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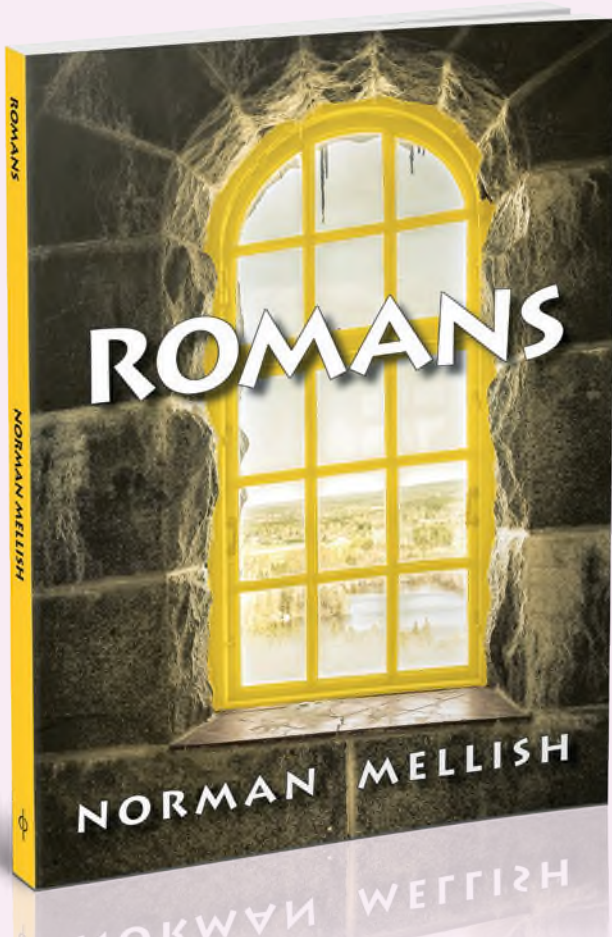
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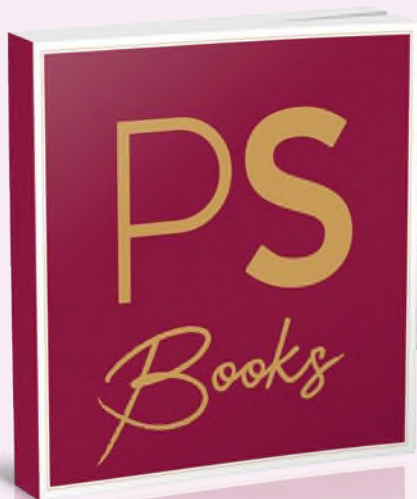
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‘Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit’, 1 Cor. 12. 4.

‘Variety’s the very spice of life, that gives it all its flavour’ is an observation attributed to the poet William Cowper.

As we consider the amazing diversity of life on earth, how blessed we are to inhabit a world so beautiful, so filled with wonder. Reflecting on the heavens and the earth and man’s responsible role as steward, the psalmist could exclaim, ‘how excellent is thy name in all the earth!’ Ps. 8. 1, 9.

Turning to the world of humanity, we observe that global economic forces, war, and developments in travel and communications have combined to greatly increase the diversity of the society and culture in which we live and serve Christ. Some see this as a negative thing, but if we take seriously Christ’s commission to preach the gospel to every nation, and how this fired the zeal of the Apostle Paul, we should surely embrace the challenges with relish. Many assemblies have been enriched by a new diversity of believers, in terms of background, ethnicity, and culture, yet gloriously ‘all one in Christ Jesus’, Gal. 3. 28.

Turning to the headline scripture, despite what they thought, many in the Corinthian assembly were spiritually immature, and Paul is concerned throughout to redirect them toward true spirituality. Influenced by worldly patterns of Greek celebrities and their devotees, they were in danger of degenerating into cliques aligned to favourite servants of God, and thereby impoverishing themselves, when in fact they were heirs to a far broader range of teachers and truths, 1 Cor. 3. 21-23.

Selfishness and indulgence were also evident at a number of levels, 8. 10; 11. 21; 12. 14, 21, all of which tended to deny the reality of the believers as one body in Christ. In particular, their attitude to spiritual gifts and their use was unedifying, 14. 23. There is always the possibility that we favour believers who have similar interests and outlook to ourselves, and undervalue those whose gifts and ministries differ. How blessed is the assembly where each and every gift that God has given is encouraged to develop and flourish under the presidency of the Holy Spirit!

Unity and diversity are surely also reflected in the rich library of scripture. Whilst the ancient writings reveal a variety of genres and circumstances of their composition, they continue to convey the living truths of God to every nation and language in a divinely effective manner.

Conscious of this, we make every effort in this magazine to ensure that the diverse truths of scripture are clearly presented in a fresh, relevant, and balanced way.

Once again in this issue we are very grateful to our dedicated contributors, and trust that the articles will prove timely, interesting, and edifying.

Ken Totton

Ministry Articles Editor

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Words at the Cross

By **MERVYN WISHART** Belfast, Northern Ireland

Words spoken directly to the Lord Jesus on the cross

1. 'And **they that passed by** reviled him, wagging their heads, and saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross', Matt. 27. 39, 40.

The first group reviled Him (spoke injuriously against Him). They wagged their heads in utter contempt, not even taking time to stop. By their gesture they fulfilled the prophecy of Psalm 22 verse 7, 'All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head'. They misunderstood His claim to rebuild the temple in three days, 'But he spake of the temple of his body', John 2. 21. His prophecy would be gloriously fulfilled by His resurrection on the third day.

2. 'And **the soldiers** also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar, and saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself', Luke 23. 36, 37.

The second group, the soldiers, mocked Him and approached the cross offering Him vinegar to drink. Unknown to them, they too were fulfilling an Old Testament prophecy, 'and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink', Ps. 69. 21. He was the one who had turned water into wine at Cana of Galilee, but the last thing men offered to Him was vinegar to drink. Matthew adds that it was mingled with gall, 27. 34.

3. 'And one of **the malefactors** which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us', Luke 23. 39.

The third group were the malefactors. Again, a prophecy was fulfilled, 'he was numbered with the transgressors', Isa. 53. 12; Mark 15. 28.

At His birth, He was surrounded by the beasts of the field, and at His death He was numbered with the outcasts of society; men who were criminals. Many who passed by mocked the Lord Jesus, and 'The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth', Matt. 27. 44.

Each group said to the Lord Jesus, 'Save thyself'. Little did they appreciate that He had come to save others and to give **Himself** a ransom for all, 1 Tim. 2. 6. He was on the cross according to the will of God and, 'pleased not himself', Rom. 15. 3. The first group said, 'save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross'; the second group said, 'If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself'. The third group said, 'If thou be Christ, save thyself'.¹

The truth is that He was the Son of God; He was the King of the Jews; and He was the Christ. Yet He remained on the cross until the mighty work was done.

Words spoken about the Lord Jesus at the cross

1. The chief priests, scribes, and elders

'Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God', Matt. 27. 41-43.

If anyone should have known to expect the arrival of the Saviour, it ought to have been these men, the chief priests, scribes, and elders of Israel. They were well acquainted with Zechariah chapter 9 verse 9, 'behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation', see also Isa. 52. 7.

It is remarkable to listen to those who had made themselves the enemies of Christ using words that were absolutely true:

'**He saved others**' – millions of souls on earth and in heaven can say a loud 'Amen' to that statement.

'**Himself he cannot save**' – to save us, He gave Himself.

'**He trusted in God**' – as the perfect servant of Jehovah, He lived in constant prayerful dependence on God, Ps. 22. 10.

'**Let him deliver him now, if he will have him**' – the worst of all the verbal taunting of Christ recorded in scripture.

'**Let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him**' – millions of His people have believed in the One who did not come down from the cross but who remained there, and ultimately cried in triumph, 'It is finished', John 19. 30.

2. Some of them that stood there

'Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, This man calleth for Elias . . . The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him', Matt. 27. 47, 49.

The Lord Jesus had no need to call for Elias. He could say, 'Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?' 26. 53.

3. The centurion

'Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God', Matt. 27. 54. 'Now when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man', Luke 23. 47.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke each mention the centurion who was in charge of the crucifixion. Matthew informs us that his duty entailed 'watching Jesus', 27. 54. Mark tells us that he stood near to the cross, 15. 39. What seemed to impress the centurion most was the manner in which the Lord Jesus bowed His head,

and said, 'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit', Luke 23. 46.

Then there were the miracles – the darkness, the earthquake, the rending of the stones. These were visible, tangible, and audible signs to convince even the most sceptical. What was the result? 'They feared greatly', Matt. 27. 54; 'he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man', Luke 23. 47. He confessed Christ to be the Son of God, 'Truly this man was the Son of God', Mark 15. 39; see 1 John 5. 1.

Let us not overlook what Matthew tells us, 'they that were with him . . . feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God', 27. 54. There was a work of grace not only in the centurion's heart but also in the hearts of the soldiers who were with him. They found salvation at the foot of the cross where multitudes still can come in repentance and faith to claim the Saviour as their own.

What a delightful account of the grace of God towards the soldiers who nailed the Saviour to the cross.

Words written by Pilate at the cross

All four Gospel writers mention the words that were written by Pilate and fixed over the cross.

John calls it a **title**, 'Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross', 19. 19, 20. These are the only two occurrences of this word in the New Testament. The title of a book conveys something of its contents, and a comparison of the four Gospels will show that the title read, '**JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS**'. So, the words of Pilate's title spoke volumes about the One who was on the centre cross.

Matthew calls it an **accusation**, 27. 37. The word is translated 'cause', Acts 13. 28. It is rendered 'crimes', Acts 25. 27. Concerning the Lord Jesus, there was **no cause** and there were **no crimes**; yet for guilty sinners and for crimes that were not His own He suffered and died on the cross. The **accusation**

became an affirmation of who He was and what He came to do.

'Was it for crimes that I have done,
He groaned upon the tree?
Amazing pity! Grace unknown!
And love beyond degree'.
ISAAC WATTS

Mark and Luke both speak of a superscription, and there is something durable about 'words that are written'. The Jews raised an objection. They said to Pilate, 'Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews', John 19. 21. Pilate would not yield, nor change one word. He said, 'What I have written I have written', v. 22. Why were the words not changed? Was it merely the intransigence of the governor? No, God was in control of everything that took place at Calvary – '[He was] delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God', Acts 2. 23.

The words were not changed because they were true. They were read by the crowds of people going into and returning from Jerusalem. John says, 'This title then read many of the Jews: for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city', 19. 20. The writing was in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin, so that everyone who passed by on the highway could read and understand the words. Matthew says that the 'accusation' was, 'set up over his head', 27. 37. When first written, the words were in three languages, but they are now preserved for us in our New Testament and can be read in over 1500 languages.

On one occasion the Lord said, 'Show me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny'. He asked, 'Whose is this image and superscription?'. When the answer was given as Caesar's, He said, 'Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's', Matt. 22. 19-21. The superscription on the coin reminded the people of their obligation to render Caesar his due. The superscription on the cross reminds us of our obligation to render all that we are and have to

the One who suffered there for us.

This is Jesus

The angel Gabriel announced both to Mary and to Joseph that the child who would be born of Mary would be called Jesus, and that His mission to earth would be 'for he shall save his people from their sins', Luke 1. 31; Matt. 1. 21.

'And when He hung upon the tree,
They wrote this name above Him;
That all might see the reason we
Forevermore must love Him'.
GEORGE W. BETHUNE

Of Nazareth

It was the fulfilment of prophecy, 'He shall be called a Nazarene', Matt. 2. 23. It was a place of ill repute – Nathanael asked, 'Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?' John 1. 46. Ask anyone from the multitudes who were healed, and they were ever thankful for the day they heard the message, 'Jesus of Nazareth passeth by', Luke 18. 37.

'And burdened ones, where'er He came,
Brought out their sick and deaf and lame.
The blind rejoiced to hear the cry:
'Jesus of Nazareth passeth by'.
EMMA F. R. CAMPBELL

The King of the Jews

As Christians we mourn the sad moral conditions in the world today, but we should never become so discouraged and downcast that we lose the enjoyment of the bright prospect that is ours in Christ. In spite of everything and everyone who would oppose, God has said in the unchangeable words of scripture, 'Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion', Ps. 2. 6.

What Pilate wrote was true, and the King who hung on the cross outside the city will one day rule on the throne inside the city.

Endnote

1 Matt. 27. 40; Mark 15. 30; and Luke 23. 37, 39.

PEACEMAKER/ RECONCILER

By **DAVID BRAUCH** Wauwatosa, USA

It was a perfect autumn day weather-wise back in October of 2014 within the Lycus Valley of the former Territory of Phrygia in southwest Turkey. After leaving our tour bus we began climbing a steep hill with no steps. After about fifteen minutes we found ourselves standing on the top of the barren acropolis containing the remains that once was Colossae. Two photos of Colossae, one showing the acropolis, can be found here: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colossae>. The other shows some huge rock-like slabs that formerly formed the walls of some enclosures. To the west, at a distance of about 100 miles is the Aegean Sea and what was formerly a major seaport, the cosmopolitan city of Ephesus.

It is fascinating to recall that while under house arrest, most likely chained to a Roman soldier, the Apostle Paul wrote at least four letters, two about the same time, which went to the same location namely, Colossae. One was addressed to an individual, Philemon, who is believed to be a wealthy landowner. The second was to an assembly of believers in that location. The latter Epistle seems to suggest that Paul had never visited this city, since it only speaks of him having 'heard' of the Colossians' faith, Col. 1. 4. His knowledge undoubtedly came about through a fellow prisoner named 'Epaphras', Philem. 23. It is widely held that Epaphras was a convert of Paul during the latter's three years of ministry in Ephesus, Acts 20. 31. Most likely, Epaphras not only established an assembly of believers in Colossae, but in two other towns also located in the Lycus Valley, namely, Hierapolis and Laodicea. Colossians chapter 4 verse 13 reads, 'For I bear him witness that he has a great zeal for you, and those who are in Laodicea, and those in Hierapolis'. Paul mentioned in his letter to Philemon his hope to visit Colossae upon being freed from prison, Philem. 22. However, most Bible scholars seem to agree that there is **no** evidence that Paul ever visited that location.

It is intriguing that in both of these letters Paul raised the subject of

reconciliation. Perhaps, it is the most important spiritual activity in which a believer can be engaged – and it usually comes with a cost to the one who initiates it. Like no other time in world history, the crying need in our cities, states or provinces, countries, and the entire world is for peace and harmony to exist between disputing factions of mankind. I would suggest to you that the United States is presently divided almost as badly or worse than it was when Abraham Lincoln took office when the issue of slavery tore the nation apart.

Paul drafted a tender and touching letter to Philemon. He wrote on behalf of Onesimus, a runaway slave who had wronged Philemon. The details of the offence are not stated, although it is speculated that Onesimus had fled after stealing money. Sometime after going absent without leave, Onesimus came into contact with Paul. He may actually have been arrested and imprisoned alongside Paul.

Alternatively, he may have previously heard Paul's name (as his owner was a Christian) and so travelled to him for help. After meeting Paul, Onesimus became a Christian. A feeling of affection grew between them; Paul would have been pleased to keep Onesimus with him. However, he considered it more prudent to send Onesimus back to Philemon with an accompanying letter, in the hope

of effecting reconciliation between them as they were now Christian brothers. Paul stated in his letter, verse 18, that if Onesimus owed anything, Philemon should charge this to Paul's account, even though it would be a genuine sacrifice for Paul to reimburse Philemon in this manner. The preservation of this letter suggests that Paul's request was granted. What a great illustration of human reconciliation!

Incidentally, the costliest example of human reconciliation mentioned in the scriptures is that of Joseph forgiving his ten older brothers. They hated him and took the opportunity to rid themselves and their father of him by selling him. He ended up in Egypt where he spent upwards of eleven years in prison before being elevated to the second in command behind Pharaoh.

To the greatest degree possible, the God of heaven has committed Himself to provide supernatural assistance, on a number of occasions throughout history, to God-fearing mankind in order to achieve overall peace. For example, '[Jehovah] will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none will make you afraid; I will rid the land of evil beasts, and the sword will not go through your land', Lev. 26. 6. The Apostle Paul wrote the following in a letter to the church at Colossae. We read, 'For it pleased the Father that in Him [Jesus Christ] all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven', Col. 1. 19, 20.

Reconciliation presupposes the existence of a former state of harmony and friendship. Such a state originally existed involving Adam and Eve with God; their oneness was expressed and enjoyed. Sadly, this couple put an end to this treasured relationship by their sin.

Though the Creator God is 'angry with the wicked every day', Ps. 7. 11, yet He is never unwilling to accomplish reconciliation. But man, whose carnal mind is enmity with God, is naturally averse to this reconciliation. Colossians chapter 1

verse 20 indicates that our Lord took the initiative to reconcile all things to Himself. Jesus' atoning work is full and broad. He made peace through 'the blood of His cross'. This ranks as the most costly and painful instrumentality that the world has ever witnessed in order to bring about the restoration of fellowship.

Psalm 22 describes the four sets of enemies that were present at the cross – Jewish religious leaders, the Jewish commoners, Roman soldiers, and evil spirits (as represented by the bulls of Bashan). They repeatedly and viciously cast invectives against our suffering Lord and seemed not in the least emotionally moved by the sight of His physical anguish. We note that God did not 'meet us halfway'. Our Lord comes to us all the way, and invites us to accept the pardon that He Himself has made possible for us. He laid the foundation for it;

He did everything needed to mend the relationship – it was the ultimate sacrifice!

Colossians chapter 1 verses 21 to 23 describes how the greatness of Jesus' work on the cross **personally** touched the lives of the Colossians. 'And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight'. Using the phrase 'the body of His flesh', although seemingly superfluous, indicates that Paul wanted to emphasize that this happened to a **real man on a real cross**. 'Blameless and above reproach in His sight' is the result of God's work of reconciliation. Taken together, these words show that in Jesus we are pure and cannot even be justly accused of impurity. Note that a breach of that friendship

was overcome by a reconciliation of man to God, and not vice versa. Sin made us enemies; the cross has brought peace. Sin created a gulf between us and God; the cross has bridged it.

