

# PreciousSeed

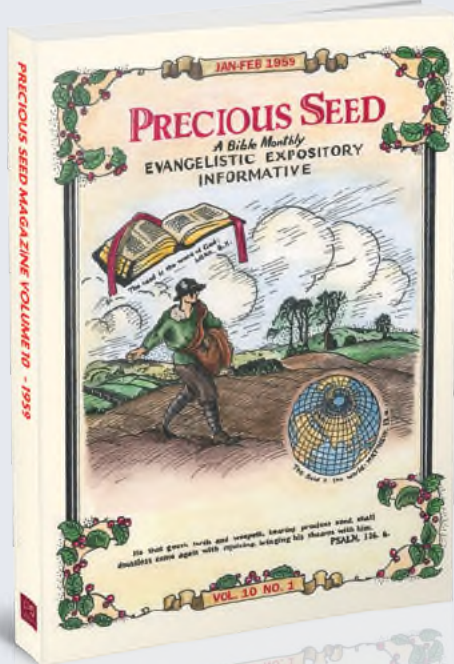
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'Now the disciples had forgotten to take bread', Mark 8. 14

PS  
Magazine

# NEW MATERIALS FROM PRECIOUS SEED



## Precious Seed Volume 10

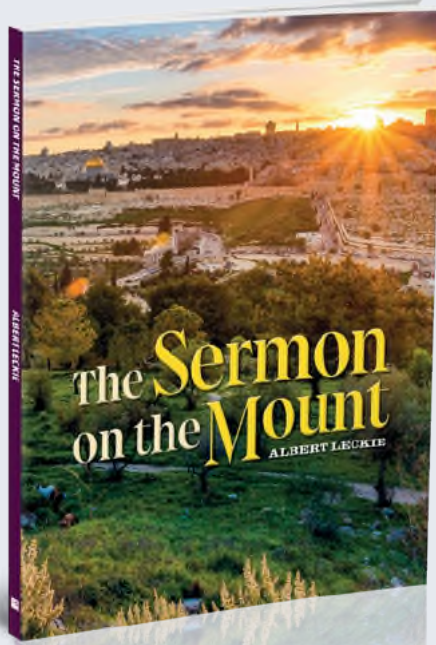
**Volume 10 in our reprint of archive material covers the year 1959.**

As with previous volumes in this series, there is the same mix of articles. There is something for younger believers. There is a continuation of J. H. LARGE's series entitled *When thy Son asketh thee*, which became a Precious Seed booklet. The various studies in John's Gospel, started in the previous volume continue here, as well as A. G. CLARKE's series *Concise Notes on the Levitical Offerings*.

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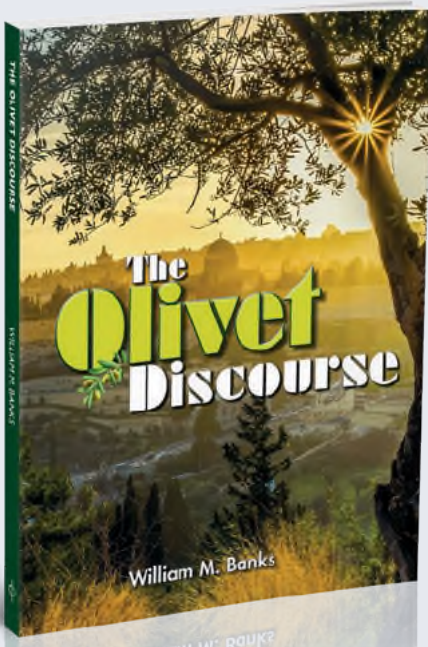
**This is the sixth book in the Albert Leckie series.**

The sermon on the mount is so called because Matthew says of the Lord, 'he went up into a mountain', 5. 1. Whilst this may be its geographical setting, its spiritual setting is the kingdom in anticipation. It will, in a very real way, be the heart cry of the faithful, godly Jew during the coming tribulation.

However, while this is the true setting of the sermon on the mount, it is quite wrong to dismiss it as Jewish and thus irrelevant to today. The language employed, the promise given, and the people addressed may differ, but the principles of God's kingdom never change and it is these abiding principles that are dealt with in this book.

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**By William Banks**

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By a careful comparison of scripture with scripture, the author takes us through these important chapters unfolding to us divine purpose in relation to Israel leading up to the return of the Lord to the earth. In an area of truth where there is confusion and error, it is good to have a clear presentation of what the Bible teaches.

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## ‘The God of the armies of Israel’, 1 Sam. 17. 45

How do you look at situations? Do you assess things merely from a human perspective, or do you instinctively include God and His claims as part of the picture? Israel had opted for a king who stood head and shoulders above the rest, but now both Saul and his people are cowering at a Philistine champion who towers above them all.

In problem solving, breakthroughs often depend on recasting or reframing a problem – crucially, knowing which elements to include and which to exclude. Young David instinctively sees something, or rather, someone whom others have lost sight of – God’s honour is at stake, v. 36, as Goliath has defied the armies of the living God. But David went on to say, ‘I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied’, v. 45.

Like so many today, the ungodly Goliath had totally discounted the living God. But at the opposite pole, David the shepherd lad puts **God centre-stage** in his thinking and actions. Later, he would affirm, ‘I have set the Lord always before me: because

he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved’, Ps. 16. 8.

David was probably inspired by a fine sense of Israel’s history, especially God’s warrior exploits at the Red Sea. ‘Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever. The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace’, Exod. 14. 13, 14. EDITH G. CHERRY’s much-loved hymn *We rest on Thee, our Shield and our Defender* includes the line ‘**Thine is the battle**, thine shall be the praise’.

David sees that the defeat of the Philistine will reveal the power of Jehovah to the nations and to Israel, 1 Sam. 17. 47, so he goes against the Philistine, armed only with the equipment of a shepherd lad.

Surely this is a glorious pointer to ‘great David’s greater Son’. Despised and rejected by men; disbelieved even by His own brothers; going alone against the foe, trusting His Father for

His ultimate vindication. Giving the glory to God alone. Hebrews 2 verses 14 and 15 get to the heart of the matter, ‘Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage’.

Israel had no part in the one-on-one fight, but they join in the victory and the enemy is put to flight. Thus, for Israel, **terror** gives way to **triumph**. David, the young warrior of Judah, saw that God’s honour was at stake, and, in faith, went against the foe in the name of the living God. How vital to learn to look at challenging situations from the divine perspective!

Once again, we acknowledge the faithfulness of God. We look to Him to graciously continue to bless the magazine, and our contributors and readers alike, in the year that lies ahead.

**Ken Totton**

Ministry Articles Editor

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### PULL-OUT

**YPS**  
By ANDREW DUTTON

# Words at the Cross

## Words spoken by the Lord Jesus on the cross

By **MERVYN WISHART** Newcastle, Northern Ireland

Part 3

Second saying from the cross, 'Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise', Luke 23. 43.

It was no accident that the Lord Jesus was crucified between two thieves. The One who at His birth in Bethlehem was surrounded by the beasts of the field was at His death crucified between two representatives of the lowest of society. Everything that took place at Calvary was in accordance with the will of God and in fulfilment of the word of God. When Peter and John were released from custody, part of the spontaneous praise of the believers was, 'For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done', Acts 4. 27, 28.

There are five books of scripture which refer to these two men. Each of the four Gospels mentions them. **Matthew** and **Mark** both say that they were 'thieves', Matt. 27. 38; Mark 15. 27; men who habitually broke the sixth commandment. They sought to enrich themselves at the expense of others. What a contrast between them and the Man on the centre cross. He said, 'The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly', John 10. 10. He had not come to rob men but to enrich the lives of those who would receive Him.

**Luke** uses the word 'malefactors' to describe them, 23. 32, a word made up of two words meaning 'an evil doer'. Again, there was a stark contrast between them and Christ. They were notorious criminals, but

scripture records of Him, '[He] went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him', Acts 10. 38. In his Gospel, Luke is careful to emphasize the contrast between Christ and the malefactors, 'And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death', Luke 23. 32. In the reading of this verse, it is most important to observe the commas supplied in English translations; the Lord Jesus was not a malefactor. The word used by Luke when he speaks of 'two other' is *heteros*, meaning **other** of a different kind.

**John** in his Gospel says, 'where they crucified him, and two other with him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst', 19. 18. He simply referred to them as 'two other'.

**Isaiah** says, 'and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many', 53. 12. Mark confirmed that this prophecy was fulfilled at Calvary, Mark 15. 28. How wonderful to remember that not only did the Lord Jesus die with transgressors but He died for transgressors, 'But he was wounded for our transgressions', Isa. 53. 5. The children's chorus repeats this precious truth:

Three crosses standing side by side,  
Of broken law a sign,  
Two for their own transgressions died,  
The middle One for mine'.

### Both thieves joined with those who mocked the Lord Jesus

'And they that were crucified with him reviled him', Mark 15. 32. Both

men were guilty of many crimes, but this was the worst of all; they mocked and taunted the suffering Saviour. They both witnessed the crucifixion of Christ and heard His prayer asking for forgiveness for those who crucified Him. They read the title over the cross, 'This is Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews', Matt. 27. 37.

### One of the thieves repented

Doubtless the repentant thief was affected by what he saw and heard. He could do nothing to make amends for his past. He realized that time for him was running out. He made confession of his sin, saying to his companion, 'we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds', Luke 23. 41. This is the starting point for anyone with an earnest desire to be right with God. The publican said, 'God be merciful to me a sinner', 18. 13.

### The other thief continued to mock the Saviour

Sadly, we do not read that the second thief ever repented. They had the same opportunity, each was equally near to the One who is twice called in the New Testament 'the Saviour of the world', John 4. 42; 1 John 4. 14. They witnessed how patiently He suffered, and they heard His words. How true it is: one was saved that none need despair; one was lost that none might presume.

### The repentant thief spoke to his companion concerning Christ

'This man hath done nothing amiss', Luke 23. 41. These words could never be spoken truthfully of any other. He remonstrated with him, saying, 'Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?' v. 40. Solomon wrote, 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom', Prov. 9. 10.

They were under a twofold condemnation. A death sentence had been passed on them by the Roman court, and within a few hours they must die. But they were under a far greater condemnation because of their sin against God and their rejection of His Son, 'he that believeth not is condemned already,

because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God', John 3. 18.

### **He spoke directly to the Lord Jesus**

'Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom', Luke 23. 42. It was clear that he now believed certain truths about Christ.

1. His sinlessness, v. 41;
2. He is a king who will one day come in His kingdom, v. 42;
3. He had heard the Lord praying for the forgiveness of the soldiers, and believed there may be forgiveness for him.

In his utter extremity on the threshold of eternity, he said, 'Lord, remember me', v. 42.

### **The Lord spoke to him**

'Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise', v. 43. It was a word of certainty, 'verily I say unto thee'; a word concerning his company, 'shalt thou be with me'; a word about the contentment of heaven, 'in paradise'. He offered him far more than he had asked for. What did he ask for, and what did the Lord promise him? He asked that the Lord remember him when He would come into His kingdom. What marvellous blessings there are associated with the earthly millennial kingdom! And the Lord promised him an entrance into glory that very day, but also to be with Him when He comes to establish His kingdom on earth. Paul writes, 'When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory', Col. 3. 4.

Divine grace far exceeds human expectations. He went from the gallows to glory, from agony to ecstasy. In the morning of that day, he was a condemned criminal; in the evening he was a glorified saint. He was the firstfruits of the glorious redemptive work of Calvary. He had no deeds of merit in his former life, and he had no opportunity to live for Christ after his conversion. He could not be baptized; he was saved by sovereign grace alone. He was arrested and charged with many crimes, judged unfit to walk on the streets of Jerusalem, and led outside

the city gate to the place of execution; yet by the marvel of God's grace, he entered that very day through the portals of glory.

The Lord Jesus was the first of the three to die. His last recorded words from the cross were, 'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit', Luke 23. 46. When the repentant thief breathed his last on earth, immediately his spirit was consciously with Christ in paradise. Paradise is synonymous with heaven, the dwelling place of God. We note what the Saviour said, 'Thou shalt be with me in paradise'. It is His presence that will make paradise what it will ever be.<sup>1</sup>

Paradise is the antitype of the Garden of Eden. JOHN MILTON, 1608-1674, wrote a book entitled *Paradise Lost*, and another, *Paradise Regained*. The story of the Garden of Eden is of 'Paradise Lost'; but, because of the triumph of Christ at Calvary, paradise has been regained and the Lord Jesus could speak to the repentant malefactor of meeting him there that very day.

### **The God of promise**

When the repentant thief heard the reassuring words from the Man on the centre cross, he laid hold of the promise. He had nothing else; no material possessions, his friends, and family were gone. As he faced eternity and realized he soon must meet God, he had one consolation: the promise of the Son of God. The believer today has nothing less and needs nothing more.

Beginning with the promise of Genesis chapter 3 verse 15 concerning the coming Saviour, almost four thousand years rolled by before its fulfilment, Gal. 4. 4.

### **God fulfils His promises**

In Genesis chapter 12 verse 2, when he and Sarah were childless, God promised Abraham that He would make of him a great nation – he was seventy-five years old, and twenty-five years would pass before his son Isaac was born, 21. 5. When he was asked to offer up Isaac, Abraham said, 'My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering', 22. 8. About 1900 years would

pass before the day when John the Baptist identified the Lamb of God, John 1. 29. God will fulfil all His promises. In Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple, he bore witness to God's faithfulness to His word, 'there hath not failed one word of all his good promise', 1 Kgs. 8. 56.<sup>2</sup>

### **Learning to trust God**

The secret of knowing God's peace in a troubled and turbulent world is for the believer to rest on God's promises. 'Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength', Isa. 26. 3, 4.

In New Testament language, 'Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus', Phil. 4. 6, 7.

Faith and fear are mutually exclusive in the experience of a Christian. At any time, we can have one or the other, but not both. Isaiah wrote, 'I will trust, and not be afraid', Isa. 12. 2. Our feelings may change, but God's promises are forever settled in heaven, Ps. 119. 89.

'Feelings come and feelings go, and feelings are deceiving;  
My warrant is the Word of God;  
naught else is worth believing.  
Though all my heart should stand condemned for want of some sweet token,  
There is One greater than my heart,  
whose Word cannot be broken.  
I'll trust in God's unchanging Word,  
till soul and body sever,  
For, though all things shall pass away,  
His Word shall stand for ever'.

MARTIN LUTHER 1483-1546

#### **Endnotes**

- 1 The word is found three times in the New Testament: Luke 23. 43; 2 Cor. 12. 4; Rev. 2. 7.
- 2 Peter and Paul confirm this, 2 Pet. 1. 4; 2 Cor. 1. 20.

# TITLES OF JEHOVAH 2

## JEHOVAH ROPHECA

By **MARK SWEETNAM** Dublin, Ireland

The years of wilderness wandering are a tragic period in the history of Israel. The greatest tragedy of those years does not, perhaps, lie in the trail of graves that marked the fulfilment of the divine judgement as the carcasses of the disobedient fell in the wilderness. Sad though that trail of death undoubtedly was, there was a deeper sadness to the story of thirty-eight wasted years when Israel could have been, and should have been, in the land, possessing the inheritance that God had promised her. The deepest tragedy of all was that it did not need to be like this, that God had never intended it to be like this. The tragedy of their wasted years is the tragedy of ours. God does not want us to waste our time in wilderness wanderings; it is our unbelief and disobedience that prevent our progress, keep us on the wrong side of Jordan and out of the land where a rich inheritance of blessing awaits our possession. It does not have to be like this.

Of course, not all of Israel's wilderness experience was wasted. While God had not intended them to spend years in wandering, He had brought them out of Egypt into the wilderness and, in the nation's first journey to Kadesh-Barnea, we see God carrying out a deliberate and focused programme of education. We see this in a particularly focused way in the three months that it took the nation to travel from the Red Sea to Sinai. In that brief period, and with Sinai and its covenant in view, God gave His people a crash course in what it meant to live with the presence, the power, and the provision of God. On the shores of the Red Sea, at Marah and Elim, in the wilderness, at Rephidim, and in battle against Amalek, Israel learned the reality and the range of God's multi-faceted, variegated ability to succour His own in any circumstance. And, as we look at the record of His provision, we can see, in all the variety, a consistency that was not, perhaps, so readily apparent to Israel. At Marah, in the manna, and in the rock that bore the stroke of Moses' rod, we learn the lesson that all of God's provision for His people's passage is found in the person of Christ, the true bread that came down from heaven, John 6. 32, the rock

from which the nation drank, 1 Cor. 10. 4, and the One who has the power to bring sweet water from bitter.

