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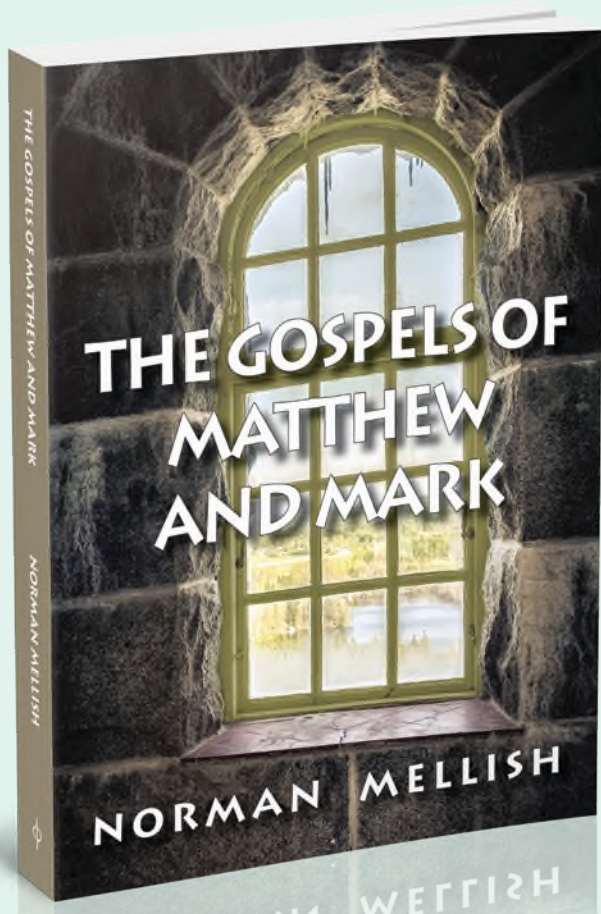
MAY 2026 Vol. 81 | No. 2



'Pharaoh's chariots and his host hath he cast into . . . the Red sea',  
Exod. 15. 4



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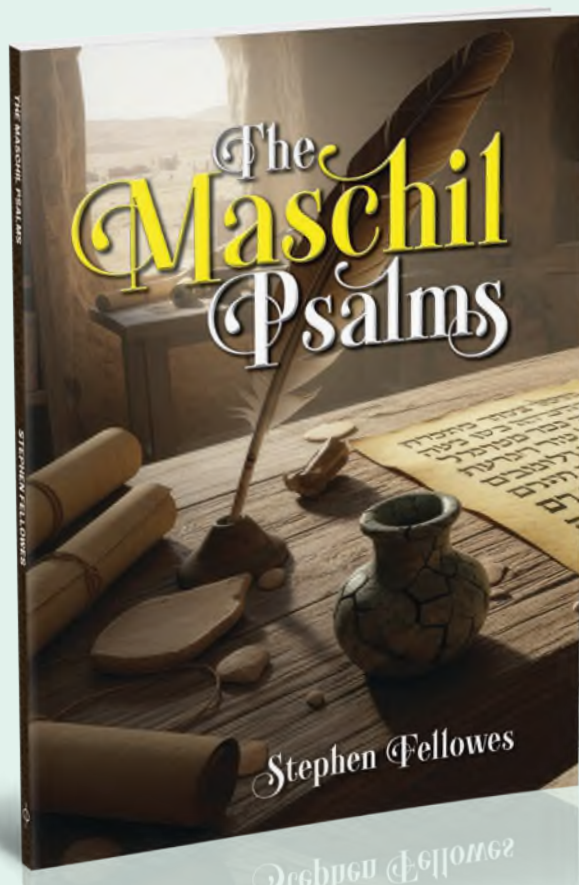
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Please check that the number of magazines requested reflects the number of magazines that you distribute. We ask that you do a regular review in order that we might be good stewards of the resources we receive from the Lord's people for the furtherance of the work. As stated on the back cover, distribution is our major expense and we are seeking to keep that to a minimum.

## 'O give thanks unto the Lord; call upon his name: make known his deeds among the people', Ps. 105. 1

I am no musician. However, I am told that in western music a chord needs at least three notes and, if you will excuse the reference to a homophone, I do know from my Bible that the preacher declares that 'a threefold cord is not quickly broken', Eccles. 4. 12.

In Psalm 105 verse 1, the psalmist strikes three notes that, together, form a beautiful chord of Christian living: a thankful heart; a dependent life; and a public witness.

### A thankful heart

'O give thanks unto the Lord'. Whilst circumstances can be occasions for appreciation, our gratitude should not be tied solely to them. True thankfulness must be anchored in the character of our God. Job, in the midst of loss, declared, 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord', Job 1. 21. When Israel forgot God's works, they grumbled, but when they remembered, they sang, Exod. 16. 2, 3; 15. 1. A thankful heart in every circumstance remembers God's goodness and responds in praise.

### A dependent life

'Call upon his name'. To call is to cry for help, to admit need. God's name represents His character, promises, and power. Jehoshaphat prayed, 'O our God, wilt thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee', 2 Chr. 20. 12. In a culture that prizes independence, scripture calls us to dependence, and we should remember that prayer is not weakness; it is the confession that God alone is strong. Daniel prayed three times a day, even when it was dangerous, and his dependence brought deliverance, Dan. 6. 10.

### A public witness

'Make known his deeds among the people'. This is about God's glory being displayed through transformed lives. After the Lord Jesus healed the man possessed by demons, His words to him were, 'Return to thine own house, and shew how great things God hath done unto thee. And he went his way, and published throughout the whole city how great things Jesus

had done unto him', Luke 8. 39. The early church had 'favour with all the people' because their lives reflected Christ, Acts 2. 47. God's faithfulness is not meant to be a private secret but a public testimony. Are our lives truly exhibiting 'how great things God hath done' unto us?

So, Psalm 105 verse 1 gives to us a threefold cord that will be strong and, since it is a Psalm, a three-note chord that will produce a harmonious sound from our lives. We ought to be grateful for what God has done, dependent on who God is, and bold in making Him known.

Once again, as we send out this issue of the magazine, we do so with thankfulness to the Lord for His continued provision of written material and of funds to allow its production and distribution, in dependence on Him for blessing and future resources, and with a desire that it helps readers to know more about the Saviour.

### Sandy Jack

Ministry Articles Editor

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### PULL-OUT

### YPS

By ANDREW DUTTON

# Ezekiel the Seer Part 3

## THE JUDGEMENT OF GOD DRAMATIZED

By **GRAEME ANDREWS** Wallingford, England

### Ezekiel is a varied prophecy

This book is famous for visions.<sup>1</sup> However, it would be wrong to characterize Ezekiel as a 'one trick pony'. Ezekiel contains much more: poetry, parable, allegory, drama, symbols, sign acts, historical narrative, regulations, and apocalyptic revelations. This prophecy is colourful, diverse, and varied.<sup>2</sup> In chapters 4 and 5, we encounter an unusual prophetic communication method.

### Ezekiel is a personal prophecy

The book has an autobiographical quality.<sup>3</sup> Events in his life and actions he performs instruct people. For example, having lost his beloved wife, Ezekiel was not permitted to mourn, in order to challenge the people, 24. 15-24. At times, the messenger's life and actions became the message itself.

### Ezekiel is a unique prophecy

A prophet's *modus operandi* is verbal communication. However, the Lord shut Ezekiel's mouth, 3. 26. How would he function effectively? Ezekiel's silence:

- 1 was not perpetual. God opened his mouth when required, v. 27. In modern terms, he was not a 'content creator'; he did not come up with his own ideas; he moved under the control of God.<sup>4</sup>
- 2 required him to employ dramatically different methods of communication, chh. 4, 5.

Ezekiel spoke when God commanded, and behaved as directed. Therefore, he became an enigmatic figure. His strange conduct engendered criticism. BROOME diagnosed Ezekiel with catatonic or paranoid schizophrenia and labelled him a psychopath.<sup>5</sup> Such criticism is unwarranted, similar behaviour permeates the prophets, Jer. 27. 2;

28. 10; Isa. 20. 2-4. What makes this prophecy distinct is the 'frequency and drama' of his strange activities.<sup>6</sup>

### Ezekiel dramatizes Jerusalem's siege

Unable to speak, the prophet dramatizes the coming judgement with four theatrical acts.<sup>7</sup> Ezekiel mimes God's message.<sup>8</sup> Before considering Ezekiel's drama, it is worth noting that this is six years before Jerusalem falls.<sup>9</sup> The Jews considered the temple inviolable, thinking it would never fall. God informs them that the conquest of Judah will be completed.<sup>10</sup> This would validate his prophetic ability.

### Act 1: the siege of an unprotected Jerusalem, 4. 1-3

Ezekiel 'plays toy soldiers' to visualize the demise of Jerusalem. Consider:

- 1 **A symbol for the city.**  
God tells Ezekiel to take a tile, a Babylonian clay brick, and inscribe Jerusalem on it, v. 1. How did he do so? Writing the word Jerusalem or sketching the city's skyline? We can only wonder.
- 2 **A siege of the city.**  
Ezekiel creates siege paraphernalia, v. 2. Likely using soil to create a ramp and pieces of clay to depict the rest, in verse 3 he lays siege to the city.
- 3 **A sentence on the city.**  
The final scene finds Ezekiel raising an iron pan against the city. Ezekiel now plays the role of God. The audience would have eagerly awaited God's saving intervention. But God never intervenes, the iron pan never falls. Instead, it symbolizes the barrier between God and Judah.<sup>11</sup>

Verse 3 describes this as a **sign to the city**. Ezekiel is not merely being

entertaining; he is instructing the people. Let us remember when using visual aids that we should do so for educational purposes, not entertainment purposes.<sup>12</sup>

### Act 2: the sentence of an unrepentant Judah and Israel, 4. 4-8

This section is easy to describe but difficult to decipher. God requires Ezekiel to lie on his left side for 390 days, followed by forty days on his right, vv. 4-6. He is bound to ensure immobility, v. 8. The days of Ezekiel's play are equated to years:

- 390 days = 390 years of the iniquity of Israel
- Forty days = forty years of the iniquity of Judah

Understanding this is challenging. Are the years literal or symbolic?<sup>13</sup> Are they related to the past (the reason for judgement) or the future (the duration of judgement)? Scholars are divided and we cannot be dogmatic. It seems best to take this as looking backward to the sin that caused the judgement of God. The duration implies a patient, gracious God, providing opportunity for repentance. This view is not without difficulty, but the same can be said for any of the other interpretations.<sup>14</sup>

A second difficulty is practical. Is it physically possible to lie on one side for 390 days? Context suggests Ezekiel performed this action daily, probably at the same time and place. But then he would be unbound and 'free' to go about his business. Indeed, verses 9 to 17 requires that Ezekiel has enough mobility to make bread and cook it on coals. This would be impossible if immobile 24/7.

### Act 3: the subsistence of an unclean Jerusalem, 4. 9-17

God now expects Ezekiel to consume unappetizing and unclean food.

**Ezekiel's food.** A starvation diet during the siege.

This bread was no delicacy. It was a subpar wheat formed of numerous elements, 4. 9. The bread is sold today, packaged as 'Ezekiel 4. 9

bread'. However, scripture is not recommending this bread. Scarcity of quality ingredients is the thought. You made Ezekiel's bread when nothing else was available; it described protracted siege conditions. This theme is reinforced by the limited quantity he could eat. With a food intake of approximately eight ounces per day, he was subsisting on a starvation diet.

**Ezekiel's fuel.** A contaminated diet after the siege.

Ezekiel's method of cooking would have meant that the bread was in contact with the fuel, human dung – how degrading and defiling! Ezekiel, for once, objects and God graciously relieves him, allowing the use of cow manure rather than human excrement. This was apparently more appropriate ritually. The message is clear; contamination awaited them in exile.

#### Act 4: the summary of a unique judgement

The preceding two sign-acts were repetitive, occurring daily for fourteen months. Act 4 is one-off by its very nature. Ezekiel's final drama may be described as 'a brilliant one-man double act', his shaved hair representing the residents of Jerusalem and its treatment representing their judgement.<sup>15</sup>



This drama revolves around the number three. Hair is divided into three parts. It is disposed of in three ways. 'Take thee' occurs three times, 5. 1. Finally, 'fire' appears three times, v. 4.<sup>16</sup>

For the prophet, this was humiliating; the same would be the case for Jerusalem. But more significant is the horrific outcomes prophesied here. Chapter 5 verse 12 and Jeremiah chapter 15 verse 2 explain the significance of these actions. Ezekiel's hair is divided into three portions indicative of the result of the siege of Jerusalem for its inhabitants:

- one-third was burnt. Demonstrating what happened **inside the city**, destroyed by plague and famine, 5. 12.
- one-third was chopped. Announcing what happened

**outside the city**, death by the sword at the hands of enemy combatants.

- one-third was scattered. Emphasizing what happened **away from the city**, some survivors were dispersed.<sup>17</sup>

Consider the impact on Ezekiel; faithful service for God can bring significant challenges:

- 1 He would have been **hated**, act 1.
- 2 He may have been **harm**ed, act 2.
- 3 He would have been **hungry**, act 3.
- 4 He is **humiliated**, act 4.

Ezekiel's example suggests: we should communicate God's word effectively; not shy away from our ministry no matter how difficult or unpopular; and our lives can be a witness for God.

#### Endnotes

- 1 'No other Old Testament prophet experienced so many visions as Ezekiel. Altogether, seventeen chapters of the book contain accounts of visions'. F. B. HUEY, JR, *Layman's Bible Book Commentary: Ezekiel, Daniel*, Broadman Press, 1983, pg. 29.
- 2 'No other prophet is so creative in his presentation of his message, and none is as forceful'. DANIEL I. BLOCK, *New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Ezekiel (Chapters 1-23)*, Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997.
- 3 Ezekiel almost exclusively writes in the first person, exceptions include: 1. 2, 3 and 24. 24.
- 4 'Originality is usually prized among writers and speakers. Yet there was to be no originality in Ezekiel's doctrine . . . He is reminded that his job is to convey and not to create'. DOUGLAS K. STUART, *The Communicator's Commentary Series: Ezekiel*, Word Books, 1989.
- 5 WILLIAM VARNER, *Ezekiel's Strange Signs*, <https://israelmyglory.org/article/ezekeils-strange-signs/> 1995.
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 Most of Ezekiel's signs or symbolic actions are recorded in chapters 4, 5, 12, and 24.
- 8 Each theatrical act essentially has two scenes. Act 1, scene 1 – the siege model, scene 2 – the iron frying pan. Act 2, scene 1 – lying on the left side, scene 2 – lying on the right side. Act 3, scene 1 – the eating of bread, scene 2 – the cooking of the bread. Act 4, scene 1 – the shaving of his hair, scene 2 – the three actions with the hair.
- 9 Comparing chapter 1 verse 1, chapter 3 verse 16, chapter 40 verse 1 and 2 Kings chapter 25 verse 3 would suggest that the exact time differential is three days short of six years. Ezekiel was not just commenting on current affairs, he was foretelling the future in a narrative uncommon among the people.
- 10 The exile of Judah occurred in three phases. First, in 605 BC, Daniel and other nobles were taken to Babylon, 2 Chr. 36. 6, 7. Second, in 597 BC, Ezekiel and approximately 10,000 Judeans were taken captive, 2 Kgs. 24. 10-16. Finally, in 586 BC, the city was sieged, defeated, and destroyed. Those who were not slaughtered or starved were carried off into captivity, 2 Kgs. 25. 1-7. The events of prophecies of Ezekiel recorded in chapters 1 to 24 occur between the second and third deportations.
- 11 Cp. Isa. 59. 2.
- 12 Ezekiel's actions in chapters 4 and 5 provide support for the use of object lessons or visual aids in our ministry, and this is not just restricted to children's work. VARNER very helpfully states, 'while God has not asked us today to do such bizarre things as he commanded Ezekiel to do, perhaps we can effectively use attention-getting devices, as long as they do not cheapen the gospel. Any legitimate visual aid can be employed if it gets people's attention and clearly communicates God's Word. The prophets have something to teach us in this regard'. WILLIAM VARNER, *op. cit.*
- 13 430 years may be linked to the captivity in Egypt, which lasted this length of time. Hosea had warned that Israel would be returned to Egypt symbolically, Hos. 8. 13, and this is the fulfilment of this.
- 14 The 390 years counted backwards would date the start of the sin of Israel in the reign of David. It is hard to pinpoint why exactly this would be the beginning point of the nation's iniquity. The LXX was so confused by this dating that it was changed to 190 years, approximating the exile of the northern kingdom, thus changing the meaning of 'iniquity' from its normal usage to meaning the punishment due to sin. All attempts to reconcile the 430 years to a connection with the captivity itself are either inexact figures or require reference to some random extra-biblical historical event.
- 15 CHRISTOPHER J. H. WRIGHT, *The Message of Ezekiel: A New heart and New Spirit (The Bible Speaks Today)*, Intervarsity Press, 2001.
- 16 DANIEL I. BLOCK, *op. cit.*
- 17 There is also a hint of a remnant, a few strands of hair are hidden safely in his garments.

# THE 'I AM' STATEMENTS OF SCRIPTURE

## 3. NEW TESTAMENT

By **MERVYN WISHART** Belfast, Northern Ireland

1. When teaching in the temple at Jerusalem, the Lord Jesus said to the Jews, '**Ye are from beneath; I am from above . . . I am not of this world**', John 8. 23. The prophet Micah prophesied that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, Mic. 5. 2. He who is the eternal One came into time and space – 'When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son', Gal. 4. 4. He came into space, leaving the infinite realm of the heavens.

When he was praying at the dedication of the temple, Solomon said, 'But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee', 2 Chr. 6. 18. How amazing it is, then, to read of the humble circumstances into which the Son of God was born, 'And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn', Luke 2. 7. CHARLES WESLEY expressed it well in a line of his hymn, 'Our God contracted to a span, incomprehensibly made man'.

The Lord spoke often of heaven as the place He came from and the place to which He would return, 'And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven', John 3. 13; cp. 6. 32, 33, 38, 50, 51, 58.

John the Baptist said, 'He that cometh from above is above all . . . he that cometh from heaven is above all', 3. 31. Paul wrote of the great contrast between Adam who was created, and the Lord who is the Creator and came from heaven, 'The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from heaven', 1 Cor. 15. 47.

During His sojourn in this world, the Son of God continually brought delight to the heart of His Father in heaven. Isaiah prophesied of the One who would 'grow up before him [God] as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground', Isa. 53. 2. In the midst of all the weeds, thorns, and thistles of this world of sin, there arose a tender plant, exquisite in its beauty. In Christ, not only was there the absence of sin of every kind, but the presence of every grace and every virtue that God ever desired should be seen in a man. He brought the very fragrance of heaven itself to this sinful world, 'All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces', Ps. 45. 8. He alone could say, '**I am from above**', John 8. 23.

2. The Jews in the temple listened as the Lord Jesus spoke of His Father. They said to Him, 'Abraham is our father', John 8. 39. The Lord Jesus said, 'Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad', v. 56. Then they said to Him, 'Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?' The Lord replied, '**Before Abraham was, I am**', v. 58. He did not say, 'Before Abraham was, I was', which would also have been true, of course, but it was altogether more significant that He said, 'Before Abraham was, I am'.

