

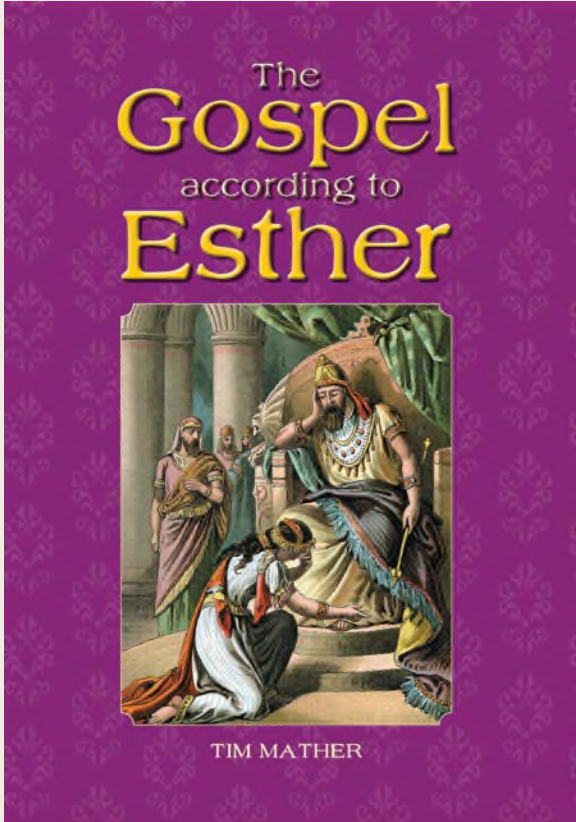
PreciousSeed

AUGUST 2026 Vol. 81 | No. 3



'And when we had sailed over the sea of Cilicia and Pamphylia,
we came to Myra', Acts 27. 5.

PS
Magazine



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by Tim Mather

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Editorial

AUGUST 2026

Vol. 81 | No. 3

‘Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine’, 1 Tim. 4. 13.

Without a doubt our world is changing radically – economically, politically, morally, technologically, and socially. Are the latest technological advancements endangering one of the oldest, and perhaps (dependent on the material at hand) noblest pastimes? Reading!

Reading is one of the enduring elements of life. We place a premium on it when our children are young, recognizing that it forms the building blocks of language, speech, communication and education. One may worry that in our present age the skill of reading is becoming increasingly obsolete – novels have been replaced with films, as visual stimuli erode our imagination; social media platforms and streaming services are replacing newspapers and textbooks as core information sources. Furthermore, the artificial intelligence (AI) revolution in business, academia, and our personal lives is causing us to step away from the printed page (or digital versions of the same) to the consumption of short summaries. Instead of getting to grips with the entire argument of an author, AI condenses it into bitesize chunks that

are easily digested and regurgitated (regardless of their accuracy). How Christians should react to AI is an important theme; perhaps you would like to spend some time considering this edition’s question time section. AI has unquestionable benefits, streamlining massive documents that we may only have a passing interest in, and intrinsic risks, the well-known hallucinations it can be prone to.

When Paul writes in 1 Timothy chapter 4 verse 13, he marks out three integral components of Timothy’s ministry: First, ‘reading’ – Timothy is to ensure that the church **articulates the truth of God**. In the first century, prior to the printing press and with lower levels of literacy, this would have been a necessity. The first expression specifically relates to the public reading of the word of God, but its applicability to personal Bible study is evident. The Bible is the only infallible framework for the church. Timothy would not be able to accomplish the next two themes if attention was not given to reading. Second, ‘exhortation’ – He is to **apply the truth of God**, addressing people’s present situation/context

with sage insights. Third, ‘doctrine’ – Timothy must **advance the truth of God**, systematically outlining biblical themes. Paul exhorts him: explain it, teach it, declare it, and live it, cp. v. 12.

Spiritual progress comes when we ‘give attendance to reading’, collectively or individually. There is no adequate replacement for Bible reading, and resultant study. We need to read it to be able to preach it; neglecting the canon generates powerlessness in evangelism. We need to read it to be able to pray it. After all, the material we present to the Father in remembrance/worship of the Son can only legitimately be derived from time spent in the scriptures. We need to read it to be able to teach it. It is our spiritual textbook, the only sufficient guide if we want to live for the glory of God. We need to read it to feed upon it, as it is food for our souls.

It is our prayer that this edition of *Precious Seed* renews a focus on Bible reading and supports you while we await the arrival of the Saviour.

Graeme Andrews
Ministry Articles Editor

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PULL-OUT

YPS
By ANDREW DUTTON

GOD'S PURPOSE IN REDUNDANCY

A meditation on Psalm 105 verses 16 and 17

By **GRAEME SMITH** Wallingford, England

‘When he summoned a famine on the land and broke all supply of bread, he had sent a man ahead of them, Joseph, who was sold as a slave’, ESV.

Introduction

In 2015, shortly after being made redundant for the first time, I prayed that the Lord would speak to me through my daily Bible reading. That morning, He graciously drew my attention to Psalm 105 verses 16 and 17 – verses that capture key truths about God’s dealings with His people in times of trial. In moments of uncertainty and loss, such as redundancy, these verses offer deep encouragement. They remind us that God is not only present in our suffering but is also sovereign over it, working out His purposes through it.

Psalm 105, which begins with thankfulness and concludes with a note of praise, provides a sweeping historical review of Israel’s journey from God’s covenant with Abraham to its fulfilment as Israel enters the Promised Land. Nestled between these great events are two remarkable verses describing a devastating famine, vv. 16, 17. Just as famine was a time of acute hardship for Israel, redundancy can feel overwhelming in the present. Yet, with time, we may come to see it as part of a far greater plan God is unfolding for our good.

Providential purposes

God summoning a famine, v. 16. Psalm 105 states plainly that God called for the famine. He was not merely responding to events – He was sovereign over them. Focusing on God’s sovereignty is one of the most effective ways for a believer to endure a trial such as redundancy. Redundancy often leaves the future feeling uncertain, but when we recognize

that God allows such events for our good, we can experience the peace Paul describes, Phil. 4. 7. Some Bible teachers paraphrase this verse ‘The peace of God, is better than knowing the reason why’ or ‘which is better than understanding what the future holds’.

Job’s experience reminds us that God’s sovereignty can operate in a permissive way; Satan requested, and was granted permission to bring about Job’s severe material and financial losses. We may ask, as Jacob’s family perhaps did, ‘Why has this happened?’ For them, the famine brought about the fulfilment of Joseph’s prophetic dreams, Gen. 37. 5-9, when his brothers bowed before him in Egypt. Likewise, God may use redundancy to accomplish purposes we cannot yet see – perhaps even to cultivate humility in us. If so, we should not resist His hand.

In closing this section, we might note that Joseph himself endured great hardship, yet he was close enough to God to recognize His plans. He told the brothers, ‘you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good’, Gen. 50. 20 NKJV.

Provision paused

Breaking the supply of bread, v. 16. Just as famine meant that the supply of bread was broken for Israel, redundancy today often brings hardship to a home. Jacob was forced to send some of his family to a foreign country (Egypt) to look for bread. Following redundancy, families may be forced to relocate, and the ‘breadwinner’ may be separated for a time. All this causes financial insecurity and emotional strain.

Another reason why redundancy is so troubling for people is the uncertainty

associated with it. How long will it take to find another job? For some, a new job may be found quickly, but others may face long periods of unemployment. For Jacob and his family, they faced seven years of famine.

Whatever the duration, Job again provides guidance, as he experienced far greater loss than most. When he declared, ‘the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away’, Job 1. 21 NKJV, he acknowledged both God’s sovereignty and grace – recognizing that all he had was God’s provision, and that God had the right to remove it. The lesson for us is clear: ultimately, God is our provider, not our employer.

The Lord Jesus reinforced this truth in His Sermon on the Mount, Matt. 6. 25-34. His words could easily have been spoken to someone facing redundancy. He exhorts His disciples not to respond like the Gentiles who anxiously ask, ‘what shall we eat?’ or ‘what shall we drink?’ or ‘what shall we wear?’ Instead, followers of Christ should take their lead from the birds who are fed by the heavenly Father. When the Lord said, ‘Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life’, v. 25 NKJV, He gave a command that for some is extremely difficult to follow. Those who suffer from anxiety may feel that these verses are specifically aimed at them. However, these verses are addressing the problem of materialism, which can affect all and not just the anxious. Paul refers to this problem in 1 Timothy chapter 6 verses 6 to 10, where he teaches the believer to be content with whatever material possessions they might have. Cultivating a spirit of contentment may well provide us with the ability to withstand the storm of redundancy. The Chicago lawyer, Horatio Spafford, seems to have experienced this when, following immense personal and financial loss, he wrote the hymn *It Is Well with My Soul*. His losses included the tragic death of his children and the ruin of his business, yet he turned his grief into words of enduring faith.

Prepared pathway

Sending a man ahead, v. 17.

In some translations, verse 16 begins

with the word ‘when’, which links it to verse 17. When God caused the famine to come, He had already sent a man ahead to deliver them. We know this man to be Joseph who had been sent by God, in advance, in readiness for the famine. Long before we see the problem, **God has prepared the solution**. Redundancy does not catch God by surprise – His providential plan is already in motion.

The Psalm reminds us that God had arranged for Joseph to be in the right place and the right position to be able to help his family when the famine came. It is hugely reassuring for us to rest on the fact that God has it all planned out in advance. So many believers can testify to experiences of God’s providential goodness in times of material loss.

Another way in which God has richly prepared the solution for us is by providing a High Priest who is **with us** in the storms of life. The writer to the Hebrews points to this truth as a reason for not placing one’s faith in material things. Believers facing redundancy can rest on the assurance that ‘I will never leave



thee, nor forsake thee’, Heb. 13. 5, 6. It does appear that it is during the darkest hours that we appreciate His presence most.

This section is concluded with the thought that we should all be alert to the needs of others and be willing to help other believers who may be facing financial hardship. In Acts chapter 11 the Holy Spirit prompted Agabus to warn of a coming famine. As a result, ‘every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea’, v. 29.

Perplexing plans

Joseph, sold as a slave, v. 17.

To human eyes, God’s chosen method of preserving Israel might seem perplexing. Why would God’s plans involve one of Jacob’s sons, Joseph, being sold into slavery? Joseph provided the answer when he said, ‘you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good’, Gen. 50. 20 NKJV. So, God might bring us through difficult periods in our lives to preserve us from a worse outcome. Equally, when a believer experiences redundancy, it may be that God has planned this to bring about some greater good. Our prayer should be that we might emulate Joseph.

It is not always easy for us to understand, or even see God’s providence in difficult circumstances, but some New Testament passages might help us. For instance, we learn that God uses trials to bring about spiritual maturity, Jas. 1. 2-4. It is a comfort to know that God is using redundancy to facilitate improvements to our spirituality. He also uses trials in our life to demonstrate the genuineness of our faith, 1 Pet. 1. 6, 7. The faith we show in times of difficulty, like redundancy, will be rewarded with praise when Christ returns.

Conclusion

Redundancy, like famine in Israel’s history, is never easy to endure. Yet Psalm 105 reminds us that such trials are neither random nor meaningless – they are woven into the fabric of God’s providential purposes. He is sovereign over both our plenty and our want. The

same Lord who summoned a famine also sent a man ahead, showing that His plans include both the hardship and the provision. What appears to us as loss, delay, or perplexity is often preparation for something greater that we cannot yet see.

Joseph’s testimony – ‘you meant it for evil . . . but God meant it for good’ – captures this truth. Redundancy may seem bewildering at first, but it can be God’s means of redirecting us, deepening our trust, and refining our faith. Like Job, we are called to acknowledge both the Lord’s giving and His taking, resting in His goodness. Like Christ’s disciples, we are urged not to be anxious but to trust our heavenly Father who feeds the birds and clothes the flowers.

In the end, redundancy is not merely a conclusion but a pathway – a pathway toward greater humility, contentment, and confidence in God’s unfailing presence. He will never leave us nor forsake us, and His purposes always lead to praise.

As the poem written by GRANT COLFAX TULLAR, but popularized by CORRIE TEN BOOM, so eloquently puts it:

My life is but a weaving
Between my God and me.
I cannot choose the colours
He weaveth steadily.
Oftimes He weaveth sorrow;
And I, in foolish pride,
Forget He sees the upper
And I the underside.
Not till the loom is silent
And the shuttles cease to fly,
Will God unroll the canvas
And reveal the reason why.
The dark threads are as needful
In the Weaver’s skilful hand
As the threads of gold and silver
In the pattern He has planned.
He knows, He loves, He cares;
Nothing this truth can dim.
He gives the very best to those
Who leave the choice to Him

For a thoughtful and compassionate exploration of walking with God through seasons of trial, you may find comfort in TIM KELLER’s book, *Walking with God through Pain & Suffering*, Hodder & Stoughton, 2013.

Ezekiel the Seer

THE AUTHORITY OF GOD INDICATED

By **GRAEME ANDREWS** Wallingford, England

Our studies now move into the second main division of Ezekiel. Herein we see that the book is not only arranged chronologically but also thematically as oracles against foreign nations are grouped topically.

Overarching structure:

1. Chapters 4-24: **The full departure of God’s glory.** The horror of Judah’s fall. These chapters occur before the siege of Jerusalem. Whether by vision, theatrical play, or denouncing oracles, the prophet forecasts the fall of Jerusalem. The city would be sieged and the people slaughtered for their crimes. But central to Judah’s judgement would be the exodus of the divine presence.

2. Chapters 25-32: **The foreign detractors of God’s glory.** The honour of Judah’s God. This section occurs primarily during/after the siege of Jerusalem. Its downfall was major geo-political news. But, in those days, it would have been a marker of religious significance as well. Hostile nations surrounding Judah would rejoice in the defeat of Jerusalem and the demise of Judah’s God. It is worth noting that no word of denunciation is levelled against Babylon in this section; they were God’s agents of judgement.¹

3. Chapters 33-48: **The future dwelling of God’s glory.** Hope for Judah’s future. At the end of chapter 33 the tone changes. Ezekiel has provided limited words of comfort so far. Now the prophet’s mouth is opened and his message changes. Themes of restoration abound; the nation will be resurrected spiritually, redeemed individually,

and the temple will be rebuilt. What a transformation the final vision brings; God’s glory returns.

Predictive prophetic authenticity

Ezekiel chapter 26 may be a textbook example of the wonder and difficulties of predictive prophecy. Prophets generally had two responsibilities:

1. Speaking out against sin, condemning the nation’s current affairs spiritually, politically, morally and socially.
2. Predicting future events. Deuteronomy chapter 18 verses 21 and 22 provides the barometer for predictive prophecy: the prophecy must come to pass. Failure was not an option!

In our previous study, we detailed how Ezekiel is validated in the short term. Six years before the fall of Jerusalem, he depicted the siege. Sceptics minimize this, suggesting that Ezekiel was just good at reading the political climate. In essence, they claim, he is making deductions any political commentator could have made. This reasoning is flawed, arising out of a disdain for the supernatural nature of prophetic revelation. Our study in Ezekiel chapter 26 is different. It is fulfilled long after Ezekiel has died and cannot be met with the same objections. By verses 13 and 14, the Grecians are now in the ascendancy.²

Ezekiel 26. The city of Tyre: A case study in prophetic inerrancy

A study of Ezekiel’s messages concerning Tyre (“Tyrus” KJV) is informative. There are four sermons which alternate between oracle and lament. Tyre was a city-state which, by the thirteenth century BC, became the most important in Phoenicia.³

It was a virtual commercial empire being described as ‘the Queen of the seas’, responsible for establishing Carthage and it had influence as far as Spain.⁴

Chapter 26 indicates the contemporary crime of Tyre. Jerusalem was its great economic rival; removing trade tariffs due in Jerusalem would benefit Tyre.⁵ For Tyre the fall of Jerusalem marked a great pay day and Tyre rejoiced, ‘I shall be replenished, now that she is laid waste’, v. 2 ESV. God’s response is categoric, ‘Behold, I am against you . . . and will bring up many nations against you’, v. 3 ESV. The rest of our chapter details the fall of Tyre because of its greed, with successive nations breaking against it like waves of the sea. Chapter 27 laments the fall of this great commercial powerhouse. In chapter 28, we read of the political side of Tyre, the pride of its prince, and the power behind it all, the devil himself.⁶

Structure of chapter 26:

The destruction of Tyre foretold, vv. 1-6

- The reason for the judgement, vv. 1, 2.
- The regularity of the judgement. Tyre would be bombarded by successive waves of nations, v. 3.
- The result of the judgement, vv. 4-6.

The destruction of Tyre detailed, vv. 7-14

- The siege of Nebuchadnezzar (note the references to ‘he’),⁷ vv. 7-11.
- The siege of many nations (note the references to ‘they’),⁸ v. 12.
- The siege of Alexander the Great (note the reference to ‘I’: as Tyre falls God is working out His purpose through Alexander the Great), vv. 13, 14.

The destruction of Tyre lamented, vv. 15-21

The conquest of Tyre: A tale of two cities

Tyre was comprised of two parts, the mainland ‘old Tyre’ and the island fortress which was about half a mile from the coastline. The island was impregnable, with walls 150 feet high and twenty feet wide. Prior to Alexander’s conquest, the island fortress was never breached.

The Babylonian siege of mainland Tyre, vv. 7-11

The Bible is correct even in the smallest of details. Nebuchadnezzar comes from the north to siege Tyre, v. 7. Surely this is wrong, as he marches upon Tyre following victory over Jerusalem in the south? We do not necessarily need to explain this away as some sort of generic statement of the direction that the Babylonians had to invade Syria/Palestine from.⁹ After the siege of Jerusalem, we find Nebuchadnezzar in Riblah of Hamath, a location north of Tyre, 2 Kgs. 25. 21; Jer. 52. 9.

