

PreciousSeed

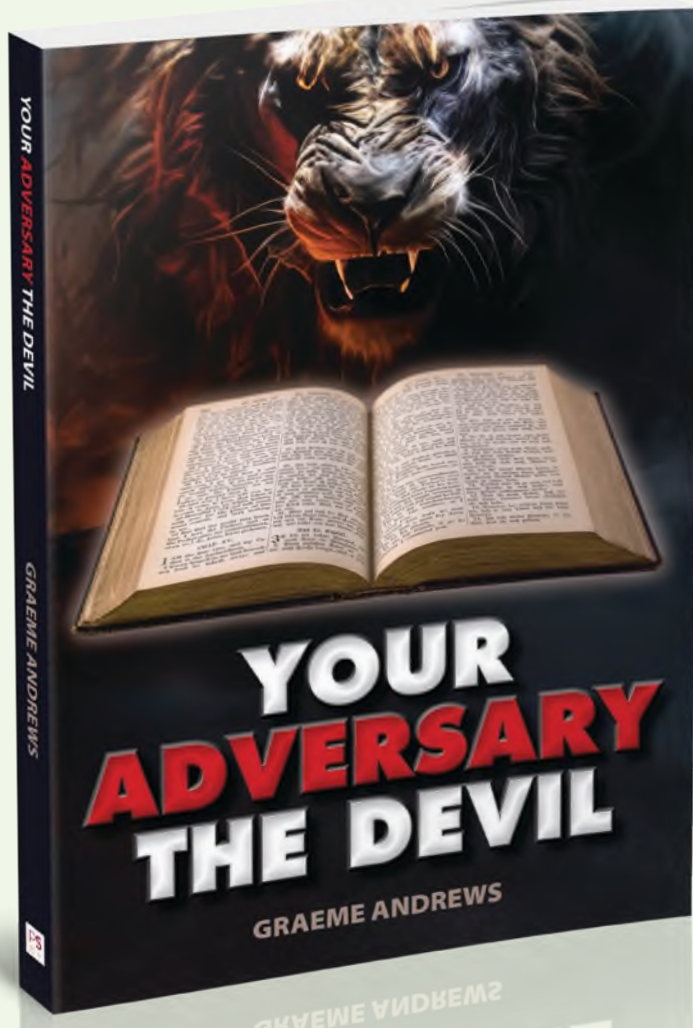
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'Can . . . the leopard [change] his spots?' Jer. 13. 23

PS
Magazine

NEW MATERIALS AND OFFERS FROM PRECIOUS SEED



The subject of the Devil is a neglected one. Much of professing Christianity have rejected his reality and conservative Christians often neglect detailed study of this character. Sermons on his person and purpose are not abundant, and written materials are either non-existent or non-scriptural. Sadly, Christianity has become ignorant of the devices of one of our great enemies, the Devil.

This book aims to increase biblical literacy concerning our foe. Ignorance of our enemy will not help us overcome him. A study of his personality, strategy, and activity will garrison us. The battle with the forces of evil will not be won based on our own ideas, incantations, or initiatives. Victory arrives based on the power and protection of God. Paul commands us to 'put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil'; Eph. 6. 11.

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‘Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves’, Phil. 2. 3.

Often the first verses of this chapter are overlooked in a rush to the amazing doctrinal truths found in verses 5 to 11, and yet they are at the root of why the apostle, inspired by the Holy Spirit, unfolds the ‘mind of Christ’.

It would be tragic if the motive of interaction with our fellow saints were to be either ‘strife’ or ‘vainglory’ and yet, sadly, as demonstrated in the assembly at Philippi, it can be. It behoves us therefore to carefully and seriously consider not only what we do, but also our motives.

In his Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, W. E. VINE indicates that the word ‘strife’, Gk. erithia, does not so much convey the idea of conflict or disagreement, but rather of ambition, self-seeking, one who would be prepared to spin the truth for their own advantage, the result of which is factions in the assembly.

In a world that is dominated by ‘spin-doctors’, whose art seems to lie in manipulating the truth to win followers

and promote themselves or their agenda, we do well to examine our motives to ensure we are not motivated by self-interest and to humbly put the interest of others at the heart of our thinking. It is sadly the case that unity and harmony in many an assembly has been destroyed by those who put their personal agenda above the interests of others or the company as a whole.

God grant us each the humility and grace to examine ourselves before the Lord and learn from the mind of Christ.

Once again, as we send this issue of the magazine to press, it would be our prayer that the articles, which the authors have expended much effort in writing, would be an encouragement and challenge to the readers.

Sandy Jack
Ministry Articles Editor

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1 Peter 4

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

Part 5

First Peter can be summarized under four general headings:

1. Salvation,
2. Sanctification,
3. Submission, and
4. Suffering.

Chapter 4 falls into the book's final section under the main heading of suffering. Peter speaks of suffering in each chapter of his letter. He learned the lesson of Luke chapter 17 verse 25 that the Lord Jesus must first 'suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation', and chapter 24 verse 26, that Christ ought 'to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory'. He did not always see this as clearly as he does now.

From chapter 3 verse 13 to the end of chapter 5, Peter talks a lot about the believer's suffering. I have divided chapter 4 up as follows:

1. What suffering does for the believer, vv. 1-6
2. How the believer should behave while suffering, vv. 7-11
3. The challenge to rejoice in our suffering for and with Christ, vv. 12-14
4. Do not suffer for the wrong reasons, but glorify God in your suffering, vv. 15-19.

We will work our way through the chapter section by section.

What suffering does for the believer, vv. 1-6

In verse 1, Christ's suffering for us ended in His death. His death dealt the final blow to sin. Sin was judged and no longer has legal rights or power over the believer. Peter is teaching that the followers of Christ should think clearly about sin and death, as this will equip them to live as believers. Understanding that death breaks the power of sin means that we realize that we are finished with sin. Romans chapter 6 verses 11 and 12 present the same truth.

Verse 2 describes the outcome of this way of thinking. From now on, we live the rest of our lives fulfilling God's will rather than our human desires.

Verse 3 calls us to look back. In the past, says Peter, you pleased yourself and your sinful desires. From now on, do not live a Gentile, pagan lifestyle [a sordid list of examples of how godless people live follows] but live to please God by doing His will.

As a result, people you used to share your life with will find it hard to take it in, v. 4. They will be surprised that you do not continue to join them in their reckless and wild lifestyle. They will be inclined to slander you rather than praise you. We should not be surprised or offended by snide remarks and insulting comments from those we used to party with.

But please do not lose heart. The people who are laughing at you now will one day stand before God, v. 5. They will 'give account' – their 'payback' day will come! It literally means that by their insults and unbelief they are amassing a debt that God will require them to pay back on the future day of judgement. All of humanity will stand before God – both the living and the dead. The living are those who are alive when Messiah returns to Israel. Matthew chapter 25 explains this; it is called the judgement of the living. The dead are those who have died but are brought back to life to stand before God at the great white throne, Rev. 20.

The first section ends with a verse that is difficult to explain. It starts with the phrase 'for this cause', which makes us look back at the statement in verse 5. Whatever verse 6 means, it explains that what happened in life was so that the judgement mentioned in verse 5

would be just and right. It explains how those who have died will be judged in the future. The gospel is definitely not preached to people after they have died because scripture makes it clear that it is only during our lives on earth that we can hear and receive the gospel. For instance, the Bible says, 'the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins', Mark 2. 10. So, there would be no point in preaching to people who have left this world through death as God can only forgive their sins while they live on earth. Hebrews chapter 9 verse 27 states that after death comes the judgement. The offer of salvation is made to all people while alive on earth. So, I conclude that Peter is saying that the gospel was preached to people who are dead now but heard it when they were alive. When they were living, they listened to the gospel and were saved. Because of their salvation, men judged them and persecuted them, and some of them even lost their lives for their faith in Christ. However, the fact that they suffered in the flesh, v. 1, and live now for the will of God, v. 2, means that they are those who live according to God in the spirit. Whether they are still on earth or now in heaven, they lived to do the will of God.

How the believer should behave while suffering, vv. 7-11

Most people need an incentive to help them focus their minds. Peter reminds his readers that time is running out, 'the end of all things is at hand', v. 7. So, as a result, Christians should behave thoughtfully. A list of good behaviours is given that result from the awareness of this:

1. Be sober (be alert, think clearly);
2. Watch unto prayer (take prayer seriously);
3. Have fervent charity (love) for your fellow believer;
4. Be hospitable (and do not begrudge it);
5. Serve your fellow believer;
6. Understand what has been entrusted to you;
7. Speak for God and serve Him as He has enabled you (speak with

God's words, serve with God's strength);

8. Glorify God in everything you do.

If we behave in these ways, it will bring glory to God through Jesus Christ.

The challenge to rejoice in our suffering for and with Christ, vv. 12-14

Peter makes two main points in this section. First, he says you should expect to suffer as a follower of Christ. Second, learn to rejoice in your trials, as your suffering is evidence that 'the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you'.

Through harrowing experience, he has discovered that tough, fiery trials are part and parcel of life as a disciple of the Lord Jesus. However, rather than accepting this as annoyingly inevitable, he calls the believer to rejoice that they share in the sufferings of Christ. The New Testament makes this same point many times:

The Lord Jesus said, 'Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also', John 15. 20.



James wrote, 'My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations', Jas. 1. 2.

Paul writes that he will 'rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church', Col. 1. 24, and, 'If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us', 2 Tim. 2. 12.

Do not suffer for the wrong reasons, but glorify God in your suffering, vv. 15-19

The final section brings a warning to the believer. While it is a good thing to suffer for doing good, it is totally out of order for a believer to suffer for bad behaviour. Note the range of examples that Peter gives – murdering, stealing, causing trouble, or being a person who meddles in other people's affairs – at a basic level, just nosey but possibly with the intent to defraud. This bad behaviour is also highlighted elsewhere and it does not please God.¹ Be warned.

In verse 16, Peter teaches that believers should not feel ashamed for suffering for Christ. Their reactions and behaviour should glorify God. It is a great testimony when we behave well under persecution and pressure. The apostles are a great example of rejoicing in their sufferings for Christ, 'And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name', Acts 5. 41. No doubt Peter is reflecting on his own shame when he denied Christ, Luke 22. 54-62. He learned a hard lesson that day, which he shared with the saints.

Verses 17 and 18 teach a sobering lesson. Peter contrasts the judgement of the believer with that of the ungodly. We know that the believer is in view as Peter says that judgement begins at the 'house of God'. The church of the living God is described as 'house of God', 1 Tim. 3. 15. The purpose of judgement for the believer is to make them more disciplined, refined, and mature.

For the unbeliever, it is to censure them and enforce eternal separation from God. Peter questions, if God sends the 'fiery trial' to His people and they are being saved with difficulty (through testing times and circumstances), what will happen to the ungodly and the sinner when they face the judgement of God? It will be irreversible and devastating.

In verse 19, we are reminded that suffering could be according to God's will. We often assume that God only brings good times and that all suffering is from an evil source. This is not borne out by scripture. Job suffered according to God's will. Suffering can be a direct result of your service for God, as Paul explains in 2 Timothy chapter 1 verses 11 and 12.

The big lesson of the verse is about how we react when we suffer. Some translations say we must do what is right or keep doing what is right. The second instruction is to commit the keeping of our souls to the faithful creator. Peter says that living in the face of suffering demonstrates our trust in the faithful creator. I do not think Peter is talking about God as the world's creator but as the source of our new creation.² The one who created us knows what He is doing. We can trust Him and commit ourselves to Him for our well-being.

In other words, we should follow the example of the Lord Jesus when we suffer for Him. We must entrust ourselves to God. Peter has already taught us that this is what the Lord Jesus did when He was reviled and threatened, 1 Pet. 2. 23. They accused the Lord Jesus of this, 'He trusted in God', Matt. 27. 43, and it is how we should react to suffering.

No one would choose to suffer, but if it is God's will that we suffer, we can rest in the fact that He knows what He is doing and that everything is for our best interests and His glory.

Endnotes

- 1 See 1 Thess. 4. 11; 2 Thess. 3. 11; and 1 Tim. 5. 13.
- 2 Eph. 4. 24; Col. 3. 10; 2 Cor. 5. 17.

The One who ‘came down’, ‘laid down’ and ‘sat down’

By **MALCOLM HORLOCK** Cardiff, Wales

[Unless otherwise stated, scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Version of the Bible]

Many will be familiar with the closing words of the short spiritual song,

‘Lord, I lift Your name on high’:

‘You came from heaven to earth to show the way,

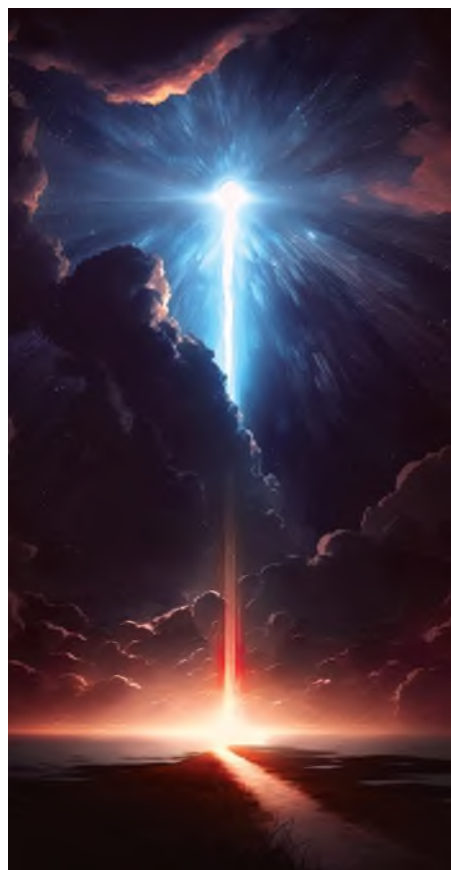
From the earth to the cross, my debt to pay:

From the cross to the grave, from the grave to the sky–

Lord, I lift Your name on high’.

Personally, I enjoy linking three expressions from that song with three sayings of the Lord Jesus recorded by the Apostle John (two in his Gospel and one in his book of the Revelation) – each of which uses the word ‘**down**’.

First, I link the expression, ‘You came from heaven **to earth**’ with the Lord’s words in John chapter 6, ‘I have **come down** from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me’.



Then, I link the expression, ‘from the earth **to the cross**’ with His words in John chapter 10, ‘I am the good shepherd . . . I **lay down** My life for the sheep . . . I **lay down** My life . . . No one takes it from Me, but I **lay it down** of Myself [“of My own accord”]’.

And, finally, I link the expression, ‘from the grave **to the sky**’ with the words of the risen Lord in Revelation chapter 3, words addressed to the angel of the church in Laodicea, ‘To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and **sat down** with My Father on His throne’.

First, ‘I have **come down** from heaven’. The Apostle Paul spoke of the Lord Jesus as the One who ‘descended’, and ‘descend’ He most certainly did; who, though He had been immeasurably rich, for our sakes became abjectly poor. ‘You know the grace [the undeserved favour and kindness] of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes [“because of you”, literally] He became poor’.

We bow in wonder anew when we consider that, such was His amazing condescension, He, **God’s ‘only begotten Son’**, deigned to become **Mary’s ‘firstborn Son’** . . . that He exchanged the **exalted throne** of the Lord of hosts for an animal’s **feeding trough**.

On one occasion, the Saviour Himself spoke of seeing Satan ‘**fall** . . . from heaven’ and the town clerk of Ephesus is on record in Acts chapter 19 as having spoken of the image of the Greek goddess Artemis which supposedly ‘**fell down** from heaven’. But the Lord Jesus did not ‘**fall down** from heaven’; He ‘**came down** from

heaven’. What a breath-taking – what a stupendous – stoop!

John records in chapter 5 of his Gospel how, when Jesus told the Jews, ‘My Father has been working until now, and I have been working’, they ‘sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, **making Himself equal with God**’. And then, in chapter 10, John further reports the words of the Jews to the Lord Jesus, ‘For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, **make Yourself God**’.

The irony lay in that, whereas the Jews asserted that He, ‘a Man’, was making Himself out to be ‘equal with God’ – yea, to be ‘God’ Himself – the truth was that He was only in the world at all because He, who ‘**was** [and had always been] **God**’, having refused to cling to His position of splendour as One on equality with God, had become a man!

In a well-known passage in the book of Ecclesiastes, the Preacher stated, not only that there is a time to be **born**, but that there is a time to **die**.



This was true, of course, of men in general, but it was no less true of our Lord Jesus.

For that reason, our Lord made it clear, not only that He had **come down** from heaven, but that He would, of His own accord, as He said, **lay down** His life – that for Him, not only had there once been **a manger**, but the time would come when there would be **a cross**.

The Apostle John certainly got the point. Years later, he wrote, ‘By this we know love [“this is how we know what love is”], because He laid down His life for us’. The cross of Jesus was many things, but among the many, it was the pulpit from which He preached His boundless love to us.

We rejoice to know that, when that time came, the self-same One who so willingly had ‘**come down**’ from His heavenly glory, then steadfastly refused to ‘**come down**’ from His shameful cross.

And we thank God that our Lord’s death was **not the end of the story**.

For, as the Apostle Peter declared concerning Him on the great day of Pentecost, ‘whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it’. For his part, the Apostle Paul assures us that the One ‘who **descended** is also the One who **ascended** far above all the heavens’.

Then the One who ‘**came down**’ from heaven and who ‘**laid down**’ His life, ‘**sat down**’ with His Father ‘on His throne’ . . . at God’s right hand – the place of supreme dignity and honour.

