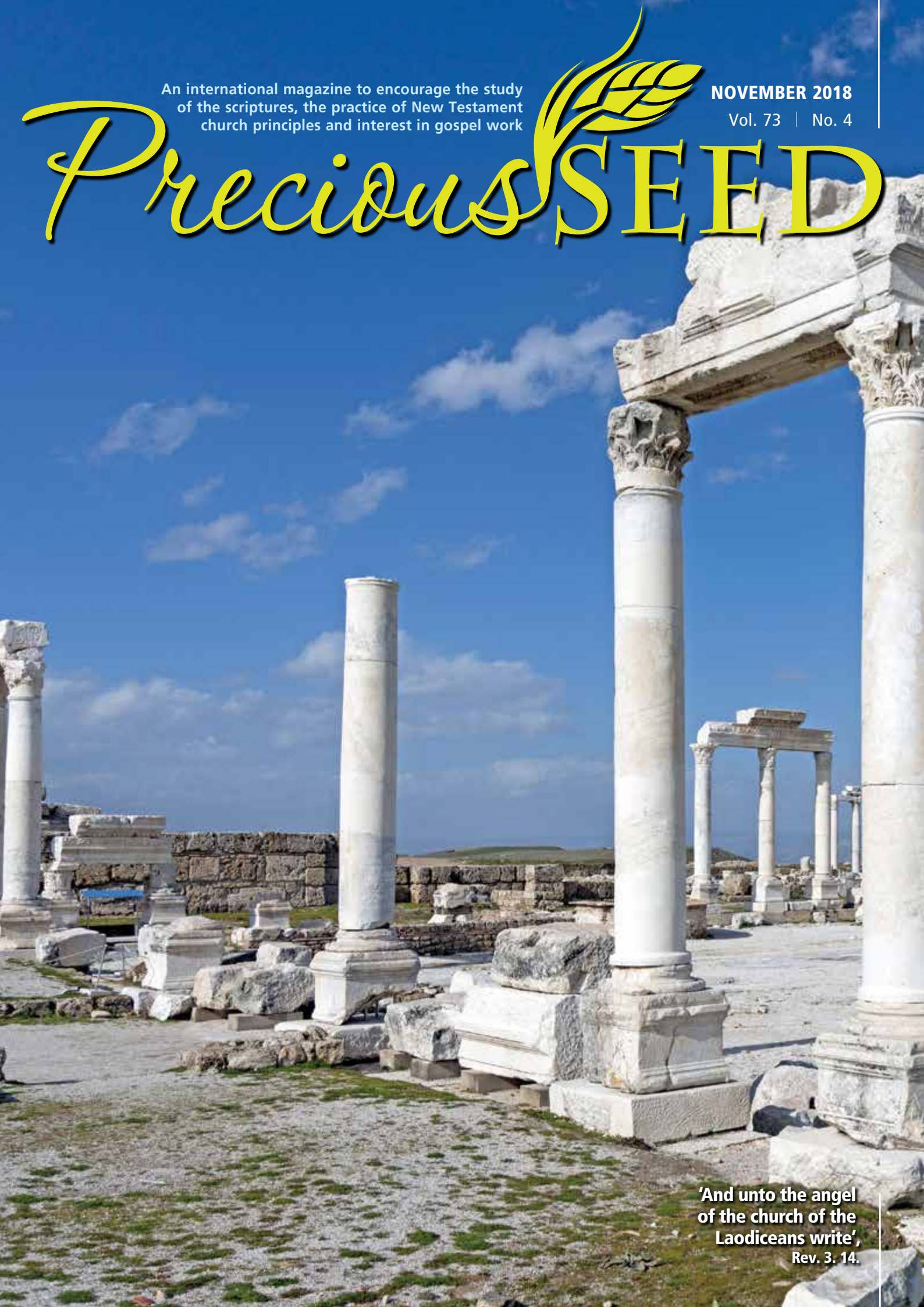


An international magazine to encourage the study
of the scriptures, the practice of New Testament
church principles and interest in gospel work

NOVEMBER 2018

Vol. 73 | No. 4

Precious SEED



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of the church of the
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Rev. 3. 14.

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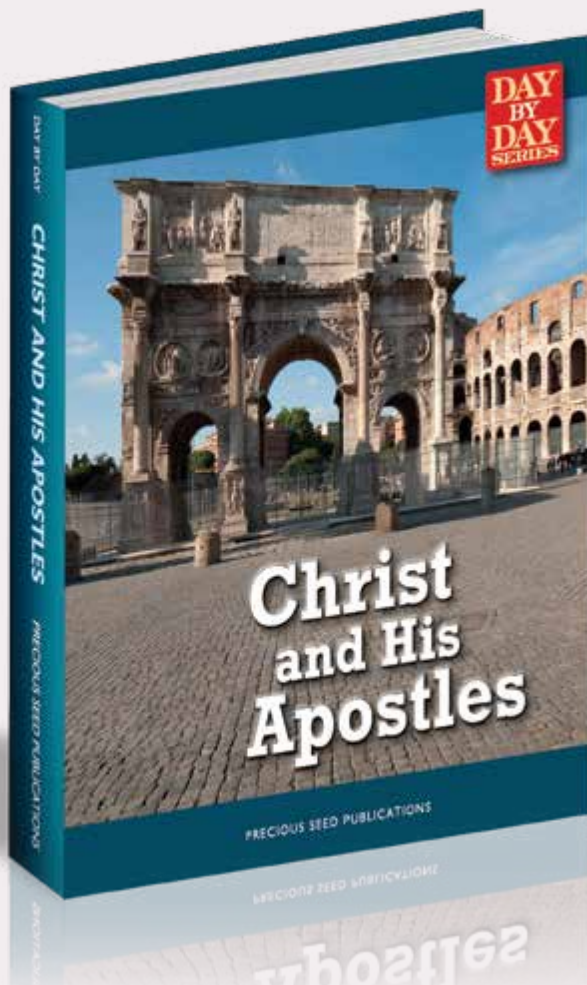
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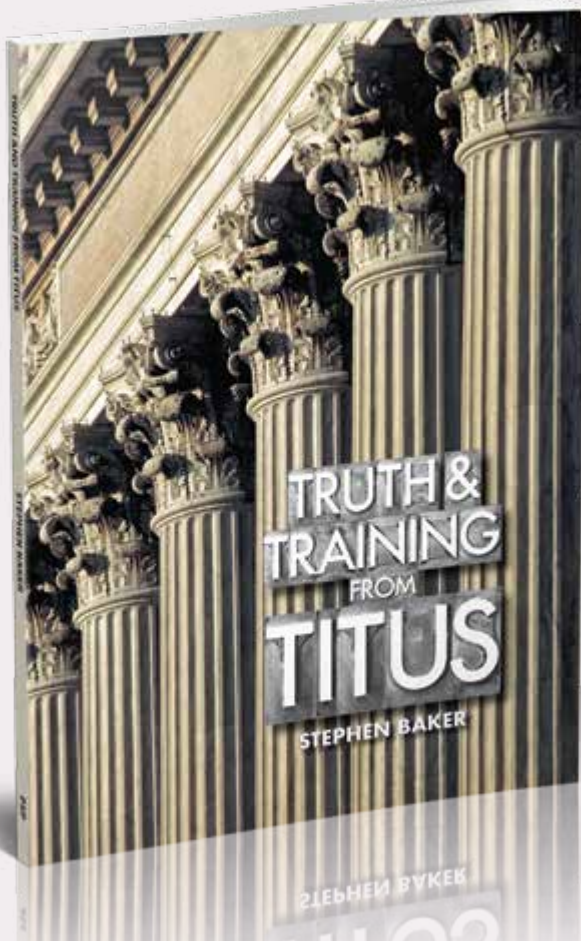
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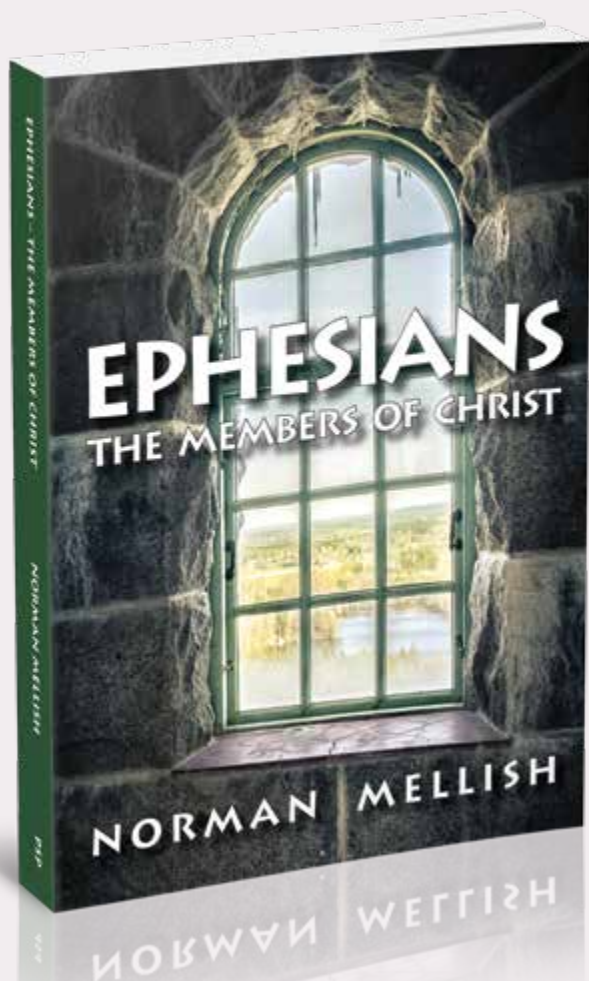
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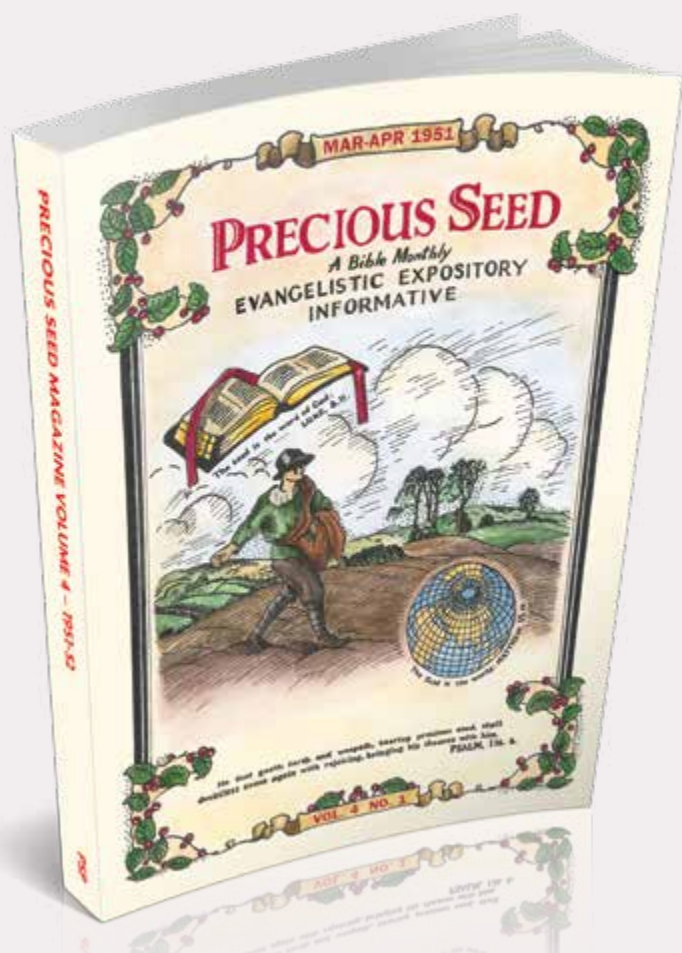
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‘Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you’, 1 Pet. 5. 7.

As Peter encourages his trial-burdened readers to cast ‘all your care upon’ God, there are some interesting and simple points to note.

Note well who it is that Peter is encouraging his readers to cast their care upon; God – the Supreme Being! The One who is, and always will be above all. The One who is worthy of trusting with our cares. The One who has ‘the mighty hand’ and is capable of carrying our cares, v. 6. As always in the Christian experience, it is vitally important for us to get a good grasp, from the scriptures, of the nature and character of our God – the only true God – the One whom the angel described as ‘God with us’, and of whom Paul could say that he aspired to ‘know him’. If we are to implement the injunction of Peter, we would do well to explore and learn more about Him from the scriptures which speak of Him, for the more we know Him, the easier it will be to trust Him. Note also how we are to act – ‘cast’. The

idea in the word is to ‘give up’ or ‘lay upon’. Scripture is the best interpreter of scripture, and the idea can be seen in the other occurrence of the word in the New Testament in Luke chapter 19 verse 35. The loosed colt, which was brought to the Lord Jesus, had garments of the disciples cast upon it. I guess it would have been rather strange if the owners of these garments, having laid them on the beast, then immediately took them back and put them on their own back. Yet how often do we do just that with the cares we are enjoined to ‘cast upon’ God?

Note further what we are to cast – all your care. How often do we miss out on a blessing by half-hearted obedience? O the richness of the extent of the grace of God! One dear saint used to encourage us by reminding us that there isn’t anything that you can’t take to the Lord, since He already knows all about it anyway!

Finally note why – ‘he careth for you’.

Maybe we miss the thrust of this beautiful verse when we simply state ‘for it matters to Him about you’. Of course, that is true, but surely the One, who, while down here amongst His earthly people carried their sorrows, their sadness and their anxieties, is the same One who carries the cares of His precious children today. Why carry what He will carry? Trust Him. Be low in His presence, rid ourselves of any self-exalting pride that often hides in self-sufficiency and, as the Spirit of God has promised through Peter, ‘He will lift you up in due time’.

Once again it is our prayer that, as the articles in this magazine are read, they will be a blessing, stimulate worship, provoke deeper devotion and, above all, bring glory to our God. As a committee, we would express our thanks to those who have contributed to this issue and over the course of the past year.

SANDY JACK

Ministry Articles Editor

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YPS

The Messianic Psalms

PSALM 68

By **RICHARD COLLINGS** Caerphilly, Wales

Overview

Psalm 68 contains just part of a verse that enables us to consider it as being Messianic, 'Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men', v. 18. This quotation appears in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, although the wording is slightly revised, 'Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men', 4. 8. Whist this article focuses on verse 18, it may be of benefit to begin by making some introductory comments.

Author

The heading of the psalm states that it is 'A Psalm or Song of David'. He composed at least half of the psalms that were sung in the religious ceremonial activities of the Jewish people, and for that reason he is called the 'sweet psalmist of Israel', 2 Sam. 23. 1. The heading also informs us that the psalm was to be given to the 'chief musician'. The 'chief musician' was the man who directed the music for the singing of the psalm and, in David's time, Asaph was that man.

Occasion

There is considerable debate amongst expositors as to what prompted David to write this psalm, but one possible occasion relates to the return of the Ark of the Covenant from the house of Obadedom to Jerusalem. The details of this final journey are recorded in 2 Samuel chapter 6 and 1 Chronicles chapters 13 to 16, and, as the procession made its way, there was singing, rejoicing and music; it was a scene of ecstatic joy.

Verse 1 is almost identical to a verse in Numbers, 'And it came to pass, when the ark set forward, that

Moses said, Rise up, Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee', 10. 35. Whenever the ark moved forward triumphantly in the wilderness, Moses would quote these words. David repeats them in verse 1 because the ark was moving in triumph back to Jerusalem – the only occasion in David's reign when the ark was moved.

Outline

There are several subdivisions in the psalm, but it contains two principal sections. Verses 1 to 18 relate to the past, and verses 19 to 35 look on to the future; the psalm, therefore, is both historic and prophetic. The historic section does not refer to Israel's failings in the wilderness but to the power and faithfulness of God to Israel in liberating them from Egypt, leading them through the wilderness and locating them safely in Canaan.

Whilst the opening half of the psalm has already taken place, the psalm awaits its complete fulfilment in the millennial reign of Christ. It heralds the ultimate victory of the Lord over every rebel opposition to His entitlement to reign as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Captivity captive

There are differences of opinion relative to the interpretation of the words 'captivity captive', but I believe an examination of its occurrences in the Old Testament will help to clarify its meaning in Ephesians. The phrase occurs three times in the scriptures, two have already been mentioned in this article and the other occurrence is in Judges chapter 5 verse 12, 'Awake, awake, Deborah: awake, awake, utter a song: arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive, thou son of Abinoam'.

Due to their disobedience, the Lord sold the Israelites into the hand of Jabin, king of Canaan, and for twenty years they were in captivity. Having eventually repented of their waywardness, God's people were liberated, and in the last verse of Judges chapter 4 we read, 'And the hand of the children of Israel prospered, and prevailed against Jabin the king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin king of Canaan'. The whole of chapter 5 is taken up with the triumphal song of Deborah and Barak, and it is against the backdrop of Israel's liberation and the defeat of Jabin that in verse 12 we read about captivity being led captive. Those who once held Israel captive are themselves now held in captivity.

As already noted, the first half of Psalm 68 is historic, tracing God's majesty, power and faithfulness in not only freeing Israel from the Egyptian bondage but settling them into their own land. *En route* they were opposed by various enemies, but God led Israel to victory removing every form of opposition. PHILLIPS states, 'Alien kings fled in terror from many a battlefield. The victorious Hebrews, flushed with victories handed them by God, would go through the abandoned tents of the enemy collecting the spoil. The women at home would divide the spoils of war brought back by the triumphant troops'.¹

We see therefore that in the passage in Judges and in Psalm 68, the phrase 'captivity captive' refers to victories achieved, of foes being defeated and of spoils being shared. As that is how the phrase is used in the Old Testament, I see no reason to deviate from that usage in Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

All too frequently we limit the events that transpired at Calvary to what, by God's grace, has come to us, but this is a very limited perspective. We are deeply grateful that our Saviour bore our sins in His own body on the tree, but He did much more than that. At the cross the Lord defeated the devil and annulled his power over death, 'that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil', Heb. 2. 14. In fulfilment

of the prophecy made in Eden, the seed of the woman had bruised the head of the serpent, Gen. 3. 15.

At the cross our Lord also defeated the varied ranks of Satanic forces. What seemed to human eyes to be a tragic defeat was in fact the greatest of all victories. At Calvary, the unseen powers of darkness were utterly routed, 'having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it', Col. 2. 15. In relation to this verse, VINE in his *Expository Dictionary* writes, 'There is no doubt that Satan and his hosts gathered together to attack the soul of Christ . . . the powers of darkness gathered against the Lord at that time, fiercely assaulting Him to the utmost of their power'. Despite His physical sufferings, the Lord repulsed their attack and completely overthrew His demonic assailants and thereby 'captivity had been led captive'. The full proof of that victory was demonstrated three days after His crucifixion when the Lord rose from the dead and subsequently ascended to take His place at the right hand of the majesty on high.

