

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

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Precious SEED



'And when he was come
into Jerusalem, all the
city was moved',
Matt. 21.10

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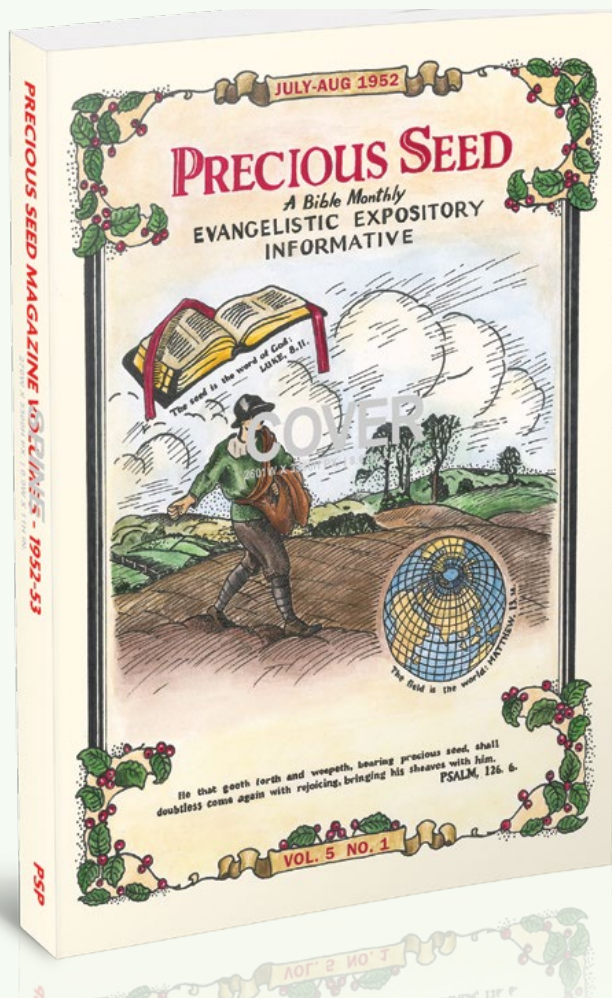
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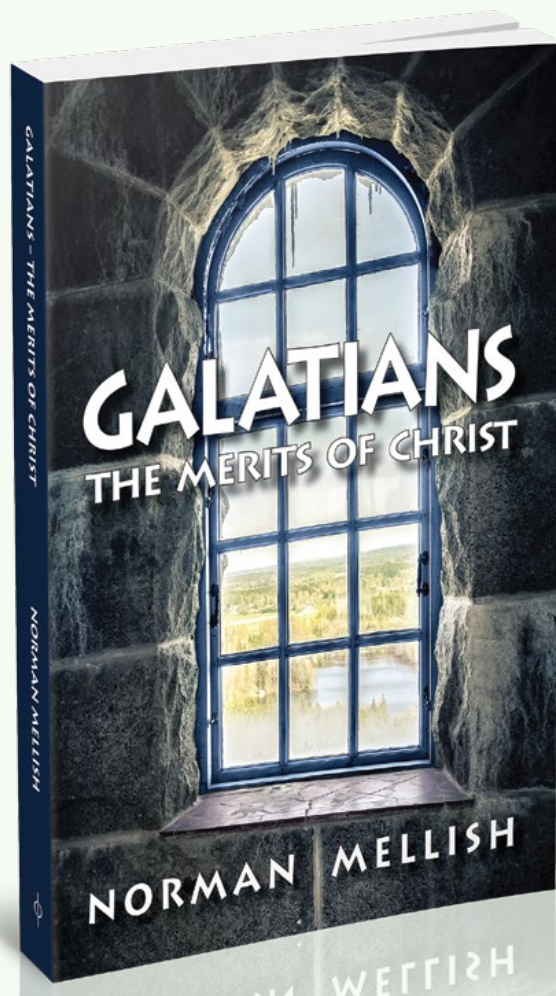