Speaking of the Jewish priests of Old Testament days, the writer to the Hebrews pointed out that, ‘every priest **stands** ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, **sat down** at the right hand of God’. That is to say, the Jewish priests never dared sit down in the presence of God for the simple reason that their work was never

finished. But our Lord Jesus took His place, seated at God’s right hand, as sure and certain evidence that He had forever completed the work He had come to do.

This is not to say, of course, that our Lord is inactive today. Far from it. In the words of the Apostle Paul, ‘It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us’.

We delight to know that, just as the **resurrection** of the Lord Jesus provides us with the supreme demonstration of **the power of God**, so the **cross** of the Lord Jesus provides us with the supreme demonstration of **His love**.

But we rejoice also in the knowledge that our Lord’s cross did not exhaust His love – that, though **He** died, **His love** did not – that He loves us still – and that, at this very moment, He is actively engaged in representing every last one of us before the face of God.

Let us thank God, then, that the One (i) who ‘**came down**’ from heaven (who ‘came from heaven to earth’) and (ii) who ‘**laid down**’ His life (who



went ‘from the earth to the cross’), is now ‘**sat down**’ at God’s right hand (has gone ‘from the grave to the sky’).

Endnotes

- 1 Written by Rick Doyle Founds in 1989.
- 2 John 6. 38. With reference to His incarnation, the Lord Jesus spoke of Himself six times as having ‘come down from heaven’, John 3. 13; 6. 33, 38, 50, 51, 58; cp. John 6. 41, 42.
- 3 John 10. 14-18. ‘Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends’, John 15. 13. ‘No mere man ever laid down His life for others in the sense in which Christ laid down His life for the world. Every man must die at some time . . . When a man sacrifices his life, he does but sacrifice a few days or years; he does but lay it down earlier instead of later. But Christ did not choose between dying at one time rather than at another; **He chose between dying and not dying**’, FRANKLIN JOHNSON, *The Fundamentals*, Volume VI, Chapter IV, pg. 61.
- 4 Rev. 3. 21.
- 5 Eph. 4. 9, 10.
- 6 2 Cor. 8. 9.
- 7 John 3. 16, 18; 1 John 4. 9.
- 8 Matt. 1. 25; Luke 2. 7.
- 9 Isa. 6. 1, 10 with John 12. 39-41.
- 10 Luke 2. 7.
- 11 Luke 10. 18.
- 12 Acts 19. 35 JND.
- 13 The Lord Jesus did not ‘**look down**’ from heaven’, Ps. 14. 2; 53. 2; 80. 14; Isa. 63. 15; He ‘**came down**’ from heaven’!
- 14 We read of the king of Nineveh (the mighty king of Assyria), who ‘arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth’, Jonah 3. 6. But, as believers, we know someone who rose up from a far grander throne, laid aside a far more gorgeous robe, and who clothed Himself with flesh. And all because He loved us!
- 15 John 5. 17, 18.
- 16 John 10. 33.
- 17 John 1. 1, 10; Phil. 2. 6, 7.
- 18 Eccles. 3. 2.
- 19 1 John 3. 16.
- 20 ‘Come down from the cross, and we will believe’, Matt 27. 42. ‘The crowds shouted: “Come down from the cross and we will believe on you”. General Booth commented: “It is precisely because He did **not** come down that we believe on Him”’, WILLIAM BARCLAY, *Jesus as They Saw Him*, pg. 244. The only miraculous sign which our Lord was to give was not His **coming down from the cross**, but His **coming up from the grave**!
- 21 Acts 2. 24.
- 22 Eph. 4. 10.
- 23 Acts 2. 33, 34; Eph. 1. 20; Heb. 8. 1; 1 Pet. 3. 22.
- 24 Heb. 10. 11, 12.
- 25 Rom. 8. 34.
- 26 ‘Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us’, Rev. 1. 5 JND; cp. RV and ESV.
- 27 Heb. 9. 24.

THE TEACHING IN THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS

Part 9 – A better hope

By **ALASTAIR SINCLAIR** Crosshouse, Scotland

The letter to the Hebrews sits central to the New Testament both literally and theologically. It is surrounded on either side by a series of letters named after individuals, those preceding Hebrews being the recipients of the letters and those after Hebrews being the authors of the letters. These personal letters are themselves preceded by letters by Paul to seven locations and followed by letters from the Lord Jesus to seven locations in the opening three chapters of Revelation. These letters to local churches are then preceded by history in the Gospels and Acts, and followed by prophecy in Revelation chapters 4 to 22. This centrality is very appropriate as this unique letter, written to a race by an unidentified author, is also central to the transition from the Old Testament to the New Testament. In fact, Hebrews chapter 8 verse 13 confirms a new covenant (or testimony), replacing an old one which is 'ready to vanish away'. Just to be clear, this old covenant refers only to the covenant of law which was made at Sinai, as a bilateral covenant between God and Israel and was dependent on Israel's obedience, in which they failed miserably. It does not affect the covenants with Noah, Abraham, and David which are all unilateral covenants made by divine promise with no dependency on the other party, and all of which must have a literal fulfilment. This new covenant was promised in Jeremiah chapter 31 verse 31 and would be written in their hearts, not on tables of stone. Once again, it is a unilateral covenant, ratified by and dependent on, the blood of Christ alone, 1 Cor. 11. 25, and so can never fail and fade like the old covenant.

The emphasis of Hebrews is that everything to do with this new covenant is superior to the old one. Despite the things which accompanied the covenant of law being literal, touchable, and tangible, they were in fact only a shadow, 10. 1. What the Hebrew believers have now, though generally spiritual rather than physical, is, in fact, the real substance, 10. 34; 11. 1. The writer looks at the literal things accompanying the law, such as priests, offerings, the tabernacle, the land, Jerusalem, and others,

as all being inferior to the 'better' things they now have as believers. The book could well be described as detailing all things that are 'better' under Christianity than under the law. This can be seen in that of the nineteen times the Greek word translated 'better' is used in the New Testament, thirteen of them are found in Hebrews. These thirteen occurrences can be grouped together and summarized as follows: We have better provision in Christ's sacrifice rather than that of animals, 9. 23; 12. 24, and its outcomes are perfect, 11. 35, 40. The promises we have

are all better, 7. 22; 8. 6 ('better' is referenced twice). They relate to a better place, as heavenly rather than earthly, 10. 34; 11. 16. Even though we are no longer under law, all these better outcomes should result in better practices, 6. 9. Above all of this, our blessings are secured by a better person. He is better than the angels, 1. 4, better than Melchizedek, 7. 7, and, by implication, better than Levi, Moses, Aaron, and even Abraham.

The remaining reference to things which are better is the 'better hope', 7. 19. In the remainder of this article we will seek to show that this also relates to the superior person that we belong to and who Himself is our ultimate hope. The verse tells us that it is this hope 'by the which we draw nigh unto God'. This is another central message of the Hebrew Epistle. The old economy, which is passing away, though it was marked by a place where God dwelt among them, was, in fact, clearly giving out a message of 'keep back'. This is well illustrated in chapter 12 where the spiritual mount Zion is contrasted to the literal mount Sinai. Though Sinai, where God Himself was to be found, 'might be touched', 12. 18, because it was a physical mountain, in fact 'if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart', v. 20. In contrast, the following verses confirm that we come to a heavenly mountain associated with the new Jerusalem in the company of angels, Old Testament saints, all our brothers and sisters in the church, God Himself and, of course, the Lord Jesus. This intimacy is a theme of the whole book, which makes much use of the imagery of the tabernacle. The building of this tabernacle gets enormous coverage in the book of Exodus and more in the books that follow, even though it is a temporary structure (tent) and smaller than many of the halls we meet in today. Why is it given so much coverage? The answer, of course, is that it was constructed to be the place where God could dwell among His people, and they could meet with Him. This seems to also speak of intimacy, but the detail soon reveals that the great message of this tabernacle is

not 'draw near' but, in fact, 'keep back'. It has a gate, a door, and a veil, all as barriers to the presence of God. The gate only gains entry to the court where burnt offerings are continually made on the altar. The door gives access only to the priests who alone tend the various vessels in the Holy Place. Two thirds of the way along the Holy Place is a veil beyond which is the Shekinah glory of God between two cherubim on a mercy seat which sits on top of the Ark of the Covenant. Even the priests have no access to this, but only the high priest and, even then, only on one day a year. On that day, the Day of Atonement, more sacrifices and both incense and blood must be taken in and put on the mercy seat to make atonement and allow the high priest to survive going into God's presence. This extensive ritual must be repeated every year. These 'barriers' emphasize the holiness of God and man's sinfulness making him unfit to come into God's presence. Well might the Hebrew writer confirm they were 'offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins', 10. 11. In contrast to this, the Lord Jesus has made perfect provision through one sacrifice never needing to be repeated, 9. 26, 28; 10. 12.

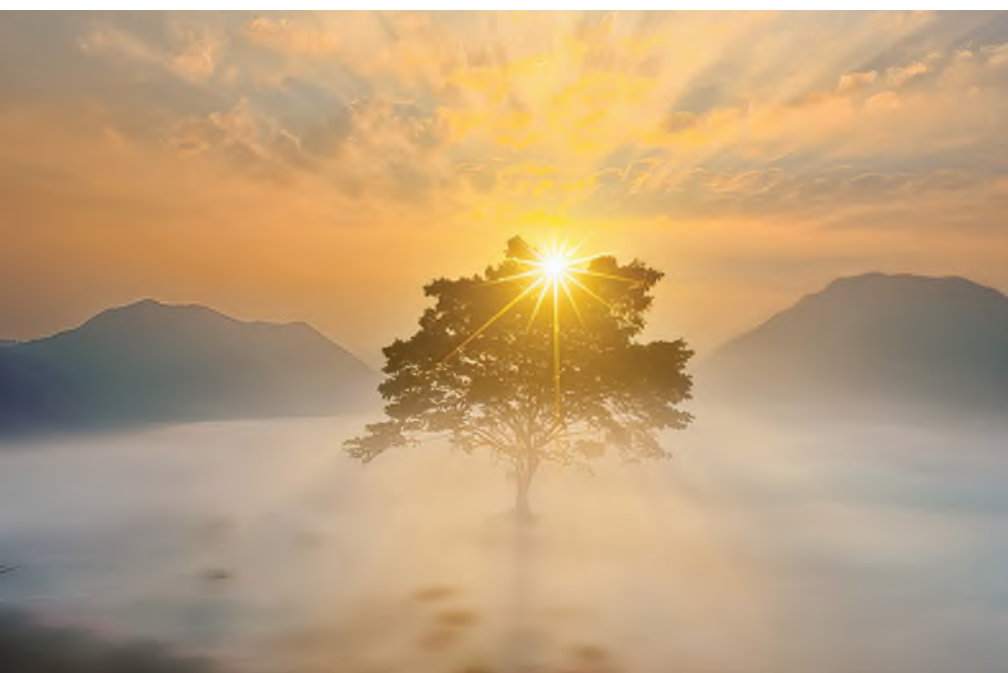
Our sins are no longer covered temporarily, as in the old sacrifices, even on the day of atonement. But 'removed' 'as far as the east is

from the west', Ps. 103. 12, which is infinite. The psalmist is no doubt contrasting this to the tabernacle, where east to west is the altar to the mercy seat. Rather than having barriers, the turning point of Hebrews invites us to have 'boldness to enter into the holiest . . . through the veil, that is to say, his flesh', 10. 19, 20. It goes on to tell us He is our High Priest and He is in heaven itself, and through Him we can draw near now. This is a present blessing but also the guarantee of an even greater future hope. This hope is referred to in chapters 3 verse 6 and 6 verse 11 as being 'unto the end' as to when it will be realized. Chapter 6 verses 18 and 19 tell us where it will be realized, which is 'within the veil' where, verse 20 confirms, our Lord is not only a High Priest but also a forerunner. This hope is not only a present spiritual entrance inside the veil but also a future prospect of a literal entrance into the Father's house, because our forerunner, firstfruits, and guarantee is already there! So, this better hope by which we draw nigh unto God is in fact Christ Himself. The Colossians, who were being attacked by those who taught that they need more than just Christ, are reminded that they have a 'hope which is laid up for you in heaven', Col. 1. 5, and this hope is none other than 'Christ, who is our life', Col. 3. 4. Our 'life is hid with Christ in God', v. 3, and will be realized when He appears. So, the Hebrew writer urges us to 'hold fast

the profession of our faith [hope] without wavering', 10. 23.

The final reference to hope is in chapter 11 verse 1, which introduces a great catalogue of Old Testament saints whose faith was the evidence of their hope. Amongst this list, Abraham stands out as the father not only of the nation of Israel but of all the faithful who believe God and are therefore considered righteous. As the father of the nation, he clearly had a promise, and therefore a hope here on earth in the eventual possession of a land. This same earthly hope is true of most listed in the chapter and indeed of Israel. Be clear that this hope will eventually be realized as the promises of God are 'yea and amen', 2 Cor. 1. 20. However, chapter 11 concludes by reminding us that 'these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect', 11. 39, 40. These dear saints who all died prior to the provision made by Christ at Calvary, nevertheless had a hope which was dependent on Him. Not only did they have a 'hope' here on earth in the promise made to them, but they also have 'a better hope'; 'they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly', 11. 16. Like Abraham, they 'looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God', 11. 10.

This better hope, better country, and better city is outlined in chapter 12 where these saints of the past who, in consequence of the death and resurrection of Christ, have now been 'made perfect', along with us, 'the . . . church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven', the angelic host, and God Himself, will all come unto 'the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem', 12. 22, 23. All this is because of the presence in heaven of 'Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and . . . the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things', 12. 24. Well might we, along with the hymnwriter, pronounce 'how bright that blessed hope, Jesus will come!' and appreciate there can be no 'better hope' than His person and His presence.



NEHEMIAH

A MAN OF PROGRESS – THE PLACE

Part 6

By **TOM MERRIMAN** Carmarthen, Wales

At this time, Jerusalem was the centre of God's testimony – He had placed His name there. This was indicated by the Lord in Moses' day and acknowledged by Solomon when the temple was dedicated.¹

Our present dispensation was preceded by the words of the Lord Jesus, 'the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth', John 4. 23. He established the principle that 'where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them', Matt. 18. 20. Lessons can be drawn by comparing the significant features of Jerusalem that were rebuilt or repaired to the centre of testimony today – God's assembly.

The walls marked a line of separation, but the gates granted reception to the city. Doors, some with added security, were necessary for the regulation of the gates. Towers enabled supervision of activity around the city. On a spiritual level, the same applies today.²

More may be gleaned by considering other features of the city, but this study focuses on Nehemiah's survey of ten gates mentioned on his anticlockwise journey round Jerusalem, starting at the north, Neh. 3.

Sheep gate, v. 1

Near the temple, this was first on Nehemiah's report, indicating its importance. It provided a way to bring sacrifices, including the daily offering of lambs.³ This gate and the portions of wall and towers linked to it were ceremonially sanctified, setting it apart in the eyes of the people. Everyone needed to know

its purpose for the gate to be used appropriately.

Thank God that a way into His presence has been opened for us by our Lord, 'the way', John 14. 6. 'A new and living way' has been 'consecrated for us', and 'having an high priest over the house of God', we are encouraged to draw near, Heb. 10. 20-22. Each believer is part of a holy priesthood whose service is 'to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ', 1 Pet. 2. 5.

Do we readily respond to God's invitation to draw near? When it comes to worship, is our approach God's way, and are our lives marked by holiness?

Fish gate, v. 3

According to the law, fish having fins and scales could be eaten.⁴ This gate, allowing in such supplies, was rebuilt, the door being doubly secured with locks and bars. Had they been used when the men of Tyre offered their wares on the sabbath, it would not have presented a problem, Neh. 13. 15-22.

In the New Testament, fishers of fish learned to be 'fishers of men', Mark 1. 17. As the gospel net was cast in Acts chapter 2, those who received the word were baptized, and, being added to the local church, 'continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers', v. 42. This set a pattern for those being received into a local assembly. In respect of salvation, it is wonderful to know that those who have come God's way benefit from the double security of being within the hand of the Lord Jesus, and that of the Father, John 10. 28, 29. In respect of the local assembly,

care is needed to see that those brought into the assembly have truly entered by 'the door', John 10. 1, 2; Acts 20. 28-30.

The growth of God's assembly is linked to the preaching of the gospel. As James and John took time to mend their nets, Mark 1. 19, careful preparation is needed to ensure that we are preaching the gospel soundly.

Old gate, v. 6

Instead of removing this damaged gate, significant repairs were performed.

In the New Testament, we find 'old' things that are removed or replaced.⁵ However, there are others that should be retained.⁶ Therefore, old ways, traditions, need to be carefully considered, and removed or repaired where necessary.

Three times traditions are seen negatively:

- The Pharisees held to traditions of men and disregarded the word of God, Matt. 15. 2-6; Mark 7. 5-13.
- Paul was 'exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers' – steeped in religion, Gal. 1. 14.
- Traditions of men can spoil a believer's enjoyment in Christ, Col. 2. 8.

However, three times traditions are seen positively:

- Paul praised the Corinthians for the 'ordinances' (*paradosis* – same Gk. word) they kept, 1 Cor. 11. 2. Note, however, that in this section of the Epistle dealing with the gatherings of God's people, some repairs were needed. Paul addressed: headship, vv. 3-16; conduct at the Lord's supper, vv. 17-34; and the proper use of spiritual gift, chh. 12-14.
- The Thessalonians were encouraged to 'stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle', 2 Thes. 2. 15. The apostles' doctrine is still important.
- They were also to 'withdraw . . . from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the

tradition which he received of us', 2 Thess. 3. 6.