During a period of twenty-five years, my wife and I worked on behalf of Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship in hosting in our home various groups of international college students. Initially, we gave a driving tour of the city where they would be studying. Subsequently, we brought them to our house for dinner and fellowship. During these years, only two Islamic graduate students accepted our invitation – L from Indonesia, the country with the most Islamic followers, and F from Iran. A presentation of the gospel was made after dinner. It was not certain in our minds whether or not we had presented the gospel clearly enough to these two girls. My wife, Joanne, recalls questioning F regarding her faith. She replied that she was not a Christian. Several years had passed when, surprisingly, we heard from her. It was in the form of an interesting picture postcard from Iran since she had returned there. This postcard was quite graphic. There was no writing on it. It showed only a deep and wide chasm and a cross lying on its side bridging the separation. It indicated to us that F had understood the message of the gospel and perhaps had received the Lord by faith.

Finally, Romans chapter 5 verse 10 states, 'For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life'. Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father where He daily lives to make intercession for us His people, and to provide assurance that the reconciliation He obtained by His death benefits us into eternity.

Editor's note

All quotations in this article are taken from the NKJ version of the Bible.



Economic parables 8

THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS

By **KEITH KEYSER** Gilbertsville, Pennsylvania, USA

God values people. Much of Luke's material highlights human worth. Luke chapter 14 looks at human value from different angles, including: human indifference to suffering people on the sabbath, vv. 1-6; human ambition and the Master inviting one to greater honour, vv. 7-11; the Lord's instruction to invite those who cannot repay (He values the needy), vv. 12-14; human disinterest in the king's banquet, vv. 15-24; and, finally, the priority of valuing the Lord above all other relationships, vv. 25-35. Chapter 15 similarly emphasizes the value of the sheep, the coin – and especially – the younger son through its famous 'lost' parables. Sadly, this last tale relates the elder brother's devaluing of his sibling and his father in favour of the family estate.

The opening parable of chapter 16 teaches the importance of material stewardship in light of eternity. The Lord's teaching on financial stewardship elicited the ire of some greedy religious people, v. 14; Christ responded, 'You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God', v. 15 NKJV. They imagined that they were serious-minded and righteous in their pursuit of God, but in fact they were violators of the law, which forbids covetousness. Their behaviour consistently put material things ahead of people. But the narrative of the rich man and Lazarus demonstrates that one's attitude toward material things reveals one's true spiritual state, vv. 19-31.¹ The rich man was not condemned because of his wealth, but his attitude towards material things demonstrated his lost condition. Coming after the Lord's condemnation of Pharisaical materialism, vv. 14-17, this passage highlights covetousness' true nature as idolatry, Col. 3. 5.

Love your neighbour

The Israelite law contained numerous provisions for weak and vulnerable groups like widows, orphans, and

strangers. The book of Ruth presents an excellent account of various of these ordinances carried out on behalf of the widows Naomi and Ruth – the latter also being a foreigner. The 613 commandments of the law were synthesized as loving God with the entirety of one's being, and loving one's neighbour as oneself, Matt. 22. 37-40. The rich man seemed too self-absorbed to put these commandments into action. He 'was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day', Luke 16. 19. In his translation, WUEST gives the flavour of his opulent lifestyle, 'he was in the habit of clothing himself in purple and fine linen, living luxuriously and in magnificent style every day'. The note in the *New English Translation* calls him the 'original conspicuous consumer'. Clad in purple like royalty, as well as fine linen, his wardrobe was immaculate. Although scripture uses fine linen as a picture of righteousness, Rev. 19. 8, in this man's case, it was merely superficial self-adornment.

As for the indigent man outside, WUEST offers that he was 'a certain beggar . . . [who] had been flung down carelessly at his gateway and was still there, full of ulcerated sores and eagerly desiring to be fed with those

things which fell from time to time from the table of the rich man', vv. 20, 21. The contrasting picture could not be starker. Whereas the rich man was comfortably feasting in glittering circumstances, the poor man wanted the barest sustenance and life's basic necessities. The phrase used to describe his earnest longing for crumbs is the same term used in chapter 15 verse 16 to express the prodigal's desperate desire for the husks.

Lazarus' body was racked with pain from ulcerated sores, and his clothing was likely of the poorest quality. Someone apparently placed him at this ornate gateway in hopes that the wealthy man would share his largesse; nevertheless, no aid was forthcoming from the affluent homeowner.² Only the neighbourhood curs took any interest in Lazarus, and their ministrations rendered him ceremonially unclean and only augmented his physical distress. In Jewish thought dogs were filthy, and provided an apt description of the unclean Gentiles.³ In short, his outward circumstances were miserable.

Rich man, poor man

The rich man's disinterest in his poor countryman's plight offers a telling indictment of his heart condition. As Proverbs chapter 29 verse 7 explains, 'The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern' NIV 2011. He squandered his resources on himself – not necessarily in flagrant gluttony and perverse appetites, but rather in routine self-indulgence. Yet his means, which could have been such a help to many, were not even used to ameliorate his impoverished neighbour's condition.

Verses 22 and 23 show the sudden reversal of their outward circumstances with the corresponding revelation of their characters, 'And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; and in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom'. The Lord's words must have startled his Jewish audience, who had traditionally thought of material possessions as

an outward sign of God's favour; however, books like Job relate that life is more nuanced. Sometimes, despite their integrity, the righteous are poor; conversely, wealth may be gained illicitly, or at least grossly misused. It is not a safe indicator of divine approval.

The rich man was a member of his culture's elite circle – one of the so-called 'beautiful people'. His name was probably familiar in the halls of wealth and power, yet in our Lord's telling, he was quite anonymous. As STUART remarked, 'The rich man, whose name in life must have been in many mouths, is nameless. How fitting, all will own, was this. Who cares to know the name of the one who lived to himself? Better bury it in oblivion as regards any record on earth'.⁴ On the other hand, Lazarus was a nobody at the societal ladder's bottom rung. But he was known to the Good Shepherd, who calls His own sheep by name, John 10. 3. In fact, the beggar's name hinted at his faith, for Lazarus is a derivative of Eleazar, meaning 'God is my help'.⁵ Faith in Christ is what saves, Acts 16. 31, rather than material poverty or wealth.⁶

The ultimate reversal

The rich man was buried, but the passage merely says that Lazarus died. The former may well have had a resplendent sendoff, befitting someone from the upper class. The poor man may not have even had a proper funeral. The key difference between them lay in what happened



next. 'The minute the beggar stepped through the doorway of death, angels became his pallbearers, and he was carried by them into Abraham's Bosom', said MCGEE.⁷ Conversely, the formerly rich man was revealed to be spiritually bankrupt. He was 'in torments' and could see the blessing that the formerly poor man now enjoyed. He could also remember that man's name. Clearly, he was not ignorant of the identity of the beggar who daily lay at his gateway. He had every opportunity to show Lazarus mercy but was too busy lavishing care on himself. This unmerciful man now craved the mercy of a drop of water from Lazarus. He was still objectifying the poor man: treating him like a servant for gratifying his own needs. He showed no remorse and certainly no repentance.

The word or miraculous signs?

The rich man suddenly became interested in evangelism: specifically, he wanted his five brothers to be spared Hades' torment. But his methodology reflected a darkened mind. Whereas God has set forth the scriptures as the means of giving the knowledge of salvation, Rom. 10. 17, the rich man desired a resurrected representative to bear witness from beyond the grave. He dictated his own terms for the conversion of his brothers. He obviously sought to spare them the consequences of unbelief. There is no mention of true repentance – a change of heart regarding obedience to the Almighty and deliverance from sin's defiling effects.⁸ Sadly, Abraham assured him that if they disregarded God's word, then there was nothing else that would change their minds. Despite the overwhelming evidence of Christ's bodily resurrection, there are multitudes who refuse to submit to the Lord in faith. Some bypass the straightforward, yet powerfully saving, scriptures in a desire for miraculous revelation, as a clever cloak for their unbelief.

What can believers take away from this story?

1. People are of eternal value, regardless of their physical or economic status.
2. Material things are a stewardship

to be used for God's glory; we will give an account for how we employ them.

3. Christians must show mercy to needy, suffering, and lost people.
4. We must preach from the holy scriptures to the lost concerning the resurrected Christ.

Endnotes

- 1 The passage does not claim to be a parable, and multiple teachers affirm that it is historical, not parabolic, e.g., DAVID GOODING, WILLIAM MACDONALD, and RANDAL AMOS. Even those who see it as a parable aver that it is probably based on actual individuals.
- 2 WUEST's translation says that he was 'flung down carelessly', implying that people callously cast him there. Others assert that the Greek can be rendered more neutrally, e.g., 'And at his gate lay a poor man', RSV. Either way, it is clear that the rich man was indifferent to his presence there.
- 3 Isa. 66. 3; Mark 7. 27, 28; Phil. 3. 2.
- 4 C. E. STUART, *From Advent to Advent*, Galaxie Software, 2004, pg. 186.
- 5 One commentator eloquently writes, 'As to Lazarus, the real cause of the welcome which he finds in the world to come is not his poverty, but that which is already pointed out by his name: *God is my help*'. FRÉDÉRIC GODET, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, Vol. 2, Funk & Co., 1881, pg. 178. [Italics original].
- 6 Speaking of the rich man, 'It is very important to see that he was not sent there because he was rich; he ended there because of his unbelief, as the end of the story makes abundantly clear. That unbelief manifested itself in the way he treated his poor neighbour. The Bible told him that he was to love his neighbour as himself. He made not the slightest attempt to do so'. DAVID GOODING, *Windows on Paradise*, Myrtlefield Trust, 1998, pg. 110.
- 7 J. VERNON MCGEE, *Thru the Bible Commentary*, Vol. 4, Thomas Nelson, 1997, pg. 321.
- 8 'His plea for his brothers is a veiled rejection of the will of God: "Moses and the Prophets" are not enough! His brothers need a miraculous tour de force to change. His outlook remains wholly utilitarian: he is concerned with avoidance of "this place of torment" (v. 28) rather than "producing fruit in keeping with repentance" (3. 8). What he wants from religion, for himself and his brothers, is not a religion that changes his actions, but one that spares him from the consequences of his actions. During his life he failed to heed the teachings of "Moses and the Prophets", and in Hades it is too late to heed them. The results of his choices are final, for "a great chasm" (v. 26) prohibits altering his destiny'. JAMES R. EDWARDS, *The Gospel according to Luke*, Eerdmans, 2015, pg. 473.

THE TEACHING IN THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS

Part 4 – The Warnings (2)

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

As was stated in the first article, the writer to the Hebrews weaves various warnings to his readers alongside the important doctrine relating to the person, offices, and work of Christ. Coming to the latter chapters in the Epistle, the writer considers something of the life of the believer in Christ, comparing and contrasting it with what the Hebrew believers had been saved from.

Profiting from chastening, 12. 1-13

It is imperative that the lessons of scripture are not lost. In quoting from the writings of Solomon to his son, the writer reminds his readers of the value of discipline. He wants them to appreciate that the quotations with which they should have been familiar are not merely historical but are a present voice to the generation to which he wrote, v. 5. Indeed, the scriptures are a living word to every generation and events, then as now, are designed to shape the saint. But the warning remains. It is important that the readers are able to distinguish between the Old Testament position, where God's judicial dealings were a sign of His displeasure, and the New Testament situation, where God's discipline is a symbol of His love.

Discipline is a mark of our sonship. Love administers rather than withholds judgement, v. 6. It is also impartial in that every son is scourged, vv. 6, 8. Although chastening is not pleasant, see 'scourgeth', v. 6, it must be endured, v. 7, if we are to learn the lessons He would have us to learn. We must remember that it is out of the hottest furnace of affliction that the purest metal is formed.

Discipline is to develop in us 'the peaceable fruit of righteousness',

v. 11. If a Christ-like character is to be developed within us, it will be through the positive discipline of God. As the wise God, He knows best, and as a loving Father His chastening is for our good. Unlike natural fathers, God, as our heavenly Father, does not relinquish responsibility or care over us as we grow older. Equally, He is not just fitting us for this life but particularly for the life to come. His will is perfect and His desires for us are equally perfect.

However, at the time of discipline, these experiences seem grievous but, if we are prepared to accept the training they are intended for, we can learn much and grow more. But let us also remember the ministry of restoration and support in which fellowship is key. When we, or others, are flagging or feeling faint, let us 'lift up the hands which hang down', v. 12.

Pursuing peace, 12. 14-17

If there are things in the Christian life that might discourage us, then the exhortation of the writer is to press on – pursue peace and holiness, v. 14, and have a mutual care one for another, v. 15.

As an example of one who valued such spiritual things lightly, the writer mentions Esau. Although not all expositors agree, it would appear from the mention of the two points of fornication and profanity that Esau

was marked by both evils. Genesis specifically states that Esau married two wives, both of whom were a cause of great trial and distress to his parents, 26. 34, 35. He also valued his birthright as virtually worthless. As the elder of the two sons, he had the title to the family inheritance, the privileges of the firstborn, and the ability to act as the family priest. For the provision and consumption of one meal, Esau gave all this away. Though he may have realized his folly at a later stage, he showed no genuine repentance for his deeds. The construction of the DARBY translation, which puts the phrase, 'for he found no place for repentance', v. 17, in parenthesis, helps us to appreciate that what Esau sought with tears was not repentance but the blessing he had so foolishly given away. The danger for these Hebrews is that they too might value lightly that which is of such great spiritual import and that they might return to the empty ritual of Judaism. Although we may not be drawn back to Judaism, it is clear from a cursory glance at many Christian groups that ritual and liturgy have their appeal. The tangible and the visually grand attract and fascinate many, drawing them away from the simplicity that is in Christ and the biblical pattern of gathering.

Promoting reverence, 12. 25-29

Building on the failure of Esau and with such a clear testimony in this Epistle to the superiority of the new covenant and the basis upon which it is founded, how could certain Jews refuse to hear the voice of God speaking so clearly? In such a situation, the writer warns that there is no escape from the judgement of God, v. 25. The only means of escape and salvation, once rejected, leaves the rejecter exposed to the eternal punishment of God. It must be remembered that God has not changed, v. 29. He is still a consuming fire. The voice that shook the earth at Sinai will shake it again, v. 26.

Are we linked with the unshakeable kingdom through grace, vv. 27, 28? Are we serving God acceptably with reverence and godly fear? Or are we part of that which, having been

shaken for a second time, will pass away? There is no middle way. There is no middle ground. These Hebrews are exhorted to make their calling and election sure and avoid the message of those who had hardened their heart.

Protecting purity and contentment, 13. 1-6

How might the believer serve God acceptably?

We start by what we do to fellow saints. The exhortation is to allow brotherly love to continue, v. 1. Love in our hearts is an essential manifestation of our genuine Christianity, something that should be nurtured and continued.

We follow that with hospitality to strangers, v. 2. Here is an expression of love to those visiting an area where they are largely unknown. The entertaining of angels reminds us of the ministry of Abraham in Genesis chapter 18, which was volunteered, personal, and generous.

As well as caring for those strangers, we should also express our sympathy to those suffering imprisonment for the name and testimony of Christ, v. 3. The degree of sympathy suggested is that we sympathize ‘as bound with them’, that is, taking their case to heart.



Our responsibility in verse 4 is moral – to uphold marriage, holding it in honour. By avoiding fornication, it is honoured by those who are unmarried. By not indulging in adultery, we do not defile marriage once it is entered into.

Finally, the writer says, do not allow the love of money to mar your fellowship with God as well as with one another, v. 5. Covetousness can be an all-consuming attitude which will not bring satisfaction but will bring spiritual disaster. We need to generate a sense of contentment with those things that God has given us.

These are abiding practical truths for all the people of God!

Practising obedience, 13. 7-17

This chapter mentions our responsibility to shepherds. These shepherds were characterized by their ability to teach and expound the scriptures, ‘who have spoken unto you the word of God’, v. 7. They were faithful men, ‘whose faith follow’. The word has the idea of imitating – their lives were worthy of the closest scrutiny in terms of their faithfulness. Their stance had not changed and their faithfulness had not wavered. In that sense, these leaders were pointers to the person of the Lord Jesus who is unchanging, ever the same, v. 8.

The shepherd has responsibilities to fulfil, ‘they watch for your souls’, v. 17. The picture is of one who is wakeful, concerned for a critical case in a situation where danger is known to exist. Their desire, as faithful shepherds, is to be able to give account with joy. To do so, these shepherds wish to see that progress is achieved and the individual is profited for eternity!

There was a real danger to these Hebrews. Rather than progressing, they were wavering under the ceaseless pressure of those who followed the archaic ritualism that they had left. It offered and emphasized externalism through ceremonies and observances. The true faith in Christ is not concerned with the external but the internal –

the establishment of the heart. Yet that does not impoverish the believer. Rather, says the writer, we Christians ‘have an altar’, v. 10. It is not a material altar but Christ. As VINE puts it, ‘What the material altar was to the Israelites Christ Himself is to believers’.¹ We have something better than, superior to, that enjoyed by the Jew.

What, then, should be our response to this religious system? ‘Let us go forth therefore unto him’, v. 13. Salvation is impossible within the camp of Judaism. These Hebrews must make the irrevocable step of leaving their systems and ceremonies behind and accept the reproach of Christ. The writer would emphasize that we are to go forth ‘unto him’. Our citizenship is in heaven and therefore we have no continuing city here, v. 14. We are earnestly seeking and moulding our lives by the hope of the city that is coming.