3. 'Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, **I am the Son of God?**' 10. 36. This was clearly the Lord Jesus affirming His deity. In addition to the Lord Himself, there were seven individuals in the Gospel of John who confessed Jesus as the Son of God:

- John the Apostle, 'The Word was God . . . the only begotten son', 1. 1, 18;

- John the Baptist, 'I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God', 1. 34;
- Nathanael, 'Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel', 1. 49;
- Peter, 'We believe and are sure that thou art . . . the Son of the living God', 6. 69;
- The blind man, 'Dost thou believe on the Son of God? . . . And he said, Lord, I believe', 9. 35, 38;
- Martha, 'Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God', 11. 27; and
- Thomas, 'My Lord and my God', 20. 28.

4. '**I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty**', Rev. 1. 8. Alpha and Omega, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, embrace all the letters in between. To indicate that someone has mastered a subject, we might use the words, 'they know it from A to Z'. Forming these letters into words, it is possible to communicate all of the knowledge known to man. God has revealed Himself fully in Christ, He has spoken unto us in His Son, Heb. 1. 2; cp. Rev. 1. 11; 21. 6; 22. 13.

The words 'which is, and which was, and which is to come' in Revelation chapter 1 verse 4, concerning God the Father, indicate eternity; in verse 8 the same words are used equally of Christ. 'The Almighty', which is used nine times in Revelation, speaks of the omnipotence of God in every sphere. In a turbulent and uncertain world, how reassuring it is for the Christian to remember that God is in control, Eph. 1. 11. 'The Almighty' is used in the book of Job more than thirty times, where infernal powers are also shown to be subject to Him.

5. The last 'fear not' in the Bible is followed by three I AM statements, each of which should dispel the believer's fear: 'And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; [1] **I am the first and the last:** [2] **I am he that liveth, and was**

**[became] dead; [3] and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death'**, Rev. 1. 17, 18.

#### **'I am the first and the last'**

The One who in verse 13 is introduced to us as the Son of man, is unaffected by time. He is the Eternal One. In relation to history, He calls the generations from the beginning, 'I the Lord, the first, and with the last; I am he', Isa. 41. 4. In relation to redemption, 'I am the first, and I am the last', 44. 6. In relation to Creation, 'I am the first, I also am the last', 48. 12.

When we pray for loved ones, let us remember that our Lord is not constrained by time; and even should we be called home before our prayers are answered, we can rely absolutely on Him to honour His promise and answer according to His will. The golden vials full of odours are the prayers of saints, Rev. 5. 8. They are retained in heaven and do not disappear into the ether. Let us continue to leave in this world a legacy of prayer.

#### **'I am he that liveth and was ["became" JND] dead'**

Death had no claim upon Him, 'I have power to lay it [my life] down, and I have power to take it again',



John 10. 18. We must die because we can do nothing else; He died of His own volition.

#### **'Behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death'**

WILLIAM KELLY notes on this verse, 'He is the absolute master of all that might threaten man, whether for the body or the soul'.<sup>1</sup>

6. 'And he said unto me, **It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely**', Rev. 21. 6. When the Lord Jesus said on the cross 'It is finished', John 19. 30, everything necessary for man's salvation was complete. These words, 'it is done', refer to the purposes of God being brought to fruition in 'a new heaven and a new earth', Rev. 21. 1.

On the occasion of the great feast day in Jerusalem, the Lord Jesus cried with a loud voice, 'If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink', John 7. 37. He alone can satisfy the thirsty soul in time and in eternity. He said to the Samaritan woman, 'Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst . . . [it] shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life', John 4. 14. Believers will drink eternally from a never-failing supply. The message of Isaiah is, 'Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters', 55. 1.

7. **'I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last'**, Rev. 22. 13. God has revealed Himself fully in the person of His Son. Eternity will never exhaust the exploration of this theme. Paul speaks of 'the unsearchable riches of Christ', Eph. 3. 8, and we are assured 'Christ Jesus . . . is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption', 1 Cor. 1. 30.

8. 'I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. **I am the root and the offspring of David, and the**

**bright and morning star'**, Rev. 22. 16.

The One who was before David in time, came through David's royal lineage. Paul stressed His link with David, 'Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh', Rom. 1. 3. Matthew begins his Gospel by introducing Him as 'Jesus Christ, the son of David', 1. 1. David's ancestor is also David's descendant, Isa. 11. 1.

'The bright and morning star' anticipates His coming again. In the last words of David, he spoke of 'a morning without clouds', 2 Sam. 23. 4. He also wrote of a morning without tears, Ps. 30. 5. Solomon wrote of a daybreak without shadows, S. of S. 2. 17. These words are engraved on many a headstone, marking the place where the mortal remains of a Christian have been interred.

For the believer, the morning star heralds the dawning of an endless, fadeless, cloudless day – 'The night is far spent, the day is at hand', Rom. 13. 12. He is the morning star in relation to the church, which awaits the imminent return of her Lord. Three times in the last chapter of our Bible we read, 'Behold, I come quickly', Rev. 22. 7, 12, 20. He is the Sun of righteousness in relation to Israel. At the end of the tribulation period, the Lord Jesus will come for Israel's salvation, 'But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings', Mal. 4. 2. 'Unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation', Heb. 9. 28.

We wait to see  
the Morning Star appearing  
In glory bright;  
This blessed hope illumines,  
with beams most cheering,  
The hours of night.

MARGARET L. CARSON (1833-1920)

#### **Endnote**

1 Quoted in JIM ALLEN, *Revelation* in K. S. STAPLEY and T. WILSON (eds), *What the Bible teaches*, John Ritchie Ltd., pg. 49.

# NEHEMIAH

## A MAN OF PERCEPTION

Part 9

6. 1-16

By **TOM MERRIMAN** Carmarthen, Wales

Jerusalem's wall was almost complete, 'there was no breach left therein', but not yet secure – 'at that time I had not set up the doors upon the gates', v. 1. The enemies of God's people knew it, and the chapter details a series of attempts to prevent the work from being finished. Whilst Nehemiah knew this was God's work, it was credited to him.<sup>1</sup> They 'heard that I had builded the wall', and this brought him personally into the enemies' field of view. If they could stumble the man heading up the work, perhaps Jerusalem's security could still be compromised.

Various methods were employed to ensnare him, but Nehemiah was determined to complete the work and leaned on God for strength and protection. With his eye on the goal and his trust in God, he perceived the subtle attempts to harm him, v. 2, and stood firm without giving way to fear, vv. 9, 14, 19.

Soon after David learned that he was to become Israel's king, he was given greater acclaim than Saul, requiring humility and wisdom.<sup>2</sup>

Leaders of similar character are just as important today. To keep God's sheep from being scattered, under-shepherds with spiritual experience are needed.<sup>3</sup> Since a leader may also become a target, suitable qualities are essential. The virtues of vigilance and a sound mind are vital for keen perception.<sup>4</sup>

Nehemiah's discernment and handling of the various attempts to undermine him are instructive for us today.

### Invitation to compromise, vv. 1-4

Sanballat and Geshem sent for Nehemiah, asking him to travel a few miles north-west of Jerusalem to one of the villages in the plain on Ono, 'Come, let us meet together'. Nehemiah was clear in his thinking – departure from Jerusalem meant departure from the work, which he was not prepared to do. Its

importance to him and to the city left no alternative. There was no middle ground on which negotiation or agreement could be made with the enemies of God's people. The wall had to be finished. It should be added that compromise was not on Sanballat and Geshem's agenda either, despite their friendly guise. Nehemiah was sensitive to their true objective – personal harm was intended, 'they thought to do me mischief'! Four times the invitation came in the same manner, but he was unwavering. On each occasion the messengers were sent back with the same answer, 'I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down'.

Our Lord also had a clear sense of the task ahead of Him. He understood the necessity of the suffering He would experience and 'steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem', Luke 9. 51. This was a resolve expressed in His earliest recorded words, 'I must be about my Father's business', 2. 49. It was maintained throughout His life, 'My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work', John 4. 34. Three times in Gethsemane, Jesus expressed His readiness to fulfil the Father's will. He also saw it through to completion, 'I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do', 17. 4; 'It is finished', 19. 30.

When Jesus shared with His disciples what would take place in Jerusalem, Peter thought there must be another

way; but it could not be. And when the mocking cries invited Him to prove Himself to be the Son of God by saving Himself, He could not come down from the cross. For the scriptures to be fulfilled, for God's righteousness to be upheld, and for the work of redemption to be completed, there was no room for compromise. It was necessary for Him to endure the cross.<sup>5</sup>

In God's service, there is no room for compromise with the enemy. 'The friendship of the world is enmity with God'; 'The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other'; 'Resist the devil, and he will flee from you'.<sup>6</sup> To maintain the distinctiveness of God's people today, the principle of separation remains. This was taught by Paul in 2 Corinthians chapter 6 verses 14 to 17; verse 17 reads 'wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord'.

**Staying focussed** on the Lord's work will bring perspective and help us to avoid distraction. With the Lord's own example before us, let us take to ourselves the exhortation given to Archippus, 'take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it', Col. 4. 17.

### False accusation, vv. 5-9

The four earlier invitations had not achieved the desired result of distracting Nehemiah and drawing him away from Jerusalem. A fifth invitation was accompanied by an open letter for the eyes of everyone. This was an attempt to begin a rumour that would lead to fear, weaken the workers' hands, and leave the wall unfinished. 'Gashmu' was named as a witness to add credibility to the false claims. This was probably the full name of 'Geshem the Arabian' – a biased witness, Neh. 2. 19; 6. 1, 2.<sup>7</sup> It contained slanderous reports that Nehemiah and the Jews planned to rebel against Artaxerxes, establishing a breakaway kingdom. It suggested that Nehemiah planned to 'be their king', and that he had appointed prophets to publicize this news in Jerusalem. This letter implied that Nehemiah's interest in building

the wall was for the sake of his own position and glory.

Left unaddressed, these accusations might have discredited Nehemiah in the eyes of the Jews and led to the withdrawal of the king's support. Sanballat hoped to force Nehemiah to meet with him so that he could hurt or destroy him. Nehemiah displayed a temperate spirit, discerning the source of the rumours and roundly refuting the lies. Then he prayed for God's strength to advance the work.

The Lord Jesus faced attempts to discredit Him, being called 'a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners', Luke 7. 34. He also faced the accusation that it was by Satan that He cast out demons. By this, the Holy Spirit was blasphemed, and Jesus rejected the claim. He showed the inconsistency of the argument and explained the severity of casting such aspersions, Mark 3. 22-30. At His trial, the Jewish leaders 'sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death', Matt. 26. 59. Against these, 'Jesus held his peace', v. 63. 'When he was reviled, [he] reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously', 1 Pet. 2. 23.

There are times to directly refute false claims against the cause of Christ.



With meekness and godly fear, God can enable us to defend the hope that is in us. At other times, godly character is its own answer. As we serve under the eye of God with a good conscience, we can be **strong in faith** knowing that the Lord will uphold us. 'Whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ', 1 Pet. 3. 15, 16. See also 1 Pet. 4. 19.

### **False prophecy, vv. 10-14**

Tobiah and Sanballat enjoyed a measure of success through bribery. This avenue may have been developed through the exchange of correspondence between Tobiah and some of God's people, vv. 17-19. Shemaiah was 'shut up' – probably a self-imposed state to give the impression that he was afraid to leave his house. Perhaps it was Nehemiah's desire to strengthen and encourage God's people that led him to visit this man. Feigning loyalty, Shemaiah suggested that they meet in the temple and shut the doors for fear of being slain in the night. This would offer material for an evil report or reproach to be made against Nehemiah by those who suggested that he wished to be king. But the thought of hiding to save his own skin was never entertained by Nehemiah. It would be a failure of leadership and a demonstration of self-interest. This he regarded as 'sin', v. 13.

He answered, 'Should such a man as I flee? and who is there, that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in', v. 11. He perceived that the prophecy and counsel was not of God. As Nehemiah laid the matters out before the Lord, he also made mention of 'the prophetess Noadiah, and the rest of the prophets' – evidently there were other false prophecies abroad that were also designed to cause fear. Again, endowed with spiritual perception, Nehemiah stood firm.

Shemaiah's susceptibility to bribery is reminiscent of Judas' choice of money over the Lord. The behaviour suggested by Shemaiah is similar to the cowardly hired keeper of sheep described by the Lord Jesus, 'the hireling fleeth, because he is an

hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine'. He, of course, exemplified true shepherd character, 'I lay down my life for the sheep', John 10. 13-15.

As there had been false prophets, the Apostle Peter also warned against false teachers, 2 Pet. 2. 1. Therefore, keen spiritual perception is still needed – especially by spiritual leaders – to identify and withstand such dangers that would threaten God's flock, Titus 1. 9-11. As it was through God's enabling that Timothy was encouraged to 'hold fast the form of sound words', 2 Tim. 1. 13, delivered to him, let us **stand firm** today. 'Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding', Prov. 23. 23.

### **The wall's completion, vv. 15, 16**

Spiritual perception enabled Nehemiah to avoid the snares laid before him. With the wall finished in just fifty-two days, the enemies of God's people and others who had witnessed these events were 'much cast down in their own eyes'. They were forced to recognize 'that this work was wrought of our God'.

In spiritual service, may we seek God's glory, not our own, remembering that the work is the Lord's. Of God's perfect servant, it was said, 'He shall not fail nor be discouraged', Isa. 42. 4. What He begins, He completes. Let us therefore stay focussed, strong in faith, and may we stand firm, for 'God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind', 2 Tim. 1. 7.

#### **Endnotes**

- 1 Cp. Moses, Exod. 40. 33; Joshua, Exod. 17. 13; Solomon, 1 Kgs. 6. 9.
- 2 1 Sam. 18. 5, 14, 15, 18, 30.
- 3 'Not a novice', 1 Tim. 3. 6.
- 4 'Sober' (sound mind), 1 Tim. 3. 2; Titus 1. 8.
- 5 Matt. 16. 21, 22; 27. 42; Luke 24. 44-46; Rom. 3. 23-25.
- 6 The world: Jas. 4. 4, see also 1 John 2. 15, 16; the flesh: Gal. 5. 17; the Devil: Jas. 4. 7.
- 7 See C. F. KEIL and F. DELITZSCH, *Keil & Delitzsch Old Testament Commentary, Neh. 2. 19*, <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/kdo/nehemiah-2.html>, 1854-1889.

# THE 'LOOKS' OF THE LORD JESUS

By **MALCOLM HORLOCK** Cardiff, Wales

Part 2

*[All quotations are from the New King James Bible unless otherwise stated]*

## Some received the benefit of His care and thoughtfulness

Consider the disciples during the incident at Caesarea Philippi, when Jesus 'began to teach' openly<sup>1</sup> that He 'must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed'.<sup>2</sup>

Peter then 'took Him aside [presumably, that he might not be seen to reprove the Lord in front of the other disciples] and began to rebuke Him.<sup>3</sup> But, turning round and **looking on His disciples**, 'He rebuked Peter, saying, "Get behind me, Satan"<sup>4</sup>. The Lord knew (i) that the other disciples shared the very same aspirations, ambitions, and hopes as Peter and (ii) that they might easily have been led astray by Peter's remonstrance. For their benefit as much as for Peter's, therefore, a public 'rebuke' was necessary.

His consideration and care shone even brighter for His mother at Golgotha. **'When . . . [He] saw His mother**, and the disciple whom He loved standing [near] by, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son"<sup>5</sup>. There were other women standing there (including Mary Magdalene and His aunt, Salome) but He had eyes for only one.

Perhaps, just for a moment, our Lord remembered the time He had entered the world through her womb . . . perhaps He recalled the time when she had watched Him grow up as an infant, how she had washed, clothed, and fed Him . . . perhaps He thought of the thirty years they had shared together in lowly Nazareth. I do not know.

But I do know that His mother had now reached an age at which, in normal circumstances, she would

have looked to Him, her first-born son, for support. But, instead, she was compelled by her very love for Him to stand and witness Him suffer the humiliating and agonizing death of a condemned criminal.

Surely, He must have seen the misery written across His mother's face as she stood there – helpless. His wounds bled, but she could do nothing to staunch the blood. His mouth was parched, but she could do nothing to moisten it. Arms which had once gently clasped her neck were outstretched out on the tree, but she was unable to caress them.

Doubtless the Saviour knew that every lash of the soldier's scourge on His back had made her wince – that she had felt each iron spike driven through His hands and feet – that, when they twice<sup>6</sup> stripped Him of His garments, she had felt His shame keenly – that every cruel taunt and cheap jibe flung in His teeth had wounded and stung her too.

How then, we ask reverently, did the Lord feel as, knowing all that she was suffering, from His cross He saw his mother?

When He said to Mary, 'Woman, behold your son', He was, in part at least, thinking of the past and was, in effect, saying His 'farewell', His 'goodbye', to her. For, as I understand them, those words marked the close of an earthly relationship which He and Mary had shared for a third of a century but which could not be taken through the grave.<sup>7</sup> When He said to the beloved disciple, 'Behold your mother', He was thinking of the future and was making full provision for her.<sup>8</sup>

## Some received the benefit of His protection

Sometimes what He saw displeased Him and, if necessary, He was quick to defend and shield those under attack. Consider three such incidents recorded in the Gospel according to Mark.

(i) In chapter 3 we read in the closing section of the chapter how His mother and His brothers stood outside the house 'calling Him'.<sup>9</sup> When informed that they were outside 'seeking' Him, He asked, 'Who is my mother, or my brothers? And **looking around at those sitting about Him**, He said, "Behold my mother and my brothers. Whoever does the will of God, the same is my brother, and sister and mother"<sup>10</sup>. That was certainly a look of favour and approbation.

(ii) But earlier, as recorded in the opening section of chapter 3, He 'looked around' with anything but favour and approbation!

The Lord was then in a synagogue and before Him stood a man with a withered hand.<sup>11</sup> Again, it was the Sabbath day<sup>12</sup> and the scribes and Pharisees<sup>13</sup> were watching Him carefully, hoping to find grounds to accuse Him of the capital offence of Sabbath violation.<sup>14</sup> The Pharisees had recently witnessed how He had previously defended His disciples when they had criticized them for plucking ears of corn on the Sabbath.<sup>15</sup> No doubt, they were hopeful that He would now violate the Sabbath law Himself, which they understood to prohibit every act not absolutely necessary.

The glares of the scribes and Pharisees declared loudly, 'Don't you even think about doing anything on this day of all days!' Unflinching, Jesus took up the challenge, called the man forward and asked them, 'Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?'<sup>16</sup>

'If you have', He was saying, 'the power and the opportunity to do good and you do not do it,

in effect, you have done evil<sup>17</sup> because, by taking no action, you become responsible for the need remaining unmet. If I have the power to heal this man's withered hand (and I most certainly do) and I refrain from doing it, then I am as responsible for the fact that he continues to have a withered hand as if I myself had caused it to be withered in the first place'.<sup>18</sup>

'To save life or to kill', He added. By these words, the Lord explained that, although the man's infirmity was not life threatening, nevertheless, in principle, all human actions (and nonactions) – no matter how small and seemingly insignificant – tend in one of two directions; the extreme in the one direction is to give life and the extreme in the other direction is to take life.



