

PreciousSeed

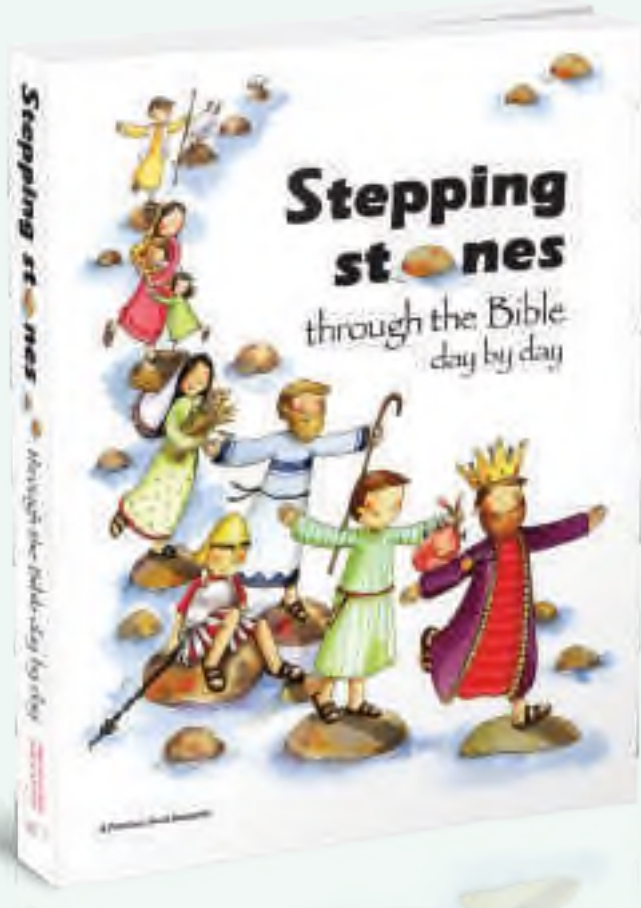
NOVEMBER 2026 Vol. 81 | No. 4



'He came unto the sea of Galilee, through the midst of the
coasts of Decapolis', Mark 7. 31.

PS
Magazine

NEW MATERIALS AND OFFERS FROM PRECIOUS SEED



Stepping Stones – through the Bible day by day

Edited by Ian Rees

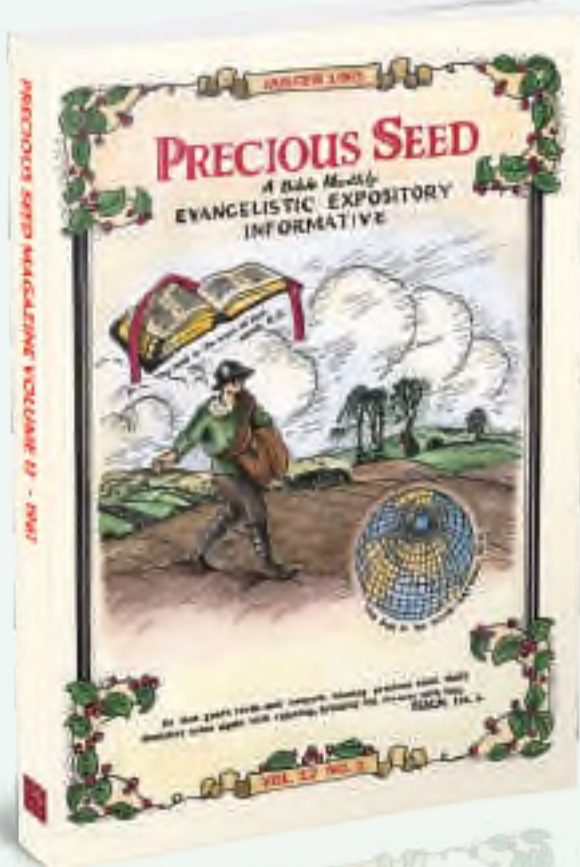
In collaboration with John Ritchie Limited, we are pleased to announce the reprint of this valued and much loved daily reading book for children. Originally printed in 2008, with reprints in 2010 and 2014, it proved a popular book to read to children, or for older children to read for themselves, to enable them to get to know Bible truth.

Now printed in hardback, it is available for a new generation.

With full colour illustrations by Honor Ayres throughout, it will make a beautiful and lasting gift, as well as an excellent introduction to daily Bible reading.

Copies are available from John Ritchie, Kilmarnock; their Online shop can be found here:

<https://www.ritchiechristianmedia.co.uk>



Precious Seed – Volume 12

The year 1961 was classed as Volume 12 of the magazine even though it was published some sixteen years after Volume 1 which ran from 1945 through to 1948. Still under the editorship of J. H. Large, the magazine continued to be evangelistic, expository, and informative.

As indicated in Volume 11 page 177, this volume contains papers on the timeless topic of *How to Study the Bible*, together with short studies by David Gooding on principal Greek words in the scriptures. This was also the year in which William Trew's series on Philipians was commenced.

As with previous volumes, there is something of interest analytically, biographically, doctrinally, devotionally, and historically.

Order your copy today for a special price of

£9.00 each
with free postage



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

Being ready to go! – ‘come away’, S. of S. 2. 10, 11.

The call of the Bridegroom has long stirred the hearts of believers. It is tender language, rich imagery, and an unmistakably personal appeal, ‘Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away’. While the passage speaks poetically of the Bridegroom drawing His bride into renewed fellowship, there is in it a prophetic echo that has encouraged saints down through the centuries. The voice that calls the bride out of winter’s gloom into the brightness of His presence anticipates another call — one that will gather all His redeemed to Himself at His coming, 1 Thess. 4. 16.

It is the Bridegroom’s call. It is the moment when love, long anticipated, becomes sight. The imagery in the Song of Songs — the call to rise, the ending of winter — beautifully aligns with the believer’s hope of the rapture. It is the call that lifts us from earth’s shadows into the full brightness of His presence.

In that light, our readiness to go becomes a searching matter for each of us. Are we ready to go? We are not speaking here of salvation, for that is the necessary prerequisite to belonging to the company described as ‘the bride, the Lamb’s wife’, Rev. 21. 9. Rather, we are considering the state of our affections, so that when the call comes,

we do not meet it with reluctance, shame, or regret.

The rapture will be sudden, but readiness for it should be the object of our daily living in this world. It should be seen in our affections, in our obedience, and in the loosening of our hearts from a world that sleeps on the edge of judgement, 1 Thess. 5. 6.

Undoubtedly, we are going to a place where the storms of winter are past and where the heavy rain showers are over and gone; but the searching question remains — are we ready to go?

What makes us ready to go? The bride in the Song rises because she loves the one who calls her. She is drawn by His presence more than held by her surroundings. Are our affections centred in the Lord Jesus? Are we listening, longing, and willing to rise when He calls?

Readiness also requires a loose grip on earthly things. A believer ready to go is not entangled in this world, absorbed with this world, or anchored to this world, but lives lightly enough to leave at any moment.

Further, Paul could say, ‘I am ready

to depart’, because he had served faithfully, declared the whole counsel of God, and left nothing undone. A Christian ready to go is one who keeps short accounts with God – sins confessed, relationships tended, and duties fulfilled.

We live in dark and difficult days. The pressures of life, the noise of the world, and the subtle pull of earthly things can easily dull the believer’s hope. Yet the early Christians encouraged one another with a single word: Maranatha – our Lord comes. It was not a slogan, but a settled expectation. It belonged to hearts that were ready to rise when He called.

So, the challenge comes to us with weight: Can we truly say ‘Maranatha’ to one another? Are we ready – genuinely ready – to go?

Once again, we warmly appreciate the work that has gone into each article and thank all the writers who have contributed with care and conviction. Their ministry reminds us that the resources entrusted to us are not ours to hold loosely for ourselves, but to use faithfully for the Lord.

Sandy Jack

Ministry Articles Editor

Contents

Ezekiel the Seer – Part 5 2

By GRAEME ANDREWS

The ‘I Am’ statements of scripture – Part 5 4

By MERVYN WISHART

Nehemiah – Part 11 – A man of precepts 6

By TOM MERRIMAN

Exodus 34 – Seeking the Lord’s glory and to know His ways 8

By TIM GESKE

Diversity – Part 4 10

By MARK SWEETNAM

The person and work of the Holy Spirit – Part 4 12

By JOHN SCARSBROOK

The looks of the Lord Jesus – Part 4 14

By MALCOLM HORLOCK

People at the Lord’s feet in Luke’s Gospel 15

By JAYA KUMAR

Titles of Jehovah – Part 10 16

By ANDREW WARE

Mountain scenes of Matthew’s Gospel – Part 3 18

By STEPHEN FELLOWES

The present value of things written long ago 20

By PHILIP COLLIER

Covenant confusion 22

By ANDREW WILSON

The life and times of Elisha – Part 9 24

By PHIL RAGGETT

Towns and cities in the life of the Lord – Part 14 26

By IAN REES

Chairman’s notes 28

By JOHN BENNETT

Question Time 29

By FRANK A. PROUDLOCK

PULL-OUT

YPS

By ANDREW DUTTON

Ezekiel the Seer Part 5

THE SANCTUARY OF GOD'S GLORY

By **GRAEME ANDREWS** Wallingford, England

Ezekiel's final vision, chapters 40 to 48, constitutes one of the longest visions in scripture. It is perhaps the most significant and controversial portion of this enigmatic book. The temple depicted may be referred to in a number of ways: (i) Ezekiel's temple (the author that revealed it), (ii) the millennial temple (the age that contains it), or (iii) Christ's temple (the architect who will build it). This temple is not a man-made construct. It is built 'by' Christ and 'for' Christ – 'Even he shall build the temple of the Lord; and he shall bear the glory', Zech. 6. 13.

This vision's importance cannot be understated:

First, it completes the narrative of the book. It is a fitting climax, a grand finale, and a needed conclusion; the central theme of the book (the glory of the Lord) would never be resolved without it. The glory which vacated the temple to the east in chapters 8 to 11 now returns from the same direction, Ezek. 43. 2, 4.

Second, it completes the story of restoration detailed from chapter 33 onward. Chapters 33 to 39 depict Israel as regathered geographically, restored spiritually, reunited politically, and regenerated nationally. The ultimate symbol of Israel's restoration is a permanent sanctuary, 37. 28. Therefore, approximately thirteen years after the restoration oracles are received the culminating vision arrives.¹

Third, the vision concludes Ezekiel's personal narrative. The book begins with Ezekiel taken captive before he could function in a priestly capacity. Thankfully, any preparatory years of training have not been wasted. 'God was going to give His people a description of a future temple. To do this God needed someone very familiar with the temple and its ministry. Ezekiel was just the man'.²

The final nine chapters divide into three sections:

1. The sanctuary for worship, 40. 1 – 43. 12.
2. The system of worship, 43. 13 – 46. 24.
3. The society that worships, 47. 1 – 48. 35.

Interpreting the millennial temple

How should we interpret this vision and prophetic scripture? The current author affirms that we must interpret scripture consistently, employing a literal hermeneutic and understanding the passage as the original audience would have. To give some idea of the diverse treatment of Ezekiel's temple, consider the following. Ezekiel's temple has been viewed:

- i. **Historically**: either as a memorial of Solomon's temple or as the blueprint for Zerubbabel's temple. The millennial temple described here is radically different in its design and size to those structures; this is enough to discredit this interpretation.
- ii. **Symbolically**: this is the 'big hitter' within modern Christianity. Proponents of this approach view the text as depicting the development/progression of the church. This view is underpinned by replacement theology and a non-literal interpretation of prophecy. Expositors adopting this approach are inconsistent as they have used a literal interpretative framework for Ezekiel's earlier, now historically fulfilled prophecies, but

switch to an allegorical framework for anything that is outstanding.

- iii. **Literally**: chapters 40 to 48 depict a literal temple that has not been constructed to-date and awaits a future fulfilment. Its details are real; it is an architectural schematic and an actual description of Israel's millennial sanctuary.

Note: prophecy should be interpreted literally but also should be viewed practically. The purpose of the vision is to encourage its readers to holiness, 43. 10, cp. 1 John 3. 3.

Inspecting the millennial temple

Ezekiel receives a guided tour of the millennial temple, twenty-five years into their captivity. The vision constitutes his 'mount Sinai experience'; on a high mountain, he receives the temple blueprint and legislation for the coming age. In chapter 40 verse 4, he is reminded of the seriousness of the matter. 'Ezekiel . . . [is required] to use his eyes, his ears and his reflective faculties (the heart) . . . What was to be revealed would require the concentration of Ezekiel's every faculty. Surely no less is required of us in order to comprehend the vast themes set forth in the ensuing chapters'.³ One should note that a non-literal interpretation of this temple fails to meet the high standards required of Ezekiel. Why does attention to detail matter, if the details were mere symbols open to any whim of interpretation?

The size of the sanctuary

The sanctuary is **substantial**. At first, he sees 'the frame of a city', 40. 2. However, the prophet is not approaching Jerusalem and then narrowing down to a small structure contained therein. The temple itself is city-sized. 'Ezekiel's temple courts alone are considerably larger than the entire ancient city of Jerusalem'.⁴

The temple district is marked out by two walls. The inner wall (500 cubits by 500 cubits), 40. 5, and the outer wall (500 reeds by 500 reeds), 42. 17. A major textual debate exists as to the sanctuary's overall size. In chapter 42 verse 17, most commentators and translations replace 'reeds' with 'cubits', following the LXX. Doing so essentially removes the outer wall from existence.

However, the Hebrew text tells us there is a vast encircling wall around the complex; adopting the Hebrew text results in a sanctuary that is approximately sixfold bigger. Most who argue for the shorter measurement do so to fit the structure within the confines of modern-day, or ancient, Israel. This concession is not necessary as a topographic reconfiguration of the land, and indeed the whole world, is anticipated.⁵ Millennial Israel will be a very different place from modern-day Israel.

Its size is required to fulfil its global remit. Isaiah speaks of ‘a house of prayer for all people’ and the nations are mandated to come up for the feast of tabernacles, Isa. 56. 7; Zech. 14. 16.

The substance of the sanctuary

The millennial temple is a **simple** entity. We do not read of the building materials; there is no reference to gold, silver, or precious stones. While this sanctuary eclipses Solomon’s in real estate terms, the building materials seem simpler. Furthermore, the furniture list is sparse. But there is a clear rationale for this – the temple will not need an ark to represent God; they will have the Son of God physically there.⁶ All symbolic representations can pass away – the reality is present! SUMMERS comments aptly, ‘the chief glory of the Temple will not be its fittings and fixtures, but the fact that the Lord is there’.⁷

The sanctity of the sanctuary

The holiness of the sanctuary is **safeguarded**. The walls define boundaries between this holy district and the secular land surrounding it – separation is taught. The walls, while clearly literal, denote holiness. TATFORD reminds us that while thick and strong, the relatively low height of the walls would mean that they were not for fortification purposes.⁸ ‘Holiness becometh thy house’ is the main message, Ps. 93. 5. This sanctuary will not be a tourist attraction or a place for entertainment. It will be a centre for worship, whose holiness will be guarded jealously.

Adjudication is practised in the temple. Chapter 40 verse 7 refers to ‘every little chamber’ within the gate. Comparison

with other scriptures suggests these rooms will be for the temple officers or ‘porters’.⁹ Thus, the temple possesses guardrooms, ensuring no one unfit enters. The temple has gates to welcome people in. But we must remember that the grace of God does not diminish the holiness of God. ‘After the death of Athaliah, Jehoiada “set the porters at the gates of the house of the Lord, that none which was unclean in anything should enter in” (2 Chr. 23:19)’.¹⁰

The symmetry of the sanctuary

With a few minor exceptions, there is an intricate symmetry to this temple. ‘The only place where the symmetry of the Temple complex is not carried through [is the chambers by the north gate/east gate]. To maintain symmetry, one would expect the chambers to be by the north gate and the south gate [some modern translations tweak the text to maintain symmetry]’.¹¹ The north chamber is linked to priests who keep charge of the house, Ezek. 40. 44, 45, and the one by the east gate is for those who keep the altar, v. 46. Those who keep the altar are ‘the sons of Zadok’. Thus, we encounter the faithfulness of God, remembering and rewarding faithful service thousands of years down the line.¹²

The system of movement in the sanctuary

Order marks this sanctuary. In particular, one must not exit by the same gate they entered, 46. 9. Ezekiel depicts a dual one-way system for movement (running north to south or south to north). This ensures order and opportunity for worship, mitigating the chaotic tendencies of humans to queue jump or do things their own way. Either route took them directly to the altar. We see a typical lesson here; one cannot worship without due regard for the sacrifice of Christ. The practical import of this is most precious – ‘a final lesson for the pilgrim as he leaves, then, is this: no one can come to worship at the altar and be unchanged by it’.¹³ As an aside, space does not permit exploration, but those who go to the sanctuary, will sacrifice there (literally).

The steps within the sanctuary

The journey to the temple was upward, spiritually, morally, even

geographically, Isa. 2. 2. Not only will people ascend to the temple, but they will also ascend within it. **Seven steps** to enter the outer gates, Ezek. 40. 22. **Eight steps** to enter the inner gates, 40. 31, and then additional steps to enter the temple proper, 40. 49. The closer we get to God the more effort it takes! Let it be our prayer that the Lord would ‘plant my feet on higher ground’.

The summary of the sanctuary

The millennial temple will be **pure**; its holiness is guarded. Second, it will be **prevalent**; it looms large on the horizon, seen for miles in advance. It will be **pervasive**; people from every nation attend to worship. It will be **permanent**; the glory will never depart, 43. 7. It will be **personal**, as the book concludes with a wonderful title of Jehovah – Jehovah Shammah, ‘the Lord is there’, 48. 35. Prophetically, we read that it is the **pinnacle**, ‘the latter glory of this house will be greater than the former’, Hag. 2. 9 NASB. Its glory is not in the structure but in the man enthroned there, the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, Jehovah Shammah.