Our activity is also different, ‘By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually’, v. 15. We note that the nature of the sacrifice is ‘praise’ or giving thanks to His name. The extent of the sacrifice is ‘continually’ or in every circumstance. The object of the sacrifice is ‘God’. The means of our sacrifice is ‘the fruit of our lips’, v. 15, and ‘to do good and to communicate’, v. 16, and submission, v. 17. If the first is from our hearts through our lips, the second and third are from our heart through our lives.

We live in days when ‘the poison of asps is under . . . [the] lips’, Rom. 3. 13, when ‘there is none that doeth good’, v. 12, and when insubjection and disobedience characterize many. It is in that context that the believer is enjoined to live differently. May we allow God to shape our lives that we might be ‘perfect in every good work to do his will’, and that He might work in us ‘that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever’, v. 21.

Endnote

¹ W. E. VINE, *The Epistle to the Hebrews – Christ All Excelling*, Oliphants, 1958.

The Battle for the Mind

Part 1 A SOUND MIND

By **MARK LACEY** Bath, England

'For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind', 2 Tim. 1. 7

We are all now very familiar with the concept of a pandemic. The effects of 2020 and 2021, in a physical sense, were evident for all to see. However, since that time, another more hidden pandemic has been on the rise in relation to the mental health of our nation. Already fragile prior to 2020, the challenges associated with this have only increased since. There are so many things that battle for our minds. As well as the manifold entertainments that are on offer in our world, the pressure of work, the financial challenges of making ends meet, concern for family members, pressure from friends (particularly amongst the young), media images of what makes someone successful or beautiful, the list is endless. Mercifully, our Bible offers much help in relation to the mind. This short series of three studies will look at intensely personal and practical matters, including the mind that should exist between God's people. A sound mind. A renewed mind. One mind.

The common Greek word that we find for the 'mind' in our New Testament is *nous*, defined by W. E. VINE as 'the seat of reflective consciousness, comprising the faculties of perception and understanding, and those of feeling, judging and determining'.¹ It is true that the battle for the mind is one of Satan's most potent weapons in modern society, in keeping the unbeliever from Christ, and affecting the testimony of those who love Him. We say, categorically, that the mind of the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ is in no way exempt from the challenges faced by the world. In fact, we might say that with the additional challenges of living a life that is worthy of the Lord – dealing with relationships in the local assembly of the Lord's people; supporting the burdens of others; the trial of some

past or besetting sin; sacrificial giving; managing the time pressure of activities and meetings – on top of everything else, the pressures are even more real for the believer.

It seems that some move through these pressures untouched. There are certainly those who confidently assert that the likes of panic attacks, anxiety, stress, and depression are not for the believer. They insinuate that anyone passing through such must be experiencing some degree of spiritual deficiency. This will only serve to exacerbate the feelings that already exist for such believers and cause significant damage. It must be said that such dismissive responses can only be from those who have not walked this way before, and they are certainly not bearing 'one another's burdens', Gal. 6. 2. It would surely be better to listen and love, rather than judge and present as having all the answers.

Challenging statistics

The numbers are perhaps difficult to be certain about, but there is no doubt that there is compelling evidence that this is a significant challenge to our world and to the church. A simple online search will reveal many more statistics than can be provided here – the following is just a sample. One in four people in England will experience mental health issues each year. Mental illness is the largest single source of burden of disease in the UK. The total cost of mental ill health in England is estimated at over £100 billion per year. Mental health conditions increased from seventeen percent in 2021 to twenty-six percent among seventeen to nineteen-year-olds, in 2022. Fifty-eight percent of employees experience anxiety.

It is difficult to find reliable statistics in relation to Christians in this

context. However, back in 2018 I jotted down some numbers that I came across in a Christian magazine from the United States. It suggested that approximately three out of four church leaders said that they knew someone diagnosed with clinical depression. More than half (fifty-seven percent) said they knew at least three people who fell into that category. Almost six in ten (fifty-nine percent) said they had counselled at least one person who was eventually diagnosed with an acute mental illness. Almost a quarter indicated they had battled a mental illness of some kind on a personal level. However, nearly half (forty-nine percent) said they rarely, or never, spoke or preached on the subject to their congregations.

Challenging solutions

In terms of facing these challenges, there are many avenues available to find help. This may involve medical and psychological intervention of one kind or another. Some would dismiss these options as unnecessary for a believer, but that is likely to be to the detriment of any who are suffering, perhaps seriously so. There are many believers who have undoubtedly benefitted from such support and intervention, including ongoing medication. Counselling can also be very helpful, although a degree of care is necessary. Some counsellors would make 'faith' a part of the problem – they may focus on attributing negative self-worth to the place that sin takes in our thinking. Careful research should enable the identification of a suitably qualified Christian counsellor, or at least one who will be sympathetic towards our faith in Christ, seeing it as part of the answer, rather than the problem. Specialist mental health counselling is not something that assembly elders, or other believers, necessarily have the skills and qualifications for.

Challenging scriptures

Whilst we have dismissed the view that these kinds of challenges of the mind must simply be down to some sort of spiritual deficiency, we say with utter sincerity that the word of God has to be at the centre of all of our thinking. When thinking of the trial of faith that his readers were

experiencing, Peter urged them to protect themselves, ‘gird up the loins of your mind’, 1 Pet. 1. 13. Ultimately, we can only do this by being people of the word, reading it, taking it into our minds. Thankfully, the scriptures have a great deal to say about the mind that will be of significant blessing to us all. If it is true, as stated above, that the emotional, mental, and spiritual pressures are harder for the believer than for others, it is certainly true that with the scriptures and the Lord, our resources are greater than any that the world can offer. Hallelujah! More than that, our eternal prospect is of total freedom from the struggles of the mind, ‘God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes’, Rev. 21. 4.

Timothy was likely a middle-aged man, in the thick of the battle in all sorts of ways. He was a great man of God, but there is sufficient evidence to suggest that he was a man who experienced a degree of fear and anxiety (it is possible to experience both). The intensity of the persecution he faced from inside and outside the assembly was likely as fierce as has ever been known in the history of



the church – as Paul said, ‘our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears’, 2 Cor. 7. 5.

DR. MARTYN LLOYD-JONES wrote, ‘Timothy, obviously, was a naturally nervous person, but equally he was a person given to depression. There are certain people who are more prone to depression in a natural sense than others . . . though we are converted and regenerated, our fundamental personality is not changed . . . the person who is more given to depression than another person before conversion will still have to fight that after conversion’.²

Yet, praise God, Paul shows him another way. The context of 2 Timothy chapter 1 verse 7 is such that he wants Timothy to pick up the baton and press on, exercising that gift that God has given to him. It is possible for Timothy, when at his lowest, to know the spirit of power (when he feels weak), love (when others hate), and of a sound mind (when the mind can become so confused and downcast). The English expression ‘a sound mind’ is one word in the Greek, *sōphronismos*, and has to do with self-control, moderation, and an admonition or calling to a soundness of mind; also rendered ‘discipline’.³ He needs, as do all the people of God, to hear the word of God and set his mind on those things that are of value for eternity, not just for time. ‘Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth’, Col. 3. 2 NKJV.

There is much that would cause us to fear, but we need not be afraid. We have power, and we have love that we can lay hold of; in times of challenge to the mind, these are two of the things we stand most in need of. Can we lay hold of this gift of God?

Challenging examples

We discover time and again that Timothy was not alone – others went on a similar journey.

Job: ‘My soul is weary of my life; I will leave my complaint upon myself; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul’, Job 10. 1.

David: ‘My heart is sore pained within me: and the terrors of death

are fallen upon me. Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me, and horror hath overwhelmed me’, Ps. 55. 4, 5.

Elijah: ‘He requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life’, 1 Kgs. 19. 4.

Jonah: He wished in himself to die, and said, ‘It is better for me to die than to live’, Jonah 4. 8.

We do well to remember the one who was exhorting Timothy, the Apostle Paul. It is easy to forget that he was the one who spoke of being ‘beside ourselves’ and who ‘despaired even of life’, 2 Cor. 5. 13; 1. 8. A fresh reading of 2 Corinthians will enable any to see that this was a time of great pressure for the apostle, that he found hard to bear. The great encouragement, nonetheless, is that he was able to lay hold of truth that benefits us too, ‘My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me’, 2 Cor. 12. 9.

Paul had asked the Lord to remove his ‘thorn in the flesh’ – but that was not His intention, v. 7. Rather, He would show Him more grace and strength. It is when our mind is at its most troubled and confused that we learn the most about ourselves and, more importantly, about the God who promises us the spirit ‘of power, and of love, and of a sound mind’. It is a blessing to recognize that it is only when we are deeply conscious of our weakness, when we are at our weakest, that the strength of Christ is seen at its fullest and most complete. What an encouragement to our minds and souls to be able to cast ‘all your care upon him; for he careth for you’, 1 Pet. 5. 7.

‘In the multitude of my anxieties within me, Your comforts delight my soul’, Ps. 94. 19 NKJV.

Endnotes

- 1 W. E. VINE, *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*, Nelson.
- 2 MARTYN LLOYD-JONES, *Spiritual Depression, Its Causes and Cure*, Banner of Truth.
- 3 W. E. VINE, *op. cit.*

NEHEMIAH

Part 1 **A man of priority**

By **TOM MERRIMAN** Tenby, Wales

Wider context and application

Nehemiah is the sixteenth of the seventeen Old Testament history books, one of three that documents events following Israel's Babylonian exile.¹ God had called the nation to be a 'kingdom of priests', Exod. 19. 6; His desire was for it to be known that He was their God, and they His people, Lev. 26. 12. As time passed, there were periods when the nation followed the Lord, but the general trend was of decline in spiritual matters. There was division and departure from the Lord. His people adopted the practices and false gods of the surrounding nations. Instead of bringing honour to His name, they were 'dragging it through the mud' and were a reproach. Despite the warnings of the prophets of the Lord, they were taken into exile. However, God purposed this with a view to their recovery and return to the land. Nehemiah records the return of a third group of captives from exile.²

The opening expression sets the scene, 'The words of Nehemiah ["consolation/comfort of Jehovah"] the son of Hachaliah ["darkness of Jehovah"]'. Against the dark background of the Lord's hand of discipline upon His people, under Nehemiah's leadership the Lord brings restoration.³

Here we might see an application to believers of the present dispensation, whom Peter identifies as 'a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people'. God's desire is that we should live for the honour of His name - 'that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light', 1 Pet. 2. 9 NKJV. At times, however, it will be necessary for our Father to discipline us, His sons. With Proverbs chapter 3 verses

11 and 12 in mind, the writer to the Hebrews exhorts, 'My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth', 12. 5, 6. His chastening, grievous as it may be to experience, is with a view to spiritual refinement. When we respond to Him positively, 'afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness', v. 11.

His calendar, v. 1

The time note, 'it came to pass in the month Chisleu', is according to the Hebrew calendar. This is significant because the Persians had their own. It indicates that, despite any comforts Nehemiah enjoyed connected with his secular role in the palace as the king's cupbearer, v. 11, he had not forgotten the Lord, nor the calendar of the Lord's people. The following expression, 'in the twentieth year [of Artaxerxes the king]', however, indicates that he was also in touch with circumstances around him.

This might serve as a timely reminder to God's people today to try, wherever possible, to prioritize and plan our lives around the things of God. There are many activities and comforts the world offers that could occupy our lives, but we are exhorted to 'be not conformed to this world: but be . . . transformed by the renewing of . . . [our] mind', Rom. 12. 2. As far as our own calendars are concerned, we would do well to follow the pattern of the early church by prioritizing the same activities. Having received the word, been baptized, and added to the company of believers, they 'continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers', Acts 2. 42.

His brethren, v. 2

Upon the arrival of certain men from Judah, Nehemiah was unashamed to be associated with them and enquired after the welfare of the people of God, and for the place associated with God's name, Jerusalem. Amongst them was Hanani, whom he identified as 'one of my brethren'. In this respect, he might be compared with Moses, who, despite his own position in Pharaoh's household, 'went out unto his brethren' and saw their burdens, and witnessing the smiting of a Hebrew, recognized him also as 'one of his brethren',⁴ Exod. 2. 11. Like Moses, Nehemiah would soon be leaving the comfort of the palace, 'Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season', Heb. 11. 25. Is this not reminiscent of the stoop of another? 'Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich', 2 Cor. 8. 9. He who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, now crowned with glory and honour, 'is not ashamed to call . . . [us] brethren', Heb. 2. 11!

Nehemiah's role at this moment was not wrong or sinful in itself. Esther, who was queen to the Gentile king, Ahasuerus, when the lives of her nation were under threat, was asked by her uncle, Mordecai, 'who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?' Esther 4. 14. In other words, God had brought about the circumstances, and this was her moment to act. There are similarities with Nehemiah's situation; he had been brought to this position for such a time. The arrival of his brother from Jerusalem, together with certain men of Judah, was no coincidence. God was using them to bring to Nehemiah's attention the plight of his fellows, hundreds of miles away in Jerusalem, that comfort might be brought to them.

Paul advised the believers at Corinth to put into action their concern for the poor saints, hundreds of miles away in Jerusalem, exhorting them

to 'perform the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to will, so there may be a performance also out of that which ye have', 2 Cor. 8. 11. Likewise, let us be sensitive to the needs of our brethren near and far. And, following our Lord's example, wherever our God has made it possible for us to help, let us do so.

The city, v. 3

The conditions reported to Nehemiah were bleak indeed. 'The remnant that are left of the captivity . . . are in great affliction and reproach'. No wonder, for whilst the temple had been rebuilt, it was surrounded by ruins. The wall, symbolic of the city's separation, was broken down, and the gates, connected with its security, were burned with fire. A few months later Nehemiah would assess the site, moving in and around the rubble of the city walls at will – it was an object of contempt, Neh. 2. 13-15. The reason had been the departure of a previous generation from God's ways and the resulting discipline of God.



However, there is encouragement to be found in Nehemiah's record. Few though there were, the wall would soon be 'joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work', 4. 6. A little later, the wall would be complete, and even the enemies of God's people 'perceived that this work was wrought of our God', 6. 16.

Although this may not reflect the international situation of God's testimony, sadly, 'those that are left', is not an unfamiliar term used in some places today. Let us take courage from the words of Jonathan to his armourbearer, 'there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few', and from the experience of Gideon, whose army against the Midianites was whittled down to three hundred – that it might be known that the victory was of God.⁵ We are expected, and privileged, to labour together in God's work, 1 Cor. 3. 9, but 'except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it'; 'except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain', Ps. 127. 1.

His concern, v. 4

Nehemiah's response to the unhappy news reveals his burden of heart for the people of God and for the place where He had set His name. 'I sat down and wept' describes the spontaneous language of sorrow. His sincerity is plain, for He 'mourned certain days, and fasted', entering into the affliction of his brethren in Jerusalem and indicating that their plight mattered more to him than food. Then he made supplication, praying 'before the God of heaven' – an appropriate response to his deep concern.

Perhaps Nehemiah had in mind the prayer of Solomon, who 'spread forth his hands toward heaven', 1 Kgs. 8. 22. Solomon asked the Lord to 'hear thou in heaven' the prayer of His people when, in response to His chastening, they returned to Him. Solomon called on God to 'maintain their cause . . . and forgive . . . and give them compassion . . . that thine eyes may be open unto the supplication of thy servant, and unto the supplication of thy people Israel,

to hearken unto them in all that they call for unto thee', vv. 49-52.⁶ Soon, we will find that Nehemiah, a man of priorities, was fitted to undertake a task that would bring encouragement to God's people, and bring dignity to the place associated with His name.

Our Lord's concern for His people and for the city of Jerusalem was also expressed in tears, John 11. 33-36; Luke 19. 41-44. Furthermore, the afflictions He experienced in the flesh enable Him to 'be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God' and He has both made 'reconciliation for the sins of the people' and is able to 'succour them that are tempted', Heb. 2. 17, 18.

How do we prioritize our time? What importance do we place on the gatherings of God's assembly? How much do we love our brethren? Are we concerned when distressing news about the people of God and the assemblies of His people comes our way? How do we respond? Nehemiah sets a good example for us to follow in his priorities and in his response – let us take it to the Lord in prayer.

An aspiration like Nehemiah's is expressed in Psalm 137 verses 5 and 6, 'If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy'. May we have a similar burden for the testimony of our God.

Endnotes

- 1 The others are Ezra and Esther. There are seventeen books of prophecy and the last three, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, are also post-exilic.
- 2 The first was under Zerubbabel's leadership, Ezra chh. 1-6, the second under Ezra's leadership, Ezra chh. 7-10.
- 3 See COLIN LACEY's introduction to Nehemiah in *What the Bible Teaches, Ezra Nehemiah Esther*, John Ritchie Ltd, pg. 207.
- 4 That Hanani alone is designated in this way probably identifies him as a close relation, perhaps even a brother in the flesh to Nehemiah.
- 5 1 Sam. 14. 6; Judg. 7.
- 6 The expression 'hear thou . . . in heaven' occurs eight times in 1 Kings chapter 8.

John the Baptist Part 4

Doubt and death

By **COLIN LACEY** Bath, England

The time has come to reach the end of our journey with the greatest of all the prophets. It has been a privilege to follow John from his mother's womb and now, sadly, to his decease. As we leave him, I am sure, like me, you look forward to spending eternity with him. What a story he will have to tell us! We might well borrow an expression from the New Testament and say of him, 'Of whom the world was not worthy', Heb. 11. 38.

I suspect, as we move on, that many of us will have been left with seemingly unanswerable questions about him; not least of all, why did a man of his spiritual standing have doubts as to whether Christ was the Messiah or not? On one occasion, he had said of Him, 'And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God', John 1. 34; yet, in apparent contradiction of this statement of faith, he went on to ask of Jesus, 'Art thou he that should come? or look we for another?' Luke 7. 19. Also, when speaking of Jesus, he once said, 'I knew him not', John 1. 31. Perhaps this is where our judgement can err and lead us astray. The Greek word used for 'know' means 'to know fully'. No person, not even John the Baptist, could claim to know everything there was to know about Christ. He surpasses our knowledge and understanding. Indeed, He said of



Himself, 'no man knoweth [fully] the Son, but the Father', Matt. 11. 27.