For thirteen years, Babylon sieges Tyre. Mainland Tyre is conquered alongside the surrounding dependent towns, 29. 18. RIDDLE notes that verses 7 to 11 outline ‘a land-based siege’.¹⁰ Nebuchadnezzar wins a hollow victory but never captures the true prize, the island. As the island was supplied by sea, it was relatively impervious to siege warfare. Historically, Tyre surrenders, but does so on its own terms and conditions. Later we find a biblical principle reaffirmed: God is no man’s debtor. ‘God didn’t think Nebuchadnezzar was paid enough for his efforts [regarding Tyre], so He gave him Egypt as an extra bonus (29. 18-20)’.¹¹

The Macedonian siege of the island fortress, vv. 13, 14

Some 250 years later, the island fortress falls to Alexander the Great.¹² He took the bricks of the levelled mainland city, even using its dust, to build a causeway to the island, v. 12.¹³ This activity allowed him to turn ‘the island into a peninsula so that he could bring his siege engines to bear’.¹⁴ Additionally, he utilized ships from conquered Phoenician cities and help from the King of Cyprus who wished to ally himself to Alexander. Finally, the island fortress was cut off and razed to the ground.

The controversy of Tyre: failed or fulfilled prophecy?

Liberals reject this prophecy on two grounds:

1. They demand that the prophecy be understood to mean that Nebuchadnezzar destroys all of Tyre, effectively ignoring the development of thought and the

reference to ‘many nations’, v. 3.

2. They claim that the expression ‘shalt be built no more’, v. 14, means this is a failed prophecy as a settlement exists there presently, the Lebanese town of Soûr. It is now a fishing town with a UNESCO World Heritage centre for the excavated parts of ancient Tyre. UNESCO admits that a great part of the important archaeological vestiges remain submerged, matching verse 19, ‘great waters shall cover thee’.¹⁵

The second objection is worth reviewing. “‘Shall never be built” might be better translated “will not be built up again”, that is, “will not go back to its former state” and does not imply that the island of Tyre would never again have any buildings or inhabitants at all’.¹⁶ For Tyre to be ‘rebuilt’, it would need to have commercial reputation, great wealth and prominence again – the renown of chapter 27. None of this is the case.¹⁷ Thus, we affirm the following in defence of the veracity of

the word of God:

- 1, The modern city of Tyre is not the same as the ancient Tyre. You cannot rebuild that which is underwater – Alexander’s conquest radically shifted the geography of this region.
- 2, The placement of the city is different. Originally ‘old Tyre’ was south of the island fortress. Soûr boasts a mainland city directly parallel to the headland city.
- 3, The **prominence of the city is different**. Soûr is a fishing port, just as the Bible predicts, a place for ‘spreading of nets’, v. 5, not a commercial powerhouse. Chapters 26 and 27 are about the glory, prominence, and commercial significance of Tyre. This has never been regained; Tyre’s zenith was reached in Ezekiel’s day.

In 332 BC Alexander fulfilled most of this prophecy. He laid waste to this commercial giant that rejoiced in Jerusalem’s demise. God fulfils a complex prophecy via numerous nations over centuries.

Endnotes

- 1 ‘When Jerusalem finally fell in 586 BC, the only states that were still resisting the Babylonians were Egypt and Tyre. It is not coincidental, therefore, that of the foreign nations addressed by Ezekiel, these two are singled out for the brunt of his oracular volleys’. DANIEL I. BLOCK, *New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Ezekiel (Chapters 24-48)*, Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998, pg. 32. Babylon was God’s chosen instrument, so these nations were against: (1) the people of God – mocking Judah’s demise; and (2) the instrument of God – i.e., Nebuchadnezzar and his mighty army.
- 2 We may describe predictive prophecy as the ‘fingerprint of God’, Isa. 46. 9, 10.
- 3 CHARLES LEE FEINBERG, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel: The Glory of the Lord*, Moody Press, 1982, pg. 147.
- 4 JOHN L. MACKAY, *Ezekiel – A Mentor Commentary. Volume 2: chapters 25 – 48*, Christian Focus Publications, 2018, pg. 32.
- 5 Tyre controlled the sea route for trade, with Jerusalem controlling the land routes through Canaan. The demise of Jerusalem provided Tyre the opportunity to increase its profit. THOMAS CONSTABLE, *Notes on Ezekiel*. <https://soniclight.com/tcon/notes/pdf/ezekiel.pdf>. 2024, pg. 209.
- 6 RIDDLE helpfully divides the oracles against Tyre: Chapter 26, ‘the ruins of Tyre’. Chapter 27, ‘the renown of Tyre’. Chapter 28, ‘the rulers of Tyre’. JOHN M. RIDDLE, *Ezekiel: Coming Back from Exile*, John Ritchie, 2020, pg. 293.
- 7 Ezekiel utilizes a spelling of Nebuchadnezzar closer to the Babylonian spelling of the name.
- 8 Between Nebuchadnezzar’s raid of Tyre and Alexander’s triumph over it, the Persians brought destruction upon it in 525 BC. Many others followed down the centuries. RALPH ALEXANDER, ‘Ezekiel’ in FRANK E. GAEBELEIN (ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Volume 6 (Isaiah-Ezekiel)*, Zondervan Publishing, 1986, pg. 870.
- 9 TUELL is indicative of this approach. It is possible historically that Nebuchadnezzar had to return east to attend to some matters and then, avoiding the desert, marched Northwest to the mediterranean and south down the coastal plain. STEVEN TUELL, *Understanding the Bible Commentary Series: Ezekiel*, Baker Books, 2008.
- 10 JOHN M. RIDDLE, *op. cit.*, pg. 296.
- 11 WARREN W. WIERSBE, *Be Reverent: Bowing before our awesome God (OT Commentary Ezekiel)*, David Cook, 2000.
- 12 Zechariah prophesies the fall of Tyre following the Babylonian captivity, Zech. 9. 3, 4.
- 13 CHARLES LEE FEINBERG, *op. cit.*, pg. 148.
- 14 STEVEN TUELL, *op. cit.*, 2008.
- 15 <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/299>.
- 16 DOUGLAS K. STUART, *The Communicator’s Commentary Series: Ezekiel*, Word Books, 1989, pg. 260.
- 17 There was a mini revival or renaissance during Roman times; however, this still does not restore Tyre to anywhere near its biblical zenith.

THE ‘I AM’ STATEMENTS OF SCRIPTURE 4

By **MERVYN WISHART** Newcastle, Northern Ireland

‘And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst’, John 6. 35

This is the first of the seven delightful ‘I am’ sayings of Christ in John’s Gospel.

There are three types of bread in John chapter 6.

1. **Natural bread, v. 9** – the five barley loaves, and two small fishes, were handed over by the lad to Andrew who brought them to the Lord.
2. **Heavenly bread, v. 32** – ‘Moses gave you not that bread from heaven’, the manna.
3. **The true bread, v. 32** – also spoken of as ‘the bread of life’, v. 35, ‘the bread of God’, v. 33, and ‘the living bread’, v. 51.

The natural bread

Andrew said to the Lord, there is ‘a lad [“little boy” (JND)] here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?’ v. 9. He was thinking of the quantity of food required. It is interesting that there was also a little boy used in the service of the Lord in the Old Testament. ‘Samuel ministered before the Lord, being a child’, 1 Sam. 2. 18.

The little boy in John chapter 6 was part of an interesting trio in scripture. He **gave what he had**. In 2 Kings chapter 5, the little captive maid in the house of Naaman **told what she knew** and her master was cured of leprosy. Mary of Bethany **did what she could**, Mark 14. 8, and was the first to anoint the body of the Lord Jesus in view of His burial.

Philip was concerned about the cost of providing for such a large number. He said, ‘Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little’, John 6. 7. Andrew was thinking about

the quantity, Philip about the cost.

It was a small amount of bread, only five loaves, but they were given into the hands of the Creator. He took the loaves and gave thanks, He distributed it to the disciples and the disciples to the multitude.

The men sat down on a carpet of grass which the Lord had provided. ‘He causeth the grass to grow’. Ps. 104. 14. The Lord took account not only of their spiritual need to hear His word, but also of their comfort as they sat on the ground. His spoken word was spiritual food; He also provided the food they needed to sustain them on the journey home.

We note the abundance of the Lord’s provision despite the scepticism of the disciples. Each person was given as much as they desired. They were filled. When the Lord said, ‘Gather up the fragments that remain’, v. 12, there were twelve baskets full. This was ‘over and above’ the amount that was eaten, v. 13. The Lord often gives not only enough to meet the present need, but He gives ‘over and above’ our expectations. The miracle is recorded by all four Gospel writers, and the place was noted as ‘where they did eat bread, after that the Lord had given thanks’, v. 23.

The heavenly bread

The children of Israel tempted God in the wilderness, by asking ‘Can God furnish a table in the wilderness . . . can he give bread also?’ Ps. 78. 19, 20. The Psalm records God’s gracious provision for them, vv. 23-25. He ‘opened the doors of heaven, and had rained down manna upon them to eat, and had given them of the corn of heaven. Man did eat angels’ food’.

The name of the manna

The people called it ‘Manna’, meaning ‘what is it?’ Exod. 16. 15. The One of whom it speaks is the transcendent Christ, beyond knowing completely. ‘No man knoweth the Son, but the Father’, Matt. 11. 27. JOSIAH CONDOR wrote,

‘But the high myst’ries of His Name
An angel’s grasp transcend;
The Father only (glorious claim!)
The Son can comprehend’.¹

Exodus chapter 16 describes the manna. As to its size, it was small. As to its shape, it was round, v. 14. As to its taste, it was sweet, like wafers made with honey. As to its colour, it was white, v. 31. As to its location, when the morning dew had gone up it lay on the face of the wilderness. Each of these descriptions speak beautifully of the Lord Jesus.

The manna small speaks of His incarnation. The One of whom Solomon said, ‘The heaven of heavens cannot contain thee’, 1 Kgs. 8. 27, was born in Bethlehem, wrapped in swaddling clothes, held in the arms of Mary and laid in a manger. Bethlehem means ‘the house of bread’. In Ruth chapter 1 verse 6, in the land of Moab, Naomi heard that the Lord had visited His people in giving them bread and she returned to Bethlehem.

The manna round speaks of His eternity. In Micah chapter 5 verse 2, the prophet said, ‘whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting’. John begins his Gospel with the words, ‘In the beginning was the Word’, and begins his Epistles stating, ‘That which was from the beginning’. Bethlehem was not the beginning. The One who was born there bears the name, the ‘Father of Eternity’, Isa. 9. 6 JND.

The manna sweet. Every believer can bear testimony to what the Lord Jesus means to them. Not only has He saved our souls, but He has won our hearts. The bride in the Song of Solomon said, ‘I sat down under his shadow with great delight and his fruit was sweet to my taste’, S. of S. 2. 3.

The manna white reminds us of

the unsullied light of heaven from whence the Lord Jesus came. On the mountain of transfiguration, the disciples had a glimpse of His glory, Matt. 17. 2. He was the only man who passed through this defiling world, untainted by sin.

The manna on the face of the wilderness

The three Synoptic Gospels each give a record of the Lord’s progressive postures in prayer in the garden of Gethsemane.

Luke says that the Lord Jesus ‘was withdrawn from them [the disciples] about a stone’s cast, and kneeled down, and prayed’, 22. 41.

Mark says, ‘And he went forward a little, and fell on the ground and prayed’, 14. 35.

Matthew adds, ‘he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed’, 26. 39. With His face pressing the dust of the earth, that was cursed because of sin, Gen. 3. 17, He knew that on the morrow He would suffer and die on the cross. To redeem us from the curse of the law, He would be made a curse for us, Gal. 3. 13.



John does not refer to the prostration of the Lord on the ground in the garden. By contrast, He speaks of how the arresting party fell to the ground before His glory, John 18. 6.

The true bread

The true bread is in contrast to the manna. It was for a limited number, the children of Israel; for a limited time, forty years in the wilderness. When they reached Canaan, the manna ceased. It only sustained those who ate of it for the journey through the wilderness. In process of time, they died.

We see a vivid picture of the Lord Jesus in His incarnation. Seven times in the chapter, we read ‘He came down from heaven’, 6. 32, 33, 38, 41, 50, 51, 58. DARBY translates the words, ‘come/comes down out of heaven’, cp. the true light, 1. 8, 9. The contrast is with John the Baptist who was not that light but came to bear witness of the light.²

The bread of God

Clearly the bread is a man, the Lord Jesus, 6. 33. Christ is the bread of God. He is the One who continually and eternally brought delight to God’s heart, Prov. 8. 30. God has sent His Son that He might give life unto the world, abundant life for all who will receive Him.

The hymn writer penned the words,

‘O what is all that earth can give?
I’m called to share in God’s own joy;
Dead to the world, in Thee I live,
In Thee I’ve bliss without alloy’.³

The bread of life

‘I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst’, John 6. 35. The one who has come down from heaven to give life unto the world is able to save and satisfy every person who comes to Him.

The living bread

‘I am the living bread which came down from heaven’, 6. 51. How are we to understand what the Lord meant by eating His flesh and drinking His blood? This is not a reference to the Lord’s supper; the emblems do not become the actual body and blood of

Christ. The words of the Lord Jesus in John chapter 6 were spoken before the Lord’s supper was instituted in the upper room.

‘The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat?’ v. 52. As the Jews were asking the question among themselves, the Lord said in verse 53, ‘Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you’. The Lord Jesus is clearly speaking of His suffering and death on the cross for the potential blessing of all mankind. What is meant by eating His flesh and drinking His blood? He was not speaking of His physical body but using it as a spiritual message. When He said, ‘he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst’, v. 35, it is clearly spiritual hunger and thirst. It could not possibly mean that the person who comes to Christ will never again feel natural hunger or thirst thereafter. He was not speaking of the satisfaction of physical hunger and thirst but rather a spiritual blessing that those who come to Him would receive. When we eat and drink, our body assimilates food and we derive benefit from it; we come into the good of it. The Lord Jesus suffered and died on the cross, more than 2,000 years ago. When a person repents of their sins and trusts in Him for salvation, they immediately come into the good of all He accomplished at Calvary. By faith we partake of the bread of life and come into the possession of life eternal.

Not only does receiving Christ as the bread of life bring salvation but it also brings satisfaction. Note what He said in verse 35, ‘I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall **never hunger**; and he that believeth on me shall **never thirst**’. Not only salvation and satisfaction, but also union with the Lord Himself, v. 55.

Well might every believer say from a full heart, ‘Lord, evermore give us this bread’, 6. 34.

Endnotes	
1	<i>Believers Hymn Book</i> , number 352.
2	Cp. the true vine, 15. 1, and Israel, Isa. 5. 7.
3	<i>Believers Hymn Book</i> , number 140..

NEHEMIAH

A MAN OF PRUDENCE

By **TOM MERRIMAN** Carmarthen, Wales

Neh. 6.15–7.73
Part 10

Completing the wall, 6. 15, 16

Less than ten months since Nehemiah heard of the conditions in Jerusalem, the monumental task was finished. The building and repairs, completed in the sixth calendar month, Elul, took only fifty-two days, despite significant opposition. This great accomplishment was a testament to God’s enabling. Nehemiah fulfilled a critical role, but God put it in his heart, 2. 12, and only God could be credited with its completion. Israel’s enemies and surrounding nations recognized it and were ‘much cast down in their own eyes’.

When the limitations of Egypt’s magicians were exposed, they recognized the ‘finger of God’, Exod. 8. 19; 2 Tim. 3. 8. Similarly, in the days of the early church, the Jewish council tried to resist the work associated with the name of Jesus. But after an angel released the apostles from prison, Gamaliel wisely advised, ‘if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it’, Acts 5. 38, 39. The Lord had said, ‘I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it’, Matt. 16. 18.

What God begins, God completes – and to perfection. It was true of creation, also of our redemption. In virtue of Christ’s perfect work, all of God’s enemies will be subdued beneath His victorious feet, to the glory of God. Moreover, His work begun in us will be continued until its perfection – in ‘the day of Jesus Christ’, Phil. 1. 6. Jerusalem’s finished wall shows that great things can be accomplished in a brief time. ‘Is any thing too hard for the Lord?’ Gen. 18. 14; cp. Jer. 32. 27.

Hindrances, vv. 17-19

Communications

Nehemiah became aware that while the building and repairs had been

ongoing, correspondence had been exchanged between the nobles of Judah, and Tobiah, one of their chief opponents. These were extensive – they sent him ‘many letters’ and his letters reached them unhindered. Were some of these the same nobles who ‘put not their necks to the work of their Lord’, the same nobles who lent money on interest to their brethren in hard times, 3. 5; 5. 7? Likely, their minds had been affected by Tobiah.¹

May our communications be found wholesome. This applies to verbal, written, and digital messages, including conversation, email, messenger apps, and social media. ‘Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers’, Eph. 4. 29.

The communications we receive will also impact on our thinking and behaviour. The world boasts many influencers, and we must take care from whom we receive spiritual guidance. Paul’s teaching for Crete applies today – overseers should give no room for error to be taught to the assembly. Some of the Cretans had to be admonished for their lazy attitude and appetite for deceptive material, ‘rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith’. The inconsistent and immoral lives of these teachers were a giveaway, Titus 1. 10-16. With so much material easily accessible beyond the sphere of the local assembly, believers are each responsible for turning aside from that which could threaten the spiritual welfare of whole families.

Philippians chapter 4 verses 8 and 9 provide an excellent set of principles, ‘whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure,

whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things’.