God's response to His people's circumstances was gloriously consistent; theirs was marked by a dismal predictability. Marah set the template. Scarcely had the rejoicing strains of the Song of the Sea faded away before they were replaced with the murmuring of the people against Moses – and against God. In Numbers chapter 11, their murmuring would bring down devastating judgement on 'the uttermost parts of the camp', but here it elicits only God's gracious provision. This contrast in God's response may reflect the fact that one of these episodes of murmuring took place before Sinai, the other after; a solemn reminder that 'the "sins of the saints" are graver than the "sins of the sinners"'.<sup>1</sup> It may be too that the people murmur here in response to a real need. Numbers chapter 11 tells us nothing about the catalyst for their complaint and gives no indication that it was in any way justified. Similarly, in Numbers chapter 21, where the Lord sends fiery serpents in response to the people's murmuring, it is the fact that they are complaining not about their need but about God's provision (a provision

that speaks of Christ) that makes their offence especially egregious. Here, the people had journeyed three days and had to cope, not just with the very real difficulty of diminishing – or depleted – supplies, but with the disappointment of finding only bitter and undrinkable water. But even these adverse and alarming circumstances could not justify murmuring, with its connotations of obstinate complaint. Moses' response shows us the better way – faced with insurmountable difficulty, he 'cried unto the Lord', Exod. 15. 25. Israel had not chosen the difficult circumstances in which she found herself. The waters of Marah were not a punishment for disobedience. God Himself had brought them to the place called 'Bitterness'. But at that place, and in those circumstances, God 'proved them', for while the circumstances were beyond their control, their response was not and between the murmuring of the people and the crying of Moses there was a significant difference. We should note it well, for it is easy for us to murmur at our circumstances, nurturing a sense of grievance in our hearts, when the true path to blessing is that exemplified by Moses and exhorted by Peter, 'Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you', 1 Pet. 5. 7.

Moses did not cry in vain. 'The Lord shewed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet', v. 25. The account is striking in its compression – we are not told whether God told Moses to cast the tree into the water, though it seems a reasonable inference that He did so. The result of this is to focus our attention upon the tree as that which makes bitter water sweet. And it does so, surely, not so that we can engage in botanical speculation to identify a naturalistic cause for the effect of the sweetened water, but so that we, for whose admonition these things were written, 1 Cor. 10. 11, might be reminded of that unique tree that has made bitterness sweet. Calvary's centre tree, 'cast into' the most unpleasant circumstances of life, still has the power to make the bitter waters sweet and refreshing. 'Beauteous figure this of Him Who was, in infinite grace, cast into the bitter waters of death, in order that

those waters might yield nought but sweetness to us for ever'.<sup>2</sup> Israel's exodus from Egypt had begun with a rod that made water undrinkable; her journey into the wilderness begins with a tree that had the reverse effect.

Even Moses might have wondered why God would lead His people, so early in their journey, to so inhospitable a place. 'The name of it was called Marah', says verse 23, indicating that its bitter waters were well-known. Verse 25 gives us the answer, 'there he made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there he proved them'. God was testing His people. Like all divine testing, this was demonstrative rather than diagnostic, designed to reveal to Israel what God already knew about them. Israel's experience was what Peter (speaking to 'strangers and pilgrims') calls 'the trial of your faith', 1 Pet. 1. 7. Faith in God had brought this people safely through the Passover and out of Egypt. Now, in their wilderness journey, they must learn that the One who had met their need once-for-all in redemption could daily meet their need in provision and preservation. That lesson seems so obvious in the abstract, and yet few of us could deny that we have had to learn it in our experience time, and time, and time again.

God's testing is both probing and pedagogical,<sup>3</sup> and here, at Marah, He had a lesson for the people to learn, 'a statute and an ordinance' to teach them. Scripture speaks

more frequently of 'statutes and ordinances', in the plural, and at Sinai, in the law, Israel would receive a multiplicity of divine instructions. Here a singular statute is in view, and verse 26 tells us what it is, 'If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the Lord that healeth thee'.<sup>4</sup> On the banks of the Red Sea, Israel had felt the shackles of their bondage to Egypt fall from them. Now, as they embark on the journey into the wilderness, they must learn that, to use the important distinction that Paul draws in Galatians, they have liberty, but not licence. They had been set free from bondage to Pharaoh so that they could serve the Lord, their God.

Their obedience would bring blessing, in the form of preservation from 'these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians'. Although the plagues upon Egypt are not elsewhere spoke of as diseases, the language suggests that it is these, especially, that God has in view. Whether it was the plagues or more general maladies common to Egypt, however, the promise of preservation was underwritten by a fresh revelation of the character and the power of God: Jehovah Ropheca, 'the Lord that healeth thee'.

That revelation may have jarred

the Israelites, and there are at least two reasons why it should capture our attention. God had promised to preserve them from the diseases of the Egyptians, but He now presents Himself as their healer. If He was going to preserve them, why would they need to be healed? Moreover, what they seemed really to need was a God who would take care of their circumstances, a God who would heal the bitter water and provide for their need. But in their murmuring, they had revealed a pathology that went beyond their circumstances and ran deeper than the diseases of Egypt. It was they who needed healing, not the water.

The lesson here is as important for us as it is for Israel. When challenging circumstances arise in our lives, our reflex is to look to God to solve the problem by changing the circumstances. Sometimes, in His grace, He does, but often He does not, because we need to be changed more than the circumstances do. This is the truth highlighted by the writer to the Hebrews as he speaks to believers who were in acute difficulties about their responsibility to 'endure suffering as discipline', Heb. 12. 7 CSB, to look for the lessons in adverse circumstances, to be exercised by them so that afterwards they might yield 'the peaceable fruit of righteousness', Heb. 12. 11. When we do that, we learn something of the gracious kindness of our Father, who is still Jehovah Ropheca, the God who heals us.



#### Endnotes

- 1 VICTOR P. HAMILTON, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary*, Baker Academic, 2011, pg. 241.
- 2 C. H. MACKINTOSH, *Notes on the Book of Exodus*, Pickering & Inglis, n.d., pg. 189.
- 3 BLACKBURN argues that the verb 'proved' could be rendered 'trained': 'the Lord's goal at Marah is to fashion a people who will obey' (pg. 67). Compare the use of the same verb in Exodus chapter 20 verse 20.
- 4 The identity of this statute is not straightforward and other suggestions have been made. However, 'the unambiguous implication of this ambiguous phrase is that Israel's welfare will depend upon obedience to the voice of the Lord', W. ROSS BLACKBURN, *The God Who Makes Himself Known: The Missionary Heart of the book of Exodus*, NSBT, Apollos, 2021, pg. 66.

# 1 PETER 1: PILGRIMS OF THE HEAVENLY WAY<sup>1</sup>

By **KEITH R. KEYSER** Gilbertsville, USA

The Christian life is a pilgrimage. Our sojourn here is temporary, and we are travelling through this fallen wilderness of a world on our way to a heavenly inheritance. By reminding his readers of the trinitarian source and purpose of their salvation, Peter pastorally lifts their eyes to their heavenly destiny, so that they may bear with trials on the road to glory. Their eternal well-being was planned in accordance with the Father's perfect knowledge, the Spirit's sanctifying work, and the Son's redemptive sacrifice<sup>2</sup> leading to the saints' obedience, v. 2.<sup>3</sup> The apostle understood the rigours of following the Lord through this difficult scene; accordingly, he knew how to console, challenge, and encourage his fellow-saints on their weary trek. Though following Him entails suffering in this present age, believers may take solace in the divine eternal plan for His people.

The chapter divides this way:

Our identity – pilgrims linked to the triune God's eternal purposes and covenantal grace, 1. 1, 2;

Our hope – a heavenly inheritance, 1. 3-12;

Our preparation – holiness through faith and obedience, 1. 13-21;

Our solidarity – brotherly love from new life that stems from and is sustained by God's word, 1. 22 – 2. 3.

## **The believer's identity**

Being part of a dispersed people – the Jewish diaspora, as it is often called – the Hebrew-background readers were naturally attuned to a sense of otherness, stemming from their centuries-long wanderings during 'the times of the Gentiles', Luke 21. 24. In verse 1, Peter referred to them as 'pilgrims',<sup>4</sup> alternatively rendered 'sojourners',<sup>5</sup> or 'those who reside as aliens'.<sup>6</sup> These renderings reflect their true identity as those who are not yet home; they do not belong to this transient, fallen world, but pertain instead to the better country that is coming,

Heb. 11. 13-16. Amid hardship, instability, and persecution, 1 Peter repeatedly focuses the believer's vision of God and His purposes for this world and the one to come. The big picture view helps them to endure tribulation,<sup>7</sup> as well as providing an incentive for progressive sanctification, 1 Pet. 1. 13-16; 1 John 3. 2, 3.<sup>8</sup>

## **The believer's hope**

The believer's life-journey is reminiscent of Israel's wilderness wanderings, with Peter's 'inheritance' terminology especially recalling the book of Numbers' typology, vv. 4-9. The Father has begotten the saints to a living hope through Christ's resurrection – one that provides motivation to progress through this world to a glorious heavenly inheritance, vv. 3-5. His triumph over death guarantees their security now and will bring them to an incorruptible reward. A. T. ROBERTSON noted its imperishability, and praised its superiority compared with earthly legacies, commenting, 'So many inheritances vanish away before

they are obtained'.<sup>9</sup> In verse 23, the same word 'incorruptible' describes the spiritual seed of God's word, which is the source of our spiritual life.

The inheritance is also 'undefiled', like the Lord who graciously bestows it. Its description is rounded out by, 'that fadeth not away'. While this world's baubles are soon tarnished and often rot away, the believer's inheritance is eternally pristine to the praise of His ineffable glory.<sup>10</sup> It is safely 'reserved' for them, and they in turn are 'guarded' by God's power mediated through faith for the culmination of their salvation, v. 5.<sup>11</sup>

Like Israel in the wilderness, the church encounters opposition in the present age. But verses 6 to 9 reveal that trials are actually being used by the Lord for a greater end. Like the crucible's heat which reveals gold's unalloyed lustre, trials demonstrate – and purify – faith. Christianity is no unliveable, ivory-tower philosophy; rather, it is designed for real world conditions and struggles. In tribulations, believers learn to lean on the Lord, as well as manifesting the reality of His sustaining power and mercy during varied hardships. The sufferings will be employed to strip away the world's mistaken view of Christians, for the saint's faith will receive commensurate praise, honour, and glory at Christ's revelation, v. 7. Just as the Man of Sorrows' sufferings resulted in His eventual glorification,<sup>12</sup> so His people's troubles will redound to His honour when He returns, v. 9.

## **The believer's preparation**

The next section of the chapter demonstrates that while this preordained salvation was promised in the Old Testament, its realization only came to pass in the Christian era. God, who delights to reveal Himself to mankind, breathed forth His word through chosen prophets. They were tremendously interested in this message, 'searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified



beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glories that would follow', v. 11 NKJV. They foresaw Messiah and His two comings: one to suffer and the other to triumph in glory, Isa. 52. 13-15. But they also discovered that their prophecies pertained to believers of another time. Therefore, the saints in Peter's day were privileged to

receive things that the angelic world also desired to study, v. 12. They could take heart that their difficulties were within God's knowledge and circumscribed by His sovereign grace. Just as their Lord suffered and then was glorified, Luke 24. 25-27, even so their tearful experience would culminate in glory.

Peter uses terms that evoke memories of the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread, vv. 13-21. 'Gird up the loins of your mind', v. 13, matches the physical dress of the Israelites in Egypt on the night of the original Passover, Exod. 12. 11. They were to have their flowing garments tied up in order to facilitate a quick departure.

### Endnotes

- 1 DANIEL SMITH, who served the Lord in China, Japan, Taiwan, and Vancouver, wrote a highly recommended autobiography titled *Pilgrim of the Heavenly Way*.
- 2 'Sprinkled is the technical term that is used in the Old Testament when it was a question of cleansing by blood. The priest would take blood and sprinkle it on the person or elsewhere, as they came for forgiveness of sins. Never in the Old Testament do we have washed in blood; always sprinkled by blood. Therefore, in talking of the great sacrifice of Christ and his atoning, cleansing blood, the New Testament uses the term, sprinkled'. DAVID GOODING, *The Holy Spirit: Three Aspects of His Work in the Believer*, Myrtlefield Trust, 2018, pg. 25. Italics original.
- 3 'What the Father plans and the Spirit empowers, Christ thus receives, as exalted Saviour and ruling Lord', WAYNE GRUDEM, *1 Peter*, IVP, 1988, pg. 56.
- 4 NKJV; 'temporary residents', NKJV mg. Compare 1 Peter chapter 1 verse 17, where DARBY translates a synonymous phrase as 'pass your time of sojourn in fear'.

- 5 JND, F. W. GRANT (*Numerical Bible*), RV.
- 6 NASB '77, NASB '95. *The Legacy Standard Bible* says 'those who reside as exiles'.
- 7 'Heaven would not be that to us which it will be, were we not prepared by the chequered scenes of life for its enjoyments . . . God is thus, by present bitters, preparing us for future sweets; he is now qualifying us, by endowing us with a relish that shall give a zest to those pleasures which are at his right hand forevermore'. ANDREW FULLER, *Works*, Vol. 1. Sprinkle, 1988, pg. 391.
- 8 'The mind which is inspired by the glorious expectation is grandly secure against the encroachment of the evil one. Hope-inspired thought is its own defence. *It energises the will*. The great hope feeds the will, vivifies it, makes it steadfast and unmovable. Into all this powerful hope are we begotten again by the abundant mercy of God'. J. H. JOWETT, *The Epistles of Peter*, A. C. Armstrong, 1906, pp. 5. 6. Italics original.
- 9 A. T. ROBERTSON, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Broadman, 1933, electronic ed.
- 10 'It is beyond the reach of death.

- No grave is ever dug on this estate. It is an inheritance "undefiled". It is beyond the taint of sin. No contamination ever stains its driven snow. The robes of the glorified are whiter than snow. It is an inheritance 'that fadeth not away.' It is beyond the blight of change. The leaf never turns. "Time does not breathe on its fadeless bloom". JOWETT, pg. 7.
- 11 Verse 5 refers to the future aspect of salvation, what Romans chapter 8 verse 23 calls 'the redemption of our body', at Christ's second coming. See Rom. 8. 18-39; 1 Cor. 15. 50-58.
  - 12 Phil. 2. 5-11. J. N. DARBY comments, 'The great secret is to have entire confidence in the love of God, in the certainty that He is the doer of it – not looking at circumstances or at second causes, but seeing the hand of the Lord in it, that it is the trial of our faith, and that it is only on the way. When the day comes in which God has things His own way . . . these very trials will be found to praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ. It is a process that He is carrying on now; it may be even the putting into the furnace to bring out the preciousness of the faith'. *Works*, Vol. 16, Stow Hill, 1962, pp. 187, 188.



# THE TEACHING IN THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS

## Part 6 – The High Priesthood in Hebrews

By **ALAN J. GAMBLE** Glasgow, Scotland

Alone among the writers of the New Testament, the title ‘High Priest’ is applied to the Lord Jesus by the writer to the Hebrews. He uses the term eighteen times. On eleven of these occasions, he applies it to Christ. The other seven times relate either to Aaron, Israel’s first high priest, or to his successors under the law of Moses. Usually this is by way of contrast to Christ’s high priesthood. Thus, it is not surprising that the author declares that the main point of his letter is that Christians have a High Priest, exalted in heaven, 8. 1. Probably the first readers were being taunted that they did not have a high priest as part of the attempt to cause them to go back to Judaism and abandon their faith in Jesus.

The role of the high priest in Israel was to represent the nation to God, primarily by the offering of sacrifices, 5. 1. The ministry of the Lord Jesus as the Great High Priest was in the past His self-offering as the final sacrifice for sin, and in the present the sustaining of His people by His intercession in heaven, 9. 24. Thus, He secures our final salvation, 7. 25.

The letter begins with a majestic opening statement establishing that God has spoken His last word to humankind in His Son. In so doing, as D. W. GOODING points out, the writer ‘comes straight to the fundamental issue between Judaism and Christianity: is Jesus or is He not the Son of God?’<sup>1</sup> The introduction makes seven crucial assertions about the Lord Jesus. The last two directly relate to our subject. The Son of God

has made ‘purification for sins’, v. 3 NEWBERRY, and then He ‘sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high’. Cleansing from sin’s pollution for all who trust Him could only have been accomplished by the Lord Jesus. F. F. BRUCE comments that ‘the grace which has provided a remedy for the defilement of sin by a life freely offered up to God on our behalf calls forth a sense of personal indebtedness’ which consideration of Christ’s creative work ‘could never evoke’.<sup>2</sup> Christ’s sacrifice on the cross is followed by His enthronement. He is now exalted to the very highest place of transcendent majesty. His heavenly session is ‘the seal of the Divine acceptance of His work of purification’.<sup>3</sup> The posture of priests in the old covenant was standing, 10. 11. Their work of sacrifice was never done. Christ is seated. His sacrificial work is finished once and for all.

The first chapter of Hebrews is one of the strongest statements of Christ’s full deity. The second is an equally strong affirmation of His real humanity. One reason for our Lord’s incarnation was to fit Him to be ‘a merciful and faithful high priest’, 2. 17. For the Saviour to fulfil that ministry, ‘he had to be made like his brothers in every respect’, 2. 17 ESV. Only thus could He ‘make propitiation for the sins of the people’ NKJV. Propitiation means that all the demands of God’s righteous throne are fully met and God’s just and holy wrath, His revulsion against all wickedness, is removed from those who turn to Christ. Propitiation enables God to be just and the justifier of all who believe in Jesus, Rom. 3. 25, 26.