Gave gifts unto men

Although the apostle makes mention of the ascension in verses 7 to 10, his primary reason for quoting Psalm 68 was not to show that the Lord's ascension had been foreshadowed in Old Testament writings. He quotes David to substantiate the truth

that he had just declared in verse 7, 'unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ'. There are several passages in the New Testament that tell us about spiritual gifts and from them we learn that each member of the godhead is involved in those gifts being given; in Ephesians the giver is Christ. Those gifts, which are itemised in verse 11, were not given by Christ whilst He was on earth but were consequent to His ascension and exaltation.

We have already observed that there is a difference in the quotation made by Paul in Ephesians to that written by the psalmist. David stated, 'thou hast received gifts for men', whereas in the Epistle it states that the ascended Christ 'gave gifts unto men'. Just as there is a great diversity of opinion in relation to the phrase 'captivity captive' so there is as to why Paul changed the wording in the phrase now being considered. One explanation is that Paul was not following the genuine text of the psalm but was quoting an old Jewish interpretation that he was familiar with, and which, instead of 'received gifts among men', paraphrased 'gave gifts to men'.

Another explanation for the difference relates to the contents of the psalm and of the Epistle. Psalm 68 focuses upon Israel and God's triumphs. Therefore, David thinks of the mighty victor receiving gifts because of His

conquests on behalf of Israel. The Apostle Paul is writing about the Christ and the church which is His body. He understands Psalm 68 as referring to Christ who, having triumphed over the infernal hosts and ascending to heaven, now dispenses gifts for the benefit of His people, the church.

MCBRIDE in his commentary on Psalm 68 presents the following suggestion, 'The gifts which the risen and ascended Lord gives to men are the captives themselves . . . a true servant of God is one who primarily sees himself as a captive servant of the Lord. He has forfeited all his own rights to the service of his heavenly Lord, his risen Head and in this he finds true freedom and the commensurate divine enabling to carry out the ministry with which God has entrusted him.

However, the risen Lord has looked among His captives, and has taken up gifts "in the man" i.e. taken up individual persons he has captured and redeemed and even though they were once avowedly "rebellious" to the throne of God are now gifts which He can now give to His church in His service'.²

Conclusion

The psalm concludes by presenting a millennial scene as Israel, which once was under the heel of the Gentiles, is strengthened by God. The worship of the beast, that was enforced on all peoples, has been eradicated, and the temple at Jerusalem becomes the centre of God's global worship, 'Because of thy temple at Jerusalem shall kings bring presents unto thee . . . Sing unto God, ye kingdoms of the earth; O sing praises unto the Lord; Selah: To him that rideth upon the heavens of heavens, which were of old; lo, he doth send out his voice, and that a mighty voice. Ascribe ye strength unto God: his excellency is over Israel, and his strength is in the clouds', vv. 29, 32-34.

Endnotes

- 1 JOHN PHILLIPS, *Exploring Psalms Volume 1*, Kregel Publications.
- 2 W. T. MCBRIDE, *Meditations in the Messianic Psalms*, Crimond House Publications.



PERSONALITIES IN THE NATIVITY

MARY

By **MICHAEL WILKIE** Inverness, Scotland

The woman who was chosen by God to be the mother of the Lord Jesus was a woman who combined a remarkable ordinariness with an equally remarkable greatness. In one sense, she was no different from any other woman, and yet, in another sense, she stands absolutely alone in her greatness. She is a character well worthy of study. Of course, it is important that in considering the life of this remarkable woman we must maintain a scriptural balance, avoiding, on one hand, the error of making her a goddess and an object of worship, while, at the same time, ensuring that we give her the honour that her godliness deserves.

In chronological terms she comes to our attention first as ‘a virgin espoused to a man’, Luke 1. 27. Notice, firstly, her ordinariness in this. Socially, she was just a young girl, in a nondescript town. Spiritually, she was no different to the rest of humanity – she was afraid at the presence of the angel, and spoke of God as her Saviour, v. 47. Intellectually, she was perplexed when Gabriel revealed to her that a physiological impossibility was about to be her experience.¹ The Spirit of God is thus emphasizing to us that Mary was no superhuman, no queen of heaven. And yet it is against this background of ordinariness that scripture reveals to us something of the true nobility of her spirit. First, her moral purity is emphasized. Her own testimony in verse 34 is, ‘I know not a man’, and this is confirmed by the statement of Matthew that these things happened ‘before they came together’, Matt. 1. 18. We must not forget that God forbids sexual relations outside of the marriage bond. Then, also, her spiritual greatness is demonstrated by her submissiveness to the will of God for her. When Gabriel tells her that she has been chosen to tread a path that will lead to the (undeserved!) ruin of her reputation, there is no hesitation on her part, no reluctance, no giving way to self-interest – her simple

statement is, ‘Be it unto me according to thy word’, v. 38. Let us challenge ourselves in the light of this – what is our response to the will of God? Are we resistant, and faithless, or do we bow before the wisdom of Him whose heart ‘is most wonderfully kind’.² May God give us all a confidence in Himself that will lead us to submit to His will in every situation of life! Remember, incidentally, that in circumstances such as Mary’s, there is nothing wrong with asking questions of God – Mary herself asks, ‘How shall this be?’ v. 34. The attitude of her heart, however, is different from Zacharias in chapter 1 – his unbelief led him to doubt the word of God, whereas Mary merely has a godly curiosity as to the means by which God will accomplish that which He has said He will do.

The next scene in which Mary is shown to us is the house of Zacharias, Luke 1. 39-56. Again, notice the ordinariness. In a situation where God has brought her into strange circumstances, a young godly woman turns to an older godly woman who has been through a similar experience. There is great wisdom in this – God has given believers to each other, and we ought to draw comfort and strength from each other. There can be a great danger in following

the advice of unbelievers in times of spiritual crisis, since they cannot be expected to give us godly counsel.³ But we see also that Mary, despite her youth, is not a spiritual novice – she has a deep understanding of God, as shown by her song in verses 46 to 55. Look at the sort of things that she sings about: the joy of knowing God as Saviour, v. 47; the holiness of God’s name, v. 49; the fact that God is a God of mercy, v. 50, power, v. 51, and grace, vv. 52, 53; the fact that God keeps His promises, vv. 54, 55. There is a very simple yet profound lesson here – those who know their God will find it possible to sing even when the future seems very dark. Many of the things that are found in Mary’s song are quotations from the Old Testament. The challenge comes to us all. Do we know our Bibles well enough to be able to sing like this in times of crisis? We would do well to follow Mary’s example here.

After the birth of the Lord Jesus, the next time we see Mary is in the temple. As a devout Israelite, she has come to present her son to God, and to offer to the Lord that which the Law required. Once more she is seen as an ordinary woman – having given birth to a child, she must offer a sacrifice for her purification, like any other Jewish mother. Not only that, but all that she can bring is the smallest offering that the Law permitted – ‘a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons’, 2. 24. The reference is to Leviticus chapter 12 verse 8, where God takes account of the fact that not every woman would be able to afford a lamb. Far from being a woman in a rich and prosperous family, Mary’s resources were so few that she had to take advantage of the graciousness of God in not demanding more from His people than they are able to bring. Let us never forget that the home in which our Lord grew up was not a wealthy one as far as the world estimates these things.⁴

And yet, even in the midst of her ordinariness, we see more gleams of Mary’s greatness. By her very presence in the temple she is demonstrating her submission to the word of God – the attitude of heart that she showed in chapter 1 verse 38 has not been impaired by her entry into



motherhood. It is always encouraging to see a believer whose enthusiasm for the things of God is not diminished when family responsibilities come along. Furthermore, let us note the other purpose for Mary's attendance at the Temple – she came 'to present him to the Lord', v. 22. In other words, she acknowledges that God has first claim on her family. In Exodus chapter 22 verse 29, Jehovah declares that 'the firstborn of thy sons shalt thou give unto me'. This is a great challenge to every believer – what do we want for our children? Are our ambitions for them restricted merely to earthly things (a career, a home, marriage, a family), or do we have spiritual desires for them? In other words, are we prepared to give them to God, and let Him use their lives for His glory?

The Temple is also the setting for the final scene involving Mary in the early life of the Lord Jesus, in the well-known incident in Luke chapter 2 verses 41 to 52, which occurred when He was twelve years of age. Once again, her ordinariness is evident in the series of mistakes that she makes. First, she makes a wrong assumption – presuming that He is in the family group as they journey home. This leads to a needless emotion – she spends three days of sorrow, searching for Him. The outcome is an unfair action. She gives expression to her [understandable!] anxiety and criticizes Him for what she perceives to be His thoughtlessness. Notice

the significance of this – a wrong assumption about what the Son of God was doing ended up in an unwarranted criticism of Him, and drew forth a rebuke from Him. Sadly, we too can be guilty of the same thing, and call into question the way that God deals with us. Let us ever bear in mind that in His dealings with us the Son of God is always 'about His Father's business'.

But even here, amidst all this all-too-human weakness, the greatness of Mary's character shines through once more. Firstly, notice that she had made it her custom to attend the occasions when the people of God were gathered together, and that she did so along with her husband. Is this true of each of us as well? Remember that the command of scripture is that we are not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, Heb. 10. 25; remember, also, that there are incalculable benefits of regular attendance at the assembly gatherings – not the least of which is that if I am habitually among the Lord's people, it is there that I (and my family!) will form the relationships that so often prove to be a support in Christian experience. I cannot expect to have Christian friends if I do not spend time with the Christians! Secondly, let us notice the way that Mary learns from her interaction with the Saviour. Having been gently rebuked by Him she does not (as others might have done) succumb to resentment or despair, but thoughtfully treasures

up His words, and makes them the daily food of her heart. There is great spiritual maturity in this – it is often the case that the greatness of a saint is seen not in their strong points, but in how they respond when their weak points are revealed. Mary goes through the uncomfortable experience of having to realize that her anger at what the Lord had put her through was unjustified, but she uses that experience to grow in the things of God. And the wonderful result of those years of thoughtful meditation is evident the next time we see her. A problem arises at the wedding in Cana of Galilee, and having told the Lord all about the problem she is able, with the moral authority borne out of the previous eighteen years' experience, to turn to the servants and say to them, 'No matter what He asks you to do, no matter how unusual His instruction may be, I have learned from experience that it will be to your advantage to do as He tells you'.

Let us leave her there – this greatest of all women, whose character can be summed up in the two wonderful expressions that 'bookend' the early years of the Lord's life: 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word'; 'Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it'. May something of her character be seen in us!

Endnotes

- 1 Remember that this also shows us that Mary was no credulous young girl, ready to believe any miraculous-sounding story – she knew that children are conceived by one means and one means only.
- 2 FABER'S hymn ('There's a wideness in God's mercy') goes on to say: *'If our love were but more faithful, we should take him at his word; and our life would be thanksgiving for the goodness of the Lord'*. Such words could well have been spoken of Mary!
- 3 This, of course, does not mean that we are to avoid, for example, seeking medical advice in times when that is needed. The point is that we ought to value the scriptural counsel of those who are mature in the things of God, more than the suggestions of those who are not acquainted with our heavenly Father.
- 4 It is remarkable that God gave His Son to two poor people (Joseph and Mary) to raise and to two rich people (Joseph and Nicodemus) to bury. God does not need material wealth to create conditions where godliness can flourish.

THE EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

By **WILLIAM M. BANKS** Hamilton, Scotland

Part 3

The two prayers, vv. 3-14 (continued)

The two prayers can be outlined as follows:

- 1 Thanksgiving, vv. 3-8 – two hearings:
'Since we heard of your faith . . . love . . . hope', vv. 3-5;
'Ye heard', vv. 5-8. Note it is stated twice, vv. 5, 6.
- 2 Petition, vv. 9-14 – two requests:
'That ye might be', v. 9;
'That ye might walk', vv. 10-14.¹

The second prayer – petition, vv. 9-14

The inbuilt couplet is again apparent in this prayer. In the first case the apostle and Timothy, linked with him again in united exercise, are praying 'that ye might be'. They desire that character will be built, before praying 'that ye might walk'. This, of course, is always the divine order. What we are is more important than what we do and should be the springboard for it – our scriptural standing and conviction leads to proper behaviour. There are six references to prayer in the Epistle.²

'That ye might be filled', v. 9

The communication from Epaphras led to an intelligent basis for the apostle's prayer. In other words, his prayer was specific, not general like many of our public prayers today. He wasted no time in initiating his request, 'from the day we heard it', and being consistent in it, 'do not cease', cf. 1. 3. The heart of the apostle was in the request, 'and to desire'. To desire is to pray, the two ideas are intimately linked – the one the inner emotion, the other the outward expression.

The details of the filling which the apostle desires are bursting with richness, vitality and intensity; **knowledge** (full knowledge), **wisdom** and **understanding**.³ The qualifying descriptors are telling; he wants them

to be **full** of knowledge in **all** wisdom and **spiritual** understanding. This is unparalleled spiritual territory.

- Filled with the **full knowledge** of His will. The basis of knowing His will is clearly articulated in Romans chapter 2 verse 18, 'And knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law'. It comes about only through a thorough knowledge of the word ('the law') – essentially an awareness and accumulation of scriptural facts or material which can then be used as an appropriate base to do His will.⁴ Many today want to know 'the will of God' for their lives; there is no shortcut; it takes 'blood, sweat and tears' – reading, praying, meditating, waiting, patience – there is no easy road to be 'filled with the full knowledge of His will'! This is spiritual territory!
- The fullness of the wisdom – 'in **all wisdom**'. 'Wisdom' occurs six times in the Epistle.⁵ It includes the whole range of mental faculties, applying the facts obtained by the above knowledge to a particular situation. The whole of life's choices are involved – spiritual and secular – including assembly responsibilities (exercise of gift, general contributions), career, marriage, location etc.
- The **spiritual understanding** – this is intellectual discernment based on spiritual saturation, resulting in the ability to differentiate between the false and the true, the good and the bad – thus, full knowledge and wisdom leads to right choices and behaviour – approving 'things that are excellent', Phil. 1. 9, 10.

The fundamental requirement for implementing all of the above is 'the

fear of the Lord'. 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge', Prov. 1. 7; 'the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding', 9. 10. The three ideas can be summarized as follows: knowledge is perception, moral **cognition**; wisdom is ethical and spiritual **conduct**; understanding is insight, perception, spiritual discernment, leading to **control**.

'That ye might walk worthy of the Lord', vv. 10-14

The apostle is now desirous that what they are by the implementation of the weighty truths of verse 9 will be worked out in a worthy walk in the sphere of the Lordship of Christ. Having laid the spiritual foundation in verse 9, he now desires appropriate devotion. PEAKE notes, 'Doctrine and ethics are for Paul inseparable'.⁶ The idea behind the word 'worthy' is that of equal weight, i.e., spiritual truth should have adequate corresponding outworking in the Christian life, cp. 2. 6; 4. 5. We have to walk worthy of our calling, Eph. 4. 1; of the gospel, Phil. 1. 27; and of God, 1 Thess. 2. 12. All of this is to be done with the objective of bringing pleasure to God, seeking to please God in every aspect of life, 'unto all pleasing', not merely pleasing others, v. 10.

The worthy walk of the believer is then seen in four governing participles in verses 10 to 12; bearing fruit, growing (increasing), being strengthened and giving thanks.⁷ The first two are related, as they are in verse 6.

- '**Being fruitful** in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God', or 'Bearing fruit in every good work and growing by the true knowledge of God', v. 10 JND. These two features, bearing fruit and growing, were seen to be a unique feature of the gospel in verse 6. Those who embrace the gospel should take on its features. There is, however, a very important difference in the grammar involved. In verse 6, the verb is in the middle voice indicating that the power is inherent in the gospel itself; in verse 10, it is the active voice indicating the personal responsibility of the believer for both bearing fruit and growing.^{8,9} In addition, the tenses in

verse 10 are in the present tense, and therefore continuance, indicating an ongoing responsibility.

- **‘Increasing** in the knowledge of God’, v. 10. This phrase is looked at separately to ask whether the idea is locative – growing in knowledge – or instrumental – growing by knowledge. DARBY is in no doubt that it is instrumental. Perhaps this is fitting in the development of knowledge in the chapter. In verse 6, there is knowledge of the grace of God; in verse 9, knowledge of the will of God, and now knowledge of God Himself. The knowledge of God is to be the means of their spiritual growth. The development is intrinsic; it will lead surely to increased fruit in the life of the believer.
- **Being ‘strengthened** [found only once in the New Testament =



dunamoo] with all might [*dunamis*] according to his glorious power [the power (dominion = *kratos*) of His glory – manifested excellence]’, v. 11. Note the three important words related to power, cf. Eph. 1. 19, 20; Rom. 6. 4. ‘The power which Paul and Timothy long to see manifested in their readers’ lives is the power of God himself—nothing less’.¹⁰ The objective of the strengthening is ‘unto all patience [endurance] and longsuffering with joyfulness’. The idea behind the word patience is that of restraint (not to retaliate a wrong) or calm sweetness, cf. 1 Cor. 13. 4; Gal. 5. 22. The lack of despondency and revenge and the presence of joyfulness are seen in the experience of Paul and Silas at Philippi in Acts chapter 16 verse 25.

- **‘Giving thanks** unto the Father’, vv. 12-14. This last participle is really an expression of worship (cf. ‘walk’ and ‘work’ in verse 10) for four reasons which are expanded in the succeeding verses. The Father has ‘made us’, ‘delivered us’, ‘translated us’, and redeemed us. We should be a thankful people!

The Father has ‘**made us** meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light’. Believers are qualified, based on grace, to have a share in the inheritance of the saints in light. That there is an inheritance is clearly articulated elsewhere in our New Testament, 1 Pet. 1. 4. But in this case it is being shared with others now. Walking ‘in the light’ is the current sphere in which the believer moves, 1 John 1. 7. While we share this with saints of the present dispensation, there could be a reference to Old Testament saints as well who also anticipated a glorious future inheritance, cf. Heb. 11. 10, 16; 12. 23.

We have been ‘**delivered** . . . from the power of darkness’. This was the ruling principle of the region we occupied before conversion. It is evident in current society, with the god of this world very much in control. The errors to the fore in the epistle emanate from this source. They are in direct contrast to the sphere of ‘light’ mentioned above in which the believer moves. These dark forces were overcome at Calvary in the triumph of the Lord

Jesus ‘having spoiled principalities and powers’, 2. 15.