This gate teaches us that some 'old paths' must be retained.⁷

Valley gate, v. 13

Uzziah built towers at certain points, including the 'valley gate' to strengthen the defences, 2 Chr. 26. 9, likely named after the valley of Hinnom to which it opened on the west, Josh. 15. 8. The valley moved south to merge with the Kidron that came round the east of the city – a humble outlook, not having the prospect of the gates near the temple.

There are some aspects to the testimony for God that are not glorious to experience. But the lows are needed as well as the highs for true faith to be tested. For those passing through the valley gate, let us remember that the God of the hills is also the God of the valleys, 1 Kgs. 20. We can also take encouragement from Isaiah chapter 57 verse 15, 'thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones'.

Dung gate, v. 14

Located at the southern tip of the city, this was evidently used for waste disposal. This may have included the remains of a previous day's sacrifice, things removed from animals in preparation for sacrifice, and anything else that did not belong in the city.

Is the dung gate in use today? It prompts us all to be fresh in spiritual service. It is also a reminder that some things have no place in God's assembly. Ephesians chapter 5 verses 3 to 5 notes a list of evils that should 'not be once named among you, as becometh saints', and 1 Corinthians chapter 5 teaches that the leaven of moral sin must be put out.

Fountain gate, v. 15

At an earlier time, Hezekiah saw

that the approach of Sennacherib threatened a siege. In preparation, he brought a supply of water inside the city.⁸ It flowed from the Gihon springs through a conduit to the pool of Siloah – 'Siloam, (which is by interpretation, Sent.)', John 9. 7. Repairs to this gate and wall ensured the security of this supply. The 'king's garden' likely owed its fruit to this fountain and reservoir.

Believers, too, have a hidden source. As the man of John chapter 9 returned from the pool seeing, so our spiritual eyes are enlightened by the free supply of the Spirit. While all believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, the local testimony, too, ought to be a place where spiritual refreshment is freely available. Watered by the Spirit, 'God's husbandry [cultivated field, garden]' will prosper with spiritual fruit, 1 Cor. 3. 9.

Water gate, v. 26

Water was used for washing and drinking and therefore essential for cleanliness and to sustain life. The scriptures were later read from near this gate, Neh. 8. This is fitting since water is compared to the word – 'that he might sanctify and cleanse it [the church] with the washing of water by the word', Eph. 5. 26. Apollos, 'an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures', Acts 18. 24, is said to have 'watered' what Paul had planted, 1 Cor. 3. 6.

The wall linked to it was repaired, but notably, the water gate itself required none. The word of God is infallible, but its truth must be upheld in God's assembly today, 1 Tim. 3. 15.

Horse gate, v. 28

Here we see a partial fulfilment of Jeremiah's prophecy. He said the city would be built 'unto the corner of the horse gate toward the east . . . holy unto the Lord; it shall not be plucked up, nor thrown down any more', Jer. 31. 40. Nehemiah's day saw its restoration, but the true fulfilment of this prophecy remains for a future day. In scripture, horses are often linked with battle.⁹ Psalm 24 verse 7 describes a welcome fitting for our Lord,

the victor, 'Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in'. What a contrast to His entrance upon a colt!¹⁰

May God's people be found overcoming the things that He has conquered – sin, death, the world, the devil – and longing for His return and final victory.

East gate, v. 29

Repairs to this gate are not mentioned, but Shemaiah was its keeper (watchman). Presently the gate is sealed – a cemetery at its door – but this will not prevent our Lord's return. Ezekiel saw the glory of the Lord departing from the east gate, but it is also the place to which His glory will return.¹¹

May we, like Shemaiah ('heard by Jehovah'), be heard of the Lord echoing, 'Even so, come, Lord Jesus', Rev. 22. 20.

Miphkad/Inspection gate, v. 31¹²

Next to 'the place of the Nethinims, and of the merchants', this gate was probably where people or produce were assembled or arranged for inspection.

Let us be mindful of and motivated by the forthcoming assessment of our service at the Judgment Seat of Christ, 2 Cor. 5. 9, 10.

Summary

Thus, the work of the wall and gates progressed. So may God's testimony be furthered in our day, for His name's sake.

Endnotes

- 1 Deut. 12. 11; 1 Kgs. 8. 29.
- 2 John 17. 17; 1 Cor. 3. 17; Acts 2. 41; Rom. 16. 2; Acts 20. 28; Titus 1. 5.
- 3 Exod. 29. 38.
- 4 Lev. 11. 9.
- 5 Matt. 9. 17; Heb. 8. 13; 2 Cor. 5. 17; Rom. 6. 6; Eph. 4. 22; Col. 3. 9; 1 Cor. 5. 7, 8; 1 Tim. 4. 7.
- 6 2 Cor. 3. 14; 1 John 2. 7.
- 7 Cp. Jer. 6. 16.
- 8 2 Chr. 32.
- 9 Prov. 21. 31; Rev. 19. 11. See also, Philem. 2, 'Archippus ['master of the horse'], our fellowsoldier'.
- 10 Luke 19. 34-44.
- 11 Ezek. 10. 19; 11. 23; 43. 4.
- 12 Miphkad means 'muster, appointment, numbering'.

Words at the Cross

By **MERVYN WISHART** Belfast, Northern Ireland

Part 6

The fifth saying from the cross is 'I thirst'. This is the shortest of all of the seven sayings from the cross, and it is recorded only by John, 19. 28.

The One who said, 'I thirst'

He made the waters, Gen. 1. 2

The phrase, 'the waters', is referred to eleven times in the first chapter of our Bible, and 'the sea' is mentioned four times. In the next chapter we read that a river went out of Eden to water the garden, 2. 10. It divided and became four rivers, so there was an abundant supply of water in that first garden, a paradise designed and planted by God. 'Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it: thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water', Ps. 65. 9; cp. Ps. 46. 4.

He said, 'I thirst', though He made the rivers;

He said, 'I thirst', though He made the seas.

'I thirst', said the King of the ages:
In His thirst, He brought water to me.¹

He measured the waters, Isa. 40. 12

'Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand?' If we extend one hand with the palm upwards and pour in a small amount of water, it is possible to retain only a few drops; so just think of the enormity of this question. It is figurative language, of course, but it eloquently conveys the magnitude and unlimited capacity of our God. The seas, the rivers, the lakes, and the waters of all the cosmos are in His hand.

Yet, with parched lips, for six long hours the creator of all things endured the burning heat of the eastern sun. Having not accepted one drop of the liquids offered to Him, His suffering from dehydration would have been intense. But far greater than those physical sufferings were His sufferings when He bore the wrath of a holy God against sin, Lam. 1. 12, 13. How amazing it is to consider the graphic prophetic words in Psalm 22 verse 15, 'My strength is dried

up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death'.

He fulfilled the last remaining prophecy

In spite of the agony He was experiencing, His mind was clear and His words were lucid. He had perfect knowledge of the Old Testament scriptures and knew that one prophecy remained to be fulfilled.

1. 'Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst', John 19. 28; cp. Ps. 69. 21.
2. 'And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And he was numbered with the transgressors', Mark 15. 28; cp. Isa. 53. 12.
3. 'Where they crucified him', John 19. 18; cp. Ps. 22. 16.
4. 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do', Luke 23. 34; cp. Isa. 53. 12.
5. 'Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be . . . These things therefore the soldiers did', John 19. 24; cp. Ps. 22. 18.
6. 'These things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken', John 19. 36; cp. Ps. 34. 20; Exod. 12. 46.
7. 'And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced', John 19. 37; cp. Zech. 12. 10.
8. 'And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?', Matt. 27. 46; cp. Ps. 22. 1.
9. 'The chief priests mocking him . . . said . . . He trusted in God; let him deliver him now', Matt. 27. 41-43; cp. Ps. 22. 8.

(This is not an exhaustive list.)

There are three recorded occasions when the Lord was offered something to drink at Calvary.

Mark chapter 15 verse 23: At the

time of His crucifixion, 'And they gave him to drink wine mingled with myrrh: but he received it not'. Earlier in the upper room, He had told His disciples that He would not drink of the fruit of the vine until He was with them in the coming kingdom, Matt. 26. 29. Myrrh was one of the gifts brought by the wise men soon after His birth, and it was offered to Him here a few hours before His death, but He refused it. To prepare His body for burial, Nicodemus brought 'a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight', John 19. 39. Thus, myrrh was associated with His birth, His death and His burial.

Luke chapter 23 verse 36: 'And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar'. It seems that a number of soldiers offered Him sour wine, which they had been keeping for themselves.

Matthew chapter 27 verse 48: 'And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink'. It was at the ninth hour, when the Lord Jesus said, 'I thirst'; He drank of the vinegar and then cried with a loud voice, 'It is finished'. See also Mark 15. 34-37; John 19. 28-30.

The Lord Jesus had gone about doing good, healing the sick, bringing blessing wherever He went; and yet here, when there was one last opportunity to afford Him an act of solace before His death, even that was denied. The One who 'looked . . . for comforters, . . . found none', Ps. 69. 20. He had turned water into wine at Cana of Galilee; now they gave Him vinegar to drink.

Men wondered at the sight so rare,
And sitting down they watched
Him there.
And none who saw could
understand
Why darkness covered all the land.
And none who heard the cry, 'I
thirst',
Knew why the sinless One was
cursed;
Nor understood those words so
true,
'Forgive, they know not what they
do'.

For God alone, and none beside,
Knew what was done when Jesus
died.²

He gave evidence of His true humanity

Scripture strongly affirms both the deity of Christ and His true humanity:

- He was thirsty – it was real thirst, John 19. 28
- He was hungry – it was real hunger, Luke 4. 2
- He was weary – it was real weariness, John 4. 6
- He wept at the tomb of Lazarus – they were real tears, John 11. 35
- He rejoiced – it was real joy, Luke 10. 21

He was a real man; the only perfect man who ever lived on earth. He died on the cross, He was laid in the rock-hewn tomb, rose again on the third day, and is now a glorified man in heaven.

He provided the water of life for all who will receive it

There are two Old Testament illustrations:

1. The smiting of the rock at Horeb, Exod. 17. 1-7; Ps. 78. 20.

In their journeys, the children of Israel came to Rephidim, ‘and there was no water for the people to drink . . . And the people thirsted there for water’, yet they journeyed ‘according to the commandment of the Lord’. Sometimes trials come, even when a Christian is in the path of God’s will. What a severe trial this was: hundreds of thousands of people travelling in



the wilderness with no water. In spite of their unbelief and complaining, the Lord made a miraculous provision for them. Moses was instructed as to what should be done, ‘Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink’, v. 6.

Psalm 78 verse 20 tells us what happened, and the New Testament explains the meaning of the story, ‘for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ’, 1 Cor. 10. 4.

The rock at Horeb was smitten; the Lord Jesus was smitten at Calvary, ‘with his stripes we are healed’, Isa. 53. 5. He was smitten so that, in virtue of His death, the water of life might flow out and be available to all who will receive it.

2. The water brought to David from the well at Bethlehem, 1 Chr. 11. 15-19.

Although David had already been anointed king by Samuel, he was not yet crowned and was still being pursued by Saul. He and a number of his mighty men were holed up in the cave of Adullam, surrounded by the host of the Philistines, whose garrison was then at Bethlehem.

David expressed his desire for a drink of water from the well of Bethlehem that was beside the gate. His longing was not a request for someone to bring the water to him. However, when three of his mighty men heard him, they left the cave, broke through the host of the Philistines into their stronghold at Bethlehem and drew water from the well. Though outnumbered, they fought their way there and back and gave the water to David.

David’s reaction was to refuse to drink it. He said, ‘Shall I drink the blood of these men that have put their lives in jeopardy?’ He considered that God alone was worthy of such devotion, so he poured the water out before the Lord.

At Calvary the Lord Jesus faced a far more formidable foe than the

Philistines. He was victorious over the powers of darkness; cp. Col. 2. 15. In His victory, He has not brought natural water from the well of Bethlehem, but spiritual water – the water of life – within the reach of all who will receive it. He did not go to the cross in jeopardy of His life, but laid it down of His own volition. In John chapter 10, five times He stated that He would lay down His life for the sheep, vv. 11, 15, 17, 18 (twice).

He offers living water to those who are thirsty

‘Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life’, John 4. 14. These words were spoken by the Lord Jesus as He conversed with one woman beside the well at Sychar. Her response was, ‘Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not’, v. 15.

‘In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink’, John 7. 37. This invitation was extended to every person in that vast crowd assembled in Jerusalem at the Feast of Tabernacles. The only requirement was, ‘if anyone thirsts’, NKJV. The gospel hymn expresses it well, ‘All the fitness He requireth is to feel your need of Him’ [JOSEPH HART].

‘And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely’, Rev. 22. 17. Again, as in verse 16, the Lord Jesus is the speaker, ‘I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star’.

We should also remember that the One who said on the cross, ‘I thirst’, gave the solemn warning of a man who was then, is now, and will be forever tormented by a thirst that can never be quenched, Luke 16. 19-31.

Endnotes

- 1 BEVERLY LOWRY. Found here: <https://www.letras.com/the-cathedrals-quartet/i-thirst/>.
- 2 DREW CRAIG, *The Land and People of Israel*, Gospel Folio Press.

WHAT I AM AND WHAT I SHOULD BE!

By **JEFF BROWN** Nantgarw, Wales

Introduction

As believers, have we ever considered not only what our relationship with God is but also what our responsibilities before God are? Have we ever contemplated not only what the purpose and meaning of life is generally, but, more importantly, what is the ultimate plan that God has for me specifically?

The purpose of this present article is to bring before us the wonder of what we are in Christ, and then to challenge each of us as to our responsibilities – what we should be in our daily lives and service for Him! Basically, is what we are positionally in Christ reflected in what we are, and how we live, practically every day?.

What I am in Christ

There are so many blessings that every believer is the recipient of:

- a divine creation
- made in the image and likeness of God
- a new creation in Christ
- a permanent dwelling place of the Holy Spirit
- a child of God
- having the mind of Christ
- a believer-priest
- a servant of God

A divine creation, Gen. 2. 7

Every believer is a divine creation. Humans are uniquely different and superior to all other forms of life on this planet – created in the image and likeness of God and given great authority, Ps. 139. 14. Man was, and still is, physically, intellectually, socially, biologically, emotionally and spiritually distinct from all else! His capabilities are far higher than for mere survival – man's superior level of learning and intelligence shows his tremendous potential to dominate Earth! Humans are not advanced animals in transit, part of a purposeless, endless, meaningless, evolutionary process but unique beings made for a divine purpose!

God made each of us uniquely – no-one else on this planet has (or

ever did have) the same genetic imprint that you and I have! This, of course, is true of everyone that has ever existed – saved and unsaved; they are all the results of divine creation. If this truth was appreciated today, then there would be a much greater regard for the sanctity of human life, especially regarding issues like abortion, euthanasia, war, etc. When we, as believers, see others in that light (as unique beings among all of God's creation and souls for whom Christ died), then it should surely affect our motivation for the lost! It should also affect our attitude towards each other!

The image and likeness of God, Gen. 1. 26

This is a deep and profound truth. 'Image' and 'likeness' are very close in meaning, and are used together in the statement regarding man's relationship with God. 'Image' means 'to shade', so, as a shadow represents the substance, so man represents God on earth. 'Likeness' means resemblance, not necessarily a physical but a spiritual resemblance, possessing certain, but not all, of the originator's characteristics. Man is certainly not omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, holy, or righteous as God is, but he resembles his creator as an eternal being, although a created one (in contrast

to the animals that cease to exist at death, Eccles. 3. 21.

Man is also a tripartite being, with not only body and spirit but a soul. Man could never have been derived by a natural phase of development from inferior creatures – his self-awareness, moral consciousness, and self-determination are proof of that!

Man had been made in the likeness of God – an evidence of God's creative power, but Philippians chapter 2 verse 7 reminds us that the Son of God was made in the likeness of men – an evidence of God's condescending grace and that He is 'the image of the invisible God', Col. 1. 15.

The image and likeness of God in the believer

Sin has robbed man of his original function. Although Adam was created in the image and likeness of God, we notice that after the entrance of sin, Seth was born in the image and likeness of Adam, Gen. 5. 3, not God! So those that are unsaved are not fulfilling their original function. The question is, are we living our original function? This is formed by a life of constant renewal of the mind and consecration, Rom. 12. 2. The ultimate purpose of God for believers today is to bring about a moral transformation to Christ, Phil. 3. 20, 21.

A new creation, 2 Cor. 5. 17

Being a Christian brings us into a further relationship with God. Human beings have all been given physical life from God, yet now, as believers, we are blessed with spiritual life – the first at our physical birth and the second when we were 'born from above', John 3. 3 lit., and given new spiritual life in Christ. We are no longer working on the old principle of human nature but overriding it with something completely new and powerful; the power that created all things out of nothing is the same power that creates new life within us now!

The aim and centre of our lives has been shifted. It sets us in a new 'world', but with the old world still around us. We now have new

purposes, new powers, and a new relationship! Our daily lives should reflect what we were created for, that is, to obey, love, worship, and be in communion with God. After salvation, God began to restore the original image of God in the individual, Eph. 4. 24.

A permanent dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, Rom. 8. 11

At our conversion an eternal, divine person took up permanent residence within us! All believers' bodies became a temple of the Holy Spirit, 1 Cor. 6. 19. The Holy Spirit has many functions in the life of a believer. He

- instructs/teaches, John 14. 26
- interprets the word, 1 Cor. 2. 13
- influences our decisions, Acts 16. 6, 7
- intercedes for us, Rom. 8. 26, 27
- illuminates our minds, John 16. 13-15

There are many circumstances in which the Holy Spirit should affect our lives as believers. He should be in evidence, and leading us in prayer, Eph. 6. 18; Jude 20; preaching, 1 Cor. 2. 4; worship, John 4. 24; our life and walk, Gal. 5. 25; Rom. 8. 4; being led, Rom. 8. 14; Gal. 5. 18; and experiencing the love of the Spirit, Rom. 15. 30. We need to allow the free course of the Holy Spirit in our daily lives.

