlived their mother. Selina's husband died when she was in her late thirties. Despite her overwhelming loss, she continued to maintain her faith in God. Towards the close of her life Selina remarked, 'I am well. All is well, well forever. I see, wherever I turn my eyes, whether I live or die, nothing but victory.'⁵

Further reading

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³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.



John the Baptist Part 3

By **COLIN LACEY** Bath, England

We commenced this series of articles by examining some of the unique events that surrounded the birth and early life of John the Baptist. He was described by John, the apostle, as ‘a man sent from God’, John 1. 6. We will now consider the nature of his ministry and message that led to him being described by the Lord as, ‘much more than a prophet . . . Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist’, Luke 7. 26, 28.

We begin our journey by finding ourselves among a group of powerful and influential people in the Roman Empire: Tiberius Caesar, the emperor; Pontius Pilate, governor of Judea; and Herod, Philip and Lysanias, Roman tetrarchs (rulers of different parts of the kingdom). In addition to these Roman dignitaries, we also meet Annas and Caiaphas, two Jewish high priests. The religious system in Jerusalem had become so corrupt that there were two high priests, instead of one. As we continue to examine the biblical record, we realize that this group simply provides us with the context for the ministry of John the Baptist, Luke 3. 1, 2.

It is no surprise to discover that John’s unique lifestyle and message



led to him becoming the subject of numerous myths and legends. One of the most popular of these was that he was orphaned and eventually cared for by one of the religious wilderness communities; however, there is no indication in the biblical record that this was the case. Nevertheless, his priestly family background would have undoubtedly given him a sound foundation for his calling to prepare the way for the arrival of the Messiah. Indeed, he would have become very familiar with the Old Testament scriptures that foretold this coming event. Also, his extended family would have given him a unique insight into the events that surrounded the birth and early years of both him and Jesus.

First words

The first recorded words that a person speaks often give an insight into their character and mission. Such was the case with John the Baptist. The following words were spoken by, or about, him at the commencement of the four Gospels:

- ‘In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, and saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’, Matt. 3. 1, 2.
- ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins’, Mark 1. 3-5.
- ‘And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins’, Luke 3. 3.
- ‘John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me’, John 1. 15.

The questions put to John by his listeners gave him every opportunity

to boast and attract numerous disciples to himself. Some suggested that he was the **Messiah or Elijah**, the forerunner of the Messiah, while others linked him with ‘**the prophet**’ promised by God.

Many Bible teachers have fallen into the error of allowing themselves to become more important than their message and thereby displacing the person who is central to it. When John was asked the question as to who he was, he avoided the temptation to make false claims about himself. It is true that he had a small group of personal disciples, who followed him, Matt. 9. 14; however, when the appropriate moment arrived, he willingly pointed them to Christ. John records in his Gospel, ‘Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; and looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus’, John 1. 35-37. On another occasion, he said of Christ, ‘He must increase, but I must decrease. He that cometh from above is above all’, John 3. 30, 31. Little did he know, when he spoke these words, what it would mean for him to decrease. He ended his days, beheaded in the darkness of a prison cell at the request of Herodias, a wicked and vindictive woman. Are you prepared for the cost of following Christ?

Appearance

Our first encounter with John, following his birth, takes us into the wilderness, where we find him dressed in a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt. His diet consisted of locusts and wild honey, Matt. 3. 4. As well as linking him with the prophets and the poor, his hairy coat was suitable attire for the harsh living conditions of the wilderness. The Lord challenged the people to tell Him what kind of person they expected to see when they went out to listen to John preach. He said, ‘But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they which are gorgeously apparelled, and live delicately, are in kings’ courts. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet’, Luke 7. 25, 26.

THE HIND OF THE DAWN

By **MERVYN WISHART** Belfast, Northern Ireland

As the two disciples walked on the road to Emmaus, the Lord Jesus expounded to them 'in all the scriptures the things concerning himself', Luke 24. 27. In John chapter 5 verse 39, speaking of all of the Old Testament, He said, 'they are they which testify of me'. When the Spirit of God illuminates our minds to understand, doubtless something of the person and work of Christ can be seen on every page of scripture.

In **Botany**: He is 'the Root of David', Rev. 5. 5; 'a rod out of the stem of Jesse', Isa. 11. 1; 'the man whose name is 'The Branch', Zech. 6. 12; 'the true vine', John 15. 1; 'a plant of renown', Ezek. 34. 29.

In **Astronomy**: He is 'the Sun of righteousness' – in relation to His coming for Israel's salvation, Mal. 4. 2; 'the bright and morning star' – in relation to His coming for His church at the rapture, Rev. 22. 16.

In **Geology**: He is 'that spiritual Rock', 1 Cor. 10. 4; 'the rock of ages', Isa. 26. 4 JND; 'a living stone', 1 Pet. 2. 4; 'for a foundation a stone', Isa. 28. 16.

In **Zoology**: He is 'a lamb', Isa. 53. 7; 'the Lion of the tribe of Juda', Rev. 5. 5; 'a red heifer', Num. 19. 2; 'the scapegoat', Lev. 16. 8, 10, 26.

The name we will now consider is found in the inspired title of Psalm 22: Aijelesh Shahar – The hind of the dawn.

The birth of the hind

In Job chapters 38 to 41, the Lord asked Job more than seventy questions to emphasize to him the limitations of his knowledge. There were three questions relating to the birth of the hind.

'Canst thou mark when the hinds do calve?' 39. 1.

'Canst thou number the months that they fulfil?' v. 2.

'Knowest thou the time when they bring forth?' v. 2.

These were questions which Job could not answer. How it speaks to us of One of whom we read, 'great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh', 1 Tim. 3. 16. The **incarnation** of Christ is clearly affirmed in scripture, and we believe it, even though it is beyond our understanding. Adam came by **creation**; we were born by **generation**; the Lord Jesus came into the world by incarnation. We bow in wonder as we read the words of Gabriel to Mary, 'that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God', Luke 1. 35. It has rightly been said, 'In Bethlehem God was not born, but the one who was born was God; and at Calvary God did not die, but the one who died was God'.

The hind growing up

In Job chapter 39 verse 4, we read of the young hind growing up. Isaiah, in his prophecy, speaks of the Lord Jesus growing up, 'he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground', 53. 2. In the midst of the thorns and thistles of this sinful world, there grew up a tender plant, exquisite in its beauty, emitting a fragrance that ascended to heaven, bringing infinite pleasure to the heart of God.

Luke records, 'And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man', Luke 2. 52. During the years preceding His public ministry, very little is revealed. These are sometimes referred to as 'the silent years'. During those years there was One

whose eye was continually upon Him, observing His childhood, His boyhood, and His manhood, and from the opened heavens God's voice was heard, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased', Matt. 3. 17.

The hind – surefooted

The hind moves with grace and agility and is able to climb safely to high mountain crags, and traverse rugged terrain that is inaccessible to other animals. Writing about his own experience, David said, 'He maketh my feet like hinds' feet . . . Thou hast enlarged my steps under me, that my feet did not slip', Ps. 18. 33, 36.

Isaiah wrote, 'All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way', 53. 6. There was only one person who was gloriously unique, in that every step He took in this world was in the will of God and in perfect harmony with God. He alone could say, 'And he that hath sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him', John 8. 29.

Peter in his Epistle wrote, 'Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps', 1 Pet. 2. 21. We could never follow in His steps; we could never walk perfectly as He walked, but we should endeavour to follow His steps. The sum of the Master's teaching to His disciples condensed to a few words would be, 'Follow me'.

Peter spoke about the 'footsteps of the shepherd', cp. 1 Pet. 2. 21 and 2. 25, and Solomon spoke about the 'footsteps of the flock', S. of S. 1. 8. May we be able to say, like the psalmist, 'For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living', Ps. 116. 8, 9.

The hind forsaken

Jeremiah wrote of a severe drought that completely dried up the pasture. The hind calved in the field but then did what was contrary to its nature; it forsook its young, because there was no grass, Jer. 14. 5. At Calvary, the central saying of the seven sayings

from the cross was, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' Matt. 27. 46. This was the first of two sayings which were spoken with a loud voice. It was a heart-rending cry which pierced the darkness that had enveloped the scene at the sixth hour. Peter had denied Him, Judas had betrayed Him, the disciples had forsaken Him and fled; but all through His life on earth He had enjoyed unbroken communion with His Father. But now He is forsaken by God on the cross.