Challenged by His question, the scribes and Pharisees kept silent, refusing to answer.

'And **He looked around on them** in anger, being grieved at the hardening of their heart, and He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand". And when he did so, his hand was restored.<sup>19</sup> And the same eyes which had earlier swept around a group of men with favour and approbation now blazed momentarily<sup>20</sup> around a very different group of men with anger at their unbelief and, possibly, at their refusal to answer His question.

(iii) In chapter 10, having heard the Lord's teaching on marriage, divorce, and remarriage,<sup>21</sup> His disciples were taken aback, concluding that, if the case was as He taught, it was better not

to marry at all.<sup>22</sup> Jesus had then spoken of those who 'made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven'.<sup>23</sup> In all likelihood, His disciples completely misunderstood His point, and so, when fathers<sup>24</sup> brought their young children for Him to touch them,<sup>25</sup> the disciples were in no doubt that Jesus would have little or no time for the little children.

Certain, then, that the Lord would not want to be bothered with children, His self-appointed bodyguard 'rebuked' those who brought them to Him.<sup>26</sup> **When Jesus saw this**, He was indignant<sup>27</sup> and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not prevent them, for of such is the kingdom of God".<sup>28</sup> He then folded them in His strong carpenter's arms 'and blessed them'.<sup>29</sup>

#### Endnotes

- 1 Mark 8. 32 (παρησιᾶ); rendered 'plainly', ESV. See the article, 'παρησιᾶ' by HEINRICH SCHLIER, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, volume V, pages 871-886, especially page 881.
- 2 Mark 8. 31.
- 3 Mark 8. 32.
- 4 Mark 8. 33.
- 5 John 19. 26.
- 6 Matt. 27. 28, 35.
- 7 It is quite likely that Mary and the Lord met again very soon after His death, during the 'forty days', when He 'shewed himself alive' to His disciples 'after his passion by many proofs', Acts 1. 3 RV. Certainly, we know that Mary was present among the 120 disciples at the 'upper-room' prayer meeting immediately following the Lord's ascension, for we read that then the apostles 'continued stedfastly in prayer, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus', Acts 1. 13, 14 RV. Yet, even if Mary did meet the Saviour during that forty-day period, their relationship would have been very different at that time. For then she would have been simply a disciple along with the others. The Lord Jesus would then be no longer her son; on the other side of death and resurrection, He would be to her, as to all His people, a living Lord and Saviour.
- 8 John 19. 27.
- 9 Mark 3. 31.
- 10 Mark 3. 33-35 lit.
- 11 Mark 3. 1.
- 12 Mark 3. 2, 4.
- 13 Luke 6. 7.
- 14 Mark 3. 2; cp. Exod. 31. 14, 15.
- 15 Mark 2. 23-28.
- 16 Mark 3. 4.
- 17 Note, 'to him who knows to do good, and does not do it, to him it is sin', Jas. 4. 17.
- 18 Cp. 1 Kgs. 13. 4.
- 19 Mark 3. 5 lit.
- 20 The tenses of the Greek verbs indicate

that Jesus was angry momentarily (aorist tense), but His attitude of compassion was persistent (present tense); THOMAS CONSTABLE, *Expository Notes on the Bible*, e-Sword resource, comment on Mark 3. 5.

21 Mark 10. 2-12; cp. Matt. 19. 3-9.

22 Matt. 19. 10.

23 Matt. 19. 12 ESV.

24 There seems little doubt that the young children were brought by their fathers (and not, as claimed by William Hutchings in his well-known Sunday School hymn, by their mothers – from 'Salem' or anywhere else). The word 'those' in 'his disciples rebuked those that brought them' is masculine, both in Mark 10. 13 and in the parallel account, Matt. 19. 13. For the fathers to have brought their little ones would have been consistent with what we know of Jewish practice. Speaking of the blessing of little children in the synagogue, the ancient Jewish law stipulated, 'After the father of the child had laid his hands on his child's head, he brought him to the elders one by one, and they also blessed him, and prayed that he might grow up famous in the Law, faithful in marriage, and abundant in good works', G. F. MACLEAR, *St. Mark* (Cambridge Greek Testament), Cambridge University Press, pg. 135. In all likelihood, therefore, it would have been the fathers who brought the babes to Jesus for Him to lay His hands on them and to 'pray', Matt. 19. 13. And the Lord did exactly what the synagogue elders did when fathers brought their children to them – He 'blessed' the babes, Mark 10. 16.

25 Mark 10. 13.

26 Mark 10. 13.

27 The same word (ἀγανακτέω) as is used of the ruler of the synagogue in Luke 13. 14.

28 Mark 10. 14 lit.

29 Mark 10. 16.

# Exodus 32 – A great sin – Israel worships the molten calf

By **TIM GESKE** Wausau, Wisconsin, USA

Every sin against a holy God is truly a great sin. Simply put, every sin has two basic evils, as Jeremiah states, 'For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water', 2. 13. Every sin separates us from God and brings about spiritual death, as demonstrated in the garden of Eden. While God is longsuffering and patient in His forthcoming judgement, there are some sins noted in the biblical record that particularly invite the wrath of God and cause His anger to wax hot. Such is the sin we find in Exodus chapter 32 in the case of Israel and the making of the molten calf. Three times in this chapter, the thought of a great sin is brought up.

It may be well to note some other examples of sins that are called great in the Bible, and we shall mention four.

- The sin of Sodom and Gomorrah. 'And the Lord said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous', Gen. 18. 20. The cry and weight of their sin was very grievous, begging the judgement of God.
- The sin of Eli's sons polluting the priesthood. 'Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord: for men abhorred the offering of the Lord', 1 Sam. 2. 17. Eli's sons are described by God as 'sons of Belial', meaning 'worthlessness', v. 12. Their sin was a vile corruption of the priesthood and caused immense dishonour to the name of the Lord.
- The sin of Jeroboam, son of Nebat. 'For he rent Israel from the house of David; and they made Jeroboam the son of Nebat king; and Jeroboam drave Israel from following the Lord, and made them sin a great sin', 2 Kgs. 17. 21. Who can even tell the greatness of this sin of corruption and division?
- The sin of Israel's idolatry. 'And it shall come to pass, when

thou shalt shew this people all these words, and they shall say unto thee, Wherefore hath the Lord pronounced all this great evil against us? or what is our iniquity? or what is our sin that we have committed against the Lord our God? Then shalt thou say unto them, Because your fathers have forsaken me, saith the Lord, and have walked after other gods, and have served them, and have worshipped them, and have forsaken me, and have not kept my law', Jer. 16. 10, 11. This sin caused the nation to be displaced and taken captive for seventy years.

These are all examples of 'a great sin' in the eyes of God. Now, in Exodus chapter 32, Moses is finishing his forty days upon Mount Sinai receiving the instructions for the tabernacle and the priesthood. As noted oftentimes, the number forty is a number of testing in the scriptures.<sup>1</sup>

Our passage begins with the scene in the camp of Israel. The congregation had been instructed to 'tarry . . . here for us, until we come again', Exod. 24. 14. Joshua attended Moses in the mount, where Moses went up to meet God. Waiting can be very difficult. Waiting often is a test of

our obedience and faith. God asks us to wait. The Thessalonians were described as waiting 'for his Son from heaven', 1 Thess. 1. 10.

In Moses' absence, Aaron and Hur have been left as a resource to the elders for attending to matters, if needed, Exod. 24. God is now communicating with Moses on the mount, specifically giving all the instructions and pattern for the tabernacle, its furniture, and the priesthood including the public sanctification of Aaron and his sons. The glorious provisions included the continual burnt offering and the Day of Atonement feast, pointing gloriously to Christ and His work of propitiation. All this was taking place on the top of the mount.

But, back down in the camp, the testing was building up to an explosion of unbelief. It started ever so simply enough with the statement, 'we do not know what has become of him [Moses]', 32. 1 NKJV; and yet, the decision to turn around completely was markedly bold, immediate, and definite – 'Up, make us gods which shall go before us'. This defiance came in spite of the recent revelation of God in the moral law (ch. 20) and the civil law (chh. 21-23) with repeated emphasis of absolute repulsion of idolatry. For example, read again the decalogue in Exodus chapter 20. Notice that after the tenth commandment, there is the reiteration of the exclusion of other gods and idols in verses 22 and 23.

Listed below are some of the many abhorrent elements in this sin which became part of the story of Israel's apostasy. Each one adds an extra dimension of astonishing treachery. As the reader finishes reading each point, one could add the phrase, 'and not only that, but'.

- 1) They said to Aaron, 'up, make us gods, which shall go before us' – idolatry by definition, 32. 1.
- 2) They used the gifts given to them by the Egyptians (earrings) in making the idol, cp. 12. 35, 36; 32. 3.
- 3) Aaron was held responsible for his participation, engraving the idol, 32. 21; Deut. 9. 20.

- 4) Aaron had been put in charge of the people. His responsibility was to lead them in the ways of the Lord.
- 5) God was at that very time speaking with Moses on the mount about anointing Aaron as high priest.
- 6) Aaron took time to melt gold and fashion it deliberately 'and there came out this calf', Exod. 32. 24. KEIL and DELITZSCH note the term is used for 'a young bull'.<sup>2</sup> This bull would be akin to the Egyptian god, Apis, which the Lord showed His power over in multiple plagues, particularly plague five, as well as six and seven.
- 7) This young bull was consequently credited by the Israelites to have brought them out of Egypt!
- 8) Aaron proclaimed a feast to the Lord, thereby committing an even greater sin by associating the name of the Lord with their sin.
- 9) The people rose up early to commit this sin. They had a lustful eagerness for this idolatry.
- 10) Israel offered burnt offerings and peace offerings to this bull. The offerings God had prescribed were intended to picture Christ.
- 11) They feasted in honour of the bull and ate and drank. The leaders of Israel had recently sat down and ate and drank when they sealed the covenant with God, 'And upon the nobles of the children of Israel he laid not his hand: also they saw God, and did eat and drink', Exod. 24. 11.
- 12) They rose up to play. So often in scripture, man-made religious feasts are a devilish device for sensuality as we shall see here.
- 13) They made themselves naked and brought shame upon themselves openly; and all this in the plain view of their enemies.
- 14) They gave reason for their enemies to blaspheme God.
- 15) They broke their covenant with the Lord. Three times, all Israel had previously vowed to do all that was in the law.<sup>3</sup>

God's wrath is now mentioned three times in verses 10, 11, and 12. Moses' anger is similar when he sees the magnitude of this great sin, vv. 19, 22.

We do well to seek out some lessons for ourselves. First, as WARREN WIERSBE has noted, 'Impatience is often the cause of impulsive actions that are sinful'.<sup>4</sup> Refusing to wait when we know waiting is required, preempts the workings of the Holy Spirit and the blessings of God. It also sets the stage for deviation of some sort.

Second, and in parallel to waiting, is the lesson of trusting the Lord. When we are willing to obediently trust the Lord with an eye of hope and faith, it will result in the resolve to continue waiting. This is an acquired attribute which is fruit from the Spirit's leading.

Third, we cannot but wonder how greatly it would have helped Israel to 'remember' what God had done for them already. His merciful, powerful, and loving character had been well established by His actions. The psalmist recalls, 'So he fed them according to the integrity of his heart; and guided them by the skilfulness of his hands', Ps. 78. 72. When recounting the sin of Israel in Exodus, the psalmist begins with 'Praise ye the Lord. O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever', 106. 1.

If only they would:

- Remember the harsh and bitter labour in Egypt, as well as the marvellous plagues and demonstrations of God's power.
- Remember the powerlessness of Egypt's idols and pantheistic worship seen in real time with the Lord's control over all of nature and creation.
- Remember the Red Sea deliverance.
- Remember Pharaoh's army washed up on the shore, dead.
- Remember the water flowing from the rock and the manna daily from heaven.
- Remember that God Himself spoke the commandments from this very Mount Sinai so that the people heard and were fearful and asked that Moses speak instead, Exod. 20. 19.
- Remember that after giving the ten commandments,

God Himself had especially re-emphasized not to make **any** graven image of Himself or anything in heaven or on earth, Exod. 20. 4-6, 22, 23.

- Remember that God was still on Mount Sinai and the mountain was ablaze.
- Remember that they are God's people and His firstborn, and they belong to Him. Their worship and service is not to Pharaoh, but it certainly was not to themselves that they had been redeemed.

The moral compass of Israel had previously been set by the Lord. Even more deeply had it been inscribed on their soul and conscience. Yet, ignoring all, they suppress their memory, reason, and thinking. They reset their moral compass and crave and lust and rebel.

Romans chapter 7 verse 13 sums up how God uses this to teach us the sinfulness of sin, 'But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful'.

In the next study, we shall trace the repercussions of Israel's 'molten calf' sin, God's multifaceted judgement, and follow Moses' intercession as to whether the Lord will destroy Israel, forgive Israel, or even dwell in the midst of Israel. Moses is learning and growing and asking to know more of God's ways.

#### Endnotes

- 1 We mention just a few: Moses fasting forty days on the mount; the twelve spies of Israel searching the land forty days; Elijah going forty days in the strength of God's provision in the wilderness; Jonah preaching to Ninevah of the impending judgement of God in forty days; and, of course, our Lord led of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted forty days.
- 2 C. F. KEIL and F. DELITZSCH, *Commentary of the O.T. Vol 1*, Hendrickson Publishers Inc. 2006, pg. 466.
- 3 Exod. 19. 8; 24. 3, 7.
- 4 WARREN WIERSBE, *The Bible Exposition Commentary - Pentateuch*, Cook Communications Ministries, 2006, pg. 245.

# DIVERSITY Part 3

## The assembly – diversity of gift but unity of operation Part 2

by **ANDREW WILSON** Brisbane, Australia

One common problem in church life today involves people trying to read their church traditions back into the Bible (often by picking an isolated proof-text) instead of starting with scripture and following where it leads. So, for example, some Christians read a formal class of priests, processions, liturgies, and sacraments back into the Bible, when the New Testament contains none of these things. Reformed churches, claiming to be biblical, have exchanged the Roman Catholic priest (as the special mediator between God and man via the sacraments) for the ordained minister who alone is qualified to administer the sacraments and preach the word. But, again, the New Testament does not mention this. Other Christians are prepared to do whatever works to draw people to Christ, copying the world or following the latest church growth fad. Some argue that the New Testament does not give us any pattern of church order, so we can pick and choose which bits of the Bible to include and which to ignore. But our Lord's own example of testing any question by appeal to scripture means we must look back, not to the Reformation, nor to ancient tradition, nor around at contemporary culture, but to God's inspired word as the supreme authority, and to apostolic example as our divinely ordained guide, in the church.

In a previous article we looked at three passages dealing with spiritual gifts and showed how all of them are concerned with the need for unity despite diversity. Here we turn to the fourth New Testament treatment of spiritual gifts, 1 Corinthians chapters 12 to 14, and see how the New Testament describes spiritual gifts being put into operation in the church gatherings.

### 1 Corinthians: disunity in the church

In 1 Corinthians, we have an acute case of disunity in the church. There is division over leaders in the church, exacerbated perhaps by racial differences between Jewish and Gentile believers, chh. 1-4; disputes over matters of church discipline, chh. 5, 6; differing opinions about secondary matters, like eating food offered to idols, chh. 8-10; social divisions between rich and poor at the Lord's Supper, ch. 11; and divisions

because of different spiritual gifts, chh. 12-14.

Paul points out the Trinitarian nature of their spiritual gifts: it is the same Spirit, the same Lord, and the same God who have given these gifts and work through these ministries, 12. 4-6. Just as in Ephesians, the picture of unity and diversity in the Godhead is a model for the unity and diversity of believers.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 12, Paul writes about two sorts of Christians who do not like the truth that all believers have spiritual gifts. First, some think they are good for nothing. Paul likens them to the foot or the ear who say, 'Because I am not the hand . . . [or] I am not the eye, I am not part of the body', vv. 15, 16. The other sort of Christian says that because others do not come up to his high standards, he would rather do it all himself; this is better than letting others have a

go and mess things up. But this is as ridiculous as an eye saying to a hand, 'I have no need of you'. All God's people have spiritual gifts, and all the gifts are important, just like all the parts of the body. 1 Corinthians chapter 13 teaches that unless the oil of love lubricates the machinery of the church, the engine will soon seize up.

### Spiritual gifts in the church gatherings

In 1 Corinthians, a gathering is described which includes the Lord's Supper and additionally provides freedom for the exercise of a variety of different edifying spiritual gifts. (Notice that the same expression, 'when you come together', is used in relation to the Lord's Supper, 1 Cor. 11. 17-20, and the use of gifts for edification, 14. 26; these are not two separate meetings, but the same gathering. We see the same dual-purpose meeting at the institution of the Lord's Supper in the Gospels and in Acts chapter. 1)

1 Corinthians chapter 14 verse 26 says, 'How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification'. LEON MORRIS writes, 'this little paragraph is very important in giving us the most intimate glimpse of the early church at worship'.<sup>2</sup> CRAIG BLOMBERG writes, 'opportunity is made available for all whom the Spirit leads on any given occasion to contribute'.<sup>3</sup> Numerous commentators remark on the fact that there is no mention of any church official leading the meeting.<sup>4</sup>

There are, however, guidelines for order. Verse 29 says, 'Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge', NKJV. Not only were multiple messages preached, but there was immediate evaluation and interaction, with discussion and questions. The women are to be silent, as verses 34 and 35 plainly state.

Finally, in verse 37, Paul says, 'If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord'. The principles of church gathering here

are not Paul's suggestions, but God's commands. Nor (as some allege) is this a description of some disorderly arrangement found only in Corinth, for Paul in one of his transitional remarks says these guidelines are found in 'all the churches of the saints', v. 33. So, the purpose of the church gathering is two-fold: first, to remember the Lord, and second, to encourage and build each other up by using our spiritual gifts.

Nor is 1 Corinthians chapter 14 verses 26 to 40 the only passage that pictures such arrangements. 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 verses 19 to 21 speaks of the same spiritual freedom in church life when it says, 'Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Test all things, hold fast to what is good', NKJV. I. H. MARSHALL writes, 'what is set out in detail in 1 Cor. 12-14 is stated here summarily. The Spirit is powerful and active like fire in the congregation . . . Gifts for ministry were being exercised, but some people were trying to suppress them (we don't know just how), but it is wrong to do so'.<sup>5</sup>

Not all meetings must follow this 'open' format, or be held on the Lord's Day, for in the New Testament there were other occasions where one person preached, whether in evangelism or instruction, but this pattern applies to the main church meeting.

There are many ways in which we can quench the Spirit by adopting



a distorted form of biblical church gathering, without putting into operation what it really says. Many churches today have abandoned the Lord's Supper, or reduced it to a brief, token, empty ritual. The result is that believers' hearts are not warmed as they think on the adorable person of Christ.