Commitments

The problem of God’s people’s connections with the outside world ran deep, and beyond the nobles, for ‘there were many in Judah sworn unto him’, Neh. 6. 18. How cleverly Tobiah had established his association. First, by marrying the daughter of Shechaniah, the son of Arah (named on the register of those that returned from captivity, 7. 10). Second, by the marriage of his son, Johanan to the daughter of Meshullam, the son of Berechiah (an industrious builder, having repaired part of the wall, and that near to his chamber, 3. 4, 30). KEIL and DELITZSCH suggest that ‘from this reason being given, we may conclude his affinity by marriage was confirmed by an oath’;² i.e., on the basis of.³ But both were forbidden by the Lord, ‘thou shalt make no covenant with them . . . neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son’, Deut. 7. 2, 3. Such connections had probably been exploited when Shemaiah was bribed in an attempt to deceive Nehemiah, 6. 10-14. Nehemiah was clear; as close as Tobiah’s association may have brought him, he had no pedigree among God’s people, ‘ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem’, 2. 20; See Deut. 23. 3.

These established avenues of communication and friendship were used by Tobiah to depict himself in the best light, whilst attempting to frighten Nehemiah. Those who were reporting Tobiah’s ‘good deeds’, and divulged Nehemiah’s words to him, were deluded by an appearance of piety that had no substance. It is of God’s grace that the rebuilding task had not been derailed through such compromises.

Paul expressed a concern that the Corinthians’ ‘minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ’ through the work of ‘false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ’, 2 Cor. 11. 3, 13.⁴

We are to recognize those who are genuine, who deliver sound doctrine and conduct a life that complements their preaching. They must be distinguished from others that have ‘a form of godliness, but [deny] . . . the power thereof’, from whom we are to ‘turn away’, 2 Tim. 3. 5.

The Jews’ pledged friendship with Tobiah reminds us to carefully choose our personal ties and friendships for ‘evil company corrupts good habits’, 1 Cor. 15. 33 NKJV. James’ warning is fitting, ‘friendship of the world is enmity with God’, Jas. 4. 4. Let us avoid commitments that are at odds with our heavenly citizenship. Believers should not be ‘unequally yoked together with unbelievers’, 2 Cor. 6. 14 – the two can have no fellowship with one another.

Helps, 7. 1-73

Although the wall was complete, there was no room for complacency and rest. Nehemiah prudently implemented further measures to secure Jerusalem and the people of God.

GER DE KONING helpfully comments, ‘The wall is finished, but the vigilance must not slacken. It is about “having done everything, to stand firm” (Eph 6:13). When the greatest effort has been made, the greatest danger is that things will still go wrong’.⁵ Care to maintain God’s testimony is a continual work.

Gatekeepers, 7. 1

Nehemiah assigned porters to operate and secure the doors. Singers were appointed to lead the congregation in praise and thanksgiving; the Levites’ duty was to assist the priests in their service.⁶

A centre of testimony preserved from worldliness is fitting for the ‘house of God, which is the church of the living God’, 1 Tim. 3. 15. When God’s praise is upon people’s hearts and lips, there is less room for anything of a corrupt nature. When saints’ hands are occupied in His work, there is less room for them to be defiled by sin.

So, may our lips and labours be employed in God’s praise and service. ‘Let the word of Christ dwell in you

richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him’, Col. 3. 16, 17.

Governors, vv. 2, 3

Two men were selected to share overseership of the city of Jerusalem, both for their good character. Hanani, Nehemiah’s brother, had first brought the people’s plight to Nehemiah’s ears, demonstrating his concern for God’s people. His report of the city’s condition was an accurate assessment, 1. 2, 3. Hananiah had experience as ‘the ruler of the palace’ and was known for his faithfulness and godly fear. They were to see that Jerusalem’s gates were opened, not at first light, but when the sun was hot – having enough strength to expose potential threats. They were also to ‘stand by’ as they were shut and barred at the end of the day.

‘Watches’, responsible as lookouts for Jerusalem, had to be occupants of the city, and were assigned to their own neighbourhood, ‘over against his house’.

Overseership in God’s assembly is a spiritual appointment for those with experience, of suitable character, and a willing mind. A family connection need not be a barrier, provided the required spiritual qualities are present. Peter called on overseers to fulfil their responsibility – ‘[take] the oversight thereof’, 1 Pet. 5. 2. However, their example is to be followed by each of God’s people, who are responsible for their own area of testimony.

Genealogies, vv. 4-73

To date, the wall and gates of Jerusalem had been the focus of the restoration work, in keeping with the burden given to him by the Lord, 2. 12 – but houses also needed to be built. Households, too, required integrity, lest the ungodly should be found occupying the city. The issue of Tobiah’s close but invalid connections highlighted the need for claims to an inheritance among God’s people to be examined. Again, Nehemiah was

sensitive to his God-given burden, this time in connection with the people – ‘God put into mine heart to gather [them] together . . . that they might be reckoned by genealogy’.⁷ He showed no partiality, ensuring that ‘the nobles, and the rulers, and the people’ were all compared against the register of those that had first returned from Babylon. This comprised:⁸

- A sum of the people returning from captivity, vv. 8-38
- Priests, responsible for sacrifices, vv. 39-42
- Levites, who offered supporting service, v. 43
- Singers, to maintain the Lord’s song, v. 44
- Porters, to maintain the city’s security, v. 45
- Nethinims, assistants to the Levites in practical service, vv. 46-60⁹
- Those unable to show their lineage, vv. 61-65
- Congregation and gift summary, vv. 66-72
- Occupation of the cities, v. 73

To help ensure the integrity of the local assembly today, it is fundamental to confirm, in a prudent manner, that those it receives have their names written on God’s register, the Lamb’s book of life. Furthermore, families with spiritual virtue will contribute to its strength.

Ultimately, we must continually commit the assembly’s wellbeing to the Lord. ‘Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain’, Ps. 127. 1.

Endnotes

- 1 Note Nehemiah’s prudence, 2. 16.
- 2 C. F. KEIL and F. DELITZSCH, *Keil & Delitzsch Old Testament Commentary*, Neh. 6. 18, found at <https://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/eng/kdo/nehemiah-6.html>, 1854-1889.
- 3 Cp. Ezra 9. 1, 2.
- 4 Cp. 2 Cor. 11. 14, 15.
- 5 G. DE KONING, *King comments on the Whole Bible*, Neh. 7, 2021.
- 6 2 Chr. 20. 21; 8. 14.
- 7 Cp. 2. 12.
- 8 See also Ezra 2. 1-70.
- 9 See ‘Temple servants’ in M. F. UNGER, *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, Moody Press, 1988.

THE ‘LOOKS’ OF THE LORD JESUS

By **MALCOLM HORLOCK** Cardiff, Wales **Part 3**

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

4. Some received the benefit of His protection (continued)

(iii) In Mark chapter 11, we read of the second occasion when the Lord Jesus cast out those who bought and sold in the temple.¹

We note that, in advance of this action, the Lord had, first, **‘looked around at all things’** and had then gone out to Bethany for the night.² It was on His return the next day that He overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold doves and so forth.³

The Lord explained His actions in terms of the words of Isaiah, ‘Is it not written, my house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations? but you have made it a den⁴ of robbers’.⁵

The court of the Gentiles, which should have been available for prayer and the worship of the true God, was occupied by tradesmen – in part, by ‘the Bazaars of the sons of Annas’.⁶ Men came to pray and to bring their offerings to God but were ‘robbed’ and deprived of their spiritual privileges by a corrupt and money-grubbing priesthood. That which Jesus saw stirred Him (out of compassion and love) to spring to the defence of those who were denied the blessing of the special place appointed for them to bring their intercessions and their praise to God.

It is most important that we understand what it was that made the Saviour angry on each of these occasions. That which made Jesus angry in Mark chapters 3, 10 and 11 was certainly not (a) some petty injury done to Himself or (b) some personal insult, such as was once delivered to Him by the inhabitants of ‘a village of the

Samaritans’, who refused Him hospitality – following which He simply passed on to another village.⁷

Our Lord’s anger was roused, rather, when others suffered hurt or loss by being deprived of that which was for their good and blessing. It was, that is, love and compassion which provoked our Lord to indignation and anger:

- (i) for the man with the withered hand of chapter 3,
- (ii) for the children and their fathers of chapter 10, and
- (iii) for the would-be worshippers of chapter 11.

‘Time would fail me to tell’⁸ of the occasions when . . .

5. Some received the benefit of His straight speaking

By way of example only, I point to our Lord’s encounter with a rich young ruler.⁹

The incident concerns a rich¹⁰

young¹¹ ruler¹² who approached Jesus with a question about obtaining eternal life. The man claimed that, from his youth, he had observed those commandments in the law which were concerned with adultery, murder, theft, false witness, fraud, and respect for parents.¹³

However, this exemplary young man knew in his heart that more was required of him than mere outward conformity to the law; hence his question, ‘what do I still lack?’¹⁴

‘Jesus, looking at him, loved him’, we are told, ‘and said . . . “You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me”’.¹⁵

The Lord knew the man’s heart, that riches held the supreme place there – that what the man really worshipped were his possessions and his riches. The Lord’s loving (albeit stringent) demand ‘touched the poisonous swelling as with a sharp lancet when He called for surrender of wealth . . . it was this man’s money which stood between him and eternal life’.¹⁶

It was for this reason that Jesus put His finger on the dominant idol in the ruler’s life and told him first to give away all his possessions and then – and only then – to ‘come’ and ‘follow’ Him.¹⁷

We should note that the commandments which the man claimed to have kept were all ‘man-ward’, taken from what is known as the second table of the Decalogue.

In effect, the Lord Jesus took him back to the very first commandment of the first table, which was ‘God-ward’; namely, ‘You shall have no other gods before me’.¹⁸

Tragically, faced with this demand, the ruler’s brow clouded over¹⁹ and ‘he went away sorrowful’.²⁰ The price was too high. But Jesus had spoken straight to the man and would not pare down His requirements to make them easier for him to accept.

In each of the cases we have considered so far (from that of the multitudes with their physical and spiritual needs to that of the rich ruler), that which the Lord Jesus saw moved Him to do something or to say something or, at the very least, to feel something.

But there is one recorded instance when the Saviour’s ‘look’ was itself His response to a painful situation. I refer to the occasion when **‘the Lord turned and looked at Peter’**.

6. Peter received the benefit of His look

I refer to the occasion when **‘the Lord turned and looked at Peter’**. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said, “Before the rooster crows today, you shall deny me three times”.²¹

At that moment, Jesus was being led out²² from the place where He had appeared before the council during the night to spend a few hours in some form of a cell before being brought back before the council early in the morning for a formal so-called trial with its predetermined verdict and sentence.²³

En route, Jesus was led past a charcoal fire²⁴ which the guards²⁵ and the servants of the High Priest had kindled²⁶ in the middle²⁷ of the High Priest’s courtyard below.²⁸

Around the fire, the guards and the servants gathered to warm themselves for it was cold.²⁹ Peter joined them as they sometimes sat³⁰ and sometimes stood³¹ near the fire.

The servants of the High Priest were shortly to mock Jesus, to beat Him with their fists, and to blindfold Him.³² At that point, He would not be able to ‘look at’ anyone!

But for one brief moment, His eyes met those of the unhappy apostle. And that single glance told Peter that Jesus knew everything – that Jesus had recognized his face and his voice – that Jesus had heard his every word, including his dreadful oaths!³³

For the Lord to have spoken even one syllable to Peter at that moment would have been for the Lord to betray Peter. Under close questioning, Peter had repeatedly

denied that he even knew Jesus. The Lord could not afford, therefore, to make the slightest gesture of recognition. He was not able even to slacken His pace. But then He did not need to! He compressed everything He wanted to say to Peter into His one look.

Perhaps His look reminded Simon Peter, not only of Jesus’ prediction of Peter’s failure,³⁴ but also of the very first time they had met. On that occasion, Andrew (Peter’s brother and one of the disciples of John the Baptist) had left the Baptist to follow the ‘Lamb of God’.³⁵

Andrew found Peter to tell him, “‘We have found the Messiah’”. Andrew then ‘brought him to Jesus. **Jesus looked at³⁶ him** and said, “You are Simon, the son of John. You shall be called Cephas” (which is by interpretation, ‘rock’³⁷)’.

Endnotes

- 1 Mark 11. 15, 16; cp. John 2. 14-16.
- 2 Mark 11. 11 NKJV.
- 3 Mark 11. 12, 15.
- 4 ‘σπήλαιον, “a grotto, cavern”, W. E. VINE, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, Oliphants, article ‘Cave’ 2.
- 5 Mark 11. 17 lit.; quoting from Isa. 56. 7 and Jer. 7. 11.
- 6 ‘Many of the traders charged very high prices, taking cruel advantage of the pilgrims who came from the countryside and from foreign lands. The traders had to pay for permission to have their stalls in this area, and it seems they had to pay the leading priests. Later Jewish tradition remembered one place as “the Bazaars of the sons of Annas”, ALLAN MILLARD, *Discoveries from the Times of Jesus*, Lion Books, pg. 82.
- 7 Luke 9. 52-56.
- 8 From Heb. 11. 32.
- 9 Matt. 19. 16-22; Mark 10. 17-22; Luke 18. 18-23.
- 10 ‘He was very rich’, Luke 18. 23.
- 11 ‘The young man said’, Matt. 19. 20.
- 12 ‘A certain ruler asked Him’, Luke 18. 18.
- 13 Mark 10. 19, 20.
- 14 Matt. 19. 20 NKJV.
- 15 Mark 10. 21 ESV.
- 16 ALEXANDER MACLAREN, *The Gospel according to St. Mark*, Bibliolife, pg. 77.
- 17 Matt. 19. 21.
- 18 Exod. 20. 3 ESV.
- 19 ‘When the man heard this, gloom spread over his face’, Mark 10. 22 (Good News Bible). The word which Mark uses (στυγνᾶσας) signifies ‘to be gloomy’ and is translated ‘lowering’ as a description of the sky, Matt. 16. 3.
- 20 Matt. 19. 22.
- 21 Luke 22. 61 NKJV with footnote.
- 22 ‘Jesus must have looked on His erring
- Apostle either from the chamber in which He was being tried, if it was one of those chambers with open front . . . or else at the moment when the trial was over, and He was being led across the courtyard’, F. W. FARRAR, *The Gospel according to Luke (Cambridge Greek Testament)*, Cambridge University Press, pg. 380. With W. MANSON (‘the Lord, who is in the courtyard’, *The Gospel of Luke: The Moffatt New Testament Commentary*, Harper, pg. 252) and R KENT HUGHES (‘In the heat of his denial, Peter was oblivious to the shuffle of feet as Christ was being led out into the courtyard—and certainly he was not prepared for the excruciation of the next moment’, *John: That You May Believe*, Good News Publishers, pg. 337), I favour the latter. In any case, the Lord was in some place from where He could see Peter and Peter could see Him.
- 23 Luke 22. 66 – 23. 1.
- 24 John 18. 18.
- 25 Matt. 26. 58; Mark 14. 54.
- 26 John 18. 18.
- 27 Luke 22. 55.
- 28 Mark 14. 66.
- 29 John 18. 18.
- 30 Matt. 26. 69; Mark 14. 54; Luke 22. 55.
- 31 John 18. 18.
- 32 Mark 14. 65; cp. Matt. 26. 67, 68; Luke 22. 63, 64.
- 33 Mark 14. 71.
- 34 Luke 22. 31-34.
- 35 John 1. 35-37, 40.
- 36 ‘ἐμβλέπω . . . This verb implies a close, penetrating “look”, W. E. VINE, *op. cit.*, article ‘Look’, A. 5. The same verb is used in Luke 22. 61.
- 37 ‘Doubtless in Aramaic the expression was kēpā, a word meaning “rock”, D. A. CARSON, *op. cit.*, pg. 156.

EXODUS 33 THY PRESENCE IN OUR MIDST

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

Our previous study was in Exodus 32 and we looked at some of the details that made the ‘molten calf’ sin such a grievous one. We pick up the story where we see God responding in His righteousness.

The Lord’s response is grave as He replies to Moses, ‘Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation’, Exod. 32. 10. God here is on the verge of wrath. This great sin, one of treachery and idolatry, was presumptuous, and deserved (if not required) the death penalty. The Decalogue had been given, Exod. 20. Israel had agreed to a conditional covenant with God, Exod. 24. The blood had been sprinkled on the people as they stated, ‘all that the Lord hath said will we do and be obedient’, vv. 3, 7. The penalty for idolatry was death.¹ When Moses and Joshua hear and see the sinful scene, they grasp the magnitude of the departure from God.

Three responses to the molten calf

The immediate response of Moses

This is twofold: a) Those acting in rebellion must taste the bitterness of their sin – Moses burned the molten calf, ground it to powder, scattered it upon the water, and made the children of Israel to drink of it, 32. 20; b) Moses calls for people to enlist on the Lord’s side, v. 26. This is a case where treachery abounded where obedience had fled. The question was extremely poignant: are there any who take the Lord’s perspective, who see the gravity of sin as He does, and are willing to lead in repentance and justice? Those in the tribe of Levi respond to the call of God and His cause of righteousness.

The added response of the Lord

This is mentioned at the end of the chapter, v. 35. If any who had led this

sinful venture had delusions that they had escaped the judgement of Moses and the Levites, they were to find the truth of Numbers chapter 32 verse 23. As Dathan and Abiram tried to avoid judgement by staying in their tents, and as Achan tried to hide an ‘accursed’ treasure, all were brought to light in the searching judgement of God.

The long-term response

God would yet ‘visit their sin upon them’, Exod. 32. 34. The wrath of God would bring the entire generation of unbelievers to death in the wilderness over forty years, ‘Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles . . . have tempted me

now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice; surely they shall not see the land which I swear unto their fathers’, Num. 14. 22, 23.² The treachery of the molten calf worship was the latest in a series of incidents exposing their hearts of unbelief, each incident very telling, and together building the case evidencing Israel’s apostasy and deserved judgement. (*See table below*).