In the context of Psalm 22, the tender, defenceless hind is surrounded by ferocious beasts: the bulls of Bashan, v. 12; dogs, v. 16; the lion, v. 21. These refer to human and infernal foes all arrayed against Christ, but the psalm commences with the heart cry of the lonely sufferer, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' v. 1.

Believers remember with gratitude that He was forsaken, that we might never be forsaken; He was rejected, that we might be accepted; He went outside the city, that we might be brought to the inside of heaven; He suffered, that we might not suffer; He died, that we might live. How wonderful that the Christian can live day by day in the enjoyment of His unfailing promise, 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee', Heb. 13. 5.

The hind loosed

In Jacob's prophecy concerning his sons, he said of his tenth son, 'Naphtali is a hind let loose: he giveth goodly words', Gen. 49. 21.



The same word is used by Peter on the Day of Pentecost, referring to the resurrection of Christ, 'Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it', Acts 2. 24. He is loosed for ever from the domain of death, 'knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him', Rom. 6. 9.

He is the invincible Christ; Herod could not kill Him, Satan could not defeat Him, death could not destroy Him, the grave could not hold Him. Death had no claim whatever on the sinless Son of God. He was the only one who ever lived over whom death had no claim; yet of His own will He could say, 'I lay it [His life] down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again', John 10. 18.

Jacob said of Naphtali, 'He giveth goodly words'. How precious are the words spoken by the Saviour between His resurrection and His ascension.

The hind in high places

The hind has a particular ability to climb to great heights. David wrote, 'He maketh my feet like hinds' feet, and setteth me upon my high places', Ps. 18. 33. The One who was given the lowest place on earth, when 'Herod with his men of war set him at nought', Luke 23. 11, now occupies the highest place in heavenly glory.

The prophecy in Isaiah has been fulfilled, 'he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high', 52. 13. The three words here rise in an ascending scale, each word rising higher than the preceding one: raised up; lifted up; exalted.

Where is the Lord Jesus at this moment?

Paul answers, 'Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come', Eph. 1. 21.

Peter answers, 'Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand

of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him', 1 Pet. 3. 22.

How amazing to remember that at this moment, far above the sky, He appears 'in the presence of God for us', Heb. 9. 24. He is our Advocate with the Father, our Intercessor, and our Great High Priest.

The hind of the dawn

Christ, as the hind of the dawn, reminds us that the morning is approaching when our Lord will come. 'The voice of my beloved! behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills. My beloved is like a roe or a young hart . . . Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved, and be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bether', S. of S. 2. 8, 9, 17.

When a believer dies, scripture speaks of them as 'those who have fallen asleep through Jesus', 1 Thess. 4. 14 JND. He causes them to sleep, and, in the morning, He will call them to awake at His coming. Awaiting that glorious morning, the body sleeps, while the soul and spirit are with Christ in the conscious enjoyment of His presence. A beautiful picture of this awakening is seen in John chapter 11. When Lazarus died the Lord Jesus said, 'Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep', v. 11.

'The night is far spent, the day is at hand', Rom. 13. 12. It will be a **morning without tears**, Ps. 30. 5; **'a morning without clouds'**, 2 Sam. 23. 4; **a daybreak without shadows**, S. of S. 2. 17.

May a consideration of this sevenfold view of Christ as the hind of the dawn draw out our hearts further to our beloved Lord.

'I am waiting for the dawning
Of that bright and glorious day,
When the darksome night of sorrow
Shall have vanished far away.
When forever with the Saviour,
Far beyond this vale of tears,
I shall swell the hymn of worship
Through the everlasting years'.

THE PROPHECY OF GOG AND MAGOG

By **JEFF BROWN** Nantgarw, Wales

Background

Ezekiel was a priest and a prophet who lived during one of the darkest times in Israel's history – the seventy-year captivity in Babylon. While God's people generally seemed overwhelmed and downcast because of their circumstances, Ezekiel rose above his surroundings and remained resolute in his faith in his God. Could this be a challenge and an encouragement to us today? His messages to the nation were that, although they now appeared like dry bones in the sun, yet God would re-establish them and breathe life into the nation in a coming day – present judgement will be followed by future glory.

Introduction

In light of the above circumstances, we are introduced to one of the most amazing prophecies of scripture in chapters 38 and 39. A swift-moving, massive army of many nations, descending mainly from the north in relation to Jerusalem, will attack Israel in a time of peace. This would seem to be one of the greatest one-sided conflicts ever experienced in Earth's history, and something on a scale never witnessed before. Israel appears to be finished, but God will intervene and the invading army will be almost annihilated!

The prophecy – things to consider

Inspiration and interpretation

When we consider the accuracy and precision of Bible prophecies that have already been fulfilled, it gives us renewed confidence in the inspiration of scripture; it also gives us guidance for our present situation and continuing hope for the future. However, we do need to be careful regarding the specifics of events yet future that can be interpreted in different ways.

Names and locations

The names and locations concerning this massive army descending on Israel from the north are mostly names not familiar to us today. Some Old Testament and New Testament location names have remained unchanged throughout time, e.g., Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Egypt, Damascus, Rome. Yet many of the names given in these chapters are ancient names of areas and peoples that existed when the prophecy was given – names known to Ezekiel but not to us, names that no longer exist, e.g., Gomer, Rus, Magog, Meshesh, Togarmah, Tubal. Names of countries and regions have even changed in recent years, e.g., Eire to Ireland, Persia to Iran, Siam to Thailand. Therefore, in our study we need to look carefully and try to locate where these areas may be today.

What about Jerusalem?

Spiritual

Jerusalem has always had a special place in God's purposes regarding mankind. It has been at the centre of God's dealings with man in the past and will be in the future. It was at Jerusalem that the first temple (and subsequent temples) would be built, 1 Kgs. 6; at Calvary, just outside the city, salvation was procured, Luke 23; and it was from the city that the spread of the gospel originated, Acts 1. 8. This future attack of Gog and Magog from the north, and followed a few years later by the battle of Armageddon from multiple directions, are all in relation to the city. Finally, in the millennial reign of Christ, the throne will be established at Jerusalem. Thus, the city is central regarding divine purposes!

Geographical

Jerusalem can also be regarded as central in its geographical position. The Earth's thin crustal surface is

broken into many unequal plates with continents and oceans on top of them. Sub-crustal convection currents (vast energies of heat and pressure) move those crustal plates in relation to each other, so all of Earth's land masses are constantly changing position in relation to each other, albeit at normally just a few centimetres per year. Using computer models, all the Earth's continents can be moved back together into one complete land-mass – the result puts Jerusalem entirely at the central point!

Who are Gog and Magog?

Gog

We read of many names in chapter 38 verses 1 to 6 regarding this vast invading force. The name Gog appears to be different from the rest and is the title of a person, whilst all the other names mentioned are areas or locations or peoples. In the context of Ezekiel chapter 38, the word Gog seems to refer to an individual, vv. 3, 9, whilst verse 7 refers to a commander of a vast moving army. So, Gog has a title, similar to Pharaoh, Caesar, or President. Gog is the prince of Rosh or Rus, possibly Russia!

The other names

Those mentioned in verses 1 to 6 are ancient names given to areas or regions and peoples that once existed, some of which we can identify, such as Libya, Ethiopia, and Persia (Iran), but many of which we cannot be absolutely sure. It is normally accepted that Tubal, Gomer, Togarmah and Meshech were ancient regions situated in modern-day Turkey, while **Magog** is an ancient name associated with south Russia, and perhaps including Kazakhstan. Ros or Rus is an ancient name for present-day west Russia. It should be stressed that we cannot be dogmatic regarding these suggested locations. We simply seek to try and locate where we think they are!

Divine inspiration

What a remarkable thing that Ezekiel prophesies of a vast invasion involving Russia, fourteen centuries before Russia as a country was founded. Similarly, Isaiah speaks of

‘the circle of the earth’, Isa. 40. 22, 1,500 years before men stopped believing that the Earth was square and that if you travelled far enough you would ultimately fall off the edge!

Where will Gog and Magog attack?