There is another problem if we only have the Lord's Supper, without the free exercise of spiritual gifts because the New Testament never describes a meeting that is just for the Lord's Supper. Paul says, 'let all things be done for edification', 1 Cor. 14. 26, but if we change it to, 'let all things be done for worship and remembrance', the result is that no one is taught, and no one grows by using their spiritual gifts. Sadly, even the worship is affected when we are not fed, so we have spiritual staleness, long pauses, and 'tape-recorder' prayers. Or there might be a little time allowed at the end for a brief word. But 1 Corinthians chapter 14 teaches there is opportunity for multiple brothers to use various spiritual gifts. In the New Testament, they had two or three main messages every Sunday, with a mini Bible study after each. Rather than a yearly conference, they had one every Lord's Day; God's people enjoyed a three-course spiritual feast every week. No wonder the churches in the New Testament grew and spread so rapidly.

Another problem in putting the New Testament church gathering into practice arises if there is no control or guidance. Some people will stand up and speak off the top of their head (though there was nothing in their head to begin with) or try to teach the Bible when this is not their gift, or give out too many hymns (after three or four hymns there is little impact). The Pastoral Epistles give many more examples of unprofitable contributions to the open meeting that the apostle criticized: legalists, long-winded bores, and assorted false teachers, e.g., 1 Tim. 1. 3-7. In the New Testament, there was freedom, but there was also quality and quantity control. Those who are shy and retiring need to be encouraged to take part, while others sometimes need to be gently and lovingly corrected. The

open meeting is not a free-for-all.

The present author has found the 'open meeting' one of the greatest blessings of his spiritual life. There is nothing more encouraging than seeing a young brother taking the first steps of spiritual growth by contributing out of love for Christ and God's word. But, on the other hand, such meetings can lead to spiritual famine if the Spirit is quenched by man's rules and traditions, or un-Christlike shepherding.

PROFESSOR RENDLE SHORT wrote, 'When Paul heard what painful meetings they were having in Corinth, he might have said: "Do not listen any longer to all these ignorant people, mostly slaves; make Stephanos your minister, and let him do it all". No doubt this would have helped very much in some directions; but the Apostle was not prepared to give up the open meeting; it was far too valuable. He did not want to make churches like comets – with a brilliant head, and a long nebulous tail. He told them, however, – and it is very important to put the injunction into practice – that the assembly was not called upon to listen to everybody who chose to make a nuisance of himself, or who talked unprofitably. There were some "whose mouths must be stopped" (Tit. 1:11). The listeners were to be the judges (1 Cor. 14:27-29).

It was an open meeting, but there were rules to be obeyed. It was a meeting open for the Spirit to speak by whom He would, not open for men to say what they pleased'.<sup>6</sup>

#### Endnotes

- 1 Paul did not preach a sermon in Acts chapter 20 verse 7 – the Greek word used is *dialogomai*, which means to dialogue, discuss, converse.
- 2 LEON MORRIS, *1 Corinthians*, TNTC, IVP, 1985, pg. 190.
- 3 CRAIG BLOMBERG, *The NIV Application Commentary*, Zondervan, 1994, pg. 278.
- 4 See ANDREW WILSON, *Do Not Quench the Spirit: a Biblical and Practical Guide to Participatory Church Gatherings*, Believers Publications, 2016, pp. 29-33.
- 5 I. H. MARSHALL, *1 Thessalonians, New Bible Commentary*, IVP, 1994, pg. 1284.
- 6 A. R. SHORT, *The Principles of Christians called 'Open Brethren'*, Pickering and Inglis, 1913.

# Reflections on the Cross

## Part 6 ITS DETRACTORS

By **ERNEST ABBOTT** Singapore

Around the cross itself, we have four classes of people: the soldiers; the religious people; the criminals; and the passers-by. These four classes of people each make some derogatory remarks about our Lord. We may take these groups as representative in general. The world is full of religious people who, in their supposed cleverness, reject the claims of the only Saviour of the world. The soldiers represent the might of Rome, the passers-by the 'man in the street', those who tend not to think for themselves but follow the crowd. The criminals represent those who are outside the law and the normal flow of society. All these groups reject the cross and its claims.

The passers-by, or the ordinary people, take out of context or misunderstand the words of our Lord. 'Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross', Matt. 27. 40. There are a number of points in their comments to look at. First, the destroying of the temple was the only accusation that the false witnesses could agree upon at the trial of the Lord, 26. 61. In one confrontation with the Jews where they were seeking a sign, the Lord answered by pointing to the cross and the resurrection, John 2. 18, 19. The temple that the Lord spoke of was His body. The destruction was His death, and the rebuilding was pointing to His resurrection.

What we see from the passers-by is what we see from the spiritually ignorant and ill-informed in the world today. Their attempt to detract from the Lord and His cross is really a judgement on themselves. He that believeth not is condemned already, 3. 18.

Second, we note that there is a mention of salvation which we shall look at in more detail later.

Third, there is the seeking of a sign, which is something that was characteristic of the Jews, 1 Cor. 1. 22; John 2. 18, but the Lord had already told them plainly that no sign

would be given, except that of the prophet Jonah, Matt. 12. 39. The greatest sign that could be given was taking place before their eyes, yet they could not see it.

Fourth, we note the common language between the passers-by and that of the Devil, in the words 'if thou be the Son of God', 4. 6; 27. 40; these words have the same origin and are said in a futile attempt to frustrate the purposes of God.

Next, we shall look at the religious leaders, who, although they held themselves up as virtuous and the protectors of the law of Moses, were really no better than the passers-by. Again, there is the theme of salvation, 27. 42, and the seeking of a sign. The religious leaders refer to the Lord as 'the King of Israel'. On their lips, it is no statement of faith, as in the case of Nathanael, John 1. 49; it is a statement of mocking derision and contempt. The Lord is the true King of Israel, something that was recognized not only by Nathanael, but also by the crowds on what is commonly known as Palm Sunday, 12. 13.

The religious leaders taunted the Lord with words from Psalm 22 verse 8, and, in so doing, unwittingly fulfilled the prophecies of the psalm, Matt. 27. 43.

When we come to the malefactors, there is again the thought of

salvation. In His dealings with the repentant malefactor, the Lord demonstrates that even in His dying hour, He saves others.

The final group of mockers were the soldiers, the representatives of Rome. These rough and brutish men made sport of their victims, mercilessly mocking our Lord with a cruel mock coronation, v. 29, the humiliating, degrading scourging, and the gambling for the Lord's seamless garment. To these soldiers, this crucifixion would be the same as many others. This one, however, was different; what they missed (except perhaps one of them, 27. 54) was that 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself', 2 Cor. 5. 19.

We have noted that the theme of salvation occurs several times. What the mockers missed was that the work of salvation was taking place before their eyes. Indeed, the name of Jesus given to the Lord at His birth means 'Jehovah the Saviour'.

The Gentiles, in their mocking, used the title 'King of the Jews', Matt. 27. 29. This is a political title, and one the Lord could rightly claim, 2. 2. When He entered into Jerusalem as the King of the Jews, He was rejected. However, there is a day to come when He will enter Jerusalem in fulfilment of Zechariah's prophecy, Zech. 9. 9. The Jews referred to the Lord as King of Israel, which has messianic and religious implications. The King they were waiting for, when presented to them, they rejected in favour of a Caesar, John 19. 14, 15.

Both Jews and Gentiles could not see that the one hanging on the cross was the King of kings and Lord of lords, Rev. 19. 16, but they will, one day, bow their knee to Him, Phil. 2. 10.

The cross will never be without its detractors; those who deride the blessed Saviour. The cross may be foolishness to some, a stumbling block to others, but unto us which are saved it is the power of God, 1 Cor. 1. 18.



Edited by  
**ANDREW DUTTON**

**YOUNG PRECIOUS SEED**

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## Editor's Introduction

Welcome to the May issue of YPS. Perhaps this will provide a welcome break from exam preparation or other work pressures.

Thanks to Richard Smith for his series on the Kings of Judah – I hope you enjoy his last article on Hezekiah, along with the other articles in this issue..

Andrew Dutton

## Seeing the world through a biblical lens – biblical femininity

STEPHEN G. BAKER, LIVERPOOL, ENGLAND



The previous article on masculinity focused on the uniqueness of being a man from a biblical perspective. This article is about what the Bible says about being a woman. As I start this article, let me remind you of a couple of general points:

- Humans are unique. The creation of humans on day six of creation week was the peak of the creation process. It is said uniquely of humans that they were created in the image of God, Gen. 1. 27. But, as we consider the characteristics of men and women, bear in mind that God is so great that we can never fully reflect His glory.
- We are distinct from animals. The cultural trend, because people have rejected God and rebelled against Him, is to see humans purely as a higher form of animal. The bullet point above has addressed that in part, but human memory, imagination, creativity, language, our ability to cook, our dexterity, our moral responsibility, and our spiritual awareness force us to consider how different we are.
- There is a distinction between the sexes. God has created men and women with distinctive qualities. We may have many similarities, but there is something very special about women. This is equally true about men, and if we miss this we lose sight of what an amazing work God did in creating people.
- An attack on these truths is an attack on God's glory and His creatorial order. He made us to be similar and yet different. To ignore this and force the sexes into the same mould is insulting to God and damaging to us, and wastes what we have to offer in life practically.
- The church should restore and reflect the order of creation. This will be done by practising the truth of headship and seeing the roles of men and women in the church and in the family as complementary. This topic will be addressed in more detail in a later article.

### The creation of the 'first lady'

We do not really know how long it was after Adam's creation that God created the first woman, Eve. It doesn't look as if it could have been long, but we are not told. What we are told is that, despite their beauty, intriguing variety, and amazing

abilities, the animal creation did not 'fit the bill' when it came to satisfying Adam's needs. Scripture says, 'there was no helper . . . [just right for] him', Gen. 2. 20 NKJV. Animals could not provide the social interaction he needed; they could not stimulate him intellectually; they did not meet his emotional needs and would never satisfy his sexual needs either.

Basically, God created the 'first lady' because Adam was incomplete without her. He had a need and an emptiness without this companionship. It was declared that it was 'not good [beneficial] that man should be alone', v. 18 NKJV. So, God said that He would make him someone who balanced him – a counterpart who was suitable and complementary for him. She was going to be profoundly like him ('bone of my bones', Gen. 2. 23) and yet profoundly distinct.

Having looked at why the woman was created, let us, for the rest of this article, consider what type of person God created when he created a woman. Women are generally known (there are always exceptions) for their appreciation of beauty, their care for their appearance and dress sense, their ability to communicate, their empathy, their loyalty, their passions and emotions, and their kindness and care. They have gentleness where a man might be rough; they have perception when a man with his single vision can't see it, giving them additional insight and foresight. Working together, men and women can be a powerful combination; working against each other is a recipe for devastation and disaster. When sin came into the world, the devil sought to bring conflict and disagreement between the sexes, which sadly is still seen in our day.

In closing, I want to point you to a few passages that emphasize God's design for femininity.

### Proverbs 31. 10-31

This is the most comprehensive portrait of a God-fearing lady in the Bible and a great example of womanhood.

- She is a person of great integrity who can be trusted, v. 10, 11, 12, 18, 25, 26.

- She is a strong person who handles many situations in life well, vv. 17, 18, 20, 21, 25, 27.
- She dresses herself and her family well and appreciates beauty, vv. 21, 22, 24.
- She is intelligent, perceptive and dignified, vv. 11, 25, 26, 27.
- She is careful with money and resources, vv. 11, 13, 16, 27.
- She is entrepreneurial and an organizer, vv. 13, 16, 18, 24.
- She has a care for family and the community, vv. 11, 12, 15, 20, 21, 25, 27.

- She is kind and thoughtful in how she does things and when giving instructions, v. 26.
- The fear of the Lord is her foundation, v. 30.

This is not a checklist but a celebration of Spirit-shaped womanhood. Other passages you could explore that describe biblical femininity include: 1 Peter 3. 3, 4 and Titus 2. 3-5. That can be your homework. If you are really interested, read the life stories of Miriam, Deborah, Ruth, and Mary, and you will see some great role models to learn from.

# 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 Version

## Hezekiah

The cycle of the kings is repetitive. The good kings tend to do similar things; the rascals do too. There was a pattern to their behaviour: the bad kings abandoned what was important to God – His word, His house, and His people, while the better kings invested their reign in reversing their predecessors' wickedness. In this final article, we will examine one of the great reforming kings, Hezekiah. 'He did what was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father David had done', 2 Chr. 29. 2. Hezekiah was not perfect but is one of the finest of the kings. It is good to see the order in which Hezekiah worked in 2 Chronicles chapters 29 and 30:

1. He restored the temple, 29. 3-19.
  2. He resumed temple worship, 29. 20-36.
  3. He remembered the Passover, chapter 30.
1. To achieve anything for God we must remove all obstacles in our life to God working effectively. These could include:
    - **Sinful behaviour:** God will not give the blessing He longs for us if there is known, habitual, unconfessed sin in our lives. 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear', Ps. 66. 18. Sin must be confessed and removed with the determination that it will not recur. God is faithful, 'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness', 1 John 1. 9.
    - **Time-wasting behaviour:** How many of us spend too much time 'doom-scrolling' on our phones? 'Harmless' distractions can rob us of hours of time, 'All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful', 1 Cor. 6.12.
    - **Super-spiritual behaviour:** It is possible that we are so busy going to conferences, camps, young-people's weekends and gospel outreaches, that we don't spend the time we should nurturing our own relationship with God. We need to be careful that we aren't too busy to spend time on our own in the word of God and in prayer. We should also not be 'forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another', Heb. 10. 25. The fellowship of God's people is more important in these 'last days' than ever before. However, in 'your room', Matt. 6. 6, is where you experience God. JACK HUNTER used to tell us to 'read your **own Bible**, get to know your **own God!**' Therefore, 'let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which

so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us', Heb. 12. 1.

2. Having removed what shouldn't be there, Hezekiah can introduce something positive: worship. There is no real biblical definition of worship. It is an acknowledgement of God, His nature, attributes and claims, expressed in praise, thankfulness, and action. Old Testament worship was visible and audible, 'Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet; Praise Him with the lute and harp! Praise Him with the timbrel and dance; Praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes! Praise Him with loud cymbals; Praise Him with clashing cymbals! Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!' Ps. 150. 3-6. The New Testament doesn't mention music; it is not forbidden in the church, but accompaniment should not be the focus, 'The hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth', John 4. 23. Worship is not prescribed by legal dictate; it comes from an understanding of truth. Worship is not an expression of emotion or feelings, rather an expression of what I know of God:
  - a. in His character, 'Give to the Lord the glory due His name', Ps. 96. 8.
  - b. in His actions, 'Sing praises to the Lord, for he has done gloriously', Isa. 12. 5 ESV.
 'What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me?' Ps. 116. 12. What is the acceptable response? 'I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service', Rom. 12. 1. Worship involves sacrifice – not of animals being offered, but of a life laid down for the Lord.
3. With worship comes rejoicing. The Passover was a celebration in the Jewish calendar, when they recalled the great redemption from Egypt, that the nation had known. Many gathered in Jerusalem in 2 Chronicles chapter 30. There was 'great gladness', v. 21, praise, and singing. They 'rejoiced', v. 25, and there was 'great joy', v. 26. To top it all off, 'their voice was heard; and their prayer came up to His holy dwelling place, to heaven', v. 27. God loves to hear His people's praise and worship, 'Whoever offers praise glorifies Me', Ps. 50. 23. Isn't that our chief desire? It makes Him rejoice; it also makes us glad!

# Christian basics – spiritual gifts (continued)

ANDREW DUTTON, NORWICH, ENGLAND

I remember, when I was younger, often hearing Bible teachers state 'all scripture is for us, but not all scripture is about us'. This remains good advice and a helpful starting point for Bible study. We need to understand **what** the scripture is teaching and **when** it applies to our Christian lives and service. This is important when approaching the subject of spiritual gifts.

Summarizing our last article, we emphasized:

1. every believer has received a spiritual gift, 1. Cor. 12. 1; 1 Pet. 4. 10.
2. all believers need to work together using their different gifts, 1 Cor. 12. 15-30.
3. that God has given individuals with gifts to benefit the people of God, Eph. 4. 12.

In this article, we are going to touch on gifts themselves. However, this is a big subject, covered in 1 Corinthians chapters 12 to 14, Romans chapter 12, and Ephesians chapter 4. The aim is to set out some principles and encourage you to dig deeper into these passages!

## Are all spiritual gifts active today?

1 Corinthians chapter 12 provides a long list of spiritual gifts. Paul was teaching about gifts that were active at the time of the apostles and, in chapters 13 and 14, how they were to operate harmoniously in love – this is what we must strive for today and is the emphasis of the teaching. But many of the gifts listed by Paul were temporary; here are examples from verse 28:

- **Apostles** were chosen by the Lord Jesus, Mark 3. 13-15, and they were also personal witnesses to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, Acts 1. 22; 4. 33. Apostles also had the task of completing the written word of God, John 16. 13-15, and 2 Pet. 3. 2. This gift was therefore limited to the twelve (including Matthias), plus Paul, to whom the risen Lord uniquely revealed Himself on the Damascus Road.
- **Prophecy** revealed the mind of God, and was only necessary until the completion of the scriptures, Rom. 16. 26.
- **Miracles** as a gift, were limited to the early days of the church, and examples include the raising of Dorcas from the dead, Acts 9. 40.

## Lasting gifts from 1 Corinthians chapter 12

Of the many spiritual gifts listed, the following are lasting and required until the Lord Jesus returns to take us to be with Himself:

- **Teachers**, vv. 28, 29, are those that explain and apply the scriptures practically to Christians.
- **Helps**, v. 28, seems to be a wider ranging spiritual

gift such as the ability to 'support the weak', Acts 20. 35, and to 'comfort the fainthearted', 1 Thess. 5. 14 NKJV. Phebe is described as 'a servant of the church', Rom. 16. 1, whose work was to protect and care for the believers, v. 2.

- **Governments**, v. 28, refers to guiding and leading through difficulty, just as a captain steers a ship.

In Romans chapter 12, there is service, v. 7, 'exhortation', v. 8, meaning to comfort and encourage, and showing 'mercy', v. 8; this is practically relieving the burdens of others.

Paul also speaks about 'evangelists and . . . pastors', Eph. 4. 11, focussing on men given by God to local churches. There is a sense in which all Christians should be involved in 'the work of an evangelist', 2 Tim. 4. 5, but recognizing that there are some that the Lord has specially fitted for this work.

## Practical points to note

In considering the spiritual gifts in the scriptures, the following points may help you:

- Be serious about studying the scriptures to understand what is being taught.
- Pray for help to understand and base your convictions on the scriptures. This will safeguard you against other views that you will come across.
- Continue with the points from the last article: commit to God and be serious about your spiritual gift and ask the Lord for help in finding ways to serve Him; consider the guidance of older believers and be prepared to work at being prepared by God for service, Gal. 1. 15-18.