The present aspect of Christ’s high priesthood is unfinished. Christians are on a journey to glory. On it we are attacked by temptation. We are helped by the intercession of Christ. He does so with fellow feeling with us. For because He Himself has suffered being tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted, 2. 18. He experienced all the trials and temptations of His life on earth as perfect man with human emotions. He feels for us in heaven because He felt like us on earth. He most certainly sympathizes with us in our temptations as the author uses a double negative to emphasize, 4. 15. This is because the Saviour in every respect was tempted as we are. However, he is careful to stress that the Lord Jesus never succumbed to any temptation. He was always ‘without sin’. Sometimes it is suggested that this means He felt the force of temptation less than we do. That is a fallacy. The opposite is the case. ‘He knows the full force of temptation in a manner that we who have not withstood it to the end cannot know it’.<sup>4</sup> The population of a city which withstands a siege knows the limits of the power of the enemy more than that of one which falls.

We have examples of the Lord’s intercession on earth for Peter as an individual and for all the apostles and all the believers of this age, Luke 22. 31, 32; John 17. 6-26. These give us indications of the issues which He raises before His Father now in heaven. In the circumstances of the first readers, the concerns of the Lord would relate to the pressures on them, both of persecution and persuasion, to abandon their Christian confession. F. F. BRUCE suggests that the temptations endured by the Lord were ‘those subtle temptations which attended His messianic calling’.<sup>5</sup> In different ways, He faced and overcame the temptation to bypass the cross. He steadfastly set His face to accomplish His saving mission. What an encouragement to the first readers who were being tempted to give up their loyalty to God that they had an intercessor who was the victor over much more severe trials than even those they were facing. Identifying with his

readers, his call is to 'hold fast our confession', 4. 14 NKJV. That call is based on the greatness of their High Priest. He has ascended to the highest possible place. He bears the earthly name of Jesus yet is the Son of God. It is followed by another appeal, to draw near to the throne of grace to receive the grace and mercy needed in every time of need. We too should heed that call.

A question arises. The lineage of the Lord Jesus was from the kingly tribe of Judah, not the priestly tribe of Levi, 7. 13, 14; 8. 4. Thus, He could not function officially as a priest in the temple during His earthly ministry. In what sense is He a priest? The writer explains and emphasizes that the Lord's high priesthood is 'after the order of Melchizedek'.<sup>6</sup> This was a divine appointment by an oracle, accompanied by an oath, spoken to Messiah. Aaron had also been appointed by God to be high priest. There the resemblance ceased. Aaron was the first of a high priestly line. In contrast, 'to say that Christ is a priest after the order of Melchizedek is to

say that He is in a class by Himself. His Priesthood is unique'.<sup>7</sup> Chapter 7 demonstrates, by an intricate argument, the superiority of the order of Melchizedek to the order of Aaron. Melchizedek is a mysterious figure only referred to twice in the Old Testament, Gen. 14. 17-20; Ps. 110. 4. In my view he was an ordinary human being and historic figure, just like Abraham whom he met and sustained. However, he is a picture of Christ. The writer draws on Genesis to show that Melchizedek received tithes from Abraham, and that he also blessed Abraham, not the other way around. These facts establish the superiority of Melchizedek, the king-priest, to Aaron and his successors. More significantly, the silence of scripture is used to establish that Melchizedek had no genealogy and that his death is not recorded. Thus, it seems that his priesthood continues. The high priesthood after the line of Aaron was all about death and birth. It was hereditary. As each high priest died, he was succeeded by the next in

line who was descended from Aaron and his wife, Elisheba, Exod. 6. 23. That was the only qualification. As a result, there were eighty-three high priests between Aaron and the destruction of the temple.<sup>8</sup> In contrast, Christ became a priest not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life, 7. 16. In other words, He owes His priestly office to the appointment of God alone. His priesthood is permanent. It is based on His indestructible life. His risen life will never end and can never end. 'Because Jesus lives for ever, his priesthood lasts forever', 7. 24 NLT. His intercession will always prevail. The writer shows that the change in the priesthood means a complete change in the law, and its replacement by the better hope by which Christians draw near to God, 7. 12, 18, 19. The superiority of the Lord's priesthood is also shown by the totality of His unique moral perfections. He did not ever need to offer up a sacrifice for His own sins for He had none, unlike the high priest of Aaron's order who needed to make daily sacrifices for themselves. Christ is the very priest that we need, 7. 26, 27. Also, Christ's high priesthood was established by a divine oath to Him, which was lacking in the case of Aaron, 7. 20, 21, 28. The Lord Jesus, as the Son of God, is the perfect high priest who carries out a perfect ministry for His people.

Let the hymn writer, C. L. BANCROFT, have the last word, 'Before the throne of God above, I have a strong and perfect plea, a great high priest whose name is love, who ever lives and pleads for me'.

#### Endnotes

- 1 D. W. GOODING, *An Unshakeable Kingdom*, Gospel Folio Press, 2002, pg. 27.
- 2 F. F. BRUCE, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, 1964, pg. 7.
- 3 P. E. HUGHES, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Eerdmans, 1977, pg. 47.
- 4 P. E. HUGHES, *op. cit.*, pg. 124.
- 5 F. F. BRUCE, *op. cit.*, pg. 53.
- 6 Psalm 110. 4, cited or alluded to in: 5. 6, 10; 6. 20; 7. 11, 15, 17 and 21.
- 7 R. B. GAFFIN, *The Perfect Saviour*, Inter Varsity Press, 2012, pg. 63.
- 8 JOSEPHUS, *Antiquities*, 20.27.



# The Battle for the Mind

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## Part 3 BE OF ONE MIND

By **MARK LACEY** Bath, England

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'Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind', Phil. 2. 2.

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The battle for the mind has to be fought on many fronts. Our first study explored this very personally, by looking at the pressures that many face with fear, anxiety, depression and the like. Then, we saw the extent to which the devil uses the temptations of the world to occupy our minds with all manner of things, other than 'things above', Col. 3. 2. To be clear again, whilst the 'mind' is defined by W. E. VINE as 'the seat of reflective consciousness, comprising the faculties of perception and understanding',<sup>1</sup> we saw in this passage last time that this is *phroneō*, the exercised or set mind.<sup>2</sup> The focus of this study is now less on individuals and the things of the world. Rather, it is on the importance of the collective mind of the body of believers known as an assembly or local church. Here the battle for the mind is just as real, recognizing that the whole is made up of many parts.

It is never envisaged that believers should live some kind of isolated life, devoid of company and fellowship with other believers. However, a collection of so many minds is never going to be without its difficulties, and if an assembly is to thrive, there is a battle to be of one mind. If companies of the Lord's people are to survive, this will only be possible where there is unity – 'Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!' Ps. 133. 1.

Furthermore, if these same companies are to know blessing, then by their actions and outreach they should be drawing others towards the Saviour through the gospel. How can that be achieved if their testimony is that they are not at one

with each other? Such a lack of unity might even lead to the same solemn condemnation that was levelled at the Pharisees, 'ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men', Matt. 23. 13. It is evident that there is a battle for the mind in the collective endeavour to, 'be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous', 1 Pet. 3. 8, 9.

### Being like-minded

To adopt such a mind is counter to the culture of our day. Whilst some organizations now lay more store by the importance of a corporate culture and collective identity, underneath the surface are often individuals filled with ambition, jostling for position. The attitude is, 'What can I achieve and how far can I get?' There is no place for such a mind between believers – and it only takes one to affect the whole.

The passage that our header text is taken from is key, and a prevailing theme of Philipians. It is unclear what the precise circumstances were, but it is evident that all was not well. Paul is keen to emphasize throughout his letter, and particularly in chapter 2, that to live for Christ means to live in unity with others. On account of all that we have in Christ, Phil. 2. 1, we need to 'be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind', v. 2 – we need to have the same motivation and commitment. There is no room for 'strife or vainglory', v. 3, for self or ambition (the idea of politics is involved in these words), or conceit (empty pride). Instead, there should be lowliness (a sense of smallness), thinking of others more highly than self and giving serious consideration to the interests of others, vv. 3, 4.

Later, Paul gives a clearer indication of what might have been going on, v. 21.

### Thinking of others rather than self

The mind of the believer needs to be disciplined to the extent that it behaves differently to the natural instinct, concurrent with the on-going battle with the sinful nature. The mind of the believer needs to be different from that of the world around us. Unity is not about everyone doing what I want, or agreeing with everything I say. It is about me putting others' interests ahead of my own – that is never easy. The unity of the assembly will never rise above my ability to do such, nor anyone else's achievement of the same. It is hard to attain, but we are not without example.

### The example of Christ

Philippians chapter 2 verses 5 to 11 is the perfect place to start. Often considered in isolation, the context can be lost. They present the supreme example of the mind that we are to have, 'Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus', v. 5. The mind of Christ is where we need to start.

Despite His utter supremacy, in that He was equal with God, He made Himself of no reputation – if anyone had reason to exalt self, it was Christ, but this was never the mind that He demonstrated. He became a bondservant, 'one who gives himself up to another's will . . . devoted to another to the disregard of one's own interests'.<sup>3</sup>

He humbled Himself; made Himself low. The following verses elaborate as to precisely what that entailed. He became obedient 'to the point of death, even the death of the cross', v. 8 NKJV. This was the attitude that pleased God and led to His exaltation, v. 9. This mind led to exaltation beyond measure, a name above every name, to the glory of God.

It is certainly a clear principle in our Bibles that the only way to true exaltation is true humiliation. If our Old Testament establishes the principle of 'them that honour me I will honour', 1 Sam. 2. 30, then the

Lord Jesus certainly takes that further when He says, 'But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted', Matt. 23. 11, 12.

### The example of Paul

Having looked at the example of Christ, Paul shows his hearers that whilst Christ sets the highest of standards, it is possible to 'work out your own salvation', Phil. 2. 12. There are undoubtedly greater depths to this expression but perhaps in the simplest terms he is saying that it is possible for them to begin to live this out in their lives. It is possible to 'work out' these things, when believers allow God to 'work in', v. 13 – giving Him control in order to accomplish His will. It is possible to gain victory in this battle for the mind.

To summarize Paul's guidance to being of one mind in verses 14 to 17, he says, 'Don't complain or question; be blameless; stand apart from the world; cling to the word; hold nothing back' – the words are 'poured out' and 'sacrifice'. The advice might often be given, 'No-one said it would be easy!' The way of sacrifice never is, but, like the drink offering upon the ancient altars, Paul is willing to give of himself, to pour himself out completely, in pursuit of such a mind that will allow him to move in unity with his brethren.

### The example of Timothy

In our first study, the words to Timothy about being of sound

mind were prominent. Perhaps these believers knew something of Timothy's own personal battle for the mind. It is interesting, then, that Paul does not hesitate to use him as an example of someone who has overcome in this battle.

Timothy has clearly followed the examples of Christ and Paul – he is like-minded (literally, equal in soul).<sup>4</sup> Philippians 2 verses 20 to 23 clearly show how he is living this out. He demonstrates sincere and genuine care towards his fellow saints. He recognizes their needs – they are living for self, yet he is determined to show them another way. He has walked the way of servitude and has proven himself a faithful and willing servant. He has not lowered himself to their level but sought to be a living example of Christ before them.

### The example of Epaphroditus

Finally, Paul presents Epaphroditus. This man is less prominent, less well known, perhaps one of their own. They likely knew him well and would attest to the things that Paul said of him in verses 25 to 27.

He is beautifully described as a brother, fellow worker, fellow soldier, messenger and minister. He has a sincere yearning for the people of God, despite his own afflictions. He has passed this way himself and experienced the mercy of God – this influences his relationships with others. It is certainly true that when we pass through difficulties, we can become more focused on self than ever, but here was one whose empathy fostered greater unity with his brethren. What a uniting mind this is.

### The example of Euodias and Syntyche

It would be remiss to complete this study without reference to the issue that Paul addresses in verses 2 and 3 of chapter 4. Here is an example not to follow. Two women have worked hard in the gospel. They have been useful, and their names are in the book of life. They have worked as one with others – their companions. Nevertheless, something is threatening their unity of mind – they are losing the battle.

It is interesting to note that there is no indication as to the cause of the discord. Whether it is personality, envy, doctrine, family, it does not matter. The key to overcoming all such battles is a heart-call to discover unity of mind again – that they lay aside their evident differences. It is interesting to note that he states clearly that others need to help them achieve this, rather than stoking the fire.

Wherever there are people, there are differences – such are impossible to avoid. However, where differences turn to disagreements, unity is threatened. Where there is lack of unity, where believers will not follow the example of Christ and others in this letter, the testimony suffers as the world looks on and blessing is lost.

What follows in chapter 4 are features in the life of a believer, and an assembly, that will lead to singleness of mind. How evident are these where you are? Remember, it starts with me. Joy, v. 4 – where believers rejoice in the Lord, it is harder to argue. Grace, v. 5 – gentleness, moderation, graciousness, forbearance, how believers respond when they feel aggrieved. Prayer and thanksgiving, v. 6. Peace, v. 7 – no anxiety but prayer, praise and peace. Virtue, v. 8 – thinking on the right things. Generosity – they have cared, v. 10, shared, v. 14, given, v. 15, sent, v. 16, and sacrificed, v. 18.

In this battle for the mind, may God grant each of us, by humility and lowliness, to let this mind be in us which was also in Christ Jesus. Then, may we know the blessing of moving in unity with likeminded believers, that the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ might go forth to His glory and to the salvation of souls.

#### Endnotes

- 1 W. E. VINE, *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*, Nelson.
- 2 J. STRONG, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, Hendrickson.
- 3 JAMES STRONG, *Enhanced Strong's Dictionary*, Olive Tree software.
- 4 *Ibid.*



# NEHEMIAH

## A MAN OF PREPARATION

### – PERSONALLY Part 3

By **TOM MERRIMAN** Tenby, Wales

The earlier part of this chapter, chapter 2 verses 1 to 10, records Nehemiah's audience before King Artaxerxes. Taking the opportunity offered by the king's enquiry, he asked to be released from his duty as cupbearer, and for resources to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. By verse 8, Nehemiah was able to say that these had been granted 'according to the good hand of my God upon me'.

Nehemiah later became responsible for overseeing the rebuilding of the city's walls, gates, and doors. These were important for regulating the security of the place associated with God's name, and for ensuring its distinctiveness. First, however, he had learned to regulate his own life. This began with prioritizing the things of God, Neh. 1. 1, 2. His concern for his brethren and for Jerusalem was expressed through prayer over a period of four months, vv. 2-11.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, Nehemiah chapter 2 verses 1 to 9 are testament to his consistency in civil matters before the king, perhaps over several years. These were key factors in understanding God's purpose and obtaining the approval of Artaxerxes.

The events of this chapter also cover a period of four months in which preparation was made for the task ahead. Although the work of rebuilding the wall took just fifty-two days, much more time was spent in prayer and preparation.<sup>2</sup>

Maintaining a testimony to the honour of God's name and upholding the truth today brings into view our own behaviour, 1 Tim. 3. 15. Those who oversee God's house must be blameless in the personal, domestic, and civil spheres, 1 Tim. 3. 1-7. However, since elders are called to be 'ensamples to the flock', godly character ought to be the aim for each of God's people, 1 Pet. 5. 3. Proverbs chapter 25 verse 28 says, 'He that

hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls'. Therefore, to be 'meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work', self-discipline is something for which we must take individual responsibility, 2 Tim. 2. 21.

#### **Nehemiah's circumstances**

Nisan was the month of Passover, bringing to mind the occasion of Israel's release from Egypt. They were to be ready to go when the moment came; having their loins girded, feet shod, and their staff in their hand. On their departure, they requested resources that would be used to build God a sanctuary, Exod. 12. 11, 35. Nisan was also the month that Ezra, having prepared his heart for the task in hand, set out for Jerusalem. He stood before the same king as Nehemiah, thirteen years earlier. Artaxerxes had granted his request, supplying the resources required, Ezra 7. 6-28. What an encouragement to Nehemiah as he anticipated what may have been a rare private occasion before the king.<sup>3</sup>

The Lord can provide for every work that He commissions, for His resources are limitless. Grateful for His provision by the hand of the Philippian believers, Paul also assured them, 'my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus', Phil. 4. 19. The same God also stands ready to meet our needs when His work is our priority. The challenge to us is our own readiness to be used by Him.

DAVID LIVINGSTONE, a Scottish missionary to Africa, wrote, 'Lord, send me anywhere; only go with me. Lay any burden on me; only sustain me. Sever any tie, save the tie that binds me to Thy heart'.<sup>4</sup>

#### **Nehemiah's cup**

Within the walls of the palace, Nehemiah bore in his hand the king's wine, that 'maketh glad the heart of man', Ps. 104. 15. However, upon his heart was the affliction of his brethren, and the fact that Jerusalem was without a wall. Sensitive to the burden the Lord had placed upon him, Nehemiah's own cup was empty!