In Exodus through to Deuteronomy, we have the accounts of God bringing the people of Israel out of Egypt into the promised land, where we learn many attributes of God. We have: His strong and holy arm of redemption; His faithful shepherding care; the foreshadowing of New Testament truths fulfilled in the person of Christ; and His longsuffering and mercy towards His people. Yet though God is longsuffering, He ‘will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children’, Exod. 34. 7. We see this in the immediate response, the added response, and the long-term response of God.

Moses’ four intercessions

These truths regarding the righteousness and justice of God are

‘These ten times’, Num. 14. 22 – The unbelief of a generation leading to forty years of wandering and death in the wilderness. ³			
1	Exod. 14. 11, 12	Sinful regret and doubt	Sinful regret and doubting God’s power and intentions at the Red Sea
2	Exod. 15. 23, 24	Sinful murmuring	Murmuring at the bitter waters of Marah
3	Exod. 16. 2, 3	Sinful regret and murmuring	Strong murmuring about lack of food in the Wilderness of Sin
4	Exod. 16. 20	Sinful disobedience	Not following God’s instructions to not leave any manna till morning
5	Exod. 16. 28	Sinful refusal to obey	Waiting for manna on the Sabbath against God’s instructions
6	Exod. 17. 1, 2	Tempting the Lord	Testing and striving against God at Rephidim
7	Exod. 32. 1-7	Treacherous idolatry	Making, worshipping, attributing redemption from Egypt to a molten calf and designating the image as Jehovah
8	Num. 11. 1	Rejecting God after the covenant	Continued murmuring after God’s provision at Sinai. God sent fire to destroy them
9	Num. 11. 4	Rejecting God’s provision	The people lusted, tempted God, complained with tears, despised the manna
10	Num. 14	Rejecting God’s inheritance	Complete unbelief and rebellion at Kadesh-Barnea

woven into the narrative together with **His tender mercies and grace**. Moses’ intercessions may be enumerated by the following descriptions:

- 1) ‘staying’ the wrath of God, 32. 11-13;
- 2) to forgive this great sin, vv. 31, 32;
- 3) that God would dwell with Israel, 33. 12-17; and
- 4) take us for Thine inheritance, 34. 9.

For the purposes of this article, we will now focus on the third of Moses’ intercessions, found in chapter 33 upon God’s announcement of His plans.

Moses having successfully intervened with God to stay His wrath, 32. 14, and having achieved the ‘forgiving’ or ‘letting’ of Israel’s sin, vv. 33, 34, the Lord makes a series of promises in the opening verses of chapter 33:

- ‘I [will] give it’, regarding the promised inheritance.
- ‘I will send an Angel’, regarding direction and leadership.
- ‘I will drive out’ regarding the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites.
- ‘Unto a land flowing’ with milk and honey and the blessing of the Lord.

However, the careful reader will be quick to observe something critically missing: the Lord’s presence. Verse 3 tells the sad news, ‘I will not go up in the midst of thee’ and the reason is told as well, ‘for thou art a stiff-necked people: lest I consume thee in the way’. C. H. MACKINTOSH comments, ‘This is touchingly beautiful. A “stiff-necked people” demanded the boundless grace and exhaustless patience of God’.⁴

If we study Moses, we see a man of God responding not rashly, but seriously and resolutely. Every eye watched as he took a tent and pitched it outside the camp, v. 7. As per Moses’ directive, the tent was called ‘the Tabernacle of the congregation’. The congregation had been sternly instructed to strip themselves of their ornaments – the ornaments of which substance had been devoted to making of the molten calf just days ago. Every man now was attentively standing at his tent door to see what the Lord would do, as well as Moses. This time,

Moses takes his place **inside the tent**, while the Lord in a cloudy pillar descends to speak with Moses from outside the tent. After the outcome of this intercession and the subsequent building of the tabernacle, the Lord would in future days take His position inside the veil of the holiest within the tabernacle and dwell with Israel.

Far from requesting God for a mere human companion to accompany him on the journey, Moses will settle for nothing less than the presence of God all the way. Just as Jacob laid hold of the man he wrestled with until he had the blessing assured, so Moses reverently shows his resolute thirst for God’s presence through to the end.

The biblical record shows an intimacy between Moses and God, even during such jeopardous a scene as we have here, 33. 11. This is quite unique in the history of God’s dealings with mankind. Even as we come to Moses’ request later in verse 18, he is reminded by God that no one can see His face and live. The usual means that God spoke to men through much of Old Testament history was through dreams and visions, Num. 12. 6. For this reason, the prophets and men of God were called ‘seers’.⁵ God gives us a clue to this intimacy: Moses’ meekness, Num. 12. 3. May we ever and more increasingly be aware of our neediness, our wretchedness, and yet in faith crave the fellowship and closeness of a submissive and congruent walk with God as we learn from the life of Moses.

Moses’ intercession here was focussed upon restoring the presence of God in Israel’s midst. Yet we discover the centre of his interchange with God had to do with His grace. No less than four times the phrase is mentioned, ‘found grace in thy sight’. During this exchange, Moses pleads that he could know the way of the Lord (similar to His request ‘shew me thy glory’ which we will take up in a future article). ‘Every successive display of grace does but elicit larger desires; and Moses therefore now longs for himself that he may see God’s glory’.⁶ God’s gracious character will be part of the revelation of His glory to Moses in chapter 34.

God answers in His grace that ‘My

presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest’, 33. 14.

Knowing the exigency and gravity of this moment, Moses meekly yet determinedly responds, ‘If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence. For wherein shall it be known here that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight? is it not in that thou goest with us? so shall we be separated, I and thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth’, 33. 15, 16. God’s presence is absolutely essential. Moses heard God’s answer, but here he underscores the necessity of God’s presence. He had learned after eighty-one years what Christ would tell His disciples, ‘without me ye can do nothing’, John 15. 5.

And so it is today. The distinction of the people of God from any other person on earth is this, that the presence of the living God abides in us. ‘And lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen’, Matt. 28. 20.

To this request of Moses, the Lord gladly and wholeheartedly responds with a freshly revealed readiness, ‘I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken: for thou hast found grace in my sight, and I know thee by name’, Exod. 33. 17. The Lord’s original plan was recorded in chapter 25 verse 8, ‘And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them’.

Would God dwell with His people Israel? Exodus chapter 33 tells us, ‘Yes’! We close this article with the words the Apostle John heard out of heaven, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God’, Rev. 21. 3.

Endnotes

- 1 Exod. 22. 20; see also Deut. 6. 13-15; 17. 1-7; 27. 15.
- 2 For a more complete thread of God’s workings in this regard, the reader is encouraged to read together, Numbers 14, Psalm 95, and Hebrews 3 and 4.
- 3 References courtesy of Randy Amos’ oral ministry.
- 4 C. H. MACKINTOSH, *Notes on the Pentateuch*, Loizeaux Bros., 1972, pg. 268.
- 5 Cp. 1 Sam. 9. 9; 1 Chr. 29. 29.
- 6 E. DENNETT, *Typical Teachings of Exodus*, Wilson Foundation, pp. 372, 373.

THE PERSON AND WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT Part 3

Walk in the Spirit and be filled with the Spirit

By **TIM COLTMAN** Winshill, England

In our previous studies, we have been thinking about who the Holy Spirit is, and titles given to this person of the Godhead. In this article our focus turns to the teaching of the Apostle Paul as he exhorts the saints that they might 'walk in the Spirit' and 'be filled with the Spirit'.

Walk in the Spirit

We have many exhortations and challenges in scripture as to our walk as a believer. Our walk has to do with our whole manner of life and conduct. How we walk, where we walk, and who we are walking with, are all questions we can ask ourselves as we examine our own Christian life and progress.

Our blessed Saviour is always the perfect example – the One who steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem, Luke 9. 51. His walk was perfect, obedient, and ever brought delight to the Father. Every step that He took was in full communion with God.

Paul, in writing to the saints at Galatia mentions walking in the Spirit on two occasions, Gal. 5. 16, 25. In this chapter the key word is 'liberty'. In the first half of the chapter, we are exhorted to 'stand fast . . . in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free', v. 1. This liberty is freedom from the claims of the law on account of the work of Christ. In the second half of the chapter, it is liberty again, but not to live how we like because we are justified but living in the power of the Holy Spirit. In this last half of the chapter, we are in a very practical section and we are encouraged to 'walk in the Spirit', v. 16. But how do we do that on a day-to-day basis?

Notice, first of all, that this is a command, 'This I say then, Walk in the Spirit', that is, we are to walk and to keep on walking in the Spirit, to be dependent on the work of the Spirit. Failing to do so could lead us to succumb to the lusts of the flesh. When we walk in the Spirit, the lusts of the flesh are not fulfilled in our life. We should be giving our time, thoughts, and meditation to the things of the Lord and His word while serving Him. This is something that we need to be constantly working at. We will never extinguish the challenge of sin, but we can cultivate right thoughts and actions in our life, so that we do not fall into sinful patterns and habits.

The two mentions of the word 'walk' in verses 16 and 25 are different. In verse 16, Paul says, 'Walk in the Spirit', and the word 'walk' is *peripateō*. The thought is to order your whole life by the Spirit, to view your whole life and allow the Holy Spirit to regulate and control every aspect of it so that we might not yield to the flesh. It is to be grounded, and empowered by the Spirit, to walk in the ways of God, pleasing God and to be in communion with Him. The word of God should be our main focus, and we should be obedient to the clear teaching and guidance of scripture, living a life that pleases Him. We obey His voice and are guided by Him.

When we come to verse 25, the word 'walk' is *stoicheō* and has a slightly different meaning. We are not now looking at the big picture of our life but thinking of the moment-by-moment and step-by-step of our life as we walk in the Spirit. It is a military term of walking in rank and in step. In every moment and in every step, we are to walk in the Spirit. Is our walk in keeping with the word of God? Does it please God? What I read, watch, think about, and meditate upon, is it pleasing to the Lord? Is our walk a walk of love, kindness, humility, purity and contentment?

Paul speaks of the works (plural) of the flesh, vv. 19-21, but then speaks of the fruit (singular) of the Spirit, v. 22, 23. To be marked by the fruit of the Spirit, we must be controlled and guided by the Spirit in our life.

Filled with the Spirit

'Be not drunk with wine . . . but be filled with the Spirit', Eph. 5. 18. Paul mentions a person filled with wine, which means they are under the control of it. So too with the Spirit. If we are filled with the Spirit, we are under the control of the Spirit. Being filled does not mean that we can have more of the Spirit following our conversion, but it has the thought of allowing the Holy Spirit to control our lives.

This is not a one-off event, neither is it an ecstatic experience. It is something we need to constantly work at, a repeated experience, and is the ideal state of the believer. If our life is to be given wholly and totally to the Lord, there should be no part of our life from which the Holy Spirit is excluded.

How can we be filled with the Spirit? Paul tells us, 'Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns . . . making melody in your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things . . . submitting yourselves to one another', vv. 19-21.

What a challenge to us both to walk and be filled with the Spirit.



Edited by
ANDREW DUTTON

YOUNG PRECIOUS SEED

is a supplement of *Precious Seed*, designed for those young in the faith. Its purpose is to restate timeless truths from the word of God for a new generation of Christians and to kindle a biblical approach to current issues in the world in which we live. YPS is published by *Precious Seed*, PO Box 8,829, Derby, DE1 0SY, UK, and is available separately from the main magazine.

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YOUNG.PRECIOUSSEED

Editor's Introduction

Welcome to the August issue of YPS.

I hope the summer is going well. It's a time when many believers can take part in special outreach activities and enjoy the company of other Christians. If you have spare time, why not find out if there are opportunities near you for Christian service and fellowship? The summer is also a good time to catch up on reading, and I hope

that this issue of YPS will be a good resource for you.

We have a new series starting on the Book of Revelation, thanks to David McGahie. I trust you enjoy the issue and find it to be a blessing.

Andrew Dutton

Biblical masculinity and femininity in the local church

ANDREW DUTTON, NORWICH, ENGLAND

In previous articles we have considered the uniqueness of humans, created in the image of God, Gen. 1. 27, and the distinction between males and females. These together complement each other and can glorify God. However, because of our fallen creation, this partnership, designed by God, is not fully displayed and, instead, there is conflict and disagreement.

The local church is where God's order should be best seen in a world that has rejected Him and His word. It will not be perfect, because local churches are made up of saved sinners, who all still have the flesh! This article outlines some principles of biblical masculinity and femininity as they are expressed in the local church. We cannot address every aspect of the subject but provide a starting point for further study.

General principles

- **All believers are priests.** This subject is dealt with by Peter; he says that believers are an 'holy priesthood', 1 Pet. 2. 5. A priest is someone that has the privilege to enter the presence of God; in the Old Testament, this would be to offer sacrifices on behalf of God's people. In the New Testament, the role of all believers is to 'offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ', v. 5. Paul exhorted the Romans to 'present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God', 12. 1; the context is that believers, together in one body, should fulfil their spiritual gift, to prove the 'will of God', v. 2. Perhaps our most significant opportunity to offer spiritual sacrifices is in remembrance of the Lord Jesus at the breaking of bread; preparation is required by all believers in their worship of the Lord Jesus, expressed audibly by the males.

- **All believers are one in Christ.** 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus', Gal. 3. 28. Regardless of race, status in the world, or sex, Christians are equal in dignity and value, and are one in Christ.
- **All believers have equal responsibility.** Being priests and one in Christ Jesus brings great privilege and responsibility for all believers, male and female, old and young. It is a privilege to be part of a local church, but also a responsibility to study the word of God, pray, and serve the Lord daily in the priestly activities and work of the local church – not just when there is a meeting!
- **There are different spiritual gifts.**¹ God distributes gifts 'to each one individually as He wills', 1 Cor. 12. 11 NKJV, and has given individuals gifts to benefit the people of God, Eph. 4. 12. Some gifts are more prominent than others, but not more important – the unseen gifts of helps, 1 Cor. 12. 28, service, Rom. 12. 7, and showing mercy, v. 8, are vital for the wellbeing of a local church. Interestingly more than half of the ongoing gifts in the New Testament are unseen, compared to prominent gifts such as teaching.
- **There is an order of headship.** 'The head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God', 1 Cor. 11. 3. The Corinthian church was not acknowledging the headship of Christ, and Paul was teaching God's order: God, Christ, man, woman. This is order, not inequality, as the Lord Jesus is 'equal with God', Phil. 2. 6. In the local church, this is shown in symbol form, the covered head of the woman and the

uncovered head of the man show the glory of Christ, as the man 'is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man', v. 7. Headship is also shown in roles, 'I will therefore that men pray every where', 1. Tim. 2. 8, they are commanded to lead audibly church gatherings in prayer (this is all men in the church, as prayer isn't a spiritual gift) while 'women keep silence in the churches', 1 Cor. 14. 34. This relates to what is audible – as we have already seen, the silent, spiritual prayer and worship of all believers is important.

Practical implications

So, what are the implications of the principles? First, because God has stated these things in His word, I can believe them, base my convictions on them, and seek to obey them. Second, I can appreciate the wonder of God's purpose and the dignity of serving as male and female together in the local church, for His glory.

¹ There are some recent articles in YPS on spiritual gifts, which may be helpful:

www.youngpreciousseed.org/articles/spiritual-gifts/ and

www.youngpreciousseed.org/articles/spiritual-gifts-continued/

Book of the Revelation – Part 1 – Introduction

DAVID MCGAHIE, KELLS, NORTHERN IRELAND

When asked to write this series on the book of Revelation, I thought of the great fascination that many have for the book. As the world hurtles towards the end of this current era, there is a growing interest in trying to understand the future as revealed by the eternal God.

However, this book frightens many people. There are two main reasons. First, the book has a mix of both symbolic language and literal descriptions, resulting in much debate about what it really means. Second, many of the events described are frankly terrifying, as we read about a time of great persecution and future judgement falling on Earth's population.

If you are curious about this book's message, but unsure how to unravel it, then I trust this series will help you discover that for those who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ the theme of the book is extremely positive. Whilst challenging, there is no reason to fear it. We will go on a journey of exploration, taking us back into the past, through the present, and into the future. The Revelation is not only about what is commonly called 'end times'! It contains a lot that is directly relevant to us today.

How should we tackle it? As with any book of the Bible, it is worth trying to read it through in one go. It might take you a little more than one hour, but it is well worth it!

As you read, keep a pen and paper beside you, noting down things that seem strange, and phrases or things that seem to appear repeatedly.

When studying a book, we should note the reason why it was written. This book is the **'Revelation of Jesus Christ'** and it also shows **'things which must shortly come to pass'**, 1. 1. The first part is the most important. Throughout the book, the Lord Jesus is being revealed, and what is revealed is revealed by Him. So, in every difficult passage we should look to see how He is being revealed and what we are learning about Him. That is much more important than trying to work out practical details of how future events will unfold!

We see that the book is written to seven literal, first century churches, v. 4, and as local churches in the twenty-first century, it is directly relevant for us. There is also a blessing for those who read, hear, and **keep** what is written, v. 3. This emphasizes that it is not just for our intellectual interest but should impact our behaviour.

It is important to learn how to interpret the many pictures that are painted for us in the book. My clear recommendation is this: when the literal interpretation makes sense, don't turn it into some kind of symbol. The Bible is inspired of God, and His goal in communicating with human beings is to reveal Himself and provide clear guidance for our own good, not to confuse us. We can read Genesis literally, and we should read the Revelation literally, except where it is clear that the language is symbolic. John helpfully points this out on many occasions when he says that what he saw was 'like' something, indicating that it is not literal. The book talks about a literal sinful man who will be a great world leader, but when it describes him as a wild beast with seven heads and ten horns, 13. 1, we understand that this is symbolic, describing something about his origins and character. When interpreting symbolic pictures, we refer to other scriptures and avoid falling into idle speculation to fit our own preferred way of seeing things. Remember that John knew his Old Testament very well. Lots of the answers to difficult bits are hidden away there!