# Saints' CVs: John Laing

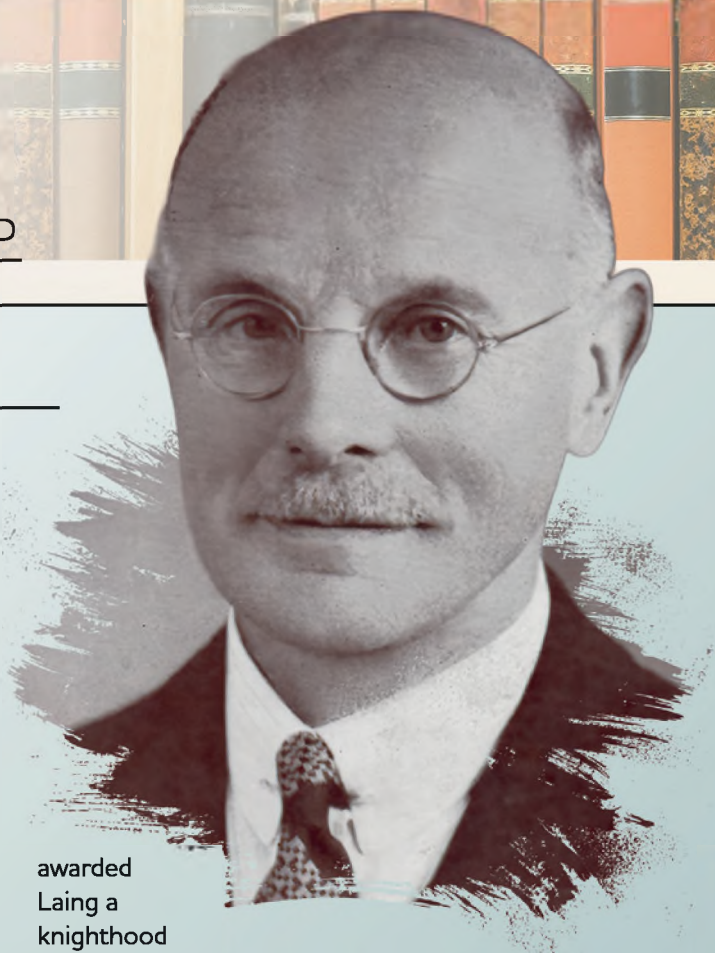
BY JEREMY SINGER, BRIDGE OF WEIR, SCOTLAND

## JOHN LAING 1879-1978

John Laing was a builder who positioned his firm to become one of Britain's largest civil engineering companies in the 20th century, with a listing on the London Stock Exchange. When Laing left school to join the Carlisle-based family construction business, it was simply involved in the local building trade. Although his father was the owner, Laing served as an ordinary apprentice for three years, learning bricklaying and other practical construction skills. After this, he was promoted to become a project manager in his late teens, rising to company director of John Laing & Son plc by 1920.<sup>1</sup> However, Laing had already made a much more important commitment in his life; he had taken the important step of trusting the Lord Jesus as Saviour when he was a child of seven.

An engineering contract in Barrow proved particularly challenging in 1907. There was a law case which, if he lost, would have led to the family being bankrupted. However, Laing emerged relatively unscathed financially; the legal finding was that the original contract had been unfair against Laing's company. During this stressful period of uncertainty, Laing made a solemn commitment before the Lord, to 'make Him a participating partner in his business'.<sup>2</sup> Once the legal case was concluded, Laing wrote down his 'programme for life', which he summarized as being: 'First, the centre of my life was to be God – God as seen in Jesus Christ; secondly, I was going to enjoy life, and help others to enjoy it'.<sup>3</sup> He also drew up a financial plan, in which he pledged to give to the Lord increasingly large proportions of his money as his annual income grew.

Laing's company became a national player, moving from simple construction work into complex civil engineering projects. They put up large housing estates, major highways, and factories. This increasing success led to growing profits. During World War II, his company built airfields, secret RAF Bomber Command headquarters, and the famous Mulberry Harbours for the D-Day landings. Post-war reconstruction work included the new Coventry Cathedral, after the original cathedral was ruined by wartime bombing raids. Queen Elizabeth II



awarded  
Laing a  
knighthood

for this project, which he insisted his firm would complete on a non-profit making basis. He followed the same selfless principle for other church building projects.

The company looked after its employees well, in keeping with the philosophy of the director. Laing ensured staff enjoyed holidays with pay, a company pension, and bonus payments when appropriate. Such benefits were not common at the time.

His massive financial success led to increasing generosity in supporting Christian work in the UK and around the world. He set up several charitable trusts for this purpose. The gifts disbursed by his trusts total more than £200 million, according to publicly available records.<sup>4</sup> The trusts continue to operate long after Laing's death in 1978. Despite all the wealth he had generated in his lifetime, when he died Laing's personal possessions were valued at merely £371.<sup>5</sup>

John Laing was first and foremost a builder. But he didn't only work in brick and concrete. His construction materials were also 'gold, silver, precious stones', 1 Cor. 3. 12. These durable contributions will outlast time and count for eternity. Laing's life experience teaches us that it's possible for believers to combine successful business ownership with Christ-exalting spiritual service.

<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Laing\\_Group](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Laing_Group).

<sup>2</sup> F. R. COAD, *Laing: The Biography of Sir John W. Laing, CBE (1879-1978)*, Hodder & Stoughton, 1979, pg. 50.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 51.

<sup>4</sup> A. MCILHINNEY, *The Service of Giving: Sir John Laing and his Trusts, 1922-2022*, OPAL Trust, 2022, pg. 298.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.johnlaingcharitabletrust.com/about-us/about-sir-john-laing/>.

# THE PERSON AND WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

## Part 2 Sealed with, grieve not, quench not the Holy Spirit

By **TIM COLTMAN** Winshill, England

In our previous article we saw that the Holy Spirit is not a force but a member of the Godhead. We mentioned some of the names given to the Holy Spirit and considered the promise and the coming of the Holy Spirit. In this study we would like to think of what the scriptures teach us regarding the moment we as believers received the Holy Spirit.

### Sealed with the Holy Spirit, Eph. 1. 13, 14

‘After that ye believed’ – the thought is that of ‘upon believing’, or ‘having also believed’. There is no thought of a gap in time between believing and receiving the Holy Spirit.

‘Ye were sealed’ – a seal is the idea of a private mark or stamp. We see the use of the seal elsewhere in scripture. For example, Jezebel wrote letters in Ahab’s name, and sealed them with his seal, 1 Kgs. 21. 8. We also have the seal mentioned in Daniel chapter 6 verse 17, where the stone was ‘laid upon the mouth of the den [of lions]; and the king sealed it with his own signet’. In Matthew chapter 27 verse 66 in relation to the Lord, ‘they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch’.

As we think of those things that were sealed in scripture, it points us to concepts of authority, identity, ownership, and possession. Similarly, when a farmer buys cattle or sheep, he will identify them as belonging to him, either with a brand or mark. It is the price he paid for them that makes them his and not the mark or branding. The mark shows who they belong to.

The challenge for us today is that as we live our life is it clear to whom we belong? We have not been marked physically with a seal, but it should be evident to those around us that we are different. Our life is different – our conversation, where we go, and

how we live. Also, how we respond to situations in life, the joy within us, and the hope before us, should mark us. We have been bought with a price. The Lord Jesus paid the ultimate price, and we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.

Paul then mentions ‘the earnest of our inheritance’, Eph. 1. 14. An ‘earnest’ has in view a deposit, a pledge, or a down payment. It declares that there is more to follow. The example of the giving of an engagement ring has often been used. When the engagement ring is given, it is a pledge and a promise that more will follow at the marriage.

What blessings are ours now, that is, what we are a part of and have entered into, and what greater things will be ours in a coming day – the promise of our inheritance.

### Grieve not the Holy Spirit, Eph. 4. 30

It is a solemn thing, a warning, when Paul writes and says that it is possible for us to grieve the Holy Spirit. The word ‘grieve’, *lypeo*, has the thought of making sorrowful, or ‘to cause grief’. We have already seen that the Holy Spirit can be lied to, Acts 5. 3, and resisted, 7. 51. Now, Paul says, ‘grieve not the Holy Spirit’.

What can grieve the Holy Spirit? Through these verses, Paul mentions lying, anger, stealing, corrupt communication, bitterness, and wrath. We should not be marked by

conversation which is harmful. To bring that up to date, the email that we send, or message we post onto a chat – is it for the edifying of those that will receive it? Are we building up the Lord’s people, or working as a busybody? Corrupt communication has the thought of being rotten, putrefied, and not fit for use.

Of things that will grieve the Spirit, Paul says they need to be put off or ‘put away’, v. 31. We should be a people who edify and build up the saints. In contrast to those things that would grieve the ‘holy Spirit of God’, is an appeal, ‘Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you’, v. 32.

### Quench not the Spirit 1 Thess. 5. 19

The word ‘quench’ means ‘extinguish’, ‘stifle’, or ‘hinder’. Scripture teaches that we have each been given a gift, and all should be encouraged to exercise that gift, no matter how young or how old we are, or how long we have been on the Christian pathway. What a privilege to use and exercise the gift that we have been given.

If we were to operate a one-man ministry, the gifts that have been given to the saints would not be used and evident, and that would be to the detriment of the assembly, denying the Lord what is rightfully His. This is an example of quenching the Spirit.

Paul encourages Timothy to ‘stir up [fan into flame] the gift of God, which is in thee’, 2 Tim 1. 6. We all should see our responsibility to use the gift that we have been given, all coming together prepared to offer our worship both audibly and silently. So, at the prayer meeting, and as we come together to serve and work, using the gifts that God has given us, we should ultimately please Him and be for His glory. Let us not be a people that hinder and stifle the Holy Spirit.

What an encouragement to think that we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance, but also to think of the challenge that we might not grieve or quench the Spirit.

# TITLES OF JEHOVAH 8

# JEHOVAH HELEYON

# THE LORD MOST HIGH

By **ANDREW WARE** Melbourne, Australia

'In the year that King Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up', Isa. 6. 1. When we stop and think, the vision that Isaiah saw in the opening of the sixth chapter of his prophecy, is almost beyond human comprehension. Here was One greater and higher than any mortal king of this world. Here was One who was the centre of the seraphim's song – 'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory', v. 3. Little wonder that Isaiah's response is, 'Woe is me!' v. 5. Although the title of the Lord in this passage is the 'Lord of Hosts', this scene also reveals the One who is known as the 'Lord Most High'.

*Jehovah Heleyon*<sup>1</sup> first appears at the end of Psalm 7, 'I will praise the Lord according to his righteousness: and will sing praise to the name of the Lord most high', v. 17. The specific title only occurs three times, and all within the Psalms, the other two being Psalm 47 verse 2 and Psalm 97 verse 9.<sup>2</sup> However, 'Heleyon' is a multifaceted title, not only linked with the name *Jehovah*, but with 'God', El, and on many occasions simply used alone as 'the Most High'.<sup>3</sup> There is also one occasion where He is spoken of as 'the Lord, God Most High', Gen. 14. 22 NKJV. The title 'Heleyon' is a metonym, where the description of one of the Lord's attributes becomes a title – He is the highest, there is nothing and no one greater or more glorious than Him. He is above and over all things – so He has the title: Lord Most High.<sup>4</sup>

So, the title is an indication of His **supremacy**; however, as we shall see, it is also used particularly as an indication of His relationship with nations outside of His covenant people, or those who are the enemies of God's people. He is the God of all nations, even those who fail to recognize Him as such, so it is a title that speaks of His **sovereignty**. This means that the title is often pointing forward

ultimately to the Lord Jesus Christ's return and reign in the millennium.

## The Most High

The first time 'most high' appears is in the interaction of Abram and Melchizedek in Genesis chapter 14 verses 17 to 20. Melchizedek, Salem's king, is identified as 'priest of the most high God', v. 18; this is *El Heleyon*. It is then repeated in verses 19 and 20, when Melchizedek himself speaks of God as he blesses both Abram and the Lord. The Gentile priest-king knows Him as 'the most high God'; however, when Abram speaks, the title on his lips is 'the Lord, the most high God', v. 22. This is a fascinating difference in how these two men speak of the Lord. Particularly, it is the one to whom promises were given, in chapters 12 and 13, and with whom later the covenant was made in chapter 15 that speaks of Him as the Lord. Indeed, He will reveal Himself by this name to Abram, 'I am the Lord', Gen. 15. 7. The one that the nations may know as 'God most high', is the one His people know by name, *Jehovah*.

That it is a name that seems uniquely linked to how the Lord is known to the nations is further seen in the other two times the title is used in the Pentateuch. Balaam was

a disobedient man, yet he spoke of knowing 'the knowledge of the most High', Num. 24. 16. Also, Moses in Deuteronomy chapter 32 says that 'the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance. . . [and] fixed the borders of the peoples', v. 8 ESV. Even though on the tongue of His servant, the title is used in describing the Lord's action towards the nations in general.

## The Lord most high

So, what is the distinct meaning of *Jehovah Heleyon*? In many ways, Abraham's words above open this up for us. The one who is the Most High, is the Lord of His people in a distinct way. So, when we come to the Psalms, this title is full of comfort for us – as well as wonderful expectation of a future day. Psalm 7 is a cry to the Lord who is the righteous Judge. In verses 1 and 2, David cries out for relief and deliverance from 'those who persecute' him, v. 1 NKJV. The superscription of the Psalm gives an indication of the specific circumstances, 'concerning the words of Cush, a Benjamite'. The identity of this Cush is something of a mystery. Whoever it is that verbally assails David, his cry is to the Lord as judge. His enemy is lion-like in his attack, v. 2, and we can know something of this when others speak against us. Peter also tells us of 'your adversary the devil . . . a roaring lion', 1 Pet. 5. 8, who accuses the brethren, Rev. 12. 10. In Psalm 7, verses 3 to 5 are a plea of innocence; whatever the charge was levelled at David, he believed he was clear of it for he says 'if I have done this', v. 3. If he was guilty, he would be willing to take the consequence, vv. 4, 5, but as far as he is aware it is a false charge, so verses 6 and 7 are a cry for the Lord to 'arise . . . in thine anger', v. 6. He is calling for the Judge to stand up for him; after all there is 'none to deliver', v. 2, no one else is any help. Through verses 8 to 11, three times the Lord is identified as the Judge – beginning with the statement, 'the Lord shall judge the people', and followed by the request 'judge me, O Lord', v. 8. All this leads to the statement that 'God is a just judge, and God is angry with the wicked

every day', v. 11 NKJV, before going on to list the sins and the Lord's judgement on them, vv. 12-16. It is then at the end of the Psalm, that David says he 'will sing praise to the name of the Lord most high', v. 17. What a comfort for us to know, like David, that despite all of the evil words and actions of men, even levelled at us, there is a righteous judge, supreme above it all.

Not a cry for justice, Psalm 47 is an exaltation of the One who is the ruler over all. The superscription here is a 'Psalm for the sons of Korah', an interesting group who are associated with eleven psalms.<sup>5</sup> These men were linked to worship in the temple, 2 Chr. 20. 19, and this psalm is a song of unbridled worship to God. Verse 1 is a call to praise – instructing all peoples to 'clap your hands', and to 'shout unto God'. Why? Because 'the Lord most high is to be feared . . . a great King over all the earth', v. 2 NEWBERRY margin. **All** people should praise Him because He is over **all**. Notice again, the title 'Heleyon' is linked to the nations. However, although the call goes out to all peoples, in the present tense in verse 1, there is future emphasis for Israel when 'He shall subdue the

people under us', v. 3, those who are the 'excellency of Jacob whom he loved', v. 4. Verses 7 to 9 indicate that this reign covers 'all the earth', v. 7, and is 'over the heathen', v. 8. While there is no doubt of His eternal reign, when will it be that 'the princes of the peoples gather . . . [and] the shields of the earth belong to God', v. 9 ESV? It will be in the millennium. In that day, the Lord Most High who is the eternal King, will be King on the earth as well as over it.

Psalm 97 verse 9 contains the last reference to this title, though various translations have different renderings.<sup>6</sup> The NASB rendering is, 'for You are the Lord Most High over all the earth'. In any case, 'Jehovah' and 'heleyon' are in verse 9, so the thought comes through despite translator choices. We know no author or context for this psalm, but 'the Lord reigns', v. 1 NJKV, is the triumphant opening statement. Indeed, verse 5 declares that He is 'the Lord of the whole earth'. But, as well as the reign of the Lord, there is emphasis on His battles against His enemies, vv. 2-5, and particularly against their idolatry, vv. 7-9. The idols are nothing, for He is the Lord most

high who is 'exalted far above all gods', v. 9. They are the ones who should bow to Him – 'worship him, all ye gods', v. 7. In many ways, the judge and king themes of Psalms 7 and 47 find their culmination here, and this psalm seems to point distinctly to Christ's return. With phrases like 'fire goeth before him', v. 3, and 'the hills melted like wax', v. 5, and 'all the peoples see His glory', v. 6 NKJV, it is plain to see 'the consummation to come at Messiah's second appearing'.<sup>7</sup> When Gabriel spoke to Mary concerning her child, he said, 'He shall be great and shall be called the Son of the Highest', Luke 1. 32.<sup>8</sup> The Most High came in lowliness then, but He will return with 'clouds and darkness . . . righteousness and judgment', Ps. 97. 2. What a sight that will be!

Verses 10 to 12 seem an appropriate way for us to end our meditation on the Lord Most High. For we who love the Lord should 'hate evil', v. 10, for the righteous Judge hates evil. There is comfort too, for He 'preserves' and 'delivers' His people, v. 10 NKJV. Wonderfully, in following the Lord there is 'gladness for the upright in heart', v. 11. So, we 'rejoice' in the Lord Most High, 'and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness', v. 12.



### Endnotes

- 1 The exact transliteration of the Hebrew will vary from resource to resource, with many giving it as 'elyôn', and noting its relation to the verb 'âlâ', meaning 'to go up'.
- 2 Psalm 83 verse 18 might be included in this list.
- 3 The number differs between translations, but there are twelve clear references to 'most high God' or 'God most high', and around thirty times He is simply called the 'most High' – e.g. Pss. 9. 2; 91. 1; Isa. 14. 14; Dan. 4. 17.
- 4 The first time 'eylôn' is used in a context not referring to Jehovah provides an insight. In Genesis chapter 40 verse 17, Joseph is listening to the baker describe the three baskets in his dream and he describes 'the uppermost' basket – it was the topmost one.
- 5 Pss. 42, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 84, 85, 87, and 88.
- 6 KJV: 'for Thou, Lord, art high above all the earth'. ESV: 'for You, O LORD, are most high'.
- 7 A. G. CLARKE, *Analytical Studies in the Psalms*, Kregel, 1979, pg. 244.
- 8 ESV renders this 'Most High'.

# Mountain scenes of Matthew's Gospel

## Part 1 THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

By **GRAEME ANDREWS** Wallingford, England

Matthew is the gospel of the sovereign Son. Christ announces, articulates, and anticipates His kingdom. This first mountain scene of Matthew presents the **principles of the kingdom**, Matt. 5-7. By the seaside, Christ delivers the **parables of the kingdom**, the kingdom in mystery form, Matt. 13. A further mountain scene provides a **preview of the kingdom**, Matt. 17.<sup>1</sup> Christ's Olivet discourse completes His kingdom messages on the mountains, denoting the **precursors of the kingdom**, Matt. 24, 25.

During this sermon, Christ outlines His manifesto, enumerating the principles of the kingdom or, to be more precise, He outlines the character of the subjects of the kingdom and the type of people who inherit the kingdom.