The Father has ‘**translated us** into the kingdom of his dear Son’ – the One who is the object ‘of His love’.¹¹ This kingdom is both present and eschatological, Rom. 8. 30; Phil. 1. 6. The believer has the honour of sharing presently the affections of the Father for His Son in a kingdom of love, and the glad prospect of sharing in a millennial kingdom which will demonstrate the Son’s sovereignty to a wondering world. It will not be under the authority of angelic beings as the Colossian teachers of error would anticipate, but under the sway of the man who destroyed every opposing foe by His triumph at Calvary.¹²

We have also been **redeemed** [*apolutrosis*]. The word involved here means ‘a releasing, for (i.e., on payment of) a ransom’.¹³ It is linked with forgiveness and justification, redemption as the result of expiation, deliverance from the guilt of sins, Rom. 3. 24; ‘through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus’, Eph. 1. 7; defined as ‘the forgiveness of our trespasses’ RV; so, Colossians chapter 1 verse 14, ‘the forgiveness of sins’, indicating both the liberation from the guilt and doom of sin and the introduction into a life of liberty. Its basis is ‘through his blood’ as the ransom price paid, and its effect ‘the forgiveness of sins’.

Endnotes

- 1 This outline is carried over from the last article by way of continuity.
- 2 1. 3, 9; 2. 1; 4. 2, 3, 12.
- 3 Cf. 2. 2, 3 and Prov. 3. 19, 20 for the same three words.
- 4 See Col. 4. 12; Rom. 12. 2; 1 Tim. 2. 4; 1 Thess. 5. 18.
- 5 1. 9, 28; 2. 3, 23; 3. 16; 4. 5.
- 6 A. S. PEAKE, *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, Vol. 3, Hodder and Stoughton, 1903.
- 7 H. ALFORD, *The Greek New Testament*, Vol. 3, Moody Press, 1968.
- 8 W. E. VINE, *Colossians in The Collected Writings of W. E. Vine*, Gospel Tract Publications, 1985.
- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 F. F. BRUCE, *The Epistle to the Colossians*, William B. Erdmans Publishing Company, 1984.
- 11 J. B. LIGHTFOOT, *Saint Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, Zondervan Publishing House, 1879 Edition.
- 12 Cf. 2. 18 and Heb. 2. 5-8.
- 13 W. E. VINE, *Amplified Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, World.

THE GOSPEL OF MARK

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

Part 4

The ministry begins, vv. 14-20 (continued)

The call of the ministry, vv. 16-20

It seems clear from Mark's structure of events that those who accepted the Lord's preaching were few. Rather than the multitude, there were four disciples who were prepared to leave their nets and follow the Saviour. Their call has a number of practical lessons:

- It was beyond social class – Simon and Andrew were 'casting a net', v. 16, in the relative shallows of the sea indicating they operated at a different level to that of James and John who were 'in the ship', v. 19.
- It required immediate obedience – in both cases Mark emphasizes 'and straightway', vv. 18, 20.
- It necessitated a complete break with the past – scripture clearly records, 'they forsook their nets', v. 18, and 'they left their father', v. 20.¹
- It meant a close fellowship with the Saviour and a desire to learn of Him – 'and followed him', v. 18, and 'went after him', v. 20. Wherever the Saviour leads the disciple will go!
- It preceded service – 'I will make you to become fishers of men', v. 17. The sense of these words indicates a slow process in making them soul winners. It would be in the measure that they went after the Saviour and learned of Him that they would be schooled to be 'fishers of men'.²
- Although it had a cost, the Lord is no man's debtor – 'Zebedee ... with

the hired servants', v. 20. Although James and John must have been key figures in the fishing business of their father, Luke tells us of the catch that was left to Zebedee when the Saviour called his sons, and here Mark adds that the hired servants would assist him in what the future held.

- It involved men with different skills – 'casting a net', v. 16, and 'mending their nets', v. 19. Different gifts would be needed in the service of God and each of the four would serve in different ways.

The man with the unclean spirit, vv. 21-28

It is this miracle that Mark chooses to mention first in his gospel. It is a miracle that tells us of the need of the Servant's ministry and the authority with which that ministry is to be accomplished. The key words would be 'astonished' and 'authority', for what the Saviour did was met with astonishment and what He did manifested His authority both in His words and in His deeds.

The surprise, vv. 21, 22

The Lord makes His way to the synagogue as the place where the people would gather on the Sabbath day. It is a place that gives Him opportunity to teach, a discourse of some length, and an audience that seemed ready to hear.

Mark does not record the content of the Lord's message but He does record its effect, 'They were astonished at his doctrine', v. 22. WUEST comments, 'They were astonished, *ekplesso*, a very strong word meaning, to strike with panic, shock in a passive sense to be struck with astonishment, amazed. The verb is in the pictorial imperfect, describing the prolonged amazement

of the audience'.³ Mark's phraseology suggests that the astonishment was twofold. They were astonished at what He taught and the manner in which He taught. Their amazement was also ongoing. It continued throughout His discourse as new truth upon new truth was uttered. They were shocked out of their normal slumber, surprised by what they heard, stunned by the One who spoke.

Their conclusion was that the Saviour was a man who 'taught them as one that had authority', v. 22. He did not rely upon the teachings of others. He did not rely upon tradition and ritual. The Saviour spoke with a freshness and with an authority that was His own, derived from none other. What a testimony to the words of the Saviour.

The scene, v. 23

What makes the event remarkable is the scene in which it takes place. Mark tells us that 'there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit'. It was 'their synagogue'. Although it was a place that they had set aside for the worship of God and the teaching of the law, it was clearly their place and not one that was owned of God. This is underlined by the fact that in the midst of the synagogue was this man possessed with an unclean spirit. ALAN COLE comments, 'it is a strange commentary on the spiritual condition of Capernaum that a demoniac could worship in their synagogue with no sense of incongruity, until confronted by Jesus'.⁴ The addition of the word 'unclean' exposes the nature of the possession. The spirit was impure, morally foul, and likely to render the man the same.

Mark does not tell us but we are liable to speculate upon how long this possessed man had been in the synagogue and how often he had attended. It would appear obvious that his presence had not been detected or exposed until the Saviour came and until He spoke.

The statement, v. 24

The presence of the Saviour causes this spirit to cry out, v. 23. The tension between the Saviour and the spirit was obvious as they were in moral and

spiritual opposition. That opposition is clear from what the spirit said. He bore testimony to the Saviour.

- His purity – ‘what have we to do with thee’; ‘the Holy One’. He spoke of the utter incompatibility of the two: unclean spirit and the Saviour. The Lord is the Holy One. The unclean spirit is from the evil one. They have nothing in common and their interests are completely separate. As such they repel each other and, hence, the cry of the one possessed.
- His person – ‘Jesus of Nazareth’; ‘the Holy One of God’. What a testimony to the fact that here, in the person of the Saviour, was God manifest in flesh.
- His power – ‘let us alone’; ‘art thou come to destroy us?’ The spirit testifies clearly to the ability that the Saviour has. He could, if and when He chooses, destroy this evil spirit and all those kindred spirits. The Saviour had come to destroy the works of the devil and the time could come.

The statement of the spirit is also remarkable in what it tells us of the spirit world. The man speaks as the mouthpiece for the unseen demon world. He expresses their fears and their expectation and testifies to the authority of the Saviour Himself.

The silence, v. 25

The Saviour does not welcome the testimony of the man with the unclean spirit. He has nothing in common with the unclean and evil world and does not seek, by default or by silence, to be associated with it. Hence, the man and the unclean spirit must be silenced and the man delivered. The Saviour issues His rebuke and His twofold command.

The language used is strong. The rebuke does not bring the unclean spirit to a conviction or acknowledgement of sin, but it is issued as a means of enforcing the silence that the Saviour requires. The phrase ‘hold thy peace’ is to muzzle the cry of the spirit and is followed by that command that will bring the release of the man.



The language used is simple. Only eight words are recorded as spoken by the Saviour. There is no elaborate ritual. The authoritative word of the Saviour is sufficient.

The struggle, v. 26

Though the unclean spirit must obey the command of the Saviour, for it is powerless to resist, it does not do so without a struggle. The man is convulsed in a spasm that affects his whole body. A loud shriek is uttered, whether in defeat or seeming defiance is not clear. Finally, Luke tells us that the man was thrown into the midst of the synagogue.

The struggle is short. The foe is defeated. The Saviour is triumphant. The victory is decisive and conclusive, ‘he came out of him’.

The story, vv. 27, 28

As the teaching of the Saviour sent a wave of surprise and shock through the synagogue, so this act of deliverance for the possessed man brought a fresh wave of shock and a resulting animated discussion.

Marks tells us, ‘they were all amazed’, v. 27. It affected all the members of the synagogue. They were

frightened, awe-struck at what they had witnessed. The sad thing was that their discussion was one that focused upon the words and actions of the Saviour. They ‘questioned among themselves’, v. 27. There was no thought for the person who could accomplish such things or command with such power. HIEBERT comments, ‘How pathetic it is that they were occupied with the effect and failed to enquire further about the person before them’.⁵

From that animated discussion within the synagogue, Mark tells us, ‘His fame spread abroad throughout all the region’, v. 28. The story was told. The message was spread.

Endnotes

- 1 ‘The prefixed preposition implies a separation, here, a separation from the fishing business to the preaching of the Word of God. The participle is in the aorist tense, speaking of a once for all action. It was a complete break from their former life, and a permanent one’, WUEST, pg. 29.
- 2 ‘The call implied the need for intensive training for the new task’, HIEBERT, pg. 46.
- 3 WUEST, pg. 30.
- 4 ALAN COLE, *Mark. An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Press, 1969, pg. 61.
- 5 HIEBERT, pg. 52.

What does the Bible tell us about the future? Part 1

THE LAST DAYS OF THE CHURCH ON EARTH

By **STEPHEN BAKER** Liverpool, England

A very high percentage of the Bible is about the future. Some people estimate that over a quarter of the Bible deals with future events. Having said that, we need to bear in mind that the truth of the church was hidden in the Old Testament and not revealed until New Testament days. Therefore, we should not expect to find predictions about the conditions in the world during the last days of the church on earth in the Old Testament. On this basis, this article will be based on New Testament references.

Before I continue I need to clarify two things:

- 1 What I mean by the word 'church', and;
- 2 That I believe that the church will not always be on earth and so there will be a day when it is taken from earth to heaven.

These two issues will provide a framework for us to work within when considering our question.

What the word 'church' means?

The word 'church' in some ways is an unfortunate translation of the Greek word *ekklesia*. Most dictionaries explain the word as meaning 'the called people'. TYNDALE is famous for translating the word as 'congregation', reminding us that the word is describing people who meet together for a specific reason. It has been used mainly in a religious context, but the word is also used for civic/public meetings, Acts 19. 39, 41.

The first two references to the church in the New Testament are found in Matthew chapters 16 and 18. These two references explain the two aspects of

the church that are taught in the New Testament.

Matthew chapter 16 describes what I am going to call 'the dispensational church'. It is made up of every believer from the commencement of the church on the Day of Pentecost, Acts 2, to its completion at the coming of Christ, 1 Thess. 4. It is called 'his body' in Ephesians chapter 1 verse 23. In the same chapter, verse 22, we learn that the Lord Jesus Christ is 'head over all things to the church'.

In summary, based on Matthew chapter 16 verses 18 and 19, the dispensational church (and therefore all local churches):

- 1 Is built on Christ who is the foundation;
- 2 Is owned by the Lord Jesus – 'my church';
- 3 Is growing and will grow until the Lord Jesus returns;
- 4 Is the focus of the devil's destructive activity;
- 5 Will never be destroyed by Satan's power;
- 6 Represents the authority of Christ on earth.

The word when used in Matthew chapter 18 verses 15 to 20, clearly refers to a situation where a person, while trying to sort out a personal dispute, comes to the 'church' to request a decision. In this section there is a reference made to decisions that are made on earth being corroborated in heaven. This is similar to what is said in Matthew 16, but the point seems to be that of the authority vested in a local church as opposed to the authority that was vested in Peter as is seen fulfilled in Acts chapters 2, 8, 10 and 11.

One day, the church will be taken from earth to heaven.

This subject will be dealt with later in this series, so I will not elaborate save to say that the church will one day be taken from earth to heaven. Not all of the church is on earth, as many of the saints have died, Eph. 3. 15, 1 Thess. 4. 15, 17. The Lord Jesus promised that He would come again for His own in John chapter 14 verse 3 and many other passages either hint at or teach this truth. For example, John chapter 17 verse 24 and 1 Thessalonians chapter 4.

So, what will the world look like in the last days of the church on earth?

The key passages to look at for this detail are 2 Thessalonians chapter 2, 2 Timothy chapter 3, 2 Peter chapter 2, and Revelation chapters 2 and 3.

The expression 'last days' is a significant one when we are looking at this subject. Whilst we cannot be dogmatic as to when the last days are, we can see from these passages the characteristics and moral features of 'last days'.

2 Thessalonians 2

In this passage, the Apostle Paul is explaining the conditions that will be in place when the 'man of sin' will be revealed. By comparing numerous passages, we conclude that this will not happen until the church has been translated to heaven. However, the characteristics of this period are clearly seen in this passage.

Verse 3 – there will be a major rebellion against God; the scripture calls it 'a falling away'.

Verse 10 – there will have been a

refusal to love the truth, that is the truth of God as revealed in scripture. This refusal reflects the aggressive denial of the need of salvation by human beings.

Verse 12 – the refusal to believe the truth is a result of, and also the means by which, that generation will delight and have pleasure in unrighteousness. Like Noah's generation and Lot's generation, the people get their thrills from wicked pursuits.

2 Timothy 3

This passage specifically claims to be describing last days.

In verse 1, Paul says that these are terrible days of difficulty – unpleasant, evil days. The following list makes for very unpleasant reading. The people of that day, which sounds very much like ours, are selfish, egotistical, materialistic, super-assertive, arrogant and proud, abusive, ungrateful, unforgiving and focused on pleasure.

I have not gone down the list and quoted each description, you can do that on your own, but you can see for yourself that the conditions that are described as 'last days' are indeed 'terrible times', v. 1.

We must be careful in case we see this list as just describing the lower end of a selfish and violent society. This is a list that covers all of society. The rich and the poor, the powerful and the down-trodden; all strata of society are included. The key is found in verse 5, 'having a form of godliness but denying its power'. In a society where 'evil is called good, and good is called evil', morals are severely messed up and what might appear moral, is actually done in denial of all that pleases God.

2 Peter 2

Peter adds his voice to the description of conditions in the last days.

In verse 1, we learn that there will be those who teach error. The false teaching is so bad that it is described as 'destructive heresies'. It is off-the-wall error that destroys the truth of God and destroys those who fall under its evil spell. The main error relates to the person of Christ and the work of salvation, v. 2. These false teachers will

attract a great following, v. 3. This is similar to the warning that Paul gave to the Ephesian elders in Acts chapter 20.

The false teachers of the last days will exploit the people of God with 'made up stories', v. 3. In other words, they are fully aware that they are deceiving people and doing it for personal profit. The judgement that is pronounced reflects the severity of the sin of false teaching and false teachers.

Revelation 2 and 3

These chapters can be used as a template to describe conditions in the church, as well as in the world, before the Lord Jesus returns to the air. The seven churches of Asia Minor can be looked at **prophetically** – as a timeline from Pentecost to the rapture or **morally** – conditions that could exist at any one point in time in church history.

Prophetically – from this standpoint the church in Laodicea describes the church in the period of time just before the Lord comes. Look at the low moral state and spiritual character of this local church. Sadly, the moral/spiritual state of the world is often reflected in the state of the church.

This is a church that is lukewarm. There is little reality or conviction. The Lord finds it spurious and distasteful. This church sees itself as rich and in need of nothing, but the Lord describes their real condition as 'wretched, and miserable, and poor and blind and naked'. It would appear that recovery in these days will be on an individual basis, as the Lord appeals for individuals to 'open the door' for Him to come in.

Morally – this view of the seven churches reminds us to be aware of the low spiritual condition that could exist in any local church. Every generation, potentially, faces the same problems and can demonstrate 'last day' characteristics in their behaviour.

Here are some key examples: the increase of satanic activity in some locations will have devastating effect on church testimony, Rev. 2. 13. The changing role of women and the seduction of false religion will bring divine judgement, v. 20.

The constant theme of overcoming and the rewards that relate to the future reign of Christ on earth, would remind us that these conditions will exist right up until the coming of the Lord.¹

As I conclude this article may I add this comment. Many passages of scripture describe conditions that will exist in the world after the church has been taken to be with the Lord. While I cannot be dogmatic about this suggestion, I do not think that these evil conditions will suddenly commence when the church goes. From 2 Thessalonians chapter 2, we know that lawlessness is already working in the world, but that there will come a point when its progress will no longer be impeded. I judge that in verse 7 the Spirit of God is hindering the full advancement of evil while the church is still in the world. At the point of the church's removal, the Spirit of God will also go. Just as the Spirit came at the commencement of the church in Acts 2, so the removal of the Spirit will coincide with its removal. At that point the actors and the actions of unrestricted evil will be revealed.

This being the case, the descriptions of society after the rapture are relevant for us to consider.²

They describe a world where there will be:

- 1 Increased levels of evil activity
- 2 Aggression and persecution
- 3 False prophets and teachers
- 4 Claims to political unity
- 5 A united form of world religion
- 6 Streamlined economic and financial world systems
- 7 Increased wars producing apparent peace.

Last day conditions may be upon us, or at least we can see signs that the world is fast moving towards the way things are described in scripture. May the Lord give us grace to live for His glory as individuals and assemblies of His people until that day when He shall come.

Endnotes

- 1 Rev. 2. 7 – Rev. 3. 21; Rev. 2. 26, 27; 3. 12; 3. 21.
- 2 These are given in Matthew chapter 24, Luke chapter 21, Revelation chapters 13, 17, and 18.

**An Assembly of the Lord's people
will be a people among whom ...**

THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST IS RECOGNIZED

By **SANDY JACK** Eastbourne, England

Part 1

Maybe it is not surprising that truths concerning our salvation should tend to interest us most, but there are other truths of equal value in the estimation of heaven – truths which concern the place and honour of the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. These are truths that we should be careful to search out, appreciate and act on in order that we might give the Lord Jesus His right place in our lives.

Some such truths are to be discovered in the mode and manner in which those who are His disciples gather together in a local assembly. Seeking to display these principles in our practice will bring God-designed honour to His Son – and surely the privilege and priority of any true disciple would be to ensure that their Saviour is given due honour?

To see truths in relation to a local assembly in this light might bring a freshness to them in our day and generation. They are not a matter of man's opinion or tradition – of rules or creeds – these truths have been unveiled for us in scripture in order that we might honour the Son. This is what will make these truths precious to us. It will mean we won't give them up lightly; we won't see them as optional; we will be careful about seeking them out, grasping their meaning and working them out in our lives. It will also mean that we will take care not to meddle with them or modify them. It is the happy privilege of all those who are redeemed by the precious blood of Christ to render willing, ungrudging

obedience to all the commands of the Saviour, John 14. 15.