Endnotes

- 1 The final vision is not the last message of the book chronologically; that honour belongs to chapter 29 verse 18 (the one glaring chronological outlier in Ezekiel). But it is the last message logically and thematically.
- 2 JOHN W. SCHMITT, and J. CARL LANEY, *Messiah’s Coming Temple: Ezekiel’s Prophetic Vision of the Future Temple*, Kregel, 1997, pg. 48.
- 3 CHARLES LEE FEINBERG, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel: The Glory of the Lord*, Moody Press, 1982, pg. 241
- 4 RANDALL PRICE, *The Temple and Bible Prophecy: A Definitive Look at its Past, Present and Future*, Harvest House Publishers, 2005, pg. 531.
- 5 Cp. Zech. 14. 4, 10; Isa. 2. 2; Mic. 4. 1, 2.
- 6 Cp. Jer 3. 16, 17.
- 7 A. SUMMERS, ‘Ezekiel’s Temple’, *Assembly Testimony Magazine*, Nov/Dec 2009.
- 8 FREDERICK A. TATFORD, *Dead Bones Live: An Exposition of Ezekiel’s Prophecy*, John Ritchie Ltd, 2012 reprint, pg. 232.
- 9 Cp. Neh. 11. 19.
- 10 JOHN M. RIDDLE, *Ezekiel: Coming Back from Exile*, John Ritchie Ltd, 2020, pg. 476.
- 11 JOHN W. SCHMITT, and J. CARL LANEY, *op. cit.*, pg. 92.
- 12 Cp. 44. 15; 48. 11.
- 13 SIMON SHERWIN, ‘Ezekiel’s Temple – Gospel Lessons’, *Present Truth*, no. 213, October 2016.

THE 'I AM' STATEMENTS OF SCRIPTURE 5

By **MERVYN WISHART** Newcastle, Northern Ireland

'Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, **I am the light of the world**: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life', John 8. 12; cp. 9. 5.

The eternal light, Ps. 104. 2

'God is light, and in him is no darkness at all', 1 John 1. 5. The positive and negative statements together reveal what is the very essence of God. David wrote, 'Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment', Ps. 104. 2. Paul states, 'Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen', 1 Tim. 6. 16.

THOMAS BINNEY directs us to those realms of light above:¹

'Eternal Light! Eternal Light!
How pure the soul must be
When, placed within Thy searching sight,
It shrinks not, but with calm delight
Can live, and look on Thee.

There is a way for man to rise
To that sublime abode;
An offering and a sacrifice,
A Holy Spirit's energies,
An Advocate with God'.

THOMAS BINNEY (1798-1874)

The light of creation, Gen. 1. 3

His first spoken words in creation were 'Let there be light: and there was light', Gen. 1. 3. This was on the first day. On the fourth day, the sun, the moon and the stars were created. The reason for their creation is given. The lights in the firmament of the heavens were:

1. 'to divide the day from the night', v. 14.
2. 'to give light upon the earth', vv. 15, 17.
3. 'to divide the light from the darkness, v. 18.

The One who is the Light of the world fulfils all three, cp. John 11. 9; 12. 46.

Light was created on the first day, yet the sources of light were created on the fourth day. We are reminded of the words of scripture, 'With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible', Matt. 19. 26.

The light of prophecy, 2 Pet. 1. 19

'We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place'. It was written by Matthew, 'Galilee of the Gentiles; The people which sat in darkness saw great light', 4. 15, 16; cp. Isa. 9. 2. It was spoken by Simeon, 'A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel', Luke 2. 32.

The light of the world, John 8. 12

The Lord Jesus came into the world to reveal all that God is. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, Col. 1. 15. He could say, 'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father', John 14. 9. We note the connection between life and light. In John chapter 1 verse 4, 'In him was life; and the life was the light of men'. By His very presence and ministry in this world the light of God was manifested.

What an indictment of the human family is found in John chapter 3 verse 19. 'And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil' NKJV. 'The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it', 1. 5 NIV. Light will dispel darkness but never the reverse; darkness cannot overcome light. Just as insects will flee from the sunlight shining in when a stone is upturned,

sadly many have an aversion to the light of the gospel. 'The true light was that which, coming into the world, lightens every man', 1. 9 JND. The true light is the Lord Jesus. John came to bear witness of Him. He came to bring light within the reach of all men.

Light in the heart, 2 Cor. 4. 6

At conversion the light of salvation dawns upon the soul. 'God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ', 2 Cor. 4. 6.

When he spoke of his experience of conversion, Paul seemed to have a growing appreciation of the wonder of what happened that day on the road to Damascus. Luke's account records, 'suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven', Acts 9. 3. Paul's testimony in Caesarea was, 'there shone from heaven a great light round about me', 22. 6. Paul's witness before King Agrippa was, 'I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun', 26. 13.

Peter speaks of a marvellous light. Believers are, 'an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light', 1 Pet. 2. 9.

The believer's responsibility

The One who said, 'As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world', John 9. 5, said prior to leaving His disciples, 'Ye are the light of the world', Matt. 5. 14. 'For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light', Eph. 5. 8. God's desire for His people is, 'That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world', Phil. 2. 15.

Light in the home, Exod. 10. 23

The plague of darkness, the penultimate plague which covered all the land of Egypt, was described as darkness which could be felt, Exod. 10. 21. It was palpable. The Egyptians could not leave their houses for three

days, 'but all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings', Exod. 10. 23. The homes of God's people differed from the homes of the Egyptians in that they each enjoyed light in their dwellings.

The Lord spoke of light for 'all that are in the house', Matt. 5. 15, and light for those that enter into the house, Luke 8. 16.

The Christian's home should be a place where the light of the gospel is clearly seen both by those who live in the home and by those who visit. The Lord spoke of two places that no one would think of placing a lighted candle: under a bushel or under a bed. Either position would greatly inhibit the outshining of the light and cause a serious danger of fire. The bushel was used as a measuring vessel for dry products, such as grain or flour, which were being sold in the market. It represents commerce, the busyness of life. The lesson may be that the believer can be too busy, even with the legitimate things of life, and thereby their light of testimony for Christ is diminished. In Luke chapter 8, the bed may indicate indolence, a person who is not busy enough, and they become lethargic as to their responsibility to serve the Lord; they fail to respond to the command of the Lord. 'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven', Matt. 5. 16.

When a person is born again, the light of salvation comes into their home. The Lord said to Zacchaeus as He entered his home, 'This day is salvation come to this house', Luke 19. 9.

The Christian home should be a beacon of light in a dark world. God's people of old were commanded 'lay up these my words in your heart . . . And ye shall teach them your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house', Deut. 11. 18, 19.

The light of heaven, Rev. 21. 23

There were three sources of light in the tabernacle in the wilderness. The outer court was lighted by the sun and the moon by day and by night. The holy place where the priests carried out their daily duties was lit by the seven lamps of the menorah. The lamps were supplied with pure olive oil from the olive trees which the Lord caused to grow in the wilderness, Isa. 41. 19. The holiest of all was illuminated by the *shekinah* glory of God.

Concerning the holy city, Revelation chapter 21, we read, 'the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof', v. 23. Equally, chapter 22 verse 5, 'And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle [artificial light], neither light of the sun [natural light]; for the Lord God giveth them light'.

The light of the morning, 2 Sam. 23. 4

One of the most delightful titles of Christ in scripture is, 'the bright and morning star', Rev. 22. 16. The appearance of the Lord Jesus as the morning star will herald the dawning of an endless, cloudless and fadeless day.

'A morning without clouds' was included in the last words of David,

'And he shall be as the light of the morning, like the rising of the sun, a morning without clouds', 2 Sam. 23. 4 JND. There were many clouds that crossed the sky of David's life. Some because of the relentless pursuit of him by Saul, who sought to kill him; some the result of his own failings; some because of the rebellion led by his son, Absalom. Now, at the end of life, he anticipates 'a morning without clouds'.

A morning without tears. 'Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning', Ps. 30. 5. In Luke chapter 7 verse 13, the Lord said, 'Weep not' to the widow of Nain. He was able to remove the cause of her tears by raising her son to life. In Luke chapter 8 verse 52, He said to Jairus, whose daughter had died, 'weep not'. He was able to remove the reason for his tears by raising his daughter from the dead. Revelation chapter 21 verse 4 explains for us why there will be no tears in heaven, 'And he shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death shall not exist any more, nor grief, nor cry' JND.

A daybreak without shadows.

'Until the day break, and the shadows flee away', S. of S. 2. 17. These words are engraved on the headstone over the grave of many a dear saint who awaits the summoning shout of the Lord at His coming. The shadows speak of the onward march of time, as indicated by the moving shadow on the sun dial. It is known as the 'shadow of turning', Jas. 1. 17.

In Isaiah chapter 21 verse 11, the question is asked, 'Watchman, what of the night?' His reply was, 'The morning cometh', v. 12.

In Romans chapter 13 verses 11 and 12, Paul, speaking of this present age, writes, 'now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light'. Solomon wrote, 'the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day', Prov. 4. 18.

Endnote

1 Believers Hymn Book, number 378.



NEHEMIAH

A MAN OF PRECEPTS

By **TOM MERRIMAN** Carmarthen, Wales

Part 11

The wellbeing of the people (the Jews) and the place (Jerusalem) were linked. Obedience brought God's blessing to the place, benefiting the people. In this setting, the walls had been repaired, but work was also required amongst the people.¹ Central to chapter 8 is the word of God – by it, God's people would be built up. Nehemiah's record shows the value he placed on the precepts of scripture, and were the basis for his exhortation, 'the joy of the Lord is your strength', v. 10.

The people and the place are intrinsically linked today, since the people are God's dwelling-place.² The spiritual wellbeing of individuals contributes to an assembly's strength. Likewise, the strong spiritual condition of an assembly, founded on, and following the word of God, will benefit its members. If we are to delight ourselves in the Lord, we need to understand His will and ways by His word. The psalmist wrote, 'consider how I love thy precepts: quicken me, O Lord, according to thy lovingkindness', Ps. 119. 159. Do we love God's word?

The word requested, 8. 1, 2

Ezra was asked to 'bring the book of the law' and the people **assembled**. As the tribes had gathered around the tabernacle to hear God's word, these 'gathered themselves together as one man'. Ezra (appropriately named, meaning 'help') was given room to minister the word, his ability being recognized. As 'the scribe', his textual skills enabled him to handle 'the book of the law', but, as 'the priest', his ministry was 'down to earth', and 'brought the law before the congregation'. Gifted by God, he was a 'ready scribe' having 'prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments', Ezra 7. 6, 10. Present were men, women 'and all that could hear with understanding', no doubt, including children.

Similarly, today, it is becoming for

God's people to assemble around the scriptures, reflecting the truth of the one body in which we are called, Jew and Gentile brought together as 'one new man' in Christ, Eph. 2. 15. Gifts have been divinely given to build up the assembly and should be recognized and given opportunity to be used. However, work is also required – 'study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth', 2 Tim. 2. 15. Scholarly ability has been used to interpret texts and provide written material to aid Bible study. However, teaching must be accessible and applicable to people's everyday lives, enabling men, women, and children to understand. Parents do well to introduce children to the assembly environment and the word of God from a young age. Any questions raised by children about the scriptures offer the opportunity for further discussion and explanation.³ The Spirit of God can apply matters learned in youth in later years.⁴

They gathered in 'the street that was before the water gate'; appropriate as a place of refreshment and cleansing. Notably, this gate needed no repairs.⁵ Psalm 119 verse 160 states, 'Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever'.

One day, the bride of Christ will be gathered on the golden street

before the river of God, clear as crystal, having been sanctified and cleansed 'with the washing of water by the word', Eph 5. 26.⁶ Let us strive, practically, toward what we are, positionally, by the cleansing of the word – a truth the Lord taught by washing His disciples' feet, John 13. 4-17.

Israel's activity mirrored that of earlier returnees from captivity.⁷ The 'first day of the seventh month'⁸ an appointed season, the Feast of Trumpets.⁹ This would have reminded them of the trumpet sound that accompanied God's voice, and of silver trumpets used for Israel's gatherings, and to instruct them in their goings.¹⁰

Let us not forsake the assembling of ourselves together to hear God's voice and to be instructed in our ways.¹¹

The word read, v. 3

'He read therein', and the people 'were **attentive** unto the book'.¹² The word was pertinent, that 'which the Lord had commanded to Israel', v. 1. Though by Moses' pen, it was from the Lord, and for them. The public reading 'before the street' made it accessible to all. It was prolonged, 'from the morning until midday' – even then, it comprised a sizable volume, and time was dedicated to its hearing. Read 'before the water gate', people were met with the word of God before they could access water for drinking and washing, and their ears were inclined towards the word – it was a priority.

Have we appreciated that the Bible is from God, and that it is for us? 'All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable', 2 Tim. 3. 16, having been written by 'holy men of God [who] spake as they were moved [carried along] by the Holy Ghost', 2 Pet. 1. 21. Timothy was to 'give attendance to [public] reading' of scripture in the assembly, 1 Tim. 4. 13. Ours is a larger collection of writing than Israel's book, requiring time and attention. We must read widely to grasp the bigger picture, and closely, to consider the detail. If our physical condition reflected our spiritual health, how would we appear? Gaius' spiritual condition fared better than his physical frame, for he walked in the truth.¹³

The word raised, vv. 4-6

This explains how the reading was undertaken. The book was lifted – a pulpit being built for this purpose (not to elevate the man), and Ezra ‘opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people)’. Consequently, the people were lifted – Ezra, to read the word, thirteen men stood at his side showing their attentiveness and support, and the people stood in **anticipation** – God was about to speak! Then, voices were lifted – Ezra offered praise to the great, eternal, self-existent God who deigned to speak with His people. Their voices too were lifted, answering ‘Amen, Amen’ – offering their agreement and readiness to accept God’s word. Hands were lifted, anticipating what they would receive. Finally, the Lord was uplifted, as the people ‘bowed their heads, and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground’. The word lifted before their eyes indicated the place it should have in their hearts.

What position does it hold in our lives? For nations to be lifted, they must uphold God’s word.¹⁴ The local church is a ‘pillar and ground of the truth’; the extent to which that is done will be reflected by the time and obedience given to it, 1 Tim. 3. 15. Believers can ‘adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour’ through their conduct in the workplace, Titus 2. 10. Homes too can become places where the scriptures are displayed and discussed.¹⁵ What about our personal lives; our minds? Does God’s word take a higher place than news or sports feeds, magazines, and biographies? Meditation on the word can make us like the blessed man of Psalm 1, fixed, flourishing, and fruitful. When the book is



uplifted, believers are uplifted with godly dignity; voices are uplifted in worship to God; hands are uplifted in His service, and the Lord Himself is uplifted in our hearts. Let us give God’s word the place it deserves with the attitude suggested by Eli to Samuel, ‘speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth’, ready to do whatever He asks, 1 Sam. 3. 9.

The word related, vv. 7, 8

Thirteen men, likely chief Levites, assisted by others, ‘caused the people to understand the law’. This enabled the people to appreciate its bearing on their lives but required their humility. They **apprehended** and ‘stood in their place’, allowing the word to take effect, though it came as a rebuke as they realized their failures. This apprehension came by grasping:

- the word – ‘they read in the book of the law of God’. We too must take it up and read it;
- the words – ‘distinctly’, each word being conveyed with clarity. Study tools and comparison of scripture passages aid the comprehension of the text – necessary for a fuller understanding;
- the wider context – ‘and gave the sense’, through impartation of knowledge and insight. This requires broader reading to grasp the thought flow;
- what it meant to them – ‘caused them to understand’, which involved teaching, v. 9. We should have the same objective.

The scriptures are not a rulebook but convey the knowledge of God. Paul’s ambition was to know God, and to ‘apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus’, Phil. 3. 10, 12.

The word received, vv. 9-12

The people **accepted** the word, and Nehemiah seized the moment to exhort them. They were discouraged – with heads cast down; they felt their weakness. They needed to get their eyes off themselves and up to the Lord and His strength, ‘This day is holy unto the Lord [*Jehovah*] your God; mourn not, nor weep’, v. 9. They were distressed, looking back in sorrow for their failure. But sorrow has a counterpart, and they needed to look on, determined to obey the

Lord, ‘this day is holy unto our Lord [*Adonay*]: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength’, v. 10. They were disquieted, but the Levites ‘stilled all the people . . . Hold your peace, for the day is holy’, v. 11. Understanding what must be done, they could set themselves to it.

How do we respond when the scriptures rebuke us? Remorse is a start, but we must not wallow in failure. Hebrews encourages us to look ‘unto Jesus’, to ‘despise not thou the chastening of the Lord’ – it is out of love. Also, to ‘lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet’, 12. 2, 5, 12, 13. When we know what the Lord desires, let us accept it, and make it our joy to do His will.¹⁶

The word revisited, vv. 13-18

Senior figures returned the second day, eager for further understanding. This was matched by an earnestness to do what they heard. Realizing that they should keep the Feast of Tabernacles, they **applied** themselves to it, publishing, and performing the feast according to the scriptures. During the feast, ‘day by day’, Ezra read again. In fulfilment of Nehemiah’s words there was much enjoyment, ‘there was very great gladness’, v. 17.

May we be eager to learn more, and earnest in applying ourselves to the word. Enjoyment will follow. ‘When we walk with the Lord in the light of His word, what a glory He sheds on our way! . . . the favour He shows . . . the joy He bestows, are for them who will trust and obey’, J. H. SAMMIS.

Endnotes

- 1 Many in Judah were sworn to Tobiah – this needed addressing, Neh. 6. 17-19.
- 2 1 Pet. 2. 5.
- 3 Deut. 6. 20.
- 4 2 Tim. 3. 15.
- 5 Neh. 3. 26.
- 6 Rev. 21. 21; 22. 1.
- 7 Ezra 3. 1.
- 8 Neh. 8. 2.
- 9 Lev. 23. 24; Num. 29. 1.
- 10 Exod. 19. 19; Num. 10. 1-10.
- 11 Heb. 10. 25.
- 12 ‘Attentive’ is appropriately inserted to convey that the ears of the people were ‘to’ the book, lit.
- 13 3 John 2. 3.
- 14 Prov. 14. 34.
- 15 Deut. 6. 6-9.
- 16 John 4. 34; 8. 29.

EXODUS 34

SEEKING THE LORD'S GLORY AND TO KNOW HIS WAYS

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

We have come to the last in this series that began with the 'great sin' of the molten calf and God's dealings with Israel's treachery. Our previous article traced how the Lord had engaged Moses on the question of His presence amongst His people. This led to his third intercession where he dealt with God's deep and original purposes for His chosen people. The Lord has answered with forgiveness, yet in a way that His disciplinary action would correct and judge the sin. Having a front row seat many months in the theatre of God's mercy and judgement, Moses now asks of the Lord, 'Show me now thy way, that I may know thee', Exod. 33.13. In real time, Moses witnessed the holy blend of God's forgiveness and mercy, alongside His visiting iniquity and 'by no means clear[ing] the guilty', Exod. 34. 5-7. Set on God's glory through this great mission, this humble servant wondered in awe. His wonder would soon give way to worship.