The answer to this question is much more straightforward. This mighty army – the greatest ever seen in Earth’s history up until that time – will invade the land of Israel from the north (mainly). Chapter 38 verse 8 clearly states that the invasion will come ‘against the mountains of Israel’.

When will Gog and Magog attack?

Nothing remotely like what Ezekiel has prophesied has yet taken place in Israel’s history, so this is still future – this prophecy has yet to be fulfilled! Three factors will help us try to ascertain when this invasion occurs, all recorded in chapter 38.

First, Ezekiel records that the invasion occurs in ‘the latter years’, v. 8, and in ‘the latter days’, v. 16. These terms refer to the end times, i.e., Israel’s final times of distress and to the end period of Gentile supremacy!

Second, verse 8 tells us that before this invasion occurs, then God’s earthly people must have come into the land and been gathered out from many areas – this has been happening subsequent to the establishment of the modern state of Israel in 1948.

Third, the nation must be at rest when this attack occurs. Notice verse 8, ‘dwell safely’, and verse 11, ‘unwalled villages’, ‘at rest’, and verse 14, ‘dwelleth safely’. There are only two time periods in the Bible when Israel is at rest – at the beginning of the tribulation period, after the rapture of the church, and in the 1,000-year reign, the millennium. Isaiah chapter 2 verse 4, referring to the 1,000-year reign, states that ‘neither shall they learn war any more’. Therefore, the only time period that fits the invasion of Gog and Magog seems to be at the beginning of the tribulation period.

Why will Gog and Magog attack?

Put simply, because an omniscient God has prophesied it to be! Looking at it naturally, the attackers have viewed the comparative wealth of Israel. Gog seeks control of the Middle East. There is also a hatred of the nation from this joint Islamic/atheistic attack. Gog seeks to challenge the authority of the Antichrist who, at the beginning of the tribulation period, will have signed a seven-year covenant with Israel to protect her and give her peace – not out of any genuine love or friendship with the Jews but for personal gain and status.

The results of the attack

God in control and magnified

Earlier in this article we saw that the attack of this vast army from the north on the nation of Israel will appear to be one of the greatest one-sided battles in history – a vast army against a tiny nation! Gog will make a massive miscalculation, a grave mistake! Although Israel will seem to be finished, yet God is in control. Let us remember that in situations we find ourselves in and those that are developing in the world scene today, our God is still in control, and His eternal purposes will ultimately be worked-out perfectly. Ezekiel chapter 38 verse 16 shows God to be in control of the situation and to be magnified as a result, v. 23.

Devastating results

Although this conflict is only very brief, there are some devastating results – a great earthquake, infighting among the various nations of the army, rampant disease, then torrential rain, hailstones, fire and falling burning sulphur, vv. 18-23. Five out of every six men in this army are slaughtered, 39. 2, and it then takes seven months to bury the dead, v. 12! The Antichrist seeks to take credit for what God has accomplished, and his power is strengthened. Yet out of all this chaos, the power of God is also seen in the 144,000 witnesses preaching the gospel of the kingdom – perhaps millions of tribulation saints will be ‘saved’ at this point in time!

What about Armageddon?

What has been described so far will be the greatest army the world has ever seen, yet it will pale into insignificance in comparison with what takes place a few years later at Armageddon, and a few other places, Rev. 16. 12-16. This will be, by far, the greatest conflict the world has ever witnessed. Armageddon will be a coalition of many foes. Psalm 2 verse 2, partially fulfilled at Calvary, will be completely fulfilled at Armageddon. The armies will come from many directions, and it seems that the whole world will come together at this point, Rev. 16. 14. Here, then, at the climax of the tribulation period, there will be great upheavals on Earth and in the heavenly bodies as a result of the original judgements of the seals, then followed by the trumpets and bowls/vials judgements – certainly not a time of peace! In contrast, Gog and Magog are just one enemy coalition, coming mainly from one direction – the north, Ezek. 38. 6, 15; 39. 2, and in a time of unusual peace. Because of this, the present writer believes that the invasion of Gog and Magog cannot be Armageddon, but it can only be in the early stages of the tribulation period.

Why do we need to know about Gog and Magog?

God’s word reveals His complete plan for humanity. Studying prophecy gives the believer confidence for the future and confirms the inspiration of scripture, as we have seen the precise and accurate fulfilment of some prophecies already. Biblical prophecy comprises about one third of the entire Bible, so not to look at and study prophecy will limit our appreciation of all God’s purposes for mankind.

This particular prophecy will not be enacted until after the rapture of the church, which could be at any moment! Are we looking in glorious anticipation for that day and are we living presently in the light of it and the subsequent day of review at the judgement seat of Christ?

Keep watching, fellow believer. Be ready. Continue to serve faithfully.

THE PROPHECY OF HOSEA Part 2

By **BRIAN CLATWORTHY** Newbury, England

In chapters 2 and 3, we are mainly concerned with the interaction between God and Israel, mirrored in the relationship between Hosea and his promiscuous wife, Gomer. We feel the frustration of both God and Hosea as they grapple with the infidelity of each of their spouses. The whole of chapter 2 is a delicately cloaked allegory in which the parallels between Hosea and Gomer and God and Israel are similar, but distinct. Gomer is punished for her adultery and is judicially cast out by Hosea, 2. 2. But when she has left him and descended into the depths of degradation, ending up as a slave and the property of someone else, Hosea is encouraged by God to, 'Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another man and is an adulteress', 3. 1 NIV. He buys her freedom for the price of a slave, and then restores her to himself. His love for his adulterous wife is to be in the same measure as God loves Israel. Her period of degradation and exile is again linked to God's approach to Israel's future restoration, 3. 4, 5. Love, not law, will one day triumph, as Israel enjoys the blessings of restoration and acknowledges David's greater Son, 3. 5.

G. CAMPBELL MORGAN writes, 'That is the story, bluntly told. The first part is tragic, but it is not uncommon. The second part is by no means common and is absolutely amazing'.¹

Part 2 – chapters 4-14

Chapter 4 begins the second part of the prophecy that stretches to chapter 14. Chapters 1 to 3 contain the first part of the prophecy, with the controlling metaphor being the story of Hosea and his family. The opening phrase in verse 1 of chapter 4, 'Hear the word of the Lord, ye children of Israel', brings into clear focus the need of Israel to heed the message of God. A small section within this second part applies to Judah, 12. 2-7, but the rest is exclusively to do with Israel.² This fourth chapter is written in the form of a legal indictment against Israel who had failed to recognize the Lord's authority over them, 4. 1, 2. This was reflected in their lack of kindness (*hesed*) towards others and their violations of the central parts of the Decalogue, including the misuse of oaths, Exod. 20. 7; Deut. 5. 11.³ Linked with these failures was also a lack

of knowledge of God's law, evident in the priests' failure to provide spiritual leadership to the nation, 4. 4-10. This had a detrimental effect on the whole nation and both the nation and its priests would be harshly judged by God, vv. 7-11. Not only did Israel disobey God's word but they formed alliances with godless nations and prostituted themselves by Baal-worship. Judah is warned by God not to imitate Israel in her guilt and she is clearly someone to avoid, vv. 15-17. Verse 17 is emphatic, suggesting that Israel had become inextricably bound to idols and had broken its covenant with God. Also, notice the play on words in verse 15, where 'Bethel' meaning 'house of God' is now changed by the prophet to 'Beth-aven' meaning 'house of evil', cp. Amos 5. 5. Chapter 4 concludes with a depiction of the nation 'caught up in the currents of forces over which they have no

control. The divine will and the machinations of national leaders will carry the nation onward until they stand as displaced persons, cast out of home and country'.⁴ What a hopeless situation to be in!

In the first three verses of chapter 5, God speaks directly to the priests, the leaders of the tribes of Israel and the royal household. Their leadership had led the nation into idolatry and prostitution which had become internalized in the nation, vv. 3, 4. They had actively sought alliances with other nations and the worship of other gods, and even though they went through the motions of formally worshipping the God of Israel, God saw through their hypocrisy and had withdrawn Himself from them, vv. 6, 7, cp.