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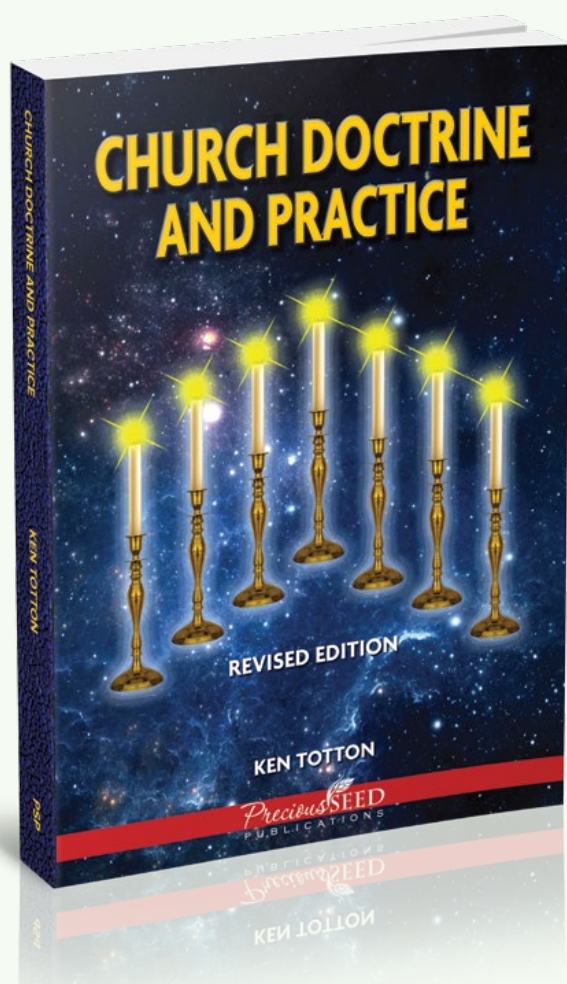
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‘That your faith and hope might be in God’, 1 Pet. 1. 21.

As Peter lifts his pen to write the first of two letters from him that appear in the New Testament, he is writing at a time when Christians are suffering tremendous opposition. A variety of trials, attribution of evil to their actions, suffering for doing good and the clear opposition of society around them, to point out a few. While most commentators would describe the primary audience of the letter as Jewish Christians, we do well to remind ourselves that all Christians are ‘strangers’ in a world that opposes God. Thus, the inspired text will point us to truth that is important to embrace by faith, and which stabilizes each of us in time of trial.

The truth that grounds the believer in trial is the reality that our God is a God of purpose. That unthwartable purpose is secured by a complete and united action toward us which involved the entirety of the Godhead: ‘election according to the foreknowledge of

God the Father’; ‘sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience’; and ‘sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ’, 1. 2.

What Peter unfolds to his readers is that, in spite of what the circumstances of life might seem to suggest, our God can be relied upon! His abundant mercy has brought us into a ‘lively hope’ – prospects rooted in the undeniable reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 1. 3. His power not only guards ensuing future prospects but is also providing an undefeatable guard to the subjects of His purpose as they are besieged in a hostile world, vv. 4, 5. Furthermore, we are to allow the extent of the investment of God in our redemption to be the resting place for our faith and hope, vv. 19-21. Note the word used – ‘redeemed’; it is not our salvation that is in view. The Spirit of God reminds us not only of the price paid; precious blood that is infinitely more valuable than earth’s paltry bullion, but also

that God has acted to pay the price to purchase us back for Himself. Behind the word is not a mere reaction to our lost estate, but also the purposeful actions of Almighty God.

May the word of God, through the instruction of the divine teacher, help us to peruse and perceive the character and actions of our God, so that we might, like the Psalmist of old, address our thinking and cry, ‘Why art thou cast down, O my soul? . . . Hope thou in God’, Ps. 42. 5, 11!

Once again, we acknowledge the contributions of so many authors over the past year and commend this issue to you for your prayerful consideration. In doing so we look to the Almighty for His gracious blessing.