The intrinsic beauties of our glorious Lord

And thus Moses' passion continues to build. His first request, 'Show me now thy way, that I may know thee' in chapter 33 verse 13, gives place to the second, 'Shew me thy glory', v. 18. Both are quite related. It is the import of holy writ and the experience of every saint of God that to see the glory of God is to:

1. Know the Lord;
2. Understand the ways of the Lord;
3. See the name of the Lord proclaimed;
4. Behold the goodness of the Lord.

Observe the Lord's reply in the following verses, 'I will make all my goodness pass before thee', and 'I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee', v. 19. This reply gives us a clue as to the nature of Moses' requests and how God will answer them.

Moses' thirst was a deep one; but was his petition for visual or physical nearness? The case can be made that Moses had already seen the external, effulgent glory of God

in the burning bush, 3. 1-6. He had been with God for forty days and forty nights on the mount of the Lord, 24. 18. He had spoken with God 'face to face', 33. 11. We read in chapter 34 that his face shone after the next forty days and nights on the mount. Certainly, Moses, like all believers, longed for a physical closeness to God.

But there is more. The appearance of Moses with Christ on the mount of transfiguration 1,400 years later may help us understand God's answer. The face of Christ Jesus shone as the sun; and yet the focus is on the discussion, their 'talking with him', Matt. 17. 3, speaking 'of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem', Luke 9. 31. And finally, the audible endorsement from the Father, 'this is my beloved Son: hear him', v. 35. The moral glory, the character of God, the plan of God, and the ensuing glory were all wrapped together in this appearing.

Consider for a moment his intercessions. Well may we expect to

see a man of God pursuing the glory of God in his prayer and actions. We find this in Moses' intercessions, as he pleads the glory (reputation) of God among the nations as they witness the course of Israel out of Egypt into the wilderness.

His real quest was becoming one that would allow Him to **know his Lord** more intimately. Contrast this with the psalmist's commentary on Israel, Ps. 95. 10. Moses sought to understand God's glorious ways. Commissioned and sent by God, he was finding out how the Lord could make a promise to the patriarchs, and weave it into a world history that involves the future judgement of the iniquity of the Amorites and the exposure of the false gods of Egypt. All the while doing so in a way that pictures God's redemption by blood and by power.

Included in God's sovereign weaving of Israel's journey were His disciplinary actions. In the previous article, we highlighted some of God's multifaceted responses to the failings of Israel, including His responses to this 'great sin', Exod. 32. 30. Yet, God is faithful to His promises, forgiving, and showing mercy to thousands. Moses, like us, is seeking to understand these things more fully.

God is ready to answer Moses and reveal a glimpse of His effulgent glory along with the declaration of His intrinsic moral glory. And so, the Lord would put Moses in the cleft of the rock, and cover him with His hand, while He passed by, 33. 22, 23.

What follows is unique in recorded history. The Lord God Almighty descended in the cloud and stood with him there. Then we read, He 'proclaimed the name of the Lord', 34. 5. The declaration immediately becomes one of the scriptures' longest catalogues of the Lord's attributes contained in eight statements. These statements focus our attention on the intrinsic glories of the Lord, which truly satisfied the deepest longings of the heart of Moses (and should satisfy ours). When the Lord highlights His divine attributes, He does so under the banner of

the declaration of His name. This includes all His actions (both mercies and judgements), designs, and motives. In summary, God's **goodness** is defined by His perfect and beneficial words and actions; the results are proven over time.

Underscore the banner: **the declaration of God's name**. The sub-banner is **the goodness of God**. Of His name, one has written, 'It robes Him in all the majesty, dignity, and grandeur, and boundlessness of changeless unity. It exhibits Him, as the sole fount of every stream of life'.¹ The Lord Jesus Christ on earth declared such to the fullest, John 17. 6, 24-26. In this great seventeenth chapter of John, the themes of God's love, God's work, God's glory, and the declaration of God's name run parallel to those of Exodus 34.

Moses' desire was aligned with Christ's. To know the only true God and His Son, was Christ's prayer on behalf of His disciples, John 17. 3. It was also Paul's passion as he writes to the Philippians, Phil. 3. 8, 10. Similarly, Paul writes to the Ephesians, 'that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in **the knowledge of him**: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that **ye may know** what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe', Eph. 1. 17-19.

The revelation of God's glory to Moses declared the very moral glories of our Lord. And yet, he did 'see my [God's] back parts' or 'see me from behind', Exod. 33. 23 JND. WARREN HENDERSON writes, 'How are we to understand what Moses saw? It is like the light of the sun: our eyes cannot stare at the sun in its full strength without being damaged, but yet we are able to enjoy beautiful sunsets'.²

Just as Moses 'rose up early' in eager anticipation, he now moves with deepest reverence as he 'made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and **worshipped**', 34. 8.

A sanctified people for a holy Lord

Moses now leverages his position of favour in his intercession (fourth in this section). Sin has been acknowledged. Forgiveness has been granted. Moses intercedes in new and surprising terms – words of endearment, 'take us for thine inheritance', v. 9. Words that echo those of marriage proposals. How would the Lord respond? Would the Lord go so far as to renew the covenant of espousal?³ The Lord responds firstly with an unconditional promise of future victory, described as 'marvels'. Secondly, He stresses their sanctification to Him, separated from the pagan idolatry that prevailed in the land.

In the remainder of the passage, the Lord sets forth a list of feasts, gifts, holidays, and sacrifices. Consider this as a list of desirable (required) features in His beloved nation, His new wife. These would serve to continually warm the fires of their hearts. Many of these festive obligations had been given after the tenth plague found in Exodus chapters 12 and 13, and again after the giving of the civil law, chh. 22, 23. Included now in chapter 34 are the keeping of the feast of unleavened bread, the offering of the firstborn, the seventh day rest, the feast of weeks, the feast of ingathering, the required appearance of males at three annual feasts, and the firstfruits of their land brought to the house of the Lord. All these would safeguard and rekindle the remembrance of God's great power, grace, and love.

After so great a deliverance from Egypt, and so great a promised new land to possess, the children of Israel would continue to move forward. 'They have well said', the Lord responds, but continues, 'O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always', Deut. 5. 28, 29.

The list of feasts and sacrifices in Exodus chapter 34 verses 10 to 27 picture for us a life lived in the Spirit for the New Testament believer. Let

us explore how these themes might apply to us. First, after emphasizing not to make any covenant with the peoples of Canaan, the Lord enjoins Israel to keep the feast of unleavened bread. A lesson for us today, Paul exhorts believers to 'keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth', 1 Cor. 5. 8. Second, the redemption of the firstborn may remind us that it is our reasonable response to live our lives given to Christ, Rom. 12. 1, 2. Third, the sabbath reminds us that through faith we have entered into God's rest and everlasting fellowship with Him. Fourth and fifth, keeping the feasts of firstfruits and ingathering express, 'but now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits . . . afterward they that are Christ's at his coming', 1 Cor. 15. 20-23. The Lord has appointed us that we should go forth and bear fruit for Christ, John 15. 16. Sixth, the three annual required feasts may remind us not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together as a company of believers, Heb. 10. 24, 25. Seventh, 'Christ our passover is sacrificed for us', 1 Cor. 5. 7, the fulfilment of all types and sacrifices in the scriptures. Our obedience to the Lord in each of these matters will go a long way in the path of a life that is pleasing to God.

When we look at these 'feasts' and 'observances' in the context of this passage, our hearts can beat afresh with a response to our Lord's desire for His chosen people. God has so richly invested in His people and seeks our grateful response. Such a redemption was planned by His heart, carried out by His power, and rooted in His love. May each of us, like Moses, always seek the glory of God, seek to know Him, and faithfully serve and worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.

Endnotes

- 1 JOHN GRANT, *Exodus, What the Bible Teaches*, John Ritchie Ltd, 2004, pg. 445.
- 2 W. HENDERSON, *Out of Egypt*, Gospel Folio Press, pg. 415.
- 3 God's love for His newly redeemed beloved. Cp. Jer. 2. 1-3; Deut. 7. 6-15; Hosea 11. 1, 4.

DIVERSITY

Part 4

The unity and diversity of scripture

by **MARK SWEETNAM** Dublin, Ireland

One of the glorious characteristics of God is the consistency with which He acts. This is true in relation to the attributes of His person. God is always faithful to His own character; His every action bears the stamp of His righteousness, mercy, and love. But His actions are also marked by what we might call a consistent style. Just as we might admire the characteristic brushstroke of a talented artist or the distinctive sentence structure of our favourite author, so in God's creative works, we can identify recurring motifs. This should not surprise us. Human creativity is a consequence of our creation in the image of God, and the greater artist is no more likely to work with random inconsistency than the lesser.

One of the motifs of God's work is His delight in unity through diversity. To most of mankind, this is counter-intuitive; what passes for unity in human things is more commonly uniformity and uniformity cannot encompass diversity. This has become increasingly – and depressingly – clear in recent conversations about diversity. Even as increased emphasis is placed on diversity, the range of acceptable opinions about diversity has become increasingly narrow and demands for uniformity have become ever more strident. God, by contrast, works by better means to higher ends. He is interested not in a monotonous uniformity, but in a vital unity that thrives because – and not in spite – of diversity.

This characteristic is evident in creation. At the macro level, systems of unimaginable complexity, and at a bewildering array of scales, operate together in one harmonious whole, and at the micro level of humanity, male and female provide each other with the perfect and completing complement. We see it in the church. It is not incidental that Paul follows Ephesians chapter 4's great paean to Christian unity with a description of diversity seen in the distribution, operation, and

contribution of gift. And Ephesians' picture of the church, the body of Christ, is echoed at a local level in 1 Corinthians, most clearly of all in the juxtaposition of chapter 12 verses 27 and 28, 'Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers'. And it is seen in the canon, in the Bible's blend of unity and diversity, its almost endless variety and its consistent and coherent testimony.

Both the unity and the diversity of scripture are recognized in the opening verse of Hebrews, 'God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets'. 'Sundry times and divers manners', more prosaically rendered by modern translations as 'at many times and in many ways' captures with great economy the diversity of scripture. 'Sundry times' reminds us of the enormous chronological scale of scripture. While the precise dating of the earliest portions of scripture is impossible, even a conservative estimate would involve millennia, rather than centuries. God's word was written down in the age of the Pharaohs, and the Persians, in the days of judges, kings, and Caesars, during the ministries of prophets,

priests, and apostles. Revelation did not arrive in a smooth uniform flow; sometimes it came as a torrent, sometimes as a trickle, and sometimes not at all. At sundry times, God spoke.

He spoke 'in divers manners'. These different ways likely embrace both method and mode. We grasp only a little of the former – it is difficult for us to understand fully what it meant to be 'moved by the Holy Ghost', 2 Pet. 1. 21. We are more readily able to appreciate the latter, for it would be a dull reader of scripture who could fail to appreciate that its sixty-six books encompass an enormous range of genres and styles. Reading scripture exposes us to narrative, poetry, biography, history, and apocalyptic. And each of the categories of genre contains myriad variations between and even within individual books. Think, for example, of the poetry of Job, where each character has his own voice, and where the quality of the poetry varies, from Job's friends to Job himself, and finally to the sublime strains of divine speech. Or of the book of Psalms, which runs the gamut of human emotion and spiritual experience. Or of the crisp efficiency of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, with their bureaucratic borrowings, the pastoral simplicity of Ruth, the complex characterization of Moses or David or Paul. In divers manners, it all came, inspired by a God who loves variety and is able to address the tastes and temperaments of all sorts of personalities, tempered together so as to address every part of our personality, ministering to our minds, our hearts, and our souls.

'At sundry times and in divers manners' God spoke. And He spoke 'by [through] the prophets'. Somewhere around forty of these 'holy men of God', 2 Pet. 1. 21, were used. They were all men, and they were all holy, but beyond those important commonalities, they, too, were marked by enormous diversity. Some were young, some old (and some wrote when they were young and when they were old). Some were well educated, others were not. Some came from elite backgrounds,

others had humble origins. Like any group of forty men would be, they were marked by a variety of personality and profession. Their number encompassed shepherds and civil servants, fishermen and kings, priests and doctors. Some are well-known, others unknown. Though mostly Jewish, they were not exclusively so. And they did not all write in the same language.

In short, no matter what way we look at it, scripture is marked by diversity, by a complexity that no book of merely human origin can equal. And it is a book, for though the Bible is made up of sixty-six books, it is not just a set of covers enclosing some sort of jumbled anthology of ancient writings. It is a whole, a coherent and unified book. That unity is organic, not manufactured, for the Bible is united in having one source and in telling one great story.

That the patchwork of revelation has a single source is emphasized by the writer to the Hebrews. It is 'God', literally 'the God' who has spoken unto the fathers by the prophets. This emphasis continues throughout the Epistle: the human writers of scripture are never identified, and quotations from scripture are attributed to God directly. The writer also emphasizes the fact that scripture tells a single story. He gives us a masterclass in the understanding of Old Testament scripture. Although God has now spoken in Son, and although the old covenant has been replaced with the new, Old Testament revelation remains relevant for believers in this age. After all, as the juxtaposition of Hebrews chapters 11 and 12 makes clear, we are part of the same story as those worthies who lived by faith in previous generations.

Peter agrees. In his second Epistle, he reminds us 'that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation', 1. 20. This is a difficult expression to pin down. It does not mean, as some have thought (and taught) that scripture cannot be understood by individuals apart from a 'magisterium' of the teaching of

a particular church or religion. It could refer to the fact that prophets did not communicate scripture on their own initiative – that is precisely the point that Peter makes in the following verse ('the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man'). It is difficult, however, to see why Peter would make the same point twice. The third possibility is that Peter is saying that no passage of scripture should be understood in isolation from the rest of scripture. Verse 21 then gives the reason why this is so – scripture must be understood as a whole, because it is a whole. It is not a collection of human utterances, written down on human initiative. Rather, it is 'the prophetic word made surer', 1. 19 JND. Prophetic here means 'oracular', originating with God, and Peter reiterates the prophetic nature of scripture in verses 20 and 21. Scripture, though written down by 'holy men of God', 1. 21, is the product of a singular directing intellect – it comes from God.

Peter's second Epistle stresses that scripture has a single source. The first chapter of 1 Peter emphasizes that it tells a single story, and that even those who wrote it down only imperfectly understood, 'Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow', 1 Pet. 1. 10, 11. The singular story of scripture, with all its different strands and sub-plots, has a singular subject, for it all speaks of Christ. At times it speaks of His sufferings, at others of His glory, but it is all about Him.

An appreciation of the unity and diversity of scripture will inevitably impact our engagement with it. Reading the Bible with a consciousness of its diversity will mean approaching each book of scripture with an alertness to its genre, style, and the context in which it was originally written. This

will keep us from approaching each book in the same way, and preserve us from, for example, reading Old Testament narrative in the same way as we read New Testament Epistles, or poetry in the same way as history, argument in the same way as apocalyptic. If we treat scripture as a homogeneous text we risk frustrating the purposes for which God revealed Himself in such variety in the first place.

But we should read scripture too with an eye to its unity. At its most basic, that will mean reading all of it. We all have our favourite parts of scripture, but we impoverish ourselves if we return repeatedly to the same sections and ignore the rest. In reading the whole of scripture, we should keep before us the big picture of the Bible and the unfolding of progressive revelation. Seeing where each book slots into the canon, and grasping the contribution that each makes to the Bible's overall story will unlock scripture for us. A grasp of the big frameworks of scripture will be a real help here; time spent in understanding the covenants and dispensations of scripture will pay rich dividends in our understanding of the book. As well as these frameworks, we should also endeavour to grasp the big themes of scripture, the arcs that run through the whole canon. God has great programmes in history: of redemption, residence, and rule. These great themes are the girders of the Bible, and we can only really grasp them when we grasp the unity of scripture.

The Bible is a book like no other, for it comes to us from the hand of God and bears the stamp of His divine style. As we read it, let our desire be that so beautifully expressed by GEORGE HERBERT (original spelling retained):

Oh that I knew how all thy lights
combine,
And the configurations of their
glorie!
Seeing not onely how each verse
doth shine,
But all the constellations of the
storie.

THE PERSON AND WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT Part 4

His work in Incarnation

By **JOHN SCARBROOK** Killamarsh, England

There are few more moving statements in scripture than that recorded by Luke, the beloved physician, in chapter 2 verse 7 of his Gospel record, 'she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn'. It was a moment that fulfilled ancient prophecies. An event that the Apostle Paul would later describe as 'the fulness of the time', Gal. 4. 4, a cardinal step in the great plan and purpose of salvation; an occasion which brought a multitude of the heavenly host from their native sphere to announce this lowly birth to Bethlehem's shepherds. Truly, something unique and remarkable was taking place.

No sooner had Adam and Eve partaken of the forbidden fruit in Eden's garden, than the Lord God made known that a plan, conceived in the eternal counsels, was already in place to deal with the catastrophic results of the fall; the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head, Gen. 3. 15. Time would run its course for several thousand years before this enigmatic statement came to fruition outside the city wall of Jerusalem. Yet a longing was instilled in the hearts and minds of patriarchs, prophets, and people for a Promised One, a deliverer, a Messiah, a King.

By one act of disobedience, sin had entered the world, rendering the whole stream of humanity polluted at source, Rom. 5. 12. The taking of fruit from the tree was effortless, the plan prepared to counter the consequences of that one act was infinitely costly and beyond the reach of mortal mankind to accomplish. God has revealed Himself as a God of love and forgiveness, so His heart went out to fallen man. But, because He is also intrinsically holy and righteous, sin could not be simply dismissed or ignored. The decree had been made plain, 'in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die', Gen. 2. 17. Sin must inevitably result in death. The Lord God demonstrated this by providing coats of animal skins as a covering for Adam and Eve, to replace

the fig leaves stitched together by their own efforts.

Man's inherited sinful nature would inevitably end in physical death. If mankind was ever to be released from the sentence of spiritual death and separation from God for all eternity, then salvation's plan would need to be effective. So, in order that man was not estranged from His presence until the time came to unveil His purpose, a loving God accepted substitutionary sacrifices as a covering for sin, a foreshadowing of what was in the divine mind.