How do we treat and look after our bodies? If we really appreciate that a divine person is dwelling in us permanently, 1 Cor. 6. 19, then that should affect our attitudes, as believers, to obvious things like smoking, alcohol, drug-abuse; yet it should also make clear to us our position on abortion and euthanasia!

A child of God, Rom. 8. 14-16

At physical birth, we were all brought into a relationship with the family that were responsible for our birth. So, at our new, spiritual birth when we accepted Christ as our Saviour, we were immediately brought into the family of God, John 1. 12, 13.

Development

Children often imitate their parents in many ways. As children of God, we are urged to imitate our loving Father, Eph. 5. 1. In contrast to

many children in the world today, we should be marked by obedience, to effect a life of holiness, 1 Pet. 1. 14-16. A healthy child is marked by continual growth, and spiritual growth will be the evidence of a believer's development! A child needs to be fed, there is an inbred instinct for food, and they cannot live without it – never a day is missed.

It should be the same in the spiritual sense regarding the word of God, 1 Pet. 2. 2. After natural birth, a newborn child receives food unquestioningly, wholeheartedly, and thankfully. That should be our attitude to the word after our new birth. We cannot have spiritual growth without spiritual food. Evidence of our spiritual growth is that we will sin less, but never be sinless!

Having the mind of Christ, 1 Cor. 2. 16

Believers have the spiritual capacity to receive divine truth, through the miracle of regeneration and the receiving of the Holy Spirit. Things that were ever in God's eternal thoughts have now been revealed to the church! The mind of Christ was given to us at salvation; what we have in Philippians chapter 2 is the continual working out of the mind of Christ in our daily lives, v. 5. Each believer has a spiritual capacity greater than the greatest intellects (unsaved) of the day. The mind of Christ was never a delayed afterthought – what a privilege that we have! Are we availing ourselves of it and applying ourselves to it?

A believer-priest

All believers are priests at conversion, Rev. 1. 6. Today, believers have two main priesthood roles – first, to bring our spiritual sacrifices to God, and, second, to have direct access to the Father. Note that all priesthood activity in scripture was marked by spiritual and moral purity. We may be children of God, and as a consequence of that also a New Testament priests, but if there is unconfessed sin in our lives then there can be no communion with God and any 'worship' would be hollow!

As believer priests today we offer ourselves as sacrifices, Rom. 12. 1 – our whole being, all the power and faculties of our mind and bodies for God's service. We should meditate continually on Christ and bring thoughts of His preciousness to the Father, Heb. 13. 15, especially (but not exclusively) seen in the 'Breaking of Bread' meeting. We also have continual access to God, not the limited access of a few in Old Testament times. Do we appreciate this inestimable privilege of having direct, immediate access to the eternal throne room?

We could say that as holy priests we worship the Lord, and as royal priests we go out as representatives into the world to witness, 1 Pet. 2. 9. The order is important; before we can go out as royal priests, we should have offered ourselves as 'living sacrifices' as holy priests.

A servant of God

We have always been servants, even if we never realized it! Before we were saved we were all the servants (slaves) of sin and Satan; now we have become the servants of God, Rom. 6. 17, 18; 1 Thess. 1. 9. To be a true servant demands submission, obedience, and faithfulness – features lacking in our 21st-century world! Today's culture demands personal 'rights' with much less emphasis upon 'responsibilities'. Yet, as believers, we must submit in all aspects of our lives to Christ, who Himself was the perfect bondservant, Phil. 2. 7. He came to serve, not to be served, Mark 10. 43-45. Actually, to be a servant is a divine calling, we are God's handiwork – called to good works, Eph. 2. 10.

So many that were faithful in their relationship to and service for God in the Old Testament were termed 'my servant' or 'servant of the Lord'. In the New Testament, the apostles also were described as 'servants of Jesus Christ', e.g. Paul, Peter, James, and Jude. We are reminded that in a coming day 'his servants shall serve him', Rev. 22. 3-5. We, therefore, should aim to do now what we shall be doing then, eternally serving Him!

BUT GOD . . .

By **NATHANAEL REED** Ontario, Canada

Introduction

In the words of talk show host and psychologist DR. PHIL MCGRAW, “‘BUT’ is a powerful word. It means forget everything I just said, I’m now going to tell you what I really mean’. Although not always completely accurate, generally speaking, the words which follow ‘but’ are the ones to remember.

The word ‘but’ is used almost 4,000 times in scripture, and some of the most intriguing examples are those which reference God, as in ‘but God’. We can note that in several of those instances, specific Old Testament characters are associated with this little phrase.

- Noah had been in the ark for 150 days . . . but God, Gen. 7. 24 – 8. 1
- Joseph was hauled off into slavery . . . but God, 50. 19, 20
- David was pursued relentlessly by Saul . . . but God, 1 Sam. 23. 13, 14
- The sons of Korah saw wickedness all around them . . . but God, Ps. 49. 14, 15
- Asaph’s flesh and heart might fail . . . but God, 73. 25, 26
- Solomon’s kingdom had been threatened . . . but . . . God, 1 Kgs. 5. 3, 4
- Jahaziel was confronted by an enemy horde . . . but God, 2 Chr. 20. 14, 15

On each of these seven occasions, God’s presence not only provided protection for His harried servants, but actually turned bad into good. What is also compelling about these seven ‘**but God**’ statements is a foreshadowing of God’s redemptive plan for humankind:

- Christ’s work of redemption, Noah, Joseph, and David
- God’s motive for redemption, Ps. 86. 14, 15
- The blessings of redemption, sons of Korah, Asaph, Solomon, and Jahaziel.

But God . . . Christ’s work of redemption

But God remembered (Noah)

Noah was confined to the ark for 150

days, **but God** remembered Noah . . . and the waters subsided, Gen. 7. 24 – 8. 1. This does not actually mean that God had forgotten Noah, but only that, from the reader’s perspective, the spotlight of God’s attention turned to this faithful servant.

Although Noah’s confinement appears as a foreshadowing of Christ’s confinement to the grave following His crucifixion, the Lord had already assured His followers that, even during this darkest of hours, His Father would still be with Him, John 16. 32.

God’s silence does not mean we have been forgotten.

But God meant it for good (Joseph)

Joseph was betrayed by his brothers and sold into slavery, ‘**but God** meant it for good’, Gen. 50. 19, 20 NKJV. Stephen would also say about Joseph’s circumstances, ‘**but God** was with him and rescued him out of all his afflictions’, Acts 7. 9, 10.

Centuries later, when Christ spent three long days and nights in the tomb, not only did the Father remember Him, but, as He did for Joseph, He rescued Him, Acts 13. 29, 30.

But God protected (David)

David was hounded by King Saul everywhere he went, **but God** did not give him into his hand, 1 Sam. 23. 13, 14. God watched over His servant David, for He had amazing plans for the shepherd king, and His will can never be overruled.

Saul’s persistent persecution of God’s anointed foreshadows the determination of the prince of darkness to bring the Lord to His knees. In fact, at first glance, when Christ died on Mount Calvary, God’s protection seemed to have fallen short. Although He was able to protect David, He was not able to protect Jesus from death and still redeem humankind. Ultimate victory, however, was not to be denied, for three days later the Father raised His Son triumphantly from the dead, Acts 2. 32.

But God . . . His motive for redeeming us, Ps. 86. 15

This next ‘but God’ serves as a critical link between this foreshadowing of Christ’s redemptive work and the blessings resulting from His sacrifice. This verse describes in marvellous detail the Father’s love for us and reveals the fact that He sent His Son so we might be made alive with Christ. Paul reiterates this in Ephesians chapter 2 verses 4 and 5.

But God . . . the blessings of redemption

Redemption from a lost eternity (Sons of Korah)

In Psalm 49, the sons of Korah remind us that at one time death was our shepherd, but now it is the Good Shepherd who leads us. No longer do His children need to fear death, but they can look forward to an eternity spent with our Father because of Christ’s gracious work of redemption, Eph. 1. 7.

He gives us strength and is our portion forever (Asaph)

Not only has God redeemed us, but He has promised to be our source of strength and our portion forever. Following His ascension into heaven, Christ graciously sent the Holy Spirit to be our guide and the source of strength and comfort for this earthly pilgrimage, Eph. 3. 16; John 16. 13.

He gives us rest (Solomon)

As He promised rest to King Solomon, so He promises rest for His weary pilgrims, Matt. 11. 28. We can rest in the knowledge that He has redeemed us, and our future is secure.

He fights our battles (The prophet Jahaziel)

The truths spoken of by Jahaziel are as real today as they were then. God’s plans were laid out before the ages of time and each and every one of them will be fulfilled exactly as promised.

Conclusion

These two little words – ‘but God’ – give strength for today and hope for tomorrow. They remind us of the enormous cost that was paid for Christ to lay down His life for us. These words also remind us of the great love and the wonderful blessings He provides, 1 Cor. 15. 57.



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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YOUNG.PRECIOUSSEED

Editor's Introduction

Welcome to the August issue of YPS.

Holiday times are a great opportunity for reading and if this is

a holiday period for you, I hope you will enjoy working through this issue of YPS. But if you have more time than usual available to you, why not explore other written Bible teaching? Much is available at www.preciousseed.org.

Also, past and present YPS articles are now available as podcasts on Spotify and Apple Podcasts – search 'Young Precious Seed'.

Andrew Dutton

Seeing the world through a biblical lens – the creation of humans

STEPHEN G. BAKER, LIVERPOOL, ENGLAND

When describing the origin of human beings, the Bible states that God created people in His own image, Gen. 1. 27. There were two types of humans created, male and female. They were like God in some way and, as we will see shortly, the intention was for them to manage the planet on behalf of the Creator. At this early stage, we do not get much detail of the differences between male and female; we have to wait until the second chapter of the Bible for this.

In the same passage, Gen. 1, the initial responsibilities of humans are outlined – they were to have children and populate the earth. As responsible adults (they were created as mature humans) they were delegated the task of managing the planet and controlling all the species of animals, Gen. 1. 30. Both humans and all other living creatures were initially vegetarians, vv. 29, 30. In the second chapter of Genesis, we have some additional responsibilities outlined. Adam's first job was to maintain and tend the Garden of Eden, 2. 15, and to cultivate the soil, v. 5. Work was part and parcel of human existence before the fall and sin came into the world. Adam was a worker before Eve was created.

Now we come to the detailed account of the creation and formation of the first man and woman. Adam was created from the dust of the ground, v. 7. He had a physical body first and then God breathed into him the breath of life. This reminds us that we are more than just flesh and blood. Humans have a spiritual dimension to them. Later in the Bible, we get additional details about man being a living soul and having a spirit. But what about Eve, the first woman? Before we get to that, please note a few things.

- Adam was lonely and had social needs, v. 18;

- The animals that God had made could not satisfy his deep longing for companionship, v. 20;
- Adam needed someone who was compatible and who could help him live life to the full, vv. 18, 20.

So, God created a suitable helper for Adam. She was designed specifically with the man in mind, as without her life could not be full, satisfying, and complete, v. 18, and the man would have been alone. Note this, she was made from the same materials as Adam. Not from dust but from one of his ribs, v. 21. They were the same kind of people; different from the animal creation, 1 Cor. 15. 39. It could be significant that the part of Adam's body that God made Eve from was close to his heart. We learn later in the Bible, Eph. 5. 25–33, that husbands are to love their wives 'as their own bodies', v. 28, so Eve being made from part of Adam's body is significant, Gen. 2. 23.

The relationship of Adam and Eve before sin came into the world, Gen. 3. 16, Rom. 5.12, was evidently very intimate. The principle of the lifelong union of marriage was established in the Garden of Eden. Adam does what every man should do when he gets married. He cleaves to his wife. This indicates that in marriage a bond is created between a man and a woman that is unique to them. Malachi chapter 2 verse 15 makes it clear that this union between a man and a woman in marriage is made in heaven by God, as well as confirmed on earth by the husband and wife.

These initial chapters of the Bible establish the distinctions between the two genders biologically and emotionally, and form the basis on which the scriptures will explain the principles of healthy living within families, communities, and nations. It is well worth considering this biblical perspective.



Gone, but not forgotten. Epitaphs of the kings of Judah

RICHARD SMITH, BRIDGE OF WEIR, SCOTLAND

All quotations are taken from the New King James Bible

2. Joash

In this series we are examining statements made about some of the kings of Judah – how they will be remembered. Previously we considered Jehoram, who **departed without being desired**. Now we turn to Jehoram's grandson Joash.

The kings make for thrilling reading, full of intrigue, ambition, and violence. Jehoram's son Ahaziah was another evil king. He was hunted and killed in Samaria by Jehu. Ahaziah was 'the [grand]son of Jehoshaphat, who sought the Lord with all his heart', 2 Chr. 22. 9. It is tragic to see the complete failure of Jehoshaphat's son and grandson. Sadly, it is still possible for the same to happen: a generation to turn its back on what faithful believers have established, leading to individual and family failure. Let us determine to remain faithful to the Lord and His word.

When Athaliah saw her son was dead she seized the throne, destroying the seed royal – murdering members of her own family! It's a reminder that we have enemies: the world, the flesh, and the Devil, all of which seek to dominate us – we must resist, allowing God's Spirit to have dominion over our lives. The Devil was clearly behind Athaliah, his aim to kill off the kingly line through which the Messiah would come. God would not allow this. Step forward Jehoshabeath, 'the lady who saved Christmas', according to DALE RALPH DAVIS! She smuggled the baby Joash into the temple and, along with her husband Jehoiada the priest, protected him for six years, 2 Chr. 22. 11, 12. Godly women are so necessary. I well remember an older sister in Bridge of Weir who supported me through my difficult teenage years – the warmth of her friendship, the sternness of her rebuke when necessary. Her prayers were sincere and helped to preserve me as a young Christian. Godly sisters have such a valuable role to play in our individual and assembly lives. Although rightly silent in public gatherings, their influence is invaluable. Eventually Jehoshabeath's husband Jehoiada presented the six-year-old king to Judah. He covenanted with the military to protect Joash, and through collecting and arming the tribe of Levi he encouraged an environment of worship, ch. 23. Protection from the world along with worship and service of God are key features of the church. We should ensure that we gather with the Lord's people at every opportunity. The king was then presented to the people. Athaliah's reign of evil was over. On behalf of young Joash, Jehoiada set a great foundation for the people. The result was that the people rejoiced, v. 21, and the city was quiet. We must be before the Lord, asking that He would give us the courage to stand firm as He did for Jehoshabeath and Jehoiada.

Joash reigned for forty years and 'did what was right in the sight of the Lord', 24. 2: He married and had children; he



restored the temple that Athaliah had ruined; he ensured the people played a role in the restoration; he acted quickly, and the work was completed; the house of God was restored to its original condition and reinforced. Sacrifices were offered once again, and all was well.

Jehoiada the priest died at the age of 130 years. He had been faithful to God, he had 'done good in Israel, both toward God and His house', v. 16. What happened to Joash when his godly influence was no longer there? To complete the quotation from verse 2, 'Joash did what was right in the sight of the Lord **all the days of Jehoiada the priest**'. After Jehoiada died, Joash changed. He was influenced by the princes of Judah. He abandoned the house of God, abandoned God Himself; he returned to serving idols; he would not heed the prophets; he even had Jehoiada's son Zechariah stoned for speaking out, v. 22. The result was God's judgement, executed by the Syrians who attacked and stripped the wealth of the temple, taking it to Damascus. Joash was wounded in the battle and his own servants assassinated him for his wickedness towards Zechariah. In short, his fall was dramatic when Jehoiada was gone.

The principle of a godly mentor is scriptural: Elisha spent years learning from Elijah; Timothy spent years with Paul; the disciples spent more than three years with the Lord. However, when they were left without the physical presence of their teacher they were expected to stand on their own two feet; in the language of Paul, to 'work out your own salvation with fear and trembling', Phil. 2. 12. Where will the power for this come from? 'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me', 4. 13.

May God give us the wisdom to lean on Him for all the strength we need, even when all other support has gone.



Christian basics – Looking for Bible teaching

STUART SCAMMELL, CARDIFF, WALES

‘These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so’, Acts 17. 11.

The Bible is the best-selling book of all time. Each year there are about 100 million Bibles printed, and it is estimated that over five billion copies of the Bible have been printed over time. This is astounding. There is no doubt that God’s message through the scriptures transforms lives. Paul could write, ‘I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth’, Rom. 1. 16. This is the message that God has for rebellious mankind, and it is a beautiful message of love and grace.

God does not want us to stop there. He wants us to progress through our spiritual lives. He wants, as it tells us in Matthew chapter 28 verse 19, ‘to make disciples of all the nations’ NKJV. To become a true disciple of Jesus Christ, we need to learn of Him and read from God’s word.

In the UK, we have the privilege of being able to freely read from the Bible. It may well be that we do not always value it enough. It does us good to remember the words of 2 Timothy chapter 3 verse 16, that ‘all scripture is given by inspiration of God’. This means that it is breathed out by God and is His specific guidance to us. If we stopped to think about that and try to grasp exactly what the Bible is, it would cause us to read it more. The end of this verse tells us that it ‘is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness’. God tells us, through the Bible, how we should live, yet when we get things wrong, we are shown through scripture that we have stumbled. God does not leave us there; we are told that we are corrected through the inspired pages and instructed in the way that we should live. The following verse in 2 Timothy tells us the reason for this is ‘that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work’, 2 Tim. 3. 17 NKJV.