In launching into this series, we hope to cover a number of aspects of the practice to be found among a biblically-gathered assembly of believers. That said, this is in no way intended to be a list of 'rules' that define what an assembly is – that would risk legalism, an attitude which is devoid of the liberty into which believers have been brought. Nor do we see that God has left believers free to devise their own approach to honouring His Son – that would be a liberalism that is equally to be shunned.

It is implicit in the salvation of every true, born-again believer that they have not only received Christ as their Saviour but have acknowledged Jesus as 'Lord'. This acknowledgement of His lordship is not a step subsequent to salvation – it is integral in trusting Christ in order to receive salvation and is part of the gospel, as illustrated when Paul preached in Corinth, 2 Cor. 4. 5. This truth is seen in other scriptures too. Paul, in Romans

chapter 5 verse 1, states that 'we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ'. The Spirit of God is very careful to use appropriate titles when mentioning the Son of God, so we can rest assured that the inclusion of 'Lord' here is significant. In other words, man can only be at peace with a holy God on the basis of God declaring him righteous (justification), and that declaration can only be made through all that the name 'Lord Jesus Christ' avails for. In passing, maybe we would do well to reflect on the content of our preaching – the declaring of this aspect in respect of salvation might protect us from the big danger of 'easy-believism'! Salvation is not simply a rescue plan for mankind from eternal judgement; it is much bigger than that – it is about God bringing honour (glory) to Himself through giving suitable recognition to His Son.

It is clear from the account of the formation of the church at Antioch that this recognition of Christ as Lord was to be promoted as they gathered. The early church leaders, on hearing of the salvation of a great number of souls, sent Barnabas and he exhorted them all 'that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord', Acts 11. 23. Furthermore, it would be strange doctrinal logic that unveils such a critical and beautiful truth and then dismisses it as irrelevant in a local church.

Nationally, Israel made it abundantly clear what position they ascribed to Jesus of Nazareth – they had Him crucified. The Gentile nations also took their place at Golgotha, and gave their verdict through 'wicked hands', Acts 2. 23. God, however, has declared Him to be both 'Lord and Christ'. One day – at the dawn of a glorious 1,000-year earthly reign, the nation will accept its folly and, along with the Gentile nations, experience the righteous rule of the One they crucified – He **will** be given His rightful place!

However, in a world in which our Saviour is rejected and disowned, and where He is 'trodden under foot' by the majority of humanity, there are those who for the glory of God, and on

the basis of gracious, divine purpose, are destined to be conformed to the image of His Son, 'that he might be the firstborn among many brethren', Heb. 10. 29; Rom. 8. 29.

As divine purpose is worked out in time, God has given us the opportunity to demonstrate the lordship of Christ among us as we gather as an assembly. What joy it must bring to God to see those who have been redeemed by the precious blood of His Son, gather in a united attitude of 'Jesus Christ is Lord', Phil. 2. 11!

How is that lordship expressed in a local assembly? From some of the corrective teaching in the New Testament, we can see the implications of an absence of the practice of this truth and therefore understand how its proper implementation may be seen.

The first letter to the Corinthians is a letter addressing a number of errors into which that assembly had fallen. Paul opens by addressing the issue of division among the saints. Outside of the Gospels and the historical book of Acts, the term 'Lord' appears more in this letter than any other in the New Testament (fifty-four times), and its importance is under scored by seven occurrences in chapter 1 alone, demonstrating unequivocally that the root of the division was the absence of the lordship of Christ being acknowledged among them. It is salutary also to note that the failure of two saints to live out the lordship of Christ also caused unacceptable consequences in the assembly in Philippi. Paul beseeches that the lordship of Christ be the foundation for the resolution of their differences, Phil. 4. 2. It is a searching issue: amongst the saints where you meet, is there unity? If not, then the solution does not lie in pushing a personal agenda; it lies in repentance amongst all the saints and reinstatement of the lordship of Christ. Of course, unity does not equate to uniformity – that issue is also addressed in later chapters of the same Epistle – and the secret ingredient that allows an assembly to function under the lordship of Christ is explicitly revealed by God's Holy Spirit in chapter 13.

In chapter 5, a sad, solemn gathering is described, and the apostle instructs the assembly that when they are gathered together they need to act with the 'power of the Lord Jesus Christ', v. 4. It is important to note that the power that would enable them to deal with the situation didn't come from themselves. I can only imagine how stressful such a situation might have been for them to face. How were they to face it? The 'power' to act would not come from their authority, but from the authority drawn from the One who they recognized as Lord.

There is also an important distinction to be made as to the Lord's table in chapter 10 and the Lord's supper in chapter 11. The table in chapter 10 is relevant to the daily, individual experience of every believer; note the absolute, categoric nature of the phrase 'Ye cannot', 10. 21. On the other hand, the supper in chapter 11 is clearly an activity which is corporate and the practice of an assembly. So, in a local assembly, the weekly (see Acts chapter 20 verse 7) gathering in order to 'eat the Lord's supper' is closely linked with the declaration of the assembly that 'Jesus Christ is Lord' – note that we are told that it is a declaration by the participants of 'the Lord's death till he come', 11. 26. Which believer that loves the Lord would not want to be there and be part



of that wonderful privilege of publicly proclaiming such wondrous truth?

Finally, as he draws the letter to a close, Paul reminds the assembly at Corinth that their labours should be in the Lord, 15. 58. Indeed, it is the lordship of Christ among them that prevents their labours being pointless. Are we working together in the assembly, single-minded, single-hearted, single-eyed, under the lordship of the Saviour?

There is another type of 'lordship' which is also recorded for our warning in scripture. It is that of unprincipled, proud, self-centred, self-appointed elders who use their position to demand submission from the saints, 1 Pet. 5. 1-4. That is not the shepherd character of how God expects elders to discharge their responsibilities under the Chief Shepherd. Those elders, who 'lord it' over the saints, are usurping the lordship of that same Chief Shepherd. God forbid!

One final note is that this truth also underpins the truth of the autonomy of all local assemblies. It was never God's intention that assemblies should have accountability to each other. That does not preclude fellowship between assemblies, but to entertain the concept that one local assembly is in anyway responsible or accountable to another invalidates the honour that our risen Lord claims for Himself amongst His gathered people! Even a cursory reading of the description of the risen Saviour in Revelation chapter 1 will show that He holds a direct relationship with each assembly individually and no-one else, nor any other assembly, can usurp that. We live in days where the understanding of this autonomy is under threat; the danger is that failure to adhere to this truth potentially turns a so-called assembly into no more than an organization or denomination. God give us the grace to never see assemblies as 'The Assemblies'.

How important this truth is, and how privileged we are to be able to put the lordship of Christ into practice as we meet together and honour our Saviour!

The Twelve Tribes of Israel

SIMEON

By **LLOYD STOCK** Bury St. Edmunds, England

A poor start

The names of Jacob's sons were all given by their mothers, with one exception.¹ They are loaded with the angst and struggle that pervaded the family, though, again, Judah and Joseph are exceptions.² Leah called her second son Simeon, 'because the Lord has heard that I am hated, he has given me this son also'. Arriving into this world amidst such miserable circumstances was less than ideal. One can hardly blame the mother in this case, but how sad it is when parental struggles are projected onto the children. It was inevitable that Simeon and his siblings would be affected by all this.

When Jacob addresses Simeon in chapter 49, his comments were equally intended for Levi. This was likely because he is calling to mind their combined cruelty in the brutal murder of the men of Shechem, Gen. 34. Singling them out as 'brothers' reinforces their closeness, but their affinity was not positive. The moral behind their story is repeated throughout scripture to demonstrate that religious fervency is no better than spiritual indifference. James and John exhibited a similar attitude towards the Samaritans and were rebuked by the Saviour, Luke 9.

Demise foretold

Jacob's final words to them were, 'I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel', Gen. 49. 7.

These are solemn words, and it must have pained Simeon to hear them. Still, it must have pained the tribe more-so to realize that their omission in Moses' final words was not an oversight, Deut. 33. Imagine their reaction. Every tribe was receiving encouragement, even if it amounted to just a few comments, including his partner in crime, Levi, but for Simeon – nothing. They had been purposefully omitted; how humiliating.³ Jacob had predicted their demise; Moses had put the nail in the coffin. What future could there be for them?

Demise endured

Sure enough, Simeon's demise would eventually materialize. In the national census recorded in Numbers chapter 1, Simeon is one of the larger tribes, coming in at 59,300. However, the census in Numbers chapter 26 records a staggering reduction in the tribe, numbering only 22,200 – a reduction of 60%! This is all the more surprising when you realize that despite a generation falling in the wilderness, several tribes recuperated quickly and were numbered larger in the second census than in the first.

What is more telling, however, is how precisely Jacob's words came to pass. Just how would they be divided and scattered? Joshua chapter 19 verse 1 gives us an inkling. When they finally reach the land of promise, Simeon's territory falls within Judah's. Of all the tribes to have to work out this irregular arrangement with, Judah was preferable (as we shall see, in our survey of Judah). Even so, it is not hard to see that Simeon's identity would have been so obscured by the arrangement, as to ultimately bring Jacob's words to pass.⁴

Demise braved

This all makes for sober reading. With such a miserable start in life and such a miserable forecast for their future, we might well have expected the tribe to have consciously embarked on a course of recklessness, wallowing in self-pity. Thanks to their patriarch's failure, the tribe's dismal future was settled. Why bother going on? On the contrary, until their eventual absorption into the southern kingdom, they appear on the page of scripture, fulfilling their rightful place in the nation. When the tribal princes bring their offering for the tabernacle, Simeon is there. When Judah is looking for help to go up against the Canaanites, Simeon willingly participates. When David is on the brink of becoming king, again Simeon is there, offering moral support. Whilst their

omission in places is obvious, they are not entirely absent, as we might have expected them to be.

There is a lesson for us here. Amidst miserable circumstances, there is a tendency to self-pity, and in Elijah's case for instance, even suicide. Not so with Simeon. May God grant us grace to remain faithful to him, come what may. Whatever the circumstances of our past, whatever the apparent prospects of our future – remember, God will prevail!

Grace abounding

In God's design, as we saw in our introduction to this series, Simeon was graciously included in the 'twelve'. God's ever-prevailing purposes secure this tribe's future, despite their own inability to redeem themselves from their miserable beginnings. Unsurprisingly, then, when the tribes are listed in Revelation chapter 7 for sealing against the day of God's wrath, Simeon is once again named. With grace and without prejudice, God assigns an equal portion of the tribe for protection. Finally, in Ezekiel chapter 48, as the promises for the nation are finally realized, they enjoy a portion of the land as it is allocated out to the tribes. What a glorious day that will be. No more will they be defined by their odious sin, Gen. 34. 30. For where sin abounded, 'grace did much more abound', Rom. 5. 20.

The lessons for us stand in plain sight. May we worship our God and Father for His gracious hand upon us and be sure to extend the same grace to those around us, including those who have stumbled. We call to mind the words of ROBERT MURRAY MCCHEYNE's poem:

'Chosen not for good in me,
Wakened up from wrath to flee,
Hidden in the Saviour's side,
By the Spirit sanctified,
Teach me, Lord, on earth to show,
By my love, how much I owe'.

Endnotes

- ¹ Cf. Gen. 35. 18.
- ² We saw in the introduction to this series that Judah and Joseph occupy a special place in the family so far as the nation's history is concerned.
- ³ All of the manuscripts, with the exception of the LXX, confirm this.
- ⁴ The Hebrew word for 'divided' conveys precisely this type of arrangement.

2 Kings

By **COLIN LACEY** Bath, England

Introduction

It is all too easy to focus on the historical, archaeological and chronological debates that surround the books of Kings and to miss their powerful message. It is also possible to spend time supplementing the writer's history with additional material from 1 and 2 Chronicles, thereby giving the impression that his work is incomplete. It is important that the reader avoids both of these dangers in the interest of seeking to capture the writer's exercise in recording approximately 450 years of the history of Israel's united and divided monarchy. Clearly, he had no intention of giving an exhaustive account of the events that took place during this period; therefore, he selected the material that conveyed the message he wished to impart. 1 and 2 Kings were originally one book, which was divided in two by the Greek, and then Latin translators. Indeed, in the Septuagint they were linked with 1 and 2 Samuel.

Purpose of the book

The writer intended 2 Kings to be more than purely a record of historical events. His desire was to convey a clear message to his first readers as to the reasons why they were away in exile from their homeland, and the ground upon which they could return. He did not comment on the events, but allowed them to speak for themselves, and left his readers to draw their own conclusions.

The author's purpose in writing was five-fold.

- 1 The underlining of the Lord's hatred of idolatry. His message to his first readers was unequivocal, i.e., the Lord had brought judgement upon the nation, because it had turned its back upon Him and, contrary to His word, had served other gods. If they were to experience brighter days, there must be no repeat of these failures.
- 2 Emphasizing that the word of

the Lord must be central. In the dark days of apostasy following Solomon's reign, and the consequent departure from God's word by the kings of Israel and Judah, the voices of the prophets were increasingly heard. The phrase, 'the word of the Lord', appears on forty-six occasions in the two books of Kings.

- 3 Although judgement fell on those who rebelled against His word, the historian was also exercised to display the Lord as longsuffering and gracious. At times, it can be a challenge for the reader to understand His patience with the evil of godless rulers; however, Peter's words are apposite: 'The Lord is . . . long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance', 2 Pet. 3. 9. He gave even men like Ahab the opportunity to repent.
- 4 The author was anxious to display throughout his writings, that the Lord is sovereign. It might appear at times that wicked men were in control of events and that His promises and purposes for His people had been thwarted. Idolatry swept the land and appeared to wipe out true worship of the Lord; however, nothing could have been further from the truth. There were always those in the land who had refused to compromise and bow the knee to Baal. Rebellious kings repeatedly failed to seek guidance from the Lord; yet, the word of the Lord was not bound and came to them through faithful prophets. Athaliah, the only queen of Judah, almost succeeded in destroying the royal seed in the house of David, the line from whence Christ came; nevertheless, the over-ruling hand of the Lord ensured that one son was preserved from her massacre, by being hidden in the house of the Lord for six years, 2 Kgs. 11. 1-3.
- 5 There is strong evidence throughout the two books of

Kings of the writer's desire to emphasize the folly of the unequal yoke, e.g., the marriage of Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat, to Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab, 2 Kgs. 8. 16-18.

Analysis of the book

Chapters 1 to 14: The kingdom divided – the ministry of the prophets.
Chapter 15: The kingdom divided – decline in the northern kingdom.
Chapter 16: The kingdom divided – decline in the southern kingdom.
Chapter 17: The kingdom divided – death of the northern kingdom.
Chapters 18 to 24: The last days of the kingdom of Judah.
Chapter 25: The end of the kingdom of Judah.

Dates and historical setting of the book

The two books of Kings cover the period from the time of Solomon's accession to the throne following the death of David up to the demise of the monarchy. During this time, the kingdom was divided into ten tribes in the north (Israel) and two tribes in the south (Judah). The second book draws to a conclusion with the overthrow of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, the double siege of the city of Jerusalem, and the carrying away of the people into exile in Babylon, 2 Kgs. 24, 25. The final event recorded is the release from prison of Jehoiachin, king of Judah, by Evilmerodach, king of Babylon, in the thirty-seventh year of the exile.

Although scholars vary as to the precise dating of the period, it probably takes the reader from the year 1012 BC up to 562 BC, a time span of 450 years. This means that the writer almost certainly assembled his material for his history during the second half of the children of Israel's seventy years of exile in Babylon; therefore, his first readers would have been the Jewish exiles in Babylon.

Author of the book

Jewish tradition names Jeremiah, the prophet, as the author of 1 and 2 Kings. There are persuasive arguments for and against this

K

870 BC



EGYPT INVADES
JERUSALEM 913 B.C.

The Northern Kingdom

Nadab | Baasha | Elah | Zimri | Omri | Ahab | A

PROPHETS TO JUDAH Shemaiah - Iddo - Azariah - Hanani

Abijah | Asa | Jehoshaphat | Jehoram | Ahaziah

The Southern Kin



EGYPT INVADERS JERUSALEM 913 BC

Ashurnasirpal II | Shalmaneser

Nabopolassar | Nebuchadnezzar

40 years

SOLOMON DIES

1 Kings 11. 43

The single book of Kings was divided into 2 books when the Old Testament was translated into Greek during the 3rd century because the Greek with all its grammar required twice as much space and so a second scroll was required.

2 Kings

1 Kings

(Dates are approx and some rounded off to nearest decade)

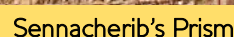
930 BC

870 BC

The Babylonian Chronicle

This Babylonian Chronicle is a record of ancient Babylon dating from 750 BC to 280 BC. This tablet is part of that chronicle and records events from 605-594 BC including Nebuchadnezzar II's campaigns in the west and the fall of the Assyrian Empire. It records Nebuchadnezzar's rise to power, removing Jehoiachin, king of Judah and inserting Zedekiah as king in his place, as recorded in scripture,

2 Kings 24. 17.



This hexagonal clay prism known as the Taylor Prism in the British Museum records campaigns of Assyrian King Sennacherib up to the final war against Babylon and describes the tribute received from Hezekiah, 2 Kings 18: 15.



The Black Obelisk of

The Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser was erected by King Shalmaneser III about 841 BC. The seven panels contain many images and 190 lines of text, including King Jehu bowing in humble tribute after his victory over the Assyrians.