In essence, the plan must take into account a number of realities:

1. Because man is a sinful being, he is mortal and subject to death, Rom. 3. 23; 6. 23.
2. He can, and will, only die for his own sins, not for those of any other, Ps. 49. 7; Ezek. 18. 4, 20.
3. It needed a man who was sinless to be a substitute and bear God's righteous judgement against sin, Gal. 1. 4; 1 Tim. 2. 6.
4. He must also endure God's ultimate penalty to provide a righteous basis whereby God could remain just and yet become the justifier of all who accept this sacrifice on their behalf.¹
5. God cannot die, so in order to deal with the matter of sin once and

for all, God became perfect man in the person of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.²

So, when we come to Luke chapter 2, the scene is set for the great moment when God would be manifest, made visible, in flesh, 1 Tim. 3. 16.

Scripture does not use the word 'incarnation', but the truth it expresses is clearly seen. It literally means 'becoming in flesh' and requires prior existence and true humanity. The human race has true humanity, but no existence before conception, save only in the mind of God. The Lord Jesus fulfilled both requirements.

The Holy Spirit moved in succeeding ages to preserve the genealogical line along which the Promised One would be born. On a number of occasions, the adversary came close to corrupting or breaking the line of descent. Abram had barely entered the land of promise, when a famine drove him down to Egypt. There, he was prepared to compromise his loyalty to Sarah, not realizing that she was as important in the purposes of God as was Abram himself, Gen. 12. 17-20. A second occasion occurred in Gerar, when doubtless the Spirit of God was active in preserving the line of promise, Gen. 20. 3. Later, in Genesis chapter 38, a whole chapter is given over to disclosing Judah's domestic activities, where doubtless the adversary hoped to corrupt the royal line. However, divine overruling prevailed and, by grace, Tamar comes into the line of Messiah. Again, in those confusing days when the wicked Athaliah gained the ascendancy and destroyed the royal princes, her own grandchildren, only Joash, a child of no more than one year old, was rescued from the carnage to later become king of Judah, 2 Kgs. 11. 1-16.

The influence of the Holy Spirit is seen, not only in the succession of kings, but also through the voice of the prophets. Some 750 years before Luke took up his pen to write, the Spirit made known through Isaiah that 'a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel', Isa. 7. 14. A few years

earlier, the prophet Micah had written under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, revealing God's purpose for the insignificant little town of Bethlehem, Mic. 5. 2. When Malachi laid down his pen, heaven was silent for some 400 years, but silence did not imply inactivity. Empires and kingdoms rose and fell, each in turn exerting their influence on the 'pleasant land', where the most significant events in world history would take place. Rome's iron hand now gripped the land bordering the Mediterranean Sea, bringing a measure of order and stability. The fulness of the time had come and God was about to send forth His Son.

For Mary, the chosen mother, it began in Nazareth with an angelic visitation. Six months previously, unknown to Mary, her elderly kinsfolk, Zacharias and Elizabeth, who lived in the hill country of Judea, had received a similar visit to announce the

miraculous birth of John the Baptist, forerunner of the promised 'seed of the woman'.

On that occasion, Zacharias had expressed doubt at the angel's word, resulting in dumbness, and possibly deafness, until the child was born. Mary, however, simply asked for some clarification of Gabriel's amazing message, 'thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS', Luke 1. 31. Mary's question in response is disarming in its simplicity, 'How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?' v. 34. The angelic reply, without detail or embellishment, condenses miraculous truth into just a few words. 'The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee [conception], and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee [preservation]', v. 35.

To Joseph, the dependable Nazareth carpenter, the initial shock of learning the situation of his beloved Mary must have been paralyzing in its impact. But God is gracious, and it was soon made known to Joseph 'that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost', Matt. 1. 20.

No human mind, no theologian, no obstetrician, no philosopher or psychologist can explain what took place in that humble Nazareth home. It is not an event to be analysed, but a truth to be believed! Furthermore, the child born would be called the Son of God. The virgin birth of the Lord Jesus is a cornerstone of Christian faith; explain it away or try to rationalize it, and there is no salvation!

The Spirit of God then turned His attention to the Palatine Hill in Rome, to the palace of Caesar Augustus. In the eyes of Augustus, 'the world' of his jurisdiction extended westward to the Atlantic coast, eastward to the banks of the Euphrates and all the Mediterranean lands in between. If he decided to impose a census to enable an accurate assessment of tax due, then that was his prerogative. What he did not realize was that a greater power than that wielded by Rome would stipulate both the terms and the timing of the census to bring a carpenter from Nazareth,

together with his expectant wife, to insignificant Bethlehem in Judea. The huge logistical upheaval which this census must have generated is not reflected in Luke's record. With Joseph and Mary in the right place at the right time, Luke simply notes, 'and so it was', Luke 2. 6.

The Child was born; the Son was given, Isa. 9. 6. Welcomed not by royalty or nobility but by a few shepherds who returned to their flock glorifying and praising God, little realizing that one day He would say, 'I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep', John 10. 11.

There were others who greeted His arrival. In Jerusalem, among the many for whom life was just a daily routine, was a man who waited longing for one who would provide comfort and encouragement to the 'poor of the flock that waited', Zech. 11. 11. Simeon may not have been prominent in Jerusalem, but the Holy Spirit was upon him and spoke to him, Luke 2. 25-35. The Spirit also guided him into the temple, that he might have the privilege of taking in his arms the Ancient of Days, become an infant of days!

Into the court of the women that day, came another figure, familiar to those who regularly visited the temple. No one could remember a time, night or day, when Anna was absent from her regular place, engaged in silent prayer. Her great age was a matter of speculation, but her sparse frame bore testimony to years of fasting. Anna did not often join with others in conversation, but this day was different. Her ears caught the words of Simeon and they harmonized with her own hopes and ambitions, taught by the Spirit of God. Her prayers were answered, she could not remain silent; with thankful heart she 'spoke of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem', Luke 2. 38.

'Veiled in flesh the Godhead see,
Hail the incarnate Deity!' [C. WESLEY]

Endnotes

- 1 John 3. 16; Rom. 3. 26; 1 Cor. 15. 3, 4; Heb. 2. 9, 14, 15.
- 2 Luke 2. 11; John 1. 14; 1 Tim. 3. 16.



THE 'LOOKS' OF THE LORD JESUS

By **MALCOLM HORLOCK** Cardiff, Wales

Part 4

On the very first time the Lord had met Peter, Andrew (Peter's brother and one of the disciples of John the Baptist) had left the Baptist to follow the 'Lamb of God'.¹

Andrew found Peter to tell him, 'We have found the Messiah', John 1. 41 NKJV. Andrew then 'brought him to Jesus'. **Jesus looked at² him** and said, 'You are Simon, the son of John. You shall be called Cephas' (which is by interpretation, 'rock'³), v. 42 ESV.

And in the High Priest's courtyard, Jesus 'looked at' Peter again, but Peter certainly did not feel much like a 'rock' now!



Among other things, the Lord's look reminded Peter: (a) of his empty promises and self-confident protests of loyalty, 'I am ready to go with you to prison and to death'⁴ and, of course, (b) of Jesus' own specific foretelling of Peter's repeated denial before the cock would crow.⁵ It has been well said that, 'Peter, called to "deny himself"⁶ denies his Lord instead'.⁷

But who can tell all that was in that look? A look blazing with anger, such as He had once directed at scribes and Pharisees on account of their unbelief?⁸ Certainly not! A look of disappointment? Perhaps. A look of pain? Almost certainly. But there was so much more.

I do not think it fanciful to suppose that the Saviour's changeless and limitless love spoke through His eyes that night. In the full knowledge of all that Peter had said and done, that single – that solitary – look declared, 'Peter, I still love you, and, Peter, come what may, I always will'. We can, surely, be confident that, in Jesus' look, Peter read both his own forgiveness and his Lord's unquenchable love for him.

Shortly before, Jesus had assured Peter of His prayer for him, 'Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you [the 'you' being plural, signifying the apostolic band], that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you [the 'you' being singular, signifying Peter personally] that your faith may not fail'.⁹

Certainly, as has been noted, combined together, 'the prayer and the look had availed. The prayer had kept his faith from failing, but the look had broken his heart'.¹⁰

It has been well said that 'Christ heals with more ease than any other: other physicians apply pills, potions,

bleeding; Christ . . . can cure with a look. When Peter had fallen into a relapse, Christ looked on Peter, and he wept. Christ's look melted Peter into repentance; it was a healing look'.¹¹

Now, in the High Priest's courtyard, Jesus reached out, with His look, to save the same man from sinking into the depths of utter despair as He had once reached out, with His hand, to save him from sinking into the depths of the Sea of Galilee!¹²

And you and I can rest today in the knowledge that to us, our all-seeing¹³ Saviour still extends:

1. His power to help;
2. His sympathy in times of sorrow;
3. His consideration and His care;
4. His protection for the weak and oppressed;
5. His faithful words of rebuke, spoken always in love; and, if we fail Him . . .
6. His forgiveness and the assurance of His unquenchable love.

'Lord, in all Thy power and glory,
**Still Thy thoughts and eyes are here;
Watching o'er Thy ransomed people,**

To Thy gracious heart so dear'.¹⁴

Endnotes

- 1 John 1. 35-37, 40.
- 2 'εμβλέπω . . . This verb implies a close, penetrating "look", W. E. VINE, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, Oliphants, article 'Look', A. 5. The same verb is used in Luke 22. 61.
- 3 'Doubtless in Aramaic the expression was *kēpā*, a word meaning "rock"', D. A. CARSON, *The Gospel according to John*, Apollos, pg. 156.
- 4 Luke 22. 33 NIV. But it was not long after, that the man who then protested, 'Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death', would hear that 'Lord' challenge him, 'Could you not watch with me one hour?' Matt. 26. 40 ESV.
- 5 Luke 22. 34.
- 6 Luke 9. 20-23.
- 7 W. MANSON, *The Gospel of Luke: The Moffatt New Testament Commentary*, Harper, pg. 252.
- 8 Mark 3. 5.
- 9 Luke 22. 31, 32 ESV.
- 10 J. G. BELLETT, *The Moral Glory of the Lord Jesus Christ*, Morrish, pg. 53.
- 11 THOMAS WATSON, *The Soul's Malady and Cure, A Body of Practical Divinity*, Banner of Truth, pg. 749.
- 12 Matt. 14. 30, 31.
- 13 Cp. John 1. 48.
- 14 J. G. DECK: the hymn entitled, 'Lamb of God! Thou now art seated'.



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.

Volume: 23 Issue: 4
NOVEMBER 2026



YOUNG.PRECIOUSSEED

Editor's Introduction

Welcome to the November issue of YPS.

Here are more articles for you to enjoy, and I hope you find them to be a help and blessing.

Andrew Dutton

Seeing the world through a biblical lens – The value of the family unit

STEPHEN G. BAKER, LIVERPOOL, ENGLAND

Statistically, strong family units are consistently linked to better health and mental well-being. It is commonly accepted that children in secure families show higher resilience, adults report lower rates of depression and anxiety, and family support reduces the impact of poverty and stress. Globally, negative family relationships are correlated with higher risks of depression (11%) and anxiety (7%). In contrast, positive family functioning improves outcomes across generations. This information comes from a variety of sources that can be readily accessed online.¹

It should not be surprising to anyone who reads the Bible carefully that the evidence points to the fact that living within a secure family unit is advantageous for health and mental well-being.

We have already seen in this series that God created 'male and female' as unique individuals with common characteristics but at the same time having very distinctive qualities. We will see in a later article that the marriage of a man and a woman is part of God's design for the well-being, stability, love and support of human beings. Added to this, we discover that there is an additional aspect of relationships and community that is vitally important for our well-being – the family. The family is not just something that conveniently evolved. It was specifically designed by God. After the flood judgement of the world, Genesis chapter 10 records the list of descendants of Shem, Ham, and Japheth – the three sons of Noah. Each part of the family tree was grouped in four ways – by land, language, families and nations. So very early on in Bible history the concept of the family unit is clearly seen.

Being part of a family should be wonderful – but realistically, I know every family has its 'ups and downs'. It is a place where we belong (I know that there are always exceptions); it is a place where we feel secure, we are loved; it is OK to be you

and so on. The family unit was intended for the health and well-being of society, and the evidence is that it is the best way for good community and social cohesion. We are worse off as individuals, and as a society, when the health of the family unit is ignored.

In Genesis chapter 12 verse 3, God gives Abram the promise of future blessing. One of the blessings is that 'in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed' NKJV. The blessing of faith in God through the promised Messiah is ultimately seen in the blessing of families. It is wonderful how often God saves whole families – it is not guaranteed, but it is often the case (see Acts 16. 15, 32, 33; 1 Cor. 16. 15).

David, the shepherd boy who became king, wrote about the family in several Psalms. He was from a big family that would have had the normal stresses and strains of family life. Still, he had discovered the importance that God had placed on the family. He writes that God is 'A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows . . . in His holy habitation. God sets the solitary in families', Ps. 68. 5, 6 NKJV. I love the fact that God is a Father to those who have no father and intends that a lonely (solitary) individual is included in family life.

One last reference and then I will leave you to ponder the significance and value of a family. In Psalm 107, an unknown writer states, 'Yet He sets the poor on high, far from affliction, and makes their families like a flock', v. 41 NKJV. Our God frees and liberates people. He rescues people experiencing poverty from trouble and makes their families like flocks of sheep. Sometimes God does this in this world and on other occasions in the next, but one thing you can be sure of is this – the picture is that God protects, cares for and feeds those who are needy and trust Him. The incidental but significant lesson we learn from this is – families should be places where we are protected, cared for and provided for. If this is the case in your life, you should be thankful.

It is what God intended. If this is not true for you, please remember God is your Father, you are part of the family of God (if you are saved) and you have brothers and sisters who can do for you what your natural siblings have never done.

¹SSPH+ | Positive and Negative Family Relationships Correlate With Mental Health Conditions –a Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. <https://www.ssph-journal.org/journals/public-health-reviews/articles/10.3389/phrs.2025.1607381/full>

Combining Asset Accumulation and Multifamily Group Intervention to Improve Mental Health for Adolescent Girls: A Cluster-Randomized Trial in Uganda – PMC. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10840800/>

Families, inequality, and child well-being in the context of the 2030 Agenda. [https://social.desa.un.org/sites/default/files/2026-05/REPORT.2026.FINAL.FOR.POSTING.13.05.26 \(1\).pdf](https://social.desa.un.org/sites/default/files/2026-05/REPORT.2026.FINAL.FOR.POSTING.13.05.26%20(1).pdf)

Book of the Revelation – Part 2, What John Saw

DAVID MCGAHIE, KELLS, NORTHERN IRELAND

Last time, we noticed that the book is the Revelation of Jesus Christ, 1. 1, and, from the start of the book, we cannot miss that. In the introduction, 1. 1-8, He is identified as the loving Saviour who died for us, v. 5, but who is clearly alive again; He is the one who rightfully has glory and dominion forever, v. 6, and who is coming back again, v. 7. We see that He is not just relevant for so-called 'Christian' nations, but that on His return **everyone** on earth will be impacted. When He is identified as the beginning, v. 8, we are reminded that it was by Him that **everything** was made, John 1. 3. As previously explained by Paul, 1 Cor. 15. 24, 25, this book will also demonstrate that He is the ending of all things as well. The introduction closes by reminding us that He is **the Almighty**. So, from the very start of the book, it is clear that Jesus Christ is God, and the end of **all history** is bound up in Him. We are also clearly aware that He is in total control, and worthy to be worshipped. These themes are so important to have in mind when following our studies in Revelation. We will see that they pop up often in various forms throughout the book. Whether looking at the past, present, or future, we cannot miss the obvious conclusion: He is the **theme of it all**.

Talking of past, present, and future, that is what John is to record, 1. 19, and send to the seven churches located in the Roman province of Asia, v. 11, part of modern-day Turkey.

While a lot of Revelation covers 'things which must shortly come to pass' (the future), v. 1, the key to understanding John's writings about both the future and the present is 'the things that thou [John] hast seen', v. 19 – that is, the past when he was writing. What does he record that was already past when he was told to write? In keeping with the theme of the whole book, it's a vision of the Lord Jesus, vv. 1, 9-18, which gives us the basis for understanding aspects of the whole book!

Let's just look at some parts of this vision quickly:

His clothes, v. 13, indicate a priest,¹ reminding us that even in the worst situations to be revealed later, He still represents His own people.

His head and hair, v. 14, recall the vision Daniel had of the 'Ancient of Days'² in the Old Testament, Dan. 7. 9-14. That

reveals again that Jesus Christ is God, the same as the Jehovah of the Old Testament. He is one who as Son of man will conquer and rule over all kingdoms of the earth. He will also judge earth's rebel leaders from the opened books. If you have read the whole of Revelation, you will immediately see why that part is relevant! He will not miss anything with those blazing eyes.

His feet of brass, v. 15 – the metal which resists fire and speaks of judgement. He is the one whose ways in judgement are perfect and who will never be condemned as He treads the world in judgement.

From His mouth, a sword, v. 16 – a symbol of the word of God. Again, this is very relevant – the one who created all things by speaking will also judge all nations and destroy all enemies by the authority of His word. And so, this vision really sets the scene for the theme of the revelation of future events.

However, it also sets the scene for the messages to the churches in the present. In the next article we will look at those. Relevant parts of the vision appear in those letters to the churches in the next two chapters.

Finally, note two more things:

1) When John turns to see who speaks, the first thing he sees is the seven churches. When people in this world start to look for Christ, the first thing they see is the Christians. We need to ensure that when they see us their eye is drawn to Christ.

2) John, who knew Jesus very well on earth, falls as though dead at the majesty of the exalted Christ. The glorified Lord Jesus is the same person who once walked on earth, but there's no easy familiarity now. John falls in worship. The one revealed here is majestic in every way. This majestic one will dictate the letters we look at next.

¹ Compare with Exod. 28. 4, 31

² While some authors identify the 'Ancient of Days' in Daniel as the Lord Jesus, others as the Father, and others simply as God, it is clear that He is the Jehovah of the Old Testament, where individual members of the Trinity are often not clearly distinguished.

Christian basics – The Will of God

STUART SCAMMELL, CARDIFF, WALES

Unless otherwise indicated, quotations are from the New King James Version.