Let us not allow any of earth's joys to make us insensitive to the spiritual and practical needs of our brethren near and far. The Macedonian believers are an example of such virtue. Though passing through a great trial of affliction, their heart for the Lord moved them to send a gift joyfully and liberally for the sake of the poor saints in Jerusalem, Rom. 15. 26; 2 Cor. 8. 1-5. If the Lord lays upon us an exercise to help further the testimony of God, may we be sensitive to His leading.

#### **Nehemiah's consistency**

A cheerful countenance would have been fitting for presenting the king's cup. Nehemiah said, 'I had not been beforetime sad in his presence', v. 1. Had consistency been lacking, his position may have been at stake and nothing unusual would have been noted. However, Nehemiah was valued personally by Artaxerxes, for he expressed tender interest in his servant, 'Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? this is nothing else but sorrow of heart' – Nehemiah's burden was now plain to see, v. 2. Whilst he had been faithful in daily matters, the Lord had brought him into favour with the king. Daniel had a similar experience. Having purpose of heart, he had offered a request that was granted since 'God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love' with one in authority, Dan. 1. 9.

Believers today are to maintain a testimony before the world that is consistent with the gospel of Christ, Phil. 1. 27. Paul's words to the

Colossians might be applied to the sphere of work today, ‘Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: and whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men’, Col. 3. 22, 23.

The world is looking on and takes note. Whilst Christian conduct is not universally appreciated, consistency, diligence and integrity are virtues that, when questioned, may offer opportunities to witness for the Lord.

### **Nehemiah’s care**

The king’s question gave Nehemiah the opportunity to speak openly. His weight of feeling is expressed thus, ‘Then I was very sore afraid’, v. 2. A change in the manner of a cupbearer might indicate treachery, leading to his execution. However, it is more likely that Nehemiah’s concern was that he might express himself properly at this pivotal moment. The wellbeing of the Lord’s people and the condition of the testimony for the honour of His name was at stake. With care, he addressed the king respectfully, ‘Let the king live for ever’. Jerusalem had previously been called, ‘the rebellious and the bad city’, when associated with building, but Nehemiah called it ‘the place of my fathers’ sepulchres’, appealing to the king’s sympathy, v. 3.<sup>5</sup>

Paul too wanted to communicate in the right way when the moment arose to declare the gospel, ‘that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak’, Col. 4. 4. He also used language appropriate for his audience, whether

Jew or Gentile, Act. 17. 2, 3, 16-32. Colossians chapter 4 verse 6 brings a similar thought to bear on our testimony, ‘Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man’.

### **Nehemiah’s commission**

The king invited Nehemiah’s request – what a moment! Yet even at this point, he recognized his dependence on the Lord and addressed the ‘God of heaven’. Before he petitioned the king, he supplicated the King of kings. A man would be the means, but God moved the king to provide for His work. It is worth noting that Nehemiah’s brief prayer offered up in a moment was preceded by four months that were saturated in prayer.

The king was already inclined to grant Nehemiah’s request, speaking of it as though agreed, ‘how long shall thy journey be? and when wilt thou return?’ v. 6. Nehemiah had given thought to the next steps and was able to indicate a timeframe. Encouraged by the king’s disposition, ‘it pleased the king to send me’, v. 6, he sought further favour – letters granting him authority for safe movement, v. 7. Whilst he could not yet have known every detail of the site materials required, he requested access to the best resources, v. 8. The enemies of God’s people were looking on, but having authority to advance the work, Nehemiah did not need to move around like a fugitive; the king even supplied a military escort. According ‘to the good hand of my God’ upon him, all that was needed was granted, vv. 8, 9.

Our God is not only able to prepare an opening, but He can also prosper every opportunity taken. Furthermore, He has the resources for the completion of His work. May we prepare for any opportunity the Lord grants us with this assurance in mind, ready to seize the occasion, entreating His favour. The Lord’s commission was to, ‘Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end

of the world. Amen’, Matt. 28. 19, 20. He has given us the resources that are required for gospel witness and assembly testimony – the indwelling Spirit of God, our enabling; the scriptures of truth, our authority.

### **The wider significance**

From the narrative alone, the broader implications of this occasion could be overlooked. The prophet Daniel had been told that ‘from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks’, Dan. 9. 25, after which Messiah would be cut off, v. 26.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the king’s agreement to rebuild the city walls marked off a moment in God’s calendar that led to the arrival of the Lord Jesus at Jerusalem.

Let us not underestimate the wider significance of God’s purpose through our lives. Personal conduct is a testimony for the Lord in itself, Titus 2. 10, that may lead to an opportunity to witness in word also. Such an opening could set off or link together a chain of events leading to the arrival of the Saviour in the life of some lost soul.

Let us therefore prepare our hearts personally before the Lord and ensure that our conduct is consistent with our convictions. The Apostle Peter wrote, ‘sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: having a good conscience’, 1 Pet. 3. 15, 16.<sup>7</sup>

### **Endnotes**

- 1 Chisleu was the ninth month, and Nisan the first, Neh. 1. 1; 2. 1. Artaxerxes’ twentieth year is mentioned in both verses and clearly straddled Israel’s calendar year.
- 2 The wall was completed in the twenty-fifth day of Elul, the sixth month, in fifty-two days, Neh. 6. 15. Therefore, the building began at the end of the fourth month, Tammuz. Nehemiah’s four-month journey may be comparable to Ezra’s, Ezra 7. 9, 1st/1st – 1st/5th.
- 3 Possibly indicated by the queen’s presence, v. 6.
- 4 Hymn. 654, *Rejoice Hymns*, Majesty Music.
- 5 Ezra 4. 12.
- 6 Sixty-nine weeks, or ‘sevens’ equal 483 years.
- 7 Cp. Prov. 16. 1.





# MEDICAL MISSIONARY NEWS

## Supporting Christian Mission through Healthcare

From the early beginnings of Medical Missionary News, when a group of doctors saw the need for prayer for medical mission across the world, MMN has been seeking to support those involved in making the Lord known through the provision of healthcare, through prayer, and in practical ways.

In 1934, a quarterly magazine was released to inform Christians of healthcare needs overseas, as little money was being donated towards medical needs. From 1947, funds were raised and a charity was created to support missionaries in medical work overseas, which has been running all these years.

### Container Work

The work of MMN was completely transformed in the late 1970s, following a request by medical missionaries for medical supplies that could not be sourced within their country. Therefore, in 1980 MMN sent its first shipment of five tons of drugs, which were shipped by air. Initially, around two containers were shipped every year from the UK, particularly for use in Africa.

The container work exceeded all expectations, and at its peak in 2004 a total of seventy-eight containers were sent to eleven different countries. Containers would include medicines, medical supplies, food, clothing, vehicle parts, supplies for babies and children, as well as an array of material to encourage people in their relationship with the Lord – from Bibles to Sunday school prizes.

Since then, the container work has continued on a reducing scale and is now located in Swindon, having moved there from Wickford in 2020.

The reason for this is threefold: supplies have become more readily available in many countries; shipping costs have increased; and the bureaucracy has become more complex. We now ship a handful of containers to Angola, Malawi, and Zambia. In addition, we work in partnership with others – Christian charities such as 'CMIAid' in Moldova and 'Tools with a Mission' to facilitate other shipments.

### Grants

This change has enabled MMN to re-focus its activities on praying for and financially supporting those involved in medical mission; in essence, going back to our original focus.

Through the generosity of our supporters, we can give grants to support Christian mission organizations in their ministry of sharing the gospel through their healthcare work – in mission hospitals/clinics, in community healthcare programmes, in caring for the disabled and orphans, through health education programmes, and offering support to those affected by disasters. Supporting partners financially means that we have been able to help projects in other parts of the world where the health needs are enormous. This includes the continued support of CMML hospitals in the northwest province of Zambia and the mission hospital in southern DR Congo, as well as new medical work that assembles in Albania, India, and Kenya are involved in.

Each project that applies for a grant must provide a detailed account of how their funding will be used, whom their funding will benefit, and how the gospel will be preached

through the work they provide. Once the funding is received, the project provides a report of the impact of the work, as well as regular prayer updates.

The aim is to develop these relationships so that we work in partnership for the gospel. It is exciting to hear of what God is doing through our partners overseas to bring light back into people's situations and to draw them to Himself, which we can then share more widely through our various media outlets.

### Students

Recently MMN has been supporting medical professionals and students in their medical and/or missionary training and development. We have been working in collaboration with Christian Medical Fellowship in the training of doctors and nurses who are looking to use their medical skills in a global health setting through their *Global Track* programme.

MMN has provided medical students with financial support to do their electives in a mission hospital or clinic, to encourage them in exploring what is involved in serving God in such a setting, and it is exciting to read of the way God is using this opportunity to spark an interest in overseas mission.

### Prayer

Above all, the focus of our work is prayer – it is what we long for our supporters to get involved with, and is at the heart of all we do. Our dependence on the Lord has not changed, and we know that everything in medical missionary activity is only possible through His will and intervention.

MMN wants to be a platform for sharing information about medical mission to encourage prayerful support. We share stories, information and resources from our partners through our website ([www.mmn.uk.com](http://www.mmn.uk.com)), quarterly magazine, and weekly prayer email, so that you can pray alongside us for our partners, as they seek to reach people with the gospel by providing practical healthcare.





Edited by  
**ANDREW DUTTON**

**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.

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# Editor's Introduction

Welcome to the November issue of YPS.

In this issue Phil Armstrong concludes his series on fascinating facts – evidence of a creator's touch, looking at the amazing building ability of termites.

We are also concluding the Soul-Searching Scriptures series, which Stephen Baker initially invited the contributors to write – it's fitting that we hear from Stephen in the final instalment.

Next year, God willing, there will be some other subjects to look forward to. But in the meantime, I hope you enjoy this issue and find it to be a blessing.

Andrew Dutton



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

PHIL ARMSTRONG, LIVERPOOL, ENGLAND

## Mighty termites

King Solomon, one of history's most famous builders, was impressed by the preparation and organization of ants, Prov. 6. 6-8. He would certainly have been amazed by the architectural genius of all the social insects – ants, termites, and some bees and wasps – in how they build their different types of nests. Among all the animals that build, including birds, some spiders, crustaceans, fish, reptiles and mammals, it is the social insects, such as termites, that create complex structures most like human architects and engineers. God has given these tiny creatures, with their tiny brains, the instincts and abilities to work so well together.

Termites need massive nests, because there may be millions of individuals in one colony. Nests usually contain a royal bedroom, nurseries, gardens, waste dumps and a ventilation system. While many species dig their homes underground, some build mounds above ground, with the largest ever found being 13 m high! An impressive nest design by the *Macrotermes bellicosus* termite from Africa includes an arch. These miniscule insects build the two bases of the arch separately and then manage to join them at the top. This is only possible when you have a good sense of 3D space, and yet these termites are blind.

The Compass termites of Australia make tall, skinny mounds that are narrow on the sides facing north and south, and wide on the sides facing east and west. This design

keeps a more stable temperature as the narrowest sides face the sun at the hottest time of the day. Lost travellers have found their way by using these nests as compasses. Many termite nests include a complex ventilation system that keeps them cool. One species in Africa makes a nest that can maintain its temperature almost within 1 degree of 30°C. Architect Mick Pearce designed a building in Zimbabwe similar to the structure of a termite mound, greatly reducing the need for expensive air conditioning. It is thought that termite mounds may one day inspire 'living, breathing' architecture.

As we finish this Fascinating Facts series, I hope you have found the articles interesting and that they have provided ample evidence of a Creator God with many reasons to praise Him for His greatness. The Bible not only tells of His great power, Ps. 147. 5, but also of His great love, Eph. 2. 4. How have you responded to His greatness, and to His love for you?

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Termite (*Macrotermes lilljeborgi*)

Termite mound



# Christian Basics – Baptism

BY ANDREW DUTTON, NORWICH, ENGLAND

'They that gladly received his word were baptized', Acts 2. 41.

'Delayed obedience is disobedience' was advice I recently heard a friend passing on to children; it is good advice, and my own children may report that it has since been repeated in our home! Looking back on my own experience, it sums up my response to the command of baptism. I trusted the Lord Jesus as my Saviour at a young age, and I remember, at the age of 11, understanding that I needed to be baptized. But I delayed for years – I disobeyed.

## A command for believers

The Lord Jesus commanded that believers should be baptized, Matt. 28. 19; Mark 16. 15, 16.

Baptism is a basic and essential step for Christians and the Bible teaches that it should follow salvation, 'they that gladly received his word were baptized', Acts 2. 41. It is also interesting that the longest recorded period in the New Testament between salvation and baptism is three days, with Saul of Tarsus, Acts 9. 9, 18. This demonstrates that there are no other steps between salvation and baptism; no process of improving lifestyle, or development of understanding in the word of God – just simply: if I have been saved, the next step is for me to be baptized.

## A symbol

Baptism is a symbol, explained in Romans chapter 6 verses 1 to 11. It is a symbol of identification with Christ, 'Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life', Rom. 6. 4. As a believer goes down into the water, they are saying, in symbolic form, 'when Christ died, I died!' This is the old 'me', v. 6, that was 'dead in trespasses and sins', Eph. 2. 1, and far away from God, v. 3. The result of this part of the symbol is that the person 'that is dead is freed from sin', Rom. 6. 7. I came into the good of these things the day I was saved, but when I was baptized, I was publicly declaring my irreversible identification with the Lord Jesus.

For the short time a believer is under the water, they are declaring that they 'are buried with [Christ]', v. 4. Burial proves that a death has taken place. Because the old 'me', v. 6, has died, it has also been buried.

On coming up out of the water, the symbol links with the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. He has died once to deal with sin and is now alive forever. Having received eternal life, we are linked with Christ in His resurrection, and

we are 'alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord', v. 11. This is in contrast to being 'dead . . . unto sin', v. 11.

The implication of my baptism is that I should live every day 'dead. . . unto sin' and 'alive unto God'.

## Practical points to note

If you are saved, but have not been baptized, the following points may help you:

- Commit to God to be serious about obeying His word. Baptism is not a subject that you need to ask for the Lord's guidance in, as His word is clear! But if you have previously resisted, you can ask the Lord to help you learn obedience. There may even need to be repentance from disobedience.
- If you belong to a Christian family, first speak to your parents. Often speaking about it for the first time can be the hardest step to take.
- If you are the only Christian in your family, speak to another Christian – if you go along to meetings at a local church, there may be someone there who has helped you, or who you look up to in Christian things. Ask their advice, particularly in how best to speak to your family. If you are under the age of 18, parental permission needs to be taken into consideration.
- If you go along to meetings at a local church, approach the elders to let them know of your desire to be baptized. You could do this with the help of a parent or friend but be prepared to tell them about how you were saved.
- From that point, elders of a local church should support you. This will include helping you understand baptism, arranging a date and location (baptisms can be held in a variety of places: maybe in a hall with a baptistry, a swimming pool, river, or even the sea; all that is required is water, Acts 8. 36).



# Soul-Searching Scriptures

BY STEPHEN G. BAKER, LIVERPOOL, ENGLAND

**‘His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it’, John 2. 5**

This is the final article of this series. When I started the series, I aimed to ask a range of people to write about a Bible verse that had significantly impacted their lives and had a very sacred place in their hearts. I know there is literature that some people feel is life-changing, but it is rare to come across a book that has had such a universal impact on people’s lives. But such is the Bible. It is the ‘living word of God’, and we should not be surprised at its powerful effect on people’s thinking and behaviour.

As I passed the editorship of Young Precious Seed to Andrew, I did not anticipate writing the final article in this series. But here we are, he asked me. Now, it was one thing for me to ask someone else to talk about a life-changing verse; it’s quite another thing to bare my soul and write about how God has spoken to me. Looking back over my life, I have concluded that God must have spoken to me many times, and I ignored Him. I hope this is not the case with you, but it is possible to be oblivious to the voice of God as He speaks to you through His word. ‘For God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not’, Job 33. 14.

The verse I want to share with you is part of a narrative describing the first miracle the Lord Jesus performed. He was at a wedding with His mother and twelve disciples. As you would expect, it was a happy day, but a major problem occurred – they ran out of wine. This was quite a crisis, especially at a wedding! But the Lord Jesus was there, and when He is present, problems can be solved.

But the words that impacted my life were not spoken by the Lord Jesus but by His mother, Mary. You probably know the story but let me remind you of it. When the wine ran out, Mary approached her son, Jesus. She told Him the problem – ‘they have no wine’. The Lord Jesus didn’t agree to fix the problem. Still, Mary, knowing that the Lord Jesus would always do what is right, turned to the people serving at the wedding feast and said, ‘Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it’. She knew that just doing what the Lord Jesus instructed would be the right thing to do.