Some things might not make sense to us, but they will be very clear to the people alive at the time when they are happening. We should humbly accept that and pray for help to understand the relevance for us – just as with every other book of the Bible.

If we have the correct attitude – humility to accept our limits, faith to take God at His word, confidence that He has it all under control, and willing obedience to practise what we learn for ourselves – we will find that this book is rich, exciting, and challenging.

Christian basics – Responsibilities of assembly fellowship

STUART SCAMMELL, CARDIFF, WALES

'When, as a young teenager, I came into assembly fellowship, it was a momentous day that I look back on with fondness. Being in assembly fellowship is God's ideal and His plan. Twenty centuries ago, in Jerusalem, the first 'church' or assembly was formed. In Acts chapter 2 verse 42, we find the believers all meeting together and they continued that way. Being in fellowship is not something to be entered into lightly or, in fact, rejected lightly either. It is not membership of a club that you may have a passing interest in or something that you pick up and drop as your mood changes.

It is God's assembly, and as Paul writes to Timothy he uses phrases such as 'pillar and ground of the truth' and 'house of God', 1 Tim. 3. 15. First, this reminds us that it is God's possession and second, that there is a responsibility for the assembly to display God's character to the 'perverse generation' that we have been saved from, Acts 2. 40. These phrases do not refer to the buildings that we meet in, but the believers that assemble together to the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 'Ground of the truth' refers to the foundations; not stone or concrete, but the truth of God's word that we stand on. A 'pillar' is something that is built to hold up. We are to maintain the truth that we have been entrusted with. Pillars were also used in the first century for display, and we, having learnt the truth of the gospel, should be displaying it to others.

Paul gives us his reason for writing: 'that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God', 1 Tim. 3. 15 NKJV. So, fellowship is not mere attendance, allowing things just to passively happen around us, it is so much more. In Acts chapter 2, we observe a very active group of new converts, without a New Testament to read. They had listened to Peter's preaching and responded with repentance and baptism, v. 38. This demonstrates that fellowship is for baptized believers only.

The statement at the start of verse 42 serves as a solemn challenge to us, revealing God's expectations, 'they continued steadfastly'. This means that they were not going to live as before; they were now going to be immersed in the things of God.

To live in any other way dishonours the name of the Lord Jesus and ruins the testimony of God's church. This has serious implications; it not only derails our lives for God, it also makes those observing us think that Christianity is disingenuous and false. They see no reality in our lives and discount the claims of Christ. This turns them away from the

gospel; they face eternity without Christ.

The fledgling church in Acts chapter 2 was genuine. Despite challenges, they were together as often as possible. They did not absent themselves from meetings, they gathered to break bread, pray, and to hear the apostles' teaching. They also continued in fellowship. Biblical fellowship is multifaceted; the Greek word is *koinonia* – it means that they were together in belief, care, social interaction, support, and work.

The church was very dynamic, and so should it be today. Times were difficult and some of the early church would have been poor servants with evident needs. The church had a common interest, they were now brothers and sisters in Christ and all their needs were met fairly.

Koinonia (fellowship) has contained in it the idea of working in partnership. We are called to take the gospel to others, Mark 16. 15, by doing the work of an evangelist, 2 Tim. 4. 5. In Acts chapter 2 verse 46, the early church displayed unity and were living out the gospel before their peers. They earned the right through consistency to tell it out. They had found Christ as Saviour; they were transformed and wanted to tell others. This is not easy, but it is our responsibility as those in fellowship in God's church.

Their faithful activity was rewarded. Verse 47 is a wonderful statement of God's faithfulness, 'the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved' NKJV. If we are part of a local assembly, we need to ensure our lives are honouring to God, and we are gathering together to learn from God's word and to pray. We must have the interest of God's people at heart and be active in telling others of Him, whom we love.



Saints' CVs: Corrie ten Boom

BY JEREMY SINGER, BRIDGE OF WEIR, SCOTLAND

CORRIE TEN BOOM 1892-1983

Corrie ten Boom was the youngest daughter of Casper and Cornelia ten Boom. Corrie's father was a watchmaker, based at Haarlem in the Netherlands. To assist with the family business, Corrie became the first registered female watchmaker in the Netherlands in 1922.

Their Christian faith was an important part of the ten Boom family life. Corrie herself became a born-again believer at the age of five. The family frequently prayed 'for the peace of Jerusalem', Ps. 122. 6, recognizing the Jews as 'God's ancient people'.¹

In May 1940, during World War Two, the Nazis invaded the Netherlands and proceeded to occupy the country. As in Germany, Dutch Jews suddenly became a prime target for persecution by the Nazi authorities. Corrie and her family sought to protect Jewish people by hiding them in their large family house. The Dutch resistance built a secret room for the ten Booms to shelter Jews. This hiding place was concealed behind a false wall in Corrie's bedroom; the secret location was well used for many months. The ten Boom family is credited with helping hundreds of Jews evade capture by the Nazis.

In February 1944, Casper and his two daughters, Corrie and Betsie, were arrested by the Gestapo and interrogated. They were accused of sheltering Jewish people in their home. The elderly Casper died after only a few days of imprisonment. Corrie and Betsie were eventually transported to a women's concentration camp in Ravensbrück, Germany. There they endured terrible treatment and forced labour.

Tragically, Betsie died at Ravensbrück in December 1944. Before her passing, Betsie whispered to her sister: '[We] must tell people what we have learned here. We must tell them that there is no pit so deep that He is not deeper still'.² A few days later, Corrie was released from the concentration camp, although she was not sure why she had been granted freedom. Later she discovered the usually efficient Nazi guards had made an administrative error in approving her release. After the end of the war, she publicly forgave her former captors. One of the most famous moments in her later life involved meeting a former Ravensbrück guard who approached her after she had given a speech in Munich. He asked for forgiveness, explaining that he had become a Christian since the war. Her response was 'I forgive you, brother



... with all my heart!'³ Corrie related this incident as an example of Christian forgiveness in action, as she travelled the world telling people about her experiences and her faith in God.

One of her most memorable comments was on Micah chapter 7 verse 19, 'Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea'. Corrie explained how our sins are 'forgiven and forgotten and to warn the accuser He puts a sign saying "No fishing allowed"'.⁴

Corrie was honoured by the state of Israel in 1968 with recognition as 'Righteous Among the Nations' for risking her life to save Jews during the Holocaust. The building where her family lived in Haarlem is now a museum known as the Corrie ten Boom House. Visitors can participate in guided tours around the building and see the hiding place where the ten Booms helped to save Jews from danger.

As a trained watchmaker, Corrie appreciated precision engineering where every piece of an intricate mechanism must be in exactly the right place for the watch to work properly. Corrie similarly understood the sovereignty of God, working in her life so every piece fell into place perfectly, according to His will, allowing her to serve Him effectively.

¹ CORRIE TEN BOOM, *A Prisoner and Yet*, SPCK, 1959, pg. 96.

² *Ibid*, pg. 160.

³ CORRIE TEN BOOM, *Clippings from my Notebook*, SPCK, 1983, pg. 78.

⁴ *Ibid*, pg. 84.

QuestionTime

Conducted by
Frank A. Proudlock

QUESTION

Is it advisable to use generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) for Bible study and in Christian ministries?

ANSWER

Generative AI (referred to here simply as GenAI) is a form of artificial intelligence capable of creating new material, such as text and images, by learning patterns from vast amounts of existing data. It is readily accessible today through tools such as ChatGPT, Google Gemini, and Microsoft CoPilot. GenAI has been described as 'the defining technology of our times', with some even suggesting its impact may be 'more profound than fire or electricity'. As its use becomes more widespread in professional and personal contexts, an important question arises: does GenAI have a place in Bible study and Christian ministry?

To answer this, it is helpful to reflect on how GenAI works. GenAI does not think, understand or possess knowledge in a human sense. Instead, it processes large datasets and generates responses by predicting likely sequences of words based on patterns it has learned. Consequently, GenAI does not discern truth. It produces plausible answers based on probability.

Positive uses of GenAI

Used carefully, GenAI can be a helpful tool in **finding information** particularly on **well-established** and **uncontroversial** biblical subjects. In this respect, it can be used in a similar way to traditional study aids such as concordances, Bible dictionaries and encyclopaedias. However, in comparison, it is far more sophisticated, being faster and broader in scope, albeit sometimes less reliable.

Appropriate uses would include:

- **Locating scripture passages:** GenAI can quickly identify Bible verses related to general themes or concepts, such as grace, forgiveness, or suffering, which can then be examined in their proper context.
- **Comparing passages:** It can bring together parallel accounts (e.g., the harmonizing of the Gospels) or help outline timelines, such as that of Old Testament prophetic ministries, with other biblical events.
- **Background research:** GenAI can place Bible books and chapters we may be studying in their historical, cultural, and geographical context, for example, explaining the setting of the church at Ephesus.
- **Language and structure:** It can help outline passages and identify key themes which can be a useful **starting point** for deeper personal study. Gen AI can also be used, with care, to compare related Bible words, such as the Greek words for 'love'.
- **Writing assistance:** GenAI is particularly useful for improving clarity, grammar, and flow in written material.
- **Practical support in ministry:** It can be useful in drafting notices, summarizing meetings, or assisting with administrative tasks.

In all these cases, GenAI can function as a tool to

assist, not as a source of authority. It can gather and organize information, but it cannot replace careful reading of scripture or dependence on God.

Dangers of GenAI Use

Despite its usefulness, GenAI presents significant risks, particularly because of how persuasive and authoritative its outputs can appear. Three key concerns are especially relevant:

- **Is it true?** GenAI draws on a wide range of sources without consistently distinguishing between what is reliable and what is unreliable, or between truth and error. While it may often generate answers that appear biblically grounded, it can also produce responses that are confused or doctrinally unsound. In some cases, it may even generate entirely fabricated information, so-called 'hallucinations'. Users should therefore exercise care, requesting sources and comparing them directly with the scriptures.
- **Is it wise?** Biblical wisdom is not merely knowledge but the ability to live rightly before God and to apply biblical principles in real life scenarios. It involves moral discernment, spiritual maturity, and experience gained through walking with Him. While GenAI can provide information, it cannot offer true wisdom. Many areas of Christian life, such as bringing spiritual guidance into challenging situations, require sensitivity, discernment, and the application of 'living by faith'. These are beyond the reach of any algorithm.
- **Who is the author?** GenAI can generate sermons in seconds; however, it has no personal faith and no relationship with God. Those who teach the word of God are called to do so through time spent in His presence, carefully meditating on the scriptures, 2 Tim. 2. 15. The Spirit of God becomes the true author of the message, as He impresses it upon the heart of a gifted teacher and enables him to share it with the people of God. Those who replace this spiritual exercise with AI-generated content risk becoming ineffective and inauthentic in the teaching of God's word.

In conclusion, GenAI is a powerful and potentially useful tool, but it must be used with discernment. It can assist with information gathering, organization, and communication, but it cannot replace the foundational elements of Christian life, such as Bible study, prayer, the work of the Holy Spirit, and personal spiritual growth.

Endnotes

- ¹ The author recognizes that the content of this article may be time-sensitive, reflecting current understanding, and that the full impact of GenAI on society and Christian belief and practice is not yet fully apparent.
- ² Satya Nadella, CEO of Microsoft.
- ³ Sundar Pichai, CEO of Google.

DIVERSITY Part 3

THE TWELVE APOSTLES

by **STEPHEN BUCKERIDGE** Hurst, England

Are the twelve disciples those whom we would have picked to start the greatest commission ever given to human endeavour? Would we have been prepared to invest three years' effort into such an unusual group? In this article on the diversity of the disciples, I hope to present a positive view of the diversity God uses, along with encouragement that we are not required to all be the same.

It is obvious from creation that God demonstrates tremendous diversity. My wife and I like palm trees – but we would not want all 2,500 varieties in our garden! We can appreciate the beauty of some of the thousands of different butterflies and also wonder why there are over 33,000 different types of fish, when most of that variety will not be seen by human beings. Some diversity may be helpful for resilience in a fallen world, but God seems to delight in variety just because He can; to give a sense of His creativity, grandeur, and beauty, and to demonstrate His ability to work in varied situations.

As human beings, we do not necessarily cope well with diversity. It can challenge our sense of security and any thoughts we may harbour that others bring us validation by being like us. God is not like that – eternally secure in His uniqueness, He says three times in Isaiah chapter 45, 'I am the Lord, and there is none else', vv. 5, 6, 18.

Diversity also challenges our limited cognitive capability to store and process information. God created the enormous variety of languages to accomplish His purpose of spreading people out around the planet, Gen. 11. Less than 1% of people can speak five or more languages, but there are over 7,000 languages in the world! God can listen to whatever language we use to pray, equally and fully understanding in whatever dialect we may use.

With such a God of variety, it is no surprise that the twelve disciples

were not clones. We have their names listed four times.¹ In each list Peter is put first, and he is well known for his prominence among the twelve. There is a striking contrast with others (such as Thaddaeus or James the son of Alphaeus) whom we know very little about. There is also a contrast with Peter's own brother Andrew, who, despite having brought Peter to the Lord, is not included on the occasions the Lord took just Peter, James, and John into situations. I sometimes wonder how he felt – but he just kept on doing what he was good at, bringing folk to Christ, John 6. 8, 9; 12. 20-22. Passages such as 1 Corinthians chapter 12 verses 24 to 27 make clear that God gives variation in prominence and roles that we must not confuse with importance or value.

This was true even in Peter's life. Prominent in the first part of Acts, he brought the gospel to the first Jews and Gentiles to be converted. Then, he practically disappears from the record, as the focus shifts to Paul. Our humanity may not readily embrace change, but just as God promised that there will be natural seasons, Gen. 8. 22 – and with each He gives each a unique beauty – so there is often diversity of service in the seasons of life.

There was diversity in character and style within the twelve that God used to accomplish different ends. This is illustrated by comparing Matthew and John; the style of writing in their respective gospels is clearly distinctive, as was the audience, timing, and purpose for which they were writing.

Matthew also reminds us of how the Lord uses those with differing views on non-essentials. Simon the Zealot may have been from those who wanted independence from the occupying Romans. Matthew the tax collector was working for the Romans. An interesting mix, but they were focused on the more important work the Lord had for them. How wise to work together on things of real value rather than being embroiled in contentious discussions of no eternal consequence! While the New Testament is clear that fellowship is based on unity on important truths, getting on with people does not need to imply agreement with every detail of all they think or do. Diverse opinion on minor matters is to be expected!

It is striking how little is said about the disciples in terms of some aspects of their background. We know nothing of their appearance and little of their physical capabilities. This is a refreshing contrast to cultures where so much is made of the differences in how people look or what they are physically able to do! One disciple could run faster than another, but both could speak of the good news of the resurrection, John 20. 4.

We infer that John was relatively young based on the time of his later writings (and perhaps his athleticism in John 20!), but nothing is specifically said about their ages. We must not limit what age an individual must be for God to use today; His word is full of examples of those He used across the age spectrum.

We know nothing about any of their qualifications, and details about occupation and financial standing for only a few. These things may matter for the specific sphere where God wants an individual to serve, but their absence is not a bar to having some area of service for the Lord.

Recognizing that God works through diversity (including using those we might not!) does not imply anyone can do anything or that we abandon any sense of discernment. The apostles were those specifically called and equipped to fulfil that role. There were false apostles in the time of the New Testament and a clear warning

given to avoid them, 2 Cor. 11. 12, 13. The apostles' service was for a time and there are no such apostles today; they were solely connected with the church's foundation, Eph. 2. 20.

Inevitably the diversity among the twelve was limited and we should note they were not the only people the Lord had as followers. There are seventy mentioned in Luke chapter 10 and 120 in Acts chapter 1. While God may single out a select group for a specific task, we know that He is willing to use, in some way, all who are available. As Mark and Luke illustrate, it was not necessary to be an apostle to be a Gospel writer.

That is especially important relative to women. While there were none in the twelve, there were many opportunities for them to be disciples in the broader sense. They worshipped Him, gave specifically to help Him, and learnt from Him.² There were women present when the eleven forsook Him and fled, implying a level of faithfulness and dedication to which the men did not attain, John 19. 25.

Looking across scripture, there are a small number of things God does not want men to do, and a small number of things God does not want women to do. This is His choice as Creator. In recognizing the value of diversity, we must resist attempts to either expand or reduce that divinely-given limitation and put our energy into the plenty that is open to us to do. Sometimes we find that there is

a natural lack of diversity among disciples as we reach those in our vicinity. Philip was from Bethsaida, like Peter and Andrew, John 1. 44; James and John were fisherman also from the Galilee area. However, the Lord would challenge their stereotypes about locality in the interaction with Nathaniel, vv. 46-49, and the woman from Samaria, 4. 27. They travelled widely in their own country, into the area of Decapolis and saw how the Lord handled Greeks and Romans as well as Jews. Healthy missionary interest, wisely used travel, and positively engaging with those from different cultures can all broaden beyond our own ambit our understanding of the diversity God uses.

A consideration of diversity among the disciples needs to include Judas Iscariot, who is always placed last in the list of disciples by the inspired writers. However, it is telling that in the upper room, when the Lord said one of them would betray Him, the disciples had no idea who it would be. This shows the wonderful grace of the Lord Jesus, that in the three preceding years there had been no mistreatment or spite shown, and it would culminate in the Saviour washing Judas' feet, just as He did the other disciples'. We inevitably come across those whose actions we feel we should speak disapprovingly of (as the Lord did regarding the betrayal), but we should distinguish that from our treatment of someone as a person. The Lord has set a high standard for us to follow; His view on the morality

of another's actions did not change the grace with which He interacted, and others could tell no difference in the way they were treated.