Elijah's ministry concludes

Ch 1 Ahaziah and Joram reign

Elisha's miracles conducted

- | | |
|-------|---|
| Ch 2 | Sufficiency of God in the face of departure |
| Ch 3 | Sufficiency of God in the face of division |
| Ch 4 | Sufficiency of God in the face of death |
| Ch 5 | Sufficiency of God in the face of disease |
| Ch 6 | Sufficiency of God in the face of danger |
| Ch 7 | Sufficiency of God in the face of danger |
| Ch 8 | Sufficiency of God in the face of duties |
| Ch 9 | Sufficiency of God in the face of deception |
| Ch 10 | King Jehu's zeal |
| Ch 11 | Queen Athaliah's downfall |
| Ch 12 | King Jehoash's reign - Part I |
| Ch 13 | King Jehoahaz reign - Part II |

'Sons of the prophets'

This group of men were a guild of prophets ministering in different locations including Bethel and Jericho. It was important to these men that the incoming prophet had the Spirit of God like the outgoing prophet. This explains their concern over Elisha, 2 Kings 2

Picking up

'How is the gold be

New Testament reference

‘And Ezekias begat Manasses; and Manasses begat Amos
and his brethren, about the time they were

‘And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and
‘And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should
And sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into
‘And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord,
and consume them, even a

Key word studies: man of God / evil in the sight of the Lord / right in the sight of the Lord **Writer** Unknown

840 BC

715 BC

710 BC

586 BC

'And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, and followed the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which made Israel to sin; he departed not there from', 2 Kings 13. 2

Kingdom, capital: Samaria

ASSYRIAN CAPTIVITY

THE FALL OF SAMARIA

Shalmaneser V | Jeroboam II | Zechariah | Shallum | Menahem | Pekahiah | Pekah | Hoshea

Elisha - Jonah - Amos - Hosea - Oded - Obadiah

Jonah

Nahum

Joel

Jehu - Jahaziel - Eliezer - Zechariah - Isaiah - Micah - Nahum - Zephaniah - Habakkuk - Jeremiah - Uriah - Huldah (woman)

Athaliah | Joash | Amaziah | Uzziah | Jotham | Ahaz | Hezekiah | Manasseh | Amon | Josiah | Jehoahaz | Jehoiakim | Jehoiachin | Zedekiah

Kingdom, capital: Jerusalem

BABYLON CAPTIVITY

TEMPLE DESTROYED

TRIBUTE TO A
SYRIA 732 BC

SENNACHERIB
INVADES 701 BC

'And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, yet not like David his father', 2 Kings 14. 3

Shamshiadad V | Adadnirari III | Shalmaneser IV | Ashurbanipal | Ashurnirari V | Tiglath-pileser III | Shalmaneser V

Merodach-Baladan | Ashurbanipal | Ashuretililani | Sinshariskun | Ashur-uballit (Kings in yellow mentioned in 2 Kings)

840 BC

715 BC

710 BC

586 BC

Archaeology

Shalmaneser III

erected as a victory stele by the Assyrian king, four-sided, limestone monument. The image above shows Israel's defeat to Assyria, 2 Kings 9-10.

Hezekiah's Tunnel

A 1750-foot (530m) tunnel carved during the reign of Hezekiah to bring water from one side of the city to the other. Hezekiah's Tunnel together with the 6th C. tunnel of Eupalinos in Greece are considered the greatest works of water engineering technology in the pre-Classical period. Had it followed a straight line, the length would have been 1070 ft (335m) or 40% shorter.

Tiglath - pileser III stela from his palace wall

Inscriptions on display today in the British Museum show the accuracy of the biblical narrative of 2 Kings and help us solve some difficult passages. For example, Pul, who takes a tribute from King Menahem, 15. 19, is identical with Tiglath-pileser in verse 29. Pul, a usurper, as king of Assyria assumed the name of one of his predecessors, Tiglath-pileser I, and reigned as Tiglath-pileser III. He reigned, as we learn from his annals, from 745 BC to 727 BC.

the mantle

'come dim', Lam. 4. 1

References to 2 Kings

and Amon begat Josias; And Josias begat Jechonias

who was carried away to Babylon', Matt. 1. 10, 11

and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian', Luke 4. 27

to be received up, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem,

to a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him', Luke 9. 51, 52

and wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven,

as Elias did? Luke 9. 54

'The book of the chronicles of the kings'

2 Kings appeals to 'the book of the chronicles of the kings' for further details about various matters that are not recorded in 1 & 2 Chronicles. For example, regarding Nadab, the second king of Israel - none of Nadab's acts are recorded in 1 & 2 Chronicles therefore these references are to other chronicles that exist which are not included as inspired scripture.

Ch 14-25 God's people and their hour of captivity

Israel's misery and captivity

- Ch 14 King Amaziah's reign & Jeroboam II
- Ch 15 King Uzziah's reign also Zachariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekah, Jotham
- Ch 16 King Ahaz's reign
- Ch 17 Northern capital Samaria falls to Assyria

King Hezekiah's might and water conduit

- Ch 18 Hezekiah and Sennacherib's proposal
- Ch 19 Hezekiah and Sennacherib's punishment
- Ch 20 Hezekiah and the Babylonian problem
- Ch 21 Manasseh's evil reign
- Ch 22 Josiah's reign - Part I
- Ch 23 Josiah's reign - Part II

Judah's malady and carrying away

- Ch 24 Kings Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin & Zedekiah
- Ch 25 Solomon's Temple burned

belief. It is of interest to note the unexpected absence of his name from the part of the record in 2 Kings when he was active in the Lord's service, i.e., during the time of Josiah and his successors. A possible explanation for this might be that, as the author, he deliberately kept his name in the background. However, the divine record is silent about the identity of the author; therefore, there is little profit to be gained from pursuing the matter further.

The book's message for today

The New Testament writers were well aware of the value of the Old Testament scriptures for believers in this particular dispensation of God's grace; therefore, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they frequently drew upon them and incorporated them into their writings. Paul writes, '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.

'Keep yourselves from idols',

1 John 5. 21. Paul reminded the Corinthian believers that in spite of God's deliverance of, and care for, the children of Israel, they turned to idolatry and other sins; therefore, they displeased Him and judgement fell upon them. He writes, 'Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them', 1 Cor. 10. 6, 7. A little further on he gives a similar warning, 'Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition . . . Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry', 1 Cor. 10. 11, 14.

Idolatry marked the lives of the children of Israel continuously during the times of the kings, and, sadly, it is still prevalent among the Lord's people today. It might take different forms from that seen in Old Testament times, but it still has the same disastrous outcome of removing the Lord from the pre-eminent place that He demands and deserves in the lives of believers.

'Preach the word', 2 Tim. 4. 2. The antidote for departure remains, as it ever has, i.e., God's word must be central. It is only when it is known and obeyed that the people of God will be kept from idolatry, and experience blessing. All too often today, the opinions of men are heard above what God has to say. Ahab, and other kings like him, never sought the Lord's guidance directly; indeed, they preferred to live in ignorance of His word, because they knew it would tell them what they did not want to hear. The same spirit exists in the professing religious world today, where every attempt is made to discredit the truth of scripture. Paul's question, when challenging those who were led astray by the false teaching that infiltrated the churches of Galatia, is apposite, 'Nevertheless what saith the scripture?' Gal. 4. 30. Ahab heard the word of the Lord, but he refused to obey it and reaped the consequences. James writes, 'But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves', Jas. 1. 22. At the head of Paul's charge to Timothy was the command, 'Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine', 2 Tim. 4. 2, 3.

'For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men',

Titus 2. 11. It has been noted that the longsuffering and grace of God were seen throughout the days of the monarchy in the books of Kings, even during the deplorable reign of Ahab and Jezebel. Sadly, many of the kings treated this grace with contempt, with catastrophic outcomes for themselves and their subjects. Paul asks the challenging question of believers, 'Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?' The resounding answer is, 'God forbid', Rom. 6. 1, 2. When he writes to Titus, he explains that the grace of God that has brought salvation within the reach of all men, teaches continuously those who have received it that, 'denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously,

and godly, in this present world', Titus 2. 12. Far from treating the grace of God with contempt, or presuming upon it, as many of the kings did, it should regulate the way a believer lives.

'The Lord reigneth', Ps. 93. 1. The rebellious kings in Israel's history had to learn the lesson the hard way that the Lord is sovereign, and that they were not in control of the affairs of the kingdom. In the present day, where it appears as if evil men do what they will and God is powerless to prevent them, it is a comfort to embrace the truth that God is still on the throne.

'Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers',

2 Cor. 6. 14. If believers are tempted to enter into an unequal yoke with unbelievers, the two books of Kings sound out a clear warning note as to the spiritual ruin that awaits them. Paul's words apply to believers of all generations, 'Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? and what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? . . . Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing', 2 Cor. 6. 14-17.

The message that the writer of 2 Kings conveyed to the exiles in Babylon is, therefore, timeless. A prayerful consideration of the text will yield many important challenges to the readers of all generations. Sadly, the Lord's people are slow to learn the lessons of the past, and therefore the same mistakes continue to be replicated among them. Like the children of Israel, idolatry, fornication, tempting Christ and murmuring are all too often to the fore in their lives, 1 Cor. 10. 7-11. Paul sounds a clear warning note about the danger of complacency, 'Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall', v. 12.

HOLINESS

By **RANDAL AMOS** Rochester, New York, USA

It seems that a key feature many believers look for in a church is happiness. Whilst happiness is not always wrong, the key characteristic of God's house is holiness, not happiness. 'Holiness becometh thine house, O Lord, for ever', Ps. 93. 5. Holiness has to do with being separated from, and not touching what is unclean. The concept of being separated from what is bad is not new to us. We separate from poison, bad food, germs, harmful animals, dirt, and cancer, to name a few.

Old Testament definition and usage of holiness

One main Hebrew word for 'holy' is *qadowsh*. It means 'sacred' and 'set apart for God's use'. Those who would take a Nazarite vow would separate from some normal pleasures, so they could be totally dedicated to God, Num. 6. 8. We have this concept in an everyday sense. A young man might separate from seeing all other girls so he can be married to only one girl.

Another similar word for 'holy' is *qodesh*. It means 'apartness' or 'separateness' and is also translated holiness and sanctuary. It conveys separating from something so God can use it. In the sacrificial system a pig [unclean] could not be used and could stay with its herd. But a firstborn cow [clean] could be used and so was separated from the herd to be put on God's altar for Him. We also have this concept in an everyday sense. We will separate a fish from its water habitat for our dinner – after we clean it.

We also get the meaning and purpose of holiness in its usage in Leviticus chapter 11. Holiness was not an intrinsic characteristic but an action in obeying the Lord. God told Israel that certain foods were clean or unclean. To eat something unclean would defile a person [contaminate with uncleanness]

and limit their service to God until they became clean again.

Beginning on a simple level, God wanted His people to be able to 'make a difference between the unclean and the clean', Lev. 11. 47. God desires a people who know the difference between clean and unclean and will separate from the unclean so they can be used by and be near to God.

New Testament and holiness

The subject of holiness in God's church to many is *passé* and belongs back in the Old Testament. We now speak of joy. But Peter reminds the church, 'Because it is written, be ye holy; for I am holy', Lev. 11. 44; 1 Pet. 1. 16. Remember the very gift to the believer in Christ's gospel is the 'Holy Spirit'. But can holiness and joy go together? The fruit of the Holy Spirit is joy, Gal. 5. 22.

Hagios, the main Greek word for 'holy', is used over 200 times in the New Testament. Sometimes it is translated 'saints', for all believers are God's holy ones. Holiness has to do with purification, consecration and sanctification of life. It is being set apart from uncleanness for God's glory.

We read of a **holy** bodily presentation unto the Lord; a **holy** kiss; a **holy** temple [church]; **holy** brethren; **holy** hands; a **holy** calling; **holy** scriptures; a **holy** priesthood offering up spiritual sacrifices; a **holy** nation [church]; and a **holy** conversation [conduct].¹

New Testament truth concerning holiness

The unholy won't see the Lord, Heb. 12. 14.²

Holiness is now intrinsic – By being born again of God's Holy Spirit in us, we are 'the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true **holiness**', Eph. 4. 24.

Two areas of holiness – There is moral wrong that damages us, and spiritual wrong that defames God's glory. Therefore, we are to 'cleanse ourselves

from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God', 2 Cor. 7. 1.

Saved to yield to holiness – By being linked to God through the living Christ, we are to 'yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness . . . fruit unto holiness', Rom. 6. 19-22.

Chastened to produce holiness – In love, the Father has 'chastened . . . but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness', Heb. 12. 10.

Older women an example of holiness

– Holiness is modelled for the next generation, 'The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness', Titus 2. 3; 1 Tim. 2. 15.

Holiness to the end – Keep going on. 'To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God . . . our Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints', 1 Thess. 3. 13.

Jesus taught that defilement is not what goes into the mouth but what comes out of the heart: pride, sexual sin, evil thoughts, deceit, thefts and blasphemies, etc., Mark 7. 23.

Today's emphasis is what goes into the mouth: bottled water, vegan diets, etc. What the heart produces is generally ignored. The Lord taught that what goes into our mouth goes through the body, bypassing the 'heart'. Thus, such things are valueless and powerless in changing the heart's defilement in anyway, v. 19. Food is for the body and is to be eaten with thanksgiving, but Christ is for the heart, 1 Tim. 4. 3-5.

Holiness mourns sin. Esau wept when he lost the blessing, not because he had sold his birthright. Men mourn for the evil that sin brings, not for the sin which brings the evil. The Lord Jesus Christ is holy, Heb. 7. 26. So may we now, 'come out from among them [secular and religious unions with unbelievers], and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing', 2 Cor. 6. 17.

Endnotes

- 1 Rom. 12. 1; 16. 16; 1 Cor. 3. 16; 1 Thess. 5. 27; 1 Tim. 2. 8; 2 Tim. 1. 9; 3. 15; 1 Pet. 2. 5, 9; 2 Pet. 3. 11.
- 2 See also Eph. 5. 5; Rev. 21. 27.

THEIR FINEST HOUR

MARY

MAGDALENE

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

As with so many who have served the Lord faithfully, the name of Mary Magdalene has been much maligned by people of the world, ranging from Popes to film-makers, but the role that she played in service to the Lord is most instructive. We meet her first in the opening verses of Luke chapter 8 before she disappears from the record of scripture. Though she disappears from view, her reappearance at the cross suggests that she was one who was active, quietly, expressing her devotion to the Saviour in a way that was supportive of the Lord and His disciples without drawing attention to herself.

Mary serving

It is interesting to look briefly at the context of the first reference to Mary Magdalene in the gospels, for Luke mentions, 'And it came to pass afterwards', Luke 8. 1.

In the verses that precede this chapter, we have the record of the Lord's visit to Simon the Pharisee's house. On that occasion, we find a woman who enters the house and washes and anoints the feet of the Lord. In the course of a conversation, the Lord asked Simon a question, 'And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged', 7. 42, 43. Whilst I would not suggest that the woman of Luke chapter 7 was Mary Magdalene, a commonly held error, I think there is an interesting parallel. Of the woman, it was said that she had been forgiven much. Of Mary Magdalene, she had been delivered from much, for Luke says of her 'out of whom had come seven demons', 8. 2 NKJV.

It is worth pondering the occasions when the Lord delivered various

demon-possessed individuals. Were there any as serious as Mary? Apart from the man of Gadara, Mark chapter 5 and other passages, who was possessed of a legion of demons, Mary is probably the worst affected individual to be delivered by the Lord. She is a tremendous witness to the saving and transforming power of Christ. Out of Mary, the Lord had cast seven demons. What was her response? Along with these other women, we are told that she ministered to Him of her substance. The Lord may not have had much personally but His and His disciples' needs were met by this group of women as they were busy in preaching.

There are times when the importance we attach to those who occupy the platform masks the gifts being exercised by others within the local assembly. That is sad! We know that the Lord had the power to turn the stones into bread. He had food that His disciples knew not of. He could survive without food much longer than we could. But what is most instructive is that He receives and welcomes the simple provisions of these sisters and shares their concern for His disciples.

Let us not underestimate the work of the sisters here, for the work of the Lord would have been seriously impoverished without it. It is a testimony to their, and Mary Magdalene's, devotion and commitment to Christ.

Mary standing

'And many women were there beholding afar off, which followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him: Among which was Mary Magdalene', Matt. 27. 55, 56. It is John's account in particular that describes these women as standing – one of three Marys in that picture.

It is interesting to remember that back in the garden of Gethsemane, chapter 26 verse 56, all the disciples had forsaken Him and fled. When it came to the events at the cross, the only one of the disciples that we know to be near the cross was John. The rest were absent. Indeed, Peter had denied his Lord three times in the events leading up to the crucifixion and those simple facts make the devotion of these women to stand in stark contrast to the fear of the men.

At the hour of the Lord's suffering and death, the women, among whom was Mary Magdalene, were present. They stood and witnessed the Lord being crucified. They witnessed the almost unrecognizable figure being hounded to His death. They witnessed His shame. They saw the ridicule and hatred of men expressed towards the Lord. They stood. They took it in. All the horrors of Calvary were played out before them.

I think this a tremendous tribute to the character of these sisters. They were committed and they were consistent.

There are companies of the Lord's people around the world who owe much of their continuance to the consistent testimony of sisters. Such sisters do not move out of their God-given sphere of service but, by the consistency of their testimony, the door of witness remains open.

Mary sitting

'And there was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over

against the sepulchre', Matt. 27. 61. Her mission was to observe the place where the body of the Lord was laid and the detail of His burial. Mark tells us, 'And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses beheld where he was laid', Mark 15. 47. These details were important to Mary as she was to come at the first opportunity to remember the Lord and think upon Him.

It is interesting too to note that Mary was one of the last to leave Calvary. Along with Joseph and Nicodemus, she left the scene of the crucifixion only when the Lord was no longer there. There is a continuing testimony to her commitment and consistency. However, I would suggest there is more. How important, as we gather to remember the Saviour, that we linger on the wonder of Calvary. We can become too preoccupied as the pressures of the day of service crowd in upon our thoughts. For Mary, she lingered by the cross.

But, as she sat by the sepulchre, in her mind she also saw what she thought to be a particular omission from the simple labours of the secret disciples, Joseph and Nicodemus. They had taken the body from the cross. They had wrapped it in a clean linen cloth. They had laid it in the tomb. It is Mark who reveals what was in Mary's mind, 'And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him', 16. 1.¹ Perhaps she felt that there was something more that she could bring.

Do we appreciate what the sisters bring to each meeting for worship? They may not express it audibly, and here there is no record of Mary speaking, but what she sought to contribute was individual and heart-felt. Equally, what she would have contributed would have brought a sweet perfume into the presence of the Saviour. Let us not lose sight of the importance of what the sisters contribute to the worship of the assembly!

Mary seeking

'In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the

other Mary to see the sepulchre', Matt. 28. 1. It is John's account that says, 'The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre', John 20. 1.

We get a clear picture of the urgency of Mary's mission – she comes at the earliest possible moment. In the glimmering light of dawn, she makes her way to the grave. What did she think she could do with the stone rolled across the entrance to the tomb? Was she aware of the guard present at the tomb?

We have no answers to these questions but we do have a picture of Mary's desire to anoint the body of the Saviour. Whatever obstacle may be in her way, she was committed to this seemingly final act of devotion.

This is a challenge for brethren and sisters alike. What is our priority in life? For Mary, her priority was to be in the presence of the Saviour. Her desire was to be involved in service for Him. There are pressures upon all of our lives, but there is a worthwhile challenge to us all to ensure that our priorities are right!

Mary speaking

'Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things unto her', John 20. 18. There seem to be particular privileges that are afforded to the women in the narrative of the resurrection. To whom does the Lord appear in resurrection first?

It would be easy to criticize Mary as one who failed to appreciate the teaching of the Lord regarding His resurrection. She might be criticized for not recognizing the Lord when she saw Him in the garden. However, reading through the subsequent appearances of the Lord in resurrection, there is equal incredulity amongst the male disciples of the Saviour, and Thomas' reaction seems to typify that fact.