The reason the verse had such an effect on my life was all down to timing. Like many of you, I had read it for a lifetime, but I heard it in a completely different light that day. You see, God’s word meets our needs and speaks to the circumstances of our lives. I had been struggling with God’s will for my life. My wife and I felt that God was calling us to give up our jobs and serve Him, but we wanted to be sure that we were doing the right thing. We couldn’t just assume that we understood God’s will; we needed concrete evidence. Over time, the Lord had provided lots of evidence and many confirmations. Still, that year, 2006, God spoke to me as I sat at the Belfast Easter Conference. It was straightforward but powerful. Rolly Pickering, an evangelist from Northern Ireland, got up to preach and read this verse. God used his message from John chapter 2 verse 5 to convince me that I had to do what God told me – leave my business and start serving Him daily in gospel preaching and Bible teaching.

Our heavenly Father will not necessarily use the same scripture to speak to you, but just remember – whatever He says unto you, do it!

In this article, we will consider three members of a remarkable 18th-century family.

## Saints’ CVs: The Wesleys

BY JEREMY SINGER, BRIDGE OF WEIR, SCOTLAND

### SUSANNA WESLEY (NEE ANNESLEY) 1669-1742

If a godly mother is the greatest blessing an infant can know, then Susanna’s nineteen children were blessed indeed.<sup>1</sup> She was an intelligent woman with a mature grasp of Christian doctrine. Susanna endured a difficult marriage to an Anglican clergyman, with frequent disagreements leading to long periods of her husband’s absence from the family home. The Wesleys also suffered from serious financial difficulties. In this unpromising environment, Susanna educated her

children ‘in the nurture and admonition of the Lord’, Eph. 6. 4. She wrote to her husband, ‘I cannot but look upon every soul you leave under my charge as a talent committed to me under a trust’.<sup>2</sup>

Susanna practised home schooling, starting her children’s education when they reached the age of five. They were



expected to learn the complete alphabet on the first day. The children also studied Greek and Latin; one daughter was able to read from the Greek New Testament when she was only eight years old.

However, the most important part of Susanna's motherly

care for her children was her prayer life. She prayed with her young family at home every day; often neighbours would come into her house to listen to these prayers.

The remainder of this article focuses on two of Susanna's sons, namely John and Charles.

## JOHN WESLEY 1703-1791

As a youngster aged five, John was rescued from a house fire. From that moment, he saw himself as a 'brand plucked from the burning'.<sup>3</sup> After studying at Charterhouse school in London, John went to Oxford University in 1720, where he became an accomplished scholar and was later ordained as a clergyman. He joined a society known as the 'Holy Club' – a prototypical student Christian union in which members read the Bible together and carried out charitable work.

After an unsuccessful visit to America, John returned to London in 1738. He attended a religious meeting in Aldersgate Street one evening, where he heard someone read LUTHER's introduction to the Epistle to the Romans. Recalling the incident years later, Wesley says, 'I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me'.<sup>4</sup>

John Wesley was friendly with George Whitefield, another former member of the Oxford Holy Club. The two men became pioneers of open-air preaching, particularly as their

evangelical message was generally unwelcome in the established church. Wesley stated, 'I look upon all the world as my parish'.<sup>5</sup> He admitted that he preferred 'a commodious room, a soft cushion and a handsome pulpit, but field preaching saves souls'.<sup>6</sup>

Wesley was frustrated by the lack of spiritual reality and enthusiasm in the established Church of England. He longed for evangelical revival and preached to that end. In the great doctrinal controversy of his day, Wesley sided against the Calvinist doctrine of a limited atonement. He had disagreements with his contemporaries and difficulties in his marriage. Like the best of men, he was only a man at best. Nevertheless, as SPURGEON says, 'The character of John Wesley stands beyond all imputation for self-sacrifice, zeal, holiness, and communion with God'.<sup>7</sup>



## CHARLES WESLEY 1707-1788

Charles Wesley was John's younger brother. Born prematurely, his mother wrapped him in wool and the baby didn't cry until he was two months old. He attended Westminster school in London, then followed his brother John to Oxford University. Charles was a founder of the Holy Club, whose members were mocked as 'Bible moths' by other students.<sup>8</sup>

Charles' conversion experience occurred three days before that of his brother John. He was captivated by the thought of 'the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me', Gal. 2. 20. On 21st May 1738, Charles states that he finally 'found [him]self at peace with God, and rejoiced in hope of loving Christ'.<sup>9</sup>

Charles became a prolific poet, writing several thousand

hymns.<sup>10</sup> Many of his works are still popular today, including *And can it be, Love divine, O for a thousand tongues to sing, and Hark the herald angels sing*. Modern scholars agree that Charles Wesley's lyrics are 'richly saturated in scripture'.<sup>11</sup> We conclude with a verse from my favourite Wesley hymn.

*Jesus the name to sinners dear,  
The name to sinners given;  
It scatters all their guilty fear,  
It turns their hell to heaven.*



<sup>1</sup> Ten of Susanna's children survived to become adults. See <https://epwortholdrectory.org.uk/family/susanna-wesley/>.

<sup>2</sup> "Mrs Wesley as Preacher." From the *Journal of John Wesley*. See <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/wesley/journal.vi.iv.xvii.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Zech. 3. 2. This is also the title of a popular biography of John Wesley: ROY HATTERSLEY *A Brand From the Burning: The Life of John Wesley*, Little Brown, 2002.

<sup>4</sup> "I felt my heart strangely warmed". From the *Journal of John Wesley* *op. cit.*

<sup>5</sup> From the *Journal of John Wesley*, *op. cit.*

<sup>6</sup> MARK WATER (ed.), *New Encyclopedia of Christian Quotations*, John Hunt, 2000.

<sup>7</sup> C. H. SPURGEON, *Defence of Calvinism*. See <http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/calvinis.htm>.

<sup>8</sup> See <https://www.wesleysoxford.org.uk/people/holy-club/what-was-the-holy-club>.

<sup>9</sup> *Journal of Charles Wesley*. See <https://wesley.nnu.edu/charles-wesley/the-journal-of-charles-wesley-1707-1788/the-journal-of-charles-wesley-may-1-august-31-1738/>.

<sup>10</sup> Charles Wesley published 4500 hymns, according to <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Charles-Wesley>.

<sup>11</sup> *In our time: John Wesley*, BBC Radio 4. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000q3m2>.

# William Yapp 1807-1874

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

Although unknown to most believers today, few readers would realize that the Bible that they carry and read is a testimony to the man who is the subject of this short article. As one writer states, 'Cover extensions have for many years been known as yapp edges, getting their name from the nineteenth-century London Bible binder, William Yapp, who created limp bindings with drawn-on leather covers which overlapped the edge of the book block . . . He was undoubtedly not the first binder to do this . . . although his name is firmly attached to this type of edge treatment'.<sup>1</sup>

William Yapp was saved in his youth and from that moment devoted himself to the work of the Lord. For many years his work was centred in Hereford before he moved to London. In later life, he returned to Herefordshire on the English/Welsh borders, settling in Leominster. In all of these locations he was involved in gospel work, spreading the gospel across neighbouring counties. It is said that whilst in Hereford he travelled to 'Worcester, Malvern, Ross-on-Wye, Ledbury, Leominster, and Ludlow . . . by horses and traps . . . [keeping] five horses in his stables for this purpose'.<sup>2</sup>

When living in Hereford, the assembly met in a large room at the Yapp house, although that soon became too small. It was enlarged (providing seating for 300-400 people) with 'the cost defrayed by brethren and sisters selling their silver-plate and superfluous furniture'.<sup>3</sup> As PICKERING writes, 'In those days the house and its furniture, dress and its fashions, amusements, occupations, business, and customs, all were tested by the Word of God'.<sup>4</sup> These were the early

days of testimony and those who had left Christian denominations to be associated with this new work soon developed their gifts to feed and shepherd the flock. BEATTIE comments, 'These brethren now found scope for the exercise of gifts which God had bestowed upon them, and on occasions would journey by horse and trap to neighbouring towns, as well as to the country villages, to preach the gospel'.<sup>5</sup>

In 1853, William Yapp moved to London, where he met with the company in Welbeck Hall. In that august company, quarterly missionary meetings were held and some of those present include the names of Arnot, Baedeker, Hudson Taylor, and Crawford. As part of his publishing work in Baker Street, London, he collaborated with James Hawkins in bringing a number of books to press, including the writings of William Lincoln, Henry Soltau, J. L. Harris, and Arthur Pridham. However, as stated above, he is perhaps best known for the flap edges he introduced through publishing Bibles. PICKERING notes, 'He continued in business till health failed, always conducting it on godly principles, putting the Lord first in everything. Thus he prospered in every business he put his hand to, and was a prince among his brethren'.<sup>6</sup>

Yapp was also involved in a written ministry, editing, and publishing the periodical *Golden Lamp* for its first five years (1870-74).<sup>7</sup> He was succeeded as editor by his close friends Henry Groves and J. L.

McLean. His desire to see believers taught and built up in their faith was also evident in the local assembly. With failing health bringing him back to the area of his childhood in 1863, he sought to bring other able brethren to Leominster. As the expanding assembly soon outgrew its premises, Yapp made arrangements to rent a large room in Waterloo House in the town. Indeed, he also rented and furnished other parts of the same building to provide accommodation for visiting speakers and those interested in helping the work of the Lord. In the year leading up to his death, four conferences were held, speakers including Henry Groves, Henry Dyer, and Henry Heath.

Apart from the public face of William Yapp, he exercised considerable shepherd care for the Lord's people. PICKERING states, 'the people of God . . . were precious to Him . . . [and so] he cared not how he toiled, or journeyed, or suffered if he could but cheer a child of God, or help him follow the Lord more fully'.<sup>8</sup> Those that were sorrowing drew out his sympathy, and those erring appreciated his help. Indeed, it seemed that grace, love, and power prevailed, and many from the world were drawn to the meetings and thoroughly converted to the glory of God. PICKERING also quotes occasions when hospitality was offered to fellow believers, young and old, rich and poor.

This saintly and thoroughly devoted servant of the Lord was called home on the 28th of November 1874.

## Endnotes

- 1 Found here: <https://www.ligatus.org.uk/lob/concept/1265>.
- 2 M. M. DAVIS, *Introduction*, found in WILLIAM YAPP, *Goodness and Mercy*, John Ritchie, pg. 6.
- 3 *Ibid.*
- 4 H. PICKERING (ed), *Chief men among the Brethren*, Pickering and Inglis, 1968, pg. 139
- 5 DAVID J. BEATTIE, *Brethren, the story of a great recovery*, John Ritchie, 1944, pg. 37.
- 6 H. PICKERING (ed), *op. cit.*, pg. 139.
- 7 Copies can be found here: <https://www.brethrenarchive.org/periodicals/independent-open-section/the-golden-lamp-or-truth-in-love-for-the-children-of-god/>.
- 8 H. PICKERING (ed), *op. cit.*, pg. 138.



# LETTER TO PHILEMON

## Part 2

By **JOHN SCARSBROOK** Killamarsh, England

The stated aims of the late 18th-century French Revolution were 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity'. In order to try and achieve this, 17,000 men, women, and children died on the guillotine and the country was left with a secular, socialist Republic which imposed its alternative will on the people of France. For the Christian, a personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour brings true liberty, a freedom from the bondage of sin and the law, together with a new Master to trust and follow with confidence. There is true equality with fellow believers as the children of God, and a unifying bond, a fraternity, forged by the Spirit of God in the heart. All of these blessings were made good to Onesimus when he trusted the Lord Jesus, there in that Roman dungeon, v. 10.

Now, however, he must return to his legal owner, Philemon, doubtless with some measure of trepidation and grateful for the support of Tychicus. As an apostle, Paul had the authority to direct the course of action to be taken towards Onesimus, v. 8, but he appeals rather to the heart of Philemon with words which Philemon would find hard to resist. It is not the apostle's aim or desire that Philemon should show leniency toward Onesimus simply because he is told to. Nor even as an act of benevolence in view of Paul's advancing years and confined circumstances. But rather 'for love's sake', v. 9.

For me, there are occasions in scripture concerning which, when reading them, I think to myself, 'I would love to have been there when . . .'. As when Joseph revealed himself to his brethren, or when Jacob was told that Joseph was yet alive. Or the moment when Haman was told who it was that 'the king delighteth to honour', Esther 6. 6. Verse 10 of Philemon is one of those moments! I can see Onesimus, maybe standing behind Tychicus, hopping from one foot to the other as the door is opened. I can imagine Tychicus handing the letter to Philemon and saying, 'Please read this before you say anything!'

New birth changed so much for Onesimus. He now had a place in the family of God, a spiritual father in the Apostle Paul, and a brother in Christ in Philemon. It also brought about a transformation in personality. As we saw earlier, Onesimus means 'profitable'. That had proved to be something of a misnomer as he made his escape with some of his master's goods. Now, however, Paul would assure Philemon that Onesimus' profession of faith was real, and his profitableness would become evident.

Verse 12 gives us the first of three requests by the apostle to 'receive him'. Paul knew, of course, that Onesimus must return to Colossae, even though he would gladly have retained him in Rome for friendship, for practical help, and in promoting the gospel. We have no idea why or how Onesimus found himself in the Roman prison. If as a result of wrongdoing, then his sentence was brief. If he had found employment, then he was free to leave both the job and Rome. The essential truth is in verse 15, where the overruling hand of God is acknowledged as the force which transported the errant slave to Rome, brought him to salvation, and would return him

to Philemon a changed man. Note the euphemistic way in which Paul refers to the escape of Onesimus, not 'he ran away', but 'perhaps he therefore departed for a season'. Paul does not condone what Onesimus has done, but he saw a sovereign hand in every facet of life. Furthermore, Paul underlines the permanence of the bonds of Christian life and fellowship. Onesimus would have no fear of being included in the next slave auction in Colossae.

Christianity not only emancipates, but it elevates, vv. 16, 17. Onesimus may well have been grateful to take up his place again as a servant in the house of Philemon, but that did not alter the fact that the master-servant relationship had changed. Philemon had gained a brother; Onesimus had gained a family. The benefit to Philemon was two-fold. His household staff had been restored and the assembly meeting in his house had gained a new convert. Verse 17 gives a clear indication of the completeness expressed in reception to the assembly; it should be without partiality or reservation. The welcome extended to the erstwhile fugitive should be the same as if Paul himself stood at the door!

Verses 18 and 19 reveal the heart of the apostle and of the Epistle. Paul had been made aware of the circumstances of Onesimus' departure and reimbursement was due to Philemon. No doubt anything of monetary value stolen from his master had been spent, and Onesimus had no means wherewith to repay the debt. Here is the very essence of the gospel. A destitute slave with a burden of debt and no possible means of settling the account is brought into contact with One who undertakes to make that debt His own, setting the debtor free. The hymn writer JAMES MCGRANAHAN expressed it clearly:

'All my iniquity on Him was laid,  
All my indebtedness by Him was paid'.

Accompanying the Epistle to

Philemon is a blank cheque signed by the apostle, v. 19, and a promissory note, 'I will repay it'. But not all debts can be calculated in tangible, monetary terms. Philemon and Paul both knew that there are spiritual debts which cannot be written on an earthly balance sheet. Philemon and his family owed so much to their acquaintance with the apostle, the benefits accruing were eternal, far exceeding any material loss occasioned by Onesimus.

With a final appeal to Philemon as a brother in the Lord, Paul expresses his heart yearnings on behalf of Onesimus. The KJV rendering 'bowels' in verses 7, 12, and 20 expresses the deepest heart desires, as the bowels were thought to be the seat of affection and emotions. The acceptance of Onesimus by Philemon would bring the apostle heartfelt joy. Above and beyond the joy of Paul in the reception of Onesimus, a matter which he

had every confidence would be accomplished, suggestion is made that further joy could be brought to the apostle. In the little phrase, 'knowing that thou wilt also do more than I say', v. 21, Paul appears to be suggesting that Philemon would maybe read between the lines of the letter and go the extra mile by granting freedom to Onesimus. He could still be a servant in the house, but on a much higher level. Many a wealthy house in the first-century Roman Empire was managed by a freedman, having responsibility for the daily running of the house, answerable only to the owner, as in an earlier day was Joseph in the house of Potiphar, Gen. 39.

In verse 22, Paul anticipates his possible release from prison, which, if so, he attributes to the prayers of the believers on his behalf; an encouragement to all that prayer is effectual. It was in the mind of the apostle that, subject to the will

of God, he would visit the home of Philemon in Colossae. Scripture is silent regarding any opportunity the apostle may have had subsequent to this imprisonment. It may be that he never left Rome again, but if he did reach Colossae, he would then see for himself the response generated by his letter.

Writing to the Philippians, the apostle looked forward to possible release, 'But I trust in the Lord that I also myself shall come shortly', Phil. 2. 24. And again to Timothy, 'hoping to come unto thee shortly', 1 Tim. 3. 14. But as has often been pointed out, the restricted movement of Paul, which gave him occasion and opportunity to write, has resulted in 2,000 years of written and preserved doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness, for the whole church!