God wants those who have trusted in Him to mature and grow and be doing God’s work in His way.

The Bible, in some places, is a very simple book, yet in others we need guidance to help us to understand. We can get help in understanding the scriptures in a number of ways. Many local assemblies convene teaching meetings, often called ‘ministry’ meetings. These would fall into two main categories. First, if there are teaching meetings that are arranged weekly by our own assembly, then we should be there. Acts chapter 2 verse 42 tells us that, ‘they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine’ NKJV, and Hebrews

chapter 10 verse 25 tells us ‘not . . . [to forsake] the assembling of ourselves together’.

Second, there are meetings and teaching weekends organized by others. These are very useful and are also great times for making Christian friends.

When listening to a Bible teacher, remember that the art of a good teacher is to make the complicated simple. Listen to those that do this avidly as they demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the scriptures, and God has given them the gift to teach for your spiritual growth.

Magazines, such as the one you are reading at the moment, are very important. Small articles that ignite interest in scriptural topics might be transformative in our spiritual growth. Ask an older Christian who you respect for their recommendations for magazines.

Bible commentaries are a valuable resource also. Over the years there are many excellent, helpful books that have been written to help us to understand the scriptures. These are readily available and can often be purchased second-hand at a reasonable price or are available online, sometimes free of charge. It should never be an exercise in accumulation, but acquiring a good selection of helpful commentaries is a useful thing to do.

Online Bible teaching can be another useful resource. This, however, must come with a health warning. There are many sites on the internet that are at first glance good, but subtle twists to doctrine can lead to error. The Devil is the master of lies and we need to be aware.

We should read and study the Bible regularly; we should see it as essential as eating. After all, if we starve, we die. If we are not reading, spiritually we are starving, and we will suffer spiritually. Feed regularly on the word of God



Saints' CVs: Anthony Norris Groves

BY JEREMY SINGER, BRIDGE OF WEIR, SCOTLAND

ANTHONY NORRIS GROVES 1795-1853

Modern-day Baghdad has endured decades of conflict caused by oppressive regimes, war, and terrorism. But even in the 1800s, it was a dangerous city, rife with crime, civil unrest, and disease. Despite these challenges, Anthony Norris Groves chose to take his wife, Mary, and their two young sons to this city – then a provincial capital of the Ottoman Empire – to share the gospel with its predominantly Muslim population. He paid a high price for his obedience to God.

Groves was originally a successful dentist in southern England. Raised in the Anglican tradition, he began to question its framework and practices after an intensive personal study of the Bible. Longing to return to the simplicity of New Testament Christianity, he became part of the emerging evangelical movement in Victorian England – coming into contact with figures like John Nelson Darby and George Müller.

In 1825, Groves published a small but impactful book titled *Christian Devotedness*, which is available to read online.¹ In this work, he outlined key principles of biblical discipleship, emphasizing trust in God's provision and wholehearted surrender of personal possessions. He also proposed a radical vision for missions: that missionaries should rely entirely on God, rather than on institutional support or guaranteed income.

At that time, many missionaries were commended and sponsored by missionary societies. Groves rejected this model, choosing instead to live by faith alone. His distinctive approach led to him being called the 'father of faith missions'.²

His first mission field was Baghdad. Groves had limited apparent success there but he sought to build relationships, and taught English using the Bible – an evangelistic method still widely used today by Christians for teaching English as a Second Language (ESL). Tragedy struck when his wife Mary died of plague, along with their newborn daughter. Groves recorded this desperate sorrow in his journal, 'I trust, in the Lord's will from the bottom of my heart, yet I feel a desolation and loneliness of heart . . . I may have nothing in this world left but His service'.³

However, his heart remained burdened for under-evangelized regions. Before long, he felt called to India, where he established a mission work based on similar

principles. Indigenous Christians in India faced strong social and economic persecution, losing their jobs upon professing faith. In response, Groves helped to set up small-scale businesses such as coffee cultivation, enabling new converts to support themselves – following the example of the Apostle Paul with his tentmaking.

Although the number of believers was small, one of them – Indian evangelist John Christian Arulappan (also spelled Aroolappen) – went on to have a significant itinerant evangelistic ministry.

Groves eventually returned to England in poor health and died in 1853. His impact, however, extended far beyond his lifetime. He influenced missionary work in the Middle East, India, and Britain. His son Henry, who survived the Baghdad ordeal and accompanied his father to India, became a strong supporter of missions. Henry also developed the *Yearly Bible Calendar*,⁴ which became the basis for devotional reading schemes like *Choice Gleanings* still in widespread use today.

Anthony Norris Groves was also the brother of Mary, who married George Müller. Both families followed the same principle of absolute dependence on God for daily needs in Christian service.

As we reflect on the biography of Anthony Norris Groves, we see a remarkable example of sacrificial service and unshakable faith. Though his life was marked by suffering and loss, his legacy endures – challenging us to trust God fully and to demonstrate similar wholehearted devotion

Quotes from *Christian Devotedness*

'Primitive Christianity owed much of its irresistible energy to the open and public manifestation by the early disciples, of their love to their Redeemer and King, and to one another'.

'Whether the gathering in the sheep of Christ out of a lost world, or even of a single one, be not worthy of all the sacrifices we are called upon to make?'



¹ A. N. GROVES, *Christian Devotedness*, 1825. Found here: <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/24293>.

² R. B. DANN, *Father of Faith Missions – The Life and Times of Anthony Norris Groves*, Authentic Media, 2009.

³ A. N. GROVES, *Journal of a Residence at Bagdad*, 1832. Found here: <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/29631>.

⁴ H. GROVES, *Yearly Bible Calendar*. Found here: <https://www.benshamgh.org/bible-reading-plan>

Brian Clatworthy 1947-2025

Brian joined the Precious Seed Trust in July 2009 on the departure of Ken Rudge and three other members who had been part of the work for some time. It was felt that Brian would bring representation from the south-west of England, the area in which Precious Seed had commenced as a work for the Lord.

Roy Hill, then Chairman, reports that, 'we were looking for someone with a good knowledge of the biblical languages. I went to meet him and was very impressed with the fact that having retired from business he had trained in theology at Exeter. After we had spent an hour or so together, I was very impressed with his knowledge, humility, and calmness and believed he would ideally fit into the work of Precious Seed, which of course, being Brian, he did!'

In joining the Trust, Brian brought some experience of writing, his first series on the Feasts of Jehovah for the magazine being in 1975. He was invited to write a regular 'column' entitled *Word for Today*, a fairly detailed examination of some key Hebrew and Greek words used in the scriptures. Although his early efforts at the task drew some constructive criticism from PS colleagues, Brian persevered and developed a slightly less erudite and more practical approach which, in turn, developed a regular readership. His faithful completion of many articles bore fruit in the attractive book *A Word for Everyday*.

In fact, he proved a prolific writer and had written over 100 articles, particularly *Word for Today* but including parts of the series on Hebrews and the Minor Prophets, before his death. Those who knew him recognized the unstinting effort and research he put into all that he contributed. Brian was also truly collegiate in his approach. A colleague recalls, 'I first met Brian many years ago in South Wales, but it wasn't until we both joined the Precious Seed Trust in 2009 that



I got to know him and appreciate his insight into the word of God. I particularly recall a most helpful exposition he gave at one of the quarterly committee meetings on the opening verse of 2 Peter, 'to them that have obtained like precious faith with us'. His thoughts were fresh, enlightening, and encouraging'.

Apart from his ability as a writer, the Trust received considerable help from his experience in financial matters. Drawing upon skills he had honed over decades of working for HMRC, his forensic eye scrutinizing the quarterly accounts provided analysis and understanding for all the Trust members. The Treasurer recalls, 'I valued the presence of Brian as someone who was actually interested in accounts! He was always thorough, but I found him to always be kind and understanding in the way he presented questions which gave the assurance that he was not out to find fault, but to seek to help you do things better'.

A former Trustee reflects, 'Brian was an intelligent man who was incredibly precise in all the work he did for Precious Seed. His contributions proved invaluable especially when it came to holding people accountable and maintaining the very high levels of integrity which are essential in running a Christian charitable

organization. He will be missed personally and professionally'.

His eye for detail also made him a careful proofreader, finding the right balance throughout. He sought accuracy whilst preserving what the author had written. Thus, when a vacancy arose, the Trust turned to Brian to join Sandy Jack as joint Editor. Although one of the older members of the Trust, Brian was always able and willing to embrace change, but never at the expense of orthodoxy or accuracy. His wise counsel, drive, and diligence in the work was always welcome and his support unwavering.

Brian had served as an elder in the assembly at Newton Abbot before relocating to Newbury to be nearer his family. In both locations he sought to teach the Lord's people, being a great believer in sound exegesis with the principles lived out in the individual life.

He was an avid reader and was passionate about any material that would aid the understanding of scripture. When travelling on business or holiday the 'icing on the cake' for Brian was the discovery of a second-hand bookshop with some theological treasures secured at a reasonable price! He was widely read, but with his senses well exercised to sift the wheat from the chaff. A younger colleague comments, 'his detailed knowledge of scripture was always a challenge and an example. I am glad that I was able to serve on the committee alongside him for a time'.

Whilst we feel our loss acutely, at the same time we thank God for a loving brother and faithful servant of God of rare calibre and dependability. Regarding such, the writer to the Hebrews exhorts us, 'Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith', Heb. 13. 7 ESV. His devoted wife Lynne faithfully supported Brian in all his endeavours and should be upheld in the prayers of the Lord's people in the days ahead.

Ken Totton
Editor, Precious Seed

The invincible¹ Christ

By **MERVYN WISHART** Newcastle, Northern Ireland

Herod could not kill Him, Matt. 2

Guided by the star, the wise men from the east came to Jerusalem seeking for the newborn king, and King Herod was troubled. He told the wise men to let him know when they found the child, so that he too could come and worship Him. However, his intention was to destroy the child, and when the wise men did not return, he killed all the children two years old and under in the vicinity of Bethlehem.

God protected the life of the Lord Jesus by means of three dreams:

1. God warned the wise men not to return to Herod but to go home another way, and Herod's evil plan was thwarted, 2. 12.
2. The angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph, telling him to take the young child and His mother and flee into Egypt. 'Out of Egypt have I called my son', 2. 15; cp. Hos. 11. 1; and another example of the wrath of man praising the Lord, Ps. 76. 10.
3. The angel of the Lord later appeared to Joseph again, informing him that Herod was dead, and it was safe for them to return. When he heard that Herod had been succeeded by his brother, who was just as ruthless, Joseph brought Mary and the child to Nazareth, 'that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene', Matt. 2. 23. Herod was dead, but the child lived on; He is the invincible Christ.

The Devil could not defeat Him, Luke 4. 1-13

For a period of forty days, the Lord Jesus was tempted of the Devil in the wilderness.

There were three separate temptations:

1. The Devil said, 'If thou be the

Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread', and His answer was, 'It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God', 4. 3, 4; Deut. 8. 3. The Lord never used a miracle to provide for Himself, always for others.

2. The Devil then took Him up into a high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. He said, 'All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them . . . If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine', 4. 6, 7. Our Lord's answer was, 'Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve', 4. 8; Exod. 20. 4, 5.
3. Finally, he brought the Lord Jesus to Jerusalem and set Him on a pinnacle of the temple. 'If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee: And in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone', 4. 9-11; Ps. 91. 11, 12. The Devil was attempting to misuse scripture. To 'dash thy foot against a stone' was something accidental; but to throw Himself from the pinnacle of the temple would have been a deliberate action. 'And Jesus answering said unto him, It is said, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God', 4. 12; Deut. 6. 16. He did not need angels to bear Him up; after His temptation they 'came and ministered unto him', Matt. 4. 11.

'And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season', Luke 4. 13. The Lord Jesus alone could say, 'for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me', John 14. 30. In the paradise of the Garden of Eden,

Adam had succumbed to the Devil; but even after fasting for forty days in the wilderness, the Lord Jesus was victorious – He is the invincible Christ.

The men of Nazareth could not harm Him, Luke 4. 16-30

In this chapter we have a remarkable account of the Lord Jesus visiting the synagogue at Nazareth on the sabbath day, and He stood up to read. He was given the scroll of the prophecy of Isaiah and He read from chapter 61 verse 1 and the first half of verse 2. The only comment He made was, 'This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears', and those who heard it wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. He had the acceptance, and indeed the admiration, of the audience.

He proceeded to speak of a miracle in the days of Elijah, saying that there were many widows in Israel, but to none of them was Elijah sent but unto a widow in Sarepta, a city of Sidon. Then He spoke of the days of Elisha, when there were many lepers in Israel, but none of them was cleansed, except Naaman the Syrian. Those in the synagogue who had been filled with admiration were now filled with indignation, 4. 28. They were enraged at the very thought of blessing coming to a woman in Sidon and a man who was a Syrian; both were Gentiles, living beyond the borders of Israel. Full of religious hatred, they rose up and led Him out of the city to the brow of the hill, fully intending to cast Him down headlong. But passing through the midst of them, He went His way – the invincible Christ.

The waves could not drown Him, Luke 8. 22-25

When He saw the great multitude around Him, the Lord commanded His disciples to go to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. He entered a ship and they followed Him. The weather changed dramatically, a great storm arose in the sea, and they were in jeopardy, v. 23. Mark chapter 4 verse 37 says, 'the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full'. When the disciples found the Lord Jesus asleep, 'they . . . awoke

him, saying, Master, master, we perish. Then he arose, and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water: and they ceased, and there was a calm', Luke 8. 24. He is the invincible Christ.

The Jews at Jerusalem could not stone Him, John 10. 22-39

The Lord Jesus was in Jerusalem during the feast of the dedication. It was winter, and He walked in the area of the temple known as Solomon's porch. The Jews gathered around Him, and asked, 'How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly'. The Lord replied, 'the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me . . . I and my Father are one', vv. 24, 25, 30.

This one statement answered their question, and again they reacted with hostility, vv. 31, 32. 'Therefore they sought again to take him: but

he escaped out of their hand', v. 39. Notice the many attempts they made to take Him.

They could not stone Him, because 1,000 years before it was written, 'they pierced my hands and my feet', Ps. 22. 16, the Calvary psalm. His death would be by crucifixion. He Himself said, 'As Moses lifted up the serpent . . . even so must the Son of man be lifted up', John 3. 14. They could not stone Him because He was not guilty of blasphemy. He is the Son of God, and His claim to be one with God His Father was true, so 'he escaped out of their hand', John 10. 39 – the invincible Christ.

Death could not claim Him, John 10. 18

The Lord Jesus was the only man who lived, who retained the right to live. All others forfeited that right because of sin, Rom. 6. 23. He spoke of His death as laying down His life; it was a voluntary act. He said, 'No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father', John 10. 18. He was not deprived of His life by the actions of the men who crucified Him. The charge was rightly brought against them, that they 'killed the Prince of life', Acts 3. 15. They did everything in their power to bring about His death, but God was in control of all that happened at Calvary, and He had also decreed what would not happen.

The last physical act of the Lord Jesus on the cross was to bow His head and dismiss His Spirit, John 19. 30. His public ministry had begun with prayer, Luke 3. 21, and it concluded with prayer, 'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit', 23. 46. He was never 'a dying man'. When all the scriptures relating to His death were fulfilled and His mighty work was finished, of His own volition He dismissed His Spirit and died. 'He yielded up His spirit', Matt. 27. 50 NKJV. W. E. VINE points out that 'yielded up' here is 'to send away', as the command of a king – which fits well with Matthew's Gospel.² The Lord Jesus was unique. Scripture records of all others,

'There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death', Eccles. 8. 8. In this too, He is the invincible Christ.

The grave could not hold Him, Acts 2. 24

The tomb where the body of the Lord Jesus was laid was hewn out of a rock, which was very fitting for the one who bears the name 'the rock of ages', Isa. 26. 4 JND. There was one way in and one way out of it. The entrance was closed by a very great stone being rolled into position. Then there was the waxen seal bearing the insignia of the Roman empire, and soldiers standing guard outside. It was ludicrous to claim that the disciples had stolen the body while the soldiers slept. The soldiers, the stone, and the seal could not hold the Lord Jesus in the tomb.

Peter said on the Day of Pentecost, 'Jesus of Nazareth . . . whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it', Acts 2. 22, 24. God sent an angel to roll away the stone and he sat upon it in defiance of the authority of Rome, for the angel represented a higher authority, and he told the women, 'He is not here: for he is risen', Matt. 28. 5, 6. The seal was broken, the guards became as dead men, and the stone was rolled away so that all might see the tomb was empty and the invincible Christ was alive.

'Wrapt in the silence of the tomb
The great Redeemer lay,
Till the revolving skies had brought
The third, the appointed day.

Hell and the grave combined
their force
To hold our Lord in vain;
Sudden the Conqueror arose,
And burst their feeble chain',
[ISAAC WATTS].

Endnotes

- 1 'Invincible'. Oxford Dictionary definition: 'too powerful to be defeated or overcome'. Found here: <https://www.oed.com/>.
- 2 W. E. VINE, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, Oliphants.



TITLES OF JEHOVAH ⁵

JEHOVAH-SHALOM

THE LORD IS PEACE

By **MARK SWEETNAM** Dublin, Ireland

This, by any reckoning, is one of the most precious titles of God in scripture. Peace, no less than grace, is a charming sound, and a commodity in desperately scarce supply in our world and, too often, in our lives. Against the background of 'fighting and fears, within and without', it is precious indeed to grasp that God does not just desire peace or promote peace, but that He is, Himself, peace.