Nevertheless, before we are tempted to be critical of John and dismiss him as being yet another failed servant of the Lord, I suggest that we owe it to him to stop and think again. It must be noted that Jesus did not censure him for his questioning; indeed, quite the contrary. He was full of praise for his faithful testimony.

We must not forget that John was in prison at this time and his movements were greatly restricted. Lengthy confinement can play havoc with a man's mind. He only heard of Christ's activity through his own disciples. They reported on what Jesus was doing and, at times, this did not seem to align with his own expectations of the Messiah. Indeed, there did not seem to be any immediate prospect of the setting up of the kingdom of God on earth, which John had preached about and longed for. Even the response of Jesus to his doubts was unexpected. He answered by performing many miracles of healing. Luke tells us that He 'cured many of their infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits; and unto many that were blind he gave sight', Luke 7. 21. Remarkably, we learn that even the dead were raised! Clearly, John was convinced by what he heard of Christ's display of power and compassion and, therefore, his doubts became a thing of the past. We never read that he questioned Jesus again.

Doubts can arise from unworthy sources, e.g., from our unbelief, our

disobedience, or our impatience. However, they can spring from our genuine struggle to find answers to perplexing problems that face us. We must not be uncomfortable or ashamed to acknowledge our 'honest doubts'. Fitting faith alongside the harsh realities of life is often a real challenge. Some of the most spiritual characters in the scriptures experienced them, e.g., Job, Gideon, Jeremiah, Habakkuk, and the father of a boy with a dumb spirit. We read of the latter that he 'cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief', Mark 9. 24. He expressed his faith, but he wanted it strengthened! It has been said, 'Faith is something we grow into, whereas doubt is something we grow out of'.¹ We must accept that all that perplexes us will not be answered in this life; there is an eternity beyond! Nevertheless, it is important that we do not get into the habit of viewing doubt, however 'honest' it is, as something which is desirable in the life of a Christian. It is not the Lord's desire that it should mark the life of believers.

So, farewell John! I confess that I can't fully understand why God allowed you to die in such distressing circumstances, but I rest in the knowledge that His way is always best. My eyes are dimmed with tears as I think of you being beheaded, alone in your darkened prison cell, at the whim of the wicked Herodias, who held a grudge against you for condemning her unlawful marriage to Herod. Indeed, my heart breaks as I see your head placed on a platter and given to a dancing girl, who then gives it to her mother. It is some comfort to know that it is left to your beloved disciples to take up the remains of your mutilated body and carry it out for burial.

They knew what a great loss you were to the nation and how much you meant to the Lord; therefore, their immediate reaction was to go and tell Him of your death. It is no surprise that His response was to seek out a deserted place so that He could be by Himself, 'When Jesus heard of it, he departed thence by ship into a desert place apart', Matt. 14. 13.

Endnote

¹ Originator unknown.



Edited by
ANDREW DUTTON

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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.

Editor's Introduction

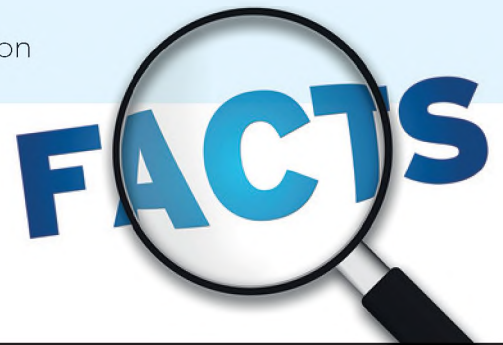
Welcome to the May issue of YPS.

I've really enjoyed reading the articles in this issue. Richard Smith looks at the reign of Jehoshaphat and notes some important lessons that will help us live consistent lives for God.

There is a new series on 'Christian Basics'. If you are a new believer in the Lord Jesus, this is to introduce some of the important aspects of Christian living. For those of us who have been saved longer, these topics will serve as a good reminder. The first article deals with daily Bible reading.

I hope you enjoy reading the magazine and trust that the articles will be a blessing to you.

Andrew Dutton

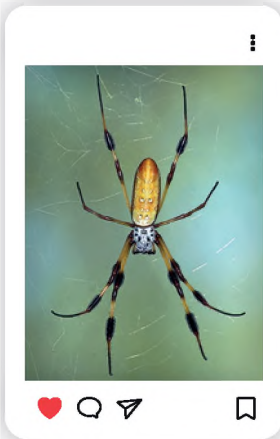


Fascinating Facts – Evidence from nature of a Creator's touch

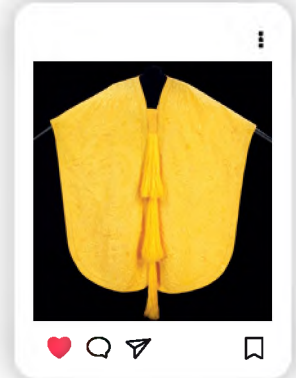
PHIL ARMSTRONG, LIVERPOOL, ENGLAND

The spider with golden silk

Golden orb-weaver spiders live in Southern and East Africa, and are among the largest spiders in the world with a massive leg span of around twenty centimetres. The reason for its name is that God has given it the ability to make a beautiful, golden-coloured silk that it spins to make its webs. Interestingly, one of the chemicals in the silk that makes it golden is a carotenoid, the same chemical found in carrots. How the spider spins its intricate web is another story, but when it is formed, the web itself is incredibly strong. Golden orb-weaver webs can stop a bee mid-flight at twenty miles per hour and can also trap small birds. Tanzanian fishermen even use the webs for fishing!



the silk tubes until they rejoin. Every centimetre of nerve guide tube needs ten metres of silk to make it. God has given this awesome material as a gift to the golden orb-weaver spider and has given us humans the ability to investigate and use it for our pleasure and benefit. It really is a mark of His wonderful, creative power.



The golden orb-weaver spider would be shocked to know that her silk has been used for two very different projects. The first was by Peers and Godley, who collected the golden silk from over a million spiders and wove it into a piece of clothing – a golden cape. To get all the silk that they needed, a team of up to eighty people collected spiders every day, then 'milked' them for their silk for around half an hour before returning them, unharmed, to the wild. It took several years to complete this cape, which was said to be the world's rarest piece of cloth. It was first put on display at the American Museum of Natural History in New York, and then at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

The second, and totally unrelated use of golden orb-weaver silk, is to help regrow damaged nerves, such as in patients who have suffered a serious accident. A group of scientists in Vienna has teamed up with the University of Oxford to make 'nerve guides'. These are special tubes, with the sides made from the silk produced by silkworms, and the inside filled with dragline silk from our golden orb-weaver spiders. The ends of damaged nerves can grow through

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How was it made? Golden spider silk
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Soul-Searching Scriptures

BY CRAIG MUNRO, GLENCRAIG, SCOTLAND

'Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest', Prov. 6. 6-8.

In 1993 my grandfather, Kenneth Munro, suddenly died when I was away studying at university. He had been a spiritual mentor to me and a huge influence in my life. It was at this time, aged 21, that I told my father, Gordon Munro, of my desire to preach the gospel on a full-time basis. My father was incredibly important to me. He was a father, leader, guide, overseer and ruler to me. Even though I knew he had lymphatic cancer, I thought he would live

on; I believed the Lord had shown me this. He was very able in the scriptures. He lived and served in our community, preached the word, took the local funerals, and had a shepherd heart. I had a few series of gospel meetings with my father, and he really connected with people. Seventy-five of the neighbours in the street where he lived attended the last series of tent meetings which he had in his own garden with brother Jack Hay. This has never been repeated.

When he died, the bottom fell out of my world. Not only had I lost my dad, but my 'big plan' was also in tatters. The assembly was small and there were, at that time, few to teach and preach. On the day of his funeral there were hundreds of mourners, and many came back to the house afterwards. I did not want to speak to anyone, and I went to my room distraught. I could not read the Bible as I was too grief stricken, but the Bible fell open on the bed. It landed on Proverbs chapter 6. Verses 6 to 8 were a direct word from the Lord to me. The ants did

not have a ruler, overseer or guide either, but they carried on working. The Lord was telling me clearly that there was work to do in the assembly and in our community; I had a work to do from the Lord and I had better get on with it! This scripture inspired me to knuckle down and do a simple work for the Lord in the assembly.

My wife and I raised our family of three children, and although there were difficult days we have been blessed and looking back we can say 'hitherto hath the Lord helped us', 1 Sam 7. 12.

In the course of time, I did leave my secular employment to preach the gospel, but it was many years after this. The assembly had grown significantly, and many teachers had been raised up allowing us to leave from time to time to have meetings elsewhere. We were taught that 'He shall direct thy paths' even if it is not the path we initially wanted to tread, Prov. 3. 6. God's ways are best.

Christian Basics – Daily Bible Reading

BY ANDREW DUTTON, NORWICH, ENGLAND

'Give attendance to reading', 1 Tim. 4. 13.

The Christian life is a different life. New believers in the Lord Jesus will find that their daily routine will need to change to accommodate fresh priorities as they seek to follow Christ. Others may have been saved for a longer period but recognize that there are still things in life to change. This series of articles will look at 'Christian Basics' and offer advice on how to get started. Our first topic is daily Bible reading.

Daily reading of the Bible is essential for Christians – the word of God is our spiritual food! David, in Psalm 19, understood how the word of God benefits the people of God. He said that the 'law of the Lord is perfect', v. 7, and that it provides refreshment to the soul; the Christian needs refreshment every day to provide strength in an ungodly world. He declared that the 'statutes of the Lord are right', v. 8, and this brings joy to the heart; the Christian needs the joy that is based on the righteous ways of God revealed in His word. David understood that the 'commandment of the Lord is pure', v. 8, bringing clarity of vision; the Christian needs clear direction in relation to the Lord's will and His ways to please the Lord.

Whilst the word of God is essential to Christian living, there are so many pressures on time that make daily reading difficult. Some of those pressures are genuine priorities, such as school, college or university work, family commitments, or helping others. Other calls on time may be less necessary, but an enjoyable part of life.

If daily reading is not part of your schedule, decide to make the change; the following hints may help:

- Commit prayerfully to God to be serious about daily Bible reading and ask for His help in making the necessary changes to your routine.
- Allocate a time that works for you, ideally when you are least likely to be distracted.
- Start small. I have often recommended the daily readings in the next column to those beginning to read, to cover a two-week period. After this, you could read a chapter each day of one of the Gospels, then move to Acts, followed by the Epistles.
- Build up to a goal to read the whole Bible systematically. There are multiple plans and apps available to read the Bible in a year, but decide on a pace that is manageable.¹ Covering the Bible in eighteen months or two years is still of great benefit.

- Accompany reading with prayer; ask the Lord to help and bless His word before reading; after reading, 'pray through' what you have read – is there something that you have read that helps you to appreciate God and His greatness, or something that challenges you?
- Don't be discouraged if you miss a day or find some passages difficult. Keep going!
- Make a note of verses that stand out to you, or those you want to come back to in order to understand better.
- Discuss what you are reading with other Christians, and ask for help on difficult passages.

Discovering the Lord Jesus - Fourteen chapters which you can get through in two weeks if you read a chapter every day:

Luke 2	The Lord Jesus is born
Mark 2	The Lord Jesus begins to work
Matthew 9	The Lord Jesus teaches and heals people
Luke 6	The Lord Jesus teaches and heals people
Luke 15	The Lord Jesus tells some stories
Matthew 25	The Lord Jesus teaches about His kingdom
John 3	The Lord Jesus talks to a ruler
John 4	The Lord Jesus talks to a woman
John 14	The Lord Jesus talks to His friends
John 17	The Lord Jesus talks to His Father
Matthew 26	The Lord Jesus is betrayed
Matthew 27	The Lord Jesus dies
John 20	The Lord Jesus rises from the dead
Luke 24	The Lord Jesus returns to heaven

¹ Most plans contain two Old Testament readings and a New Testament reading each day. This is beneficial because it means that there are no long periods of time without reading the New Testament. I like Choice Gleanings, available as a hard copy calendar and online: <http://gospelfolio.com/category/choice-gleanings/>. There are also apps available to support reading digitally.

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

BY RICHARD SMITH, BRIDGE OF WEIR, SCOTLAND



Jehoshaphat (2 Chronicles chapters 17 to 21)

So far, we have investigated the lives of the first three kings after Solomon. We have applied the test of the 'Triangle of Convictions':

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

In the kings so far we have seen that:

1. Rehoboam lacked any **conviction**.
2. Abijah had conviction but no **courage**.
3. Asa had courage but couldn't handle **correction**.

What about Jehoshaphat? He lacked **consistency**.

Jerusalem must have been an amazing place to live with the wealth of the king's family and the abundant worship of God. What a blessing to be born into a godly family! I will be forever grateful for parents who took the Bible and the church seriously, allowing me to build my own convictions and relationship with the Lord. Sadly, Jehoshaphat saw his father's deterioration into bitterness and rejection of the word of God, and he made sure he wouldn't do the same.

At thirty-five, Jehoshaphat became king. From 2 Chronicles chapter 17 verse 1, a key word of his reign is '**strength**'.

- He strengthened Judah against Israel militarily (the people of God), vv. 1-3.
- He sought the God of his father and walked in His commandments (the word of God), vv. 3, 4.
- He took the high places away, forcing the people of Jerusalem to worship (the house of God), v. 6.

Therefore the Lord blessed Jehoshaphat and the people brought him tribute, v. 5.

Jehoshaphat determined that God's word would be known throughout Judah. He sent teachers out for that purpose, vv. 7-9. They didn't go with their own ideas, they had 'the book of the law of the Lord', v. 9. **It is important that all our teaching and practice is supported by the word of God.** Anyone that claims otherwise should not be trusted.

The Lord blessed Jehoshaphat further, v. 10; Judah experienced peace. His enemies brought tribute. Jehoshaphat became incredibly wealthy, with outstanding military power and a well-defended people. What could possibly go wrong?

Ahab was the king of Israel whom Jehoshaphat had strengthened himself against. Ahab did more to provoke the Lord than any king before him, 1 Kgs. 16. 33. Instead of keeping away, Jehoshaphat entered a marriage alliance with Ahab. From relying on the Lord to prosper him, his son married Ahab's daughter and the two kings became family and friends. 2 Chronicles chapter 18 demonstrates the spiritual inequality between them. Instead

of fleeing when he had the opportunity, Jehoshaphat accepted Ahab's invitation to go to war together and said, 'I am as you are, my people as your people. We will be with you in the war', v. 3 ESV. Jehoshaphat's folly nearly caused his death, v. 31. When he cried out the Lord helped him and, unlike Ahab, he escaped with his life. Friendship with the ungodly will never improve us or draw us closer to the Lord; we must be careful who our friends are. Safely home, he was visited by Jehu the son of Hanani the seer. Jehu must have been anxious. His father criticized Asa and ended up in prison! Jehu had similar news for Jehoshaphat. How would Jehoshaphat react?

2 Chronicles chapter 19:

- He brought the people back to the Lord, v. 4. He appointed judges to apply the law of the Lord, vv. 5-7.
- He acknowledged the absolute justice of God, v. 7.
- He appointed Levites and priests to deal with hard cases, vv. 8-11.

Jehoshaphat determined not to repeat his father's mistakes. He accepted criticism and adjusted his own behaviour. What an example!

Sadly, his failure caused the peace he had enjoyed to break, and he came under enemy attack in 2 Chronicles chapter 20. His response? He set his face to seek the Lord, v. 3; Judah sought help from the Lord, v. 4. Jehoshaphat acknowledged God's sovereignty, his past behaviour with Judah, and outlined the need he now faced. Our prayers should acknowledge God's person, His past help, and include specific requests. The answer was that 'the Lord will be with you', v. 17. He was! The battle was a complete victory and Jehoshaphat expressed sincere thanks, v. 21.

Jehoshaphat's reign was hugely successful. He was faithful to the Lord and was mightily blessed by Him.

'Those who honor me I will honor', 1 Sam. 2. 30 ESV.

2 Chronicles chapter 20: Jehoshaphat made a business alliance with Ahaziah (son of Ahab), vv. 35, 36, and the whole venture met with disaster – the Lord destroyed what they had made, v. 37. He was a wonderful king but lacked **consistency**, repeating past failure.

What lessons can we learn from Jehoshaphat?

1. Repeat what is good about the past.
2. Learn from the mistakes of others.
3. Don't get too involved with the ungodly.
4. Don't repeat the mistakes that got us in trouble in the first place.

Let's be men and women having conviction about:

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

Saints' CVs: John Newton

BY JEREMY SINGER, BRIDGE OF WEIR, SCOTLAND

JOHN NEWTON 1725-1807

*Amazing grace! (how sweet the sound)
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.*

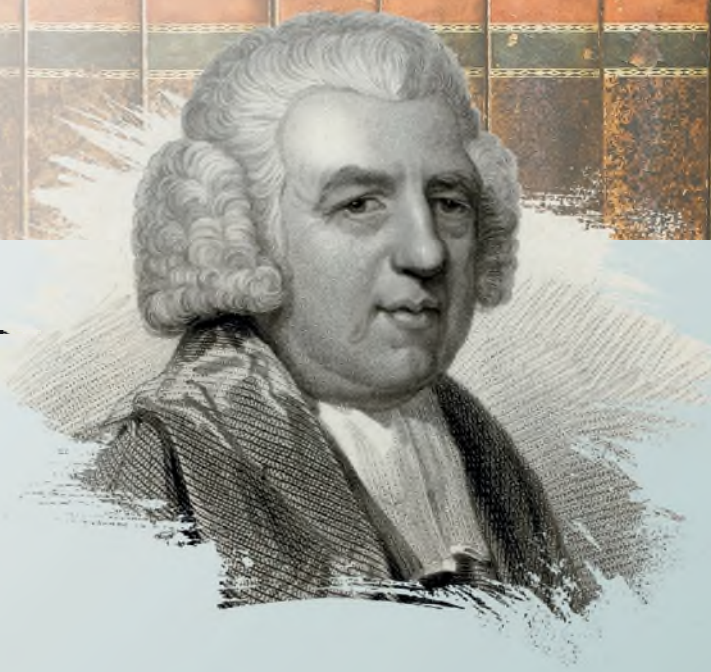
John Newton's *Amazing Grace* may be the most famous hymn in the world – it's instantly recognizable, whether played by a piper on an Edinburgh street corner or sung a cappella by US president Barack Obama at a memorial service. In fact, many famous singers have recorded versions of *Amazing Grace*, including Elvis Presley, Aretha Franklin, and Celine Dion.