The will of God is an important issue; in fact, Ephesians chapter 5 verse 17 tells us that we would be unwise not to understand the will of God.

When we think about God's will, we are often searching for direction in our lives. All Christians should crave to know this. As a new believer, the Apostle Paul asked, 'Lord, what do You want me to do?' Acts 9. 6.

In one sense, God's will is carried out regardless of anything that we do. His sovereign will demonstrates His ultimate control over all creation, and His purposes will happen. 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure', Isa. 46. 10.

God declares to us His moral will. This is revealed through the instruction of scripture. Micah makes a statement about the moral will of God being declared to man, and that we have a responsibility to follow the instruction that we receive. 'He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?' Mic. 6. 8.

Practical instruction is given in the scriptures for this. Christians are to live holy lives, with different standards from the 'world'. Paul writes, 'For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication', 1 Thess. 4. 3 KJV. We must not allow the world's standards of morality to become acceptable to us. Rather, we must live pure lives, where sexual activity is reserved for marriage.

In the very next chapter, we learn more of the instruction of God revealing His will to us. We are reminded to, 'Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you', 1 Thess. 5. 16–18. When we do this, we are acknowledging that, whatever circumstances we find ourselves in, we will find reason to be grateful to God for our blessings. When we pray, we are aligning our will to God's will and seeking to walk the path that He has designed for us.

Our lives are to reflect the character of God in the community around us. The example that the Lord Jesus left us was that He 'went about doing good', Acts 10. 38. The will of God is that we emulate this as a testimony to those who would deny the existence of God and be vocal about it. Peter wrote, 'this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men', 1 Pet. 2. 15.

There are other examples of the will of God being made explicit in scripture, and these should be evident in the lives of each believer.

When Christians ask about how they can know the will of God,

they are often referring to personal, specific **direction from God in their lives**. In this regard, the Christian who is not living the way that God would have them live and is not obeying the 'this is the will of God' statements in the Bible, cannot expect to know His direction.

In response to what our Lord did for us upon the cross, we should ask daily what we can do for Him. We can only know joy and God's blessing when we listen to the commands of God and respond with open obedience, as the servants did in response to Mary at the wedding at Cana, when she said, 'Whatever He says to you, do it', John 2. 5.

Yet, how do we discern the will of God?

We cannot expect God's will to be revealed to us while thinking we know best. His direction will be revealed to us when we, 'Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding', Prov. 3. 5. We need to acknowledge God in everything, if we are to truly know God's promise, 'And He shall direct your paths', v. 6.

If we live lives that are no different from the world, we will not think like God and discern His will. We must not be 'conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind', Rom. 12. 2.

God's will is not going to contradict His word. He speaks to us through the Bible, 'Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path', Ps. 119. 105.

God's will is given when we allow our will to be aligned with His. To do this we need to be praying; the psalmist encouraged this, 'Seek the Lord . . . Seek His face evermore!' Ps. 105. 4.

When God reveals His will to us, it is often a step of faith to move forward trusting those plans. His plan is always best. Jeremiah the prophet, at a certain point in time, wrote down God's plan for His people. Although it is specific to them at that point, it reveals the heart of God to those who trust Him. 'For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope', Jer. 29. 11.

As we seek the will of God, we are not alone. God gives us older, wiser believers to provide counsel. We are reminded that as we embark on this lifelong task of doing God's will, the Holy Spirit is there throughout to lead us. We can be encouraged as we seek God's will that, those who 'are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God', Rom. 8. 14.



Saints' CVs: C.H. Spurgeon

BY JEREMY SINGER, BRIDGE OF WEIR, SCOTLAND

C.H. SPURGEON 1834-1892

Charles Haddon Spurgeon was known as the 'prince of preachers' in Victorian England.¹ Thousands of people flocked to hear his messages each week. His sermons were transcribed in shorthand while he preached on Sunday, then edited by himself on Monday and sent to the printers for widespread distribution a couple of days later.² Although there are no recordings of Spurgeon's voice, it was described at the time as a 'silver bell'.³ We might well imagine his booming tones as we read his powerful sermons today. WARREN WIERSBE was an admirer of his preaching style, selecting many of Spurgeon's sermons in the Kregel series of 'Classic Sermons' books.⁴

Although we might not agree with Spurgeon's stance on local church order or his views on future events, we can benefit from reading his work. WIERSBE advises us to 'plunge right into his sermons . . . and revel in the grace of God that was so real to this mighty preacher'.⁵

Born in Essex in 1834, Spurgeon was saved at the age of fifteen on a snowy Sunday as he took refuge from the winter weather in a Methodist chapel. The text that day was 'Look unto me, and be ye saved', Isa. 45. 22. In later life, Spurgeon recalled how the preacher 'pointed to where I was sitting under the gallery, and he said, "That young man there looks very miserable" . . . and he shouted, as I think only a Primitive Methodist can, "Look! Look, young man! Look now!" . . . Then I had this vision – not a vision to my eyes, but to my heart. I saw what a Saviour Christ was . . . and I did believe in one moment. And as the snow fell on my road home from the little house of prayer, I thought every snowflake talked with me and told of the pardon I had found, for I was white as the driven snow through the grace of God'.⁶

Spurgeon was a gifted and prolific preacher. At the age of twenty, he was appointed as pastor of New Park Street Chapel in London (which later became the Metropolitan Tabernacle). Notable celebrities of the time came to listen to Spurgeon, including politician William Gladstone and social reformer Florence Nightingale.

Spurgeon had a way with words; so many of his striking quotations are often repeated all these years later.

- 'I know of no better thermometer to your spiritual temperature than this, the measure of the intensity of your prayer'.⁷
- 'It is a good rule never to look into the face of a man in the morning till you have looked into the face of God'.⁸



- 'Remember, Christ's scholars must study upon their knees'.⁹
- 'Nobody ever outgrows Scripture; the book widens and deepens with our years'.¹⁰

Of all his writings, my top picks are the *Treasury of David* and *Cheque Book of the Bank of Faith*. The *Treasury of David* records his comments on the Psalms; this monumental multi-volume work took him two decades to complete. The *Cheque Book* is a daily devotional which uses the banking metaphor that we can draw upon God's promises by faith, being sure that the divine credit account will never be exhausted.

Spurgeon also composed some beautiful poetry. We often sing one of his hymns when we break bread on a Lord's day morning:

Amidst us our Beloved stands,
And bids us view His pierced hands,
Points to His wounded feet and side,
Blest emblems of the Crucified.

Another of his poems which I enjoy describes a saint's anticipation of heaven:

When tears are banished from mine eye,
When fairer worlds than these are nigh,
When Heaven shall fill my ravished sight,
When I shall bathe in sweet delight,
One joy all joys shall far excel,
To see Thy face, Immanuel!

As well as preaching and writing, Spurgeon had a heart for people in need. He was a friend of George Müller, who cared for orphans in Bristol. Spurgeon set up a similar orphanage ministry in Stockwell, London, in 1867.¹¹ He suffered from poor health in later life, frequently travelling to mainland Europe where the climate was better. He died in France in 1892 at the age of fifty-seven.

¹ www.princeofpreachers.org.

² CHARLES RAY, *A Marvellous Ministry: The Story of CH Spurgeon's Sermons*, Passmore and Alabaster, 1905.

³ www.spurgeon.org/blog/10-public-speaking-tips-from-charles-spurgeon

⁴ For instance, I have WIERSBE'S 'Classic Sermons on the Word of God' and three of the eleven sermons are by Spurgeon.

⁵ WARREN W. WIERSBE, *50 People Every Christian Should Know*, Baker, 2009.

⁶ MARY ANN JEFFREYS, *Spurgeon's Conversion*, Christian History Magazine, Issue 29, 1991. christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/issue/charles-spurgeon-englands-prince-of-preachers

⁷ www.spurgeon.org/sermons/prayer-the-proof-of-godliness

⁸ www.spurgeon.org/sermons/morning-and-evening-songs

⁹ www.spurgeon.org/sermons/let-us-pray

¹⁰ www.spurgeon.org/sermons/the-talking-book

¹¹ spurgeons.org/about-us/our-heritage/

People at the Lord's feet in Luke's Gospel

By **JAYA KUMAR** Kajang, Malaysia

John's Gospel portrays the Lord Jesus as the Son of God and yet only John shows the Lord's meekness at His disciples' feet, John 13. Luke's Gospel, on the other hand, reveals the Lord Jesus as the Son of Man, but gives us a glimpse of His majesty by making the most mention of other people at His feet. Luke tells us about a sinful debtor who stood at the Lord's feet weeping, a man delivered from demon possession who sat at His feet resting, a desperate father who was at His feet pleading, a devoted woman who was at His feet listening and a defiled Samaritan leper who fell at His feet appreciating the Lord.

The debtor

In Song of Solomon chapter 6 verse 1 the question is asked, 'Whither is thy beloved gone, O thou fairest among women?' The sinful woman in Luke chapter 7 verses 36 to 50 knew that her Beloved 'sat at meat in the Pharisee's house' and went there to be at His feet. While there, the woman seems to have said nothing, but her act of love spoke volumes. Her **passion** for the Lord was evident in her loud wailing, *klaiō*.¹ She laid her **pride** at the door as she washed the Lord's feet with her tears, wiped them with her hair, and kissed them with her lips! And finally, her precious **possession** was also placed at His feet as she anointed them with perfumed oil.

The demon-possessed

Note the change when the man of Gadara met the Lord Jesus! First, the change in **relationships**. The man was described as having no house to abide in, Luke 8. 27, but was sent to his 'own house' in verse 39. He was 'in the tombs' at first, among the dead, v. 27, but later was found at the Lord's feet, with the source of life, v. 35. Second, the change in **raiment**. He went from being naked and shameful, v. 27, to being clothed and dignified, v. 35. Finally, the **realization**! He went from being in torment, v. 29, to being of sound mind, v. 35. How beautifully this experience describes the change in a sinner when encountering the Lord Jesus.

The desperate

In Luke chapter 8 verses 40 to 56, we find Jairus who was both a dignified man, as the ruler of the synagogue, and a desperate man, as the father of a dying daughter. In fact, there were two daughters whose stories intertwined at this juncture. While Jairus was concerned about his daughter, the Lord did not forget the woman whom He also called 'daughter', v. 48.

The Lord raised three people from death, and, in each case, instruction was given according to their needs. The man in Nain was delivered to his mother, and **fellowship** was provided, Luke 7. 15. Lazarus was released from the grave clothes that bound him, and **freedom** was given, John 11. 44. Here, Jairus' daughter was given something to eat, so **food** was supplied, Luke 8. 55.

The devoted

Today, Bethany is called al-Eizariya, 'the place of Lazarus' in Arabic, but in John chapter 11 verse 1, it was the town of Mary and her sister Martha. The Lord would identify Bethany with a woman who devoted herself to Him wholeheartedly and her sister. We see Mary's devotion in that she is at the Lord's feet every time she is mentioned as being in His presence.

We learn much from what Mary did in the Lord's presence, Luke 10. 38-42. We see her **cessation from work**,

vv. 39, 40. She stopped and turned from work to sit and listen. We notice her **concentration on the word**, v. 39, as she listened carefully to the Lord's teaching. We also observe the **choice of the wise**, v. 42, as she chose the part that was not taken away. That's the choice we want to make for ourselves!

The defiled

It is worth considering the contrasting features among the lepers mentioned in Luke chapter 17 verse 11 to 19:

The response, vv. 15, 16, 18

The one leper would not go ahead to enjoy his blessings without first returning to the source of that blessing to give thanks. That one leper glorified God with a loud voice, recognizing that the blessing he enjoyed came from God through Christ. That one leper was a Samaritan. The despised Samaritan, like the despised woman in Luke chapter 7, knew how to give thanks. Do we?

The reverence, v. 16

The one leper 'fell down on his face at his feet'. Though the condition of the spirit mattered most, the physical posture reflected his attitude concerning the Lord Jesus Christ.

As the Gospel draws to a close, Luke 24. 36-43, the disciples are presented with the feet of the Lord Jesus, among other things. They were not asked to handle a sunbeam but the actual resurrected body of Christ. Those 'beautiful . . . feet' that brought good news to people, Isa. 52. 7, were the pierced feet of the person who bore the judgement of God upon sin, Ps. 22. 16. They were the powerful feet that will one day stand on the Mount of Olives, Zech. 14. 4, and the brass feet belonging to the person who will bring swift judgement to His enemies, Rev. 1. 15; 2. 18. One thing is certain; nobody ever came to the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ and went away unblessed!

Endnote

1 JAMES STRONG, *Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries*, G2799.

TITLES OF JEHOVAH 10

JEHOVAH

SHAMMAH

Ezek. 48. 35.

By **ANDREW WARE** Melbourne, Australia

We come, at last, to the final title of Jehovah considered in this series of articles, and to one that is both specific to a point in time and yet indicative of a grand truth that runs throughout scripture. In some ways, the formation of this title is the most exceptional of those that we have been considering. The word transliterated shammah comes from a relatively common one in the Old Testament, an adverb simply indicating a specific place, 'there'.¹ So, it is intriguing that Ezekiel's prophecy ends with the words, 'the Lord is there' – in many ways such an everyday word, put to a glorious use! The title indicates the Lord's presence, for what else could it mean but that He will be **present there**? And this is the glimpse of the larger truth that the title hints at, for our God has always desired to be 'there' with His people. As we look at how this truth has been seen in the past and in the present, we also look forward to the future when Ezekiel's words will have their glorious fulfilment, and even beyond.

In the past

In many ways, it begins in the Garden of Eden, for when 'the Lord God [was] walking in the garden in the cool of the day', Gen. 3. 8, He really was there. There clearly had been communion between the Lord God and Adam in however long it was between the sixth day and the entry of sin. Of course, the context of the passage is after the fall, and soon the man and the woman would be banished from the presence of the Lord, eastward from Eden, and the way barred for their return, v. 24. A disruption to the fellowship had taken place, and so they could no longer be where the Lord was. Sinful humans could not be there with a holy God. Thus, the scene is set for the arc of redemptive history.

It is little surprise that the title brings us to Exodus chapter 25, and to the tabernacle, 'a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them', v. 8. The first

item He describes is 'the ark', v. 16, and after giving the instructions for its construction, vv. 10-21, the Lord says, 'there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims . . . of all things which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel', v. 22. This would be a place of meeting, a place of communication and of command, not now on Sinai, but rather in the tabernacle, in the centre of the camp. These words are directed to Moses; however, by the time we come to chapter 29, the Lord now reiterates, 'I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will be their God', Exod. 29. 45. Here is the promise of His dwelling among the people as a whole, but, in the following verse, He also states that it was His purpose, 'I am the Lord their God, that brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, **that I may dwell** among them', v. 46, emphasis added. This was

one of God's designs in redeeming the children of Israel. Furthermore, Exodus ends with the cloud coming and covering the tabernacle and the glory of the Lord filling the tabernacle, 40. 34, and the book of Leviticus opens with the phrase 'And the Lord called unto Moses, and spake to him out of the tabernacle', Lev. 1. 1, for He was there now. *Jehovah Shammah* was dwelling among His people.

Time would go on and, eventually, under Solomon, the tabernacle was replaced by the temple. The word spoken by Moses in Deuteronomy chapter 12 verse 5, 'you shall seek the place where the Lord your God chooses . . . to put His name for His dwelling place' NKJV, would find its fulfilment here. For at the dedication of the temple in 1 Kings chapter 8, after 'the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord', v. 11 NKJV, Solomon would speak of the Lord's communication to his father. To David, the Lord said that until then He had 'chosen no city from any tribe of Israel in which to build a house, that My name might be there', v. 16 NKJV, but that 'your son . . . shall build the temple for My name', v. 19 NKJV. On that day, to Solomon's wonder, v. 27, the God whose 'dwelling place' is in heaven, v. 30, also came to dwell in the temple among His people.

However, failure came in. It was a long decline, but by the time of the prophet Ezekiel, recorded in chapter 10 of his prophecy, he sees a vision of Jerusalem and the 'glory of the Lord' departing from the temple. The slow departure of the glory from the temple is indicative of both the patience of the Lord, and His seeming reluctance to depart, v. 4, 18, 19.² But depart the glory does, for first Israel and then Judah had abandoned their God, and so He would no longer be with them there.

Through all of this, the Lord was still at work, of course. For Christ came, Emmanuel,³ and 'dwelt among' His people, John 1. 14; it could be said that it was *Jehovah Shammah* coming and tabernacling there. Even more, He had come to remedy the problem begun back in Eden – so to the cross

He went, and by His work there secured ‘a new and living way’, to allow us to ‘draw near’, Heb. 10. 20, 22. When He died, and the veil of the temple was torn from the top to the bottom, amongst other things it showed that God was not within the Holy of Holies. It would not be on the ground of the physical temple that God would dwell with His people – instead, the risen Lord would send the Holy Spirit, who would come and dwell in, and with, the people of God.

In the present

This brings us to the words of the Lord Jesus in Matthew chapter 18 and His declaration of being present among His people as they are gathered together to His name, ‘there am I in the midst of them’, v. 20. Remarkable that He makes this statement on earth, but already foreshadowing today when He is glorified in heaven, and yet present with His people on earth. While the passage, vv. 15-20, initially deals with the subject of offence and forgiveness between brothers, it is this context that leads to the Lord’s second recorded mention of ‘the church’, v. 17.⁴ After dealing with the specifics of the issue of when a ‘brother shall trespass’, v. 15, against another, the Lord outlines the authority upon which the local church operates in these matters, vv. 18, 19. For this reason it is fitting that He now reveals, ‘I am there in the midst of them’, NKJV, for His presence means

there is authority there. The Lord dwells among His people, gathered unto His name – He is *Jehovah Shammah*, even in the present dispensation.

What an amazing privilege for us, yet I wonder if this truth means as much to us today as it did to former generations who stepped away from denominational structures that have no basis in the word of God, and sought to be guided by the scriptures alone in relation to church practice? This is searching, as FRED CUNDICK wrote, for local assemblies might not be ‘sufficiently stamped with the realization that “The Lord is there”’.⁵ If we are convinced that the Lord dwells among us in a unique way as we are gathered unto His name, we must realize that it is both a tremendous privilege and a huge responsibility.