Rather than criticism and censure, it is touching to see the Lord's concern and compassion for Mary. Perhaps this is Mary's finest hour. Certainly, it is interesting that it is only here that we read of Mary speaking,

although it is only a brief record of her conversation. How careful is the scripture! In private conversation, in equally private communication to the gathered disciples, Mary moves in complete accord with her biblically-defined role. What she can do, she does. What she can't do, she leaves to others. That is an important truth in application to brethren and sisters alike! May we all be exercised to fulfil the gift that God has given us – not to seek to do those things for which we are not gifted or directed!



Endnotes

- 1 John chapter 19 verse 40 records that the spices were not forgotten.

Character Studies in the Book of Proverbs

THE SLUGGARD

By **JOHN SCARSBROOK** Killamarsh, England

Part 4

Time is a very precious commodity. It takes us from the cradle and charts our course through childhood to adolescence and on into adulthood. Time takes us from the school desk to the workplace. Time measures the development of our children and our grandchildren. Time wearies and weakens our frame, and time lays us in the grave.

We cannot arrest its relentless progress. We have no control by which to influence its inevitable qualities. We are powerless to speed it up or slow it down, but one thing we can do – we can waste it!

The sluggard, or the slothful man as he is sometimes called, is an eloquent example to us of the follies of indolence, self-indulgence and sheer laziness. There is ample opportunity in our twenty-first century society to disengage the mind from reality and be taken up by a world where the idols are sportsmen and women, pop singers and filmstars; a world where morality is dictated by the 'soap operas' and where all are encouraged to be 'lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God'.

As believers, we should live in the constant awareness of a coming day of assessment, 2 Cor. 5. 10, where we will be called to give account of how we have used those things given to us. Without doubt, one question will be – 'how did we use our time?' Maybe if we heed the warnings as we consider the character of the sluggard, it will spare our blushes at the Judgement Seat.

We need, of course, to bear in mind that from the beginning, when God provided the ability and opportunity for man to work, He also made provision for him

to rest. The Lord Jesus, who in a lifetime of service never wasted a moment, Himself acknowledged the need for His disciples to 'rest awhile', Mark 6. 31. It is interesting to note, in passing, that this verse is found in the Gospel of the Saviour's unbroken service! We are reminded in Ecclesiastes chapter 5 verse 12 that, 'the sleep of a labouring man is sweet', again appropriately illustrated in the experience of the perfect Servant, Mark 4. 38.

The character under consideration, however, has no virtues to extol. He invariably wants the sleep without the labouring; he has turned indolence into an art form; he allows each day, with all its opportunities, to pass him by as he turns upon his bed as a door turns on well-oiled hinges, Prov. 26. 14.

Our introduction to the sluggard comes in chapter 6. We would not expect to find him vying for a place to receive instruction from the wise man in the earlier chapters; he cannot be bothered. When we do finally stumble across him, it is in a chapter filled with salutary warnings, and he is sleeping! It

is not difficult to hear the tone of exasperation and annoyance in the voice of the instructor, 6. 6-9, as he suggests that a visit to the anthill may be a helpful exercise for this individual. There, he can learn practical lessons from one of the smallest of God's creatures. Industry, initiative, activity and intelligent use of resources can all be witnessed in the ant. The sluggard will have none of it. His response is seen in verse 10, 'yet a little sleep', he whines, 'a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep', surely it's not too much to ask? The instructor dismisses him with a final warning of inevitable consequences in verse 11, and moves on to teach those who will listen.

A consistent voice heard throughout the book of Proverbs is a clear call for diligence, an awareness of danger and a need for constant vigilance. The man or woman who would know blessing is seen in chapter 8 verse 34, 'hearing . . . watching daily . . . and waiting at the posts of my doors', the very place where we would expect the dedicated servant to be found, Exod. 21. 6; 2 Sam. 11. 9.

All this passes the sluggard by. If he makes the effort to work at all, it is 'with a slack hand', 10. 4. If he is sent on an errand, such is his lack of discipline that it only causes irritation to those who send him, v. 26. If he manages to catch anything while hunting, distinctly unlikely in itself, he cannot be bothered to cook it, 12. 27. If he succeeds in cooking it, he is too lazy to eat it, 19. 24. He cannot be trusted with any position of responsibility, 12. 24, and, sadly, he must learn the hard way that such behaviour will result in poverty, both material and spiritual, 13. 4; 19. 15; 20. 4. The attitude of the sluggard also produces a moral deterioration. His desire to have things, which he is not prepared to work for, 13. 4, has developed into the sin of covetousness by the time we reach chapter 21, vv. 25, 26.

In our material society, prosperity is measured by possessions. To this end, the men and women of

the world purchase their lottery tickets in the vain hope of material gain without any corresponding effort. All they succeed in doing is wasting what money they do have! For the believer, who is prepared to work for just and honest reward, the exhortation of Paul to Timothy should be our guiding principle, that 'godliness with contentment is great gain', 1 Tim. 6. 6.

There is, however, one field in which the sluggard excels; he has mastered the art of excuses. He can readily produce a perfectly adequate reason for his inactivity. As far as he is concerned, any progress he attempts to make is always fraught with difficulties, like trying to walk through a hedge of thorns, 15. 19. When it comes to ploughing time, it is too cold, 20. 4, hence no harvest. Ploughing is part of the essential preparation required if there is to be a harvest. Likewise, in the work of the gospel, the spadework needs to be done. The seed needs to be sown, then watered and tended. Is it sometimes too cold to go tracting, too wet for the open air? Too disruptive to our own comfortable way of life to rearrange times to

meet the needs of the community in which we live? Are we surprised, then, when there is little or no harvest?

On two occasions, chapter 22 verse 13, and chapter 26 verse 13, the sluggard uses a classic excuse, which really takes some beating. He has finally dragged himself out of bed, and peers out of the window to see what the day has to offer. No chance of going out today – there's a lion in the street! He's the only one who has seen it, but he is convinced it was there, and that's enough to send him back to his bed!

We may smile at such a ridiculous excuse but let us not be complacent. How many believers work conscientiously from Monday to Friday? On Saturday, they cut the grass, clean the car and go to the shops. On Sunday, they wake up with a headache, so cannot possibly go to the assembly meeting.

We read the missionary reports and think how wonderful it is to hear of Africans walking for three days through the bush to sit on planks of wood and listen to the scriptures being taught for hours at a time.

Then we cannot make the effort to get into our air-conditioned cars and drive ten miles on a Saturday evening to support the neighbouring assembly and enjoy the ministry of the word of God! Oh, there is always a perfectly good reason why we couldn't make it. So many of us can relate to the lawyer in Luke chapter 10 verse 29, always 'willing to justify ourselves'.

Before we leave the slothful man to his reveries, we can take a walk past his property, 24. 30-34, that God-given inheritance, which is his to work upon, develop and enjoy. It is overgrown with thorns and nettles. Instead of a fruitful field, there is only evidence of the curse. Instead of a well-maintained wall of protection and separation, all is broken down.

We do well to consider our own inheritance; those blessings, which are ours in Christ, given richly for our enjoyment, 1 Tim. 6. 17. Do we neglect, or do we nurture them? Do those blessings bear fruit, or, as others look on our lives, do they, with a sad shake of the head, 'consider it well, look upon it, and receive instruction', 24. 32?



DAVID'S ROLL OF HONOUR

By **WILLIAM BURNETT** Oakville, Ontario, Canada

2 Samuel chapter 23 begins with, 'These be the last words of David . . . the son of Jesse'. Indeed, scripture is careful to record the 'last words' given by men of God, to ensure a seamless transition from their generation to the next. Some examples of this are to be seen in Moses, Jacob, David, and the Apostle Paul.¹ So also in our day, there should be an increasing burden about leaving a legacy of truth and godliness to the next generation. The other side of the coin is that there must also be willing hearts and minds in the rising generation to accept and cherish the heritage from the previous generation.

David's last words

In our present study, we wish to consider the last words of David, the 'Shepherd King' of Israel, as recorded in 2 Samuel chapter 23. In this chapter, David is reminiscing upon his life of conflict and conquest, days of rejection and flight, days of suffering and sorrow, and he remembers those who stood by him, no matter how harsh the conditions, or how fierce the opposition, and he gives them commendation for doing so.

In a sense, this chapter is a foreshadowing of the Judgement Seat of Christ. In this chapter there is no condemnation, only commendation for the worthy. So also, at the Judgement Seat of Christ, it is not our sins but rather our service for Christ that will be reviewed, and we will receive reward or loss according to our faithfulness.

Surprises in this chapter

As we read through the list of David's mighty men, we find that one name we thought would have been there is missing, and it includes a name that we never thought would have been there. We refer to the names of Joab, and Uriah the Hittite.

Joab

Joab was the commander of David's army, and had fought many a battle on David's behalf, bringing deliverance

to the nation of Israel from their enemies. Why, then, is the name of this mighty man missing? The reason is that, for all his excellencies, he was a harsh and bitter man, who many a time took matters into his own hands in defiance of David's orders, and whose selfish ambition for power led him to eliminate the competition. When Absalom usurped the throne, David was forced into hiding, and when the armies of Israel went out to look for Absalom, David gave strict instructions, 'Deal gently for my sake with the young man', 2 Sam. 18. 5. We know the story well. Absalom was riding on a mule, and as he passed under a tree, his long hair became entangled in the branches, and he was left suspended. When Joab came across him, he thrust three darts through him, killing him in defiance of David's instruction. When David grieved for Absalom his son, Joab rebuked him, and threatened him with complete abandonment if he would not resume his kingly duties, forcing David to comply.

Joab also slew Amasa whom Absalom had appointed commander of the armies instead of Joab, and he also slew Abner whom David was minded to appoint as commander of the armies instead of Joab. So, when it comes to the end of his life, David refuses to give such a man any place in his roll of honour.

We do well to take the warning from this omission – being active in service, and prominent in leadership, does not guarantee a place of honour at the Judgement Seat of Christ. Submission to the lordship of Christ and our motives in service will be the criteria used to reward. Joab would correspond to those whose works will be burned up – who will suffer loss – at the Judgement Seat, 1 Cor. 3. 15.

Uriah the Hittite

If ever there was a man who was loyal to David it was Uriah. David had seduced Uriah's wife Bathsheba when Uriah was on the battlefield fighting the Lord's battles. We remember how David tried to cover his sin by inviting Uriah to come back from the battlefield and spend time with his wife, but although Uriah returned, he refused to be with his wife as long as the Lord's armies were in the field. In a further attempt to cover his sinful behaviour, David instructed Joab to put Uriah into the front of the battle where the fighting was the fiercest, and to withdraw from him so that he would be killed – and he was. David repented with bitter tears when confronted by Nathan the prophet, and when he comes to making up his honours list, he recognizes the singular devotion and loyalty of Uriah and adds him to the list of mighty men. In the final analysis, at the Judgement Seat of Christ, there will be those who have served loyally and sacrificially, perhaps without much appreciation from men, but the Lord's true assessment will be given, and such will be added to the 'honours list' of glory.

Varying degrees of glory

When David compiled his honours list, not all were honoured alike. There were those who had attained to a higher level of excellence than others. For example, thirty-seven men belonged to this list of honour, but within that number, David talks about 'the first three', then he speaks about 'the thirty' and 'three of the thirty'. So, it will be at the Judgement Seat of Christ. There will be those who have been more intimate with the Lord, and whose service has exceeded others. Naturally, these will receive a greater reward. We see this principle reflected among the disciples of the

Lord Jesus. Peter, James, and John certainly belonged to ‘the first three’ in that group. They were more intimate with the Lord than the other nine, and they shared special moments in the life of the Lord Jesus apart from the others. In a sense we should all aspire to be in ‘the first three’. The late BOYD



NICHOLSON used to say, ‘the Lord has no favourites, but He does have intimates’.

‘The three’ of the thirty

Now consider ‘the three of the thirty’ who did a great service for David, v. 13. At this time, David was in hiding from Saul, and he had retreated to the cave of Adullam with his followers. They were willing to share in his suffering and hardship because they believed he was God’s anointed king. On a day when David was reminiscing about the past, he said, ‘Oh that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate’, 2 Sam. 23. 15. It wasn’t a command, only a yearning of his heart, but without delay these men risked their lives to minister to the heart of David.

The voluntary response

What lesson would we learn from the valiant deed of these three mighty men? First, our Lord is presently in exile and, ‘by the world disowned, by the many still neglected, and by the few enthroned’, and we have the unique privilege of ministering to Him – to meet the longings of His heart.² The question is – are we prepared to go beyond the call of duty because of our affection for the Lord, or are we motivated only by commandment? Surely, the highest form of service is that which springs from our affections. This voluntary response to the Lord’s desires is best seen when we gather to break bread. The Lord has made us a ‘kingdom of priests’, and, as such, He has expectations for voluntary giving. It is here that the Lord is looking for a response from our affections, rather than from a sense of duty.

The hindrances

The garrison of the Philistines was then in Bethlehem and we are told that these men ‘broke through’ to get the water for David. When we come to worship, all kinds of hindrances can arise in the mind, but if we are focussed on the Lord and His love for us we will ‘break through’ the obstacles to express our love to Him. What these men brought was comparatively worthless – a few gallons of water – but its value lay in the price they paid to get it. So also, we must not assess the worth of our worship by comparing it with what others may have offered.

Words spoken from the heart, are of more value than words of eloquence. So, let us be encouraged to ‘break through’ and worship the Lord.

Another point we should note is that the water was not shared with others, it was given to David. Just a word of caution here. The brief reading of some verse of scripture can be of value to fan the flame of worship, but the time of worship isn’t intended to be the place where we minister God’s word to each other. Peter reminds us that as a holy priesthood we ‘offer **up** spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ’, 1 Pet. 2. 5. When we come to worship the direction is vertical, rather than horizontal, as we offer our affectionate appreciations to the Lord. I quote our late brother BOYD NICHOLSON, ‘We do not gather to minister to the house of God, but to the heart of God’.

David’s appreciation

When David received this gift of water, and when he knew what it had cost these men to get it, he would not drink it. David saw this simple, seemingly worthless offering, in a different light. He saw it as representing the very blood of those who had risked life and limb to get it, and he thought it would be an appropriate ‘drink offering’ to pour out before the Lord.

In closing, the Lord is still in exile, ‘despised and rejected of men’, and He longs for expressions of our affection and appreciation. Let us follow the example of these ‘mighty men’ and be active in the voluntary expressions of worship that the Lord so desires. Keep in mind that when David compiled this list of ‘mighty’ men, it was when his exile was over, and he was now seated on the throne. Concerning the Lord Jesus, although now despised and rejected ‘the crowning day is coming by and by’ and when He sits on His throne I suggest that perhaps the highest accolades will go to those who, above all, were worshippers.³

Endnotes

- 1 Moses, Deuteronomy chapter 33; Jacob, Genesis chapter 49; David, 1 Samuel chapter 23; and the Apostle Paul, Acts chapter 20 and 2 Timothy.
- 2 Hymn, *Our Lord is now rejected*, WHITTLE.
- 3 *Ibid.*

SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN AT CHURCH IN ENGLAND

By **JEREMY GIBSON** Derby, England

In England during 2016/17 there were 13,591 recorded cruelty and neglect offences against persons under sixteen years old. In the same period 43,522 sexual offences were recorded against children under sixteen years old.¹ It is estimated that one-in-three children who are sexually abused by an adult, do not tell anyone. More than 90% of children who are sexually abused are abused by someone they know.² Sadly, much historical abuse that has hit news headlines has taken place under the auspices of religious organizations.

By way of contrast, local churches should show children genuine kindness, free from any abusive behaviours, and where their welfare is promoted. But we do not live in a perfect world. A Christian worker may become concerned that a child is being abused elsewhere. Children can make unfounded allegations against Christian teachers. Sadly, it is even possible for children to be abused in local churches. If any of these issues arise, it is vital that they are responded to quickly, transparently, and in line with current legislation. Failure to react appropriately can store up trouble for years to come. Christians must not only do the right thing, but be seen to do so.

What are the categories of abuse?

Children can be abused in four main ways: physical, sexual or emotional abuse, and neglect.

Physical abuse includes hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning, scalding, drowning, and even suffocating. Fabricated or induced illness (FII) – previously termed ‘Munchausen by proxy’ – is when a carer deliberately causes symptoms of illnesses in a child. This also comes under the umbrella of physical abuse.

Sexual abuse comprises forcing or enticing a child or young person to participate in sexual activities, whether or not the child understands the implications. Legally, no child under thirteen years of age can consent to sexual activity with anyone.

Emotional abuse is the continued emotional maltreatment of a child, causing severe and persistent adverse effects on the child’s emotional development. It may involve conveying to children that they are worthless, not giving children opportunities to express their views, or having age or developmentally inappropriate expectations. Even witnessing the ill-treatment of another person can lead to emotional abuse in a child.

Neglect is the ongoing failure to meet a child’s basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child’s health or development. A carer may fail to provide adequate food, clothing or shelter, or not protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger, not supervise the child

sufficiently, or prevent a child from accessing appropriate medical care or treatment.

What are the relevant legal principles?

The most up-to-date statutory guidance on inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children specifically mentions voluntary, charity, social enterprise (VCSE), faith-based organizations and private sectors.³ This document is based on various national legislations, including the Children Acts of 1998 and 2004, and the Children and Social Work Act 2017. Its guidance applies to all organizations and agencies which have functions relating to children and it should be complied with unless exceptional circumstances arise. Chapter two, which details organizational responsibilities, states that ‘every VCSE, faith-based organisation and private sector organisation or agency should have policies in place to safeguard and protect children from harm. These should be followed and systems should be in place to ensure compliance in this. Individual practitioners, whether paid or volunteer, should be aware of their responsibilities for safeguarding and protecting children from harm, how they should respond to child protection concerns and how to make a referral to local authority children’s social care or the police if necessary’.

What biblical principles apply to safeguarding children?

Paul made clear to the Romans that where no biblical principle is at stake believers should obey the laws of their land, Rom. 13. 1. Given that UK legislation to safeguard children does not contradict the Bible, local churches should comply. A child who is being abused is at risk of being murdered. A timely reporting of suspected child abuse has the potential to save a life. This is consistent with the Bible’s view of the preciousness of life. The Bible teaches that human beings were created in God’s image, Gen. 1. 26. Murder is considered such a serious crime that under Mosaic Law murderers were to be executed, Exod. 21. 12; Lev. 24. 17.

The Old Testament law also

emphasized the importance of showing care to the most vulnerable members of society, Deut. 24. 19. When a lawyer summed up the entire Law with two commandments, the second of these being ‘Thou shalt love . . . thy neighbour as thyself’, Luke 10. 27; Lev. 19. 18, the Lord Jesus illustrated the command with the Good Samaritan, Luke 10. 30-37. Having been assaulted, a man was left on the roadside, bleeding and bruised. Two men, from whom we would have expected genuine concern, saw the man and ‘passed by on the other side’. A Samaritan, who, because of his nationality, was despised by the Jews, ‘when he saw him, he had compassion on him. And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine’. Of course, this was the man who showed true love for his neighbour. To see a child (one of the most vulnerable members of our society) suffer, and do nothing, when it is in our power to help, is unloving.