The revelation of Jehovah-shalom occurs at a rather unexpected point in scripture. We might have imagined an aged patriarch, the struggles of life past, naming his final altar Jehovah-shalom. Or we might have expected to find it in those early, happy years of Solomon's reign, when the temple stood in pristine splendour and the kingdom's boundary was larger and more secure than it had ever been before. But the revelation of Jehovah-shalom comes in an altogether more unexpected place.

Peace is hardly the most obvious characteristic of the book of Judges, with its recurring cycles of oppression and conflict. It is true that, early in the book, these cycles are punctuated by periods when the land had rest, 3. 11, 30; 5. 31, but during none of these periods do we learn that Jehovah is peace. That revelation must wait until we reach the story of Gideon. And in the trajectory of his life, too, it comes in an unexpected place, not at the end, when Midian had been defeated, Ephraim soothed, and internal disloyalty dealt with. Rather, Gideon learns that the Lord is peace when Midianite raiders still threaten, when he has just received information that has awakened his deepest insecurities, and at the end of a rather tetchy, if not downright confrontational, exchange with the Angel of the Lord. Gideon, in short, learned the lesson when he needed it most. What was true in his experience is so often true in ours – it is in our extremity that we most learn of our God.

The truth of Jehovah-shalom was something that Gideon needed to learn. The name that he gave to his altar was no mere platitude, but the expression of a reality that he had just grasped. That he linked that truth to the tangible symbol of the altar is a telling indication of how much he valued it, and the narrator's note – 'unto this day it is yet in Ophrah of the Abiezrites', Judg. 6. 24 – is a reminder of the enduring importance of Gideon's lesson for all of God's people. Gideon did not grasp this truth suddenly. Rather, it was the climax of the lessons that he had learned since first the Angel of the Lord appeared to him.

The first lesson Gideon learned was that Jehovah was present. 'The Lord is with thee', was the Angel's unexpected greeting, v. 12. To Gideon it seemed improbable. 'Oh my Lord', he asked, 'if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt? but now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites', v. 13. The immediacy and directness of Gideon's question give us a vivid insight into his priorities, and help us to understand why God was choosing this man to be the deliverer for His people. Gideon was deeply concerned at the impoverishment of the nation. The seven years of relentless raids, the gut-wrenching experience of ploughing and planting, watering and weeding the crop only to have

it snatched away by the Midianite marauders, had burned deeply into his soul. How could God be present, and His people still suffer so?

It is striking that Gideon's question never receives a direct answer. The Angel of the Lord takes no time to explain the reality of departure and discipline, to show Gideon that God was neither distant nor uninterested. The Angel's focus is not on the past but the future, and as He commissions him to 'save Israel from the hand of the Midianites', v. 14, He gives Gideon a clear commitment, 'Surely I will be with thee', v. 16. Coming, as Gideon seems to have assumed, from an ordinary angel (insofar as there can be such a thing), this was no small promise. But, as the flesh and cakes went up in smoke and the Angel of the Lord disappeared from Gideon's sight, the reality – and the immensity – of the situation dawned upon Gideon. He had been speaking, not just to a lord, v. 13, but to the Lord, and it was not just an angel who had promised his presence, but Jehovah Himself.

We would do well to notice Gideon's response to this realization. The assurance of God's presence was not the source of complacency. Like Manoah and his wife in Judges chapter 13, Gideon understood the greatness of God; the realization that he had 'seen an angel of the Lord face to face', v. 22, filled him with terror. The presence of God with His people was not a talisman or badge of distinction to be pointed at with pride, but a holy reality that searched the depths of Gideon's conscience. 'There am I in the midst of them', Matt. 18. 20, should have no less of an impact on us in 2025.

Linked inextricably with the promise of God's presence was the assurance of His power. The Angel of the Lord had addressed Gideon as 'thou mighty man of valour', v. 12, but Gideon, in his haste to lament the condition of God's people, seems scarcely to register it. It is only when the divine messenger speaks again that Gideon seems to grasp the import of this address. 'Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites', v. 14. The Angel's words have a certain

ambiguity – just what was meant by ‘this thy might’? Gideon – who, understandably enough, appears to have been struggling to keep up with the conversation – seems to have understood this as a reference to his own innate strength. That best explains his response, ‘my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father’s house’, v. 15. But, in his struggle to process the Angel’s words, Gideon had missed a key piece of information, ‘have not I sent thee?’ v. 14. As verse 16 makes clear, this was to be the source of Gideon’s might, ‘Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man’. Gideon was right; his own strength was utterly inadequate for the task that lay before him. The required power would come, not from himself or from his bloodline, but from Jehovah Himself. That promise would be realized just a short while later, when ‘the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon’, v. 34. This interesting expression has also been translated as ‘clothed Gideon’, LSB, reflecting the fact that the underlying term has to do with putting on a garment. Strictly speaking, though, the idea is not so much that the Spirit came upon Gideon like a garment – an image that is relatively easy to understand. Rather, the grammar

suggests that we should understand that the Spirit put Gideon on. Just as we fill, and control, and empower our garments, so Gideon, in his deeply-felt weakness, was filled, and controlled, and empowered by the God who commissioned him, and who said, ‘Go in this thy might’.

Gideon has been criticised for his assessment of his own weakness. That seems hardly fair, because that assessment was correct. The answer to Israel’s need did not lie in him. His might must be God’s might. We still need to learn that lesson. We still need to ‘be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might’, Eph. 6. 10, to grasp that our lives must be lived, and our service performed, ‘Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts’, Zech. 4. 6.

Gideon learned that God is present and powerful. And the realization terrified him to the core of his being. He, in all his unworthiness, had ‘seen an angel of the Lord face to face’, Judg. 6. 22, and death seemed the inevitable outcome. But in the aroma of the ascending sacrifice, he learned that God is peace. His subsequent building of the altar served not just to erect a physical monument to the truth of Jehovah-shalom, but

to strengthen the link between the sacrifice and the peace.

Gideon’s offering, though it hardly satisfied the requirements of Levitical convention, nonetheless contained elements of the burnt offering and the meal offering. As such, it would be difficult for us to think about Gideon’s offering, and not to think of the One who is ‘our peace’, Eph. 2. 14, whose offering gives us ‘peace with God’, Rom. 5. 1. It is His sacrifice that makes the presence of God a blessing rather than a judgement, and His presence a source of joy, and not of fear. Jehovah-shalom is the God of the altar.

It was in an unexpected place Gideon learned these lessons. Strange lessons they must have seemed for a man living in violent days, charged with the responsibility to ‘smite the Midianites’, Judg. 6. 16. But the timing of the lesson was divinely planned. To engage in conflict for God, Gideon needed to be in the enjoyment of peace with God. Soon he would risk conflict with his father and experience it with his neighbours. Midian’s hosts must be overcome and God’s people delivered. Discernment would be needed – the prima-donna petulance of the men of Ephraim would require a different response to the failure of Succoth and Penuel, and Gideon would show himself as much a master of the soft word that turns away wrath, Prov. 15. 1, as of military strategy. Gideon had known the famine of strife. He had been commissioned by Jehovah-shalom. Negatively and positively, he learned the value of peace, and ‘the country was in quietness forty years in the days of Gideon’, Judg. 8. 28. This will be the last time in Judges that we read of national rest, and the quietness of Gideon’s judgeship is underscored by the succeeding mayhem of Abimelech’s disastrous experiment in kingship.

Like Gideon, we are called to conflict. It is ours to ‘fight the good fight of faith’, 1 Tim. 6. 12. But the servants of Jehovah-shalom, ‘the very God of peace’, 1 Thess. 5. 23, must not be bellicose or belligerent, for God’s call is still, ‘be at peace among yourselves’, v. 13.



HAGGAI

– A CALL TO CONSIDER

By **REX TROGDEN** Pineville, USA

Haggai was the only man in the Bible who bore this name, meaning 'My feast'. His ministry was to stir up the people of God to complete the work of rebuilding the temple, God's dwelling place. His is the second shortest book of the Old Testament and the first of the three post-exilic books that complete the Minor Prophets.

Haggai's ministry worked in tandem with that of Zechariah. Some have suggested that he was older and may have seen Solomon's temple before the exile, while Zechariah was younger and born in Babylon. This reminds us of the importance of ministry from one generation to the next like that of Moses and Joshua, and of Paul and Timothy.

When the Jews returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple, the foundation was laid in a short time and the people shouted with a great shout, Ezra 3. 13. That shout got the attention of their enemies, 4. 1. Their threats caused the people to lose heart for the work of God, and they began working on their own homes instead.

To get the work going again required more than a governor and high priest. It required the word of God and a prophet. Haggai was that prophet to bring it to them! While we know very little about the messenger, we understand the message – get back to work!

People like Haggai make us uncomfortable, to say the least. Their zeal convicts us, and their blunt questions make us ashamed. In two chapters we read four messages that compare to Hebrews chapter 10 verse 24 – 'And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works', NKJV.

The first message is one of **conviction**, 1. 1-15

It begins with a calendar. The dating of Haggai is precise and poignant. You can determine where your heart is by two books – a chequebook and a calendar. How we spend our money and how we spend our time. The people said, 'The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built', v. 2. In reply, Haggai asked, 'Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?' v. 4 NKJV. '**Consider your ways**', vv. 5, 7.

Because of their disobedience, the Lord chastened His people. It was the Lord who had brought the drought upon the land of hills and valleys that was dependent on rain from heaven, which was dependent in turn upon their obedience to Him, Deut. 11. 10-17. That was His design from the beginning when He gave them the land.

Haggai reveals they were lacking the basic things of life: food, drink, clothing, 1. 6. The Lord is the One from whom these things come. Jesus said, 'seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you', Matt. 6. 33 NKJV. They wanted the gifts without the Giver. The Lord brought their desire for things to a disappointing end and called on them to give Him first place in their lives.

It worked, and they obeyed the Lord. Therefore, the Lord blessed them with the message of His presence saying, 'I am with you', 1. 13. The word had stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel, of Joshua, and of the people.

The second message is a call to **courage**, 2. 1-9

It begins with a comparison of the

former temple in its glory to the new temple, v. 3, followed by a call to all to be strong. God made a promise in the past when He brought them out of Egypt and He now makes a threefold promise for the future:

- **I will shake** heaven and earth, v. 6, which will bring the nations to the desire of all nations, whom we recognize as the Messiah.
- **I will fill** this temple with glory, vv. 7, 8, which far exceeds the silver and gold of the first temple.
- **I will give peace** in this place, v. 9, when the Prince of Peace comes.

The third message is a call to **consecration**, 2. 10-19.

It begins with a 'Q & A session' with the priests concerning which is transmittable, holiness or uncleanness. Holiness is not transmittable, but sin is highly contagious and has spread to the whole human race and brought death to every person, Rom. 5. 12. Their sin had defiled every work of their hands, v. 14, so the Lord struck them and diminished their harvest, v. 17. But '**Consider now**', He says, and I will bless you from this day, vv. 18, 19.

The fourth message is a **comfort**, 2. 20-23

God, in His power, will shake heaven and earth, and overthrow the kingdoms of this world. In that future day, the Messiah will come and reign as King of kings, typified by the signet ring of Zerubbabel. Truly, One greater than the temple is seen in this closing and coming prophecy. What a comfort!

By application, we started with the foundation. It is essential. Many believers have a solid foundation, and that is good, but they also need to grow. Spiritually, they may be rock solid – with the basics, but without fellowship and service with joy, there is no growth!

What will it take to stir us up to build ourselves up in our most holy faith? People like Haggai to make us uncomfortable? Why not consider our ways now – and give the Lord first place in our lives?

Reflections on the Cross

Part 3 The women at the cross

By **ERNEST ABBOTT** Singapore

At the time of our Lord's earthly ministry, women in Jewish society were held in low esteem. They were not allowed to be witnesses in courts. They were not allowed to be taught the Torah. They would not figure among the followers of any rabbi; indeed, rabbis would not even speak to women in public. Into such a setting we find that our Lord brought what would have been considered a revolutionary approach in His attitude to women. He spoke to them in public; He taught them and counted many among His followers. With this in mind, it should not surprise us to find so many women at the cross.

Unlike the rabbis of the time, the Lord had female followers. Moving from Galilee to Jerusalem, many women went with Him and ministered unto Him. These dear women met His needs and probably the needs of His disciples out of their own resources, Luke 8. 3. It does not matter if they were rich or poor, it was out of their own resources that they cared for our Lord. They were devoted to Him.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke mention women or many women who had come from Galilee with the Lord. We do not know how many women were in the group, or who they all were. But we do know who some of them were: Mary Magdalene; Mary the mother of James and Josés; Salome, the mother of Zebedee's children (James and John); Mary, the mother of the Lord; Mary's sister, and Mary the wife of Cleophas.¹

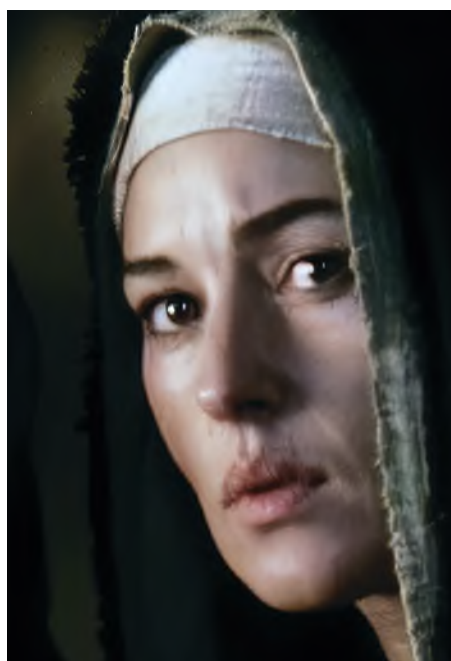
Mary the mother of the Lord was blessed among women, Luke 1. 28, 42, the one who had hidden the things about her beloved son in her heart, 2. 19, but who now was having a sword pierce her own soul, 2. 35, 51, as she watched her dear son suffer for the sins of the world. She was a devoted mother, often travelling with the Lord during His ministry, John 2. 12.

Joanna and Mary Magdalene were healed of some infirmity or delivered of an evil spirit, Luke 8. 2, along with a number of other unnamed women.

Mary the wife of Cleophas is really unknown to us. There is only one reference to her in scripture. However, her name is similar to Cleopas, one of the disciples the Lord spoke to on the road to Emmaus, 24. 18. Some have taken the similarity to suggest the same person, while others think they are entirely different people.

Salome is mentioned just once. Some think that she is Mary's sister and the mother of James and John. If this is the case, then James and John were cousins of the Lord. However, as there were mentions of many women, it may be also that the Gospel writers had different people in mind.

John brings to our attention that the women were by the cross, John 19. 25. So close were they to the cross that they could hear what Jesus said, v. 27. What a place for these dear women to be, right next to the cross of Christ. Perhaps this phrase was



in FANNY CROSBY's mind when she wrote, *'Jesus, keep me near the cross'*. After Jesus had ensured His mother's well-being, this small group of people moved away from the cross and continued to watch at a distance.

The devotion and love of these women towards our Lord is a lesson for all. They were not ashamed to identify themselves with Him at Calvary, surely bearing His reproach even to some degree. They were not slack in showing their love for our Lord in attempting to attend to His funeral rites by going to His tomb on the first day of the week with spices, Luke 24. 1. However, they were not able to carry out what they thought would be their last act of devotion; instead, they became the first witnesses to resurrection.

At the angels' command the women went and told the disciples what they had seen and heard, Matt. 28. 7. The apostles, not believing the women, went to check out the accounts for themselves, Luke 24. 11, 12. By letting women be the first witnesses to the resurrection, God had turned upside down the accepted wisdom of the day, and shown that His ways are not man's ways, Isa. 55. 8. To many Jews at the time, women would have been considered foolish or weak. But God 'hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty', 1 Cor. 1. 27.

The gospel is for all; no one group or section has exclusive claim to hear the gospel. By many of the standards of the day, the Lord did some unusual things, Matt. 11. 19; Mark 2. 16. He showed that the good news of the gospel is for all. The Gospel writers show us this clearly in the way that our Lord dealt with women and the way in which those who had previously been excluded from so many things responded in love, devotion, and loyalty to Him, even when many of His disciples abandoned Him at the cross.

Endnote

1 Matt. 27. 55, 56; Mark 15. 40, 41; Luke 23. 49

The life and times of Elisha 4

Elisha and the vessels of oil 2 Kings 4. 1-7

By **KEN TOTTON** Cambridge, England

It is remarkable that some of the most instructive stories of the Bible arise from the humblest of households and the most desperate of circumstances. The passage before us is certainly a case in point. The episode is set in the dark days of apostasy in Israel during the reign of King Jehoram.

A godly woman has suffered the tragedy of her God-fearing husband's death, and now unable to pay her debts, the creditor is threatening to take her two sons into slavery. We learn that her husband was one of 'the sons of the prophets'. In those idolatrous times when false prophets were plentiful, 1 Kgs. 18. 19, Elisha and other prophets saw the need to foster learning and training in godliness for men whom God could use to call the nation back to Him. I fear that, generally speaking, we are not sufficiently exercised about the training and preparation of the next generation of elders, evangelists, and Bible teachers, cp. 2 Tim. 2. 2.

Here is a woman, now a widow, who had probably forfeited much to support a husband who had given his time to the service of God. This kind of thinking and sacrifice runs counter to the spirit of the modern world with its 'equality agenda', but we may be sure that God deeply values the dedication of those who support those who serve, 1 Sam. 30. 24, 25; Matt. 10. 41.

We can also learn that godliness is no insurance against calamities overtaking God's servants. The widow of the story contrasts in status with the 'great woman' of the next story, 2 Kgs. 4. 8. Again, wealth and prestige are no protection against difficulties in life. Christians need to awake to the dreadful perversion of biblical truth represented by the false 'prosperity gospel', so prevalent in many parts

of the world. On the contrary, God in His providence often allows His people to be exposed to all kinds of troubles. So doing, He develops their faith, Jas. 1. 2-4, and character, Rom. 5. 4 NKJV, and draws them away from the danger of self-reliance, 2 Cor. 1. 9.