In the future

So, when we come to Ezekiel chapter 48 verse 35 at the end of his prophecy, it is the culmination of God’s desire to be there with His people throughout history. Chapters 1 to 32 of the book are very much focused on prophecies concerning different nations; first concerning Judah and then against surrounding nations. From chapter 33 onwards, the focus is very much on the future renewal and rescue of Israel; and from chapters 40 to 48 the focus is on the temple that will be built, its service, the land, and the city. As we have seen, chapter

10 records the glory of the Lord departing from the temple. However, in chapter 43 verse 5, Ezekiel sees, ‘the glory of the Lord’ fill the temple again. Then, the Lord will declare, ‘this is the place of My throne and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel forever’, v. 7 NKJV. By the time we come to the final chapter, there is a description of the gates of the city, Ezek. 48. 30-35, the millennial city of Jerusalem – and it is the city which, in the final verse of the whole book, is given the name of ‘the Lord is there’, *Jehovah Shammah*. While strictly speaking the city bears the name, it is the name of the Lord which is attached to the city, so thus it is an indication of the person of God Himself. How wonderful that the final view of that city is describing its gates, the ways of access to *Jehovah Shammah*.

Of course, the millennium will only be the culmination of this grand truth in time, for eternity will be grander still. Revelation chapter 21 takes us to a scene in the new heavens and new earth, when the city is described as having ‘no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it’, Rev. 21. 22. No temple will be needed, for God will be there – and we will be there. There are no human thoughts that can fully capture what it will be like – but our minds and our hearts stretch towards it, for that is home. So, we press on, knowing that what is ahead is all glory in the presence of the God who is there.

Endnotes

- 1 It is also rendered in other ways, for example ‘therein’ and ‘thither’ in the KJV. STRONG’s number is H8033, and a review of how the word is used just in the book of Genesis will give the sense of its overall usage.
- 2 DAVID STEVELY, *Ezekiel: What the Bible Teaches*, Ritchie Publications, 2016, pg. 75.
- 3 ‘God with us’, Matt. 1. 23.
- 4 There is, of course, a difference between the first reference in chapter 16 verse 18, where the Lord Jesus is speaking of the church which is His body, and here where it is the local church in view. Space does not allow a full exploration of this difference; however, the instruction to ‘tell it unto the church’ clearly has a local church in mind.
- 5 FRED CUNDICK, *Ezekiel: The Priestly Prophet*, Precious Seed Publications, 1971, 2012, pg. 64.



Mountain scenes of Matthew's Gospel

Part 3 **THE MOUNT OF TRANSFIGURATION**

Matthew 17. 1-13

By **STEPHEN FELLOWES** Skibbereen, Ireland

Matthew chapter 16 is a chapter of great significance and importance within the context of Matthew's Gospel. It is a chapter of revelations. We have that great revelation of the glory of the person of our Lord Jesus confessed by Peter, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God', Matt. 16. 16. Consequent upon this, we listen to the Lord Himself reveal to us the truth of the church – 'upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it', v. 18. Then, the reality of the cross is revealed, 'how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day', v. 21. Lastly, at the end of the chapter, the Lord speaks about His own personal revelation from heaven as 'the Son of man coming in his kingdom', v. 28. We know that He speaks of His manifestation, when He comes publicly and in power to establish His millennial kingdom on earth. Perhaps some were a little perplexed when the Saviour added that 'There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom', v. 28.

How could this possibly be so? What can be meant by such a statement? We believe that the answer is given in the verses at the beginning of chapter 17. On the mount of transfiguration, this is exactly what happened; to the observers there was given a preview of the coming kingdom glory. Peter, one of the favoured group, speaks in his letters of this very experience and says that they 'were eyewitnesses of his majesty', 2 Pet. 1. 16.

After six days

Matthew and Mark both tell us in their Gospels that this experience on the mount took place 'after six days', and yet when we read the record of Luke's Gospel, we read that it was 'about an eight days after'.¹ The sceptic sees a contradiction, but the regenerated student of scripture sees a most suggestive significance in the two

accounts. Of course there are no contradictions in scripture; every word is divinely inspired and completely reliable.

Six is a number in scripture that is indelibly connected with man. It was on the sixth day that God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness', Gen. 1. 26. Eight on the other hand is a number that relates to a new beginning, 'in the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised', Lev. 12. 3. Circumcision was the covenant sign and as such indicated a new beginning in covenant relationship for the Israelite.

When we view these numbers through the prism of prophetic truth, we soon see the deep relevance of them in the context of the coming kingdom. When our Lord Jesus comes in manifested

glory, He will effectively bring an end to 'man's day', 1 Cor. 4. 3 JND. We live in a day when man is to the fore, his will and his ways are paramount in this world. In contrast, the coming King will subdue the will of man and establish the divine will, and then the desire of the disciples' prayer will be fully realized, 'Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven', Matt. 6. 10. This will, of course, introduce a new beginning to the history of this world, a day of unparalleled righteousness will be ushered in. It will be the day of 'the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory', 19. 28.

The favoured three

According to His own sovereign will, our Lord selected three from among the disciples to ascend the mount and experience the glory of His transfiguration. On three occasions, Peter, James, and John were chosen for special privileges:

- A) The house, Mark 5. 35-43 – to witness the greatness of His power
- B) The mount, Matt. 17. 1 – to witness the glory of His kingdom
- C) The garden, Mark 14. 33 – to witness the grief of His soul.

Transfigured

We read, 'and [He] was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light', Matt. 17. 2. The word 'transfigured', *metamorphoo* in Greek, simply means 'to change into another form'. It is also used of believers in Romans chapter 12, where the Apostle Paul exhorts them, 'And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind', Rom. 12. 2.

Only in Matthew's account do we read of His face shining as the sun. The prophet Malachi speaks of the same day of glory when 'unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings', Mal. 4. 2. The sun, of course, reminds us of the radiance of the One who will reign. Our minds go back to that great messianic psalm, 'Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the

King of glory. Selah', Ps. 24. 10. The glory of earthly kingdoms soon fade because the reins of government are in the hands of fallen men, but here is a kingdom whose splendour will never diminish and whose glory will never fade for it is in the hand of the unfailing sovereign Son.

His garments became as white as the light. Garments in scripture often speak of character. Here was One on the mount whose coming kingdom will be characterized not only by radiant glory but by perfect righteousness. Jeremiah reminds us of such an One, 'Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth . . . and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS', Jer. 23. 5, 6.

Peter's mistake

The company of four soon becomes a company of six when Moses and Elijah suddenly appear on the scene. These are men of marked distinction on the page of scripture: Moses the man who by God formed the nation; Elijah the man who sought to reform the nation. Moses the representative of the law; Elijah of the prophets. Peter clearly was taken with such august company and in the moment suggests, 'Lord . . . if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias', Matt. 17. 4.

Peter had connected the appropriate feast of Jehovah with the kingdom setting, but the time of restored Israel's rest has not come yet. Doubtless, Peter meant well in what he suggested, even mentioning the Lord first relative to the making of tabernacles. But sadly, this is not enough. Christ bears no equals – has Peter forgotten the unequalled greatness of this One, 16. 16?

Heaven's announcement

'While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved

Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him', 17. 5. On the banks of the Jordan, at the commencement of our Lord's public ministry, heaven was opened and likewise God expressed His delight in His 'beloved Son'. Here, now on the mount of transfiguration, the Father's unqualified delight in His Son is fully declared. Peter is silenced by heaven's declaration; he must have felt that he had spoken out of place. There is but One in whom heaven fully delights. He is:

- A) The Son. God has many servants, men like Moses and Elijah, but even these fade into the background when we consider that there is one who is described uniquely and eternally and exclusively as 'my Son'.
- B) The satisfying Son. J. N. DARBY beautifully translates, 'in whom I have found my delight', v. 5. How blessed!

'Loved with love which knows no measure,
Save the Father's love to Thee,
Blessed Lord, our hearts would treasure
All Thy Father's thoughts of Thee'.

MISS. C. A. WELLESLEY

- B. The speaking Son. 'Hear ye him'. Peter has spoken out of turn. Moses and Elijah have spoken in the past for God. But now there is only one voice to be heard, the voice of the supreme Son of God.

Elijah must come

Fear has gripped the disciples, but graciously the Lord dispels their fears. They lift their eyes and see 'no man, save Jesus only', v. 8. Oh, that we too could fix our focus only on Christ! He never disappoints! The Lord reminds them that the vision is to be kept silent until His resurrection. The King is rejected, the cross is before Him, now is not the time to announce the glory of His future millennial kingdom.

But a certain query in the disciples' minds needs to be resolved, for truly the words of the scribes are consistent with the prophet Malachi

who prophesied of the coming of Elijah before the setting up of the kingdom. The Lord confirms the accuracy of this and adds that already Elijah has come. By this He means that John the Baptist has come in an Elijah-like character; he came as a reformer, but he was ultimately met with rejection.

Malachi said that when Elijah comes 'he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers', Mal. 4. 6. Here the Lord speaks of how that Elijah shall 'restore all things', Matt. 17. 11. John the Baptist never 'restored all things' however great his ministry was, but the words of Malachi's prophecy await a complete fulfilment when another Elijah-like character will bring about national restoration on the part of Israel and prepare her for her coming King.

The foot of the mount

This transfiguration scene is preceded by the revelation of the cross in Matthew chapter 16, both the cross of Christ and the cross of His disciples, showing us clearly that presently it is not the time for reigning but the time for suffering. Peter speaks of how the prophets 'testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow', 1 Pet. 1. 11. This is the order.

The mountain scene is also succeeded by the manifestation of demonic power. The poor lunatic child in the grip of Satan reminds us that he is still 'the god of this world', 2 Cor. 4. 4. We know that when our Lord sits upon the throne of David and rules with perfect equity, all satanic power in this world will have been expelled and the devil himself cast into the bottomless pit during our Lord's 1,000-year reign.

What an impression this scene must have left upon the lives of these three disciples. May we too be captivated by the unsurpassed glory and pre-eminence of Christ.

Endnote

1 Matt 17. 1; Mark 9. 2; Luke 9. 28.

THE PRESENT VALUE OF THINGS WRITTEN LONG AGO

By **PHILIP COLLIER** Melbourne, Australia

'For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope', Rom. 15. 4.

Pressure is mounting on Christians to forgo their faith, lower their standards, deny their God and adopt the ways, attitudes and thinking of the world. Those who resist, find themselves increasingly isolated, marginalized, mistrusted, and, with growing frequency, vilified and persecuted. Such is the character of our 'progressive society', a society that has turned its back on God.

Thankfully, the timeless word of God brings much needed help in these difficult days. It teaches and equips us to stand fast, and to do so with Christlike humility and grace. It encourages and enables us to patiently endure, while always rejoicing in hope. The ancient words of scripture burst off the page with relevance and power, ever ready to meet our present need.

Things written long ago

Today, we are privileged to have the complete canon of scripture at our fingertips, comprising both the Old and New Testaments. The opening words of our text, though contextually referring to the Old Testament, can be applied to the whole Bible. The Old and New Testaments alike share the authoritative stamp of divine inspiration, 2 Tim. 3. 16; 2 Pet. 1. 21. From where we stand in history, **all** scripture – sixty-six books – has been 'written aforetime' and it is within this wide sphere of application that we consider the wisdom of Romans chapter 15 verse 4.

A chain of four links

As Paul writes the verse, he uses four carefully chosen words to describe why the Spirit of God has left on record the scriptures. Those words are learning, patience, comfort and hope. By way of illustration, consider a chain of four links. Each link is represented by one word. The picture of a chain affirms the fact that the links are inter-connected and inter-dependent. For example, extracting patience, comfort, and hope from the scriptures depends on us having learned from the scriptures. Likewise, strengthening and nurturing hope is necessarily connected to the comfort that scripture brings, and so on.

Every link in this chain is vital. A missing or defective link weakens, if not destroys, the ability of the chain to serve its purpose. It is therefore necessary that we examine these four words carefully to accurately understand and firmly grasp God's intended purpose in giving us the scriptures.

Learning (instruction)

In order to have value and impact in the life of the believer, the truths and principles of scripture must be learned, understood, and applied. The pre-eminent need for learning is as true spiritually as it is secularly. For example, a student will never be able to perform basic arithmetic until the governing principles of arithmetic (addition, subtraction, multiplication, division) are grasped. The word of God has been given for our **learning**. Paul instructs

Timothy regarding the importance of scripture in this regard, saying, 'All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable [beneficial] for doctrine [teaching]', 2 Tim. 3. 16. The word translated 'doctrine' here is the same as that translated 'learning', Rom. 15. 4.

We learn from scripture by reading, by careful, consistent and diligent study, by the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit, by utilizing dependable study aids and by availing ourselves of the teaching ministry of those appropriately gifted by the Holy Spirit. The point is that understanding is not acquired osmotically, it requires effort, diligence, commitment, and appetite, 2 Tim. 2. 15. If we fail to learn and thereby to grow, our lives will be spent paddling in the spiritual shallows rather than launching out into the deep. We will be weak, unstable, and liable to be 'tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine', Eph. 4. 14.

Patience (endurance)

To have patience, or to endure, as we navigate the Christian path is to continue steadfastly, to persevere, and to press on, even under hardship. It is to carry on, not to grow weary nor to faint or give up. In scripture, endurance is seen as an attribute of the 'man of God', it is the hallmark of a race well run, and it is the admirable trait of character that allows God to test and thereby grow and refine our faith.¹ Paul commended the Thessalonians for their endurance in the face of trying circumstances, saying, 'so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure', 2 Thess. 1. 4 NKJV. The scriptures have been given to equip us to persevere, to 'run, and not be weary . . . [and to] walk, and not faint', Isa. 40. 31.

Comfort (encouragement)

To be comforted, or encouraged, is to be refreshed, aided, helped, assisted, supported, exhorted, lifted up, urged on, and released from fear, doubt, weakness, reluctance,

concern, and worry. In the original language, the word used is *paraklēsis* which is similar to the word used of the Holy Spirit as our ‘Comforter’, John 14. 16. Just as the Holy Spirit draws alongside the believer to support and help, so too the word of God brings comfort and encouragement in times of need.

Encouragement and endurance are intimately and inseparably linked. Encouragement is the fuel that feeds endurance, the light that dispels darkness, the strength that overcomes weakness and the promise that banishes doubt. Encouragement is the arm that draws us near to God, telling us ‘Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest’, Josh. 1. 9.

One commentator says with regard to the comfort of the scriptures, ‘to make strong in heart, resolved in will, and incapable of being overborne or crushed in spirit by sorrow – that is a purpose worthy of the Book, and the God who speaks through it’.²

Hope (assurance)

Unlike how the word ‘hope’ is used in common parlance, in a Christian context hope carries no hint of doubt or uncertainty. Our hope resounds

with absolute assurance and complete confidence. It encompasses all that lies ahead by way of future promise, prospect, and blessing. It brings light to bear on our earthly pathway and illumines heaven with an assuring glow. It rests on the certainty of the word of God, the immutability of the character of God, and the power of God to do all He has promised, Heb. 6. 18, 19. It stands upon the person and work of Christ, the sufficiency of His death, the reality of His resurrection, the certainty of His imminent return, 1 John 3. 2, 3, and the absolute security of our standing in Him, John 10. 27-29. It tells us that ‘we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God . . . Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need’, Heb. 4. 14, 16.

And furthermore

It is no coincidence that the outcomes of instruction from the scriptures, namely patience, comfort and hope, are also attributes of God. In Romans chapter 15, God is uniquely described as the ‘God of patience and comfort’, v. 5 NKJV, and the ‘God of hope’, v. 13. As God delights to be patient, so we are enabled to be patient. As God delights to comfort, so we enjoy the comfort of the scriptures. As God delights to ignite hope, so we are blessed with an unquenchable hope.

Recall the chain

Romans chapter 15 verse 4 can be read in two ways. The first is to see endurance as an attitude we bring as we learn from scripture. Alternatively, endurance may be seen as an attribute enabled by the instruction of scripture. In this latter sense, endurance is a result of the encouragement of scripture rather than an attitude used in approaching it. Of course, both views are true, but I lean to the second. Learning brings encouragement, encouragement enables us to endure, and thereby hope is confirmed, Rom. 5. 3-5.

An example

In Luke chapter 24 verses 13 to 35, we read of two disciples trudging their way back to Emmaus from Jerusalem, disappointed, and dejected after the death of Christ and confused by

early reports that He had risen from the tomb. The Lord Jesus, though unrecognized by them at the time, drew near and accompanied them on their journey. As they walked, He asked them to explain why they were sad. At length, they described to Him the events that led to the Lord’s crucifixion. With a mild rebuke for their slowness to learn, He turned them to the scriptures and revealed that what they deemed to be a reason for discouragement and sorrow was in fact grounds for rejoicing and hope.

Bearing in mind the four-link chain of Romans chapter 15 verse 4, notice how the Lord Jesus instructed them from the scriptures, encouraged them, motivated them to persevere, and nurtured renewed hope to cheer their downcast hearts:

- Jesus Himself taught them from the scriptures, v. 27 (**instruction**)
- Their hearts burned with renewed joy, v. 32 (**encouragement**)
- They returned to Jerusalem to resume following Christ, v. 33 (**perseverance**)
- They excitedly reported their encounter with the risen Christ, v. 35 (**hope**)

Conclusion

We have considered the present value of that which has been purposefully written and carefully preserved for us in our Bibles. To bow our hearts in gratitude for such a provision would be an appropriate response to the author and protector of this great book. In particular, a consideration of Romans chapter 15 verse 4 has reminded us of a chain of four links which illustrates how the scriptures help us to understand, prepare for, and face difficult times. In summary, the Bible has been given as a basis for **instruction (link 1)**. That instruction **encourages (link 2)** us and equips us to ‘run with **patience (link 3)** the race that is set before us’, Heb. 12. 2, energized by the **hope (link 4)** that ‘he is faithful that promised’, Heb. 10. 23 and knowing that ‘hope does not disappoint’, Rom. 5. 5 NKJV.

Endnotes

- 1 1 Tim. 6. 11; Heb. 12. 1; Jas. 1. 3, 4.
- 2 ALEXANDER MACLAREN, *MacLaren Expositions of Holy Scripture*. Available at: <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/macLaren/>.