Amazing Grace was 250 years old in 2023, since the hymn had its first rendition on New Year's Day, 1773. In any 'top ten' compilation of Christian hymns, *Amazing Grace* is ever present in the list and often right up at number one.

The man behind the hymn certainly experienced God's amazing grace: John Newton started out as a wild-living sailor. After deserting from the Royal Navy, Newton became involved in the slave trade. He sailed on ships transporting people from Africa to America. During one voyage in 1748, Newton's vessel was caught by a dreadful storm, and he cried out for God's mercy. Later, he remembered that day as the time when he began to trust the Lord – 'the hour I first believed'.

After quitting the sea for health reasons, he worked in Liverpool for several years as a tide surveyor. His interest in evangelism grew over this period. He was ordained as a curate in the Church of England and was sent to the Buckinghamshire parish of Olney in 1764. Here, at St. Peter and St. Paul church, he preached several times a week and composed many hymns for the congregation to sing. Along with his poetic friend and neighbour William Cowper, he collated 348 songs into a volume of *Olney Hymns*. Newton's contributions include hymns we continue to sing today, like:

Amazing grace; Come, my soul, thy suit prepare; and How sweet the name of Jesus sounds. The Cowper and Newton museum at Olney has interesting exhibits about Newton's life and times. However, the notebook containing the transcript for his



'Amazing Grace' sermon on 1 Chronicles chapter 16 verses 16 and 17 is lodged at Lambeth Palace in London.

Newton wrote about his experiences of the slave trade, admitting in retrospect that it was an 'unhappy and disgraceful branch of commerce' in which his personal involvement was a 'subject of humiliating reflection'. Newton had a great influence on William Wilberforce, both spiritually and in terms of campaigning against slavery.

John Newton died in 1807 at the age of eighty-two. One of his final sayings was, 'Although my memory is fading, I remember two things very clearly: I am a great sinner—and Christ is a great Saviour'.¹ In his speaking, as in his writing, Newton was blessed with a wonderful turn of phrase. Some of his memorable quotations are listed below.

'I am not what I ought to be, I am not what I want to be, I am not what I hope to be in another world; but still I am not what I once used to be, and by the grace of God I am what I am'.²

'If two angels were to receive at the same moment a commission from God, one to go down and rule earth's grandest empire, the other to go and sweep the streets of its meanest village, it would be a matter of entire indifference to each which service fell to his lot, the post of ruler or the post of scavenger; for the joy of the angels lies only in obedience to God's will'.³

'How unspeakably wonderful to know that all our concerns are held in hands that bled for us'.⁴

Further reading

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Tall Ships outreach

By **NATHAN ROSIE** Scalloway, Shetland

From 26th-29th July 2023, Shetland hosted the Tall Ships Race, an annual international race of traditionally-rigged sailing vessels.¹ The event sees dozens of ships from all around the world race along a route which includes a number of European ports, and in 2023 Lerwick was selected as a host-port. Lerwick has hosted the Tall Ships Race twice before, in 1999 and in 2011. On these occasions the event was used as a springboard for outreach among the locals and tourists attending the event. The event being held in Shetland again last year posed a tremendous opportunity to sow the seed of the word with people from all over the world arriving on our doorstep.

In preparation for the event, Anita Keith of Sound Gospel Hall ordered 3,000 reusable carrier bags with the text of John chapter 3 verse 16 printed on the outside, similar to the bags used in the recent Edinburgh bag outreaches. The bags were supplied by Andy Shanks in Ireland and printed in blue and white, the colours of the Shetland flag. Copies of John's Gospel were also ordered, specially printed for the event with a picture of the Bressay Lighthouse, which can be seen when entering Lerwick harbour. Prints were also obtained with an image



of a Shetland beach, and the text of Matthew chapter 11 verse 28, 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest'.

A team of workers came together, made up of local saints and some from the mainland who had remained in Shetland following the Shetland Christian Youth Camp (SCYC) Fun Week, where they had volunteered as leaders. The team met at the start of the week to pack the bags and, over the course of two evenings, all the bags were filled and ready for distribution. The work of bag packing was undertaken largely by a group of local sisters, joined by volunteers from the SCYC Fun Week. It was a real joy to see young and old labouring together, united by a common aim of the spread of the gospel. Into each bag was placed a Gospel of John, the gospel text print, a copy of the 'Holidays – Time to Travel' tract written by our brother Jack Hay, and a little card with the details of the Shetland Christian Bookshop and how to contact us.

The Shetland Christian Bookshop was used as a base during the outreach with workers meeting there each morning for a time of prayer before going out with the bags. Workers stood at the entrance to the pier and throughout the main streets of Lerwick offering bags to the approximately 10,000 people who attended the Tall Ships event each day.

We thank the Lord that He provided able workers and favourable conditions, and all 3,000 bags were given out over the course of two days. The response was generally very positive, and many good conversations were had with tourists and locals alike. We were encouraged in our labours as we observed the sea of blue bags around Lerwick displaying the word of God for all to see. We also enjoyed meeting and speaking with a number of fellow believers from around the world, some from as far away as Belgium

and even Australia, who were visiting the event and encouraged us in our outreach.

Groups of workers also visited the thirty-seven visiting ships to deliver bags for every member of their crews. Some of the ships had as many as 200 to 300 crew members and we are thankful to the Lord that the way was opened for access to the ships as we had initially been informed this might not be possible. Very few of the visiting crews refused the bags and many gratefully received them. The vessels were visiting from countries as far afield as Uruguay and Indonesia as well as European countries such as Denmark, Norway, Finland, Sweden, and the Netherlands. It is a joy to think of the word of God being distributed around the globe as the ships return to their countries of origin.

We have been greatly encouraged to see the bags being used around Shetland in the weeks and months following the outreach, and to hear that the bags have already been spotted in other countries. We pray that as God's word goes forth it will be used by His Spirit to the salvation of precious souls. It has also been a great joy to learn that following a conversation during the Tall Ships Event one lady has begun regularly attending the weekly gospel meeting in Sound Gospel Hall. We would ask for your prayers for her continued attendance and that she would come to know Christ as her Lord and Saviour.

It is our prayer that one soul would be saved as a result of this outreach, although we do not limit the working of the Spirit of God, but pray that thousands of souls would be reached with the message of John chapter 3 verse 16 of the tremendous love of God in giving His Son.

'So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it', Isa. 55. 11.

Endnote

1 <https://www.tallshipslerwick.com/>.

Pauline metaphors Shepherding

By **MICHAEL BUCKERIDGE** Grantham, England

Part 10

The sight of sheep dotted over a rolling green English countryside may evoke a sense of a restful, gentle, and idyllic way of life. However, those responsible for the care of those sheep, even in such apparently ideal conditions, know the hard work and vigilance required for the flock to remain healthy, or even alive. As MALCOLM RADCLIFFE put it, 'sheep seem to have a will to die'!¹

Come, then, to the life of the shepherd as described in the Bible and, whatever benefits and blessing may result, we find that it is a hard life. Responsibilities included: leading to appropriate feeding grounds; watching over the sheep by day; seeking for and recovering any that had gone astray; seeking out or providing water – not always an easy job in the dry conditions of those lands; protecting from wild animals and thieves; and ensuring that all were safely gathered in at night where they may have to continue to watch over the flock. They would be exposed to heat and cold, a precarious food supply, wild beasts, and attack from robbers.² To be a shepherd, therefore, was difficult and dangerous, and only likely to be wholly committed to when the flock was of personal value to the shepherd, John 10. 12, 13.

In Acts chapter 20 verses 17 to 38, the Apostle Paul calls together a group of men from Ephesus that are described as elders, v. 17, and overseers, v. 28. That they are told in verse 28 to 'take heed . . . to all the flock', and to 'feed the church of God' demonstrates that essential to the role of elder and overseer is that of shepherding. By exhortation and example, Paul impresses upon these men what is involved in the work of the spiritual shepherd.

Their position

The word 'elders' indicates spiritual maturity; 'overseers' their spiritual activity of watching over the Lord's people. They were clearly identifiable

so that when the message came to Ephesus, there was no doubt as to who to send, v. 17. This was not a job that they had applied for, but a work for which the Holy Spirit had fitted them and marked them out as doing, v. 28. The flock was to be of infinite value to them, having been purchased 'with his own blood'. Paul thus agrees with Peter's reminder that elders are shepherds under 'the chief Shepherd', 1 Pet. 5. 4, and that the flock are 'God's heritage', v. 3.

In all things, the Lord Jesus is the greatest example. John chapter 10 reminds us that He is 'the good shepherd', v. 11. He was willing to give His life for the sheep, and He takes care to 'know my sheep', v. 14. The people of God are of inestimable value to Him, and under-shepherds should treat them as such.

Their priorities

Paul says, 'Take heed', Acts 20. 28. What he says next is vital for them to pay attention to if they are to fulfil the work God has called them to.

Themselves

It is obvious that for the sheep to be well cared for, the shepherd needs to be in good health and condition. Obvious perhaps in a farming context, but how much of a concern is it within the assembly that the elders are in good spiritual condition? The qualifications for elders set the expectation of character and conduct very high, 1 Tim. 3. 1-7; Titus 1. 6-9. An overseer who seeks to do the work well has potential to make an impact

in the lives of others, 1 Tim. 4. 6-16, and will therefore become a target for persecution, as Paul had experienced, Acts 20. 19, 23. The nature of the work will demand involvement in supporting others, including where others may fall into sin. Such work requires a consideration of self because of the temptations that may come, Gal. 6. 1.

Then there is the warning that Paul gives regarding those that seek 'to draw away disciples after them', v. 30. Peter warns against being 'lords over God's heritage', 1 Pet. 5. 3, and John writes of 'Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them', 3 John 9. How shepherds need to 'take heed' that a legitimate leading does not become the wrong kind of authority. The shepherds of Ezekiel chapter 34 were charged with taking from the sheep, from feeding on them rather than feeding them, vv. 2, 10. Here was an abuse of position. How different was Paul, 'I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel', Acts 20. 33.

To all the flock

The shepherd watching his sheep during the day or counting them in at night is interested in each individual, Luke 15. 4. To him, the erring sheep is of just as much importance as the ones safely gathered in. Here is the heart of the One who said that He had come 'to seek and to save that which was lost', Luke 19. 10. Part of the rebuke to those who should have shepherded God's people in Ezekiel chapter 34 was that they had not 'brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost', v. 4. Paul reminded these shepherds that he had testified 'both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks', Acts 20. 21. His activity was such that he could boldly say that he was 'pure from the blood of all men', v. 26. If anything, it was the weak that held a special place in the heart of the apostle as he encouraged these men that they 'ought to support the weak', v. 35. **All** the flock is important to God and should be to those whom God has charged with the oversight of the assembly.

Another priority for the shepherd is to 'feed the church of God', v. 28.

The word 'feed' means 'to act as a shepherd', and is the same word that the Lord used to Peter in His first injunction to 'Feed my sheep', John 21. 16.³ Paul is the example for them to follow:

In attitude: 'Serving the Lord with all humility of mind', Acts 20. 19. The work of the shepherd is that of serving the flock, but Paul reminds them that in doing so, the Lord Himself is being served. That same Lord who said, 'the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many', Mark 10. 45, and who knelt and washed His disciples' feet, John 13. 3-17.

In faithfulness: the apostle speaks of the breadth and depth, Acts 20. 20, 27, consistency, v. 20, and equality, vv. 21, 26, of his teaching. The elder needs to be 'apt to teach', 1 Tim. 3. 2, willing to teach 'all the counsel of God' but also faithful in teaching both 'publicly, and from house to house'.

In trust of, and devotion to, God: to lead the flock of God will require complete trust in Him, and devotion to Him. In verses 22 to 24, Paul tells them of his desire to 'finish . . . [his] course with joy', even though he knew this would involve 'bonds and afflictions'. Paul was willing to suffer in the service of God and God's flock, following the example of the Good

Shepherd who was willing to lay down His life for the sheep, John 10. 11. It is interesting to note that, when Peter refers to the Lord as the 'Shepherd and Bishop [overseer] of your souls', 1 Pet. 2. 25, it is in the context of both His exemplary and expiatory sufferings.

In care: twice over in this section, the apostle speaks of his tears, Acts 20. 19, 31, evidence that the people of God were deeply in this shepherd's heart. He was concerned for: their diet, v. 27; their protection, vv. 28-30; building up and blessing, v. 32; and their support, v. 34. He sums up his attitude in verse 35, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'. The true shepherd is concerned for the whole of the sheep, Ps. 23, and is willing to give everything for its good. They are to 'rule' in such a way as those that we are exhorted to 'remember' and 'whose faith follow', Heb. 13. 7.

Potential problems

As Paul draws his exhortation to a close, he focuses on a vital element of the shepherd's work: the need for vigilance. He has already warned them to 'Take heed', and, in verse 31, he exhorts them to 'watch', to be alert to the dangers to, and needs of, the sheep. The shepherds in Luke chapter 2 verse 8 were described as 'keeping watch over their flock by night',

and the word here means to guard, watchfulness being a necessary part of that process. The instruction to 'obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves', Heb. 13. 17, comes in the context of the understanding that such men 'watch for your souls' in such a way that they are sleepless. They are intent on watching, because they understand that they 'must give account'.

David had to defend his father's flocks against the literal lion and bear, 1 Sam. 17. 34-36. These shepherds will have to deal with false teachers described as 'grievous wolves . . . not sparing the flock', Acts 20. 29. The attacks will be fierce, the attitude of the attacker unrelenting. Added to this, there needs to be vigilance from within their own number for those who will arise speaking 'perverse things, to draw away disciples after them', v. 30.

Recognizing the challenges that will come along, Paul commends them 'to God, and to the word of his grace', v. 32. The shepherd will need resources to fulfil his role well, and there is no better resource than the great God who has a shepherd heart, Ezek. 34. 11-16; Ps. 23. 1. In Him, strength will be found; His word the resource to meet every need.

The life of the shepherds found in the eastern lands was hard. As society changed from the nomadic to settled, the shepherds' work became less valued. Through the earnest address of Paul to the Ephesian elders may we be powerfully reminded that those who seek to shepherd the companies of God's people deserve our sympathy, support, and prayers that they may be able to 'give account . . . with joy', Heb. 13. 17, and 'receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away', 1 Pet. 5. 4.



Endnotes

- 1 M. SWEETNAM and W. BOYD (eds.), *Shepherding the Sheep*, Scripture Truth Library, 2020, pg. 17.
- 2 Summary from: *Smith's Bible Dictionary and Easton's Bible Dictionary*, e-Sword resource.
- 3 W. E. VINE, *Vine's Expository Dictionary*, e-Sword resource.

The eyes of God

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

The idea of God 'seeing' is the most widely used anthropomorphism in the scriptures. Although the expression 'the eyes of God' is not found in the Bible,¹ the phrase 'the eyes of the Lord', also translated as 'the sight of the Lord', occurs over 100 times.² Many verses also refer to God 'looking upon' or 'seeing'. Unsurprisingly, vision is our most dominant sense and to understand this anthropomorphism further we will briefly consider how the human visual system works and relate it to our subject.

The special focus of God's attention: 'Keep me as the apple of the eye', Ps. 17. 8

Our eyes are really pieces of brain stuck to the outside of our heads which we can rotate around to look out into the world!³ A perfectly clear layer of tissue at the front of the eyes, called the cornea, along with a lens inside each eye, focuses light onto the retina, a thin layer of neurons at the back of the eyes, which converts light into electrical impulses. The most important part of the retina is a small indentation, the size of a pinprick, called the fovea where our light-sensitive cells are densely packed together. The brain invests a huge amount of effort in moving the eyes very quickly and precisely to maximize the use of the fovea in each eye, rapidly scanning the scenes we look at. Hence, we read, 'For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him', 2 Chr. 16. 9.

Once we get our fovea looking at an object, we can lock onto it, tracking the object, even if it is moving or we are moving, by making sophisticated synchronized eye movements. The object we are looking at then becomes the **focus** of our attention. John speaks of the time he spent with the Lord Jesus on earth and says, 'That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life', 1 John 1. 1. He is describing this process in relation

to the Lord Jesus. We 'looked upon' Him. We viewed Him attentively and He became the special object of our focus. How blessed were their eyes in being able to gaze on the Lord Jesus in person, Matt. 13. 16.

Although God is aware of every event in the universe, at the same time there are certain things that are the special focus of His attention. King David said, 'Keep me as the apple of the eye', Ps. 17. 8. This refers to the 'little man' we see in the centre of a person's eyes as we get close to them.⁴ The reason for this is because as they gaze upon us we see a tiny reflection of ourselves caused by the shiny surface of the eyes which is kept moist with a special tear film.⁵ The Lord Jesus has eternally been the true apple of God's eye, constantly under the gaze of His Father, and the One who has always been 'daily his delight', Prov. 8. 30. We too, as God's people, are considered as the apple of His eye, 'the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry', Ps. 34. 15. We are the special focus of His attention.