Practical implications

We should value fellow believers recognizing that all are precious. This is not because of any human characteristic that we may prize but because they are purchased by the blood of Christ, Acts 20. 28. God uses diversity in characters and backgrounds and does not have favourites within the church when it comes to race, social class, and other divisions that people use.

Christians should be scrupulously fair; the Lord was not unjustly preferential within the twelve and some of His strongest words of rebuke were for Peter. Bias can come into our actions for many reasons; one example is the damage done within assemblies due to favouritism towards (or against) family members. We all have levels of 'unconscious bias', potentially leading to imperfect decisions due to our inevitably limited life experience; humble awareness of our limitations, openness to wise counsel, and dependence on the Spirit in prayer are important for us all.

We should be open-minded regarding who God will use, including those who have recovered from failure. While some failures can impact our sphere of service, a recovered Peter was used mightily during Acts and through his Epistles, and all the disciples had fled at one point. There is diversity in failure, and we must not treat people less favourably just because they happen to fail differently from ourselves, Gal. 6. 1.

We can worship God for His brilliance in diversity. For the 100 billion stars in our milky way, and the trillions more elsewhere; He has made them all to differ in glory while calling each by name, 1 Cor 15. 41; Ps. 147. 4. Likewise, we can praise Him for His willingness and ability to work through diverse disciples today.

Endnotes

- 1 Matt. 10. 1-4; Mark 3. 14-19; Luke 6. 12-16; Acts 1. 13.
- 2 Matt. 26. 7; Luke 8. 3; Luke 10. 39.



TITLES OF JEHOVAH 9

JEHOVAH

TSIDKENU

The Lord our Righteousness

By **ANDREW WARE** Melbourne, Australia

Of all the Old Testament prophets, Jeremiah had one of the most difficult jobs. His call was to prophesy in the final days of the kingdom of Judah. From the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah, when the last flicker of faithfulness burned for what must have seemed a moment, to the eleven years of Zedekiah’s reign, Jer. 1. 2, 3, Jeremiah, who was ‘ordained . . . a prophet unto the nations’, v. 5, fulfilled that calling. In an almost thankless task beginning when he was a young man and spanning over forty years and its last five kings, Jeremiah continued in his work through Judah’s death throes. It was hardly what we might consider a successful ministry, but in so many ways that are foreign to our results-focused moment of the 21st Century this is a reminder that faithfulness to God is always far more important than any seeming success we may have from a human perspective.

In Jeremiah’s time, Judah was deeply marked by unrighteousness, which is evident from the first chapter, which records not only the call of the prophet but the Lord’s incitement against the nation, ‘I will utter My judgments against them concerning all their wickedness, because they have forsaken Me’, v. 16 NKJV. For this wickedness there would be judgement, found in statements such as, ‘Hear, O earth: behold, I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not hearkened unto my words, nor to my law, but rejected it’, 6. 19. However, the word of the Lord given to Jeremiah also pointed Judah to a time of hope in the future – indeed a time still in the future. Isaiah would say that ‘a king shall reign in righteousness’, Isa. 32. 1, but in chapter 23 Jeremiah identifies a **King** whose name is ‘the Lord our righteousness’, v. 6, and, in chapter 33, a **city** that bears the same name, v. 16. For that is the title *Jehovah Tsidkenu*.¹ The use of this term, *sedeq*, in the

Pentateuch clearly outlines the foundation of the idea of righteous and just action. Take, for example, the first mention in Leviticus chapter 19, one of the clearest statements of the moral law of Israel. They were to judge their neighbours in righteousness, v. 15,² and they were to have ‘just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin’, v. 36, in other words, their trade and business were to be done righteously.³ After all, God would remind them throughout the chapter, ‘I am the Lord your God’, for example, vv. 3, 4, and 10. They had a righteous responsibility to their deliverer, who is Himself righteous. However, as we have seen, by Jeremiah’s day, their unrighteousness was far reaching.

The King

Jeremiah chapter 23 verses 1 to 8 seem to form part of the response of Jeremiah to a request Zedekiah makes, ‘Enquire . . . of the Lord for us’, Jer. 21. 2. In verse 1, there is the pronouncement of ‘woe to the

shepherds’ NKJV, those who had failed to keep and guide God’s people. Indeed, they ‘destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture’, v. 1. They had ‘not attended to’ the sheep, and so the Lord will ‘attend to’ them because of their wickedness, v. 2 NKJV. Here is the unrighteousness of the rulers, be they kings like Zedekiah, or ‘prophet and priest’, v. 11.

When we come to verses 3 and 4, a question arises: do they point to the end of the Babylonian captivity, or a later time? The gathering described is ‘out of all countries’, v. 3 (also v. 8), and they will ‘fear no more, nor be dismayed’, v. 4. This seems to point to a time that is yet to come, for the Babylonian captivity was limited and, despite the restoration that is recorded in books such as Ezra and Nehemiah, they certainly were not delivered from fear. Indeed, they have not been, as seen in the steep increase in antisemitism around the world in our day. So, it would seem that these words ultimately point forward to the millennium. The shepherds may have failed, but the Lord has not. For He ‘will gather the remnant of my flock . . . and will bring them again to their folds’, v. 3. There will be restoration under the shepherd care of the Lord. They will ‘be fruitful and increase’, v. 3, pointing to the blessing and flourishing of the nation.⁴

Whatever verses 3 and 4 refer to, verses 5 and 6 are clearly Messianic, and just as clearly point forward to the time of His earthly reign. ‘Behold, the days come’ points us forward to a time when the Lord ‘will raise unto David a righteous Branch’. This is an image not only of His lineage but is an indication of new life. The heirs of David who had sat on the throne had all been mere men at best, and the current incumbent was a wicked man – but ‘a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth’, v. 5 – the Lord Jesus Christ. Of course, although He is truly a man, He is more than merely a man, for He is God.⁵ So it is that ‘in his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely’, v. 6. Amazingly, although the northern kingdom had long gone into captivity,⁶ they too are included in the future restoration, yet another indication that the

millennium is in view, as this seems to indicate a revived nation, where the division is no more. So then in verse 6 the name of this King is revealed, ‘The Lord our righteousness’. For Israel at that time, the One who is righteous will be their righteousness.

Verses 7 and 8 seem to make up a saying of the people in the millennium, commencing with the statement ‘the Lord lives’ NKJV. Perhaps here we have an aspect of the nation’s recognition of the Lord Jesus. They despised Him and rejected Him, Isa. 53. 3, but one day they will acknowledge not only Him ‘whom they have pierced’, Zech. 12. 10, but also the One who rose from the dead. They thought, and still think, Him dead. But He lives! So ‘the days are coming’ NKJV, when they will not look back to their deliverance by the hand of the Lord from Egypt, but to the regathering under the hand of the Lord Jesus, and they will know that He lives, Jer. 23. 7, 8. *Jehovah Tsidkenu* will be their living, reigning King.

The city

Similarly, the thirty-third chapter of Jeremiah is one of hope despite the current darkness. Importantly, in verse 5 the Babylonian invasion is because of those ‘for whose wickedness I have hidden My face from this city’ NKJV. It is with the promise of ‘health and healing’, v. 6 NKJV, that the ‘captivity of Judah and the captivity of Israel’, v. 7, will return. Notice that it is both of the divided kingdoms that this promise extends to, again pointing beyond merely the return from

Babylon. There also will be pardon for all their iniquities, v. 8. Among other things, it will be a place of praise to God, v. 9, a place of joy, v. 11, and a place for the care of flocks, v. 12.

And so it is, that again ‘the days come’, when the Lord will perform that which ‘I have promised unto the house of Israel and to the house of Judah’, v. 14. Here we have an echo of chapter 23, ‘the Branch of righteousness’, v. 15, who will ‘execute judgment and righteousness in the land’, all pointing again to the Lord Jesus. There will be new life for the nation, from ‘great David’s greater Son’.⁷ However, differing from chapter 23, here when ‘Judah shall be saved’ what follows is ‘Jerusalem shall dwell safely: and this is the name wherewith she shall be called, the Lord our righteousness’, v. 16. Not now the name of the king, but the name of the city. In that day, the One who reigns and the place that He reigns from will bear the same name. So, what does this indicate? Perhaps it is that at that time the city and its occupants will share in the character of the King who rules from there. So, it is here finally, that the nation will be what it was intended to be, as we saw in Leviticus chapter 19: righteous. In that day the Lord who is their righteousness, will make them righteous in their actions – and so the city will bear His name.

All this, Jeremiah goes on to point out, will be in fulfilment of the Davidic covenant. For, in a reference to 2 Samuel chapter 7, he says, ‘David

shall never want [lack] a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel’, 33. 17. Astounding words, really, given the failure of David’s heirs in Jeremiah’s days. However, there is more than a fulfilment of the Davidic covenant here, for verse 18 says, ‘Neither shall the priests . . . want [lack] a man . . . to offer burnt offerings’. After all, David himself identified that Messiah would be a Priest-King in Psalm 110.

Perhaps one of the most significant things indicated by this title in relation to the Lord Jesus, who as King will bear the title *Jehovah Tsidkenu*, is that believers of the present dispensation already know Him in this way, even though that title is never given to Him in the context of the Church age. At that time, the rescued nation of Israel will know the truth that we as Christians know now, for, in Christ, we have been made ‘the righteousness of God in him’, 2 Cor. 5. 21. We have an imputed righteousness, apart from the Law and from outside of ourselves; we receive justification by faith in Christ.⁸ Abraham experienced the imputation of this righteousness and so do we, for ‘it was not written for his [Abraham’s] sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead’, Rom. 4. 23, 24. So too, in His millennial reign, the Lord Jesus Christ will be identified as *Jehovah Tsidkenu* for Israel. As with many things, what is true for us now will one day be true for Israel when they are restored and regathered. We can call Him the ‘Lord our righteousness’ today, and one day, so will they!



Endnotes

- ¹ ‘Tsidkenu’ is the Hebrew, often transliterated *sedeq* (righteousness), with a suffix that indicates the pronoun ‘our’.
- ² See also Deut. 1. 16; 16. 18.
- ³ See also Deut. 25. 15.
- ⁴ A detailed examination of these points is found in: J. RIDDLE, *What the Bible Teaches: Jeremiah & Lamentations*, Ritchie, 2012, pp. 223-225.
- ⁵ John 1. 14; 10. 30; 1 Tim. 3. 16.
- ⁶ This occurred during the reign of Hoshea and is recorded in 2 Kings 17.
- ⁷ Hymn by J. MONTGOMERY, ‘Hail to the Lord’s Anointed’.
- ⁸ Rom. 3. 21, 22.

Mountain scenes of Matthew’s Gospel

Part 2 THE MOUNT OF HEALING

15. 29-39

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

Introduction

In Matthew chapter 15 verse 29, the setting is described in general terms as a mountain near the Sea of Galilee. The parallel account, however, provides greater precision, locating this visit as, ‘through the midst of the coasts of Decapolis’, Mark 7. 31. This was a distinctly Gentile territory, and the presence of the Lord Jesus here was deeply significant. More than seven centuries earlier, the prophet Isaiah had foretold His coming into this region, ‘by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan,’¹ in Galilee of the nations’. The purpose of this visitation was clearly stated, ‘the people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined’, Isa. 9. 1, 2.

The context

The Sea of Galilee is relatively small, really a lake, at approximately thirteen miles long and eight miles wide. Yet the geopolitical and cultural contrasts around its shores were very striking in New Testament times. To the west of the Jordan river lay the political district of ‘Galilee’, under the rule of Herod Antipas.² Its northern sector included predominantly Jewish towns commonly mentioned in the Gospels, such as Capernaum, Magdala, Gennesaret and Chorazin. To the northeast rose the rugged highland region of Gaulanitis, the Golan region today. It was governed by Philip the Tetrarch, the half-brother of Herod Antipas, and notably Bethsaida lay on its border. These regions to the north of the lake were uniquely privileged, being the principal setting for the unparalleled miracles of the Lord Jesus and much of His teaching ministry. The so-called ‘golden triangle’ of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum are specifically named by the Lord Jesus as the places where His ‘mighty works’ had been done, Matt. 11. 21-24. Yet, despite such privilege, these areas were marked by stubborn unbelief, and the Lord solemnly declared that judgement would shortly fall upon them.

The southeastern shore belonged to the Decapolis (meaning ‘ten cities’),

a league of predominantly Greek cities, spreading through modern day Jordan.³ The region was developed following the conquests of Alexander the Great and later came under Roman authority in 63 BC through Pompey the Great, who granted the area a degree of autonomy. These cities were prosperous and highly committed to preserving Greek and Roman culture. They were also centres of idolatry, especially the worship of Pan, associated with wild, untamed places, and expressed in music, dancing, and revelry.⁴ About a mile from the east side of the lake was the imposing Decapolis city of Hippos, built on a steep plateau nearly 1,000 feet above the lake. The city dominated the eastern skyline and was an ominous reminder of Gentile power in the region to the Jewish fishing communities of the other side of the lake, where many of the disciples had grown up. It is not difficult to imagine that the disciples found travelling through Decapolis an unsettling experience. In a similar way, through obedience to the Lord’s command to ‘Go ye into all the world’, Mark 16. 15, we can find ourselves in unfamiliar and uncomfortable territory.

It is in this Gentile region of spiritual darkness that we read that the Lord

Jesus, ‘went up into a mountain, and sat down there’, Matt. 15. 29. As for other mountains mentioned in Matthew, the Lord Jesus sitting in an elevated place is a powerful symbol of His supreme authority, with echoes of millennial glory.⁵ We can directly compare the mountain experience of Matthew chapter 5 verse 1. There, the Sermon on the Mount was delivered, primarily to a Jewish audience,⁶ with the teaching drawing heavily on Old Testament themes. In contrast, little of His spoken teaching is recorded in Matthew chapter 15,⁷ perhaps reflecting the limited scriptural understanding of the audience. Yet in both settings, the Lord Jesus is described as sitting, the recognized posture of a teacher exercising authority in that culture.⁸ He is not only ‘the King of Israel’, John 1. 49, but the ‘Lord of all’, Acts 10. 36, with ‘all authority . . . in heaven and on earth’ belonging to Him, Matt 28. 18 NKJV.

The arrival of the multitudes, v. 30

In contrast to the many hours the Lord Jesus spent towards the north of the lake, this appears to be the only time He made an extended stay in the region of the Decapolis. In verse 32, a visit of three days is mentioned. We read that ‘great multitudes came unto him’, v. 30. It is likely that this remarkable response is connected



with the earlier testimony of the man of Gadara.⁹ On the only other recorded visit of the Lord Jesus to this region, he had been delivered by the Saviour from overwhelming multiple demonic possessions. The understandable desire of the man was to remain with the Lord who brought serenity and joy into his life that had previously been dominated by violence and oppression. Yet the Lord gave him a commission, ‘Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee’. As a role model to us all, he faithfully and zealously discharged his responsibility as, ‘he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and all men did marvel’, Mark 5. 19, 20. The seeds he had sown now appeared to be bearing fruit.

The healing of the multitudes, v. 31

Four groups of people brought to the Lord are named, the ‘lame, blind, dumb, maimed’, v. 30, although we also read along with ‘many others’. These were all laid at His feet in an implicit acknowledgement of His authority. The record is wonderfully simple, ‘he healed them’. These conditions vividly picture the effects of sin: its detrimental impact on our spiritual perception (blindness), our ability to communicate with God (dumbness), our ability to move spiritually towards Him or for Him (lameness), and the way sin can disfigure our life (maiming). The words of Isaiah come to mind, ‘He was wounded for our transgressions . . . and with his stripes we are healed’, Isa. 53. 5. The profound work of the cross, not only addresses the penalty of sin but also the **consequences of sin**. On a personal level, the transforming effect of Calvary can bring healing to our broken lives, restoring us to wholeness, and enabling us to experience the peace and serenity of knowing God intimately and walking closely with Him.

The multitudes marvelled as they witnessed these miracles, although in verse 31 the order of the afflictions shifts, with ‘the dumb to speak’ mentioned first. Perhaps this reflects

a particular impression made by the healing of the deaf and dumb man recorded, Mark 7. 31-37, where the people were ‘beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done all things well’, v. 37. Matthew adds an important detail, ‘they glorified the God of Israel’, v. 31, particularly relevant because these were Gentile peoples coming out of spiritual darkness. In contrast to the north of the Sea of Galilee, this region that had received comparatively little revelation, demonstrated an openness to the Lord Jesus and a genuine response of faith. The lesson for us is that the Lord can transform the most unlikely of people and work in places where we least expect it. We should not doubt His power in being able to do so.

The feeding of the multitudes, vv. 32-39

Bible critics have sometimes pointed to an apparent inconsistency in the accounts of the feeding of the 4,000 and the 5,000. However, both Matthew and Mark clearly record these as distinct events with notable differences.¹⁰ The feeding of the 5,000 probably occurred in the spring, near the time of the Passover, John 6. 4, with the people seated on grass, Mark 6. 39, in ‘a desert place belonging to the city called Bethsaida’, Luke 9. 10. By contrast, in Matthew chapter 15 the setting remains Decapolis, where the Gentile multitude sat on the ground suggesting a later time of year, perhaps late summer or autumn, v. 35.

The similarities between the two miracles should have encouraged the disciples to trust that their Lord was both able and willing to meet the need before them. On this occasion, there were 4,000 men present, ‘beside women and children’, v. 38, fewer than in the earlier miracle.¹¹ Yet they had more provisions available: seven loaves, likely from the recent wheat harvest, rather than the five cheap barley loaves described in John chapter 6 verse 9, along with ‘a few little fishes’, which the disciples seemed to dismiss so readily, v. 34. The disciples doubted the all-sufficiency of their Master, ‘whence should we have so much bread in the wilderness, as to fill so great a multitude?’ v. 33.