With both the Old Testament and the New Testament cautioning the need for a plurality of witnesses in matters of jurisprudence, no adult should ever work alone with children, Deut. 19. 15; 1 Tim. 5. 19. Although Paul is referring to two adults, his words to the Corinthians, ‘It is good for a man not to touch a woman’, 1 Cor. 7. 1, should be heeded in children’s work. Avoid any form of physical contact that could in any way be misconstrued.

How can local churches encourage the safeguarding of children?

While many of the recommendations made in *Working together to safeguard children* are probably already in place in most local churches (see table), in the current climate it is important for them to be formalized. Burying our heads in the sand is the wrong approach. It fails to show true love for children. It disregards the laws of our country. And it has the potential to open Christians up to future litigation, which can mar a testimony. An assembly should address any safeguarding concerns, including allegations against any of the children’s workers, with openness, following a clearly written policy. ‘Let all things be done decently and in order’, 1 Cor. 14. 40. A friendly and non-intimidating atmosphere should encourage children to express their views and to ask questions. To ensure every children’s worker feels confident in identifying signs of potential abuse they should undergo formal training. It is not, however, their responsibility to investigate and to make a decision if abuse has actually taken place, which can be difficult even for highly trained professionals. It is a children’s worker’s responsibility to identify and report any potential abuse to children’s social care, which will then co-ordinate appropriate investigation and intervention.



Summary of chapter two recommendations

Recommendation	Potential solution
A clear line of accountability	While elders are responsible to lead, supervise and support a local church, those who work with children should undergo formal safeguarding training. In addition, there may be a named safeguarding lead.
Senior level leadership	
Appropriate supervision and support . . . safeguarding training	
A designated lead for safeguarding	
A culture of listening to children	Older Christians should encourage children to ask questions, Josh. 4. 6, 21.
Clear whistleblowing procedures	
Clear escalation policy	Each local church should have a written safeguarding children policy to follow if an allegation or a concern is raised.
Arrangements for sharing information	
Policies . . . for dealing with allegations	Although people are interviewed before acceptance into a local church, those who work with children should undergo Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks.
Safe recruitment and working practices	

Endnotes

- 1 How safe are our children? 2018. *The Most Comprehensive Overview Of Child Protection in the UK*. Available at: <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/research-reports/how-safe-children-2018-report.pdf>.
- 2 L. RADFORD *et al*, *Child Abuse and Neglect in the United Kingdom Today*, National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, 2011.
- 3 *Working together to safeguard children. A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children*. July 2018. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/722305/Working_Together_to_Safeguard_Children_-_Guide.pdf.

POSTAL BIBLE SCHOOL CANADA

By **PETE SMITH** Portage La Prairie, Canada

It was encouraging to read the following comment, in a recent Christmas card, received from a student – 'I love learning more about the BIBLE ☺ Hopefully I can learn more in the years to come'. Over the past eighteen years one wonders what impact these monthly Bible lessons have had on over 12,000 students who have been enrolled here in Canada.

At the end of 2017, we numbered around 2,000 students. Our three largest areas of concentration are approximately 750 in Ontario, 500 in the USA, plus 475 in Manitoba. Outside of these, some 325 live in western Canada while, disappointingly, only thirty live in the eastern provinces, with none in the northern territories. Unfortunately, we seem to lose as many as we gain each year, which is approximately 1,000 students. The highest we've reached is 2,399 back in November 2015. These are marked by a very faithful team of 265 teachers, who are from all across the country, plus a few in the United States. The vast majority of our team consists of sisters. It would seem that very few brethren have a desire to get involved. We would request your prayers that we shall see this change in the future and that the existing team might be given wisdom as they mark each month's lesson, make comments, and

correspond with their class. Elaine's office team consists of three sisters from our home assembly, plus two of our daughters. Our other daughter helps by marking. Their contribution, whether on a weekly or monthly basis, is a tremendous help in keeping Elaine's workload from becoming too heavy. In addition, three or four young people from our local assembly help out once or twice a month, by opening all the mail for us and then sorting it into groups – new applications, prize requests, teacher's queries etc.

We lease a high-quality colour digital printer to produce our monthly supply of lessons and are thankful to have very few problems. Please pray that this will continue. The four grades of *BibleTime* lessons have been edited three times. We are presently considering whether to use the new eight-page Level One Lessons that have been recently introduced in



Great Britain, replacing the original four-page edition. If we do, it will mean setting up a new editorial team to go over the 144 lessons. In 2015 we decided to revise the *NewLife* Bible Studies, as we had never done a full revision of these. This project is now almost complete and will be launched on our website, God willing, maybe this spring. We have been using the new red and black format ourselves since each was completed. Please pray with us that they will prove a useful tool for Bible class teachers. All our *BibleTime* lessons are also available on our website, readily accessible for Sunday School Teachers. Prayer would be valued for Mike Badgley of Ottawa, who is our webmaster and who hopes to make some upgrades to the website shortly. Once we have completed the English *NewLife* revision, our long-standing graphic designer of some eighteen years will be retiring and Mike will be taking over the responsibility of making all our corrections. At this stage we're not sure who will be assigned the laying out of the new Level One, if we decide to use it.

Over the past seven years we have been working on a Spanish translation of the *NewLife* series. Unfortunately, due to various issues, we've been delayed several times, with the biggest holdup in 2017 being my inability to find the needed time to complete it sufficiently so it can also be made available on both our website and the BES website. Please pray that this project will see the light of day in 2018, especially as the *BibleTime* lessons are now available in Spanish.

Our two biggest ways of recruiting new students continues to be our website and promotion during our 'Treasure Seekers' children's weeks. This past summer I had seven one-week children's series, including a



return visit to a small rural community called Arborg, situated two hours north of Winnipeg. How we came to go to Arborg was quite amazing! One day a friend of ours was speaking to a farmer from there who had five of his seven children doing Postal Bible School (PBS). When he heard about the Gospel Tent he said that he would love to see children's tent meetings in his area, so our friend gave him our contact details. I was curious how many other children were doing PBS in his area and was very surprised to discover we had forty-one active students! In August 2016, over sixty children attended daily afternoon meetings, including nearly all our PBS students! What a thrill to be sharing the gospel with those who had been doing PBS lessons for three, five, or more years! Last summer, we started with only forty-two but climbed to seventy-three, with eight to fifteen parents present each afternoon. However, it was a conversation with a mum that I will remember most. She told me how her eleven-year-old son had been in Bolivia with her husband two months earlier. As his dad was driving a bulldozer, his son tried to get his attention, but his dad couldn't hear him. As he tried to get out of the way of the machine, he tripped, and was run over and killed! She said this is why he is not at the meetings this year. How solemn! A year ago he didn't miss a meeting and now he is in eternity – where I don't know! May the Lord help us to faithfully preach and distribute His word!

An annual outreach that PBS has been involved with for many years is a gospel booth in the Royal Manitoba Winter Fair that is held during the last week in March in Brandon. In recent years, PBS has taken on the full responsibility of running it, after the small assembly approached us. As a registered charity, we are given a discounted rate for our double site, which is a real help. However, as I had been struggling to come up with any new ideas in the last couple of years, we approached Mike and Helen Knox and asked if they would like to have a major input into this outreach and they kindly agreed to do this last year. Helen is our eldest daughter, and they were commended to the Lord's work in January 2016. Based on a book called



If You Could Ask God One Question, the display included these words on a large fabric display.

There was a board where people could write and leave their questions, plus an interactive photo table where those looking were asked questions. Mike had ordered 1,100 copies of the book, which were available for free to anyone who wanted a copy, while a new PBS fabric banner display was used and 'goodie bags' passed out to any children.

It was a complete break with the style and content used in recent years but, as hoped, it attracted many to stop and talk and to take for themselves a copy of the book. We would appreciate prayer for the follow-up to this year's outreach.

Another development that has tremendous potential has opened up in St. Lucia. During my last visit in May 2017, nine primary schools

were visited again and at two of them I showed the head teachers sample PBS *BibleTime* booklets. These are printed in Ireland and contain twenty-four lessons. I offered to supply these free of charge, if they felt they could use them as part of their Religious Education curriculum. Both heads were very positive and felt it was most timely and said they would get back to me after speaking to their staff. One of the schools was the very first one I visited in a rural area with about 250 students.

The other was one of those in the capital, Castries, that has over 700 students. After some months' delay and several phone calls, in November we were thrilled when the rural school ordered 126 booklets. At the time of writing we had not heard from the other school. As you read this report, I am hoping I will have had the opportunity during my Jan/Feb 2018 visit to speak with the head teachers of seven more Primary Schools where I had morning assemblies, along with the Head of a High School in Castries, and left with them samples of the booklets. Please pray that many Head Teachers will place orders and begin using the material with their children.

We have now been involved with PBS for some thirty years. Neither of us are getting any younger and, ideally by 2022, we would like our numbers to be halved to around 1,000 students. If we didn't have responsibility for any students from Ontario and the USA this could be accomplished. Please join us in praying that the Lord will overrule with regard to the future. We appreciate your continued prayers for the Lord's blessing upon this outreach.



The voice from behind

By **SAM TAUFEEK** Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Whilst, as believers, we are pressing on the journey of faith, there will always be two messages in our ears. One message is from the adversary, whose object is to make us stumble or to draw us out of the path. 'Get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us', Isa. 30. 11. Can a believer wish that God would cease from before him? Sadly, yes! As Satan tries to entangle the believer in sin, he wishes to get that individual to turn away from the presence of the Holy God, seemingly to bring rest to his conscience. More subtly, the adversary will try to convince us that we need to wait until we are cleansed, but can we really find more comfort by taking our eyes off the Lord Jesus?

The wonderful promise that follows reads, 'And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, this is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left', v. 21. This is the second message, and it is from the Holy Spirit. It is the tender voice of grace.

In Hebrews chapter 12 verse 1, we have a clear picture of a believer who is running the race and who is surrounded by 'witnesses'. But they are also encircled by sin that besets them easily, like another competitor distracting the runner. So, how can we 'run with patience the race that is set before us'? The answer is given us, 'Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who . . . is set down at the right hand of the throne of God', v. 2. We need to fix our eyes on the Lord Jesus who is the true 'Forerunner' who 'entered within the veil' in heaven, 'which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast', 6. 19.

The scriptures tell us of Demas who laboured with the Apostle Paul but, later on, forsook him, 'having loved this present world'. Demas harkened to the message that urged him to look at what the world was ready to offer and leave the true gold to explore what he would eventually discover to be the false lustre of vanity, 2 Tim. 4. 10. Peter was in a ship in the midst of a fierce storm but he stepped out, and, literally, walked on water; when the

Lord bid him to come, 'he walked on the water, to go to Jesus'. But, when Peter turned his eyes to the raging waves, 'he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him', Matt. 14. 30, 31.

When I started my career as a young and very enthusiastic engineer, I thought I could do everything. When asked to inspect some equipment at one of the work sites, I was not very pleased to know that I would need to climb a very high extension ladder, leaning on the building, to get to the equipment. The mechanic supported the ladder properly and I had no choice but to start climbing. It was soon quite obvious that I was shaky and probably shaking the whole ladder. Finally, came the timely advice from below, 'Sir, look up!'

In Psalm 73 we read of Asaph who turned his eyes 'at the foolish' and 'was envious' when he saw 'the prosperity of the wicked'. He harkened to the message of the adversary and so we hear him saying, 'But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped'. In the end, he 'went into the sanctuary of God' and, as a consequence, could declare, 'So foolish was I, and ignorant . . . thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but

thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee', Ps. 73. 22-25.

Satan can use even the closest of believers to distract us from listening and observing what the Lord is saying. In John chapter 21, the Lord Jesus revealed to Peter valuable future events in regards to his ministry and his life. However, the scriptures tell us that, 'Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following'. Peter was distracted, and his mind wandered away to John and would ask, 'Lord, and what shall this man do?' Jesus answered, 'what is that to thee? Follow thou me', John 21. 22.

May we heed the words of the psalmist, 'I have set the Lord always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved', Ps. 16. 8.



Missionary work amongst the Hutterites in Manitoba, Canada

By **JACK GOULD** Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

The Hutterites take their name from one of their early leaders, Jakob Hutter. This group had its beginnings during the Reformation and were part of the Anabaptists.¹ Both Jakob Hutter, and his wife Katharine, were continually on the move as religious and government authorities searched for them. Finally, on November 29th, 1535, Jakob and Katharine were captured and the two were separated, never to see each other again on earth. Jakob was executed, and two years later his wife was also killed. Yet what they had commenced was going to live on.

Although the Hutterites moved across parts of Western Europe in response to various forms of persecution, it was not until 1873 that the Mennonites and Hutterites sent out members to North America in search of a new place to live. Being pacifists, the main reason for this was to avoid compulsory military service that was being imposed. Thus, on April 14th, 1873, two Hutterite men, Paul and Lorenz Tschetter, with a Mennonite delegation, set out for the USA to search for suitable land.

Once they were in North America, they travelled through many parts of the country including Manitoba, in their search for land. However, the persecution they faced because of their pacifist stance during the First World War, led them to move from the USA to Canada, and six colonies were established in Manitoba, and nine in Alberta.

Jakob Hutter believed in the community of goods, where all the followers of this movement would live and work together. They based this idea on Acts chapter 2 verses 44 and 45, where the early Christians 'sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all **men**, as every man had need'. This practice continues amongst the Hutterites today.

An individual colony is presided over by a 'preacher'. A secretary handles

the financial side of the colony, while a farm boss is responsible for the agricultural activities. Each colony cultivates thousands of acres. Along with agriculture, most of the colonies also undertake manufacturing work. Colonies vary in size from seventy to 150 people. No one receives a wage for their work but they all labour together for the good of the community.

Sadly, this movement has deteriorated into a salvation-by-works theology. As adults, they are 'baptized', by pouring, and take an oath that they would never leave the Hutterite Church. While some would be believers when 'baptized', the majority would not be.

In the early 1990s, some of the young people on the colonies started to question the practices and desired answers from their preachers. These young people produced a paper called the 'Thirty Questions'. They wanted answers from the Bible and not from their Hutterite tradition. As one can imagine, this caused a great stir.

In 1994 Andrew Bergsma, along with my wife and I, commenced visiting these colonies. Hutterites cannot leave their colony unless permission is granted by the preacher. This means that they cannot come out to us to hear the gospel, so we must go to them. Personal visitation was the means of contact. This we did for seven years before the first ones

left the colony system and came to meetings.

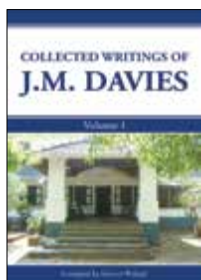
In visiting the colonies, I have been greatly helped by the material produced by the International Bible House in Delta, British Columbia. They very kindly ship us 8 inch x 10 inch (approximately 200 mm x 250 mm) gospel texts for distribution on these colonies. My approach is very simple. We buy frames for these texts and then drive on to a colony. The first person that we meet is given the framed text. Then I have enough unframed texts to give away and ask this person to take them to the common dining hall, as there is one text for each family. Often we are invited into their homes for coffee and, at times, taken to the common dining hall to have a meal with them. The Hutterites are very hospitable. To some we would be looked upon as bringing a new religion on to the colony, while others are very open and are willing to talk about the scriptures. We introduce ourselves as overseas missionaries – having spent twelve years preaching the gospel on the island of St. Lucia in the West Indies. The Hutterites do not have missionaries and this opens up the way for conversations.

There are now over 110 colonies in our province of Manitoba, and we visit each colony at least once each year. It has pleased the Lord to work amongst these dear people over the years. These gospel texts we distribute are readily received, and they put them up in their houses. God has used these verses to bring souls to Himself. The work is the Lord's from beginning to end. We ask for your prayers that this door of opportunity that has been opened to us will continue until the Lord returns.

Endnotes

- 1 'Hutterites share a common ancestry with the Anabaptists, along with the Mennonites and Amish . . . Hutterites differ in one major aspect: they believe in sharing their possessions in common, as demonstrated by Christ and His apostles, and as later further refined and described in the Book of Acts', taken from <http://www.hutterites.org/history>.

Book Reviews



Collected Writings of J. M. Davies Vols. 1-3

Compiled by Mervyn Wishart

Paperback in 3 volumes, 1428 pages, Published by STL, Cookstown, N. Ireland
ISBNs: 978-1-909789-25-8; 978-1-909789-26-5; 978-1-909789-27-2.

Mr. J. M. Davies was born in South Wales, UK, in 1895. He attended the Moody Bible Institute and Wheaton College in the USA where he acquired knowledge of Greek which was a great help to him in the understanding of the scriptures which he loved and practised. He and his wife were commended as missionary workers to India in 1920 and became fluent in the Malayalam language; he preached the gospel and taught the scriptures throughout the country. His knowledge was deep, his presentation clear and his application challenging. He was greatly loved throughout India, and in the UK and North America. Affectionally known as 'JMD', he was called home in Vancouver, Canada, in 1990, aged 95 years.

As a result of his time in India

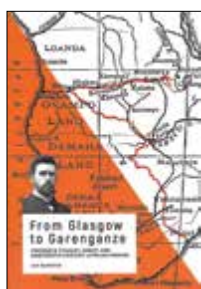
and his travels abroad, his oral and written ministry were widespread, but not readily available in any one place. As a result, a challenging project was undertaken by brethren in India and the UK to compile his written ministry and make it all available to 21st-century believers worldwide.

The three volumes make over 1400 pages and comprise nearly twenty-five books, booklets and other articles. They are written in the same style as Mr. Davies' oral ministry which makes for easy reading and clear understanding of Bible doctrine. Each reader will have his own selection of the best of this collection. Mine include the section on Romans, *The Christian's Statue of Liberty*, which is masterly; *Israel's Wilderness Journeys considered Prophetically*, which

is illuminating; and *Let us go on to Perfection*, a study of the parenthetical or warning passages in the Epistle to the Hebrews, which is so helpful. There are also many devotional truths which warm the heart and support the hopes of Christians as we wait for our Lord's return.

This is a series of books which will appeal to all and certainly no serious Bible student should be without the value of this ministry. STL are to be thanked for making Mr. Davies' writings available to a generation of believers who did not have the privilege of hearing our brother in person. As a result, many more will doubtless benefit and grow in their spiritual understanding of the good word of God.

Our thanks to Roy Hill, Pensford, England, for this review.



From Glasgow to Garenganze

Ian Burness

Paperback, 339 pages, Published by OPAL Trust and Echoes International, 1 Glenannan Park, Lockerbie, DG11 2FA, UK.
ISBN 978-1-907098-32-1.