These chapters engender controversy. Ultra dispensationalists treat them as only prophetic, completely irrelevant to the church. It must be noted that the kingdom of God/heaven is not another term for the church. The church does not exhaust the kingdom, but it is part of the kingdom.<sup>2</sup>

The sermon on the mount is future oriented. When Christ taught the disciples to pray, 'Thy kingdom come', He was not thinking of a figurative/spiritual kingdom but a literal/future kingdom, Matt. 6. 10. This passage culminates in eschatological times, when Christ reigns and Israel is redeemed. It will be precious during tribulation days as those suitable for entry to the kingdom are known by their fruits. However, that does not mean it is irrelevant presently. Such principles endure. Indeed, 'virtually every section of this message is repeated in substance elsewhere throughout the New Testament'.<sup>3</sup> Thus, Christians should apply these passages in our day-to-day experience.

The core characteristic of a citizen of God's kingdom is righteousness, see 5. 20. Christ is interested in righteousness, not a hypocritical or external form of piety. The righteousness He promotes

is radical, 'love your enemies', v. 44. It is internal, as He deals with the root cause of issues – hatred and murder, lust and adultery, etc, vv. 21, 22, 27-30.

### Attitudes that manifest righteousness, Matt. 5. 1-12

The beatitudes exemplify the character of the citizens of the kingdom. Good subjects of the kingdom closely approximate the King Himself. Within the beatitudes we see a self-portrait of Christ. 'Not only does Jesus deliver this teaching; He Himself is the key to understanding and embracing it. "Above all else, the sermon on the mount makes a Christological statement". Apart from the person and work of Jesus the Messiah, the blessings here promised are not available, and the obedience here required is not attainable'.<sup>4</sup> Let us take one case study, 'blessed are they that mourn', v. 4. Christ wept over Jerusalem, showing

sadness over the comprehensiveness of sin, 23. 37-39. Weeping at Lazarus' grave demonstrates His sadness over the consequence of sin, John 11. 35. Weeping in Gethsemane denotes His sadness over the cost of sin as He anticipated Calvary, Heb. 5. 7.

The beatitudes focus not on what we do but what we are; it has been suggested that the clue is the name itself, 'be-**attitudes**'. Space does not permit a detailed exposition of them. However, some overarching thoughts are worth outlining – see table below.

Reading the beatitudes, we are blessed: devotionally, as we contemplate Christ; practically, as we comprehend how righteousness can be manifested; eternally, as compensation is communicated, see 5. 12.

The characteristics of virtuous citizens correspond with Romans chapter 14 verse 17, 'for the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but **righteousness, and peace, and joy** in the Holy Ghost' [emphasis added]. There is a great similarity in Matthew chapter 5, see vv. 6, 9, 13.

### Approaches that negate righteousness, Matt. 5. 21-48; 6. 19 – 7. 5

In a large bulk of His sermon, Christ takes issue with the fictitious 'spirituality' of those around Him. His teaching is introduced negatively.<sup>5</sup> He targets the scribes and Pharisees, whose interpretations of, and additions to, the law carried weight in Jewish society. They have degenerated righteousness. Their spiritual ethos promoted self-centredness, self-aggrandizement,

Beatitude	A citizen of the kingdom is spiritually
Poor in spirit	<b>humbled</b> ; they feel their spiritual need and realize there is no such thing as a self-made Christian.
Mourn	<b>invested</b> ; they share the mind of Christ toward sin.
Meek	<b>controlled</b>
Hunger and thirst after righteousness	<b>motivated</b> ; they not only seek personal righteousness but also global righteousness under the reign of the Messiah.
Merciful	<b>tender-hearted</b> ; those touched by God's grace are benevolent and lenient (refusing to rush to wrath).
Pure in heart	<b>devoted</b> ; they are marked by unmixed devotion to God.
Peacemakers	<b>developed</b> ; they communicate what they have received, peace with God. Cp. Heb. 12. 14.
Persecuted	<b>dedicated</b> ; willing to endure for Christ's name.

and selfishness. Four aspects of their practices are incompatible with divine righteousness:

### 1. Minimalism, 5. 21-48

They condensed the requirements of God into overly simplified rules, corrupting the law. The impact of their approach was 'do not commit big sins' or 'do not commit external sins'. Thus, Christ corrects them. Righteousness cannot be boiled down in this way. Simplicity is not a crime and Bible expositors should seek to communicate in a simple, memorable, relatable but truthful way. However, as attention spans further reduce, we must not simplify so much that we corrupt the biblical narrative.

Not only did they simplify the law, but they corrupted it. Nowhere in the Old Testament does it say, 'hate thine enemy'; such is abhorrent to our God who made ample provision for the stranger.

### 2. Formalism, 6. 1-18

They were religious pretenders, more interested in their status and making a show of spirituality. They would make sure that their times of prayer were in the busy thoroughfares of Jerusalem. They prayed to be seen; they gave to be honoured. They had their reward in full in this life. There was nothing spiritual in it.

### 3. Materialism, 6. 19-34

Christ presents a contrast between, 'God and mammon [an Aramaic term meaning "wealth" or "property"]'; between those interested in perishable earthly riches and eternal riches, v. 24. Let the prosperity gospel advocates take note of this passage. Christ's teaching is memorable. 'Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also', v. 21. Christ is not calling His followers to poverty but to an appropriate relationship to wealth. Alongside downplaying a focus on wealth, the teaching of this section is balanced, as the one who casts aside riches can become overwhelmed by worry and anxiety.

### 4. Criticism, 7. 1-5

In chapter 7 verse 1, Christ issues forth what has become the clarion call of liberal Christianity, 'judge not'. False teachers and phoney Christians have stripped the passage of its context, so as

to make a standing prohibition against discernment of that which is false. The context of this passage is very clear, that which is real versus that which is hypocritical.

### Actions that promote righteousness, 6. 1-18

Three spiritual activities are outlined by Christ: giving, vv. 2-4; praying, vv. 5-8; and fasting, vv. 16-18. Such activities must be done in a modest and spiritual manner. Christ requires that such be done secretly and privately. By contrast, improper motivations are seen in improper conduct, self-aggrandizing behaviour. The third of these activities we will not reference in any detail; fasting is not mandatory for Christians, but neither is it prohibited.

### 1. Communicating with the need of others

The KJV's 'alms' refers to an act of mercy, a charitable deed. 'In a society without social security . . . voluntary charity and donations for the destitute formed a key part of ancient Jewish life and remained an important virtue'.<sup>6</sup> 'Greek and Roman culture had no tradition of giving to the poor out of piety; they would give in order to increase the giver's popularity'.<sup>7</sup> Evidently the Lord suggests here that Jewish giving had become more akin to pagan life. The truly righteous should give liberally and secretly, vv. 3, 4.

### 2. Communing with the God of heaven

The model for prayer had become perverted. What should have been first private, and only thereafter public, had been inverted. The hypocrites ensured they were publicly visible during designated times of prayer. One would imagine that the manner of their prayer was corrupted as well, see Luke 18. 11, 12. Christ addresses such problems in this passage. He reminds them of the primacy of private prayer and then provides the pattern prayer.

Do not be like the **hypocrites**, v. 5: they want to be **seen** – caution on the **'where'**.

Do not be like the **heathen**, v. 7: they cannot stop **speaking** (lit. babbling) – caution on the **'how'**.

The prayer life of the righteous man

is to be **selfless** and **secret**, vv. 5, 6. Prayer is conducted privately, avoiding publication. Prayer is marked by **simplicity** and **sincerity**, vv. 7, 8. God is not moved by the multiplying of words as the heathen presuppose of their false gods. Believers recognize a loving Father who knows our needs and will act in our spiritual interest. Prayer is also **spiritual** in content, vv. 9, 10. The pattern prayer fronts devotion to God and His purpose, 'Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done'. Prayer secondarily incorporates **specific** practical needs/necessities of God's people, vv. 11-13. The pattern prayer is also **short**. LUTHER suggested prayer should be brief, frequent and intense.<sup>8</sup> That seems sage advice.

### Alternatives to righteousness, Matt. 7. 13-29

While the audience was originally His followers, it seems to have broadened out to include the masses by chapter 7. Christ thus presents a series of contrasts challenging the audience. Are they on the road of righteousness or on the road to destruction?

### Authority on righteousness, Matt. 7. 28, 29

Christ is established as the preeminent authority on righteousness in this sermon. 'The people were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one having authority'.

### Endnotes

- 1 This is Peter's teaching during his exposition of the mount of transfiguration, 2 Pet. 1. 16; cp. Matt. 16. 28.
- 2 There are numerous references in the Epistles that link Christians to the kingdom, Col. 1. 13; Rom. 14. 17; 1 Cor. 4. 20; 6. 9; Gal. 5. 21; Eph. 5. 5; 2 Pet. 1. 11. See also Matthew chapter 13.
- 3 EDWARD HINDSON and JAMES BORLAND, *Twenty-first Century Biblical Commentary Series: The Gospel of Matthew – The King is Coming*, AMG Publishers, 2006, pg. 50.
- 4 J. KNOX CHAMBLIN, *Matthew: A Mentor Commentary*, Christian Focus Publications, 2010, accessed on Olive Tree Bible software.
- 5 See Matt. 5. 17; 6. 1, 19; 7. 1, 6.
- 6 CRAIG L. BLOMBERG, *New American Commentary: Matthew*, Broadman Press, 1992, accessed on Olive Tree Bible software.
- 7 CRAIG S. KEENER, *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series: Matthew*, Inter-varsity press, 2011, accessed on Olive Tree Bible software.
- 8 MARTIN LUTHER, *Luther's Works*, Fortress press, 1986, Vol. 43, pg. 209.

# SYNOPSIS

## of each of The Twelve (Prophets)

By **BRIAN CLATWORTHY** Newbury, England

### **Hosea**

Hosea was active as a prophet during the mid to late eighth century BC, close to the times of both Isaiah and Micah. His prophecy is essentially directed at the Northern Kingdom of Israel, but he also puts the southern Kingdom of Judah on warning. He is called upon to marry Gomer, a woman of loose morals who would consistently return to her promiscuous ways. The story is, in effect, a metaphor of how God suffers because of His people's infidelity. What is revealed in the book is the heart and holiness of God and it confirms to us that even though we may be unfaithful to Him, He is always prepared to forgive us if we are repentant.

### **Joel**

Joel is an enigmatic figure who appears to understand other prophecies and the history of his nation – notice in the compass of three chapters he practically quotes from every other prophetic book. Catastrophe had just struck the people of Judah. A locust infestation had decimated the possessions of the people, and Joel's message warned that there were more invasions still to come. Joel pleads with the people that they would rend their hearts and not their garments and show true repentance, 2. 13. The book gives vivid details of the Day of the Lord, as well as anticipating the gift of the Holy Spirit being given to believers.

### **Amos**

Amos was a Judean shepherd who is called upon by God to take a message of judgement to the Northern Kingdom of Israel, which was enjoying a renaissance under

the corrupt rule of Jeroboam II. Amos pronounces the devastation that would be directed at Israel's enemies for their crimes against humanity. Once Amos has captured his audience, he then turns his attention to Israel, who was not only guilty of social injustice, but their hearts were far away from God even though they were punctilious in their observances of religious feasts. Israel would be judged for their crimes against God, who roars like a lion from Zion; cp. 3. 4; Isa. 31. 4. Ultimately, however, through repentance, God would plant Israel in their own land, never to be uprooted again, Amos 9. 15. The prophecy warns us against the danger of simply going through the motions of ritual religious observances, and of being socially unjust in our dealings with others.

### **Obadiah**

A difficult book to date precisely, but the message of Obadiah is quite simply that those who mistreat God's people will be punished. How topical, then, is this message today, and whilst historically the message of judgement is principally pronounced against Edom (the descendants of Esau), the thrust of the book is that no nation will be able to escape the judgement of God in the Day of the Lord unless there is repentance on their part. The Edomites boasted in their impregnable rocky highland fortress, but this would prove to be self-deception. Pride always goes before destruction!

### **Jonah**

An unusual prophet who seemingly had a personal grudge

against the people of Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. Although he is called upon by God to take a message of repentance to Nineveh, he refuses to do so, and takes a journey by sea in the opposite direction. During the sea voyage he is cast overboard and is swallowed up by a giant sea creature. After being spued out by the sea creature he eventually gets back on the right track again and pronounces God's message to the people of Nineveh. The book reveals to us the patience and long suffering of God as well as His care for those that we might lightly esteem. Even if we might question God's purposes in this world, ultimately, He reigns supreme, and, despite us, He will show mercy to those who oppose Him if they turn from their ways and repent.

### **Micah**

Micah prophesied during the times of Isaiah, Hosea, and Amos in the late eighth century BC. His message was delivered to Israel and Judah through anguished tears. 'Because of this I will weep and wail; I will go about barefoot and naked. I will howl like a jackal and moan like an owl', Mic. 1. 8 NIV. Micah is a vehement critic of the social constructs of his day and the leaders of Judah and Israel. He denounces the leaders and the so-called prophets of his time whom he saw as oppressing God's people. Micah is a book that warns of judgement but offers the hope of redemption through a coming Saviour. God reminds His people that the principles governing His kingdom are not driven by economic pressure but the motivations of the heart.

### **Nahum**

Nahum comes many years after the prophet Jonah to pronounce judgement against Nineveh again, even while Assyria flaunted its power and wealth. Nahum plays the part of a watchman on the walls of Nineveh urging the people to prepare for an imminent attack, but then he describes the demise of the city. Nahum carries the weight of this message to the unrepentant Assyrians: "I am against you,"

declares the Lord Almighty. “I will burn up your chariots in smoke, and the sword will devour your young lions. I will leave you no prey on the earth. The voices of your messengers will no longer be heard”, Nahum 2. 13 NIV. Even though God is slow to anger, He will act when it is necessary to do so.

### Habakkuk

Initially, Habakkuk does not announce judgement but spends time reflecting and lamenting over the horrors he sees at work in Israel, and the terrors God is allowing Babylon to carry out. Habakkuk cries out to God because of these terrors and the God of Job answers, again. The book gives us a vivid insight into the heart of a man who both loved and questioned God – compare Job’s experience. Habakkuk had faith in God, but the honesty of his inquiry connects with the doubting heart struggling to hold to faith in the face of pain. ‘O Lord, how long shall I cry [for help], and thou wilt not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save!’ Hab. 1. 2. The book is important because it reveals the struggles that believers often go through when doubts arise in their walk of faith.

### Zephaniah

Zephaniah prophesied during the reforming reign of King Josiah. He constantly warned the people of the consequences their persistent idol worship would bring upon

them. He uses devastating imagery to show the sort of judgement that would be inflicted by God for their apostasy, but ultimately the judgement was designed to bring purity and unity. We see in Zephaniah chapter 3 verse 9 the overarching intention of God towards His wayward people, ‘Then I will restore to the peoples a pure language, that they all may call on the name of the Lord, to serve Him with one accord’ NKJV. The book is an important reminder to us, then, that God’s correction of His people is always with a view to our ultimate good.

### Haggai

Haggai is the first of the post-exilic prophets and was present during the rebuilding of the temple after Babylon was conquered and Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to the Promised Land. Haggai’s message is simply about getting our priorities right as believers. It was a joyful experience to return to Jerusalem, but the work of restoration would be extremely difficult. Many of the people who returned to Jerusalem from exile still remembered the halcyon days of the past and the Solomonic temple building and were easily discouraged by the extent of the new building project. Haggai encourages the people to be strong in faith because God was with them – the same God who had brought them out of exile. Haggai was partnered with a younger prophet – Zechariah – who

dreamed dreams and had visions of the future, thus giving the people hope of a coming deliverer.

### Zechariah

Zechariah was a young man who worked in tandem with Haggai in the post-exilic period. Unlike Haggai, who encouraged the people, Zechariah experienced dreams and visions that recounted the consequences Israel had experienced for their apostasy. He also awakened hope in the returning exiles for the coming of a king who would reign in Jerusalem that would be the centre of world power. Both the first and second comings of Christ are prefigured in this prophecy, which is a major example of apocalyptic genre. Martin Luther described this book as the quintessence of Old Testament prophecy.

### Malachi

Malachi is the last of the twelve minor prophets, although not necessarily the last prophet chronologically. For a period of over 400 years, the prophetic word remains silent until the appearance of John the Baptist. Malachi came along at a time of spiritual indifference when the people of God were struggling to believe that God loved them. They were more concerned about their circumstances and refused to account for their own sinful deeds. God, through Malachi, points out where the people had fallen short of their covenant with Him. If they hoped to see changes, they needed to take responsibility for their own actions and serve God faithfully according to the promise their fathers had made to God on Mount Sinai all those years before. It provides hope of a coming Messiah who would arise as the Sun of righteousness and usher in the dawn of a new day. The book encourages us to look beyond our own personal difficulties and ensure our relationship with God is based on honesty and integrity.

**Editor’s note:** This article was written some time before our colleague was called home to glory.



# The life and times of Elisha <sup>7</sup>

## ELISHA AND THE AXE HEAD <sup>2 Kings 6</sup>

By **GRAEME ANDREWS** Wallingford, England

In 2 Kings chapter 6 verses 1 to 23 we notice God's power manifested in two distinctive scenarios. In the first miracle, verses 1 to 7, Elisha shows that God's power extends past the extraordinary and the unimaginable, to the mundane and normal, a lost piece of equipment, something that was valuable but normal. In the second miracle, verses 8 to 23, the prophet demonstrates God's ability in unexpected ways. The man of God has a wonderful ability to comprehend the secret military plans of Syria, v. 12. In response to this an army battalion is sent to capture Elisha, v. 14. One day a servant of Elisha awakens to find the hosts of Syria encamping around Dothan, v. 15. This servant comes to learn that there is a greater reality than is naturally discernible, vv. 16, 17. It was revealed, after Elisha prayed, that he was not alone. The chariots of Syria pale into insignificance; the prophet has the hosts of heaven on his side. Not only does Elisha reveal the forces of heaven but he also inflicts blindness on the hosts of Syria, leading them to Samaria and to defeat, vv. 18-20.

'The miracles of Elisha . . . are of every order, quality, and dimension'.<sup>1</sup> What can we learn from this dual miracle passage? God can provide for the simple needs of His people but also can intervene in significant and dangerous situations. The first miracle addresses a financial need, the second a physical need. Thus, we must discern the truth that God can be trusted in the biggest, most complex and challenging matters but also in the most personal, menial, and normal matters. Let us always remember, the Lord cares for us, 1 Pet. 5. 7.

The first miracle of this chapter could be easily overlooked, the curious case of the lost axe head. Here is a passage that might have been cut in the editing process of a humanistic volume. It does not possess great political insights, rather it is a personal narrative. Elisha intervenes for one of his students.