God's awareness: 'The eyes of the Lord are in every place', Prov. 15. 3

Information travels from the eyes to the brain through the optic nerves, with each nerve carrying around a million separate connections. Most of the business of seeing is actually done by the brain with up to half of our brain area contributing to processing vision. The information first arrives at the brain in the back of the head after which it travels in two directions. The first route,

called the dorsal stream, can be thought of as the '**where**' pathway. It identifies where objects are and where we are relative to the world. The second pathway, the ventral stream, is the '**what**' pathway and is concerned with recognizing what we are looking at, for example, people, places, or objects. The brain combines all this incoming information to generate our **awareness** of the world.

This idea of awareness is used in Proverbs chapter 15 verse 3, where we read, 'The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good'. The picture is of the omniscient God who is fully aware of, and comprehends, every minute detail in the universe. This truth is both comforting and deeply searching. David contemplates the omniscience of God in Psalm 139, 'O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me', v. 1. He is cognizant of the smallest aspects of our life. He knows when we stand up. He knows when we sit down, v. 2. He knows our words before we utter them, v. 4. Our prayers are known to God before we even say them. David concludes, 'Such knowledge is too wonderful for me', v. 6. The New Testament informs us that God continues to actively search our hearts as He brings to bear the incisive action of the word of God upon our hearts, exposing the 'thoughts and intents'. This action proves to us daily that, 'Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do', Heb. 4. 12, 13.

When the Apostle John received the awe-inspiring vision on the Isle of Patmos, He saw the Lord Jesus as the judge of all the earth. The eyes of the Lord Jesus are described 'as a flame of fire', with no action, word, or motive missing His all-seeing gaze, Rev. 1. 14. Although we will never stand before Him as judge in respect to the penalty for our sins, we will stand before Him when He reviews our lives at the judgement seat of Christ, 2 Cor. 5. 10. Paul warns us to 'judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who

both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God', 1 Cor. 4. 5. Nothing escapes His watchful eye.

God's perspective: 'do that which is right in the eyes of the Lord thy God', Deut. 13. 18

Unfortunately, we cannot trust everything we see with our eyes. Our brains are extremely efficient signal detection devices that can rapidly interpret fragmentary and complex information using our previous knowledge and experience. Hence, we develop a **perspective** of the world by integrating incoming information from the eyes with what we already know. However, this comes at a cost. When we look at an ambiguous or incomplete picture of the world, sometimes our previous experiences will either convince us that something is real that does not exist, or generate alternative perspectives from the same information. This is the basis of visual illusions such as that seen in the figure.⁶

In the Necker Cube Illusion we see a series of cubes in three dimensions

because we expect a light source to cause the surfaces of the cubes to be different shades. Because we do not know where the light source is, the cubes can flip in perspective with us either seeing the cubes from above or below.⁷

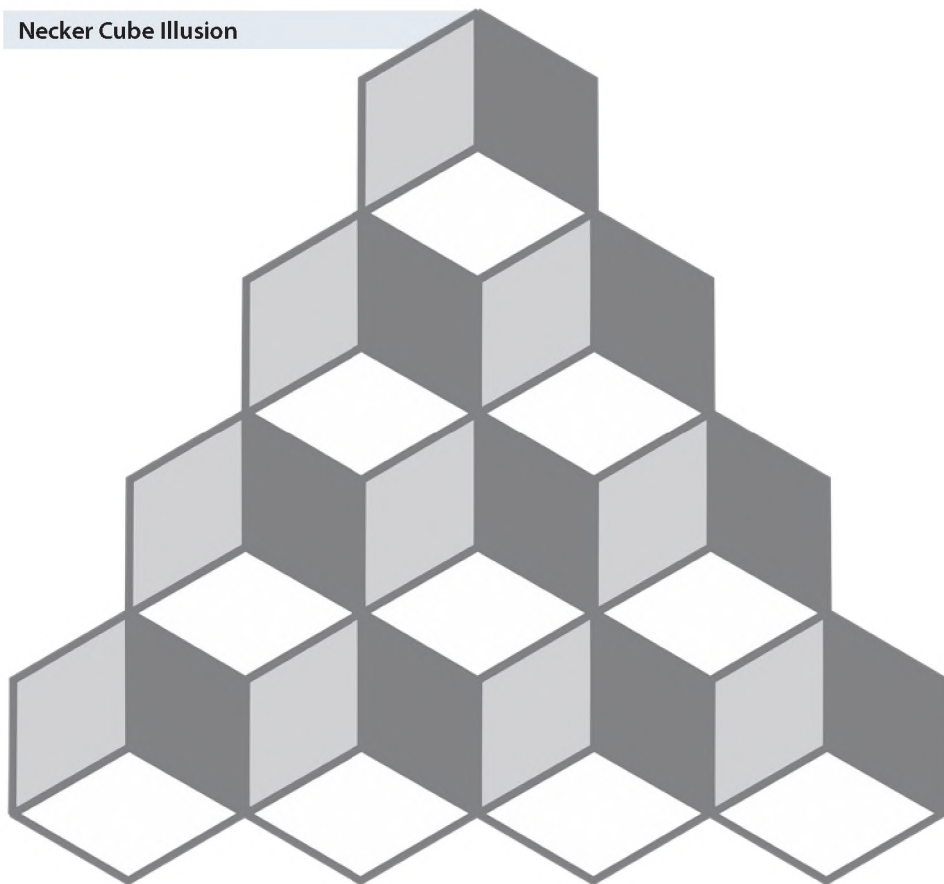
By far the most common reference to eyes or vision in relation to God is the expression 'in the eyes' or 'in the sight' of the Lord. It speaks of God's view or perspective, which often stands in contrast to the human viewpoint, 'for the Lord seeth not as man seeth', 1 Sam. 16. 7. When we find ourselves in situations we do not understand, we often do not see the full picture, but should remember that God always does. We need to bow to His all-wise and perfect perspective when it conflicts with our own viewpoint.

The expression 'in the eyes of the Lord' is first used in Genesis chapter 6 verse 8, 'But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord'. Noah's standing before God and his manner of life was in contrast with the pervasive wickedness of mankind that was about to bring forth the judgement of God.

Here are elements of the truth of Ephesians chapter 2 verse 8, 'For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God'. Noah had found grace because it was freely available to him. Yet, the expression 'the eyes of the Lord' speaks of the irreversible way in which Noah found grace because this was **viewed from God's perspective**. It was an established and unchangeable fact.

Most frequently, this expression is used with reference to that which is 'right' or 'evil' in the sight of the Lord, often in relation to the kings of Israel and Judah. The expression indicates a manner of life consistent with personal faith in God. The Lord Jesus referred to the way our beliefs inwardly affect the way we live our lives outwardly, 'A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit', and, 'Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them', Matt. 7. 18, 20. We cannot truly say we belong to the Lord Jesus if our life is inconsistent with what we profess, 'If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth', 1 John 1. 6.

Necker Cube Illusion



Endnotes

- 1 'Eyes of God' or 'Eye of God' does not occur in the KJV, NKJV, ESV, for example, but there is one reference in the NIV, Ps. 52. 1.
- 2 All of these references, except four, are found in the Old Testament. The four New Testament references are: Luke 1. 15; 2 Cor. 8. 21; Jas. 4. 10; and 1 Pet. 3. 12.
- 3 The eyes grow out from the brain during early development. Also, the retina is central nervous system tissue with very similar properties to brain tissue.
- 4 Another idea is that the apple of the eye refers to the pupil, the dark centre of the eye, which we guard to prevent damage to the cornea. The cornea is the most sensitive part of our body where we experience touch as pain.
- 5 This is called the corneal reflex. Thus, we read the description of the Shunammite women in the Song of Solomon, 'Thine eyes like the fishpools in Heshbon', S. of S. 7. 4.
- 6 For other examples of visual illusions see: <https://michaelbach.de/ot/>.
- 7 From <https://openclipart.org/detail/217776/necker-cube-illusion>.

The life and times of Elijah the prophet 6 **NABOTH AND HIS INHERITANCE**

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

This is one of many exciting stories in the Bible but sadly it has a tragic outcome. Kings in ancient times were despotic and powerful, and there seemed to be little that the 'man in the street' could do to defend his rights or belongings. So, this is a salutary tale where a man stands up to the arrogant and selfish demands of the local king but loses his life in the process. But God is not to be mocked, 'whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap', Gal. 6. 7.

Let me summarize the story from 1 Kings chapter 21.

The Plot

Naboth inherited a vineyard next to King Ahab's palace in Jezreel. Despite all his wealth, King Ahab became obsessed with Naboth's vineyard and offered to either pay for it or give Naboth a better one. To his amazement, all the money in the world would not have persuaded Naboth to part with his vineyard. It was a family plot, and it would stay in the family as far as he was concerned. So, like a big child, Ahab goes home, goes to bed, and sulks. He is the most powerful man in his kingdom, but he can't get what he wants – a vineyard close to his palace to use as a vegetable garden.

When the queen learns that Ahab is sullen, angry, and on hunger strike, she pays him a visit to find out why. As far as Jezebel is concerned, Ahab is a king and will have what he wants, whatever it takes. 'I'll sort it', she says! 'I'll get you the vineyard'.

She is very clever and knows how to manipulate people. She arranges a day of fasting (presumably under some guise of religion). She ensures that Naboth is given a place of honour at the event. Everyone in the city must be there; she is setting Naboth up. Two men are told to accuse Naboth of cursing God and the king during the day. Naboth was arrested

immediately, taken out and executed. Two witnesses were enough to condemn him.

But that's not the end of the story. When Ahab leaves the palace to claim Naboth's vineyard, he gets a visit from the prophet Elijah. God sent him to condemn Ahab and warn him that he might have gained a little land, but he will lose his life and never see his male descendants survive God's judgement. Furthermore, there is a severe judgement passed on his wife, Jezebel. Amazingly, Ahab reacts well to the message from Elijah, and God decides to delay his punishment. However, his dynasty was destroyed after he died.

It's a sad tale, but we can learn lessons from it.

King Ahab

When Ahab became king of Israel there was a good king on the throne of Judah, Asa. The account of Ahab's is dark and dire, and his evil reign is in direct contrast to King Asa's. Ahab only reigned for twenty-two years, but he did more evil in his lifetime than anyone else who had lived before him, 1 Kgs. 16. 30. To add insult to injury, he married Jezebel, the 'daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him', v. 31. Then he set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal, which he had built in Samaria. The person you marry can make a big

difference in what you do with your life, and Jezebel certainly did nothing to improve this king's life.

Undoubtedly, Ahab had never learned the wisdom of Solomon, Prov. 22. In verse 1, we read, 'A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold'. His drive for possessions was more important to him than being a man of good character.

The major mistake that Ahab made was to commit the sin of covetousness, which underpins all other sins. Ahab's sin is clearly prohibited in the law of Moses, Exod. 20. 17. In the New Testament, the prohibition continues, not only as what we should not do but in terms of being content with such things that we have.¹ There is a potent contrast in this story between the powerful man being dissatisfied despite having so much and the common man being content with what he had inherited. May God help us to be content and not commit the sin of Ahab.

King Ahab's response to Naboth's refusal to sell or exchange his vineyard tells us much about the man. He had attempted to negotiate to get what he wanted, but having failed, he withdrew. He doesn't threaten or bully Naboth but is clearly annoyed that he didn't get his own way. He was a weak leader, and Jezebel's approach indicates she was the more powerful person in the relationship. When Jezebel tells him that she will ensure he gets the vineyard, he does not resist or tell her that he wants to do the right thing. It is as if he can ignore her underhand methods as long as he doesn't have to do anything and as long as he gets what he wants. Immaturity and a weak character are a terrible combination.

Ultimately, Ahab got Naboth's vineyard, but, in the long run, he lost his inheritance and legacy, 1 Kgs. 21. 21, 22, 29. God sees and holds people to account – 'Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord', Rom. 12. 19. We too can live in the confidence that God will sort matters out in the end.

Queen Jezebel

This woman came from an idolatrous

nation led by her father, Ethbaal. The name, Ethbaal, means ‘with Baal’, probably indicating the closeness of the union between the king and his people’s religion. This religion had, for a long time, trapped the people of Israel, but when Ahab married Jezebel, he invited this distortion of truth into the very inner sanctum of the nation, producing devastating effects. This was a tragic mistake but a reflection of his weak character. We should not be surprised at Jezebel’s disregard of the rights of the poor, her disrespect of Jehovah’s laws of inheritance, and her devious methods of getting her own way.²

There are no good features in this woman’s life, and her name continues to do a great injustice to her gender. She is, however, a powerful and persuasive woman.³ Her venom, manipulation, scheming, and forcefulness are seen repeatedly in her life and none more so than in the story of Naboth.

Naboth

Here is a man of an entirely different character to the king and queen. Whilst the lives of Ahab and Jezebel are not particularly pleasant, it is delightful to focus on a man like Naboth.

Naboth only appears on the page of scripture once. The simple lesson I see in this is that everyone is important in the eyes of God, and their story is worth recording.

Naboth understood the value of what God had given him. He must



have been familiar with the laws of inheritance that God had given to Moses.⁴ I think that his confidence in God’s word and his contentment with life led him to stand his ground when Ahab sought to persuade him to swap or sell his plot of land. I suppose that if Ahab had been familiar with what Solomon wrote in Proverbs chapter 23, he might have been a bit more cautious. In verse 11, the mighty redeemer promises to plead the cause of oppressed people.

In Old Testament scripture, the vineyard was a vivid picture of the nation’s fruitfulness or lack of it, Isa. 5. 1-7. Even when the nation was not fruitful for God, there were individuals in the nation who were still producing fruit for God’s glory. Symbolically, Naboth seems to be an example of this.

Interestingly, his vineyard was right beside the palace, in the times of Ahab and Jezebel a centre of evil. In Revelation chapter 2 verse 13, there is a church in the same locality, ‘where Satan’s seat is’ – the centre of the Devil’s operations at that time. In the same chapter, the name Jezebel is used to describe an equally wicked woman. Naboth resisted the urge to give up what God had given him in exchange for ‘a better offer’ from the world. We should similarly ‘stand against the wiles of the devil’ and ‘having done all, to stand’, Eph. 6. 11, 13.

Naboth understood that there was a higher authority than that of the king. As Christians, we recognize that there will be times when standing for truth and upholding principles that are pleasing to God will bring us into conflict with the world and we will choose to ‘obey God rather than men’, Acts 5. 29.

So where did this get Naboth? He lost his life after being falsely accused and maligned. Yet, in the records of heaven, he will be recorded as one of the faithful, one of whom the world was not worthy, Heb. 11. 38.

Elijah

Poor old Elijah always seemed to get the tough gigs (to use a worldly expression). He had to live rough at

the Brook Cherith, 1 Kgs. 17, confront Ahab, contest with the false prophets of Baal, and run from the vicious anger of Jezebel. His image is that of an outdoors man with very little dress sense and a questionable diet, but he is a man God uses to confront the evils of his day. Elijah is a man of great courage and obedience!

Could God use you and me to stand up to the evils of our generation, or have we become moulded into the world’s ways of thinking? Romans chapter 12 verse 2 warns us not to do this.

God instructs Elijah to ‘go down to meet Ahab’, 1 Kgs. 21. 18. He has to meet Ahab at the scene of the crime. Ahab didn’t waste any time getting into the stolen vineyard. We are not told what he was thinking, but you get the impression that he expected Elijah to turn up. He and Elijah didn’t really get on, which is not surprising. Ahab was a weapon in the hand of Satan, and Elijah was a servant of the most high God.

You can read the conversation in 1 Kings chapter 21, verses 17 to 24. Elijah tells Ahab that his days are numbered, and that God will judge him and his wife for their evil actions. It is amazing to see how Ahab reacts to the news. He is humbled, mourns, and takes a low profile. So much so that God delays his punishment until after his death. Sometimes I don’t really understand the way God works. I would not have given Ahab any room to manoeuvre, but our God is a God of grace and mercy. And aren’t we glad! He devises means so that ‘his banished be not expelled from him’, 2 Sam. 14. 14.

Endnotes

- 1 Phil. 4. 11; 1 Tim. 6. 8; Heb. 13. 5.
- 2 As with all false religions, the worship of Baal was not just false but morally destructive, Num. 25. 1-3; Jer. 19. 5; 1 Kgs. 18. 25-29. All in all, it was not unlike the modern menu-driven philosophy and religion of the 21st century.
- 3 We see this in how she handled the situation with Naboth, 1 Kgs. 21, her aggressive schemes to ‘cut off the prophets of the Lord’, 18. 4, and her rage at Elijah for exposing the fallacy of the religion which she so loved, 19. 2.
- 4 Num. 36. 7; Deut. 19. 14; 27. 17. See also, Prov. 22. 28; 23. 10.

SPIRITUAL GIFTS HELPS

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

There is no doubt that in the writings of the Apostle Paul there is much teaching to assemblies and believers, not only in the early church, but also for us today on the subject of spiritual gifts. This is covered in: 1 Corinthians chapter 12 verses 8 to 10 and 28 to 30; Romans chapter 12 verses 6 to 18; and Ephesians chapter 4 verses 11 and 12.

JACK HUNTER presents the gifts in three lists, where thirteen gifts are listed.¹ He goes on to indicate that, including Romans chapter 12 and Ephesians chapter 4, there are around twenty gifts in total. There is much to consider in each of the gifts, but for the purpose of this article I wish to contemplate one gift which is only mentioned once and could almost be ignored and that is 'helps', 1 Cor. 12. 28. VINE indicates it to mean 'to render assistance'.²

First, we must remind ourselves that gifts are given for the glory of God and for the good of others. Gifts are imparted for the edifying of the body of Christ and to equip the saints for their work. God's purpose is that every believer should be like Christ and what better attitude than to do our best, by His Spirit, and to exercise that gift as He leads? Let us then consider those that were a 'help' in the early church and the challenge they present to us today.