Prov. 1. 28. Jeroboam II had not only made the nation wealthy but had made Israel a strong military force. When Jeroboam II died, the nation of Israel became fearful about the future, especially the threat posed by the Assyrians. They were also feuding with Judah at the time over a territorial dispute, vv. 8-11.⁵ This may well be the so-called Syro-Ephraimite war referred to in 2 Kings chapter 16 verses 1 to 9. When Israel feared the worst they turned to the Assyrians, not to God, for help against Judah, but without success, v. 13.⁶ In fact, Israel appealed to a nation that would one day destroy her and lead her people into bondage. The irony was that Assyria could not possibly heal Israel's wounds which had been inflicted by God, vv. 12, 14, so that the nation might own up to their offences and seek the Lord again, v. 15.

At the beginning of chapter 6, God calls Israel to repent and return to Him. This call is based upon the fact that just as God had wounded Israel, He alone could heal them. In the chapters that follow, Israel largely ignores God's entreaty to them. All that God desired from Israel was to love Him and express loving kindness to others, rather than more burnt offerings, 6. 6. Israel, however, continued to transgress the covenant and her treachery and guilt ran throughout the land, v. 10.

Chapter 7 highlights the danger of seeking help through political alliances with other nations, such as Egypt and Assyria. Their only hope lay in the God of Israel, and their pride prevented them from seeking His face, 7. 10. Chapter 8 provides us with a litany of charges against Israel, which reflects upon the rebellious history of the nation and its idolatrous practices, 8. 5, 6. What they have sown they would now reap, v. 7; cp. Gal. 6. 7, and, as a consequence of their rebellion, they would lose their special elect status with God, and, ironically, return to Egypt, 8. 13!

Israel had forfeited any right to be called God's people or rejoice in that relationship, 9. 1. According to McCONVILLE, ("rejoicing" is a key mark of the people in true worship of Yahweh in Deuteronomy, e.g. Deut. 16: 13-15). As in that text, rejoicing is especially in the context of the annual feasts; the Feast of Tabernacles is also in view here in Hosea (9. 5; cf. Lev. 23.39; Jdg. 12:19). Their "prostitution" again disqualifies them (as in chs 1-3)⁷

Hosea compares Israel to four things in chapters 9 to 11:

1. Spoilt grapes in the wilderness, 9. 10
2. A withered or ravaged vine, 9. 16; 10. 1
3. A trained heifer who ploughed wickedness, 10. 11-13
4. A rebellious son who turned away from God to Baal, 11. 1-7.

Yet, even though judgement is a fitting reward for the sins of Israel, God speaks of His continuing love for them. In language characterized by anthropomorphism, God expresses His unique love still for Israel, 11. 8. He cannot give up on them, and they will ultimately be restored, vv. 9-11. This is the heart of Hosea's message and similar to that of the prophet Jeremiah, Jer. 31. 20.

The last three chapters are predicated on a lesson from the history of the patriarch Jacob. Hosea recalls specifically Jacob's repentance, his deceit and punishment and this paves the way to a call to Israel to repent, 12. 3-7. Israel is compared to a trader

who used false balances to become rich and who boasted in his own achievements, vv. 8, 9. Since Israel failed to learn from the past, God warned them that His judgement would be certain and swift. They would lose their king and the northern kingdom would fall to the Assyrian hordes, 13. 1-16.

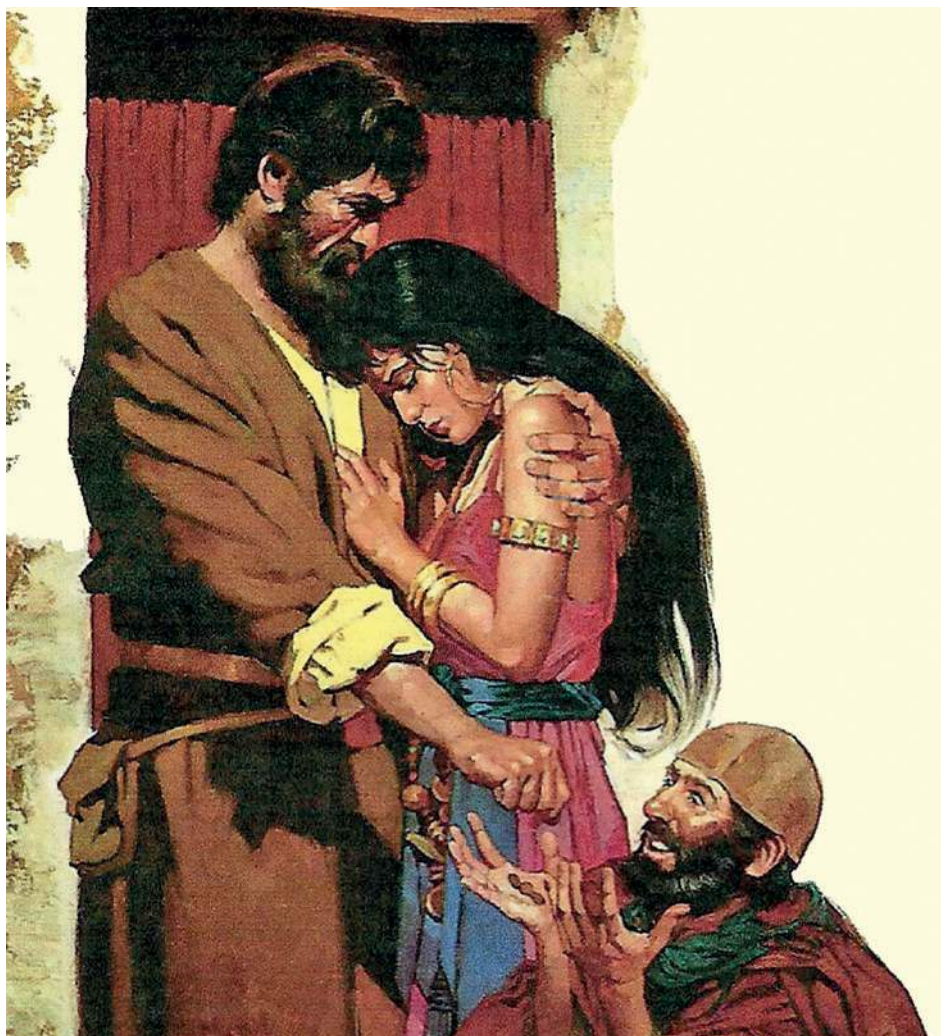
Finally, Hosea sets out the possibility of restoration for Israel. Notwithstanding all the invectives that have been brought against Israel, there is still hope for the hopeless. If Israel repented and returned to the Lord, then He 'will heal their backsliding', 'love them freely', and be to them all their sufficiency, 14. 4-7. Their restoration will be fruitful as they will flourish like the vine, blossom like the lily, and be strongly rooted like the trees of Lebanon, vv. 5-9. The prophecy ends with a call to wisdom, but also a warning to those who fail to heed the message of God through Hosea, cp. Prov. 10. 29.

Key themes in the book of Hosea

1. Restoration of the backslider.
2. The importance of godly leadership.
3. Religious form without genuine faith is valueless.
4. God's endless love for His wayward people.

Endnotes

- 1 G. CAMPBELL MORGAN, *Hosea: The Heart and Holiness of God*, Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1948, pg. 9.
- 2 'Hear the word of the Lord' is the same phrase used to start the first part of the prophecy, 1. 1, and it does not appear anywhere else in the book. Chapter 5 begins with a shorter command to the priests, 'Hear ye this'.
- 3 Five of the ten commandments are indicated in verse 2, see Exodus chapter 20 verses 1 to 17.
- 4 THOMAS E. MCCOMISKEY, *The Minor Prophets, A Commentary on Hosea, Joel, Amos, The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Zondervan, pg. 73.
- 5 Moving boundary markers was, in effect, stealing land and was a serious infraction of the law, Deut. 19. 14; 27. 17; Job 24. 2; Prov. 22. 28.
- 6 This may refer to Menahem's efforts to placate the Assyrians by paying tribute to Tiglath-pileser III, 2 Kgs. 15. 19, 20.
- 7 'House of Israel' in chapter 6 verse 10 may originally have read 'Bethel', i.e., 'the house of God'. J. GORDON McCONVILLE, *Exploring the Old Testament, Vol. 4, The Prophets*, SPCK, 2002, pg. 141, 142.