Covenant Confusion

By **ANDREW WILSON** Brisbane, Australia

Part 1

For centuries, Christians have differed on the following questions:

- Should we baptize infants or believers?
- Should the church be for the saints, or should it also include non-believers?
- Do Christians need to keep the Sabbath or other Old Testament laws like not eating certain foods?
- Does the nation of Israel have any right to the 'holy land', and is there any future in God's purposes for them?
- Will there be a literal 1,000-year reign of Christ on earth (the 'millennium') after His return?

Surprisingly, these diverse questions all have something in common: the question of the relationship of the Old and New Testaments. There are two different ways that Christians approach this question; one is called Covenant theology and the other Dispensationalism.¹ While many Christians have never heard these terms, most nevertheless (unwittingly) hold to one of these two views, and so give opposing answers to these questions. Covenant theology argues that there is a fundamental continuity between the Old and New Testaments, while dispensationalism argues that there are important differences between the Testaments.

As a result, covenant theologians teach that we should baptize infants because baptism is equivalent to, and a continuation of, the Old Testament rite of circumcision. They argue that the **sign** of the covenant has been changed, but the **subjects** of the rite remain the same: infants. They also teach that just as there were ungodly members of the Old Testament covenant community of Abraham **and his family** (many Israelites did not believe or obey God, both in the wilderness and in the land), so the New Covenant church should similarly include those who do not believe nor show any evidence of repentance (hence the millions of baptized, but functionally atheist, members of national churches). Covenant theology argues that many Old Testament worship practices should be continued in the New Covenant (a special class of priests, temples, liturgies) and that the moral

elements of the Law of Moses remain the rule of life for believers now. They hold that the New Testament church is the continuation and fulfilment of Old Testament Israel and has thus replaced national Israel in God's plans; they deny that Israel has any divine right to the land or that national Israel has any place in God's purposes for the future. Finally, they argue that the complete fulfilment of the glorious Old Testament promises to Israel is the New Testament Church, not some future earthly millennial kingdom.

By contrast, dispensationalism argues that fundamental changes occurred with the coming of the Messiah, so that there are important distinctions between the two Testaments. As a result, dispensationalists teach that baptism is not for babies, but for those who have experienced new birth, and hold that the church is for the saints (not the unsaved or those living ungodly lives). They teach that Christians are not under the Old Testament Law (the Sabbath command is never repeated in the New Testament) and believe that God's promises of a glorious future for national Israel in the Old Testament will be literally fulfilled during the millennial reign of Christ.

In this article, we will look more closely at what Covenant theology and Dispensationalism teach. In future articles, we will consider what dispensationalism and covenant theology get right, and then some of their errors we need to be wary of. Ultimately, we will see that,

while we can learn lessons from covenant theology, nevertheless dispensationalism presents a better way of understanding the relationship between the two Testaments.

What is Covenant Theology?

Covenant theology teaches that there are three over-arching covenants (or agreements) behind the Bible's storyline. First, God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in eternity made a covenant of redemption, whereby the Father sent the Son to redeem a people for Himself and by the work of the Holy Spirit these people are finally brought to glory. Second, God made a covenant of works with Adam in the garden, whereby Adam was called upon to obey God's commands and promised life if he did. Then, third, God made a covenant of grace that was progressively revealed through scripture, first to Eve, then to Abraham and others, whereby God graciously provides salvation through Christ.

There is debate over whether some of these covenants are explicitly referenced in the Bible (and therefore whether these covenants are real or are instead being artificially imposed). But we can all agree that the main concepts being taught in these three covenants are true, even if there are no Bible proof texts or even actual covenants. We are sinners who have failed to obey God's commands and can only be saved by God's grace through faith in Christ's work, and all this was planned by God before time began, cp. Titus 1. 1, 2.

The key argument of Covenant theology is that there is one covenant of grace throughout the whole Bible. That is, from beginning to end, there is only one way to be saved, which is by grace through faith. There are not different ways of salvation in different periods of time. Covenant theologians go further and argue that the New Covenant is not really new; instead, it is rather just a fulfilling of the Old Covenant. So, Covenant theology stresses the unity, or continuity, of Old and New Testaments; there is also only one people of God, so that the church is the true Israel, the fulfilment of the promises made to Israel in the Old Testament. There is no distinct future for the nation of Israel in God's plans except as Jews become part of the

church. The unity of the Old and New Testament also explains why babies are baptized in Covenant theology, and why the covenant community (i.e., the church) includes children too, and others who are not saved or living godly lives but nevertheless are part of the church through baptism.²

Infant baptism and the inclusion of unbelievers in church membership are important parts of Covenant theology for historical reasons, because Covenant theology was formulated in the post-Reformation period³ as an attempt to refute the Anabaptists (i.e., Re-baptizers) who insisted that the New Testament taught that baptism was only for believers and that church membership was only for the saints.

Covenant theology also teaches that the Old Testament Law still applies in the New Testament, so that while its civil and ceremonial aspects have been fulfilled in Christ, and no longer apply, the moral law remains as the rule of life for the Christian.⁴ In fact, some extreme forms of Covenant theology teach that the civil law still applies, so that we should stone to death adulterers and rebellious teenagers, and keep the Sabbath day (Saturday) and other Old Testament rules.⁵

What is Dispensationalism?

Dispensational theology is more difficult to define, but only because it has been frequently misunderstood and mischaracterized. Some journalists depict dispensationalism as an American fundamentalist right-wing political movement that supports Israel because it is ‘anxious for Armageddon’ and wants to speed up the return of Christ by blowing the world up. Some say that dispensationalism is a new idea invented in the 1800s by J. N. Darby, who got the idea from the mystical musings of a teenage Scottish Pentecostal named Margaret McDonald (all of which is not true).⁶ Some have argued that dispensationalism teaches that people in the Old Testament were saved by works, while people in the New Testament are saved by grace, but, as every true Christian knows, all have sinned and fall short of God’s glory so that no one can be saved by their own works, but only through the work of Christ at the cross. These are not valid definitions of dispensationalism – they

are attempts to caricature it by mixing some truth with falsehoods.

Some other attempted definitions of dispensationalism miss the mark. Some define dispensationalism as a system that divides the Bible into seven dispensations, that is, time periods in which God administered His purposes in different ways. But not all dispensationalists agree on these periods, nor is this really the central idea of dispensationalism. Some say that dispensationalists believe that a person can be saved even if his lifestyle shows no evidence of repentance from sin. However, few dispensationalists believe this, nor is it really what dispensationalism is about, for dispensationalism is **not** primarily about how people get saved. Some have argued that dispensationalists are antinomian – that is, they teach that Christians can be licentious and do not have to keep the moral law. But this too is a serious misunderstanding, as we shall see in a later article.

These inadequate definitions are like defining an Australian as someone who hangs corks off his hat and cheats at cricket. It might be true that some Australians have cheated at cricket or hung corks off their hats, but not all Australians do so. One cannot define anything by pointing to some isolated actions of a few abnormal people. Similarly, these attempted definitions of dispensationalism fail to address its essence.

There are three commonly agreed characteristics of dispensationalism.⁷ First, the key defining characteristic of dispensationalism is that there is a difference between Israel and the church, and, therefore, a difference between the Old and New Testaments. God is dealing with mankind in different ways in these two periods. As a result, second, dispensationalism has a distinctive view of future events. It holds that Christ is coming again before His literal reign on earth (premillennialism) and, significantly, it teaches a pre-tribulation rapture. That is, Christ is coming to take His church out of the world before the tribulation period. The third defining characteristic is that dispensationalism interprets the Bible by respecting the author’s

original intent. Dispensationalists thus adopt a more literal approach when dealing with Bible prophecies because this is the sense in which the inspired authors meant to be understood. (Dispensationalists also acknowledge that the Bible uses figurative language in many places, such as poetic books). Covenant theology, by contrast, often vaporizes Old Testament promises and prophecies by reading mystical, allegorical, or spiritualized meanings into non-figurative texts. It also forces the New Testament to reinterpret the Old Testament to mean something very different from what the author originally meant in context. Dispensationalism is thus different in its view of Israel and the church, in its program of future events, and in the way that we should interpret the Bible. In the following articles we will show why dispensationalism is right to adopt these three positions.

Endnotes

- 1 Other terms related to Covenant theology are Replacement Theology (although some explicitly reject this label) or Federal Theology or Reformed Theology, but this last term is broader and covers more issues.
- 2 See GUY PRENTISS WATERS, J. NICHOLAS REID, and JOHN R. MEUTHER (eds.) *Covenant Theology: Biblical, Theological and Historical Perspectives*, Crossway, 2020, or MICHAEL HORTON, *Introducing Covenant Theology*, Baker Books, 2006.
- 3 See PAUL ENNS, *Moody Handbook of Theology*, Moody Press, 1989, pp. 504, 505.
- 4 CALVIN’s third use of the Law, see his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book 2, Chapter 7.12
- 5 A teaching called Theonomy or Dominion Theology: ‘The Christian is obligated to keep the whole law of God as a pattern for sanctification and . . . this law is to be enforced by the civil magistrate where and how the stipulations of God so designate’, GREG BAHNSEN, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1977, pg. 34.
- 6 See PROF. WILLIAM WATSON, *Dispensationalism Before Darby*, Lampion House, 2020, and for more detail about Darby, see the present author’s *The End of the World*, Believers Publications, 2021, pp. 399-401.
- 7 Michael Vlach surveys the views of Ryrie, Feinberg, and Blaising and Bock on this question as well as giving his own in, “What is Dispensationalism?” in JOHN MACARTHUR and RICHARD MAYHUE (eds.), *Christ’s Prophetic Plans*, Moody Publishers, 2012, pp. 19-38.

The life and times of Elisha 9

THE SIEGE OF SAMARIA

By **PHIL RAGGETT** Prestwich, England

In 2 Kings chapter 6 verse 24, we find that the peace the nation enjoyed only lasted for a short period of time and soon the enemy was at the gate of the city again. Elisha, despite his faithfulness and service, is now facing more danger as God, in His governmental dealings with His people, allows the king of Syria to come up and besiege Samaria.

From this we learn two simple lessons that we can apply to our own lives. First, we are not immune to problems as the people of God. The prosperity gospel movement, so called, has no basis in scripture. In fact, we often find that the most faithful saints are the ones who are called to pass through the most trying of circumstances. Second, we learn that we ought to always be on our guard as the enemy of every believer, the devil, constantly looks for opportunities to attack the people of God to bring them under his influence.

Plight of Samaria

The **distress** of the people in the face of the enemy was soon apparent. Famine conditions prevailed, as a result of the siege of the city, to the extent that dung was treated as a precious commodity to be traded for silver coins! How desperate was their plight.

In subtle ways, the devil similarly seeks to bring famine conditions into our spiritual lives today. He does everything he can to stop us from reading the scriptures. The world places great demands upon our time, whether it be in business or pleasure, that will rob us of time spent in the things of God. The pressures of business and the demands of family life leave us with little time for the assembly or for the study of the word of God.

Slowly, but surely, we find our

priorities becoming skewed and we begin to place value on things that are trivial and of limited eternal worth. How much time do we spend scrolling on social media or engaged in hobbies and other pursuits that have little spiritual value? If our priorities are not adjusted, we will soon be impoverished and starved of spiritual nourishment. In a fast-paced world with many legitimate demands placed on the people of God, it is vital that we make time to gather spiritual food to avoid the dangers of spiritual famine. Make the study of the scriptures, both personally and collectively at the assembly gatherings, a priority in your life.

Powerless sovereign

The king of Israel looks on in **despair** at the plight of his people. He is presented with a tragic case of a woman whose son has just been killed and eaten. Such was their desperation that they had done the unimaginable and taken the life of a child in order that they might live. This is the fulfilment of Deuteronomy chapter 28 verses 50 and 53 where God had warned His people of the tragic consequences of disobedience with young and old being seen as dispensable. On the face of it this sounds completely foreign to our values and would be unthinkable today, but how often are unborn children preyed on and treated as worthless in society? The rights of the mother trump the rights of the child, and the sacrifice of children takes

place daily with little thought as to the serious consequences of this act. Remember God values all life but, in particular, He has a care for the vulnerable.

We can also apply the lesson to believers who would never dream of killing their child, yet in their pursuit of a career or a better lifestyle, their children are left in the care of others – often with little regard for their spiritual wellbeing. It is not easy raising children on a single salary and, at times, difficult choices do have to be made so we can provide for our families. Remember, though, that God places a high value on motherhood and the selfless sacrifice of every ‘stay-at-home mum’, who has invested her time in bringing up children for the Lord, will be well rewarded. Let all who have the privilege, and responsibility, of bringing up children never take it lightly.

Rather than appealing to God in supplication, the king actually now blames God and His prophet for the famine. Like his father, Ahab, before him, he refuses to acknowledge any culpability on his part and instead blames Elisha. Elisha’s silence at the siege was seen as his condoning of it – the king knew he could have done something about it and wanted Elisha killed for not acting. Men blame God, and His people, for their circumstances and for His apparent inactivity rather than admitting that the problem, oftentimes, is because of their own sinful ways.

Promise of God

Elisha is unperturbed by the king’s threats and once more we see that he seems to have advance notice from God of events about to take place! A man in touch with heaven had a greater knowledge than the king with all his advisors. Likewise, today, the Christian who reads his Bible has a greater understanding of the future than many of the best political analysts of the day.

Elisha speaks as the prophet of God with his **declaration** of the word of the Lord. The desperate circumstances drove men to listen to his voice. The king was at least willing

to acknowledge Elisha's power from God and stayed his murderous intent on hearing the prophet speak. A man who speaks for God with power can still stay the hand of evil men.

The king's advisor, in his unbelief, relied on what he could see rather than on the word of God. The prevailing conditions caused him to ridicule Elisha and his refusal to believe the prophet left him bereft of the enjoyment of seeing the word of God being fulfilled. The sin of unbelief is indeed a serious sin. Like the Jews who were among the first to hear the gospel preached, in their unbelief many were prevented from entering into the blessings of it. That which was a 'savour of life' to the Gentiles who believed, was a 'savour of death' to the unbelieving Jews, 2 Cor. 2. 16.

Still today, men point to circumstances and mock the promises of God. Their failure to believe God and His word will result in their eternal condemnation and rob them of the immeasurable blessings available through faith in Christ.

Provision of grace

We are now introduced to four leprous men sitting outside the gate of the city. Desperate times lead to desperate measures, and they decide to cast themselves upon their enemies in the hope that they will have mercy upon them. In the twilight they set off and to their amazement they discover that the camp is completely empty – the Lord had performed a great miracle!

In a foreshadowing of the **deliverance** of Zechariah chapter 14

in a future day, the Lord intervenes on behalf of His people. Men in their panic believe an incredible tale as they hear a great noise and imagine a great army has been summoned to fight on behalf of the besieged city. This defies belief but fear grips them and with a herd mentality they all flee from the imagined threat leaving the camp and all their resources unguarded, to the amazement of the four lepers.

God had turned the enemy into a provider of blessing for His people. Their evil plans were thwarted. What they meant for evil, God meant for good, Gen. 50. 20. This was remarkable grace as the people of God were not only going to be fed but enriched beyond measure as well.

Pointless gain

The lepers could hardly believe their good fortune and their **desires** for personal gain get the better of them. Hurrying from tent to tent they grab whatever they can and begin to store up treasures for themselves. What a pitiful sight it must have been to see these men, with their bodies covered in leprous sores, hoarding up silver and gold for a future they were unlikely to see. What was the point of hiding it when they were dying of leprosy? How sad it is to see people today doing the very same thing. They are putting all their energies and efforts into storing up treasures on earth that will be of no value to them when life comes to an end.

Let us remember the exhortation of Christ in Matthew chapter 6 verse 20 to 'lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust

doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal'. Get your priorities right and invest your time and energies in storing up treasures of eternal worth rather than wasting all your energy going in for the fleeting wealth of this present world.

Preaching of good tidings

Thankfully, these lepers realize their folly and recognize they have a higher **duty** to carry out. Not far away there is a city dying of hunger and here they are with the remedy, but they are holding their peace. Silence in these circumstances when men are dying is unconscionable. Well might we apply the challenge as we think of a world of lost sinners around us in need of the gospel. If we are not actively seeking to reach the lost then 'we do not well' for 'this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace', 2 Kgs. 7. 9. God has provided abundant riches in Christ that the world needs to know about. Let us constantly seek opportunities as they did to 'go and tell'.

As we picture these lepers making their way to pass their report on to the king, we are reminded of the words of 1 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 27, 'God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty'. These despised lepers had a message of deliverance and hope that confounded the king and his servants. What a thrill it must have been as the king's servants returned with the news that the report was entirely accurate!

Prophecy given

The **dependability** of the word of the Lord spoken by His prophet is now clearly seen as Elisha's words of blessing to God's people, and condemnation to the unbelieving lord, equally came to pass. The detail of Elisha's prophecy relating to the costs of goods and the precise timing of the prophecy were fulfilled exactly 'as the man of God had spoken to the king', 2 Kgs. 7. 18.

Let us ever remember that God's word can be trusted no matter how impossible the circumstances might seem. He is in control of all our circumstances, and our times are also in His hand, Ps. 31. 15.



Towns and cities in the life of the Lord

Part 14

THE POOL OF BETHESDA

By **IAN REES** Tenby, Wales

The word 'Bethesda' translates as 'House of mercy' or 'House of grace'. The pool of Bethesda was situated in Jerusalem and was renowned as a place of healing. It would appear that the waters of the pool bubbled from time to time. The King James Version speaks of an angel who came and troubled the water. The healing properties of this water were so well known that large numbers of the sick, the blind, the lame, and people with various physical ailments gathered there to await the bubbling of the water, believing that the first one into the water after it bubbled would be healed. In the Gospels, the word 'impotent' is usually translated as 'sick' but in the Epistles it is 'weak'.¹ No doubt they were sick because weak, but the idea is that the weak gathered there to gain strength and healing.

The location of the pool has been a matter of debate for centuries, but archaeologists excavating the area discovered such a pool, having five arches or porticos, close to the Church of St Anne, near the Temple in Jerusalem, corroborating the biblical record.² This may very well have been a *mikveh*, which was a ritual bath where the sick would gather. The ruins show two separate pools, enclosed by four walls and colonnades surrounding the pools, but with a fifth wall dividing the two, yet letting water from the smaller pool into the larger one. It was here our Lord sought out the disabled man.

Over the years there have been all sorts of interpretations of the pool. It has been suggested the five porches represent the five books of Moses, upon which so much of Jewish religious life was founded and that the thirty-eight years of the man's weakness reflects the thirty-eight years Israel wandered in the wilderness. We look at the record simply as it is written today.