Our appreciation of the apostle will be the poorer if we underestimate the value of verses 23 to 25. The closing salutation makes mention of men to whom he refers as 'fellowlabourers'. Epaphras, who was formerly free to travel, Col. 1. 7, 8, but is now a fellow-prisoner with Paul. Likewise, Aristarchus, who had journeyed faithfully with the apostle from his native Thessalonica, enduring the shipwreck of Acts chapter 27, now is also a prisoner with Paul, Col. 4. 10. Mark and Luke would be of particular blessing to Paul as those able to share what the Spirit of God had taught them concerning the pathway of the Saviour. Demas, sadly, though he did once run well, later forsook the apostle as the passing attractions of 'this present world', claimed his attention, 2 Tim. 4. 10.

The benediction of grace is a feature of all the apostle's writings. For Paul it was far more than a formal, ritualistic pronouncement. He constantly appreciated what the grace of God had done for him, and his prayer was that others too would understand and be grateful for the grace which brought them salvation and taught them the features of a godly life, Titus 2. 11, 12.



# THE SHOULDER OF GOD

By **STEPHEN BUCKERIDGE** Hurst, England

## Introduction

We are very familiar with the shoulder being used as a figure of speech. I am shouldering the responsibility of this article. However, you may give me the cold shoulder if you do not like what you read – but that will be okay so long as I have broad shoulders! The shoulder is mentioned a surprising number of times in the Bible with fifty plus references. As we would expect from general usage, the shoulder is often used in connection with strength – for example, in Genesis chapter 24, Rebekah is spoken of as carrying the water pot on her shoulder.

## Anthropomorphism

An anthropomorphism is a human attribute being used to describe God's character or actions. We know that we are made in the image of God, Gen. 1, so it is not surprising that there are some similarities. Remarkably, God deigns to use aspects of our own being – to which we can easily relate – to help us understand more of His. So, we have expressions such as 'The **eyes** of the Lord are in every place', Prov. 15. 3, or 'the Lord's **hand** is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his **ear** heavy, that it cannot hear', Isa. 59. 1. The clear statement that 'God is a Spirit', John 4. 24, avoids any doubt about these passages referring to a literal eye, hand or ear, but we also readily grasp the symbolic meaning.

Although the word 'anthropomorphism' looks imposing, it is simply a combination of two words. 'Anthropoid' meaning 'resembling a human being' and 'morph' meaning 'shape or form'. We are rightly amazed that God would be so gracious in His desire for us to come to some understanding about Him that He would use anthropomorphisms! However, even more remarkable is that His desire went further. In the incarnation, the Lord Jesus was willing to take on a literal human body. He who in His unbounded strength is 'upholding all things by the word of his power' – and could have come in whatever form He

chose – was willing to have just two human shoulders!

## Key verse

'And of Benjamin he said, The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by him; and the Lord shall cover him all the day long, and he shall dwell between his shoulders', Deut. 33. 12. This delightful verse brings before us the strength of the shoulders of God – and is such that those who trust in Him can be described as dwelling in safety. The covering (the shelter or shield) He provides is not a passing protection but that which lasts 'all the day'. We speak of someone appearing to have the weight of the world on their shoulders, and ancient mythology depicted Atlas with a globe on his upper back, but we have a God so strong He truly can 'uphold all things'.

Nonetheless, I would suggest the verse is also alluding to a deeper thought regarding the shoulders – that it is a loving and intimate type of security being described. When the Apostle John reclined upon the Saviour in the upper room it was between His shoulders and with the use of the description 'beloved of the Lord', Deut. 33. 12, it is easy to think of John's description 'the disciple whom Jesus loved'. The shoulder is a place of strength, but it is not provided by one distant or impersonal but by One who loves us more than

we can imagine and desires the closest of communion with us.

## The shoulder in the tabernacle

The sense of both strength and love is present in the high priestly work of the Lord Jesus pictured in the priestly garments that Aaron wore, as described in Exodus chapter 28. In addition to all the names of God's people being on the breastplate (in the place of affection and sympathy), they were also upon the onyx stones on his shoulders (in the place of strength). There is also a clear connection between the shoulder and the breastplate in the description given in verses 24 and 25. This all reminds us of Hebrews chapter 4 where our Great High Priest is not just spoken of as 'Jesus' but 'Jesus the Son of God', v. 14. It is a precious truth to know that we are both between His shoulders in the breastplate and upon His shoulders in the onyx stone – a double encouragement that He both fully understands each problem and can meet every need.

On the onyx stones upon the shoulders the names of the tribes were put in age order, Exod. 28. 10. Helpfully, this reminds us that the strength of God for His people is from the 'oldest to the youngest' – whatever stage of our Christian life we are at, 'He is able'.

## The shoulder in Isaiah

Along with Exodus, the book of Isaiah has the most mentions of shoulder including the well-known prophecy concerning the coming of Christ 'the government shall be upon his shoulder', Isa. 9. 6. In a similar vein, Isaiah says, 'I will commit thy government into his hand . . . And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open. And I will fasten him as a nail in a sure place; and he shall be for a glorious throne to his father's house', 22. 21-23.

So often we see human governments struggle to accomplish the goals they set and so are in awe of the One who will bring true, lasting peace and prosperity to the whole world under His future rule. That unassailable power is also a present



encouragement. Isaiah chapter 22 verse 22 is quoted in Revelation to the church at Philadelphia, 'I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength', 3. 8. There will often be discouragements in the Lord's work, but 'my strength is made perfect in weakness', and we should be looking for the open doors of opportunity. With our technology, resources, and freedoms, we have scope for witnessing that no previous generation has known – there are many circumstances today where it is still true that 'a great door and effectual is opened unto me', 1 Cor. 16. 9 – and when we 'put our shoulder to the work', we can do so in dependence on His might.

### Comparisons with others

As with all characters in the scriptures, we can use them to direct our attention to Christ and for at least two individuals their shoulders are mentioned in a way that does so readily. In Judges chapter 16, Samson carried the gates of a city on his shoulders. Yet it was his own sin that had put him in the position of needing to use his strength to escape the Philistine ambush. How different from the language of Psalm 24, 'Lift up your heads, O ye gates . . . and the King of glory shall come in', v. 7. Regarding King Saul, it was said that 'from his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people',

1 Sam. 9. 2. Saul being 'head and shoulders' above the people marked him out as different from others, but his moral failures were obvious. The Lord Jesus came without anything unusual in His shoulders or physically in any other part of His body and yet morally about every aspect of Him we would say 'he is altogether lovely'.

### In the New Testament

In contrast to the significant number of references to shoulders in the Old Testament, there are just two specific mentions in the New Testament – and both are from the teaching of the Saviour in the Gospel accounts. In Matthew chapter 23 verse 4, the Lord Jesus spoke of the legalism of the Pharisees, 'For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers'. In direct contrast to this, the shepherd of Luke chapter 15 verse 5 carries the sheep that had been lost upon his shoulders. The Lord Jesus never places an unreasonable burden upon us to bear, Matt. 11. 28-30, and as the One opposite in character to the false shepherds of Israel, the true Shepherd of the flock carries His people home.

As has often been remarked upon, the strength required to administer world affairs in the future in Isaiah chapter 9 verse 6 is spoken of using the

singular noun – 'the government shall be upon his **shoulder**'. In contrast, the resources available to the believer are seen in picture as they are carried home using the plural – **shoulders**. Sometimes, the expression 'standing on the shoulders of giants' is used to convey the advantage a generation has because of the work done by those that have gone before. There is certainly much to be grateful for from believers in the past who have lived spiritual lives. Even greater, though, is the way the Christian is not resting on the shoulders of giants but those of God Himself.

While not specifically mentioned, it would hardly seem to be stretching the imagination to say that the shoulders of the Saviour were involved in His work at the cross. 'He bearing his cross went forth', John 19. 17, reminds us of shoulders that bore suffering and shame. He bore, 'our sins in his own body on the tree', 1 Pet. 2. 24, reminds us of the greater load of sin that He endured. In moving contrast to what has already been considered from Deuteronomy chapter 33 verse 12, it was between His shoulders He bowed his head and dismissed his spirit.

### Practical consequences

Having considered the shoulders of God, what practical encouragement is there for the believer?

The perfect comfort of our Great High Priest goes far further than 'a shoulder to cry on'. His understanding and ability to help are unrivalled with all the people of God upon, in picture, both His heart and His shoulders. It is good to talk problems over with friends and better to spend time talking them over in prayer.

In connection with the Nazarite vow and the ram that was offered in Numbers chapter 6, both of which remind us of consecration to the Lord, it was the shoulder of the animal the priest was to offer. As we consider the greatness of our God and Saviour as revealed in the use of the shoulder, our response should indeed be to give of our strength – our time, our energy, our abilities, and resources He has blessed us with, whatever is our best – for Him.



# A Time to Love

By **NATHANAEL REED** St. Thomas, Ontario, Canada

Part 2

All quotations are taken from the New King James Bible

## Hearts before God – a righteous heart/a heart that plans evil

Just as our physical health depends on food and drink, so our spiritual well-being is dependent on keeping close to the side of the Lord. As our Good Shepherd, He is able to meet the needs of all who are spiritually hungry and thirsty, 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst', John 6. 35. His righteousness is imparted to all who trust in Him, and by walking close beside Him we become more and more like Him. Without Him our sinful nature will seek every opportunity to take control of our lives and behaviour, to the point it will rule our every instinct. This is the contrary heart, which is not the least bit interested in making Christ's righteousness its own.

- Personal righteousness was something that **David** strove for throughout his life. Like all of us, he was prone to sin and made mistakes, yet many of his psalms plainly show that walking close to God and pleasing Him was paramount. Twice he could have killed his tormentor, Saul, but refrained. In one instance, when he cut off the corner of Saul's robe, he was even remorseful for causing embarrassment to the Lord's anointed, 1 Sam. 24. 1-15.

In **King Saul** we see a heart busy devising one wicked plan after another. Even the prophet Samuel was afraid when God asked him to go and anoint David king. 'How can I go? If Saul hears it, he will kill me', 16. 2. Samuel knew the heart of Saul and knew he would go to any lengths to protect his throne. Spurred by jealousy and insecurity, Saul went so far as to urge his servants and his son, Jonathan, to kill David, 19. 1.

## The heart in action – the merciful heart/a heart that runs to evil

With all the pain and misery in the world, there can never be enough mercy to go around. The poet **WILLIAM BLAKE** penned the words, 'Where mercy, love and piety dwell, there God is dwelling too'. Indeed, when the God of heaven dwelt among us in human form, He spent much of His time healing the sick, raising the dead, and forgiving sinners.

The fifth beatitude is the first to display a specific overt action on the part of the one who is **blessed** – showing mercy to others. This gives us some idea of how important the quality of mercy is in God's eyes.

As we look at the preceding four Beatitudes, we see a logical progression. One must first see that his spiritual need can only be met beyond himself. This is followed by an awareness of how his sinfulness has grieved God, which results in a desire to walk as closely as possible to the side of the Master so that he might be like Him and show mercy to others as He did.

What is the opposite of **mercy in action**? The items that make the news broadcasts each and every day!

- At first blush one might not think of **David** as a merciful man, yet his life bears several examples of this Christ-like characteristic. Twice he spared Saul when he could have killed him and taken his kingdom. He also spared Abigail's husband; rewarded those who buried Saul; spared King Saul's commander, Abner; and showed kindness to Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth. Even in the smaller things of life he was merciful, as when he insisted

that the booty captured during the battle with the Amalekites be shared with the soldiers who were too exhausted to join in the fight, 1 Sam. 30. 26-31.

In stark contrast, **Saul** was a schemer who spent much of his life desperately trying to bring his wicked plans to fruition. For years, he pursued David with murder in his heart. He not only tried to pin David to the wall with his spear, but even attempted the same thing with his son Jonathan. Yet, despite all of Saul's atrocities, David never sank to Saul's level. He showed mercy to the one most lacking in this noble quality.

## Testimony before the world – the pure in heart/the deceitful heart

We find a steady maturing of characteristics in the Beatitudes as we go from the first to the sixth – from the poor in spirit to the pure in spirit. As with gold when refined, the impurities are being removed. This should be the goal of every child of God, to rid himself of 'evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, **deceit**, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness', Mark 7. 21, 22. It is by our walking daily with Christ, and holding short accounts with Him, that He is able to work in our hearts, ridding us of the sinful impurities that keep us apart from Him.

The opposite to the pure in heart is he whose heart is so defiled that he is not even ashamed to make a public display of it as a false witness – denying the truth even before a multitude of onlookers.

- **David's** song honouring King Saul after his death is a remarkable testament to his purity of heart, 2 Sam. 1. It is an incredibly gracious gesture which reveals no bitterness toward his old enemy. Despite all of the wrongs which Saul had perpetrated toward him, he could still pen the following, 'O daughters of Israel, weep over

Saul, who clothed you in scarlet, with luxury; who put ornaments of gold on your apparel', v. 24. Through the long years of his tortured relationship with Saul, David's heart remained pure.

In contrast to the pure in heart is the false witness; one who formalizes his lies before the authorities and reveals his corrupt heart for all to see. **Saul's** heart was marked by deception and disobedience, so much so that when he swore publicly to David, 'I will harm you no more', 1 Sam. 26. 21, David still fled to the land of the Philistines because he knew the king's true heart. Even the witch of Endor was not safe from his deceptions, 28. 12. The contrast between the hearts of these two men becomes greater and greater as we ascend through the Beatitudes.

### The legacy – peacemakers/ troublemakers

'The work of righteousness will be peace', Isa. 32. 17. The fact that the pure in heart will see God is remarkable. But even more wonderful is the knowledge that



the peacemakers will not only see God but will be called His children. The supreme peacemaker, of course, was Jesus Christ, who is called, 'Prince of Peace', 9. 6, and it was only by His bearing our sins on Calvary that **we** can enjoy peace with God.

The role of peacemaker is the culmination of the first seven Beatitudes, beginning with being poor in spirit and eventually growing to one who is pure in heart and finally leaving behind the spiritual legacy of a peacemaker. In a practical sense, followers of Christ are peacemakers because they bring the gospel message to others, enabling all who come to the Saviour to have peace with God as well.

The legacy left by those that God hates are those who provoke conflict and heartache with almost everyone they encounter. Instead of leaving the legacy of peace, they are remembered by God as those who were a constant source of trouble.

- **David** was a man of war – a man whose hands were stained with blood. But in a larger sense he was also a peacemaker, for the ultimate result of the wars and battles he fought brought peace to the land of Israel and to his countrymen. The fruit of his efforts in this regard can be seen during the peaceful reign of his successor, Solomon.

Contrarily, **Saul** was neither a peacemaker nor one who waited upon the Lord. Indeed, he was the very opposite of a peacemaker. He was constantly sowing discord among his brethren, even alienating his son, Jonathan. He also divided the nation, clinging to his kingship despite the consequences of defying the will of God in this matter. This rebelliousness eventually cost him not only his own life but that of his sons as well. Indeed, even after his death, Saul's sordid legacy lived on until finally coming to a close years

later with the murder of his son, Ishbosheth.

Such were the ultimate legacies of these two kings. The one walked steadfastly in peace with his God whom he worshipped and adored. The other was in open rebellion to God throughout most of his adult life, and finally ended solidly in the camp of God's first enemy – Satan.

### Conclusion

Life has often been likened to a journey, and these two biblical passages mark a distinct road map for two disparate paths. **ROBERT FROST's** famous poem, *The Road Not Taken*, speaks of a traveller coming to a fork in the road. Here he laments the choice that he must make, knowing that he cannot travel down both roads. He then makes the following decision:

'I took the one less travelled by, and that has made all the difference'.

So it is with life. Two divergent spiritual paths lie before the earthly traveller, and each one bears signposts along the way. 'Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it', Matt. 7. 14. Yet, even if the path of righteousness is taken, the traveller still has responsibilities along the way. The Lord has provided an abundance of resources for His children as they make this journey: His Holy Spirit; His word, spiritual gifts, and opportunities for service. Our responsibility is to take advantage of life and strive to mature spiritually.

It should be the goal of every Christian to leave behind the spiritual legacy of a peacemaker. However, this path of righteousness is less travelled, partly because it offers unique challenges that require discipline, determination, and sacrifice. It also asks that our face be turned to the One who is ever present and remains at our side to guide us most assuredly along the way.

## Studies in the twelve (minor) prophets 9

# ZEPHANIAH

By **JOHN SCARSBROOK** Killamarsh, England

As I write these notes in November 2023, the world focus is once again, as often before, upon the State of Israel. The response of the Israeli Defence Force to the unprovoked and murderous attack upon the kibbutzim adjacent to the Gaza Strip has alienated the greater part of world opinion against Israel, and strengthened the resolve of Arab and Middle Eastern nations to attempt the destruction of Israel and the Jewish people.

The little prophecy of Zephaniah, just fifty-three verses, written some 2600 years ago not only gives assurance that the Gentile nations will never achieve their objective, but will, in seeking to do so, call down divine judgement upon themselves to their utter destruction.

The population of Israel amounts to 0.11% and their land area occupies just 0.01% of the world's total population and area. Israel is smaller than the Solomon Islands and a little larger than Fiji, yet, since biblical days, conflicts have scarred that land, with Jerusalem the most contested piece of real estate on the planet.