SANDY JACK

Ministry Articles Editor

Contents

The Messianic Psalms

Psalm 8 2
By KEN TOTTON

An Assembly of the Lord’s people will be a people among whom . . . – Part 5 4
By KEITH R. KEYSER

The Epistle to the Colossians – Part 7 6
By WILLIAM M. BANKS

The Son of God – Part 3 – His humanity 8
By BERT CARGILL

Personalities in the early years of the Lord – Simeon 10
By COLIN LACEY

What does the Bible tell us about the future? 12
By RICHARD CATCHPOLE

The Twelve Tribes of Israel – Naphtali 14
By LLOYD STOCK

Two Kingdoms – A Study in Matthew 12 15
By SAM TAUFEEK

Assurance 16
By MICHAEL BUCKERIDGE

Character Studies in the Book of Proverbs – Part 8 18
By JOHN SCARSBROOK

Paul the Priest – Part 4 20
By STEPHEN FELLOWES

1 Thessalonians Chapter 1 – A Model New Testament Church 22
By PETER DAVIES

The Gospel of Mark – Part 8 24
By JOHN BENNETT

Ministering to Widowers 25
By DAVID BRAUCH

The establishment of Itawa Gospel Hall Assembly, Ndola, Zambia 26
By HENRY MWENYA

‘On the way to the match’ 27

Word for Today 28
By BRIAN CLATWORTHY

Book Reviews Inside Back Cover Flap
By JOHN SCARSBROOK

Question Time Outside Back Cover Flap
By RICHARD COLLINGS

PULL-OUTS

Ezra
By MALCOLM DAVIES
and JONATHAN BLACK

YPS

The Messianic Psalms

PSALM 8

By **KEN TOTTON** Cambridge, England

Introduction

This brief but magnificent Psalm is a revelation of the majesty of God and, at the same time, a celebration of the unique dignity and responsibilities He conferred on His creature, man. Whilst the fall and man's disobedience have delayed the full attainment of that purpose, the New Testament points us to a triumphant fulfilment in Jesus Christ the second Man and last Adam.

Despite its brevity, the Psalm is magnificent in the sweep of its contents. The range of thought takes us not only from 'the heavens', v. 1, and back to the beginning, vv. 3, 6-8, but, as the New Testament reveals, on to the future triumphant fulfilment.

KIDNER comments, 'This psalm is an unsurpassed example of what a hymn should be, celebrating as it does the glory and grace of God, rehearsing who He is and what He has done, and relating us and our world to Him; all with a masterly economy of words, and in a spirit of mingled joy and awe'.¹

In the modern age where proud unbelief tends to diminish the significance of humanity, this Psalm powerfully proclaims the Creator's endowment of human beings with unique nobility and responsibilities, and therefore has important messages for our present values and behaviour, as we await the future consummation.

A closer look

The Psalm is framed by the exclamation, 'O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth', vv. 1, 9. Although God's glory is displayed so emphatically in the heavens, the most vulnerable representative of humanity, the infant, is singled out in order to silence the proud opponents of God, vv. 1, 2.

The mind-boggling immensity of the universe seems to render puny mortal man unworthy of the Creator's notice, vv. 3, 4, yet, on the contrary, mankind is of far greater significance than even the unspeakable vastness and mystery of the starry heavens, and is found to be the object of God's providential

care. Man is God's special creation, vv. 5, 6. Moreover, He has appointed him as His ruler and representative in relation to all the lower creatures, whether those on land, in the air, or even in the depths of the sea, vv. 7, 8.

The opening words identify Yahweh, the covenant God of Israel, as sovereign of the entire universe, v. 1. Through creation, both celestial and terrestrial, His name is majestic in all the earth. The 'name' of God denotes the comprehensive expression of His character and attributes as revealed to mankind.

'All thy works shall praise thy name in earth and sky and sea' – R. HEBER.

Similarly, the New Testament

proclaims that 'his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made', Rom. 1. 20 ESV.