Appeal to Elisha

Widows were a vulnerable class in antiquity, and God was concerned that their needs should be remembered.¹ Having lost her godly husband, this unnamed widow now faced the further disaster of inability to repay the creditor, whereupon her sons would be taken for bondservants. Western readers should note that this desperate situation still arises in many parts of the world today. The creditor was within his rights under the law of Moses to enslave the debtors until the year of Jubilee.² There was no kinsman-redeemer to rescue the family by clearing their debt in this instance, so God, through His prophet Elisha, in effect took on this merciful role.³

In these narratives we may regard Elisha as a type of Christ. His name means 'God is salvation', and Jesus' name means 'Jehovah is salvation'. He is frequently designated a man of God, i.e., one who exercises the power of God, cp. 2 Kgs. 1. 10.⁴

Like Mary at the wedding at Cana who told the Lord, 'They have no wine', John 2. 3, the widow wisely put the situation to Elisha in faith. Clearly she enjoyed ready access to

the man of God. This is even more blessedly true for the Christian. As Paul directs, 'Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God', Phil 4. 6 NKJV. Like the widow, it is best to simply state our needs; God's solutions will regularly overturn our preconceived ideas and leave us awestruck at His ways. At the same time, God is no mere 'emergency power' to be called upon only in crises. Rather, habitual cultivation of the presence of God will mean that crises can be faced in faith, and in the grace and strength that He supplies.⁵

What hast thou in the house?

There is a remarkable principle in biblical miracles that God often chooses not to create from nothing but instead uses the little that is to hand. There are parallels here with Elijah and the widow of Zarephath, the barrel of meal and the cruse of oil, cf. 2 Kgs 4. 2; 1 Kgs. 17. 14. Is it not encouraging to note that just as Elisha aspired to be Elijah's undisputed successor, 2 Kgs. 2. 9, so here he is channelling the power of God in a similar way to his spiritual father? Famously, Christ fed the five thousand by receiving and blessing the lad's humble fare of barley loaves and fish, John 6. 1-15. It is comforting to know that God can creatively use resources that seem very insignificant in our estimation.

The method of the miracle was then outlined to the widow, requiring a response of faith. She had to borrow empty vessels from her neighbours, 'not a few', 2 Kgs. 4. 3. Those vessels would each need to be empty and clean, if the oil were to avoid contamination, cp. 2 Tim. 2. 21. The value would be not in the presumably fragile vessels as such, but in the precious anointing oil which they would hold, cp. 2 Cor. 4. 7.

Private power

In this episode God was meeting the needs of Israel's faithful remnant in times of apostasy. The miracle was not to be staged as a public event. 'Shut the door', 2 Kgs. 4. 4, was vital, and recalls Christ's directions in Matthew chapter 6 verse 6. Just as

piety is to be primarily developed in private, so God's power and grace can be experienced.⁶ A private need was privately met by a sovereign and loving God.

To this day many of the Lord's greatest works are totally unseen by the world, but it should experience the results. This runs contrary to worldly thinking, ancient and modern, that craves publicity and sensationalism, John 7. 3-5. The profound wonder of the incarnation itself is surely a case in point.

The directions of the man of God were met by simple and prompt obedience. The widow fully involved her sons who thus shared her exercise of faith. There is an exciting vividness about the participles of verse 5 NRSV, 'they kept bringing vessels to her, and she kept pouring'. As she poured the oil, we discern a delightful **abundance** and liberality in God's ways of working; there was no limitation on the divine grace, v. 6, only in their capacity to receive.

The vessels were filled, and the oil ceased to flow only when the last one had been presented. As in the cleansing of Naaman, Elisha was absent, thus putting the spotlight on the power of God alone and encouraging the family's growth in faith.

In the context of the Philippians' sacrificial gift to Paul, he could write, 'my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus', Phil. 4. 19. Sadly, our embrace of materialism has tended to bloat the list of what we might regard as our basic needs. By contrast, Paul could say, 'having food and clothing, with these we shall be content', 1 Tim. 6. 8 NKJV.

Go, sell the oil

It is instructive that directions were given to the widow in two **stages**. This is often so in the ways of God. Whereas we in our scepticism want to see the total picture, God will often grant further guidance based on our compliance with that given

earlier. This principle is classically seen in the life of Abraham. Again, to the worldly mind it might have seemed obvious what to do with all the oil, but humbly she sought further instruction. She was directed to 'Go, sell the oil and pay your debts, and you and your sons can live on the rest', v. 7 ESV. We should observe the primary importance of clearing the debts, thus honouring the God whom the family served, cp. Prov. 3. 27, 28. Thereafter they could use what remained for the family's needs.

The miracle resolved the immediate crisis that the family faced, but there is no suggestion that the residual money lasted for ever after. The mercies of God in meeting difficult circumstances do not cancel the need to engage in honest hard work to meet one's ongoing responsibilities, 1 Tim. 5. 8. A key lesson is that God will assuredly meet the basic needs of those who put His kingdom first, Matt. 6. 33.

It has been said that 'God has more to do in us than He will ever do through us'. God not only met this beleaguered widow's dire need, but He did so in a way that doubtless left her and her children marvelling at His tender and gracious provision.

'Fear Him, ye saints, and you will then
Have nothing else to fear;
Make you His service your delight,
Your wants shall be His care'.

NAHUM TATE AND NICHOLAS BRADY



Endnotes

- 1 Exod. 22. 22; Deut. 14. 29; 24. 17; 26. 12; 27. 19; Job 24. 3; 29. 13; Isa. 1. 17; Matt. 23. 14. God is 'judge of the widows', Pss. 68. 5; 146. 9. See further the helpful paper by CLARK LOGAN on 'Widows, Orphans, and Strangers' in KEN TOTTON (ed.), *Church Doctrine and Practice (Revised Edition)*, Precious Seed Publications, 2019, pp. 339-353.
- 2 Lev. 25. 39-41; Neh. 5. 4, 5; Isa. 50. 1; Amos 2. 6; 8. 6.
- 3 Compare Ruth 4. 1-12.
- 4 The term 'man of God' occurs seventy-six times in the Old Testament, fifty-five times in the books of Kings, and twenty-nine times of Elisha.
- 5 For an example of this compare 1 Samuel chapter 7 verses 15 to 17 (Samuel's routines) with verses 1 to 14, the Philistine threat.
- 6 See also Mark 5. 40; Luke 8. 54.

Journey of the Ark of the Covenant JERUSALEM

Part 3

By **STEPHEN FELLOWES** Skibbereen, Ireland

In 1 Chronicles chapters 13 to 16 there are no less than twenty-nine references to the ark of the covenant. These chapters deal with the important subject of the establishment of the kingdom under the governorship of King David. The message lying on the surface is simple but searching – if the kingdom is to be established the Ark must be given its rightful place! In this article we will apply this principle to the local assembly.

Background

David said, 'let us bring again the ark of our God to us', 1 Chr. 13. 3. An uninstructed person might ask the questions, 'Where is it?' and 'How did it get there?'

We need to travel back into Israel's history approximately one hundred years to 1 Samuel chapters 4 to 7 to obtain the answers to these questions.

Chapter 4 of 1 Samuel is one of the saddest chapters in all of the Old Testament. Israel is at war with the Philistines; 4,000 men of Israel already lie dead in the field; things are at a critical juncture. Notice in this chapter:

a) A shout

In their hour of need they decide, 'Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh unto us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies', 1 Sam. 4. 3. However, in reality the poverty of their spiritual condition was such that the mere presence of the Ark would prove to be of no avail. You see, they brought the Ark as a good luck charm. They thought that if they had the external symbol of the divine presence, they would experience the power of the divine presence. There was a noise, a commotion. There was the Ark, but there was no power with God!

How deeply searching this is. In assembly life we need to beware of the danger of high claims and low practice. We can quote 'where two or three are gathered together in

my name, there am I in the midst of them', Matt. 18. 20, but to experience this it is imperative that conditions be right.

b) A slaughter

This chapter is a chapter of death, 34,004 deaths to be precise. How desperately sad and shameful it all is. There are four people singled out at the end of the chapter, Eli the weak priest, his two sons the wicked priests Hophni and Phinehas, and the wife of the latter.

c) A son

Upon hearing the news of the Philistines capturing the Ark and the death of her father-in-law and husband, the wife of Phinehas gives birth to a son. She '[names] the child Ichabod, saying, The glory is departed from Israel: because the ark of God was taken', 1 Sam. 4. 21, and then she dies.

The prophet Ezekiel beheld the glory of God departing in chapter 10 of his prophecy, from the holiest to the threshold to the east gate to the mount. There can surely be nothing more solemn than the departure of the Lord's glory from amongst His people.

In the next few chapters of 1 Samuel, we see that the Ark is taken by the Philistines to Ashdod, Gath and Ekron. Eventually it arrives at the Judean city of Beth Shemesh and then on to Kirjath-jearim and into the house of Abinadab, 7. 1. This brings us to the place where the Ark was when it was brought by David up to the city of Jerusalem.

Burden

David's deep exercise is that the Ark should be brought again and given its rightful place amongst God's people.

There are two sides to his exercise.

There is a **private side**. This is revealed in Psalm 132, where we hear David's longing expressed, 'Surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed; I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids, until I find out a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob', vv. 3-5.

The Bible is a book replete with examples of private exercise. Gideon in the book of Judges, chapter 6, threshed wheat in a winepress to secure food for the people of God from the Midianites. Hannah would pour out her heart for a man-child to give to the Lord. Nehemiah with a broken heart went up to Jerusalem to view the broken walls. There was no fanfare, no declaration but just quiet exercise of heart. He tells us, 'neither told I any man what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem', Neh. 2. 12.

In contrast, the passage in Chronicles brings before us the **public side** of David's exercise. David comes before us on this occasion as a fine example of leadership. We are told that he 'consulted with the captains of thousands and hundreds, and with every leader', 1 Chr. 13. 1, and he communicated with all the congregation, seeking to unite them in the matter of recovering the Ark.

While we need to be careful not to make the assembly a democracy, nevertheless it is wise on the part of leaders to try, if possible, to bring the people with them. Dictatorial rule is strictly forbidden, 'Neither as being lords over God's heritage', 1 Pet. 5. 3, and obedience to God-given rule is commanded, 'Obey them that have the rule over you', Heb. 13. 17. Happily, on this occasion David and the nation are harmoniously at one.

Bringing

On behalf of the Lord, Moses

instructed Israel to 'bring me an offering', Exod. 25. 2. The nation gathered as one man in Nehemiah chapter 8 and requested of Ezra to 'bring the book of the law of Moses', Neh. 8. 1. David's desire is that Israel should 'bring again the ark of our God', 1 Chr. 13. 3.

Now, bringing the Ark had proved most problematic in the past. It was one thing to want it back but there was an appropriate way to bring it.

It was essential that the Ark was brought back:

a) According to scripture

'Then David said, None ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites: for them hath the Lord chosen to carry the ark of God, and to minister unto him for ever', 1 Chr. 15. 2.

When the Philistines sought to transport the ark of God away from their lands, they made for it a new cart, 1 Sam. 6. They knew no better and could not have been expected to.

Unfortunately, when David would bring the ark from Kirjath-jearim he simply adopted the methods of the Philistines and, likewise, placed the ark upon a new cart. God's people should know better than to act in such a way. The shoulders of the Levites was God's way according to Numbers chapter 4.

David doubtless meant well, great zeal and excitement marked the occasion, but obedience to God's word was conspicuous by its absence.

Let us beware of adopting the methods of the world in the things of God. God has ways of carrying on His

work and it is vital to remember that the end does not justify the means, and because something is marked by excitement and exuberance it is no guarantee that the Lord is in it.

b) In purity

David having learned the lesson from previous failure instructs the priests and the Levites to sanctify themselves in order to fetch the Ark, 'So the priests and the Levites sanctified themselves to bring up the ark of the Lord God of Israel', 1 Chr. 15. 14.

The prophet Isaiah instructs the remnant called out of Babylon to 'be . . . clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord', Isa. 52. 11. Paul exhorts the Corinthians, 'let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God', 2 Cor. 7. 1.

The lesson is clear and solemn, holiness must always accompany the things of God, there can be no compromise. God's presence can only be experienced where purity exists.

c) With joy

First Chronicles chapter 15 is a chapter of song and sacrifices. The order is clear: obedience and purity lead to joy! This is the principle of the very first psalm; the truly happy person is a holy person. 'Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly', Ps. 1. 1.

Obedience to God's word brings a joy that is deep and lasting, unlike the passing excitement of the flesh.

Sadly, even in these happy circumstances there was a heart that never entered into the good of it. 'Michal the daughter of Saul looking out at a window saw king David dancing and playing; and she despised him in her heart', 1 Chr. 15. 29. How telling that she is called 'the daughter of Saul' because she behaves like Saul, the fleshly man, and the flesh will never appreciate true spiritual exercise.

Blessing

'So they brought the ark of God, and set it in the midst of the tent that

David had pitched for it: and they offered burnt sacrifices and peace offerings before God', 1 Chr. 16. 1.

David's exercise had come to fruition, the Ark is back and in the midst, and, moreover, accompanied by the fulness of the burnt offering and the fellowship of the peace offering.

But just in closing we desire to go back again to the private exercise of David in the book of the psalms and trace the great order that marks the ways of God.

Psalm 132 is one of fifteen songs of degrees, sometimes called the pilgrim psalms. It is from this group of psalms that we noticed David's desire to recover the ark of God for God's glory. The last four of these psalms set before us a pattern:

a) Psalm 131 – psalm of prostration

'Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty', v. 1.

Here we have the all-important grace of humility. If the Ark is going to be returned, it will be returned by those who are devoid of all self-importance and confidence.

b) Psalm 132 – psalm of priority

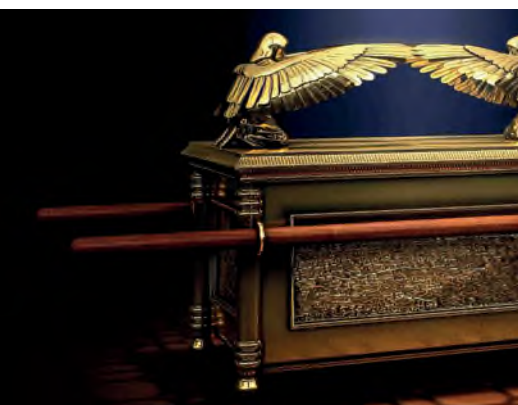
This is the psalm already cited wherein David expresses his desire for the recovery of the Ark. If the previous psalm puts self last, this psalm puts the Lord first.

c) Psalm 133 – psalm of pleasantness

This familiar psalm speaks of the fragrance and freshness of true unity amongst God's people. But it must, of necessity, be based upon the Lord being given His rightful place as seen in Psalm 132. Only then can it be said, 'there the Lord commanded the blessing', v. 3.

d) Psalm 134 – psalm of praise

'Behold, bless ye the Lord, all ye servants of the Lord', v. 1. Here the climax is reached, the Lord has been exalted amongst His people and with united, worshipping hearts they bow with ceaseless praise to the One who is altogether worthy.



PSALM 93 – THE LORD REIGNS

By **ANDREW WARE** Melbourne, Australia

For such a short psalm, the ninety-third is tightly packed with truth. We do not know the author, nor the circumstances in which it was written. It is not directly a song of praise, though consideration of its truths will lead us to praise. It is not a psalm of lament, though we will find comfort here for times of sorrow. Neither is it an intercessory psalm, but we have in the words of the psalm a reminder that the Lord is in control. Rather, it is a declaration of the character of the Lord. As such, for us in the twenty-first century, it is full of comfort in an uncertain and wicked world. There is also within it a wonderful expectation of the earthly reign of the Lord Jesus Christ, as the 'KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORD'S', Rev. 19. 16.

Comfort

Verses 1 and 2 compose the first stanza and focus on the Lord's rule. 'The Lord reigns', v. 1 NKJV, could not be a plainer declaration to commence the psalm. Here is a simple, matter-of-fact statement of God's rule – His sovereignty. We can think, perhaps mistakenly sometimes, that things have never been worse than they are now, and we do live in troubled times. There is uncertainty at hand: wars, natural disasters, civil unrest, and economic disturbance. But the Lord reigns! Despite the uncertainty, nothing is out of His control.

His is a majestic reign, for He is 'clothed with majesty', v. 1. The word 'majesty' here is linked with the idea of lifting up, and in other portions is translated 'pride', e.g., Isa. 28. 1, 3. There is no arrogance with our God, rather this is a recognition that, ultimately, He is the only one worthy of being lifted up. We understand that this reference to God's clothing of Himself is an anthropomorphism, for 'God is Spirit', John 4. 24 NKJV. The idea of clothing is that which is on display, and so the Lord displays His majesty and His strength as He reigns.

It is a strong reign, 'the Lord is clothed with strength, wherewith he hath girded himself', v. 1. Girding carries the idea of being prepared for action, and the second stanza will

develop this thought, but it should be comforting to us that the Lord is not cold and distant, but ready to act. As the seer Hanani reminded King Asa after his calamitous mistake, 'the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him', 2 Chr. 16. 9 NKJV. In the words of BONAR, 'His robes are not mere show'.¹ His is also an established reign, indeed His 'throne is established of old', v. 2; it is a permanent and unmoving rule. Nothing can shake it; no one can move it. Psalm 45 contains a similar thought in the phrase picked up by the writer of Hebrews and applied to the Lord Jesus, 'Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever', Ps. 45. 6; Heb. 1. 8. It is also an eternal reign – 'Thou art from everlasting', v. 2; as He has no beginning, so His reign had no beginning. So, the psalmist sees the all-encompassing reign of the Lord over and above all.