The only way to understand why an almost insignificant piece of land should be the object of such generational animosity is to read the Bible. The word we repeatedly hear today in referring to the Jewish people is 'Semitic'. That means descendants of Shem, the son of Noah, thus acknowledging the truth of the Genesis record. Again, the very name 'Israel' refers to that given by God to Jacob in Genesis chapter 32 verse 28. An open-minded and intelligent reader of scripture would soon discover that God used this line of genealogy to bring His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, into the world, perfect man yet eternally God, as the means of salvation for those who believe. Since Eden's garden, Satan, the adversary, has sought to thwart God's purposes of grace. If, therefore, he could dispossess the nation of Israel and annul God's promises to Abraham and David, it would

effectively call into question the veracity of the whole Bible!

So then, with that rather lengthy introduction, what bearing does it have on Zephaniah and his prophecy, and what can he tell us about the plan and purpose of God for days yet future?

First, we need to ask the question, 'what do we know about Zephaniah?' Then, when and to whom did he prophesy? We need to consider the burden of his message and to ask another question, 'does he have a voice to us today?' Finally, in a prophecy which, as we shall see, is largely of judgement, is there something here that will lift our heads and quicken our steps as we await our Lord's return?

But before we are introduced to Zephaniah, the Spirit of God makes us aware that the words which follow are 'the word of the Lord' and He closes the book with 'saith the Lord', so we are left in no doubt that we are considering more than just the thoughts and words of man.

Ancestral introductions to the so-called minor prophets are generally brief. Of some, we know only their name. Of two, we know where they came from. On three occasions, the father's name is given, and, of one, Zechariah, his grandfather. But of Zephaniah we are given four generations, taking us back to his great, great, grandfather, Hezekiah (Hizkiah, KJV), king of Judah, directing F. TATFORD to call his

exposition, *Prophet of Royal Blood*. This is significant, as Zephaniah had strong words of condemnation for 'the princes, and the king's children', 1. 8; his own family!

We know that he lived and prophesied during the reign of Josiah, which would make him a contemporary of Jeremiah and Habakkuk. All foresaw the coming Chaldean invasion which would destroy Jerusalem and take the nation into captivity because of their sin. The effect on Jeremiah was to bring him to tears. Habakkuk recoiled in amazement that God would do such a thing to His own people. Zephaniah saw beyond the present parochial judgement to a future global retribution for sin.

Josiah's reign was book-ended by wickedness and weakness: wickedness in the reigns of Manasseh and Amon, then weakness in the four kings who followed Josiah to the time of the captivity. Josiah was only eight years old when he ascended the throne, and it was in his twelfth year that he began 'to purge Judah', 2 Chr. 34. 3. It may well be that since Zephaniah gives no indication of reforms, he spoke in the first twelve years of Josiah's reign. His name means 'hidden by God' which could have been his experience, being a young man during the excesses of Manasseh's reign.

What then was the burden of his message? When Paul wrote to the Romans, he drew their attention to 'the goodness and severity of God', Rom. 11. 22; two aspects of the divine nature seen throughout the scriptures. Zephaniah deals with both, but in the reverse order, severity in chapters 1 and 2, goodness in the major part of chapter 3. Although his prophecy deals with the immediate circumstances of his day, his words embrace 'the day of the Lord', a time yet future which occupies the attention of much prophetic writing. This is not a 24-hour day, as those of creation, but a period of time commencing after the rapture, during which time the authority and Lordship of Christ will be evident. It extends through and beyond tribulation days and the Millennium, until, finally, when all God's purposes

concerning the earth are fulfilled, the day of God, the eternal state, is ushered in.

Zephaniah begins his prophecy with a statement of intent by One who has the power and the authority to carry it through. Six times the Almighty says, 'I will', followed by a declaration of judgement. The first two 'I wills' pronounce a devastation exceeding that of Noah's day, almost a reversal of creation! This is the supremacy of the God whose word men and world leaders dismiss as irrelevant, and whose existence they deny as a fantasy. But such a day will come as clearly foretold in the scripture of truth, Heb. 1. 10-12; 2 Pet. 3. 7-10.

Zephaniah then narrows his focus from a world view, and places Judah and Jerusalem in the crosshairs of his vision to target each sin upon which judgement will fall, 1. 4-6. The charge is of idolatry, astrology, hypocrisy, apostasy, and apathy; all of which could be found in our present society without too much difficulty.

In the following verses, Zephaniah turns his attention to the coming Chaldean invasion. He does not name the aggressor, allowing some



expositors to question the suggestion, but the time and the evident moral and spiritual anarchy point to the coming of that 'bitter and hasty nation' spoken of by Habakkuk, 1. 6. Judea is seen as a sacrifice prepared by the Lord and the Chaldees are the invited guests, v. 7. Chapter 1 continues by describing in detail the rapidity and rapaciousness of the invasion. From the royal family, through the city of Jerusalem, to the merchants in the marketplace, v. 11, none will escape. The idle rich who live in luxurious indifference to the voice of God will see their houses looted and left desolate, their planted vineyards will be abandoned, vv. 12, 13.

Zephaniah's graphic description calls to mind 'the great day of the Lord . . . a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress', vv. 14, 15, which will overtake a Christ-rejecting world when least expected, vv. 16-18. Also note 1 Thess. 5. 2, 3; Luke 17. 24-30.

In chapter 2, Zephaniah turns his attention to the Gentile nations surrounding Jerusalem. But, before detailing his judgements, there is an eleventh-hour appeal to all who will hear to 'Seek . . . the Lord'. God is not willing that any should perish, so opportunity is given in order that they may be hid in the day of His anger, 2. 1-3.

In verses 4 to 15, Zephaniah turns his attention to the four points of the compass, with, as always in scripture, Jerusalem at the centre. To the west, he sees the destruction of Gaza and the cities of the sea coast, traditional and historic Philistine country, vv. 4-7. To the east, Moab and Ammon, vv. 8-11, persistent adversaries of Israel, now known as Jordan. To the south, Ethiopia, v. 12, who, at this time, exercised some authority over Egypt, and northward he prophesies the destruction of Assyria, vv. 13-15, with its capital Nineveh, land now occupied by Syria and Lebanon. Some names may have changed, but the occupants of those lands are still the inveterate enemies of Israel. In spite of their constant sabre rattling, their inevitable destruction is guaranteed.

The current devastation of Gaza

and its environs, however, is not the fulfilment of prophecy but rather a foreshadowing of end times. Such events serve to assure the believer that, 'now is our salvation nearer than when we believed', Rom. 13. 11. Truly, 'the night is far spent', v. 12.

But chapter 3 commences with a reminder to Jerusalem that she has no reason to be proud or complacent. A catalogue exposing her sins, of which her princes, prophets and priests all stood accused, is given in verses 1 to 4. Josiah's reforms proved to be superficial in many respects, dealing largely with the visible manifestations of evil rather than the root. In spite of God's judgement on the Gentile nations, Judah obstinately refused to repent, thus the captivity became inevitable.

The remaining verses look forward to a restoration of the nation to their 'promised land', preparation for which begins in verse 8 with a summary of the divine programme against the opposing nations. Verse 9 may suggest a reversal of the Babel curse that 'they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent'. The regathering follows with the nation no longer proud and haughty, but in a spirit of affliction and poverty, dependent on the Lord, for millennial blessing, vv. 12, 13.

Verses 14 to 20 are remarkable in their contrast with the earlier chapters. There is singing and rejoicing because 'the king of Israel, even the Lord, is in the midst', v. 15. Jerusalem is the centre of administration reminding us of Psalm 2, 'Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion'. Zephaniah began his prophecy with six 'I wills' of judgement. He closes with six 'I wills' of blessing.

Israel today is nationalistic to the point of arrogance. Yet there is an anticipation of the future. Their National Anthem is 'Hatikvah', the hope, and in the reception area of Tel Aviv airport is a large mural displaying Jeremiah chapter 31 verse 17, 'There is hope in thine end, saith the Lord, that thy children shall come again to their own border'.

Our God keeps His promises.

# ELISHA

## PART 1

### His background and his emergence 2 Kings 2

By **ANDREW BENNETT** Sound, Shetland

At the time of the ministry of Elisha, and his predecessor Elijah, Israel had turned from God and was following after Baal. It was through her husband, Ahab, that Jezebel had established the worship of Baal, 1 Kgs. 16. 30-33.

Elijah had commenced the work of turning Israel back from Baal to God and the mantle was handed over to Elisha. Elisha's ministry continued through six Israelite kings and the extent of that ministry was about fifty years. We need to note that he was not serving amongst Judah, where there was the mix of both good and bad kings; he served in the Ten Tribes who took their lead from Jeroboam the son of Nebat, 'who made Israel to sin', 14. 16.

Judah had the temple and the priesthood. Israel had introduced counterfeit temples or places of offering, one at Bethel and one at Dan. A counterfeit priesthood had been established; these individuals were of the lowest of the people. Also, alarmingly, two golden calves had been created for the worship of the people. What was of God had become desecrated, and what was forbidden had been introduced. What God had condemned had been rebuilt, that is, Jericho. These were the times in which this man, Elisha, served. We can see in 1 Kings chapter 16 verse 30 that Ahab did evil 'above all that were before him'.

A lesson that we learn here, and throughout the scriptures, is that succession is important. Elisha took up the mantle that Elijah left and continued the work of God. Interestingly, Elisha was the only prophet who was in the succession plan; on previous occasions God raised up **prophets**. Elijah was also told who would succeed him. We see

this in 1 Kings chapter 19 verse 16, where 'Elisha . . . shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room'. Elisha was not appointed the successor because he was of the same family; they were of different families. Elisha was not appointed because he was of the same spirit; he received a double portion of Elijah's spirit.

These two men were vastly different. Elisha was not anointed that he might pursue the same ministry. Indeed, that Elisha was anointed is an exception. He is the only prophet to receive this. It is set in contrast to the anointing of two extremely wicked kings, for God will never be without His man no matter how evil and dark the days might be. God will never abandon the interests of His people. So, whilst these two wicked and evil kings were anointed, we can see that a man was raised up and anointed of God to continue His work.

When we think of our own assemblies, a question that we might ask here is, 'what does our "succession plan" look like?' If the Lord allows the testimony to continue, what will the assembly look like in the future? Are we encouraging others of gift to get involved?

From his call, Elisha showed a willingness to succeed Elijah. In 1 Kings chapter 19 verses 19 to 21, we see that he left all and followed after Elijah. More than that, he slew the oxen and destroyed the instruments that he had been using

to plough with. We can also note that there is nothing heard of Elisha until we come to 2 Kings chapter 2 so it would appear that he served a kind of apprenticeship with Elijah, before he was taken and Elisha was left to continue the work. In our own day, it is good for men of experience to train up those who are younger that they may be able to carry on the work of the Lord.

As a man, Elijah was stern and ascetic. He was ascetic in his conduct, described in 2 Kings chapter 1 as a hairy man with a girdle of leather, and stern in calling down fire upon the captains and their fifties. Elisha was different. He was quiet and amenable. When we read Elijah's ministry, it was mainly negative. It was a bold testimony against evil that brought upon him continual suffering at the hands of the king and the nation. His first message was that there would be no dew or rain – a word of judgement, and this characterized his ministry.

Elisha's ministry was different; it was a ministry of power and a ministry in grace. It was a ministry that brought benefit to others. Elisha provided water for kings, food for prophets, and oil for the widow. He saw that there was food for a beleaguered city.

Elisha's ministry was in the latter days of the nation, before the Ten Tribes were taken into captivity in Assyria. These were days of rebellion and deceit, according to the prophets.<sup>1</sup> In such dark days, Elisha stands for God. Seventy-six times in the Old Testament we have the expression 'man of God'. On over twenty occasions, it is used of Elisha. The Shunamite described him as being 'a holy man of God'. Do people of the world see us as men and women of God? Elisha was taken from the obscurity of a farm to become a figure known and respected by both high and low. On one end of the scale, we have the captive maid, and on the other end the captain of the host, great and honourable, 2 Kgs. 5.

He was an instrument to deliver a poor widow and her sons from the

creditor, 2 Kgs. 4. 1. Three kings came to his home for help and he provided water for the kings and their armies and cattle. He predicted food for a starving city, 2 Kgs. 7. He is a picture of what God can do for any man despite their poor upbringing, if they only respond to His call.

He dealt with famine, disease, and death. He cast salt into a spring of bad water, and it was healed, 2 Kgs. 2. He cast meal into poisoned food and there was no harm in the pot, ch. 4. He cast a stick into water and iron swam, ch. 6.

We can see that the lesson that Elisha learnt was that, even though Elijah had gone, the power of the Lord remained with him, 2 Kgs. 2. 14. He encountered different types of people. In Jericho, he encountered the sons of the prophets and the men of the city. These sons of the prophets are like individuals who profess faith but who are earthly minded; the men of the city were the infidels of that city. Later, Elisha reaches Bethel, and he encounters those that mocked.

Bethel is the only occasion where he exacts judgement upon these individuals. It is surprising to think of a man of God whose ministry was one of grace, and yet judgement was exacted. God must judge mockery in a special way as we see here. In the very place of the state chapel and the calf of gold, verse 23 refers to them as 'little children'. The expression indicates that they were young men. What was the mockery of these young men? They said, 'go up, thou bald head'. In their mockery, they did two things: they mocked Elijah having gone to heaven; and they mocked Elisha's bald head.

To be an infidel is bad enough but to be a mocker, a scoffer, is worse. Mockery incurs the displeasure and judgement of God. They mock the thought of Elijah having been taken up. We can recall that one of the evidences of last days, as recorded for us in 2 Peter chapter 3, is that 'scoffers will come'. They come and they ask, 'Where is the promise of his coming?' Peter says of them

that they are 'ignorant', and their ignorance is self-imposed – it is their will to be ignorant.

In the context of Elisha, they refer to him as 'bald head'. This is not a reference to his old age, or simple lack of hair, but that Elisha had shaved his head in a vow, and they mocked his bald head. The mockery is levelled against the holiness of the man of God. What ungodly men cannot imitate they will mock. Mockery continues today, especially if piety and holiness characterize us as Christians.

Two she bears came out of the wood and tore these forty-two young men. Although scripture does not state that they were killed, they may have been, but the tearing of these young men does indicate divine displeasure on those who mock.

The miracles that Elijah performed had the character of judgement. The miracles performed by Elisha were miracles of mercy, with this one exception. The end of Elijah's life was one of sorrow, but he was translated to the heavens by a whirlwind. Elisha's life and service terminated in a different way. It ended with his vigorous disapproval and reproof of King Joash for his lack of trust in God, 2 Kgs. 13. It is interesting that a man who had commenced his ministry, called from ploughing with oxen, should conclude it giving instruction to a king. It is also a testimony to his triumphant end that when a dead body touched the bones of Elisha he was revived 'and stood up on his feet', v. 21.

As we have thought of the days in which Elisha served, dark days, and the days in which we serve, may it draw us closer to the Lord and enable us to pick up the mantle of succession. Equally, thinking of the way in which Elisha's ministry ended, may it encourage us, like Elisha, to continue in our work for the Lord.



#### Endnote

1 See Hos. 7. 14; 11. 12; Amos 2. 6.

# Towns and cities in the life of the Lord

## Part 6

# SYCHAR

By **IAN REES** Tenby, Wales

Scripture speaks of a city called Sychar. Although it is mentioned only once, the passage is one of the most important for telling us fundamental truth about our Lord, about our way of evangelism, and about our way of worship.

John tells us in chapter 4 of his Gospel that Sychar was not far from a well once dug by Jacob. We have no record in scripture of the digging of the well, but we are told that Jacob met with his brother Esau, after many years of mutual distrust, and then camped near the city of Shechem. Following on from this, he bought from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem, a plot of ground where he set up an altar and called it El Elohe Israel, Gen. 33. 18-20. Presumably, he dug a well there and eventually passed the property on to Joseph.

There has been much debate over the centuries as to the whereabouts of this well and the 'city', called a town in more recent translations. A Greek Orthodox church has been built in that area, that denomination claiming it to be the area of the well upon which our Lord sat. Today, that well is situated half a mile from the present town of Nablus. It stands on the eastern edge of the valley which forms the pass between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. It is said that 'it is fed by no spring, nor is the water conducted to it along the surface. Its supplies depend entirely upon rainfall and percolation'.<sup>1</sup> Since Shechem is twelve to twenty-five metres above the surrounding valley floor, and the water may not have ever reached to the brim, the woman of Samaria was correct in asserting 'the well is deep'. Whether this well is the one Jacob dug is still a matter of debate.