Barnabas

Introduced to us in Acts chapter 4 verses 36 and 37, we can read of his charity, his care and concern, his commendation, his consideration, his call and companionship.

He was a 'help' to Saul in Jerusalem, Acts 9. 26-28, for the saints there did not believe Saul was a disciple. However, Barnabas took him and brought and introduced him to the apostles. From then on, Saul was associated with the believers at Jerusalem. Barnabas was a living letter of commendation.

In Acts chapter 11 he is a 'help' to a whole church and was concerned that they might be instructed in the truth. There was no one better suited, so he introduced Paul to the church at Antioch, vv. 25, 26, who then taught them for a whole year. Barnabas saw the potential of Paul's ministry to the saints. He did not resent taking second place.

A 'helper' to one convert in chapter 9 and to a whole church in chapter 11; Barnabas was a true encourager. Such brethren are much needed today!

Ananias of Damascus

The Lord knows who He can use in His service. Under the sovereignty of God, Saul was permitted to persecute the believers and that is the background to the events of Acts chapter 9. On the road to Damascus, the direction of Saul's life was to change. Perhaps, at first, we can understand the reluctance of Ananias when the Lord's instructions were clear as to the place, street, house, and the man. This was Saul of Tarsus!

What a help he was, to carry out those instructions, and we are amazed at his first words when he met Saul, 'Brother Saul', v. 17. What would our reaction have been? Verses 13 and 14 are a summary of Saul's pre-conversion life, and I am sure Ananias may have never learnt of the great work Saul/Paul was to undertake in the future. Paul was to relate in his testimony, Acts 22. 12-16, the help Ananias had been to

him in his first steps on the Christian pathway. Could we be such a help to someone who may become greatly used of the Lord?

Philip

Philip was a Spirit-filled man to be a 'help' in evangelism, whether to many in a city, Acts 8. 5, or to one man in a chariot, v. 35. No matter where he was preaching the gospel, the message was the same and he saw results. God took him away from a place of blessing to speak to one man in a desert. God's ways are past finding out.

Philip was a 'help' to the eunuch on his journey because he pointed him to Christ from the passage he was reading in Isaiah's prophecy. He did not speak of the way of his or the eunuch's journey, the weather, or the wilderness, but the conversation was around the word of God. No wonder the man went on his way rejoicing for the help given to him in the interpretation of the scripture, enlightening him to the truth.

Are we conversant with the scripture to speak to others? Proverbs chapter 11 verse 30 reminds us, 'he that winneth souls is wise'. We may be just the help someone we are in touch with needs to hear a message from God's word.

Dorcas

The term a 'certain disciple' is not only limited to men. It also includes women. In only seven verses of scripture, Acts 9. 36-42, we read of this woman's devotion, her deeds, her death, and the distress it brought.

She was one who saw a need and was a great 'help' in her community. She used her fingers and her funds for the needy around her. Her inward love had an outward expression.

She was certainly full of good works. What help she brought to the people which had far-reaching consequences! Some may not have given much thought to her work, but her exercise was obviously appreciated.

Many sisters realize their position in the light of scripture, and they can be

a 'help' to others where they live and further afield.

Lydia

Lydia is only mentioned in three verses of scripture, Acts 16. 14, 15, and 40. She became a valued member of the assembly at Philippi.

She was a successful businesswoman and despite her work she found time to worship according to the Jewish faith. But that was not enough. The Spirit of God worked in her life and opened her heart, and she was saved. She was baptized to identify herself with her newfound faith in Christ. Thus, we read of her opened ear, v. 14, her opened heart, v. 14, and her opened home, vv. 15 and 40. Her record of 'help' in hospitality to the Lord's servants was also given after Paul and Silas' remarkable release from prison.

Like Lydia, many a sister has been of practical help to the Lord's servants, and their record is in heaven.

Phebe

All that scripture states concerning Phebe is found in Romans chapter 16 verses 1 and 2 and it is commendable. This is the only time 'servant' is used of a woman.

Her name means 'radiant', and she was a radiant sister, v. 1, a radiant servant, v. 1, and also a radiant succourer, v. 2. Paul's commendation of her, 'receive her' and 'assist her' was because others had benefited from her godly life. She was indeed a 'help' to the Lord's people. No mention is made of a husband, but

she could be trusted to take the epistle Paul wrote to the church at Rome.

Much work has been done, and is being done, by godly sisters and we are thankful for each one who serves the Lord. We should appreciate their help and give thanks for them.

Aquila and Priscilla

It is always good when we have a godly couple like Aquila and Priscilla in our assemblies today. We do not read of them writing a book or planting a church but, in their own way, they did much to expand the work of God. They were hospitable, available, discernible, and useable.

Paul describes them as 'my **helpers** in Christ Jesus', Rom. 16. 3. Not only did they have an open hand to help but also an open home to accommodate the local assembly, v. 5. As we never read of them separately, it is clear that they were one in marriage – their hearts beat as one – but they were also one in the Lord. They were also one with Paul in their daily occupation, Acts 18. 3, and they were one in their fellowship with Paul, Rom. 16. 4.

In their knowledge of scripture, they were one, Acts 18. 26, and acted together in the home in the spiritual development of Apollos. They were one in their service for the Lord.

There is so much we can learn today from this godly couple. They were a 'help' in the locations they lived, whether it was Rome, Corinth, or Ephesus. In their witness, the Lord was honoured and glorified.

The Philippian believers

Some have titled the Epistle to the Philippians as 'Paul's thank you letter'. He wanted to encourage them against despondency and so urges them to rejoice, 1. 26. He warned them against disunity, 2. 1-3; 4. 2. However, he thanks them for the distribution of a gift. They were the only church to support his ministry.

Paul appreciates their consideration of his circumstances in their material support. They remembered his affliction and made it their own.

Their gift was a 'help' to relieve the apostle's need. He mentions their fellowship in the gospel, 1. 5, and their fellowship in giving, 4. 15. It is good to have a part in the work of the Lord – the giving of His people moving them to meet the needs of others. How often when an assembly has offered help to one of the Lord's servants, or had fellowship with another assembly, it has often been recorded that 'it has come at the right time'. Paul had a thankful spirit and a tremendous appreciation of their gift. It was a wise investment. The Lord keeps the books and will pay a spiritual dividend in His time.

Those we have considered were entrusted with work for the Lord, empowered for the task, and engaged wholeheartedly in the work that was given to them to undertake. May we be usefully employed in the spiritual welfare and work of God's people. The challenge to us is that whilst we might not be given the responsibility of preaching or teaching, we can be a 'help', as the Spirit leads. We must recall the words of the psalmist, Psalm 121 verse 2, 'My **help** cometh from the Lord'. The writer to the Hebrews writes, 'The Lord is my **helper**', 13. 6.

The question that needs to be answered is 'am I a **help** or a hindrance in my personal life, home life, and assembly life?'

Endnotes

- 1 J. HUNTER, *First Corinthians*, in K. STAPLEY and T. WILSON (eds), *What the Bible Teaches*, John Ritchie, pg. 152.
- 2 W. E. VINE, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*.



THE PROPHECY OF MICAH

By **STEPHEN FELLOWES** Skibbereen, Ireland

The penman

Like some other prophets, very little is known about the background of the prophet Micah. We do know that he came from the Judean town of Moresheth, Mic. 1. 1, and that he was a contemporary of the prophets Hosea, Amos, and Isaiah, with whom his ministry overlaps at times. He shares many interesting similarities with the prophet Isaiah in particular.

The name Micah means ‘who is like Jehovah?’, and, as we read his prophecy, we discover exactly what Jehovah is like – just, merciful, gracious, and truthful. Indeed, Micah’s prophecy ends with the rhetorical question, ‘Who is a God like unto thee?’ 7. 18.

The placing

We are not left to speculate as to the historical setting of Micah, for the very opening verse of his prophecy places his ministry ‘in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah’, 1. 1. These three kings reigned from 738 to 690 BC. As we discover from reading the prophecy, these were days generally of great social injustice and spiritual decline.

The point

The main burden of Micah’s ministry was the predicted destruction of the northern kingdom by the Assyrians in approximately 722 BC, cp. 2 Kgs. 17, and the later defeat of the southern kingdom, Judah, by the Babylonians in around 586 BC; 2 Kgs. 25; Mic. 1. 1. His book will highlight the just cause behind such discipline, as he outlines the breakdown in covenant responsibilities on the part of both Israel and Judah.

However, all is not lost because at the close of the three main sections of the book he introduces a message of hope for the truly repentant remnant.

The panorama

The book divides into three main sections, all beginning with the call to ‘Hear’, 1. 2; 3. 1; 6. 1. There is a clear pattern in these sections – each begins with the warning of judgement and closes with the promise of salvation. We might outline them as follows:

- Retribution, 1. 1 – 2. 11, followed by restoration, 2. 12, 13.
- Breakdown of leadership, 3. 1-12, followed by the blessings of the kingdom, 4. 1 – 5. 15.
- Accusations of Jehovah, 6. 1 – 7. 7, followed by the assurance of the prophet, 7. 8-20.

Section A: 1. 1 – 2. 13

This great opening section of the prophecy sets the backdrop of the rest of the book. From His holy temple, God calls to attention all the nations of the earth and the earth itself to hear God witness against His own people because of their sins, 1. 1. He comes forth in majestic greatness and all is moved because of His glory and power, vv. 2-4.

Four names catch our attention in verses 5 to 7:

Jacob – there are eleven occurrences of the name throughout the book, sometimes referring to the northern kingdom of Israel, while on other occasions the whole nation is in view. Here, in chapter 1, the title refers to the northern part of the nation that had become Jacob-like in her ways, i.e., twisted and crooked.

Israel – the dignified, princely name given to the nation by God. Alas, by idolatry and wickedness, Israel had lost every vestige of dignity.

Samaria – the capital of the northern kingdom built by Omri king of Israel, 1 Kgs. 16. 23, 24, which became infamous for perverse idolatry, Ezek. 23.

Judah – the inclusion of Judah shows us that the bad example of Israel in the north was rubbing off on her southern counterpart. Soon she would follow suit and judgement would be her portion – there was little praiseworthy about Judah!

The prophet laments with a broken heart because of the nation’s incurable condition and then traces the severity of the assured invasion upon the towns of Judah, 1. 8-16.

In the second chapter, the justice of Jehovah’s judgement upon Judah is underlined, 2. 1-11. The poor were being exploited by the rich, while covetous behaviour, violence, and oppression were the order of the day. Furthermore, when the faithful prophets warned them, the people rejected their warning and embraced the vanity of the false prophets, v. 11. God could not look with impunity upon such conduct and judgement was sure to come.

How precious to hear a word of hope and restoration at the end of this section, vv. 12, 13. The change of tone from doom to hope is abrupt, but such is not unknown within prophetic scripture, cp. Hos. 2. 2; 6. 1; 11. 9.

Note the divine prerogative; three times God says, ‘I will’:

- He will re-gather His people as a flock into rich pasture.
- He will remove as ‘the breaker’ every obstacle in their way.
- He will reign as their rightful king.

Section B: 3. 1 – 5. 15

Chapter 3 expands upon the judgement of those who held places of responsibility; it is true that the nation cannot collectively rise any higher than its leaders, as indeed is the case in the New Testament assembly where the elders have responsibility.

Those who take the position of leadership influence others either for good or bad, which is why their failure is so serious. Three persons are mentioned here:

1. Princes – these were magistrates who were responsible to administer justice but they ‘abhor judgment, and pervert all equity’, 3. 9.

2. Prophets – who ought to have faithfully communicated the mind of God to the people, but actually offered false peace, being motivated by selfishness. Meanwhile, they had the audacity to claim the Lord’s presence whilst they flouted His principles, v. 11.
3. Priests – who, amongst other things, ought to have taught God’s people for their good and for God’s glory but were motivated instead by personal gain, v. 11.

Chapters 4 and 5 focus upon the future restoration of the nation and the blessed consequences of Messiah’s millennial reign.

The Lord will be amongst His people, established and exalted, and thence Jerusalem will be the epicentre of the world and the source of spiritual instruction. All hostilities will cease; peace, prosperity and safety will permeate the whole scene, 4. 1-4. The scattered flock will be regathered and cared for in spite of the days of darkness and difficulty that lie ahead, 4. 6 – 5. 1.

Chapter 5 verse 2 directs us to what is the best-known verse from all of Micah’s prophecy. We are now brought face to face with the Ruler of Israel, the One who alone will implement all these wondrous kingdom blessings. Note:

- a) His obscurity – ‘Bethlehem Ephrathah’ the little town, nine-and-a-half kilometres from Jerusalem, significantly the birthplace of David, 1 Sam. 17. 12. How beautifully this is in keeping with the meekness and humility that marked our blessed Saviour.
- b) His humanity – He would ‘come forth’ by way of the virgin Mary, taking upon Himself sinless and holy humanity, but His birth, says Jehovah, would be ‘unto me’, that is, to fulfil His will and carry out His purpose.
- c) His authority – He would be a ‘ruler in Israel’, but before the crown must come the cross.
- d) His deity – ‘whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting’. Our Lord Jesus Christ was possessed of absolute deity, He is eternally divine. JAMIESON, FAUSSET and BROWN say of this statement, that it is, ‘the strongest possible statement

of infinite duration in the Hebrew language’.¹

The rest of chapter 5 speaks of the issues that will flow out of His righteous reign: restoration, shepherd care, peace, and security in Jehovah alone, vv. 3-15.

Section C: 6. 1 – 7. 20

These closing two chapters summarize what has gone before.

With the figure of a lawsuit, Jehovah calls upon the nation to plead their case, to give their account of the story. What has Jehovah done that is wrong? The silence of the nation is deafening. Jehovah has been nothing but kind and benevolent to Israel, 6. 1-5.

What is it, then, that God wants from them exactly? Well, what He doesn’t want is multiple external heartless offerings but rather a character that is marked by righteousness, mercy, and humility – this is the type of life that pleases Him, vv. 6-8.

Anyone who is wise will see that the discipline of Jehovah upon His people was absolutely righteous; their lawlessness called out for it. The state of things grips the heart of the prophet as he feels the weight of the departure. Like Daniel in his day, Dan. 9, he effectively ‘eats the sin offering’, Lev. 6. 26, and, in doing so, identifies himself with the sin of the nation, Mic. 6. 9 – 7. 6.

But, yet again, we have the language of hope, ‘Therefore I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation’, 7. 7. Representatively, Micah acknowledges that the discipline of the Lord is deserved and casts himself upon God’s justice, waiting until He turns the tables. The nations will be astounded and ashamed when they see Israel gloriously restored by the pardoning grace of God, vv. 8-20.

The principles

Many lessons could be gathered from the prophecy of Micah. We have seen the costliness of sin; the importance of those who are in responsible roles living lives that are righteous; the stability that comes when we fix our eyes upon God in difficult days. More

could be added but there is one verse that stands out, that if we could apply it to our lives would govern us for God’s glory: ‘and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?’ 6. 8.

1. ‘to do justly’ – well might the psalmist say, ‘the righteous Lord loveth righteousness’, Ps. 11. 7. Righteousness is seen when we, as believers, live in keeping with God’s character, in practical consistency. We live in an unrighteous world where dodgy dealings and shady practices are commonplace. The child of God ought to seek by His grace to live differently; doing the right thing isn’t always easy or popular but doing the right thing is always right!
2. ‘to love mercy’ – mercy is the lovingkindness of God, His active favour, something that David reflected when he pitied Mephibosheth, 2 Sam. 9, and it is also a characteristic that we are exhorted to show, ‘And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted’, Eph. 4. 32. ‘Put on . . . kindness’, Col. 3. 12.
3. ‘to walk humbly’ – the word for ‘humbly’, *tsana*, is a rather rare Hebrew word. Its only other occurrence being in the proverb, ‘When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom’, Prov. 11. 2. It conveys the idea of modesty, lowliness and unassertiveness. How unbecoming pride is with a child of God. The three words of Philippians chapter 2 ought to be engraved in every heart, ‘he humbled himself’, Phil. 2. 8. If this were the case, we would not only be preserved personally but we would each be more workable with one another.

The humble walk is ‘**with thy God**’ – our walk has to be ordered in personal fellowship with Him. It is only then that humility will characterize our lives.

‘A proud man is far from the cross’,
JOHN DOUGLAS.²

Endnotes

- 1 R. JAMIESON, A. R. FAUSSET and D. BROWN, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, Eerdmans.
- 2 Taken from his oral ministry.

Towns and cities in the life of the Lord

Part 4

CAPERNAUM (2)

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

John 6. 15-21 – a storm on the lake

As the background to this event, we should notice the omniscience of the Saviour – He ‘perceived that they would come and take him by force’, v. 15. The Lord knows all things!

In the words of the wise men from the east, the Lord was ‘born King of the Jews’, Matt. 2. 2. He was destined to be king. Was this the moment and the means? Clearly, we know it was not and the Lord certainly knew. We remind ourselves of Satan’s ploy in the temptation in the wilderness. Surveying the kingdoms of the world, the devil said, ‘All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them . . . If thou therefore wilt worship me’, Luke 4. 6, 7. Would it be right to be given the kingdom without the cross? We know the answer! The challenge for us is that we must be careful not to allow simple circumstances alone to steer us in a way that is what we want rather than what God wants. What is the Lord’s answer for Himself and for us? ‘He departed again into a mountain himself alone’, v. 15. The other Gospel writers tells us that in the isolation He prayed! We must submit to the will of God through the encouragement of prayer.

As the disciples set sail for Capernaum, we note the combination

of factors that existed. Verses 17 and 18 tell us, ‘it was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them. And the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew’. Alone, in the dark, and in the midst of a storm, the disciples rowed and, as other Gospel writers tell us, they rowed hard. They did what they could to rescue themselves from the situation.