The majesty of God the creator is glimpsed in the stunning vastness of stellar space, yet also paradoxically in the feeblest representative of humanity, v. 1, cp. v. 2. The human baby is awe-inspiring with its potential for growth, development, contemplation of the purpose of its existence, and, in time through grace, fellowship with its Creator. God in His wisdom appoints and evokes the utterance of a child to establish a bulwark ('strength', KJV) against the mounting opposition of proud scorers, variously described as 'adversaries', 'enemy', 'avenger', Ps. 8. 2 RV. 'The avenger in particular is one who usurps, in his own selfish interest, a judicial function which belongs to God alone'.²

A notable demonstration of this was when 'the blind and the lame came to [Christ] in the temple; and he healed them. And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David; they were sore displeased, and said unto him, Hearest thou what these say? And Jesus saith unto them, Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?' Matt. 21. 14-16.³

Urban light pollution has robbed millions of the stunning panorama of the starry sky familiar to country dwellers. On the other hand, images from powerful telescopes reveal the amazing beauty of distant galaxies. David had plenty of opportunity to contemplate the night sky during his shepherd days. 'Thy heavens, the work of thy fingers', Ps. 8. 3, points to the universe as God's creation, His 'fingers' suggest miraculous power and deft workmanship in its details notwithstanding its vast extent.⁴ The pressing question arises, 'What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?' v. 4.⁵ The Hebrew

word for man is *enosh*, pointing to frailty and mortality; the term 'son of man' suggests his lowly earthly origin.⁶ Yet amazingly, the two verbs 'being mindful of', and 'visiting' man denote God's characteristic providential activity, His loving and continuous care. How far removed this is from atheistic naturalism which reduces man to a mere animal alone in the universe, tending to despair!

Verse 5 locates man in the hierarchy of created beings. 'You have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honour', v. 5 ESV. Heavenly beings ('angels' KJV) translates the Hebrew word *elohim*, but is rendered 'angels' in the Greek Septuagint Old Testament which is quoted in Hebrews chapter 2.⁷

Man may be lower than the angelic orders, but God conferred royal status upon him in relation to the earth, Gen. 1. 26-30. 'Crowned with glory and honour', are terms which mark him out as God's vice-regent, appointed to rule with all the lower created orders under his authority. This has been compromised by the fall, yet man in his fallen state remains God's image-bearer, and the mandate remains, albeit in qualified form, cp. Gen. 9. 1.

The man Christ Jesus demonstrated His unique sovereignty in 'the days of His flesh'. He rode into Jerusalem on an unbroken colt. He directed miraculous catches of fish, and He sent Peter to obtain a coin from a fish's mouth. No wonder they exclaimed, 'What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?'⁸ But when it came to leaving indelible wounds in His body, these were caused not by wild animals, but by the responsible beings He had come to save. And, fitly, when He hung upon the cross, creation mourned; the sun was darkened, and the rocks rent.

Psalm 8 is pregnant with prophecy. When investing the high calling of man, God had in view the enabling of the incarnation, and all the liberation and ennoblement that would flow from the conflict and

triumph of the 'Second Man', His beloved Son, the Seed of the woman.

New Testament usage of the Psalm

We have already noticed our Lord's use of the Psalm to refute those who criticized the children's praise.

The Psalm is also quoted by Paul, 1 Cor. 15. 27, 'For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith, all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him'. This quotation of Psalm 8 verse 6 is linked with Psalm 110 verse 1 by the expression 'all things under his feet'. Here Paul applies the language of the Psalm to Christ the 'son of man' who came to the rescue when Adam failed. BRUCE comments, 'Adam's place could be taken only by one who was competent to undo the mortal effect of Adam's disobedience and become the founder and representative of a new humanity'.⁹ Fitly, therefore, and finally 'all things are put in subjection to him'. In this chapter of resurrection, even 'the last enemy', death, will yield to the triumphant Christ. Covering similar ground, Paul quotes the same scripture, Eph. 1. 22, where the context refers to the comprehensive exaltation of Christ over every power, both benign and hostile.

The writer to the Hebrews quotes verses 4 to 6 stressing the true humanity of Jesus, the Son of God. Man's failure in sin is contrasted with his high destiny. 'For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. It has been testified somewhere, "What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him? You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honour, putting everything in subjection under his feet"', Heb. 2. 5-8 ESV. Yet despite the fall, he goes on to speak of the second Man, 'But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone', v. 9 ESV. The

present tense 'we see' points to the crowning of Christ following His death, not prior to it. His exaltation signals God's acceptance of His sacrifice, and seals its efficacy for our salvation.