Our Lord sat beside the well at Sychar

awaiting a Samaritan woman. She, coming alone and at an inconvenient time for many, was startled that this man, who was very evidently a Jew, should speak to her. He asked of her a drink of water. Our Lord engaged her in a conversation about spiritual refreshment, not literal. She did not seem to understand this. In John chapter 4, we see the progress in spiritual understanding of the woman. She met one whom she perceived to be only a man, then recognized Him to be a Jew. It was when Christ revealed that He knew something of her way of life that she was startled, 'Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet', v. 19. Then, He revealed to her that He was more than a prophet, and she believed Him to be Christ, the long-awaited Messiah. In returning to the nearby village and testifying of her encounter with the Christ, many came out to meet Him and she became an evangelist and missionary, 'Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?' v. 29.

This encounter is of fundamental importance to our understanding of our Lord. It is at Sychar that more of His humanity is revealed to us: He was thirsty and, wearied by His journey, sat at the side of the well. Scripture often reveals to us the realities of the human body of our Lord. He slept in a boat, being weary; He was hungry; He was thirsty; He wept; He suffered terrible wounds before and at His crucifixion; He bled; He died. Without these glimpses one could imagine, as did

heretics in New Testament times, that He was not a real man but that He only appeared to have a human body. Belief in the deity of our Lord and His humanity is of absolute importance for a believer. The Spirit of God through the Apostle John insists on it. 'Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world', 1 John 4. 2, 3. John bears clear witness to our Lord's humanity and the reality of His body, '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. And our Lord reminds us of the body that is still His, His glorious body, 'handle me, and see; for a spirit doth not have flesh and bones, as ye see me have', Luke 24. 39. The tired body of our Lord, sitting beside a well, is clear indication that He was 'found in fashion as a man', Phil. 2. 8.

It is at Sychar that we also see our Lord working in fulfilment of an eternal plan. He deliberately went out of His way to meet this woman. It was part of God's sovereign plan for her and for Samaria. Our Lord 'must needs go' through Samaria on His way to Galilee, v. 3, 4. This was not usual for a Jew. Many Jews avoided Samaria, crossing the river Jordan before its borders, passing it through Perea on its east bank, re-crossing north of Samaria. The Samaritans had a mongrel religion, a mix of the Jewish worship of the one true God and paganism, stemming from the re-settlement of pagans in the area in the time of the exile to Assyria. The woman herself is surprised to speak to one who was very evidently Jewish. Yet God, in His sovereign grace, had dealings with her and our Lord sat on a well awaiting her arrival. The appointment had been made in eternity.

It is at Sychar, too, that we see the importance to our Lord of the individual. He goes specifically to meet one woman. It would be



wonderful to see crowds converted to God, but often it is the one who is significant. Through her, many Samaritans believed; Philip was caught up by the Spirit, taken from a scene of great revival to the back of beyond to meet one Ethiopian who would no doubt preach the gospel to his people; Ananias was instructed to go to a street called Straight to meet a man who would be one of the greatest evangelists of his day. Our Lord made one visit to Gadara to exorcise a man who would prove to be an evangelist to his people, Mark 5. At this first visit the people of the area begged Christ to leave. They did not want their pockets emptied with more slaughter of pigs! When our Lord returns, Legion has done his work and Christ is welcomed by them. This time in Decapolis, where Legion lived, they brought someone to Christ for healing. The result was they 'were beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done all things well', Mark 7. 37.

Then again, at Sychar we see the immensity of God's grace. Even the Lord's disciples are surprised by Him. Upon their return they 'marvelled that he talked with the woman', v. 27. This woman would not have been welcome to the Jews let alone her own society. This is evidenced by the fact that she drew

water from the well at a time when other women would not be present – at midday, in the heat of the sun – and that her marital history left a great deal to be desired, by modern standards let alone those of biblical times. A more recent translation renders our Lord's comment to her as, 'You don't have a husband. You have already been married five times, and the man you are now living with isn't your husband', CEV. That would have been scandalous in those days. That our Lord was prepared to go out of his way to meet a 'mere woman', a Samaritan woman ('the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans') and an immoral Samaritan woman at that should speak volumes to us. No-one is beyond God's grace, whether we approve of their way of life or not.

And finally, and most importantly for us, it is at Sychar that we learn something vital about our way of worship. As non-conformist, Protestant evangelicals, we take from this incident fundamental truth. It is at Sychar that we learn that, 'God is . . . Spirit: and they that worship him must worship . . . in spirit and in truth', v. 24. The woman of Samaria asked whether worship was place-based – in Samaria or in Jerusalem. Worship in Judaism had been centred around the tabernacle, then the temple, then synagogues,

and it was so in Samaria too where the Samaritans had their own temple dedicated to a mongrel form of Judaism. Our Lord replied that one could worship God anywhere. Christendom teaches that churches and cathedrals are the places where worship is to be centred – around an altar in a place sanctified for worship, and conducted by priests who alone have the authority to lead worship and 'say Mass'. The recovery of biblical truth from scripture translated into the *lingua franca* of a country – German with Luther, English with Wycliffe and Tyndale – made people realize that worship need not be confined to one religious centre. And so our Gospel Halls, Mission Halls, and meeting places take on a fundamental importance to us. Yet, they are mere buildings, not sanctified or dedicated in any way, not 'holy places' or 'houses of God' but halls in which the local church can meet to worship in spirit and in truth.

Sychar may have been a small 'city' and only mentioned once in scripture, but what truth our Lord revealed when He was there!

#### Endnote

- 1 JAMES ORR, *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, Volume 3*, Howard-Severance, 1915, pg. 1557.



# Thoughts on Second Kings chapter 5 Part 1

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

The Old Testament gives us four men named Naaman, three of whom we know very little about.<sup>1</sup> The Bible presents to us many characters, some of whom we know and delight to meditate on, whilst of others very little is known and some whose identity is unknown.

The most well-known is the Naaman of 2 Kings chapter 5 and he is mentioned by name eleven times in this delightful story, authenticated by the Lord in Luke chapter 4 verse 27. His story brings us to consider Elisha, the prophet of God, Gehazi, Elisha's servant, and a nameless little maid.

There are many ways we can look at the story. For example, we might consider the many servants in the chapter:

- Naaman, vv. 1 and 6 – a servant of the king. Naaman uses the word 'servant' of himself five times in verses 13 to 18.
- The little maid, v. 2 – she was a servant of Naaman's unnamed wife.
- Elisha, vv. 8 and 10 – God's servant and man of God.
- Naaman's servants, v. 13 – those who gave wise counsel.
- Gehazi, v. 20 – Elisha's servant.

In the chapter, we are also drawn to a 'word portrait' of Naaman in the forty-three words in verse 1. Thirty-eight of those words relate to his position – he was successful. The final words relate to his condition – it was dreadful. As captain of the host of the king of Syria, he had risen through the ranks to be commander due to his exploits for the nation. 'By him the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria'. It can be easily overlooked, but the living God had helped in the battles, and they are not attributed to the god of Syria, Rimmon. Naaman was a man mighty in valour, victorious and glorious.

Surely, he must have been the envy of all – a great man with his master.

It is obvious that the king gave him due respect, as demonstrated by the bounty to be taken to the king of Israel. He was honourable, a man of esteem and principle, and a man of high repute. What a 'CV' he had!

But he was a leper. If we take away the achievements and embellishments of this man, all that we are left with is a man in great need. He is man at his best without the living God.

Leprosy is mentioned much in scripture as being with devastating effect resulting in death. We are aware that if he lived in Israel, he would be excluded from society. The stigma of the disease was real in Bible times. The outlook for him was grim. Where was his cure to come from?

Verses 2 and 3 introduce us to a little maid and what is recorded of her stands in contrast to the great man of verse 1. There are scant details as to when she was taken to Syria, how old she was, or anything about her family or how long she had been employed in Naaman's household. The verse really hangs on one word, 'captive' – a stranger in a foreign land. However, she was in the right place, at the right time, for Naaman.

Humanly speaking, she could have kept silent for, after all, she had been taken by force away from her own environment into foreign territory. It is a challenge to us as we are in a foreign land, and we need to make the Saviour known. As we speak to people in our country today, we may be the only ones to speak a word for the Lord and draw them to the only cure through the Saviour's work at Calvary.

Four simple and yet succinct statements are spoken by the maid, the only time that what she said is recorded. She spoke of:

- What power was available – God. The living God who brought deliverance to the nation of Syria was available to deliver one man from his leprosy.
- Who the man of God was – Elisha, the man in touch with God. There was no physician in Syria who could help!
- Where he was – Samaria. There was no prophet in Syria.
- What Elisha could do – recover Naaman. What a bold statement, for we know that Elisha had not cleansed any leper or lepers in Israel. The Lord confirms this, Luke 4. 27.

What confidence this maid had in the prophet. Do we display similar confidence in the gospel? She had a concern for others. How is our concern for those gripped by sin? This was good news by an ambassador from a far country. Equally, we believe the only hope for all today is the gospel of God concerning His Son. Nothing more is known or heard from her, apart from what she had passed on to others. This reminds us we must grasp every opportunity to speak for our Saviour.

Verse 4 indicates that they believed what she said. There is not a word in scripture to suggest that they tried any other supposed cure. They acted on what she revealed although at first misinterpreted. They took her at her word for it even touched the king.

C. H. Spurgeon turned into a Primitive Methodist Church in a snowstorm and heard a message on Isaiah chapter 45 verse 22, and he was convicted of his sin. The minister had not arrived, so another man spoke with faltering words, and it touched Spurgeon's heart that day. This young girl is still remembered today for what she said. May people we speak to remember what we say, and act upon the simple message of the gospel.

## Endnote

- 1 Gen. 46. 21, a son of Benjamin; Num. 26. 40; 1 Chr. 8. 4, a son of Bela, son of Benjamin; 1 Chr. 8. 7, a son of Ehud.

# WORD FOR TODAY

By **BRIAN CLATWORTHY** Newbury, England

**Qaneh** (cane, reed, stalk)

**Qanna** (envy/jealousy)

**Qanno** (jealous)

The Hebrew adjective *qanna* is derived from the verb *qana* meaning either to be jealous or zealous. It is used in the Old Testament both positively and negatively. Positively it can refer to being zealous for the benefit of others as in 2 Samuel chapter 21 verse 2, where Saul in his zeal for Israel and Judah had sought to wipe out the Gibeonites because they were not of Israelite stock. Similarly, the word is used to describe the fervent concern of Phineas for the honour of God that averted God's wrath being poured out on Israel, Num. 25. 11, 13, and Elijah's zeal for the Lord because Israel had broken the covenant, torn down God's altars, and murdered His prophets, 1 Kgs. 19. 10. Negatively, it can be used in the sense of bearing a grudge against someone or resenting someone possessing something as in Genesis chapter 26 verse 14, where the Philistines envied Isaac because of his material blessing from God. This resentment led the Philistines to retaliate by blocking up all the wells that had been dug in the days of Abraham, and expelling Isaac from their land, vv. 15, 16. In all these instances, it is linked to strong emotion to succeed in the intended action, irrespective of the outcome of such action. This is evident in the various forms it occurs, such as the power or passion of human love, S. of S. 8. 6, to a competitive spirit, which, according to the writer of Ecclesiastes, leads to futile labour, Eccles. 4. 4, and to pure anger or jealousy which has a detrimental effect on the human body, as opposed to a calm disposition which promotes bodily health, Prov. 14. 30. It can also be a destructive passion, especially of human wisdom, as Eliphaz concludes that because of Job's anger and jealousy he has become a fool, Job 5. 2.

Remarkably, however, in the Old Testament the adjective is never used to describe the character of God

negatively, i.e., God is never described as someone who would 'be jealous' as in human terms, which has an evil connotation.<sup>1</sup> As STEPHEN D. RENN states, "The one significant difference between human and divine jealousy is that the latter trait never impacts negatively on the person of God. God's moral perfection guarantees a perfectly wholesome and just expression of jealousy".<sup>2</sup> In every instance of the word, it emphasizes that God alone is to be worshipped and will not allow any rivals, thus acting as a proscription against idol worship, Deut. 4. 24; 5. 9; 6. 15. In fact, "So closely is this characteristic associated with God that His name is Jealous (Ex. 34. 14)".<sup>3</sup> This statement in Exodus chapter 34 verse 14 extends the meaning of Exodus chapter 20 verse 5 and confirms that impassioned indignation is part of God's essential name and being, Exod. 33. 19. "This is probably a play on the name YHVH, equating its root 'h-v-h' with 'h-w-y' used in Arabic with the meaning "passion".<sup>4</sup> Although in His essential being God is a 'jealous' God, it is also possible to provoke Him to jealousy, as Israel so often did by their sinful actions, 1 Kgs. 14. 22; Zeph. 1. 18. We might compare this with the similar use by Paul of the Greek word for 'jealousy' (*parazelo*) in 1 Corinthians chapter 10 verse 22, where he remonstrates with the Corinthians, specifically over the question of idolatry.

The so-called 'jealousy offering', found in Numbers chapter 5 verses 11 to 31, was important in dealing with breaches of faith between a husband and his wife. The role of the priest was critical in determining the guilt or innocence of the accused wife and highlights the fact that fellowship with God is based upon His holy zeal.

In the Septuagint (LXX) *qanna* is translated by the Greek word *zelos* and again underpins this idea that God's holiness is expressed through His jealousy or zeal, particularly as it relates to Israel. When God's purposes for Israel are interrupted by other

nations, His holy zeal is aroused on Israel's behalf to ensure that His purposes for them are accomplished, Ezek. 36. 6; Zech. 1. 14. This is often illustrated in marital terms in God's relationship with Israel as husband is to wife and His desire to keep Israel from adulterous relationships and their worship of idols.<sup>5</sup>

We find the word *zelos* only used in a limited number of texts in the New Testament and again both relate to divine and human 'jealously' or 'zeal'. Positively, when our Lord became angry at the moneychangers in the temple, John 2. 17, the disciples explain His holy outburst by remembering the quotation, 'The zeal of thine house shall eat me up', John 2. 17 RV, quoting Ps. 69. 9. Negatively, because although Israel had an authentic zeal for the Lord, it was misplaced through ignorance of God's righteousness, Rom. 10. 2, 3.

In terms, then, zeal or being jealous for the honour and name of God is something that we as believers should actively seek to promote and thereby keep ourselves from idols, 1 John 5. 21.

## For further reading/study

### Introductory

W. E. VINE, *Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words*, Oliphants, pp. 76, 77.

### Advanced

WILLEM A. VANGEMEREN (Ed.), *Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis* (Vol. 3), Paternoster Press, pp. 937-939.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> 'The rabbis, too, find it hard to speak about God's zeal for fear of anthropomorphism. God is a jealous God, not because he envies idols as revivals, but because he cannot allow his honor to be infringed by idolatry', A. STUMPF, in GEOFFREY W. BROMILEY, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Abridged in One Volume, Eerdmans/Paternoster, pg. 298.
- <sup>2</sup> STEPHEN D. RENN, *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*, Hendricksen Academic, pg. 533. 'In God jealousy, therefore, never degenerates to envy, self-pity or undue concern for self-protection', T. DESMOND ALEXANDER, *Dictionary of the Old Testament - Pentateuch*, IVP, pg. 430.
- <sup>3</sup> WARREN BAKER and EUGENE CARPENTER, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary Old Testament*, AMG Publishers, pg. 1000.
- <sup>4</sup> *The Jewish Study Bible*, Oxford University Press, pg. 190.
- <sup>5</sup> Isa. 62. 5; Hos. 2. 19-21; 4. 17.

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## 'Now the disciples had forgotten to take bread', Mark 8. 14

It is of note that the verse that accompanies our cover picture sits in the context of Mark's account of the feeding of the four thousand. In that narrative of the miracle, and from the meagre provision of seven loaves, we are told that the multitude 'did eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets', Mark 8. 8. Apart from the fact that all were fed, seven loaves became seven baskets of fragments! Perhaps that event, a fresh memory of the Saviour's power, or the abruptness of their departure, led the disciples to take so little in the way of provision for the journey across the sea. Thus, when the Lord warned His followers of 'the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod', v. 15, they immediately jumped to the conclusion that their forgetfulness had drawn the Lord's warning. Whilst human logic and thinking can be a valuable tool in certain circumstances, we need to be careful. Although 'they reasoned among themselves', v. 16, suggesting a conclusion shared by them all, they were still wrong! When they should have sought clarification from the Lord, they did not. Hence, the Lord had to explain what He meant and to indicate that their assumption that His reference to leaven meant bread was not a safe one!

As we may well know, leaven is something that permeates and affects dough to make it rise. Its actions are relatively swift but silent and, starting small, it affects a large amount of dough. Thus, the Lord challenges His disciples, then and now, to keep a watchful eye on the things around us and their potential influence upon us.

It is interesting that two leavens are mentioned, v. 15. At one extreme, the Pharisaic legalism and ritualism was hypocrisy, designed for self-promotion. At the other edge, Herod's materialism and hedonism was to protect his status and influence, and was equally corrupt. As they ultimately joined forces against the Lord, both were poisonous! The teaching and way of life of these leaders needed to be challenged, and the Lord asked the disciples to put what they heard and what they saw to the test. It was not that they should do that once only, but that they should repeatedly weigh these things in the balance of the word of God. Here is a charge that we might apply to ourselves, as ritualists and rationalists continue to challenge the word of God in our day.

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