The life and times of Elijah the prophet 5

FLEEING FROM JEZEBEL 1 Kings 19. 1-18

By **MERVYN WISHART** Belfast, Northern Ireland

Jezebel's fury in Jezreel, vv. 1, 2

Ahab hurried back to Jezreel and reported to Jezebel all that Elijah had done that day at Mount Carmel. The prophets of Baal were defeated and slain. Ahab gave no glory to the Lord, who had answered by fire from heaven, consuming the burnt sacrifice and the wood on Elijah's altar, 18. 38. Jezebel was filled with rage and blind, unreasoning hatred. She thought only of revenge and sent a messenger to Elijah to inform him that within twenty-four hours he would die. If not, her gods, the divinities of paganism, would hold her accountable and her life would be forfeited.

She overlooked at least three things. The gods whom she claimed to fear had been impotent to protect the prophets of Baal. She did not pause to consider the implications of making such a threat against Elijah, who had so recently proved that his God possessed such tremendous power which He was prepared to use on His servant's behalf. The message she sent to Elijah had forewarned him and afforded him an opportunity to escape. Up to this point, the prophet had been guided by the Lord; but when he read the message brought by Jezebel's messenger, he succumbed to sudden panic. Momentarily forgetting his faith in God, he 'went for his life', v. 3.

For one thing, he was bitterly disappointed; there was no acknowledgement by Ahab or Jezebel of what the Lord had done with such a spectacular demonstration of His power at Mount Carmel. The people had

fallen on their faces and cried with one voice, 'The Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is the God', 18. 39. In spite of this, the events on Mount Carmel had not resulted in the national revival and recovery from idolatry that Elijah had hoped for, and he was overcome with anxiety for his own safety. It seems incredible that the man who had stood at Carmel, unflinching before the 450 prophets of Baal, should flee in fear from one evil woman.

Elijah in the wilderness, vv. 3-8

When Elijah fled from Jezebel he did not stop until he had reached Beersheba, the most southerly point in Israel. A biblical phrase used nine times in the Old Testament is 'from Dan to Beersheba' – from north to south.

Leaving his servant at Beersheba, he pressed on a day's journey into the wilderness, totally dejected, wishing only to be alone. He sat down under a broom tree, glad for the shade it provided, and asked the Lord that he might die. He said, 'It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers', v. 4. It seems ironic that the man who was destined never to die should flee from Jezebel to escape death; and now he expresses a desire to die. What a contradiction! He had been unable to bring about the restoration of Israel and their deliverance from idolatry. He had failed just as his forefathers had done. He said, 'I am no better than they'. Could we conclude that he had harboured the thought that he was superior to others, and better than former generations?

Elijah was totally downcast; he could see no future for himself in the work of the Lord. Mount Carmel had been his finest hour, but the wilderness beyond Beersheba was, without doubt, his lowest hour. What a stark contrast there is between chapter 18 and chapter 19! In chapter 18, he had experienced God's power and blessing, 'And the hand of the Lord was on Elijah', 18. 46. In chapter 19, he is utterly dejected and depressed. What an amazing change of circumstances in so short a time. We are reminded of Peter, who drew his sword in the garden of Gethsemane in defence of his Master; and yet soon afterwards denied Him before a servant girl in the house of Caiaphas.

Elijah lay down and slept under the broom tree, v. 5 NKJV. He was exhausted after the long journey of over one hundred miles. Probably he had had very little to eat since he left Jezreel and was now physically weak, which added to his depression. As he slept, an angel touched him and said, 'Arise and eat', v. 5. He touched him to waken him and prepared food to strengthen him: a cake baked on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. While Elijah slept, the angel had prepared his breakfast, 'And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again', v. 6.

'The angel of the Lord came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee. And [Elijah] arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God', vv. 7, 8. The two meals which the angel gave him were sufficient to sustain him during the long journey ahead. How often, as believers, the journey can seem too great. It is then that the Lord grants us rest, gives us spiritual food, and quickens our steps heavenward.

Elijah was the first to use the divine title, 'the Lord God of hosts', vv. 10, 14. While one angel was sent to minister to God's discouraged servant, the Bible speaks of 'an innumerable company of angels',

Heb. 12. 22, stating, 'The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him', Ps. 34. 7.

The Lord will provide

This was not the first time that the Lord had provided food in a miraculous way. In Psalm 78 verse 19, the question was asked, 'Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?' The answer is given in the following verses, '[He] opened the doors of heaven, and had rained down manna upon them to eat, and had given them of the corn of heaven. Man did eat angels' food: he sent them meat to the full', vv. 23-25. It was God's provision for the children of Israel in the same wilderness where Elijah now was.

It was not the first time that Elijah had been sustained by food which was miraculously provided. At Zarephath, in the home of a widow, his own prophecy was fulfilled, 'And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Elijah', 1 Kgs. 17. 16.

In spite of the murmuring and failures of the children of Israel in the wilderness, the Lord continued to guide them and provide food for them until they reached the Promised Land, 'He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people', Exod. 13. 22. The Lord continued to provide manna until they reached the borders of Canaan, 16. 35.

Elijah in the cave at Horeb, vv. 9-18

'(Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth', Heb. 11. 38. It was in the cave that Elijah heard the voice of the Lord, asking, 'What doest thou here, Elijah?' v. 9. He had known the guidance of the Lord formerly, 'the word of the Lord came unto him, saying', 1 Kgs. 17. 2, 8; 18. 1. He was directed to the brook Cherith, 17. 3; to Zarephath, v. 9; and to show himself to Ahab, 18. 1. However, he had fled from Jezebel without asking the Lord for guidance, and now he

must answer the Lord's searching question, 'What doest thou **here**, Elijah?'

The prophet answered, 'I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away', 19. 10, 14. These two verses are identical; in each of them Elijah uses four personal pronouns. Instead of looking up, he was now thinking only of self-preservation; he was looking in. The Lord's answer is recorded, 'But what saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal', Rom. 11. 4; cp. 1 Kgs. 19. 18.

The Lord spoke again to Elijah, 'Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice', vv. 11, 12. Only then did Elijah venture to the entrance of the cave; although he had not been told to 'Go forth' as he had in verse 11.

In scripture, the wind, the earthquake, and the fire are all associated with God's judgement.¹ The Lord was not appearing in judgement to Elijah, but speaking in a 'still small voice', a voice of gentle stillness. This was the third time the Lord spoke to the prophet in the cave. Was it because he was ashamed that Elijah wrapped his face in his mantle before he went out? The Lord spoke to him again, 19. 13. What a lesson for us to learn once more; it is in the stillness of God's presence, away from the din and clamour of a busy world, that we hear the Master's voice.

The question to Elijah was repeated,

'What doest thou here, Elijah?' His answer was the same in verses 10 and 14. There was no change to his thinking, in spite of all he had seen and heard.

When the Lord spoke to Elijah again, vv. 15-18, He commissioned him to carry out further tasks:

1. anoint Hazael to be king over Syria;
2. anoint Jehu king over Israel;
3. anoint Elisha to be a prophet 'in thy room'.

No servant, however gifted, is indispensable, and when the Lord calls them home the work will continue in the hands of others. How significant, then, were the words regarding Elisha, his successor, 'and Elisha . . . shalt thou anoint . . . **in thy room**', v. 16.

On the Mount of Transfiguration

In Luke's account of the transfiguration, Elijah is with the Lord Jesus, 'And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias . . . and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem', 9. 30, 31. All three had fasted for forty days and nights: Moses, Deut. 9. 9; Elijah, 1 Kgs. 19. 8; and the Lord Jesus, Luke 4. 2. As in all things, the Lord Jesus is unique and supreme. He was the only one of them who had the power, if He had so desired, to miraculously produce food and end His fast.

Both Moses and Elijah were marked by failure and were unable to complete their service. By smiting the rock at Horeb, Moses was not permitted to enter the land of Canaan. By fleeing from Jezebel, Elijah left his tasks unfinished and had to anoint Elisha in his place. The Lord Jesus is the perfect, unfailing servant. The conversation on the mountain was of a finished work, 'his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem', Luke 9. 31.

Endnote

- 1 Isa. 29. 6; Ps. 18. 7; Job 1. 16; Exod. 9. 23.