### A plan for expansion

Elisha visits a particular abode of the sons of the prophets. Who were these sons of the prophets? The closest

equivalent in modern day parlance might be 'seminary' or 'Bible college'.<sup>2</sup> This is where young men went to become students of the scriptures and assistants of the prophets, receiving both biblical instruction and on-the-job training. Amos, some fifty years after Elisha's death, comments on his prophetic calling, declaring that he was not a 'prophet's son', Amos 7. 14. By this he meant that he had not received formal training for this vocation, rather than implying that the prophetic gift was passed down by birthright. At different times, these schools were prominent, but they never became dominant in Israel.<sup>3</sup>

Many will suggest that a location in the vicinity of Jericho would be appropriate for the unfolding of this story.<sup>4</sup> There was a centre for the sons of the prophets there, a place for their instruction and accommodation. We assume that the school had a successful enrolment programme, probably indicative of the fruitfulness of Elisha's ministry. The growing numbers resulted in their present accommodation being insufficient ('too strait' meaning 'too

narrow, small'), v. 1. Having appraised the situation they concluded that there needed to be expansion and relocation. There is no divine directive for this approach. They saw a practical need and sought to meet it. Sometimes, when a need is clear, God expects us to act without a divine intervention. However, they did not act without guidance. They approached Elisha for his blessing and support, expressing 'a sincere desire for Elisha's presence'.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps they sought his supervision of the enterprise, but, as the story unfolds, the young man at the centre of the narrative will certainly be happy that they compelled his presence. Elisha's responsiveness to their overtures demonstrates willingness to lead, and the possession of a shepherd heart, see 1 Pet. 5. 2, 3.

They had **purpose** in their heart, for expansion – such was not inherently selfish as it would have allowed more to join their group. They requested **permission** to work; they were not spiritual freelancers, instead they recognized the authority of their master. They all jointly **participated** in the work. 'The responsibility of each young man was to fell his tree, shape it into a beam, and carry it to the chosen site. All the work was shared, and the project was to be an example of harmonious action being to the benefit of all involved'.<sup>6</sup> It is good for those seeking to do a work for God to gain buy-in from those spiritually mature and then unitedly participate in the work.

The New Testament makes it clear that Christians should desire growth and while it would be nice for there to be the necessity of expanding the buildings we use, the more necessary growth is in spiritual virtues. Peter says, 'grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ', 2 Pet. 3. 18.

### A plea for provision

#### ● A loaned axe

The fact that one of the sons of the prophets had to borrow, or 'beg', for an axe demonstrates their poverty. These students did not have a steady income but appreciated the truth of Proverbs chapter 4 verse 7, cp. 23. 23.

Spiritualizing this, one may suggest that the borrowed axe indicates that spiritual growth comes from an external source. The work of God is empowered by the Spirit, 'not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit', taking a verse out of context.<sup>7</sup>

#### ● A lost and lamented axe

During their industrious activity, an axe head flew off the handle. To one student's despair, it sank irretrievably. He turns to Elisha in desperation. 'Alas, master! For it was borrowed', v. 5. 'One must recall that iron was expensive in Bible times, and the student-prophet was very poor . . . he had no means to reimburse the owner'.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps, the modern-day equivalent of this loss is 'like borrowing a friend's car and totalling it'.<sup>9</sup> To right the wrong the student would have had to resign his spiritual studies and to seek some way to reimburse the financially incumbered party. Perhaps, he would have had to enter into indentured servitude.

#### ● A levitating axe

The man of God had a care for the sons of the prophet and their wider families, as indicated in chapter 4.<sup>10</sup> Here again he meets a similar need. Iron axe heads are very proficient at sinking, not floating. The expected result of an axe head falling into water would be it sinking to the deepest depths. The outcome generated by God was unnatural, in fact, supernatural.

Elisha often used physical items as part of his miracles. Such items do not have intrinsic power. They are props utilized in the process, here

a 'stick'. The stick does not attach itself to the axe head. This prop was to explain that just as a stick can float on water, so can iron if it is God's will. Elisha is precise, asking for detail on the location where the axe head was lost, v. 6. He does everything possible to show that what was happening was not a trick or some form of sleight of hand. The final proof of the miracle is in the fact that it is the student who retrieves it from the water, v. 7. Having wielded it during the day, he would have immediately been able to spot any discrepancy between that which he lost and that which was found.

There is no legitimate reason to reconstruct this passage with some sort of naturalistic explanation. Previous feats of Elisha are much more difficult than this action. We should therefore appreciate that God's power can be demonstrated in any circumstance. There is nothing too hard nor mundane for Him. I can come to Him with my financial concerns. I can bring before Him my family challenges. I can grab hold of the throne of grace for support in relation to my future choices. He should be the God of everything in my life.

There is a lesson in **responsibility** here. The student was, to a certain extent, careless, and this would have impacted upon his ability to further function for God.<sup>11</sup> 'God's servants must walk carefully before the Lord and take inventory of their "tools" lest they lose something they desperately need'.<sup>12</sup> There is also a lesson in **restoration**. The prophet restores

this individual's ability to function. The same can be our experience when we yield ourselves to God.

This text has provided us a practical lesson in collective labours. A presentation of the power of God in every scenario. Does it also provide us with a dispensational picture? There may be an homage to the history and future of Israel:

'Like the axe, Israel had belonged to another, Egypt, but God used it for a job He purposed to do following the Exodus. Unfortunately Israel had gone its own way (flown off the axe handle) and appeared lost to any further usefulness. Water often represents the Gentile nations elsewhere . . . Nevertheless, God was able to restore His people to a place of usefulness again, even as Elisha restored the axe head to its user'.<sup>13</sup>

#### Endnotes

- 1 RONALD S. WALLACE, *Reading in 2 Kings*, Scottish Academic Press, 1996, pg. 59.
- 2 This statement is not meant to endorse any such places. The primary place one should learn to serve God is in the local church.
- 3 Primarily the 'sons of the prophets' appear during Samuel's, Elijah's, and Elisha's ministries.
- 4 There are three locations that the sons of the prophets are associated with in the preceding chapters: Bethel, 2 Kgs 2. 3; Jericho, 2 Kgs. 2. 5; Gilgal, 2 Kgs. 4. 38.
- 5 HAROLD STIGERS, 'II Kings', in CHARLES F. PFEIFFER & EVERETT F. HARRISON (eds), *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, Moody Press, 1963, pg. 346.
- 6 ALBERT MCSHANE, *I & II Kings*, John Ritchie Ltd, 2002, pg. 219.
- 7 Zech. 4. 6.
- 8 ROBERT L. HUBBARD, JR, *Everyman's Bible Commentary: First & Second Kings*, Moody Press, 1991, accessed on Olive Tree Bible software.
- 9 GARY INRIG, *Holman Bible Commentary: 1 & 2 Kings*, B&H Publishers, 2003, pg. 228.
- 10 Three miracles: the multiplying of the oil, 2 Kgs. 4. 1-7; the curing of the stew, 2 Kgs. 4. 38-41; and the feeding of the one hundred, 2 Kgs. 4. 42-44.
- 11 We should not be too critical in this regard as Moses penned specific legislation concerning a scenario like this, indicating that it was likely a relatively common occurrence, Deut. 19. 4, 5.
- 12 WARREN W. WIERSBE, *Be Distinct: Standing Firmly Against the World's Tides (2 Kings & 2 Chronicles)*, David C. Cook, 2010, pg. 62.
- 13 THOMAS L. CONSTABLE, *Notes on 2 Kings (2025 Edition)*, available at: <https://soniclight.com/tcon/notes/pdf/2kings.pdf>, 2025, pg. 34.



# Towns and cities in the life of the Lord

## Part 12

# BETHANY

By **ANDREW DUTTON** Norwich, England

Just over a mile east of Jerusalem is Bethany, on the road to Jericho.<sup>1</sup> Today, according to secular sources, the town is 'locally called in Arabic Al-Eizariya or al-Aizariya . . . The name al-Eizariya refers to the New Testament figure Lazarus of Bethany'.<sup>2</sup> As per its modern name, we would associate Bethany with the Lord's miracle in raising Lazarus who had 'been dead four days', John 11. 39. But also, it was a place where there were those dear to the Lord, 'Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus', 11. 5, and, near to Jerusalem. We read of the Lord Jesus spending time there shortly before He would go to the cross. It is lovely to consider that there was a place where the Lord was honoured by those that loved Him ahead of the extent of rejection that would follow. As believers in the Lord Jesus today, it is a privilege to seek to honour and obey the Lord in a world that largely rejects Him.

Matthew also records the Lord Jesus lodging in Bethany after leaving the city of Jerusalem, Matt. 21. 17, then in the house of Simon the leper, 26. 6; Mark 14. 3. This is when there 'came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, as he sat at meat', Matt. 26. 7. Scholars are divided on if this is the same occasion as Mary's anointing recorded in John chapter 12, but nonetheless, we can enjoy the lessons from each of the accounts concerning devotion to the Lord Jesus.

There are several scenes at Bethany focussing on Mary and her place at the **feet of the Lord Jesus**, which we will use for our study:

- 'Mary . . . sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word', Luke 10. 39 – she came to the Lord's feet for communion and instruction; a place of learning.
- 'Mary . . . fell down at his feet', John 11. 32 – she came to the Lord's feet with her tears; a place of comfort.
- 'Mary . . . anointed the feet of Jesus', John 12. 3 – she came to the Lord's feet to offer; a place of worship.

### Place of learning, Luke chapter 10

Luke chapter 10 is at the beginning of the section in the Gospel that covers the progression of the Lord Jesus toward Jerusalem, ultimately with the cross in view, 'he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem', Luke 9. 51. Immediately before Bethany the Lord answers a lawyer's questions by speaking of the helpless man in need and the good Samaritan's selfless care, who 'saw him . . . [and] had compassion on him', 10. 33. The background is the Lord's movement towards the cross and **His heart of compassion** in meeting the needs of so many people, including Mary and Martha. The scene in Bethany commences, 'Martha received him into her house', v. 38. She should be commended for receiving Christ, but her exercise for service was spoiled by a wrong spirit towards Mary and accusation towards the Lord: 'dost thou not care?' v. 40. With loving tenderness, and His omniscient knowledge of Martha's heart, the Lord gently rebukes her, 'Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled', v. 41, she was too anxious and agitated; as believers,

we should 'be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God', Phil. 4. 6.

The Lord Jesus explained to Martha that Mary had 'chosen that good part', v. 42, she had **made a decision** to sit at the Lord's feet and hear His word. This is a decision that we, as believers in the Lord Jesus, all need to make every day; may we, with the Lord's help, decide to devote more time to Him and His word. There is **lasting value** in learning of the Lord Jesus; He said of Mary that the good part she chose 'shall not be taken away from her', v. 42.

### Place of comfort, John chapter 11

John chapter 11 is mostly taken up with the Lord Jesus miraculously raising Lazarus from death. When the Lord Jesus returned, Martha went to meet with Him, but 'Mary sat still in the house', v. 20, perhaps an indication of how the two sisters responded differently in their grief. It is interesting to note the Lord's approach to Martha and Mary; with Martha He listened and with Mary He wept. He appreciated the different ways in which people handle grief and ministered appropriately. We would do well to follow our Lord's example in learning to help sensitively brothers and sisters in need.

After the Lord's meeting with Martha and His wonderful declaration of truth, 'I am the resurrection, and the life', v. 25, via Martha, He sends a secret and personal invitation to Mary to draw near, 'The Master is come, and calleth for thee', v. 28. This call was reserved for Mary – she would know about His nearness and His desire to see her; other worldly comforters were to be kept at a distance and here we have a close, personal meeting of a believer with the Lord. Only His people can enjoy such a place.

Mary did not delay and 'came unto him', v. 29, 'saw him', v. 32, and 'fell down at his feet', v. 32; there is an

order to these things which express Mary's great need before her Lord. Importantly, Mary **brought her tears to the Lord**, v. 33; it is possible for us as the people of God, to seek the help of others in our grief and disappointment, but might we follow Mary's example and come unto Him, see Him and bring our tears to Him.

The response of the Lord Jesus is notable; He does not communicate Divine truth, as He did to Martha, v. 25; perhaps Mary already had a grasp of these things. But instead, 'he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled', v. 33, and 'Jesus wept', v. 35. We see something of the humanity of Christ in these verses, as One that was troubled by death – the effect of sin – yet sympathizing so fully with the experience of His own. But also, we see, in the resurrection miracle that followed, the Lord's deity and ability to meet the need.

We are reminded by this account of the Lord's present work of intercession for His people, 'For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities', Heb. 4. 15. There is a perfect Man in heaven, that understands; He is touched – the idea of the word is that He sympathizes, suffers with, is affected similarly and has compassion. This is all in His high priestly work, representing us and our need before the Father.

### Place of worship, John chapter 12

'Then Jesus six days before the passover came to Bethany', v. 1, now moving even closer to His suffering at the cross. The beginning of the chapter presents a lovely scene of warm communion with the Lord, including the disciples, the raised Lazarus, Mary, and Martha, before the cross. 'Martha served: but Lazarus . . . sat at the table with him', v. 2. In scripture, a table often speaks of fellowship; so here we have Martha's service for the Lord Jesus and Lazarus enjoying fellowship with Him. But also, 'Mary . . . anointed the feet of Jesus', v. 3, representing worship. The Lord is the object of service, the source of fellowship, and the recipient of worship; so should He be for us – our service or whatever we do should firstly be 'to the Lord', Col. 3. 23, and we need to daily seek fellowship with Him and bring our worship to Him.

Focussing on Mary's worship, we notice firstly that the 'pound of ointment of spikenard', v. 3, was '**very costly** to her. There is a lesson that worship of our Lord should cost us, not necessarily in terms of money, but certainly in the time that we set aside in personal devotion to Him, gleaned from His word.

Her worship was **intelligent**. There seemed to be wisdom and an

understanding from Mary that went beyond that of the disciples, who did not grasp the Lord's promises concerning His death, 'against the day of my [the Lord's] burying hath she kept this', v. 7; it is notable that Mary of Bethany did not come to the tomb on resurrection morn with the other women bringing 'the spices which they had prepared', Luke 24. 1 – she had already anointed Him! Perhaps Mary's wise foresight was a result of her previous exercise when she 'sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word', Luke 10. 39, leading her to bring suitable worship to the Lord at the right time. She 'kept' the spikenard for the Lord; it was not used after the death of Lazarus.

The anointing **brought benefit**, 'the house was filled with the odour of the ointment', v. 3, meaning that all who were in the house benefited from Mary's act of devotion towards the Lord Jesus. This is the case for the corporate worship of saints in a local assembly, when all believers can appreciate both the silent and audible worship. Whilst the scriptures do not specify, but given that a pound of the spikenard was used, it is most likely that the fragrance would have stayed with both Mary and the Lord Jesus. I love to think of the time leading up to the cross; there was a fragrance to the Lord of Mary's worship. As the Lord was experiencing betrayal, rejection, injustice, and ultimately sin-bearing, some of that fragrance may have lingered on. As with the Father, John 4. 23, worship from the Lord's people is precious to Him.

Mary's worship **was criticized**, v. 5, but Mary's devotion is focused on the Lord Jesus and He does not accept the criticism by Judas. There will often be others that will be critical, but nothing should prevent us from an attitude and heart of devotion to the Lord.

#### Endnotes

- 1 *Bagster's Bible Handbook*, Fleming H. Revell Company, pg. 141.
- 2 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bethany>.



# Christ, being raised from the dead, dies no more, Rom. 6. 9.

By **MALCOLM HORLOCK** Cardiff, Wales

*[Quotations taken from the New King James Bible]*

I was struck, some time ago, by the line of a hymn: ‘the Saviour rose **no more** to die’.<sup>1</sup>

That expression, ‘dies no more’, immediately puts the resurrection of our Lord Jesus into an entirely different category to the resurrection of all others who had been raised previously (ranging from the young son of the widow of Zarephath through to Lazarus of Bethany) for, in each and every other case, the one who died had been raised to continue the same kind and quality of life which they had lived before – and, therefore, to die again.

But not so our Lord Jesus. ‘Christ, having been raised out of the dead, dies **no more**’.<sup>2</sup>

In passing, this explains why the Apostle Paul – in full knowledge of many earlier cases of resurrection – is able to assure King Agrippa in Acts chapter 26, ‘that the Christ’ was ‘**the first** to rise from the dead’<sup>3</sup> – not, there, as Paul says elsewhere, ‘the **firstborn** from the dead’<sup>4</sup> in **rank and status** – but ‘the **first** to rise from the dead’ in **time**.

Although our Lord rose with a body having ‘flesh and bones’ – as He demonstrated to ten of His apostles on the evening of His resurrection<sup>5</sup> – unlike all those raised before Him, He went through death, out the other side, bursting forth into an altogether different dimension, rising to new life with a very different body – a body which could, for instance, pass with ease through both (i) the walls of Joseph of Arimathea’s rock-tomb<sup>6</sup> ‘**very early** . . . on the first day of the week’<sup>7</sup> and (ii) the walls of the upper room where the apostles cowered in fear of the Jews **before that day was out**.<sup>8</sup>

I want to focus on several contrasts between the resurrection of our Lord and the resurrection, some short time before, of His friend<sup>9</sup> Lazarus.

I know that these two resurrections shared much in common – not least in (i) that both tombs<sup>10</sup> were sealed by a large stone and (ii) that both resurrections followed God ‘hearing’ prayers offered up by our Lord.

As far as Lazarus’s resurrection is concerned, I refer to the Saviour’s prayer of thanksgiving after men removed the stone from the tomb and prior to His loud summoning of Lazarus to ‘come forth’ – ‘Father, I thank You that You have **heard Me**’, John 11. 41.

And, as far as our Lord’s own resurrection is concerned, I refer to that which the writer to the Hebrews records in chapter 5, how that, Jesus ‘offered up prayers and supplications, with . . . [loud] cries and tears, to Him who was able to save Him **out of**<sup>11</sup> **death**, and was **heard**<sup>12</sup> – as I understand it, ‘heard’ in that He was delivered ‘out of death’ by His resurrection.

But, make no mistake, though sharing much in common with it, our Lord’s own resurrection was **very** different to that of Lazarus. For example:

1. Lazarus’s return to life was only temporary. Lazarus would die again.<sup>13</sup> He was, if you like, only out on parole, required to report back to death and the grave in due course.

But the Lord Jesus did not leave His tomb on short-term release! ‘Christ, having been raised from

the dead, dies no more’ for, in the tomb of Jesus, the mighty ‘king of terrors’<sup>14</sup> was compelled to lay his sceptre at His feet.<sup>15</sup>

2. Lazarus rose with the same kind of natural and mortal body he had before. It was a body which did not (and, indeed, could not) pass through his graveclothes. Hence, the Lord’s command to those who stood around, ‘Loose him, and let him go’. Lazarus could not pass through his graveclothes, let alone through the walls of his rock tomb,<sup>16</sup> and, when he emerged from his tomb, he still had the napkin (the kerchief) wrapped either over or around his face.<sup>17</sup>

But, unlike Lazarus, the Lord Jesus did not need anyone to loose Him, and let Him go! His body simply passed out of His graveclothes. And Joseph’s rock-hewn tomb could no more hold Him captive than could His graveclothes!

3. It was men who, in response to our Lord’s express command, rolled away the stone from the tomb of Lazarus.<sup>18</sup>

But it was not men who moved the large stone from the tomb of Jesus; it was an angel from heaven!<sup>19</sup>

Men shifted the stone from the tomb of Lazarus to let him out, although whether he walked or shuffled out, I cannot say. But, as has often been pointed out, the angel did not open the tomb of Jesus to let Him out; the angel opened His tomb to let others in, that they might see for themselves that the tomb was well and truly empty. Its triumphant and all-glorious tenant had already vacated the premises.