A debt of gratitude is owed to the writer for the very readable style in which he has written this book. His extensive and detailed research is reflected in the large number of reference documents identified in the bibliography. For the reader, however, the events described are captivating, with or without any knowledge of F. S. Arnot, or the evolution of nineteenth century African Mission. One could easily read chapter 20 as a prologue to the whole book to whet the appetite and begin to understand just what an impact Arnot had.

It is wonderful to see how, as a young boy, he was so influenced by the labours of David Livingstone that he became determined 'he would go and help that great man in his work'; a valuable lesson on the impact great men of God could have on our young ones, given the opportunity.

F. S. Arnot journeyed into the African interior, confronted on the one hand by the horrors of the slave trade, and, on the other, by western influences such as drink and gunpowder, not to mention the insatiable desire for

minerals and ivory. Arnot's simple observation that the encounter with European civilization would import damaging practices to Africa motivated his attempts to penetrate unreached areas with the gospel. He recognized that even the prospect of British colonialism would be a dubious blessing to the Africa he loved.

Undeterred by frequent attacks of malaria, Arnot spent fourteen of his thirty-three years of service in Central Africa. What a shining example of counting the cost!

The privations of nineteenth century travel through the African interior are graphically recorded, and yet amidst these circumstances he wrote, 'I cannot but recognize the hand of the Lord in preserving my life in such trying circumstances'.

Arnot noticed that every tribe he encountered had a concept of a supreme being. This gave him an opening to explain to them the nature of the God of whom they were ignorant. Imagine trying to convey to tribal rulers who had despotic powers of life and death the fact that in God's eyes there is

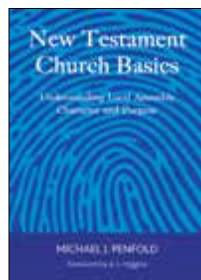
no difference, and that we are all cast upon the mercy of God.

Although the book is predominantly about Arnot, and his efforts to open up the African interior to the claims of the gospel, it would be remiss not to mention that there are numerous faithful workers acknowledged, and that they also counted the cost. The poignant words of Cyril Bird to his wife Annie, as they looked over the grave of two infants, one of which was their own son, were, 'we must have our first grave, before we can have our first fruits'. Not long afterwards he too was placed in that grave, confirming that many of their generation knew the risks and were literally willing to lay down their lives for the sake of Christ.

Just two weeks before his death ARNOT wrote, 'the missionary, conscious of his call, can only go forward, irrespective of men and means, come life or come death'.

In the words of the writer, 'his is a memory we can honour and an example we can follow'.

Thanks to Bill Brady, Killamarsh, England, for this review.



New Testament Church Basics – Understanding Local Assembly Character and Purpose

Michael J. Penfold

Paperback, 60 pages, Published by John Ritchie Ltd., 40 Beansburn, Kilmarnock, KA3 1RL, Scotland.
ISBN: 978-1-912522-29-3.

For one who was brought up listening to some of the same speakers mentioned in the acknowledgements at the end of this book, it might almost appear as if this book was unnecessary. Sadly, it is not. Whilst the truths the book emphasizes were well taught, and continue to be so, it is clear that in the busy schedule of modern life, and society's increasing emphasis upon the 'me culture', some continue to loosen their grip upon these essentials.

From the outset, MICHAEL

PENFOLD states, 'doctrine matters'. In eight short chapters, he sets out what aspects are fundamental. The local assembly: exists for divine glory; manifests the divine presence; exhibits divine design; administers divine authority; displays divine order; provides divine care; proclaims divine truth; and fulfils the divine commission. The reader should be warned. This is not 'an easy read'. This book will challenge and may even offend. For example, the writer stresses that rather than 'forever chasing the

latest fad in Christendom in an attempt to make the assembly look "cool" in the eyes of the world', we should be 'starting from the premise "What saith the Lord"'.

This book is carefully, scripturally, and powerfully argued. It sets out from a simple but profound beginning the beauty of what God established for Himself and what it behoves all of us to seek to maintain. The author is to be commended for setting these truths before a new generation with such clarity.



The World, the Flesh and the Devil

Jack Hay

Paperback, 88 pages, Published by John Ritchie Ltd, 40 Beansburn, Kilmarnock, Scotland, KA3 1RH.
ISBN: 978-1-912522-32-3.

The subjects under consideration in this brief, yet concise, study were addressed at a conference in South Wales in 2017. Now available in print to a wider audience, the importance of an acknowledgement and understanding of these topics cannot be overstated.

For those acquainted with the author and his ministry, it is easy to hear his voice throughout the book. The clear and precise approach to each subject; the explanation and scriptural use of the terms involved. The ability to draw on examples and illustrations from

Old and New Testaments and the clear practical applications for the reader, all blend to provide vital lessons and challenges to believers of all ages and experience.

The believer's adversaries as seen in the threefold title have often been presented in a very negative way, with emphasis placed on prohibitions and exclusions. This book, on the contrary, presents the subjects in a positive way. The reader is guided through the chapters logically and given a clear appreciation of the terms as used in scripture and as understood in

the context of everyday life. The practical emphasis throughout is on awareness and vigilance.

We are left in no doubt that behind the allurements of the world and the temptation of the flesh is our inveterate enemy the devil. Provision has been made for the believer who is exhorted to 'put on the whole armour of God' in order to engage in the battle. This book is a timely reminder to all who would tread the pathway of faith that although we are not ignorant of the devices of our adversary, we are so often unprepared to face the inevitable assaults.

Chairman's Notes

2018 has brought its challenges for the work of Precious Seed. We started the year by moving our book printing and distribution operation from Northern Ireland to Southampton. Thank you to Howard Coles (our retired treasurer) who assisted us by organizing the transportation. With a minimum of upheaval, the shop ordering system and dispatch procedures synchronized successfully.

Readers may also have noticed that we implemented a design refresh of the magazine, starting with the February issue. We hope that this cleaner look will make the material more accessible, whilst maintaining the same mix of expository, devotional, and practical articles.

One of the major tasks in the earlier

part of the year was the development of policies and procedures necessary to ensure our compliance with new UK, and Europe-wide, legislation, known as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). This has taken a considerable amount of time and effort and the consequences of that legislation are still being felt, particularly as a few magazine subscribers have failed to respond to our letters and requests.

If you know of someone who has not received their magazine, please tell them to contact us to make sure their names are put back on our database. Magazine requests can be sent to the secretary (secretary@preciousseed.org) or treasurer (orders@preciousseed.org). Alternatively, telephone the number on the back of this magazine.

Alongside those practical matters, some Trust members have experienced serious health issues that have affected their ability to contribute to the work as they would wish.

We would seek your continued prayer support for the work and those that give of their valuable time to continue it. We are aware of our weakness whilst, at the same time, being aware of the increasing need. As the Apostle wrote, 'Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it', yet, with Paul, we add, 'Brethren, pray for us', 1 Thess. 5. 24, 25.

Maranatha.

John Bennett
Chairman and General Editor

WORD FOR TODAY

By **BRIAN CLATWORTHY** Newton Abbot, England

Sheber (*Corn, victuals*)

Shebet (*Sceptre, rod, staff*)

Shebi (*Captivity, prisoners*)

The sceptre has been an emblem of those in authority, such as kings, judges and military leaders as well as priests, down through the centuries. Sceptres have varied in size from full length staffs to hand-held batons and have also been identified as the shepherd's crook in Ancient Egypt. Interestingly, in Leviticus chapter 27 verse 32, it is the *shebet* of the shepherd that determines the tithe paid to the Lord from Israel's herds and flocks.

Initially, however, the dominant idea behind the Hebrew noun *shebet* was that of a staff or a rod for disciplinary purposes. The noun *shebet* referred to a tree from which the rod was made, but unlike its Hebrew synonym (*matteh*), *shebet* always refers to someone in authority. In Exodus chapter 21 verse 20, a slave owner uses a rod to corporally punish a slave, and in the often misquoted verse in Proverbs chapter 13 verse 24, the rod is used by a parent to discipline a child.¹ Whilst one might think today that this is a harsh and unacceptable way of disciplining children, the overall thrust of the proverb teaches us that the motivation of the parent in any form of disciplinary action should always be love, not cruelty. As one Jewish commentator writes, 'A lax parent is treating his son as if he hated him'. Contrast this with the use of the word in Psalm 23 verse 4.

Elsewhere in the Old Testament the word is used metaphorically of the sovereignty of God, as in Isaiah chapter 10 verse 5, where He uses nations such as Assyria as a rod to punish Israel.² Similarly, in Lamentations chapter 3 verse 1, the individual, which in this context may be a collective term for Israel, regards exile as the exercise

of the rod of God's wrath – again, the imagery is that of a shepherd's rod or crook as the instrument of punishment, cp. 2 Sam. 7. 14.

Primarily, however, the sceptre became more and more a symbol of royal or imperial authority as predicted in its first use in Genesis chapter 49 verse 10. This messianic prophecy anticipates that David's greater Son will one day reign as the true shepherd king of Israel, marked out by the symbols of the sceptre and staff of His dominion. This early prophecy is reinforced later in Balaam's fourth oracle when he refers to a Star that would arise from Jacob, and a Sceptre (*shebet*) that would rise out of Israel, Num. 24. 17.

In the Septuagint (LXX) *shebet* is translated by a number of Greek words, but the word that is the dynamic equivalent of *shebet* is *rhabdos*, again meaning sceptre, rod or staff. It is used in Genesis chapter 47 verse 31 of Jacob bowing at the head of his bed – here the translators change the Masoretic Text (MT) rendering from 'the bed's head' to explain to us that Jacob was, in fact, leaning on 'the top of his staff'. In Nahum chapter 1 verse 13 the MT, which reads 'I break his yoke from off thee', is changed by the LXX translators to read, 'I break his rod from off thee'. 'His rod' may be a reference to King Sennacherib of Assyria, cp. 2 Kgs. 18. 13 *et seq.* and would then highlight God's sovereignty in destroying Sennacherib's kingly authority over His people.

The incidences of the Greek word *rhabdos* in the New Testament are limited. Nonetheless, the word does provide us with some useful insights into its various meanings in specific contexts. For example, in Acts chapter 16 verses 35 and 38 its related form is used to describe someone who carried a rod or staff of office. Hence, the reference here to a Roman lictor. In Revelation chapter 11 verse 1, which has

textual echoes of Ezekiel chapter 40 verses 3 *et seq.*, the word is used of a surveyor's measuring rod used to measure the temple of God. The word also refers to the special rod of Aaron, which, according to Numbers chapter 17 verse 3, not only sprouted but produced blossoms and yielded almonds, Heb. 9. 4, thus indicating God's sovereign choice of Aaron as High Priest. But of all the occurrences in the New Testament perhaps the one text that sticks out more than any other in highlighting the meaning of *rhabdos* is Hebrews chapter 1 verse 8. Using a catena of Old Testament texts, the writer of Hebrews, in chapter 1 verse 4 onwards, emphasizes the superiority of the person of Christ over angelic ministry.³ In verse 8, which is almost a direct quotation from Psalm 45 verse 6, the writer not only confirms the deity of Christ but also the legitimacy of His title to reign over an eternal kingdom by holding the powerful symbol of the royal sceptre. Knowing then that one day 'He must reign', 1 Cor. 15. 25, may the golden sceptre hold sway in our lives today.

For further reading/study

Introductory

Sceptre in W. E. VINE *Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words*, pp. 114, 115.

Advanced

rhabdos in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Abridged in one volume), pp. 982, 983.

Endnotes

- 1 The modern take on this proverb is, 'Spare the rod, spoil the child', but the Hebrew word for 'hate' in the biblical text can also mean indifference to or relative disregard for something.
- 2 MOTYER (*The Prophecy of Isaiah*, IVP, pp.113, 114) translates this as, 'Club of my wrath' and suggests that 'the Lord's anger empowers Assyria'.
- 3 Jews referred to this form of approach as stringing-pearls. Each text was regarded as a precious pearl that once strung together would enable the teacher to get across a major point in his argument.

QUESTION

Is it wrong for a Christian to go out with someone who is not saved?

ANSWER

From a natural perspective, it is quite possible that a Christian will find an attraction to someone who is not a believer. They may be work colleagues who get on well, or there might be some other circumstance whereby the two share several similar interests and interact easily with each other. However, the question is not whether a saved person might feel an attraction to someone not saved but would it be wrong for that to develop into a relationship. The direct answer to this is unequivocally 'yes'; it would be wrong for a believer to go out with someone who is not saved. Furthermore, any attempt to defend the situation by thinking that through the relationship the believer might be better able to witness to their partner or use the friendship to get them to attend gospel meetings does not justify a scripturally wrong association.

Whilst a young Christian may be determined to avoid a relationship with an unbeliever, the pressures testing that conviction may increase significantly as time passes. They may long to be married and, if no partner is found, there is the danger that they might relax their conviction and seek a friendship with someone not saved. In all probability, the friend they might be attracted to will be an honest, kind and genuine individual and, in many respects, they will seem to be no different to the saved person. However, that perspective overlooks the fact that there are fundamental differences between them. A Christian is someone who is saved, reconciled to God, possesses eternal life, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, walks in the light and has been delivered from the power of darkness. In stark contrast, an unbeliever is lost, at enmity with God, does not have eternal life, the Holy Spirit is not in them, they walk in darkness and are condemned.

Although the context of the verses does not relate to the question that has been asked, the apostle Paul is very forthright in setting out the contrasts between believers and unbelievers. He states, 'Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with

unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel', 2 Cor. 6. 14, 15. The differences between a Christian and an unbeliever are so distinct that a compatible relationship on every level between the two is not possible.

One of the most crucial decisions we might face is whom we will marry and therefore it is vital that we seek the Lord's guidance relative to this. As the will of the Lord will never lead us in a pathway that is contrary to the word of the Lord, we cannot claim that a relationship with an unsaved person is His will for us. In 1 Corinthians chapter 7 verse 39, Paul gives advice to widows, 'The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord'. Although the apostle is referring to a particular situation, the principle of marrying in the Lord must apply to all couples and thus it is relevant to the matter before us.

Space does not permit a fuller answer, but I would refer readers to an article written by JOHN SALISBURY in *Precious Seed*, Vol. 65 Issue No. 1, *Considering Marriage – How can I be sure?* which gives further help.

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- The magazine is published quarterly by the Precious Seed Trust, Registered Charity No. 326157.
 - It is distributed, without charge, to over 100 countries.
 - Numbers printed are over 13,000, plus over 1500 in India.
 - About 50% of copies go overseas and half of these to countries in the developing world.
 - Postage accounts for over 60% of our costs.
 - Including postage, each magazine costs around £1.00 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.
- Please send book orders to: Precious Seed Publications, 34 Metcalfe Avenue, Killamarsh, Sheffield S21 1HW, UK.
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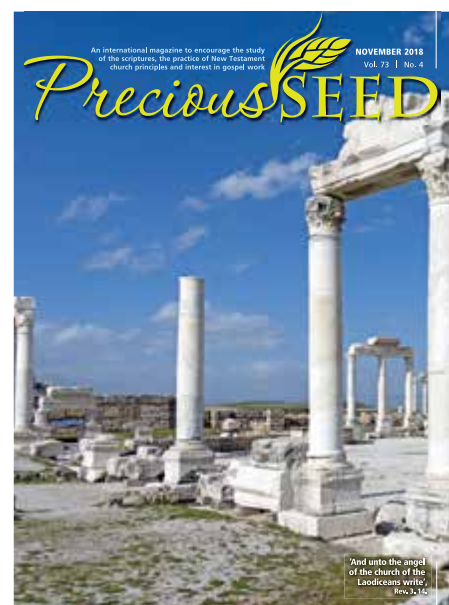
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'And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write', Rev. 3. 14.

Lycus River, a tributary of the River Meander, in an area of Asia Minor known as Phrygia – now part of present day Turkey. Nearby were the smaller and less important cities of Hierapolis and Colossae. The area around these three cities was especially prone to violent earthquakes, and the landscape was constantly changing. According to WILLIAM RAMSEY this created, 'a remarkable series of hot springs, and warm mud baths, some in the bed of the Meander, others on its banks'. Although Laodicea was a strongly fortified city, it had limited water supplies, and so was highly vulnerable to a siege as it depended heavily upon water being supplied from local cold springs via an aqueduct. The city was in all probability named after Laodice the first wife of Antiochus II, and later, under Roman rule, became famous in the ancient world as a banking and financial centre, a manufacturing hub for garments produced from local wool, and renowned for its distinguished school of medicine that specialized in producing various treatments including an ointment for the eyes. The Apostle Paul frequently visited the area known as Phrygia, Acts 16. 6; 18. 23, but as the actual boundary of this territory changed on numerous occasions, it is doubtful whether he ever visited the cities of the Lycus valley. This seems to be confirmed by Colossians chapter 1 verses 4, 6 and 9, and especially chapter 2 verse 1. He may, though, have been indirectly responsible for the establishment of New Testament churches in this area. Paul visited the city of Ephesus and stayed there preaching for more than two years, Acts 19. 9, 10. Ephesus was a city located about 100 miles from the Lycus valley. The result of Paul's preaching was that, 'all the residents of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord'. Amongst this number was a man called Epaphras, a native of Colossae. We suggest that he heard Paul preach, was converted to Christianity, and then became the evangelist of the Lycus valley, Col. 4. 12, 13. There are other references in the letter to the Colossians to the Laodicean church, 4. 13, 15, 16, and, as Colossae was only about ten miles from Laodicea, it seems likely that the two churches were closely identified – notice the exchange of letters that is encouraged by Paul between the two churches in Colossians chapter 4 verse 16. The meaning of the expression, 'the letter from Laodicea' NIV, in that text is highly disputed by scholars, but it does not make Paul's imperative any less meaningful. It could be inferred from Colossians chapter 4 verse 15 that the church in Laodicea met in the house of a person named Nymphas. There are no other references to the Laodicean church until we reach the book of Revelation, where we find a specific letter written to them by the Lord Himself, Rev. 3. 14-22. The Lord's stinging criticism of this church is graphically highlighted by a number of illustrations drawn from everyday life in Laodicea. This includes a reference to them being neither cold nor hot, but lukewarm in their spiritual lives – undoubtedly relating to the local hot and cold springs and the fact that by the time water came from the cold springs around the city via the aqueduct it would have been lukewarm. Another reference is to them being materially rich, probably through trade and banking activities, but despite their financial wealth and thriving textile industry they were spiritually poor and naked. They boasted of their medical prowess, particularly their use of eye salve, yet they were spiritually blind. How we need, therefore, to heed the warnings of this letter as we witness today in societies that are often dominated by materialism with few ethical or moral absolutes, and which constantly seek to press us into their dominant non-Christian culture, Rom. 12. 2. May we hear the Lord's voice as He requests permission to enter into our lives again and re-establish fellowship with us, Rev. 3. 20.

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