Towns and cities in the life of the Lord

Part 3

CAPERNAUM (1)

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

Capernaum was a city located on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee and, as we read in Matthew chapter 4, it was 'in the borders of Zabulon, and Nephthalim', v. 13. That is, it was in the area of the land divided between these two tribes in the time of Joshua. We also read that it became the chosen home city of the Lord, both as a fulfilment of scripture, vv. 14, 15, and after the Lord was driven from Nazareth by an attempt to kill Him. Capernaum was also the home of Peter and Andrew.

In this study of a town that is mentioned often in the scriptures it is important to note what Matthew records about it, 'The people which sat in darkness saw great light', v. 16. Notice, also, 'From that time Jesus began to preach', v. 17. According to Matthew, then, this was the time of the commencement of the Lord's public ministry and some of that was conducted in Capernaum. Set against the opposition to the Lord in His hometown of Nazareth, what was the response in Capernaum?

Mark 1. 21-34 – demoniac in the synagogue

When did this event occur? We are told – 'on the sabbath day', v. 21. On the day of gathering for religious purposes, the Lord was in the synagogue. Although we will comment upon the situation in the synagogue, nevertheless the Lord was there. A simple practical application is that we should never forsake the gatherings of the Lord's people if we can be there! We are also told, 'he entered . . . and taught'. There was a willingness to listen to the Lord. At present, this reception stands in stark contrast to that experienced in Nazareth. Here they marvelled and were astonished – this was something which they had not heard before and it was delivered with 'authority, and not as the scribes', v. 22.

The difference between the teaching

of the Lord and that of the scribes was marked. Not only could He read the scriptures giving their sense, because He was their source, but also because the Lord conveyed His message with moral authority. While many might point at the scribes and highlight their hypocrisy, they could not do that with the Lord. We see that in the miracle that follows.

Notice, though, that the synagogue was occupied by a man with an unclean spirit. What does this tell us about the place in which the scriptures were read and taught, and where the people came to worship God? You will remember when the disciples pointed out the marvel of the temple in Jerusalem, its architecture, and stones. It was merely an empty shell, a picture of what the temple once was and meant. Here the synagogue in Capernaum was but a faint representation of what it should have been. As Matthew stated, 'the people . . . sat in darkness', Matt. 4. 16.

But notice what caused this demon-possessed man to cry out. He states, 'Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth?' v. 24. It was not the presence of the scribes or other Jewish leaders. It was not the presence of the sabbath crowd of worshippers. Clearly, it was the Lord. He was 'the Holy One of God' and could silence the demon and deliver the demoniac.

But we note that the demon did not give up easily. We are told by Mark that the demon tore the man – he went into convulsions or spasms. Having no control over his own body, Luke chapter 4 verse 35 tells us that the man was thrown into the midst of the people in the synagogue. Gladly, however, we can say, nothing is too hard for God!

This forms the first miracle recorded by Mark in his Gospel.

Mark 1. 29-34 – healing in the home

If the previous verses tell us of a very public deliverance, this event is somewhat more private – it occurs in the home. We have mentioned the moral authority of the Lord in the deliverance of the demoniac and, in Mark's Gospel, that deliverance is immediately followed by the healing of Peter's wife's mother in the home. Equally, the Lord is back in Capernaum in chapter 2 to heal the man who was sick of the palsy. All of these displays of the Lord's power assist us in appreciating His authority and power in the physical and spiritual realms.

Mark 2. 1-12 – one sick of the palsy borne of four

Let us remember the context of this event; the Saviour was in Peter's house, and, as we have seen, it was a place He often resorted to because He was welcomed there. On this occasion, the crowd was such that, 'there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door', v. 2.

The house is packed. Interest is high and the Lord is in His own neighbourhood. The Lord is the preacher and, as we have mentioned, the power of the Lord was present. Humanly speaking, all seems right for a time of rich blessing.

Perhaps there have been times when we have convened special gospel meetings about which we have prayed and petitioned the Lord to bless. In those meetings there has been a sense of the Spirit of God at work in the hearts of different individuals and yet there has been

no one saved. Remember that this was the experience of the Lord here, and it is a timely reminder of the hardness of men's hearts!

Note the extent of the man's physical need. It took four men to bring him upon his bed. The word for 'bed', more likely a simple pallet, tells us something of this man's poverty brought about by his paralysis. But what is remarkable about verse 5 is that Mark tells us, 'When Jesus saw their faith'. The man's physical and material need was evident. However, the Saviour sees past the physical and is concerned with his spiritual need. 'Son, thy sins be forgiven thee'. The lesson is that the spiritual must take priority before the physical and material.

However, this miracle presents the Pharisees with a problem. Only God can forgive sins. Logically,

therefore, either the Lord was God, or He blasphemed. They came to the second conclusion. Sadly, like so many today, their decision as to the situation was coloured by their view of the Saviour; their minds were already closed to the truth. In the light of compelling evidence in the restoration of the man, they were 'reasoning in their hearts'. They had no desire to learn the truth from the Saviour or to express their views before the multitude.

But is there not a further challenge here? The response of the Saviour meant that He could read the thoughts and reasoning of their hearts. There was no statement from the scribes. There was no evidence in their posture. The Lord knew intuitively. Mark records, 'Jesus perceived in his spirit', v. 8. How sobering for each of us! Nothing is hidden from the Lord as to our thoughts, words, or deeds!

Luke 7. 1-10 – the centurion's servant

As Luke tells us, this event occurred after the Lord 'had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people', v. 1. The Lord's arrival generated interest from a Roman centurion who had a servant who was sick. He sent 'the elders of the Jews' to petition the Lord for His help.

Ignoring the 21st-century view of slavery and all that it means to many different people, we need to think about this request in first-century terms. Wasn't it only a slave? Surely, another one could be purchased from the slave market. Why expend such time and effort for a slave? Whilst such comments may be offensive to people today, they ought to enable us to see the concern and compassion exhibited by the centurion and, particularly, the Lord in responding to his request. Both put a value upon human life far above that which was the common view of the time.

In addition to the centurion's concern for his slave, we can note his attitude towards the Saviour. Although a man of some significance in military terms and having a favourable reputation in the town, v. 5, his approach to the Lord is significant. The manner in which the elders delivered the centurion's message, 'beseeching', v. 3, is an indication of his thoughts. His own words are, 'I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof', v. 6. If they had but seen it, what a challenge this was to the Jews of the town. This Gentile centurion had a greater appreciation of the Saviour than they did, and that appreciation extended beyond who the Saviour was to what He could do – 'say in a word, and my servant shall be healed', v. 7. What faith!

Whilst the Lord had commenced the journey to the centurion's house, the servant was healed at a distance. Luke records, 'he was . . . not far from the house', v. 6. Although not the significant distance between Cana and Capernaum for the healing of the nobleman's son, John 4. 46, it exhibits the Lord's power. He is not limited by distance from the patient, or the degree of the patient's illness!



Corporate Christian life in the wilderness

1 Peter 2. 4-12

By **HUW REES** Carmarthen, Wales

Introduction

Peter has drawn many parallels between the strangers and pilgrims of the wilderness generation and the generation of Christian sojourners in the Roman empire. The prospect of inheritance in Canaan typifies an incorruptible inheritance in heaven, 1. 4. The trials of the wilderness prefigure the trial of Christian faith, v. 7. Redemption by the Passover lamb is fulfilled in the blood of Christ, v. 19, and redemption by power seen at the Red Sea climaxes in the resurrection power of the Lord Jesus, v. 21. Peter then shifts to the corporate life of Christians, 2. 4-10, and again draws on wilderness imagery. Just as Israel were brought out of Egypt to corporately worship God, Exod. 5. 1, and dwell with Him, 25. 8, Christians have been redeemed to offer up spiritual sacrifices and meet with God in His spiritual house, the church, 1 Pet. 2. 4, 5.

Peter is dispensational in his outlook. He knows the church is a brand-new entity announced by the Lord Jesus Himself – ‘I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it’, Matt. 16. 18. Israel was a nation founded at Sinai many centuries earlier; it was genetically linked to Abraham and was under the law. None of these things are true of the church. It is a fundamentally new entity, distinct from Israel, Eph. 2. 20; 3. 5.

Peter knows that the church is not Israel rehashed or replaced. But he does identify common principles. Just as Israel had a house, priesthood, and sacrificial system, we have the same today. However, God now dwells in the church, not the temple; the established priesthood is not Levitical, but Christian; and the sacrificial system is spiritual, not tangible.