4. After the removal of the stone and our Lord’s quickening word, Lazarus came out of his tomb by the very same door through which, several days before, he had been carried in.

But, when His time came, the Lord Jesus did not emerge by the door through which, several days before, He had been carried in. For, when

the angel rolled back the stone from His tomb, the Lord Jesus did not come out. He had already left.

5. In John chapter 11 verse 25, the Saviour claimed to be ‘the resurrection and the life’ and the resurrection of Lazarus from the dead demonstrated the truth of His claim.

But, previously, in John chapter 10 verse 18, our Lord had claimed to have the authority, not only to lay down His life of His own accord, but also to take it again. And this time, His own resurrection from the dead demonstrated the truth of His claim!

The Apostle Paul made it clear in the first main section of his Ephesian letter that the same God who shows ‘**the exceeding riches of His grace** in His kindness toward us’,<sup>20</sup> first exerted ‘**the exceeding greatness of His power** . . . in Christ when He raised

Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places’.<sup>21</sup>

Latching onto that expression, ‘seated Him at His right hand’, we cannot help recall the assertion of the writer to the Hebrews that it was after ‘this Man . . . had offered one sacrifice for sins’ that He ‘sat down on the right hand of God’.<sup>22</sup>

Mark that phrase, ‘**one** sacrifice for sins’. For, as we quoted earlier, ‘Christ, having been raised from the dead, **dies no more**’.

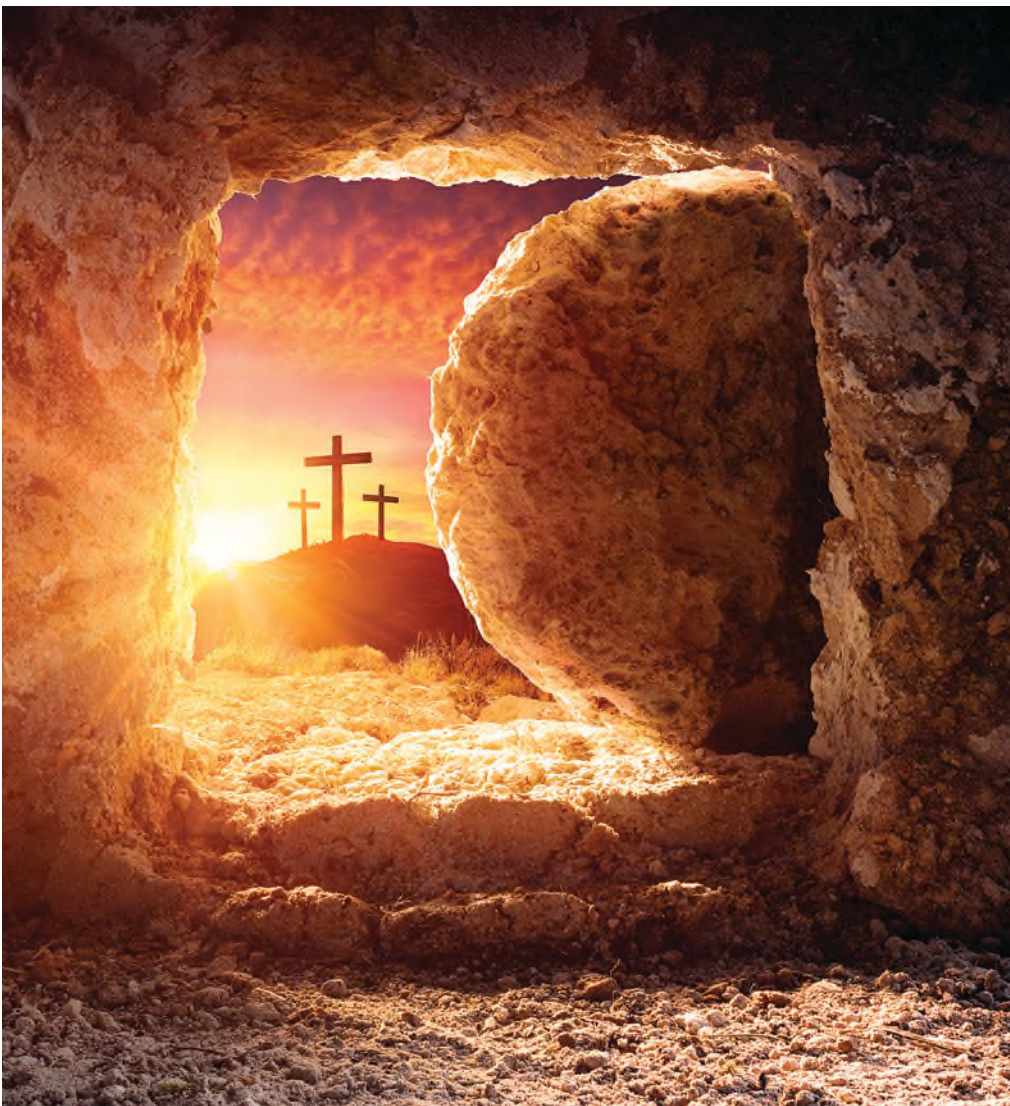
As we ‘proclaim the Lord’s death’<sup>23</sup> each Lord’s Day, we rejoice to know that death to be an altogether unique event – never to be repeated – never needing to be repeated – for,  
‘He rose triumphantly  
In power and majesty;  
The Saviour rose no more to die’.

And that same risen, glorified Lord comes to us and declares (as once

to John on Patmos), ‘I am He who lives, and became dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore’.<sup>24</sup>

## Endnotes

- 1 Hymn by Oswald J. Smith. The full verse reads:  
He rose triumphantly  
In power and majesty;  
The Saviour rose no more to die.  
O let us now proclaim  
The glory of His name  
And tell to all, He lives today!
- 2 Rom. 6. 9 (literal translation).
- 3 Acts 26. 23.
- 4 Col. 1. 18; cp. Rev. 1. 5. The distinction between the two passages is this, that the phrase in Revelation chapter 1 verse 5 lays special stress upon the fact that Christ was dead (compare verse 18), while Colossians chapter 1 verse 18 lays stress upon the fact that He rose from the midst of the dead . . . the fact that the saints are to be raised from the dead is due to His resurrection’, W. E. VINE, *The Significance of the Title “The Firstborn”*, Collected Writings, Volume 4, pg. 210.
- 5 Luke 24. 39 – ‘the eleven’, Luke 24. 33, but with Thomas then absent, John 20. 24.
- 6 Matt. 27. 60.
- 7 Mark 16. 2.
- 8 John 20. 19.
- 9 John 11. 11.
- 10 That of Lazarus was ‘a cave’, John 11. 38, and that of Jesus was ‘hewn in rock’, Luke 23. 53.
- 11 Literal translation.
- 12 Heb. 5. 7.
- 13 ‘I’m not an archaeologist or the son of an archaeologist nor do I play one on TV, but if I could find one thing I’d like to find the tombstone of Lazarus. It would say, “Died 29 AD”, and then, below that, it would say, “Died 42 AD” . . . you see, Lazarus died again and Jairus’s daughter died again . . . that’s the truth about them—they didn’t get a resurrection body like Jesus had. Easter is about Jesus getting the first instalment of a resurrection body and saying, “watch this spot—this is a preview of coming attractions!” This is why Paul says that Jesus’s resurrection is “the firstfruits” of the resurrection; the latter fruits will come when Jesus returns and the dead in Christ are raised first’, BEN WITHERINGTON III, an extract from the transcript of a seven-minute message on the subject of ‘Easter’, accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RIPz8J8dVvk&index=53&list=PL1CBE0DD656B9BC0F>.
- 14 Job 18. 14.
- 15 ‘Christ, being raised from the dead, dies no more; death no longer has dominion over Him’, Rom. 6. 9.
- 16 Matt. 27. 60; Mark 15. 46.
- 17 John 11. 44.
- 18 John 11. 41.
- 19 Matt. 28. 2.
- 20 Eph. 2. 7.
- 21 Eph. 1. 19, 20.
- 22 Heb. 10. 12.
- 23 1 Cor. 11. 26.
- 24 Rev. 1. 18 (literal translation).



# The impact of Rome

## CAESAR AUGUSTUS AND TIBERIUS CAESAR

By **DAVID BRAUCH** Wauwatosa, USA

Just as the month July was named to honour the first of the Roman Caesars, namely Julius, likewise the succeeding month, August, was chosen to honour his blood nephew and adoptive son, Caesar Augustus. The latter reigned the longest of any of the Caesars in Julius' lineage, a total of fifty-one years. While he is only mentioned once in scripture, Caesar Augustus played a pivotal role in the account of the birth of the Lord. Unbeknown to Augustus, when he issued a decree mandating that an empire-wide census be taken, he was helping fulfil a prophecy, made about 600 years earlier. The prophet Micah predicted that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, Mic. 5. 2.

What a contrast between Caesar Augustus in his palace and Jesus in the manger. At this juncture of time, which person appeared more like a king? Would you pledge your allegiance to a baby boy who excited some rugged shepherds or would you rather show homage to the ruler of the known world, with his army of thousands, who compelled each person in his dominion to travel to the place of his or her birth to register for a tax initiated by him? On the surface, who appeared to really possess ultimate authority? Certainly, we assume Caesar Augustus.

Was Caesar Augustus aware of the Lord? It is highly unlikely. The date of the Lord's birth meant that He would be in his teens when Caesar Augustus died in AD 14 but, sadly, Caesar Augustus was to impact our Lord's life in one other very painful way. It was during his reign that crucifixion was first used extensively to punish Rome's unwanted.

Tiberius, Augustus' adopted son, at the age of fifty-five, assumed the role of Caesar after Augustus' death in AD 14 and reigned until AD 37. He was the

Caesar in power when the Pharisees and Herodians sought to entrap our Lord. The Herodians were a Jewish political party who favoured and supported Herod Antipas, the Roman Empire's ruler over much of the land of the Jews from 4 BC to AD 39. The two groups mentioned above questioned the Lord as to whether or not it was lawful to give tribute unto Caesar. But 'Jesus perceived their wickedness', Matt. 22. 18, questioning them about the imprint on a Roman coin, known as a 'denarius', that He commanded to be brought to Him. After they identified the image as that of Tiberius Caesar, the Lord declared, 'Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's', v. 21.

It was during Tiberius Caesar's reign that he appointed Pontius Pilate as the fifth governor of the Roman province of Judea. The latter ruled for ten years – from AD 26/27 to AD 36/37. Although Pilate is the best-known Roman governor of Judea, few sources remain concerning his rule. Virtually nothing is known about his life before he became governor of Judea, nor the circumstances that led to his appointment. However, Pilate has become renowned for being the official who presided over the trial of the Lord Jesus.

Pilate proved reluctant during that trial to sentence Him to be crucified. After his interrogation of the Lord,



Pilate seemed convinced of His innocence. While he was sitting on the judgement seat, his wife sent word to him, saying, 'Have . . . nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him', Matt. 27. 19. From that juncture onward, Pilate persistently sought to release the Lord. However, the Jews, who were gathered in front of the Roman Praetorium, in essence threatened him by crying out, 'If you [Pilate] let this Man go, you are not Caesar's friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar', John 19. 12 NKJV.

At this point Pilate ordered the Lord to undergo a severe Roman scourging. By doing so, he hoped that the Jewish populace would be moved with pity toward our Lord when Pilate had Him, beaten and bloody, brought out before them to view, v. 14. However, our Lord's extreme appearance failed to soften the hard-heartedness of the Jewish crowd towards Him. Instead, they coerced Pilate, crying out, 'Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!' The chief priests also shouted, 'We have no king but Caesar!' v. 15. Fearing that he might appear to offend Tiberius Caesar, which, in turn, might jeopardize his position as governor, Pilate eventually ordered Jesus to be crucified on Golgotha.

From a human viewpoint, it appeared that the Lord was dying as a weak man at the hands of the strong. However, while Augustus, Tiberius, and the Roman Caesars after them, thought they were building their own empires, often they were simply unwitting and mostly unwilling actors in the establishment of the kingdom of God. The Caesars ruled by conquering lands and subjugating people – many of whom suffered and died. Yet, the Lord Jesus, while undergoing perhaps the cruellest punishment devised for use by the Caesars, conquered sin, death, and the grave by personally suffering and dying. He bore the full weight of God's wrath and then remarkably rose again to newness of life. He is now glorified, seated on a throne at the right hand of His Father in heaven. At this point, who appears more powerful – these Caesars or the Lord Jesus? Things are not always as they appear on the surface.

## QUESTION

**Why did the Lord Jesus refer to the Syrophenician woman as a 'dog'?**

## ANSWER

Someone has wryly remarked, 'the more I see of people, the more I like my dog'. Although spoken in jest, the words highlight the contrast between the unconditional affection, loyalty and positivity of dogs and the often-disappointing behaviour of people. Yet the dogs we usually meet in scripture bear little resemblance to our household pets. In biblical times, these animals were semi-wild scavengers, feeding on carrion, and associated with uncleanness and death. For instance, dogs play a central role in the gruesome demise of Ahab and Jezebel.<sup>1</sup> Because of this reputation, the term 'dog' became a Jewish insult for Gentiles as unclean and despised outsiders.<sup>2</sup> This background makes it all the more striking when the Lord Jesus uses such language in His encounter with the Syrophenician woman, Matt. 15. 21-28.<sup>3</sup>

The chapter begins in Jerusalem, where Jesus faces criticism and unbelief from the Pharisees, v. 1. He then withdraws to the region of Tyre and Sidon, a place regarded by Jews as notoriously ungodly, v. 21. There, He meets a woman whose faith shines all the more brightly against this dark backdrop. She is one of only two people in the Gospels whom Jesus commends for having 'great faith', v. 28.<sup>4</sup>

Her situation is desperate. Her young daughter is tormented by a demon, and she pleads earnestly for mercy, v. 22. The disciples, regarding her as a nuisance, urge the Lord Jesus to dismiss her, v. 23. The Lord's reply, however, is more measured, reminding them of the present focus of His earthly ministry. He was 'not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel', v. 24. Some have misused this verse to argue that the Lord Jesus disregarded Gentiles,<sup>5</sup> but in fact this account affirms the very opposite, as we shall see.

It is true that the Lord Jesus was offering the Kingdom to Israel at this point.<sup>6</sup> Yet God's plan would always be global. After His death and resurrection, the gospel would progress from Jerusalem into 'all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth', Acts 1. 8. The Lord Jesus had hinted at this at the beginning of His ministry in the synagogue at Nazareth, Luke 4. 24-27. The Syrophenician woman's faith anticipates the worldwide reach of the coming gospel message.

The Lord Jesus deliberately tests this woman to bring out her faith. Her prayer in response to the words of the Lord Jesus is brief yet beautiful in its simplicity, 'Lord, help me', Matt. 15. 25. It expresses complete dependence on Him alone. It is a prayer the Lord delights to answer and one we can all imitate. Yet the Lord Jesus presses further, 'it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs', v. 26. At first glance, the words sound harsh, but there is an important nuance to the words the Lord uses. The usual Greek word for dog is *kyōn*, from which we get canine. Instead, He chooses *kynarion*, meaning 'little dog' or 'puppy'. This affectionate term suggests not an unclean scavenger, but a pet cared for within the household. Far from rejecting her, the Lord Jesus was intimating to her that she also fell under God's expansive care for His creatures.

The Lord Jesus is inviting her to enter into a conversation of grace, and she responds appropriately, 'Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table', v. 27. In sharp contrast to the unbelieving Pharisees in verse 1, this woman recognizes the greatness of the One before her. She grasps that His provision is so abundant that even a crumb from His table is enough to meet her desperate need.

Jesus marvelled at her faith and granted her request immediately, demonstrating His power over Satan and anticipating the victory He would accomplish at Calvary.<sup>7</sup> The Syrophenician woman is a lesson to us all in terms of humble persevering trust in Christ.

### Endnotes

- 1 Ahab: 1 Kgs. 21. 19; 22. 37, 38; Jezebel: 1 Kgs. 21. 23; 2 Kgs. 9. 10, 33-36.
- 2 In, 'beware of dogs', Phil. 3. 2, we have Paul's ironic jab at false Jewish teachers imposing the law and causing devastation to the gospel.
- 3 The event is also recorded in Mark chapter 7 verses 24 to 30.
- 4 The other person whose faith the Lord Jesus marvelled at is the Roman centurion, Luke 7. 1-10. The Syrophenician woman realized that 'just a crumb' is enough. The Roman centurion realized that 'just a word' is enough.
- 5 Muslims are often coached to quote this passage when speaking to Christians to try to make this point.
- 6 It is also true that the gospel was 'to the Jew first', Rom. 1. 16; 2.10; Acts 1. 8.
- 7 Col. 2. 15.

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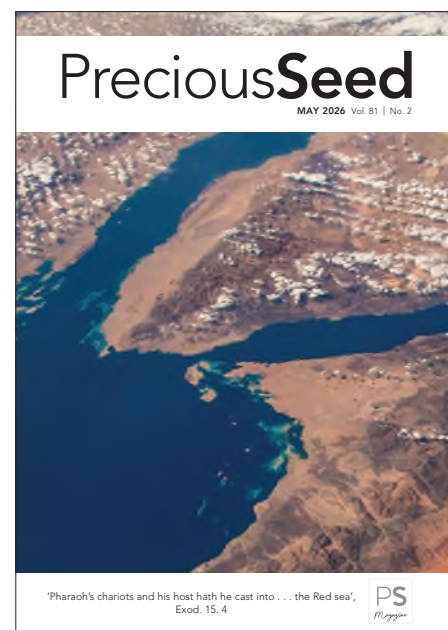
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## 'Pharaoh's chariots and his host hath he cast into... the Red sea', Exod. 15. 4

These words form part of the song of 'Moses and the children of Israel... [which they sang] unto the Lord', v. 1. It was a song of victory because it marked the defeat of Pharaoh and his host, the destruction of their mortal enemy who had brought them into slavery in Egypt and who was unwilling to let them go.

The Red Sea crossing was important for a number of reasons. First, it was a comprehensive victory over Pharaoh and his forces. There was no regrouping for a second sortie for all were lost in the sea, 'his chosen captains also are drowned... The depths have covered them', vv. 4, 5. Second, it was miraculous. Verses 2 and 3 of the chapter reveal Moses' appreciation of who was responsible for the parting of the waters and the safe crossing of the children of Israel. 'He is become my salvation', v. 2. Third, it established Jehovah as Israel's God, 'he is my God', v. 2. Whilst it confirmed that truth, reminding them of the past (the Passover) and the present, it should have given them confidence for what was to come. Fourth, in the name of God, 'Jehovah, his name', v. 3 JND, there is a reminder of His covenant promises which will not fail because this is part of His character. Fifth, it revealed the glory of God, 'Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious', v. 6.

Having seen His glory and power in their deliverance from Egypt in the Passover and in the parting of the Red Sea and defeat of Pharaoh, how sad it is to read at Marah, 'the people murmured against Moses', v. 24.

As we gather to remember the Saviour in His own appointed way, it would remind us of the need to remember the miracle of the work of Calvary, the comprehensive victory that was gained there, and the glory that it brought to God. May we rejoice in the relationship into which we have been brought as we call Him 'my Saviour', Luke 1. 47.

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