In this second feeding, the Lord again proves Himself able to meet every need, regardless of the place or people in need. The disciples’ hesitation reminds us how easily we forget His past mercies. We too may find ourselves in a wilderness through difficulty, loneliness, or infirmity, perhaps asking, as Israel once did, ‘Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?’ Ps. 78. 19. The miracle provides us with the assurance that, ‘God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus’, Phil. 4. 19.

Endnotes

- 1 ‘Beyond Jordan’ means east of the river Jordan.
- 2 These tetrarchies (literally ‘ruler of a fourth’) are described in Luke chapter 3 verse 1. Although Gaulanitis is not specifically mentioned, it falls under the regions of Ituraea and Trachonitis.
- 3 Notable ruins of Decapolis cities can still be seen at: (i) Jerash (ancient Gerasa), one of the best-preserved Greco-Roman cities in the world, sometimes described as the ‘Athens of the East’; (ii) Gadara, where the remains are both impressive and distinctive, particularly for their use of dark basalt stone alongside limestone. The ruins include two theatres, colonnaded streets, temples, and public buildings; and (iii) Hippos, where, despite severe earthquake damage, there is clear evidence of earlier pagan temples, a forum, and an aqueduct system. Later a thriving Christian community existed during the Byzantine period, perhaps evidence of the early impact of the gospel in this region.
- 4 The conversion of the wild man of Gadara, described later, and the destruction of the swine into the lake would have especially spoken to Pan worshippers. The presence of the Lord Jesus in this ‘wilderness’ region, Matt. 15. 33, was also significant.
- 5 Here the picture is of Gentile blessing in the millennium. See: Isa. 49. 6; 60. 1-3; Zech. 8. 22, 23; 4. 6.
- 6 Although not exclusively, since people from Decapolis are also mentioned in Matthew chapter 4 verse 25.
- 7 Or Mark chapter 7.
- 8 Matt. 23. 2; Luke 4. 20; Acts 22. 3.
- 9 See Matt. 8. 28-34; Mark 5. 1-20; Luke 8. 26-39.
- 10 Feeding of the 4,000: Matt. 15. 32-39; Mark 8. 1-10; feeding of the 5,000: Matt. 14. 13-21; Mark 6. 30-44; Luke 9. 10-17; John 6. 1-14.
- 11 A similar expression is used to the feeding of the 5000 and hence both occasions may have included as many as 8000 to 10,000 adults, and possibly many more given the large families that existed at the time.

The face of God

By **IAN REES** Tenby, Wales

Since our Lord told us that ‘God is Spirit’, John 4. 24 NKJV, it goes without saying that God does not have a body neither does He have a face. Before the incarnation of our Lord, the three members of the Trinity were spirit beings. We have no problem understanding this when it comes to the Holy Spirit, His very name implying that. Scripture tells us that we worship the invisible God, whom ‘no man hath seen, nor can see’, 1 Tim. 6. 16, and it goes on to say, ‘No man hath seen God at any time’, John 1. 18. Any attribution of body parts with reference to God pre-incarnation must, therefore, be figurative. The only member of the Godhead that will be visible to us one day in the glory will be the Son of God Himself, as He very evidently has a glorified human body. Yet God reveals Himself to us in terms which we can understand, and one of those ways is to speak figuratively of His face. The face of God, in this figurative sense, speaks of His communion with His people.

The open face – communion

Moses talked with God, ‘face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend’, Exod. 33. 11. This figure of speech refers to total communion with God. God’s presence was in the cloud that covered the mountain, so it was not literally true that God was present bodily, but such was the close communion between the two that it was as though a man talked intimately with his friend. The result of this intimate communion with God was seen in the shining of Moses’ face when he came down from the mountain. Jacob, after wrestling with ‘a man’ all night, realized it was with God he had wrestled. He called the name of the place Peniel, ‘for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved’, Gen. 32. 30. In both of these experiences, there was close communion with God, even though Jacob was not comfortable with it.

The shining face – approbation

The great high priestly blessing

was, ‘The Lord make His face shine upon you’, Num. 6. 25 NKJV. This is echoed in several prayers in the book of the Psalms, ‘God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause his face to shine upon us’, Ps. 67. 1.¹ It seems evident from these prayers that the people of God looked for God’s blessing on them and expressed this in the imagery of His approval with a shining face.

The averted face – disruption

The opposite idea was that God’s disapproval of the rebellious nation was seen in His face turning away from them. So, God reveals to His prophet Ezekiel His judgement which would fall on His rebellious people, ‘Now will I shortly pour out my fury upon thee, and accomplish mine anger upon thee: and I will judge thee according to thy ways, and will recompense thee for all thine abominations’. This is expressed as, ‘My face will I turn also from them’, Ezek. 7. 8, 22. Then again, He says, ‘I will set my face against them; they shall go out from one fire, and another fire shall devour them; and ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I set my face against them’, 15. 7. To the individual who rebels against God He says, ‘For every one of the house of Israel, or of the stranger that sojourneth in Israel, which separateth himself from me, and setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumblingblock of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to a prophet to enquire of him concerning me; I the Lord will answer him by myself: And I will set my face against that man, and will make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midst of my people; and ye shall know that I am the Lord’, 14. 7, 8. Hezekiah’s exhortations to the nation expressing the idea of God’s renewed blessings upon a repentant people were, ‘If ye turn again unto the Lord, your brethren and your children shall find compassion before them that lead them captive, so that they shall come again into this land:

for the Lord your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you, if ye return unto him’, 2 Chr. 30. 9. The face of God, turned away figuratively from His people, indicated His disapproval of their behaviour.

The hidden face – correction

The hidden face of God speaks of His intention to correct His people when they err or stray away from Him. ‘Thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities,’ Isa. 64. 7. In the last words God spoke to Moses before he died, God foretold the wickedness His people would do after Moses’ death. They, ‘will forsake me, and break my covenant which I have made with them. Then my anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them; so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us? And I will surely hide my face in that day for all the evils which they shall have wrought, in that they are turned unto other gods’, Deut. 31. 16-18. Moses declares this in his final song. ‘Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee. And when the Lord saw it, he abhorred them, because of the provoking of his sons, and of his daughters. And he said, I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end shall be’, Deut. 32. 18-20. Job laments, ‘How many are mine iniquities and sins? make me to know my transgression and my sin. Wherefore hidest thou thy face’, Job 13. 23, 24. The Psalmist writes after deliverance, ‘thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled’, Ps. 30. 7. Again, he says, ‘Hide not thy face far from me; put not thy servant away in anger: thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation’, 27. 9. ‘Lord, why castest thou off my soul? why hidest thou thy face from me? I am afflicted and ready to die’, 88. 14, 15, and, when he pleads with God not to enter into judgement with Him, he prays, ‘Hear me speedily, O Lord: my spirit faileth: hide not thy face from me, lest I be like unto them

that go down into the pit’, 143. 7. When God hides His face, His people know they are being corrected.

The ‘against’ face – retribution

Reference made to the face of God that is set against His people indicates retribution upon them. ‘I will even set my face against that soul that eateth blood, and will cut him off from among his people. For the life of the flesh is in the blood’, Lev. 17. 10. When forbidding child sacrifice among the people of Israel, God’s words are strong. He condemns the man who does so in no uncertain terms. ‘I will set my face against that man, and will cut him off from among his people; because he hath given of his seed unto Molech, to defile my sanctuary, and to profane my holy name’, 20. 3, and He goes on to condemn anyone who turns a blind eye to that man. ‘If the people of the land do any ways hide their eyes from the man, when he giveth of his seed unto Molech, and kill him not: then I will set my face against

that man, and against his family, and will cut him off’, vv. 4, 5. In words of judgement for those of Judah who went down into Egypt against His will, God says to Jeremiah, ‘Behold, I will set my face against you for evil, and to cut off all Judah’, Jer. 44. 11. ‘The face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth’, Ps. 34. 16, which passage is quoted by Peter in his first Epistle when giving practical guidance to believers, 1 Pet. 3. 12.

The sought-after face

Thus far with reference to the face of God we have considered it in various aspects of His dealings with His people. But His great desire was that they should have full communion and fellowship with Him, that they should want Him and desire Him above all things. Here are His tender words to Solomon. ‘If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from

heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land’, 2 Chr. 7. 14. And we are sure that the Psalmist delighted the Lord when he said, ‘When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek’, Ps. 27. 8.

Emphasis has been made on the truth that Father, Son and Spirit were, from before the foundation of the world, spirit beings without body parts. Any sight of ‘God’ seen by His people in Old Testament times – people such as Abraham when he interceded for Lot, Manoah and his wife in Judges chapter 13, Gideon and so on – were Theophanies, Christophanies rather, the appearance of the Son of God in a visible body that was not His. The incarnation changed all that. Suddenly, in breath-taking condescension, the Son of God became flesh and dwelt among us. In that body of His, He suffered, the just for the unjust to bring us to God. And when that body rose again from the dead it was and still is a visible body, one that bears the marks of the nails in His hands. That glorified body is now in heaven, at the right hand of the Father, Acts 7. 55. And it is His body that we shall one day see when we are also in glorified bodies. And the wonderful thought is this – that we read of His redeemed people, ‘they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads’, Rev. 22. 4. The first phrase implies final and eternal communion with Him, the latter total identification with Him. What a wonderful prospect for us all. In the meantime, though we know the promise is ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you’, Heb. 13. 5 NKJV, communion with God can be lost by our sin, hardheartedness, coldness, rebellion, and disbelief. May it be true of us all that the face of God should shine upon us at all times in our service for Him. Some may feel that references to these Old Testament scriptures have nothing to do with us, but let us not forget Peter’s quoting of the Old Testament to present day believers, ‘the face of the Lord is [still] against them that do evil’, 1 Pet. 3. 12! May it never be so with us!

Endnote

¹ See also Pss. 31. 16; 80. 3, 7, 19; 119. 135.



THE NOSTRILS OF GOD

By **STEPHEN BUCKERIDGE** Hurst, England

Introduction

‘The glory of his nostrils is terrible’ is the dramatic - if somewhat unusual - description of a horse in Job chapter 39 verse 20. If you have been surprised when stood next to a horse as it unexpectedly ‘neighed’ or snorted, you might be inclined to agree!

Have you ever stopped to consider why we have nostrils? Or why God considered them sufficiently important that, in keeping with many other key parts for our body, He gave us two?

Even stranger than giving us nostrils or describing those of a horse, is that the Bible goes to the effort of describing the nostrils of God. In this article we will explore what we learn about God through the description given of nostrils and of the practical implications that it has for the Christian’s life.

The nostrils of God is one of the most unusual of anthropomorphisms. These human-like characteristics are not attributed to God because He physically has them (for ‘God is a spirit’, John 4. 24). Rather, these human attributes, which are very familiar to us, are used so that we would understand more about God. Much more common examples of anthropomorphisms are things like the ears and eyes and hands of the Lord, to which we can readily relate.

Human nostrils

Something of God’s wisdom is shown by the design of human nostrils. We use them to stay alive, with most human beings doing much of their breathing through their nostrils. The design is very specific. With over a hundred hairs per nostril, the air is cleverly filtered to stop tiny impurities entering the lungs. The nostrils also aid

breathing by warming the inhaled air and adding moisture. One only needs to try feeding a baby that has a nasal cold to realize the deliberate design that went into ensuring that normally we can breathe and eat at the same time!

But it is not just in their design that God’s greatness is seen – God does not need nostrils in the way we do. God is eternal and self-sustaining and is not dependent on breathing in oxygen for survival. In a unique and divine way, He is the source of life so scripture records, ‘And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul’, Gen. 2. 7.

Divine power

Divine power is also seen in the first specific mention of God’s nostrils. In Exodus chapter 15 verse 8, ‘with the blast of thy nostrils the waters were gathered together, the floods stood upright as an heap, and the depths were congealed in the heart of the sea’. Although the deliverance of the children of Israel out of Egypt overall is spoken of as being by ‘a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm’, Deut. 5. 15, the parting of the Red Sea and holding back the water as a solid wall is spoken of as being the work of His nostrils. We may be able to blow out candles or move small things with the breath out of our mouth but there are not many things we do by exhaling through our nose. This was mighty power indeed!

Divine anger

The most dramatic mentions of the nostrils of God are in Psalm 18 and in the corresponding parallel passage in 2 Samuel chapter 22 – which both have two mentions of the nostrils of God relative to His anger. ‘Then the earth shook and trembled; the

foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because he was wroth. There went up a smoke out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth devoured: coals were kindled by it . . . The foundations of the world were discovered at thy rebuke, O Lord, at the blast of the breath of thy nostrils’, Ps. 18. 7, 8, 15.

The link between anger and the nostrils is shown by the Hebrew word itself. Although the English word nostril appears relatively infrequently in the Old Testament, the Hebrew word is quite common (more than 250 mentions) and is normally translated as anger. There is an intentional play on this dual meaning of the words in Proverbs chapter 30 verse 33. ‘Surely the churning of milk bringeth forth butter, and the wringing of the **nose** bringeth forth blood: so the forcing of **wrath** bringeth forth strife’. While the truth of the comparison is clear enough in English, in Hebrew it would have been even more memorable as the word for nose and wrath is the same (and also the same as is occasionally translated nostril elsewhere).

The idea of animated and fierce anger being shown by the nostrils is there in the description of Leviathan in Job. In chapter 41 verse 20, we read, ‘Out of his nostrils goeth smoke, as out of a seething pot or caldron’. There are several verses that give us an insight into God’s anger. While being very glad that ‘The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger’, Ps. 103. 8, another psalm reminds us that He ‘is angry with the wicked every day’, 7. 11. His anger can be fierce, Lam. 1. 12, but, in contrast to ours, God’s is always righteous, patient, and self-controlled.

A pleasing smell

There are no direct mentions of the nostrils of God in the New Testament, or verses that allude to His nostrils showing either power or anger. However, there is a use of human nostrils that we have not yet referred to – that is, the ability to smell. We may not think of it as being as important as some of the other senses, but it is clearly

something that gives a level of either pleasure or disgust and contributes to our sensory awareness.

There is certainly reference in the New Testament to God smelling a sweet savour when it comes to the Lord Jesus, ‘Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour’, Eph. 5. 2. This fulfilled what had long been pictured in some of the offerings of the Old Testament, (e.g., each of the three types of burnt offering, Lev. 1. 9, 13, 17) and other parts of the Levitical system such as the unique perfume, Exod. 30. 35-38. This stands in obvious contrast to Isaiah chapter 65 verse 5, where God’s people are described as like irritating smoke in His nose (or nostrils in several translations). I am sure that we have all experienced the contrast between that which is particularly unpleasant in terms of annoying or disgusting fumes in

our nostrils versus the delightful smell of a meal or a perfume. In the perfection of Christ’s life and the completeness of His death, there was a unique pleasure that He brought to God.

Practical lessons

This is one of the more obscure Bible studies I have done, so I think it is especially important that there is practical application.

First, this subject is a reminder of the greatness of God. We live in a time where informality is often the order of the day and technology enables remarkable experiences. Additionally, as New Testament believers, we are uniquely privileged in the access we have into the presence of God. Nevertheless, we have the same God about whom the Psalmist wrote, ‘I will speak of the glorious honour of thy majesty, and of thy wondrous works’, Ps. 145. 5. While we will never

exhaust the preciousness of the Lord Jesus – and it is entirely right that our worship is often taken up with Him – it is also befitting that there are occasions when we simply worship God for His amazing person and works. This sense of divine majesty will also bring a level of reverence and holy caution into both our day-to-day lives and the gatherings of God’s people.

By the grace of God, Christians today do not need to be in fear of eternal punishment. But it is to believers that the letter to the Hebrews records the salutary warning that ‘our God is a consuming fire’, 12. 29. Our obedience to His word should therefore be prompt, willing, and fulsome. We would surely never want to do the things that would provoke God as spoken of in terms of angry, flared nostrils.

Second, the subject should be a wonderful, positive motivator to do what is right. In 2 Corinthians chapter 2 verse 15, we have the simple but delightful statement, ‘For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ’. A remarkable aspect of our nostrils is the ability to recognize a smell, as it evokes a memory from a completely different time and place. Likewise, when someone regularly wears the same perfume, we only need to catch a faint smell of it to be reminded of that person. Applying these things to the Christian life, it is a staggering reflection on the potential of every child of God that we can be a pleasing aroma to the nostrils of God. Our smallness on planet Earth in a vast universe can easily make us think that our lives are without significance. Yet, moment by moment, we can seek to be like Christ and thereby bring pleasure to the very God of heaven. This tremendous privilege should guide all the decisions that we make.

If you have never considered the nostrils of God before, I trust this article will have expanded your knowledge of God a little. I hope too it will be a practical help as a reminder of another reason to be Christlike and thereby glorifying to our God.



The life and times of Elisha 8

THE KING OF ISRAEL

By **PHIL RAGGETT** Prestwich, England

The extraordinary life of 'Elisha the man of God', 2 Kgs. 5. 8, is epitomized in the events of 2 Kings chapters 6, 7, and 8. In these chapters we see Elisha disrupting the plans of kings, defeating his enemies, delivering a besieged city, and declaring the future.

Elisha displays many commendable, Christlike features in these chapters. His calmness and confidence, in the most trying of circumstances, and his ability to communicate powerfully for God were all the direct result of his personal communion with God. He was a man in touch with heaven – he prayed and God answered, 2 Kgs. 6. 17, 18; he prophesied and it came to pass, 7. 1. He was also a man who had a heart full of love for others. In chapter 6, he shows his care for his servant as well as his compassion for his enemies. In chapter 8, we have his care for a widow as well as his crying, v. 11, while contemplating the future for the children of Israel.