Some readers may understand what it is to feel alone, isolated, with no one to turn to for support and guidance. Others may have felt themselves in a dark place, surrounded by dark, seemingly irresistible forces. Others have been in the eye of the storm, not necessarily on the sea but a storm of circumstances over which they had no control. Having tried all that they know, it has been to no avail. They have felt the extremity of their plight. In such situations, it is good to remind ourselves of Mark’s account, ‘he saw them toiling in rowing . . . and about the fourth watch of the night he cometh unto them’, 6. 48. The Lord saw them, and the Lord came to them.

The Lord came ‘about the fourth watch of the night’. It was just before the break of day – being between three and six a.m. Put simply, it was at the last minute. It is often when we have exhausted all that we can do that

He acts, in order that the glory might all be His. In all of our struggles, may we learn to trust Him and His timing!

He came unto them ‘walking on the sea’, John 6. 19. It was not what the disciples would have expected, which is why they were afraid! Sometimes, in the perplexities of life, we have clear ideas of what needs to be done and how. It is just that we don’t have the ability to do it. However, this event teaches us that if we need to leave the ‘when’ to the Lord, we also need to leave the ‘what’ and the ‘how’. Surely, His walking upon the sea is a demonstration of His absolute power over circumstances that are far beyond us to solve! May the Lord increase our confidence in Him!

Matt. 11. 23, 24 – upbraiding the cities

Space won’t allow us to say much about the Lord’s statements here but let us consider the significance of the Lord’s condemnation of Capernaum. Why? And why was the condemnation so strong?

The simple answer is that with greater light comes greater responsibility. We noted at the beginning of our consideration of this town, ‘The people which sat in darkness saw great light’, Matt. 4. 16. According to Matthew, this was the time of the commencement of the Lord’s public ministry and, as we have seen, some of that was conducted in Capernaum. Considering all that the town witnessed and heard of the Lord, His words, and miracles, why did they choose to continue sitting in darkness and ignoring the great light?

In the English-speaking world, we have a history of biblical exposition and teaching. We have had the scripture in our own language for over 400 years. We have libraries of biblical teaching, much of which can be accessed at the click of a button. We have many Bible teachers who live amongst us or visit and teach the word of God. We have no need to sit in spiritual darkness. The light of the word of God is easily available to us. However, with such blessing comes tremendous responsibility. What are we doing for God with the resources that we have?



Why is gospel literature important in a digital world?

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

This is a good question! We live in a world where people access information in many different ways. Despite the rapid rise of communication via digital means, it is surprising that so much of our information is still presented in written and printed form. I may be old-fashioned, but I still enjoy reading a printed book or magazine when possible.

I spend a lot of my day reading information on my phone and accessing various websites on my tablet or laptop; there is, however, still a place for printed material. So, this brief article highlights the need to write good quality gospel material so that people who are not believers can explore the truth of the gospel in private. How that material is presented in terms of quality of print, design, and appropriate illustrations is going to be outside the scope of this paper, but it is also very important. If people do not even pick up or accept a leaflet because it looks cheap, it does not reflect the value and importance of the message, and we have failed at the first hurdle.

In most situations in life, we need to look at what is required and how it will be used so that we can meet people's specific needs. For instance, when giving out leaflets on the street, it will be rare for someone to accept a long and detailed explanation of some biblical doctrine. We need to hand out a leaflet that catches their attention. It must explain in simple and precise terms the challenge of the gospel. It should present the fundamental truths of salvation or raise an issue that will make them aware that they need to think about these things. Writing something short and precise can be hard at times; often, being long-winded is an easier option. Some of you (men and women) have the ability to write, but you have only done it

so far in an employment situation. So, it may be appropriate to think about how you can use those skills to present the truths of the gospel in a simple and readable way. We need good writers to apply their minds to presenting gospel truth in an engaging style that will get people to think. We must never assume that someone in the street will not want a more detailed explanation of gospel truth, or answers to questions they have had for a long time. Therefore, having good literature on hand, which goes into more detail about the gospel is also wise. All in all, we should remember to quote plenty of scripture. The word of God is more effective than our explanations, 'So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God', Rom. 10. 17.

In 2011, we at Precious Seed Publications decided to commission, design, and print a gospel booklet

series that believers, evangelists, and local assemblies could use to spread the gospel. We called it 'Faith Matters'. One reason for the name was to draw people's attention to the fact that faith does indeed matter. The other thought was that we were writing about matters of faith. All believers agree that faith, and specifically faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and His saving work, is a matter of great importance. The Lord Jesus Christ and His saving work really matter, and we want to bring that gospel message to as many people as possible. Our objective was to publish a well-written and professionally designed booklet. You will need to judge how successful we have been in this enterprise.

Since 2011, eleven issues of this publication have been produced. We usually have about five articles in each booklet explaining some aspect of the gospel or highlighting a topical issue that might draw the reader's attention to the word of God. People often receive 'Faith Matters' when I offer it to them because of the range of articles to choose from, and it looks like it is worth holding on to.

To see the latest publication (FM 11), please visit the online shop through our website, www.preciousseed.org, or <https://www.preciousseed.org/faith-matters/>. There are also back issues available for purchase at a discount.

I highly recommend this gospel pamphlet for use in a local church outreach setting or personal evangelism.



WORD FOR TODAY

By **BRIAN CLATWORTHY** Newbury, England

dikaïos (righteous, correct)

dikaïosynēn (righteousness, justice)

dikaïoō (to declare, pronounce righteous)

Anyone who seeks to understand the biblical doctrine of righteousness or justification will immediately be challenged by the vast amount of material that is found throughout scripture. MORRIS notes the limited use of the words ‘propitiation’ and ‘reconciliation’ in the New Testament and states, by way of contrast, ‘he who would expound justification is confronted with eighty-one occurrences of the adjective *dikaïos*, ninety-two of the noun *dikaïosynēn* . . . thirty-nine of the verb *dikaïoō*’.¹ This is especially true in the New Testament writings of the Apostle Paul. In fact, one could argue that this subject is one of the dominant themes of at least two of his letters where he uses the verb ‘to justify’ [*dikaïoō*] and the noun ‘righteousness’ [*dikaïosynēn*] almost exclusively in Romans and Galatians. Paul’s use therefore of the so-called *dikē* word-group in his vocabulary provides us with an important insight into this biblical doctrine. To quote MORRIS again, ‘Justification is not an isolated concept. It is part of a whole way of viewing God and the world which sees in law a means of understanding the divine ordering of things’.²

The general usage of the *dikē* word-group in non-Christian sources, such as classical Greek, shows that it often referred to a just measure or a just rule. Additionally, it emphasized a general conformity to custom or obligation and compliance with legal rules and regulations. In jurisprudence, it meant justice or the process of making a legal decision. HILL states, ‘After Homer, the implicit juristic reference became increasingly prominent and the word “dikē” was frequently used to refer to proceedings instituted to determine legal rights, a lawsuit, or trial, and even to the objects or consequences

of legal action, i.e. “satisfaction” or “penalty”’.³ Interestingly, the noun *dikē* was the name of the Greek goddess of just punishment! Overall, therefore, this word group was the basic Greek term for social righteousness or justice. As DODD writes, ‘We may take it that the Greek-speaking public, on the whole, meant by *dikaïosyne* doing the right thing by your neighbour, however the right thing might be conceived; while if it used the term in a narrower and more precise sense it meant by it the virtue of acting towards your neighbour with a strict and impartial regard to his merit. It would probably be fair to say that the narrower sense tended to colour the wider sense -i.e. that the Greek tended to think of “righteousness” in terms of “justice”’.⁴

What is significant is that neither in classical nor non-biblical Greek are there any instances of this word-group referring to ‘a personal object in the sense “to make righteous”’.⁵ This last point cannot be over-emphasized because, from Augustine onwards, Roman Catholicism has always held the view that God justifies an individual by making them righteous by some form of inner spiritual renewal. It was argued that in the doctrine of justification, there was something that could be done to initiate the process of salvation and was expressed in the famous strap-line, *facere quod in se est* – ‘do what lies within you’. The Reformers opposed this notion that righteousness could be realized by human effort, by rejecting the principle that by doing one’s best one could be in a position to receive grace. LUTHER argued that the righteousness of God was something alien (*iustitia aliena*) and extrinsic to humanity or, as he later described it in his sermon on ‘Two Kinds of Righteousness’ (1519), ‘that is the righteousness of another, instilled from without. This is the righteousness of Christ by which he justifies through faith, as it is written in 1 Cor. 1[:30]: “Who God made our wisdom, our righteousness and

sanctification and redemption”’.⁶ It came as a gift through faith in Christ alone; it was imputed, not imparted or infused, and could not be earned as a reward. This is where Luther ultimately departs from Augustine in terms of the *locus in quo* of righteousness. MCGRATH states, ‘Augustine located this gift within humanity, as a transforming reality; Luther argued that it is located outside us, being “reckoned” or “imputed” to humanity, not imparted’.⁷ This is why Paul uses terms such as ‘reckon’ or ‘impute’ when he is referring to the righteousness of God, e.g., Rom. 4. 5-8. Even though none of Luther’s ninety-five propositions included any mention of justification by faith, his whole approach only made sense because it was rooted in this biblical doctrine and the grace of God. In the words of PACKER, ‘Justification is a judgment passed on man, not a work wrought within man: God’s gift of a status and a relationship to Himself, not a new heart. Certainly, God does regenerate those whom he justifies, but the two things are not the same’.⁸

Thus, where an individual was set in a right relationship with God, they acted accordingly. For example, in the Septuagint (LXX), where the incidence of words such as ‘righteous’ and ‘righteousness’ are numerous, the adjective *dikaïos* occurs in Genesis chapter 6 verse 9, where Noah is described as ‘a just [righteous] man’. In other words, Noah acted justly or righteously because he was in a right relationship with a just God. When Abraham asked God rhetorically whether He would ‘also destroy the righteous with the wicked’, Gen. 18. 23, he thought of God in terms of a judge, hence his later comments in verse 25. Similarly, in Hannah’s prayer, she asserts that ‘there is none righteous as our God’, 1 Sam. 2. 2 LXX, which the MT⁹ translates as ‘rock’ as also in Deuteronomy chapter 32 verse 4, but there the writer expands the meaning by stating that ‘all his ways are just’. In Job chapter 34 verse 10 LXX, in his second speech, Elihu insists that God is not unjust, and that wickedness is a perversion of His righteousness, i.e., for God to act contrary to His righteous nature, it would be to pervert the course of

justice. So throughout the Septuagint, the emphasis of the *dikē* word-group is upon, among other things, doing what is just and right, Gen. 18. 19; demonstrating righteousness, 2 Sam. 15. 4; God being shown to be righteous, Isa. 42. 21; and justifying the righteous and condemning those who are wicked, Deut. 25. 1. But what predominates is the idea of a law court whereby terms such as righteousness and justification are inherently linked to forensic proceedings.¹⁰

When we come to the New Testament, we observe that the noun *dikē* only occurs three times, and on each occasion refers to retributive justice.¹¹ The adjective *dikaioi* is found in nearly every book of the New Testament including the Synoptic Gospels and John's Gospel where it is often used as a synonym for righteousness.¹² But, as previously indicated, it is Paul who makes the most significant contribution to this essential doctrine of righteousness or justification. His major use of the *dikē* word-group in the New Testament shows that the only way that we, as sinners, who deserve the wrath of God, Rom. 1. 18, can be in a right relationship with God is through the righteousness of another imputed to us freely by grace through faith alone, Rom. 3. 23, 24; 4. 5. Paradoxically, as

PACKER states, 'What Paul is saying is that the gospel which proclaims God's apparent violation of his justice is really a revelation of his justice'.¹³

In the revelation of the gospel we find that justification:

1. Cannot be achieved by human effort, Gal. 2. 21.
2. Is an act of God to justify the sinner through Christ alone, Rom. 4. 23-25; 5. 19.
3. Is confirmed and ratified by the resurrection of Christ, Rom. 4. 25.
4. Not only brings peace with God through faith in Christ but also gives us a standing in grace before God, and the hope of eternal glory, Rom. 5. 1, 2.
5. Brings us eternal life through the work of Christ alone, v. 18.

If Paul asserts that no one can be declared righteous in God's sight through compliance with His law, Rom. 3. 20; Gal. 2. 16, what is then the evidence of a person having been justified by faith? This brings a second paradox into view because it is faith alone that justifies the sinner, but it is now the evidence of good works that justify the faith of the justified. These are the outward fruits of faith, Jas. 2. 26. The question for us today is whether we are demonstrating these fruits in our

lives or, as Paul writes to Titus, simply professing to know God but in deeds denying Him, 1. 16?

For further reading/study Introductory

Justification – J. I. PACKER, *18 Words: The most important words you will ever know*, Christian Focus Publications, 2008, pp. 135-142.

Advanced

'δική' (*dikē*) Word group – GERHARD KITTEL, (translated by GEOFFREY W. BROMILEY), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Eerdmans, 1974, pp. 174-225.

Endnotes

- 1 LEON MORRIS, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross, Justification (1)*, Eerdmans, 1965, pg. 251.
- 2 *Ibid*, pg. 253.
- 3 DAVID HILL, *Greek Words and Hebrew Meanings*, Cambridge, 1967, pg. 99.
- 4 C. H. DODD, *The Bible and the Greeks*, Hodder and Stoughton, 1964, pg. 43.
- 5 ERNEST DE WITT BURTON, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, T&T Clark, 1959, pg. 461.
- 6 MARTIN LUTHER, *Luther's Works*, Volume 31, Fortress Press, 1960, pg. 297.
- 7 ALISTER MCGRATH, *Christianity's Dangerous Idea*, SPCK, 2007, pg. 43.
- 8 J. I. PACKER, *18 Words: The most important words you will ever know*, Christian Focus Publications, 2008, pg. 136.
- 9 Masoretic Text. The Septuagint (LXX) often uses the *dik*-word-group to translate the Hebrew *ts-d-q* family, and the Greek word *dikaioo* is a close dynamic equivalent of the Hebrew verb *sedek*. Both the Greek and Hebrew words mean 'to justify' in the forensic sense of 'declare righteous' or 'treat as just'. For a more detailed study on the Hebrew word *sedek* see *Precious Seed* Issue 3 Volume 65 (2010).
- 10 Notice in Jeremiah chapter 18 verse 19 LXX, where the word for 'righteousness' is translated as 'plead' because the prophet pleads before God as a judge for divine justice so that his enemies might be dealt with accordingly. The word is also used in Judges chapter 6 verse 32 LXX of a court of justice.
- 11 In Acts chapter 28 verse 4, of the wrong verdict of the people on Paul's encounter with a viper. In 2 Thessalonians chapter 1 verse 8, of the penalty that will be imposed upon 'those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ' NKJV. And, in Jude verse 7, of the punishment inflicted upon the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah that provides an example of the judgement of God.
- 12 E.g., Matt. 3. 15; Mark 6. 20; Luke 1. 6; John 17. 25.
- 13 J. I. PACKER, *op. cit.*, pg. 137.



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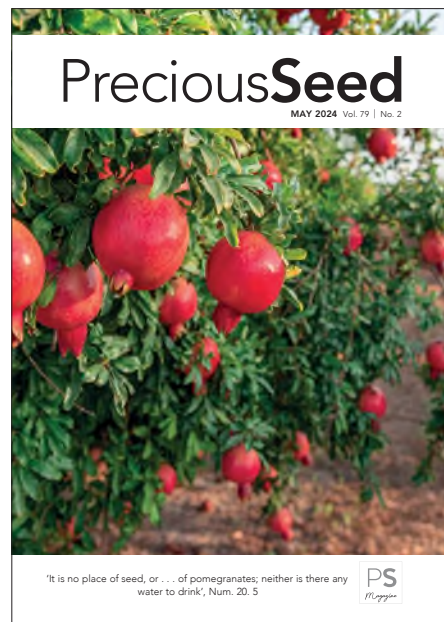
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'It is no place of seed, or . . . of pomegranates; neither is there any water to drink', Num. 20. 5.

Having been delivered from slavery in Egypt via the Red Sea, the children of Israel now arrive in the Desert of Zin. Perhaps better known to us as the Negev, it was a desolate and rocky region but on the very border of the Promised Land.

Sadly, there is an old familiar cry that arises from the people – 'why have ye brought up the congregation of the Lord into this wilderness?' v. 4. Admittedly, their present circumstances may have been far from favourable, but the vision of the land that lay ahead, given by Caleb, 13. 30, was ignored. They did not believe that God could give them what He had promised. Even though their persecution at the hands of the Egyptians should have been fresh in their minds, they longed rather for the 'figs . . . vines . . . [and] pomegranates' they had left behind, carefully omitting the taskmasters and their bondage.

Those who have shepherd responsibilities amongst the people of God may appreciate how Moses and Aaron must have felt as they fell upon their faces at the door of the tabernacle. People often suffer from selective memories and turn on their leaders with alacrity. The children of Israel had forgotten the consequences of their complaint at Taberah, ch. 11, or of Miriam and Aaron's protest against Moses' leadership, ch. 12. Similarly, they did not remember the divine provision of the manna and the quails, ch. 11. The serious judgement that fell upon Korah and his brethren for their rebellion, ch. 16, was seen only as an escape from their perceived plight.

But what divine grace we see demonstrated! The God who could say to Moses, 'I have surely seen the affliction of my people . . . and have heard their cry', Exod. 3. 7, was still cognizant of their circumstances. Although they had forgotten Him, as 'the congregation of the Lord', God had not forgotten them. He supplied water enough for them all, and their beasts.

However, there is a lesson here that might not be immediately obvious. The judgement that had fallen swiftly in chapters 11, 12, and 16 did not fall in the same way here. Why? The answer may lie in chapter 14 and verse 23. Though they had sinned against God and rejected those that He had raised up as leaders amongst them, their punishment would not be immediate but would be to live out the rest of their days outside of the sphere of blessing. They came so near but remained so far away – from God and the Promised Land!

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