Verse 5 is a central plank in the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. New Testament assembly life knows nothing of a clergy-laity split that currently handicaps many Christian congregations across the globe. Every Christian is a priest, with divine gift, Rom. 12. 6, and is expected to worship and serve God. Clericalism in its hard (High Anglicanism) or softer forms (Evangelical Pastor) has no biblical basis.

Peter also distinguishes between the dispensational church and the local assembly. In speaking about the former, he is encouraging persecuted believers that they belong to a divine construction project. They are part of something huge and unshakable, no matter what happens on earth.

Living stone, vv. 4, 5

Peter moves from tasting that the Lord is good, 1 Pet. 2. 3 ESV; Ps. 34. 8, to a solid foundation for faith, 2. 4; Ps. 34. 8. He is a keen petrologist, using the divine title, ‘the Rock’, Deut. 32. 4, for the Lord Jesus – the ‘living stone’, 2. 4. The Old Testament reveals the ‘chief corner stone’, 2. 6; Isa. 28. 16, head stone, 2. 7; Ps. 118. 22, and stone of stumbling, 2. 8; Isa. 8. 14, but never the Living Stone. The Living Stone is truth for a new dispensation. Although the Lord Jesus was ‘cast away . . . as worthless by men’, 2. 4 JND, at Calvary, God chose Him in resurrection and showed Him as precious in ascension. This means that there is a man on the throne of God. He is the only solid foundation for eternity, and His persecuted people can confidently rest in Him. The Living Stone shares His life with other stones, 2. 5, and in uniting us to Himself He has united us to one another.

Peter loves the building metaphor – a colossal edifice to the grace of God.

He never uses the bride and body imagery like Paul, since the words of Christ are wonderfully lodged in his mind, ‘upon this rock, I will build my church’, Matt. 16. 18.

This positional truth has serious practical implications. We have been saved to build into the local assembly. There is no time to waste by building for this life, career, or hobbies. We must abandon materialism and apathy, and labour together with God in the local assembly, 1 Cor. 3. 9.

Corner stone, v. 6

Peter reverts to Old Testament prophecy to show persecuted Christians that a rejected Messiah was part of God’s sovereign purpose, and their hopes will never be dashed for trusting in Him, 2. 6. This elect foundation stone was laid in Sion, according to divine purpose, long before He was put to death at the cross. Men threw Him out as worthless, but He was ultimately delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, Acts 2. 23. Peter understands the paradoxical nature of divine sovereignty and human responsibility.

The corner stone laid in Sion has connotations of a heavenly reality, Heb. 12. 22. The church is being built on this corner stone now. Isaiah shows there is a future aspect to Zion as well. After Israel’s covenant with death is annulled, Isa. 28. 15, 18, the corner stone in Zion will rule over a millennial earth.

Head stone, v. 7

Christ is precious to God, 1 Pet. 2. 6, meaning that God appreciates the worth and value of His Son and will honour Him in a future day. We who believe share in and receive the precious value of Christ, v. 7. Just as we share in His life as living stones, we share in His honour now. God views us as He views His Son; this is sublime grace.

We receive honour, but the builders who rejected Him are stumbled and shamed. They cast out their Messiah because He did not fit their sinful specifications. They wanted to keep their sin and have a military Messiah

that would bring them national glory. They cast out Christ in unbelief, but God has made Him the head stone of the church, v. 7. Peter has equated the cap stone with a risen Christ before, Acts 4. 10, 11. He is the top [*kephale*] stone. This means He is like the other stones, but also distinct and unique – ‘conspicuous above a myriad’, S. of S. 5. 10 YLT.

Stone of stumbling, v. 8

Christ was also a stone [*lithos*] of stumbling and rock [*petra*] of offence. ‘The stone of stumbling is a loose stone in the pathway encountered many times in the (journey) . . . the rock of offence points to the calamitous impact of that rock on unbelievers’.¹ Primarily, this refers to Israel. The builders, in contrast to men generally, v. 4, refer to the nation’s leaders, Matt. 21. 45, who represented the people in rejecting Christ. Salvation through Christ was an affront to a people seeking salvation by works of the law, 1 Cor. 1. 23; Rom. 9. 32. Such haughty unbelief caused them to fall over the Lord Jesus – ‘they stumbled at that stumblingstone’, Rom. 9. 32. Their temporary dispensational fall has meant blessing to the Gentiles, 11. 12, but there is coming a day when God

will pick up the nation, and restore it to full glory, v. 12. Israel was appointed to this stumbling. They are responsible for the means of stumbling – disobedience, 1 Pet. 2. 8, but the end, the stumbling itself was appointed by God. There is a solemn mystery here, and the clay cannot ask the potter why, Rom. 9. 20.

Israel was described as ‘a peculiar treasure . . . a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation’, Exod. 19. 5, 6. The result of Israel being set aside temporarily is that God has a new entity for testimony on earth; Christians are now a royal priesthood and a holy nation, 1 Pet. 2. 9. Israel was supposed to represent God to the nations, Deut. 4. 6, 7, and will do so in a future day, Isa. 49. 6, but, at the moment, God is using the church to display His glory to mankind, 1 Pet. 2. 9, and the spirit realm, Eph. 3. 10.

Royal priesthood, vv. 9, 10

A holy priesthood is Godward in its function. We have been saved to worship. A royal priesthood is manward in its function, v. 9; we are the people of God, v. 10 – saved to serve. Eldad and Medad typify what Peter has in mind here. They saw the

glory of God, and then proclaimed that glory in the camp, Num. 11. 26. Although these Christians were dispersed and persecuted, they were to herald the glories of Christ. In a day of rampant secularism, our faith cannot be private. It must be proclaimed. The primary means for doing this is preaching (heralding) the gospel and we must adhere to the God-ordained method of spreading His word, Mark 16. 15. It is vital that we maintain the scriptural means.

Dispersion, vv. 11, 12

The second half of chapter 2 reverts back to individual life. The wilderness imagery fades, and the dispersion [*diaspora*] of Babylonian captivity, Neh. 1. 9, is in the mind of Peter, 1 Pet. 1. 1. Peter writes from Babylon, 5. 13, and explains how Christians should relate to political powers, 2. 13-17, just as Israel once had new political obligations, Jer. 29. 7.

Peter starts by mentioning abstinence from fleshly lusts, 1 Pet. 2. 11, just like Daniel and his three friends abstained from the king’s meat and drink, Dan. 1. 5, 8. Good conduct was to mark these dispersed saints as they lived among a hostile audience, 1 Pet. 2. 12. The only way to silence the hostility, vv. 12, 15, was, like Daniel, to have an excellent spirit, Dan. 6. 3. Such was his exemplary character, they said, ‘We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God’, 6. 5.

The day of visitation, 1 Pet. 2. 12, is an incentive for believers to live a life of good works. When Daniel was vindicated by God sending his angel, Dan. 6. 22, his critics had their day of visitation in the lion’s den, v. 24. Similarly, there is coming a day of judgement when God will vindicate His downtrodden people and condemn the wicked. May we live for eternity and not time.



Endnote

- ¹ J. B. NICHOLSON, *1 Peter, What the Bible Teaches*, Volume 5, John Ritchie Ltd., 1987, pp. 69, 70.

QUESTION

What is the difference between atonement and propitiation?

ANSWER

Atonement and propitiation are related ideas, but with important differences, the most obvious being that they are Old and New Testament concepts, respectively. The Hebrew words *kapar* or *kipur*, meaning 'to cover', occur over 100 times in the Old Testament, and are mostly translated as 'atonement'.^{1,2} The Greek word *hilasmos* and its derivatives are translated as 'propitiation', and occur five times in the New Testament.³ In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, *hilasmos* is used to translate the Hebrew word *kipur*, indicating that these two ideas are related.⁴ Atonement can be considered as an Old Testament picture of the New Testament truth of propitiation but with built-in limitations to emphasize the infinite work of Christ on the cross.

Behind both words is the thought of presenting a gift to appease someone who is angry. For example, Jacob uses the word *kapar* to describe his actions in sending elaborate gifts to placate his brother Esau, whom he had wronged several decades earlier, Gen. 32. 20. The idea of appeasement in relation to God, however, needs further clarification. Throughout the centuries, heathen nations ignorantly viewed their gods as unpredictable and volatile dictators who needed placating with gifts to avert their wrath. As the Bible reveals, God is personally offended, and angered by sin. He is judge of the world, demanding justice and requiring judgement to be administered. Yet, His wrath is based on His unchanging righteousness. Our God is not volatile, but longsuffering, 2 Pet. 3. 9. His desire is for humanity to draw near in a loving relationship.