Secret plans exposed – God's providence

The remarkable recovery of the axe head, in the first few verses of chapter 6, was considered in a previous study. Following this event we are told, in verse 8, about a council of war between the king of Syria and his trusted servants. The omnipresence and omniscience of God are clearly seen as He reveals to Elisha the secret plans of the enemy which allows the king of Israel to avoid an ambush more than just once or twice. The king of Israel's evident knowledge of these top-secret discussions caused consternation in Syria and led the king to suspect one of his advisors must be a traitor. What a surprise it must have been to learn that Elisha was being allowed by God to listen in to the very words spoken in the king's own bedroom! Even more amazing is the fact that the servants of the king of Syria knew about Elisha and his ability to know their top-secret plans. Such was the public testimony of Elisha that even his enemies knew he was a man with power from God.

The lessons for us in this section are twofold. Firstly, let us never forget that God knows all that we do, say, and think. He is listening in to our conversations and knows our thoughts and motives. His eye is upon us even in our bedroom when no one else is around. Nothing is hidden from His all-seeing eyes. As Hebrews chapter 4 verse 13 reminds us, there is no 'creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do'.

The second lesson here is that God's providential hand is able, according to His good will, to thwart the evil schemes of men and intervene on behalf of His people. Well might we remember that the plots and schemes of men in the council chambers of Washington, Moscow, Beijing, and Davos are all known to God. With all the uncertainties in our modern world, and the struggle for power being played out on the global stage, it is good to remember that 'the most High ruleth in the

kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will', Dan. 4. 17.

Troubled hearts calmed – God's peace

In the following verses we see the plot of the king of Syria to try to turn the tables on Elisha and spy on him. The king hears where Elisha is and plots to capture him in Dothan. Overnight the city was surrounded by 'a great host', 6. 14. Rising early, Elisha's servant saw the enemy all around them and was filled with dread. In verse 15, he cries in desperation, 'Alas, my master! how shall we do?' Despite being surrounded, Elisha's trust in his God was unshakeable. His calming words in verse 16 bear a striking resemblance to those of 1 John chapter 4 verse 4, where we are reminded that 'greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world'. What confidence he had in God even when circumstances looked bleak.

In trials and tribulation we do well to remember that, as believers, we are in the hand of Christ as well as in the Father's hand, John 10. 28, 29, and we are sealed by the Spirit of God, Eph. 1. 13. This truth gives us eternal security against any forces of evil that would attempt to pluck us out of His hand. Thank God we can never lose our salvation but, more than that, because every genuine believer is indwelt by the Spirit of God, Rom. 8. 9, we can experience personal victory over Satan and his forces. The superior power of the Holy Spirit residing in us means that we can be overcomers on the spiritual battlefield.

Blind eyes opened – God's protection

With confidence, Elisha prays that God would help his servant to understand the reality of the situation. From a human standpoint, their plight was beyond hope, but the eye of faith was enabled to look beyond the circumstances and rest in the fact that God is able to protect His own. The servant saw that Elisha was indeed surrounded, not by his enemies, but by the Lord's host. Good it is when we have the same confidence that Elisha had in his God.

As believers we are never promised an easy passage through life. We will face difficulties on life's journey and, at times, we may feel overwhelmed and hemmed in. Through it all, though, we have the assurance of His promise, 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee', Heb. 13. 5. The Apostle Paul, in 2 Corinthians chapter 4 verses 8 and 9, expresses a similar thought when he says, 'We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed'. As we face these circumstances, let us pray that God would open our eyes that we may see His hand upon the tiller. The One who saves is the One who keeps. In every circumstance of life, no matter how dire the outlook might be, it is always safe to trust Him.

Open eyes blinded – God's power

Elisha prays again and God answers His servant once more. This time Elisha prays that open eyes might be made blind. Such is Elisha's fellowship with God, and his understanding of God's will, that God grants his request and does 'according to the word of Elisha', 2 Kgs. 6. 18.

The enemy is left floundering until the very man they were trying to capture comes out to speak with

them. In an audacious move Elisha persuades them to follow him. Evidently, they were not completely blind as they could walk but they were unable to discern where they were headed or who was guiding them. The man they had been pursuing is now leading and directing them, and meekly they follow him all the way to Samaria, the capital city of Israel.

Elisha prays again and God once more responds and their blindness is removed. What a shock it must have been to them as they suddenly realize that they are deep in enemy territory in Samaria not Dothan! They were at the mercy of the king of Israel who thinks he has been given an amazing opportunity to gain a victory over his enemy. To the king's credit, he waits and asks for direction, from the man of God, before acting. Here is an essential lesson for us as too often we act hastily and fail to seek God's mind and will before we make our choices in life. It is vital that we learn the importance of waiting upon God for His guidance. The king's reluctance to act without Elisha's permission changed the outcome for these men. The nation of Israel, too, was spared any potential repercussions from the enemy that may have arisen had the king been swift to execute justice, at the expense of grace.

Captive men fed – God's provision

In an act of mercy, Elisha commands the king to spare their lives. But then he goes one step further and commands the king to 'set bread and water before them', v. 22, and set them free. This was more than these men deserved. Only a short time before, they had been seeking to kill Elisha, but now, with Christlike compassion, he spares them and prepares a 'great provision for them', v. 23. Peace was wrought that day through grace.

What a beautiful illustration of the gospel this is. Men who once were set on a course of destruction are turned around completely and now head homeward, at peace with their enemy. We, who once were blinded by sin, were likewise being carried along deep into enemy territory. Our end was certain death until God, in His matchless mercy and grace, intervened and opened our eyes to see our plight and offer us a 'great salvation', Heb. 2. 3. What bounty has been provided for us through Christ. The words of Luke chapter 4 verse 18 come to mind as Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled through the One who came 'to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised'. We, who once were enemies, have been 'reconciled to God by the death of his Son', Rom. 5. 10.

The lessons are many in these delightful chapters. First, let us ever rejoice that 'the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men', Titus 2. 11. Above all, it is important to note that it was communion with God that brought confidence and courage despite the difficult circumstances faced by Elisha. Second, it is worth remembering that Elisha's care for his servant, and compassion on his enemies, brought peace to a troubled heart and nullified a tyrant's hostility. Let us have the same care for our fellow believers and, wherever possible, treat our enemies with compassion, in order that we may 'live peaceably with all men', Rom. 12. 18.



Towns and cities in the life of the Lord

JERUSALEM – THE TEMPLE

Part 13

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

The Gospels record the Lord Jesus visiting the temple in Jerusalem on at least seven occasions. Luke describes the two early visits in His childhood, while John focuses on four visits during His public ministry. In His final week before the crucifixion, the Lord Jesus was daily teaching in the temple, as recorded by the Synoptic Gospels.

The temple of the Gospels was Herod’s Temple, a magnificent expansion of the second temple built after the Babylonian exile.¹ Construction took forty-six years, and the temple became a national point of pride, with the disciples boasting to the Lord, ‘Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!’ Mark 13. 1. This temple was inferior, however, to the first, built by Solomon. The Shekinah glory, the radiant manifestation of God’s presence, had departed from Solomon’s Temple in the days of Ezekiel, borne away by the majestic angelic throne-chariot that so overwhelmed the prophet when he beheld it.² Accordingly, the ark of the covenant was likewise absent from the Holy of Holies.³ Completed around AD 63-64, Herod’s Temple stood barely seven years before the Roman general Titus and his armies destroyed it.

Despite the ungodliness of Herod, corruption in the priesthood,⁴ and the absence of divine glory, the Lord Jesus nonetheless identified Himself with the temple calling it ‘my Father’s house’, John 2. 16.⁵ Today, God’s dwelling place is no longer in physical buildings but among His redeemed people. When believers gather as an assembly they form ‘the house of God’, where His presence is known, 1 Tim. 3. 15. It is encouraging to appreciate that each gathering to His name, Matt. 18. 20,⁶ however small or weak, still constitutes the house of

God, a holy place where the Lord Jesus is personally present.

The place of obscurity yet rejoicing – Luke 2

When Joseph and Mary brought the infant Jesus to the temple with the humble offering of ‘a pair of doves, or two young pigeons’, Luke 2. 24, few were likely to have noticed their arrival. Yet God revealed to Simeon that this was the arrival of ‘the glory of thy people Israel’, v. 32.⁷ The long-departed glory of God had now returned, not upon a heavenly throne-chariot, but cradled in human arms. Simeon rejoiced, ready to depart in peace, for his eyes had seen the Lord’s Christ, the Saviour of the world.

At twelve years of age, the Lord Jesus again appeared in the temple, conversing with the leading theological minds of His day, Luke 2. 39-50. His parents’ misunderstanding of His absence reflected a deeper truth: His mission was to be about His Father’s business, for He was moving within His Father’s house.

The place of hostility yet revelation – John’s Gospel

Israel’s males were commanded to appear before the Lord three times each year at the feasts of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles, Deut. 16. 16. John records four temple visits, each marked by increasing hostility and progressive revelation.

His resurrection, chapter 2: Here the Lord Jesus cleanses the temple for the first time at the Passover feast, demonstrating His fervent zeal over His Father’s house. Genuine zeal, though often misunderstood and sometimes even discouraged, is a beautiful mark of Christlikeness. When asked for a sign, He declared, ‘destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up’, v. 19. Although the Jews misunderstood His words, the Lord Jesus, at the outset of His ministry, publicly foretold His death and resurrection within the very courts of the temple.

His fellowship with the Father, chapter 5: The feast of the Jews mentioned in verse 1 is not specified.⁸ After healing the man at Bethesda, the Lord Jesus later found him in the temple and said, ‘Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more’, v. 14, perhaps because the man’s sickness had come upon him because of some sin in his life. When accused of violating the Sabbath, the Lord Jesus revealed that He and the Father had been working together in perfect harmony, since God’s rest in His completed creation had been disturbed by the fall. ‘My Father worketh hitherto, and I work’, v. 17. The miracle, together with the discourse that followed, unveiled His divine Sonship and His shared authority with the Father.

His offer of spiritual reality, chapter 7: The Feast of Tabernacles mentioned in verse 2 was the final feast of the Jewish year, celebrating with joy Israel’s time in temporary shelters during the wilderness journey.⁹ On the last and greatest day of the feast, Jesus proclaimed in the temple courts, ‘If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water’, vv. 37, 38. His momentous words appealed to those left spiritually empty by formal religion, offering the true satisfaction of the Spirit’s transforming power. He Himself was the answer to their thirst.

His oneness with the Father, chapter 10: In verses 22 to 39, the Lord Jesus is found in the temple during the Feast of Dedication, walking in Solomon’s porch, likely the only

surviving part of Solomon’s original temple.¹⁰ This setting underscores His messianic claim as great David’s greater Son, cp. Luke 20. 41-44. When questioned about His identity as the Messiah, the Lord Jesus affirmed that His true sheep hear His voice, follow Him, and are held securely in His care, vv. 27-29. Then came His profound declaration, ‘I and my Father are one’, v. 30. Recognizing this as a direct claim to deity, the Jews took up stones to kill Him. He did not deny the claim but withdrew, for His hour had not yet come, v. 39.

The place of scrutiny and rejection – the final week, Luke 19 and 20

In the final week of the Lord Jesus’ earthly ministry, before His crucifixion, we find Him once again in the temple. All of the Synoptic Gospels record these solemn events, but here we focus on Luke’s account.

Luke traces the Lord’s determined journey to Jerusalem, beginning when ‘he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem’, 9. 51. At the close of chapter 19, the long journey ends as He enters the city on the colt of an ass. Soon after, He reaches the temple and begins to teach there, v. 47. His words, however, are met with hostility by the religious authorities. They challenge Him saying, ‘Tell us, by what authority

doest thou these things? or who is he that gave thee this authority?’ 20. 2. No doubt they regarded themselves as the temple’s guardians, the ones who decided who might teach within its courts.

In divine wisdom, the Lord’s reply silenced them, ‘The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men?’ v. 4. Trapped by their own reasoning, they could not answer. The Lord then spoke a parable, a prophetic picture of His rejection, death, resurrection, and the judgement soon to fall upon Israel. In the parable of the wicked vinedressers, vv. 9-18, John the Baptist stood as the last in a long line of servants sent to seek fruit from the vineyard. Like the prophets before him, John was rejected and mistreated. Finally, the lord of the vineyard makes a gracious yet momentous decision, ‘What shall I do? I will send my beloved son: it may be they will reverence him when they see him’, v. 13. The husbandmen recognized that this was the heir. The vineyard belonged to Him. In fulfilment of the parable, the chief priests and scribes sought to lay hands on Him, v. 19, hoping to catch Him in His words, scrutinizing His every act and utterance. What were they doing? As foretold in Psalm 118 verse 22,¹¹ they were the builders evaluating the stone’s fitness and, after close examination, they rejected Him. Yet He would become the pre-eminent ‘head of the corner’, Luke 20. 17.

He also reminded them that they must also render unto God the things that are God’s. Before them stood God manifest in flesh, yet they denied Him the glory due to His name. He revealed Himself as the ‘Lord from heaven’, 1 Cor. 15. 47, possessing divine knowledge of the world beyond and revealing the realities of resurrection life that human minds had never conceived. He was not only the Messiah, but the Lord. Not only the offspring but also the root of David, Rev. 22. 16.

What right, then, did He have to teach in the temple courts? Quite simply, it all belonged to Him: the temple, the nation of Israel, and, indeed, the whole world. He is the ‘heir of all things’, Heb. 1. 2. Their question was not only misguided but deeply offensive.

Today, we are reminded that the local assembly, the house of God, also belongs to the Lord Jesus. As Paul exhorted the Ephesian elders, ‘Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock . . . which he hath purchased with his own blood’, Acts 20. 28. Every assembly is His special possession and treasured inheritance.

Endnotes

- 1 Although Herod’s Temple is not in existence today the huge platform on which it stood is still visible. Many of the stones comprising this platform give evidence to the grandeur of this temple. For example, the Western stone forms part of the temple foundation and is 45 x 11 x 15 feet, weighing over 500 tonnes.
- 2 See Ezekiel chh. 10, 11.
- 3 The ark of the covenant is last mentioned in the days of Josiah, 2 Chr. 35. 3. Its disappearance, and possible present location, have been the subject of much and often intriguing, speculation.
- 4 Luke 13. 32; John 18. 13, 24.
- 5 Note that in this reference the Lord Jesus is present in the temple where it is also described as ‘My house’, Luke 19. 46. In His absence, however, He refers to it to the Jews as ‘your house’, Matt. 23. 38.
- 6 The context of Matthew chapter 18 verse 20 is the resolving of a dispute between believers, but the principle can be applied.
- 7 See also John chapter 12 verse 41 which is a reference to Isaiah specifically witnessing the glory of the Lord Jesus in the temple, Isa. 6. 1-7. Was He the very shekinah glory described in the Old Testament and the person who departed in Ezekiel chh. 10, 11?
- 8 Many believe this was the Passover feast, since John frequently marks the ministry of the Lord Jesus by noting successive Passovers, 2. 13; 6. 4; 11. 55. Others suggest it may have been the Feast of Purim, which remembers the story of Esther, since it is not one of the feasts prescribed in Leviticus chapter 23, and John calls it ‘a feast of the Jews’. Still others think it was the Feast of Pentecost, as the theme of harvest is mentioned in the previous chapter, 4. 35. If the latter is the case, then all three pilgrimage feasts mentioned, Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles, Deut. 16. 16, are represented in John’s Gospel.
- 9 This feast is a picture of millennial joy with the last, eighth day being a picture of eternity.
- 10 Solomon’s porch is not visible today although, interestingly, the Victorian missionary-explorer JAMES BARCLAY described features in his book *The City of the Great King* (1858) after an underground visit beneath the Temple Mount complex.
- 11 Psalm 118 is the last of the Hallel Psalms sung at the feasts. As such, the words of the Psalm would be some of the most familiar scriptures the Jewish nation would have known.



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'And when we had sailed over the sea of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra', Acts 27: 5.

PS
Magazine

'And when we had sailed over the sea of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra', Acts 27: 5.

Of course, this is really the Mediterranean Sea but the section of it described lies off the coast of Cilicia. As THOMAS CONSTABLE states, 'Prevailing winds in the Mediterranean during spring and fall [autumn] usually blow from west to east and often from the northwest. Consequently, this ship sailed north up the east side of the island of Cyprus . . . Proceeding north it came to the coast of Cilicia' (*Expository Notes on the Bible*).

As Luke records, Paul was on his way to Italy and Rome, v. 1, in fulfilment of the divine promise, 23: 11. In the sea off the coast of Cilicia the ship would progress slowly, relying largely on wind, which was contrary, and tidal currents. How different from the journey that was to follow all too soon! Being only less than halfway to their destination, the rest of the journey would be far more exposed and, as we know, far more dangerous.

It is easy to be critical of the centurion who ignored Paul's advice, vv. 10, 11, yet he was following the advice of an experienced mariner and his observed judgements regarding the weather. F. B. HOLE notes, as 'the wind veered and blew gently from the south, it looked as though God was favouring the centurion's decision' (*New Testament Commentary*).

From the record of scripture, we know that the decision brought disaster, 'with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives', v. 10. In a practical sense, what a profound lesson for all of us. Should we allow circumstances alone to be our true guide in life? We might say, as the centurion, that things looked as if the voyage would be possible and the destination achievable. How dangerous a decision that proved!

As believers, we should employ far more checks in our decision making. We have the inspired word of God, and experienced spiritual guides to help us, as seen in the words of Paul. What significance do we attach to them alongside the circumstances of life?

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