Verse 1 also declares that He is sovereign over creation, for He has established the world, and 'it cannot be moved'. We know that one day the world will be brought to an end, but that will not be through the designs or devastation of humanity. No, it will be the Lord who will one day take the earth and the heavens and 'fold them up', Heb. 1. 12. Until then, they are certain, just as the

Lord spoke to Noah, 'while the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease', Gen. 8. 22. Despite the uncertainty around us, we can rest on the certainty of the plans of our sovereign God.

The scope of scripture shows that the sovereignty of the Lord extends over all the domains of life. We could explore this in further depth, but two examples will suffice. He is sovereign in salvation, for, as Paul unfolds the great truths of salvation in Ephesians chapter 1, he writes that God works 'all things after the counsel of his own will', v. 11. He is sovereign over earthly governments too, for 'there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God', Rom. 13. 1. Of course, we know that there is no negation of human responsibility. However, what comfort to know that 'the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand', Prov. 19. 21.

In the second stanza, covering verses 3 and 4, the focus turns to the Lord's power. The imagery the psalmist uses is that of unpredictable and dangerous flooding waters. The word 'floods', repeated three times in verse 3, emphasizes the fear that deep moving water has posed throughout human history. Even today, for all our vaunted technology, raging waters, tsunamis, hurricanes, and so on claim thousands of lives, even in highly developed countries. It is little wonder that writing in ancient times as he is, the psalmist draws on floods as a picture of peril and danger.

There are also spiritual floods that might be 'lifted up', v. 3, against the believer; dangers and deep troubles that the Lord's people enter into at times. They may be dangers around the believer, for example, think of the account that Paul gives of his experiences in 2 Corinthians chapter 11 verses 23 to 27. There are also times we can feel overwhelmed from that which rises from within, from the flesh. When the floods have 'lifted up their voice', v. 3, it can be almost too much to bear. The sound of them is not the same as their actual power, but it does speak of their danger, and we are reminded that the Devil goes

about as a 'roaring lion', 1 Pet. 5. 8. However, there are also the 'waves', v. 3, speaking of the sheer power that the floods have, and wherever the rising waves of doubt, anxiety, fear, or failure can threaten to swamp us.

Nevertheless, when we look to the Lord Jesus, we remember the one who on a storm-tossed sea, when the voice of the waves lifted up, stood up in a boat and said, 'Peace, be still', Mark 4. 39. Indeed, as our psalmist says, 'The Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters . . . the mighty waves of the sea', v. 4. The waves may rise, but they can never be as high as He is. He is over all, and He is omnipotent. More than this, He is the one who would truly fulfil the words of the forty-second psalm, 'Deep calls unto deep at the noise of Your waterfalls; all Your waves and billows have gone over me', Ps. 42. 7 NKJV. For, not only is He high above all, but He is the one who came down low, under the waves of the wrath of God that our sin deserved. We can draw real and present comfort from this in the face of rising floods, that our greatest threat has been forever dealt with by the mighty Lord Jesus.

The last verse is a fitting coda to the psalm, focusing on the Lord's word and the Lord's house. How is it that we know of the God who reigns, who is clothed in majesty, and who is mightier than the roar of waters? The sure testimonies of the word of God! The psalmist says they are 'very trustworthy', v. 5 ESV, and in

the scriptures we have certainty and clarity in a sufficient and complete revelation of God. We can depend upon the Lord, for He has revealed Himself in His word.

There are three psalms that begin with the phrase 'The Lord reigneth' – this is the first, along with Psalms 97 and 99. It is interesting that all three of them end with the thought of holiness, Pss. 93. 5; 97. 12; 99. 9. In the latter two, it is the holiness of God. Here in verse 5, holiness 'becometh', or 'adorns' NKJV, God's house. Since the Lord reigns, it is right that the place where He has placed His name² should be marked by purity and separation unto Him alone. After all, He said to the children of Israel something that the Apostle Peter applied to believers in the first century, and to us as well, 'be holy; for I am holy', Lev. 11. 44; 1 Pet. 1. 16 NKJV.

Expectation

Although the psalm is not specifically Messianic, it will have a distinct fulfilment in the millennial reign of Christ.³ One day, a restored and rescued remnant of Israel will be able to sing these words truly and sincerely. As they enter the millennium, they will surely sing, 'The Lord reigns', rejoicing in a reign that will be both visible and physically situated on earth, for in that day the Lord Jesus Christ will have 'dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth', Ps. 72. 8.

Today, the state of Israel is surrounded by hostile nations and is experiencing great conflict. However, when the nation sings this psalm in the millennium, it will have experienced the 'floods', v. 3, of destruction during the tribulation like nothing that it has ever faced before. But the Lord who is 'mightier than the noise of many waters', v. 4, will have appeared 'clothed with majesty' and 'girded', v. 1, for battle against His enemies. Here in this psalm is a glimpse of what John saw centuries later, 'a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True . . . and on his head . . . many crowns', Rev. 19. 11, 12. What a sight it will be for Israel when Jesus Christ 'shall be revealed from heaven . . . in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God', 2 Thess. 1. 7, 8. Truly, then it will be said, 'Thy throne is established', v. 2, for a perfect king will rule and 'His name shall endure for ever', Ps. 72. 17.

That day will also be proof of the sure testimonies of the Lord, that His promises to Israel have not been abrogated. The one who 'stablished' the world so 'that it cannot be moved', v. 1, will fulfil the covenants He established with Abraham⁴ and with David.⁵ Finally, at least in terms of what the psalm touches on, holiness will adorn the millennial temple that will be built, Ezek. 43. 12. Little wonder that the cry to go up as He comes to rule will be, 'Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth', Rev. 19. 6.



ANDREW WARE lives in Melbourne, Australia and fellowships with the Bayswater Assembly. He is involved in gospel preaching, Bible teaching, and children's outreach locally and elsewhere. This is his first article for Precious Seed.

Endnotes

- 1 ANDREW A. BONAR, *Christ and His Church in the Book of Psalms*, Kregel, 1978, pg. 282.
- 2 See 2 Chr. 33. 7; Matt. 18. 20.
- 3 A. G. CLARKE argues that 'Prophetic anticipation . . . overshadows any other interpretation'. Though we might not go that far, it is certainly true that this is a wonderful application of the psalm. A. G. CLARKE, *Analytical Studies in the Psalms*, Kregel, 1979, pg. 237.
- 4 See, for example, Gen. 12. 1-3, 7; 13. 14-17.
- 5 2 Sam. 7. 1-17.

Towns and cities in the life of the Lord

Part 9

DALMANUTHA

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

Exactly where Dalmanutha, or Magdala (Magadan KJV mg.), was located is difficult to determine. Most commentators see them as two closely related places, some placing them on the western side of the Sea of Galilee, others on the south-east of the lake. However, although the geographical and socio-economic data may be of interest, it is the spiritual reception that the Lord received that will occupy us in this short article.

The context, Mark 8. 1-9

Both Matthew and Mark tell us that the event preceding the Lord's visit to Dalmanutha was the feeding of the 4,000. What that remarkable miracle demonstrates is the Lord's compassion for the multitude that followed Him, 'I have compassion on the multitude', v. 2. He had assessed the situation – 'they will faint by the way' – and was clear as to what needed to be done. The multitude must be fed! Although the disciples appreciated the need, they could not conceive how that need might be met.

Thinking of the events that followed in Dalmanutha, it is interesting to see the interest of the multitude. Some, says the Lord, 'came from far', v. 3. They had all been with the Lord Jesus for three days, in the wilderness, possibly with little shelter, and without food. It would seem clear that they listened to the Lord's words for, when commanded, they obeyed and were blessed – 'they did eat, and were filled', v. 8. This was certainly the best meal that they had been given in three days!

But the order of events is equally important. As that multitude followed the Lord, He could have fed them on the first or second day. Why did He wait for the third day? Apart from the fact that this miracle in feeding them was in the Lord's timing and a revelation of His power and glory, it emphasizes the Lord's priorities. The spiritual need of the multitude was met first. The Lord was mindful of

their physical need – He appreciated and reacted to that need rather than the disciples – but their spiritual welfare was paramount.

The contrast, vv. 10-13

Following the feeding of the 4,000, the Lord makes His way to Dalmanutha.

He was not in Dalmanutha long before the Pharisees sought Him out. Matthew adds that the Pharisees were accompanied by the Sadducees. They had come some distance, travelling from Jerusalem, as NICOLL observes, 'the Pharisees went out, from their seat in the Holy Land into the heathen Decapolis, otherwise carefully shunned, in their zeal against Jesus'.¹ But their motivation was wholly different from the 4,000. They had followed the Lord to learn of Him whereas the Pharisees came with altogether different objectives.

Their approach to the Lord was with questions – they 'began to question', v. 11. This was a continual questioning, 'they began at once and kept it up',² not necessarily seeking answers but disputing and debating with the Lord in an attempt to catch Him out. The disciples were ignored. They singled out the Lord for their attention in order that they might scrutinize His authority and authenticity.

What were they seeking? – 'seeking of him a sign', v. 11. The immediate context, had they known and

considered it, provided all the proof of His claimed identity. But they also ignored all the other miracles that the Lord had performed, as well as the words of grace and power that He spoke. With some insatiable desire, they wanted a sign! In another context, the Lord said, 'An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas', Matt. 12. 39; 16. 4. Behind their search for a sign, they were tempting the Lord, as Wuest comments, 'to put to the test to see what good or evil is in a thing or person . . . the context here decides for the first meaning. The Pharisees were attempting to put our Lord to the test to see whether He was an imposter or what He claimed to be, the Messiah of Israel'.³

But let us also appreciate that the Lord felt the pressure and the malignity of their unbelief. He 'sighed deeply in his spirit', v. 12. This phrase is peculiar to Mark's Gospel and indicates the Lord's sadness at their rejection of the opportunities they had been given. A. T. Robertson, quoting Swete, states, 'The sigh seemed to come, as we say, from the bottom of his heart, the Lord's human spirit was stirred to its depths'.⁴

Thus, the Lord departed from Dalmanutha and with some abruptness. He had not stayed there long but the intensity of what He had experienced and the ferocity of their rejection of Him led Him to new parts and away from Galilee.

There may be times when our presentation of Christ in the gospel meets with similar questioning and rejection from people we meet. Remember Dalmanutha! As many rejected the Lord, so they will reject us and the message of Him that we bring!

Endnotes

- 1 WILLIAM R. NICOLL (ed.), *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, Eerdmans, 1952.
- 2 A. T. ROBERTSON, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, e-Sword resource.
- 3 K. S. WUEST, *Mark's Gospel in the Greek New Testament*, e-Sword resource.
- 4 A. T. ROBERTSON, *op. cit.*

QUESTION

What is 'the sign of the prophet Jonas' and was the Lord Jesus 'three days and three nights in the heart of the earth', Matt. 12. 39, 40?

ANSWER

In Matthew chapter 12 verse 38, the scribes and Pharisees cynically demanded yet another sign from the Lord Jesus, as if the extraordinary miracles He had already performed were insufficient. In response, Jesus made this remarkable statement, 'an evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas', v. 39. This one final and ultimate miracle, foreshadowed in the events of the book of Jonah, would surpass them all. By referencing Jonah, the Lord Jesus affirms the historical authenticity of the book, underscoring the fact that these events actually happened!

The sign of the prophet Jonah serves as a powerful picture of five sequential events in the experience of the Lord Jesus:

1. His descent to Calvary: Just as Jonah was cast into the depths of the sea, so too did the Lord Jesus descend in humility to the cross. 'He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross', Phil. 2. 8. Unlike Jonah, however, who descended due to his disobedience, the Lord Jesus descended in perfect obedience to the Father's will. 'And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him', John 8. 29.
2. His immersion in sufferings on the cross: Jonah's near-death experience in the sea symbolizes Christ's sufferings on the cross, where He was 'immersed' in suffering, especially as He suffered the judgement of God for the penalty of sin. As Jonah prophetically stated, 'all thy billows and thy waves passed over me', Jonah 2. 3.¹
3. is death and burial: The Lord Jesus explicitly drew a parallel between the three days and three nights Jonah spent in 'the whale's belly' and His own time in the 'the heart of the earth', referring to His death and burial. Just as Jonah found himself in an environment that was unnatural to him,² the belly of the great fish, so too did the Lord Jesus, the author of life, enter into the realm of death, an environment to which He did not belong.
4. His resurrection: Jonah's miraculous deliverance onto dry land after three days foreshadowed the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, the greatest demonstration of the power of God in all history, Eph. 1. 19, 20.³

5. His greatness being known beyond the bounds of Israel: In Matthew chapter 12 verses 41 and 42, the Lord Jesus referenced the repentance of the Ninevites, illustrating how the gospel would extend beyond Israel to the Gentile nations. The acceptance of Christ by other nations would highlight the spiritual blindness of Israel in rejecting their Messiah.

Regarding the phrase 'three days and three nights in the heart of the earth', Matt. 12. 40, there are three main interpretations.⁴ The view presented here finds its resolution in the phrase 'the third day', which is frequently used in the New Testament to describe the timing of Christ's resurrection.⁵ The Lord Jesus told Herod, 'Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures to day and to morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected', Luke 13. 32. Here, 'the third day' simply means 'the day after tomorrow'. Consequently, the traditional Christian belief that Jesus died on Good Friday and rose on Easter Sunday aligns with this understanding. Two important facts help to clarify the timeline:

1. The Jewish reckoning of days: In Jewish tradition, the day begins at sundown, which explains the urgency of Joseph of Arimathea to ensure the Lord Jesus was buried before the Sabbath commenced on Friday evening.⁶
2. The Hebrew idiom for 'day and night': In Hebrew culture, any part of a 24-hour period was considered a full 'day and night'.⁷ Therefore, even a portion of a day counted as a complete day in this expression.

Endnotes

- 1 See also Ps. 69. 1, 2; Luke 12. 50; Mark 10. 37-40.
- 2 This ought to be remembered before historical examples of individuals being swallowed by whales or large fish are presented. The events that happened to Jonah were intentionally unusual and miraculous.
- 3 Other Old Testament baptisms are cited in the New Testament such as the crossing of the Red Sea, 1 Cor. 10. 1, 2, and Noah's Ark, 1 Pet. 3. 20-22. Along with Jonah, these stories are often ridiculed by sceptics today as being too incredible to believe. The spectacular nature of these miracles, however, picture the greatest miracle of all, the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. See <https://www.gotquestions.org/three-days.html> for a full explanation.
- 4 For example, in all the Gospels, e.g. Matthew's Gospel: Matt. 16. 21; 17. 23; 20. 19; 27. 64; also Acts 10. 40 and 1 Cor. 15. 4.
- 5 Mark 15. 42-47.
- 6 Examples of its use include Gen. 7. 4, 12; Exod. 24. 18; 34. 28; 1 Sam. 30. 12; 1 Kgs. 19. 8; and Matt. 4. 2.

The Committee

Chairman and General Editor:

JOHN BENNETT

19 Alfreton Road, Pinxton,
Nottingham NG16 6JZ

Treasurer and Secretary:

MICHAEL BUCKERIDGE

PO Box 10544, Grantham NG31 0HW

Ministry Articles Editors:

SANDY JACK,

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**Graeme Andrews, Robert Davies,
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*All committee members can be
contacted at
secretary@preciousseed.org
or by post to the Chairman.*

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 - Australia** **Precious Seed International,**
12 Amalia Street, Birkdale, Queensland 4159.
 - Canada** **Precious Seed International, Gospel Trust Canada,**
3 Hill Top Trail, Stouffville, ON L4A3G7 Canada
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'Can ... the leopard [change] his spots?' Jer. 13. 23

PS
Magazine

'Can ... the leopard [change] his spots?' Jer. 13. 23

This is a well-known phrase in English derived from a biblical text.

The leopard is one of the species of cat closely related to the lion, tiger, and jaguar. It is a muscular animal, adapted to a variety of habitats, and known as an opportunistic predator. It relies on its spotted coat for camouflage and is skilled at stalking and ambushing its prey, which it can then drag up a tree to eat. Whilst not the size of a lion or tiger, it is a fearsome beast.

But, as the mouthpiece of God, the prophet is not speaking about the leopard's skills but its appearance and its lifestyle. Jeremiah is describing the sad state of the nation. They are 'accustomed to do evil', so immersed in it that change is impossible. Equally, the leopard cannot change its appearance. It cannot wash away its spots nor remove its propensity to kill for food. Even though humans have tried to tame it, such attempts have been fraught with danger and have brought tragedy as the animal has turned upon its trainer. The consequences of the fall remain for leopards and, as Jeremiah reminds his readers, for humans too!

Yet, remarkably, Isaiah tells us that 'the leopard shall lie down with the kid', Isa. 11. 6. This is not merely changing the spots! It is a transformation achieved in the millennial reign of the Lord Jesus when the consequences of the fall will be removed and the very instincts of the brute creation will be transformed – they will not kill to eat, and the fear in those animals that would have been their prey will also be removed. As THOMAS CONSTABLE puts it, 'The presently rapacious ... will coexist peacefully with the defenceless' (The Expository Notes of Dr. Constable, e-sword resource).

Before the millennial reign of Christ an equally remarkable change can be effected. Paul spoke of the change that had been accomplished in his life by the gospel. Although he had once 'persecuted the church of God, and wasted it', by the grace of God he 'now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed', Gal. 1. 13, 23. May we never lose sight of what the grace of God has done in us, and can also do in others!

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