The Gospel record of the healing of the disabled man at the pool

is recorded in John chapter 5. It was one of the early miracles our Lord performed and shows us two important characteristics of His ministry. The first is His compassion for the sick and the helpless which He consistently showed in healing the blind, the disabled, the dying, and the leper. The second is His immense power over illness and disease. With some, He healed with a touch, others with a word or command, and one by power leaving His body by her touch of faith. Some He healed in their presence and some at a distance. We do not have that divine power, nor can we. But we can and should show compassion on those who are weak and needy in our society, however that need may be expressed.

Arriving at the pool, our Lord identified amongst the crowds a man who was unable to enter the water by himself. In most cases the sick and possessed came to the Lord seeking His help. Here, as with the Samaritan woman in chapter 4, our Lord seeks out someone in order to heal him. In the previous chapter, our Lord went out of His way to speak to a helpless Samaritan woman, a Gentile, and

here He goes out of His way to meet a helpless Jewish man. Both had an appointment with God. The record is that the man had been paralyzed for thirty-eight years, though it does not say he had been lying at the pool for that long. Here was a disabled, possibly severely paralyzed man in desperate need of help. His reply to the Lord, 'I have no man' should surely have drawn out the compassion of those round about, but evidently not. Disabled as he was, unable to drag himself to the waters in time to be the first one in, he must have been a desperate man and also a disappointed one. How often had he struggled and failed to get to the waters in time!

One wonders what he thought of this stranger who came up to him, spoke to him, and then told him to arise. It would appear from the later record that he did not know who the stranger was for, when asked by the Pharisees who it was who had instructed him to carry his bed on the Sabbath Day, he replied, 'He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk', John 5. 11. Scripture records he did not know the man's name, 'for Jesus had conveyed himself away, a multitude being in that place', v. 13. What marvellous faith this man must have had to obey the instruction of this stranger! Does this indicate his desperation, willing to try anything to get healed? Or could it be that, as soon as our Lord commanded him, 'Rise, take up thy bed and walk', he felt that inner power surging within him that enabled him to do so, just as the woman with an issue of blood knew within herself that she had been healed of her infirmity as soon as she had touched the hem of our Lord's garment, Mark 5. 33. Whatever may be the explanation, the disabled man obeys our Lord's command, rises, and does as our Lord told him. Is it not true that many, putting faith in our Lord for salvation, know instantly that surge of spiritual life that brings the knowledge of salvation, that sudden flood of peace that assures them God has accepted them and heard their prayer? Faith in our Lord followed the revelation of who He was. 'Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him,

‘Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee. The man departed, and told the Jews that it was Jesus, which had made him whole’, vv. 14, 15.

Is it not a puzzle to us that our Lord asked the man the obvious question, ‘Do you want to be made whole?’ Why ask that, when the man has evidently been brought there and left there for that purpose? Perhaps the poor man had by now given up all hope and was resigned to dying desperate and disappointed. How many like him have given up on life, resigned themselves to a life of sin having sought help from any and every quarter and just given up? ‘I have no man’ is the sad confession of so many today.

But we focus on the positives rather than the negatives in the record. The healing of the man at the pool reveals to us the compassion of our Lord for the needy, the helpless, the ‘common man’. Not for him the self-satisfied, self-important, self-reliant Pharisees and Sadducees. Not for him the wealthy, the titled, the self-righteous. ‘I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance’, Luke 5. 32 ESV, and that is exactly what our Lord does to the man who has been healed. ‘Go and sin no more, lest a worse thing befall thee’. Surely this challenges us to seek out and help the needy amongst us, whether they be important or not. ‘Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and

God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence’, 1 Cor. 1. 26-29. What was a diseased, disabled, disappointed man to our Lord? He was everything that day! Unlike the many who came to be healed, our Lord sought him out. ‘What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?’ Luke 15. 4. And what lengths our Lord went to, seeking the weak and the lost!

The record of the incident in the Gospel shows not only our Lord’s compassion and power and the invalid’s faith and obedience, it also details the miserable carping of the Pharisees. Instead of rejoicing with the healed man – and we notice the piety he showed in going to the temple as soon as he could, no doubt to give thanks to God for his healing – they complained that he had broken the Sabbath rest. Following their petty rules, (for, in order to shield the common man from breaking the Sabbath, the rabbis had introduced thirty-nine types of work one could not do on the Sabbath Day and carrying anything was one of them) no one was permitted to carry anything on the Sabbath Day, for the Pharisees considered that to be work. Sadly, as we all know, legalism often drives out compassion.

This incident is introduced by John here to indicate the growing hostility that our Lord was to face by the religious establishment of the day. From here on, men would oppose Him to His face, mutter behind His back and make plans to kill Him because He was seen, not as a champion of the poor and the sick, nor as the Messiah who had come to set His people free, but as a threat, as a trouble-maker, a rabble-rouser, a nuisance. This would later be expressed by the High Priest who would declare, ‘it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not’, John 11. 50. Our Lord would face the growing contradiction of sinners against Himself. Our Lord faces the Pharisees immediately after the man’s healing. ‘Therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath day. But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. Therefore, the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God’, vv. 16-18. There follows our Lord’s profound declaration of His deity. ‘The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him’, vv. 22, 23.

It is surely no surprise that so many places of worship, chapels, and gospel halls, are called Bethesda. As those who were physically weak and sick gathered at the pool, so we long to see many spiritually weak and sick gathered in to receive spiritual regeneration and new life from the Lord. And let us not forget the plaintive cry of the paralyzed man, ‘I have no man’. The lost around us have no man to help them – but there is the Son of man, the Son of God, who can do so. Praise His name!

Endnotes

- 1 Strong’s Greek: 770. *Astheneó*.
- 2 See: <https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-sites-places/jerusalem/the-bethesda-pool-site-of-one-of-jesus-miracles/>.



CHAIRMAN'S NOTES November 2026

By **JOHN BENNETT**

Chairman and General Editor, Precious Seed International

In the eighty-one years that the Precious Seed magazine has been circulated it has been through many different challenges, none more so than our present situation. With reserves now almost exhausted and income falling significantly, we are faced with some difficult decisions.

Those who have been readers of the magazine for many of the years it has been published will know how it has changed. When first published in 1945, its size was quarto, or 10 inches by 8 inches (254 x 203mm). It ran bi-monthly in this format through until 1948. A reduction in its size may well have been generated by a need to save money – the statement is made ‘our income has only just kept pace with our expenses’ on the first page of volume 2 of the magazine. Thus, from that volume the size of the magazine was reduced to 7 inches x 5 inches (180 x 125 mm). The next major change came in 1976 when the magazine moved to an A5 size and a thinner paper. It continued in this format, although with fewer pages and a move from a double column to a single column format, until the end of the twentieth century. In 2000, the magazine moved to an A4 format and full colour, which it has retained to the present. At every stage of development, the trustees have

kept a close watch on costs, making appropriate changes when needed, as well as moving production and distribution of the magazine to companies that provided reliability of service and value for money.

As assembly numbers have declined, so has our income from the free-will offerings of the Lord’s people. Apart from last year, Precious Seed has been running at a loss for a number of years. Changes have been made to reduce our costs, reminders issued to only order the correct number of copies required, and regular purges of our subscriber database have failed to stem the slow decline in our reserves.

Thus, were it not for a recent significant gift, trustees felt that we could have to make this magazine the

final issue. However, its temporary continuance is a testimony to the faithfulness of the Lord and His people. Against that background, we would encourage readers to pray with us for the Lord’s guidance and, if it be His will, continuing help to sustain the work in whatever form He deems appropriate in 2027.

On a personal level, after twenty-five years of service in Precious Seed, I will be making a phased retirement from the role of Chairman and General Editor during 2027 DV. I would extend my sincere thanks to trust members past and present who have supported me in the work. It has been my joy to serve the Lord in this His work, and we continue to seek His blessing upon the material that is yet to be published and that will remain on our website.

I would also express my sincere thanks to contributors from across the world that have written for us. Their patience and understanding as their material has gone through various editorial processes, not least at my hands, underlines their willingness to write humbly, and solely for the benefit of the Lord’s people.

Finally, to those who have supported and continue to support us both prayerfully and practically, we extend our thanks.



QUESTION

What is the 'times of the Gentiles' and why is it important today?

ANSWER

What is it?

The 'times of the Gentiles' describes a defined period when God permits Gentile powers to rule over Jerusalem and exercise world dominion. The phrase comes from Luke chapter 21 verse 24, spoken by the Lord Jesus, while its prophetic framework is most fully outlined in the book of Daniel.

When did it start and why?

In Daniel chapter 2, King Nebuchadnezzar dreams of a great statue made of different materials, each symbolizing successive Gentile empires: Babylon (head of gold), Medo-Persia (silver chest and arms), Greece (bronze belly and thighs), and Rome (iron legs, ending in iron and clay feet). Daniel chapter 7 presents the same empires as savage beasts. Together, these chapters show both the outward splendour of this period of Gentile dominion, yet God's true evaluation of these empires as predatory and destructive.

Consequently, the times of the Gentiles began in 586 BC with Babylon's destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. Israel once knew the Lord as their King, but rejected His rule in favour of human leadership, 1 Sam. 8. 7. Moses had warned that persistent rebellion would result in foreign domination, Deut. 28. 36, 37. This Gentile rule was a testimony to Israel's national failure after centuries of disobedience.

Yet God showed compassion. He raised faithful witnesses during this period, such as Daniel, Esther, and Nehemiah, and even used Gentile rulers like Cyrus to restore Israel to the land. Still, Israel had no king. This period of Gentile rule caused the royal line of David to fade into obscurity until the rightful heir appeared. The angels announced, 'unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord', Luke 2. 11. The long-promised Son of David had arrived in humility, identified by the astounding words, 'Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger', v. 12.

When does it end?

The Lord Jesus stated that, 'Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, **until** the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled', Luke 21. 24.¹ While Luke chapter 21 partly refers to AD 70, it ultimately points to the future tribulation. According to Daniel chapter 2, the era ends when the stone cut without hands destroys the

statue and becomes a great mountain filling the whole earth, vv. 35, 44, 45. Daniel chapter 7 identifies this stone as 'one like the Son of man', v. 13, to whom is given an everlasting kingdom, v. 14. The Lord Jesus confirmed that these passages refer to His future return in glory to establish His visible kingdom over the earth, personally reigning from Jerusalem, Luke 21. 27, 28.

How is it relevant today?

The times of the Gentiles reminds us that God remains sovereign over all empires and rulers throughout history, even those exalted in pride, as Nebuchadnezzar learned. The word 'until', Luke 21. 24, also confirms that God is not finished with Israel. The Abrahamic covenant remains unfulfilled and will only be fully realized through the personal reign of Christ.² Until then, Israel, especially Jerusalem, will **not** enjoy complete dominion of the land in God's purposes. At the same time, Israel remains under God's protective care until His promises are fulfilled, 'for he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye', Zech. 2. 8. This is crucial since Israel is the focus of satanic opposition³ as the true heirs of the Abrahamic promises.⁴

Meanwhile, the period of the times of the Gentiles has been a time of unparalleled blessing to all nations, described as the 'riches of the Gentiles', Rom. 11. 12. We must remember that today the same God who watches over Israel also has a care and compassion for all the nations of the earth, including the enemies of Israel.⁵

Endnotes

- ¹ This is particularly significant during the great tribulation when the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem will be desecrated at the time of the abomination of desolation, Dan. 8. 13; 9. 27; 11. 31; Matt 24. 15.
- ² This is an unconditional covenant symbolized in Genesis chapter 15 verse 17 where God **alone** passes between the divided carcasses of the animals as 'a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp'.
- ³ 'The devil is a dispensationalist'. Since Satan knows that God's future purposes are for Israel, he will do everything he can to thwart them. The Lord Jesus also has Jewish heritage. To hurt Israel is to hurt Him.
- ⁴ This is qualified, 'He saith **not**, and to seeds, as of many; but as of one, and to thy seed, which is Christ', Gal. 3. 16. Only through the personal reign of the Lord Jesus over this earth will the covenants to Abraham and David be fully realized.
- ⁵ This truth is evident even in the book of Jonah where we see that God even cares for Israel's enemies, and especially their little ones, Jonah 4. 10, 11.

The Committee

Chairman and General Editor:

JOHN BENNETT

19 Alfreton Road, Pinxton,
Nottingham NG16 6JZ

Secretary:

ANTHONY STEVENSON

PO Box 8,829, Derby, DE1 0SY

Treasurer:

STEPHEN SHERWIN

Ministry Articles Editors:

GRAEME ANDREWS,

SANDY JACK

YPS:

ANDREW DUTTON

Other Trust Members:

Robert Davies, Tom Merriman,

Frank Proudlock, John Scarsbrook,

Jeremy Singer.

*All committee members can be
contacted at*

secretary@preciousseed.org

or by post to the Chairman.

FACTS AND FIGURES

- The magazine is published quarterly by the Precious Seed Trust, Registered Charity No. 326157.
 - It is distributed, without charge, to over 90 countries, many in the developing world.
 - Numbers printed are around 11,000 (57% of these going overseas) plus over 1500 in India.
 - Postage accounts for nearly 60% of our costs.
 - Including postage, each magazine costs around £1.25 sterling.
 - Gifts to help in the work may be sent in any major currency to any of the addresses shown below or through the website.
 - UK donors can add 25% to their gift by using the Gift Aid scheme (details available from the secretary).
- Magazine orders, amendments and gifts by cheque should be sent to the address below or to the Birkdale, Stouffville or Farmington Hills addresses below.
 - Contact Addresses:
 - U.K.** **Precious Seed International,**
PO Box 8,829, Derby, DE1 0SY.  **Please note new address for all
UK correspondence - as above**
 - Australia** **Precious Seed International,**
12 Amalia Street, Birkdale, Queensland 4159.
 - Canada** **Precious Seed International, Gospel Trust Canada,**
3 Hill Top Trail, Stouffville, ON L4A3G7 Canada.
 - U.S.A.** **Precious Seed International, c/o Truth & Tidings Gospel Trust USA,**
37177 White Tail Court, Farmington Hills, MI 48335.
 - Visit our website: **www.preciousseed.org**
 - Make use of our email facility: **secretary@preciousseed.org**

If you wish to help in the work, this can be done in several ways:

- 1) **BY CREDIT/DEBIT CARD** using our website www.preciousseed.org and selecting 'Support Precious Seed' on the menu bar, or
- 2) **BY ELECTRONIC BANK TRANSFER** either using online banking, or by instructing your bank local branch to make an electronic payment. The Precious Seed bank account details are:
 - Account name: Precious Seed Magazine • UK Account Number: 00399475
 - UK bank Sort Code 30-98-94
 - IBAN:GB75 LOYD 3098 9400 3994 75 • BIC: LOYDGB21454

If you use this method please let us know separately either by email to secretary@preciousseed.org or via the post as sometimes the details of payees are not evident from bank statements.

USA If you wish to make a donation using a cheque in US Dollars please:

1. Make payable to: Truth & Tidings Gospel Trust USA.
2. Send to: Truth & Tidings Gospel Trust USA, 37177 White Tail Court, Farmington Hills, MI 48335 with instructions to forward funds to *Precious Seed International*.

Canada If you wish to make a donation using a cheque in CAN Dollars please:

1. Make payable to: Gospel Trust Canada.
2. Send to: Gospel Trust Canada, 3 Hill Top Trail, Stouffville, ON, L4A 3G7 with instructions to forward funds to *Precious Seed International*.

New Zealand If you wish to make a donation using a cheque in NZ Dollars please:

1. Make payable to: Global Connections in Mission.
2. Send to: Global Connections in Mission, PO Box 744, Palmerston North, 4440 with instructions to forward funds to *Precious Seed International*.

NOTE: ARTICLES EXPRESS THE CONVICTIONS HELD BY THE AUTHORS. ALL THE TRUSTEES MAY NOT AGREE WITH EVERYTHING THAT IS STATED IN ANY ONE ARTICLE. ULTIMATELY, THE AUTHOR IS RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT IS WRITTEN.

PreciousSeed

NOVEMBER 2026 Vol. 81 | No. 4



'He came unto the sea of Galilee, through the midst of the coasts of Decapolis', Mark 7. 31.

PS
Magazine

'He came unto the sea of Galilee, through the midst of the coasts of Decapolis', Mark 7. 31.

The closing verses of Mark chapter 7 tell us of the second visit of the Lord to Decapolis. By comparison with chapter 5, it seems that the Lord took a different route in this instance. On that former occasion, the converted demoniac had begun 'to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him', 5. 20.

In the context of this chapter, it is clear that the Lord has been deep in Gentile territory, cp. 7. 24-30, but the reception He received in the area of Decapolis this time was different. Chapter 5 verse 17 indicates that 'they [the people of Gadara] began to pray him [the Lord] to depart out of their coasts'. Here, 'they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech', 7. 32.

Here is a man who could not have heard of the Lord. Neither could he have clearly expressed any desire he might have had to meet the Lord. He was completely dependent upon others, and they led him to the Lord. What a blessing that they brought him to the Saviour! What an example for all of us. Our task in the gospel is exactly the same – to bring people to the Lord.

Whilst it would be easy to be critical of these concerned friends in their desire that the Lord might 'put his hand upon him', v. 32, we must remember that a tactile approach was preferable for a man for whom words meant very little. Hence, this is the method used by the Saviour, and He touches the very areas of the man's malady – his ears and his tongue. There is also a demonstrative element in the Lord's actions. He looked 'up to heaven' as an indication of the source of the blessing that would follow. But we note that it was also very personal – 'he [the Lord] took him aside from the multitude', v. 33.

In our desires to reach the lost, may we emphasize the personal nature of salvation, pointing to God as the only source of true blessing.

© Precious Seed International.

The magazine is copyrighted for the purpose of maintaining the integrity of the material and not to limit proper use of the articles. For use in other publications and for orders and distribution please contact Anthony Stevenson, PO Box 8,829, Derby, DE1 0SY, UK. The magazine is issued free of charge. Its production is maintained by the freewill offerings of the Lord's people. Readers are requested to notify changes of address and to keep the number of magazines ordered under review. No member of the Committee receives any remuneration for services to the Trust.



www.preciousseed.org

 **Precious Seed International**

 **young.preciousseed**