In the Old Testament, God provided to Moses a powerful object lesson of how Israel could approach Him on a righteous basis. God gave instructions for a tabernacle to be built, a unique structure enabling Him to dwell amongst His people, Israel. On setting up the tabernacle, however, Moses found he could not even enter because of the overwhelming glory of God, as He took up residence, Exod. 40. 35. Immediately, God provided the answer through a series of animal sacrifices that could be offered, Lev. 1-7. These animals provided **atonement**, or a covering for sin, to enable worshippers to approach God.

Yet, drawing near to God proved to be a dangerous occupation. Judgement fell on the two sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, because they failed to follow God's instructions as they approached God, Lev. 10. As a result, God limited access to His presence, providing further instructions for atonement to be made on only one day of the year, the day of atonement, Lev. 16, called *Yom Kippur* by Jewish people today. On that day, **one person**, the high priest, entered the holy of holies of the tabernacle to meet with God. Atonement was made in **one place**, at the mercy seat, the lid of solid gold placed on top of the ark of the covenant, Exod. 25. 17-22. Two cherubim figures were moulded, also from gold, at each end of the mercy seat, covering it with their outstretched wings. It was between these cherubim that God dwelt, His glory outshining and filling the holy of holies, Ps. 80. 1. The mercy seat was a meeting place between God and man. The Old and New Testament words for the mercy seat literally mean the 'place of atonement' or 'propitiatory'. Atonement was made by the high priest sprinkling the blood of several animal sacrifices before the ark and on the mercy seat. Over the years many sacrifices were offered, although they could 'never take away sins', Heb. 10. 11. But what did this elaborate picture mean?

The New Testament informs us that the Lord Jesus is our Great High Priest, the **one person** who alone can 'make propitiation for the sins of the people', Heb. 2. 17 NKJV.⁵ He is also the **one place** where propitiation is made, 'whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation [or mercy seat] through faith in his blood', Rom. 3. 25. This means that, as God and man, He is the one mediator between God and men, 1. Tim. 2. 5, and because of His work on the cross, propitiation is only possible through Him. He is then the sole meeting place between God and man. In contrast to the many sacrifices offered over the centuries, the Lord Jesus 'offered **one sacrifice** for sins', after which He 'sat down in perpetuity at the right hand of God', Heb. 10. 12, JND. The gift needed to make propitiation is one that only God could provide, in love sending 'his Son to be the propitiation for our sins', 1 John 4. 10.

Everything about atonement was limited.⁶ It was limited in its extent to Israel. It was limited in its duration, needing to be repeated every year. The high priest making atonement was limited by his lifespan and would need replacing once he had died, Heb. 7. 23. He also needed to make atonement for himself, because he was sinful, before making atonement for the people, v. 27. Atonement was limited in its efficacy, only covering sin, and not removing it completely. The result of atonement was limited, and the tabernacle was, in general, a series of barriers excluding most people from the presence of God for much of the time.

In contrast, since propitiation is based on the finished work of Christ, it is unlimited in every sense and the efficacy of His work is infinite. **Propitiation** is the idea that God is so completely satisfied with the finished work of the Lord Jesus on the cross that it has transformed the way He can deal with humanity on an individual and corporate level. It goes far beyond only averting His wrath, with God providing recipients of propitiation with unlimited access into the nearness of His presence for now and the whole of eternity, Heb. 10. 19. Propitiation is unlimited in its scope. God can offer salvation to every sector of society. The capacity of the work of Christ is sufficient that the whole human race throughout the ages could be saved. 'He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world', 1 John 2. 2. It is only effective, however, for those who respond to the gospel. Although the possibility of being justified is 'unto all' because of propitiation, it is only 'upon all them that believe', Rom. 3. 22. This is the idea of 'substitution', which is limited to those who trust in the Lord Jesus. Only a genuine believer can truly say, 'He took my place'. The work of the Lord Jesus in propitiation, therefore, never needs repeating, in contrast to atonement in the Old Testament, which needed repeating every year.

A right understanding of propitiation can change the way we live before

God and our attitude toward others. The concept of propitiation is behind the account of the publican and pharisee in Luke 18. 9-14. A failure to grasp propitiation can make us like the pharisee. Perhaps we perceive that we need to keep on the right side of God, bringing our self-righteous gifts to appease Him. In reality, this attitude is no different to heathen people bringing gifts to placate their false gods. The pharisee also failed to comprehend the scope of propitiation, thinking that God was only interested in pompous and pious individuals like himself, v. 11. In contrast, the publican laid hold of the truth that propitiation was something God must do for him. He certainly understood that he had nothing to offer God. In asking God to 'be merciful' he was really asking God 'to be propitious' to him. He understood that there was sufficient scope for propitiation to include a sinful outcast like him. The publican did not have the full revelation of truth that we have, however. We now know that propitiation is founded on the price for sin paid in full by the Lord Jesus, enabling a full and free offer of forgiveness to extend to every sector of humanity.

Endnotes

- 1 *Kipur* is the noun and *kapar* the verb of the same word.
- 2 The one reference to 'atonement' in the KJV New Testament, occurs in Rom. 5. 11 and is better translated 'reconciliation'.
- 3 *Hilasterion*, Rom. 3. 25; *hilaskomai*, Luke 18. 13; Heb. 2. 17; *hilasmos*, 1 John 2. 2; 4. 10. There is an additional reference, Heb. 9. 5, which refers to the mercy seat, the cover on the ark of the covenant.
- 4 Interestingly, the writer to the Hebrews appears to avoid using this word when describing the actions of the high priest in the Old Testament on the day of atonement in chapter 9, perhaps indicating that atonement and propitiation are distinct concepts.
- 5 *Hilaskomai* is translated as 'reconciliation' in Heb. 2. 17 in the KJV but is better translated as 'propitiation'.
- 6 Discussions over 'limited atonement' (understood theologically) can generate more heat than light, unless the doctrines of atonement, propitiation, and substitution are fully delineated. Using the terminology and definitions in this article, atonement, as an Old Testament concept, is limited, whereas propitiation is unlimited. Substitution is also limited to believers.



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'And their father Israel said . . . take of the best fruits in the land . . . almonds', Gen. 43. 11



'And their father Israel said . . . take of the best fruits in the land . . . almonds', Gen. 43. 11.

The background of our verse is the famine that afflicted the world of the time – 'the seven years of dearth', Gen. 41. 54. Because of the food shortages, 'all countries came into Egypt to Joseph for to buy corn', v. 57. Thus, Jacob said unto his sons, 'get you down thither, and buy for us from thence; that we may live, and not die', 42. 2. However, as the crisis continued and the supplies they had acquired ran out, a second visit to Joseph became necessary, although they did not know it was their brother.

Remembering the last visit and how they had found 'every man's bundle of money . . . in his sack', 42. 35, they were afraid. They also knew that the lord of the country, Joseph, had commanded them to bring Benjamin in order to verify their original story and prove they were not spies. To provide some sign of their good intent, as his sons returned to Egypt, Jacob instructed them to take gifts, items that were particularly associated with the land of Canaan in which they dwelt. ORR says of it, 'Palestine is a land where the almond flourishes, whereas in Egypt it would appear to have been uncommon' (JAMES ORR (ed.), *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, e-Sword resource).

Of other references to almonds in the scripture, Jacob is said to have used almond tree rods, 30. 37 KJV mg, along with other types, to bring forth 'cattle ringstraked, speckled, and spotted', v. 39. Aaron's rod produced almonds, Num. 17. 8, signalling which tribe was to take on the priesthood. It is said, 'This particular branch developed buds, blossomed and produced ripe almonds all at the same time – something that any farmer of the period would have known to be impossible but for a miracle' (quoted from <https://www.timesofisrael.com>). Moses was also instructed to make parts of the lampstands of the tabernacle 'like unto almonds', Exod. 25. 33. These few citations show us the importance of the almond, both practically and symbolically, and what it can teach us.

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