Conclusion

As regards the **stewardship of creation**, the Bible knows no aversion to the created order, nor is man's position a charter for the reckless plundering of the earth. God's sympathies are over all His creatures, Jonah 4. 11. Man's rule over creation is not absolute or independent of God; it is His gracious appointment as a gift, not a right. The Christian is aware that the environment and its limited resources are God's, to be respected, and treated wisely and considerately as part of a broader stewardship.

The God-ordained **dignity of humankind** contrasts sharply with the increasingly prevalent atheistic philosophy, which paves the way for the cheapening of human life in matters such as abortion and euthanasia.

As we recognize the majesty of the Creator, and the wonder of His concerns for mortal humanity, may we be moved to wonder and worship, cp. Ps. 8, 1, 9. How divinely satisfying will be the ultimate fulfilment in Christ, as ISAAC WATTS wrote:

'Where He displays His healing
power,
Death and the curse are known no
more;
In Him the tribes of Adam boast
More blessings than their father lost'.

Endnotes

- 1 D. KIDNER, *Psalms 1-72*, IVP, pp. 65, 66.
- 2 A. F. KIRKPATRICK, *Psalms, Cambridge Bible for School and Colleges*. See Deut. 32. 35; Nah. 1. 2.
- 3 Cp. Matt. 18. 1-6.
- 4 See Exod. 8. 19; 31. 18; Luke 11. 20.
- 5 The same question arises in other contexts: Job. 7. 17; 25. 6; Ps. 144. 3f.
- 6 Cp. Job. 14. 1.
- 7 Hence RV rendering: 'but little lower than God', cp. Gen. 1. 26-28.
- 8 Mark 4. 41.
- 9 F. F. BRUCE, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, New Century Bible, pp. 147, 148.

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

By **KEITH R. KEYSER** Gilbertsville, Pennsylvania, USA

Part 5

Among the many metaphors that describe the church in the New Testament, the images of the family and the body resonate most personally. The world of unbelief is a cold place and when people are exposed to the family of God's warm love it is refreshing. Upon believing in Christ as Lord and Saviour, lost people find a surrogate set of brothers and sisters who minister to them in the authority and power of the church's head, the Lord Jesus Christ. As beneficiaries of God's love in Christ, believers should demonstrate that same affectionate care towards the lost and one another. After all, the Lord Jesus Himself said that love would be the defining marker of a true disciple, John 13. 34, 35. Accordingly, each local church is to be an outpost of loving care, composed of redeemed people who are empowered by the God who is love, 1 John 4. 8.

The theology that underlies philanthropy

The local assembly atmosphere should reflect the ethos of God Himself, because He is her founder. He gave His Son and His Spirit to create her, John 3. 16; Acts 2. 17. She was purchased 'with the blood of His own', Acts 20. 28 JND, and brought into being on Pentecost. Therefore, it was created by Christ's redemptive death, victorious resurrection, and glorious ascension. The first converts instinctively craved fellowship with other saints. As one preacher put it, 'The moment those 3,000 were converted, they joined the fellowship. Nothing could keep them away. Love for the brethren had become one of the biggest and deepest things in their lives. It had become more important to them even than the sweetest earthly ties. When people become Christians they want to spend all their time with other Christians, and they become concerned about them. The proof of Christianity is that it changes people, it gives them a new birth, and they belong to a new family.

And this new family bond is deeper than natural or social or national ties. They are drawn together. They cannot keep apart from one another'.¹ They threw themselves into life together, being intimately involved in building one another up in Christ, 2. 42-47. It was the outflow of new life, 'Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another', 1 John 4. 11.

Apostolic assembly care

The apostles emulated the Lord Jesus in caring for the saints. Just as He had protected and guided them, in the same manner Paul acted both maternally and paternally, as the occasion demanded, in teaching and comforting the saints in Thessalonica, 1 Thess. 2. 7-12. Similarly, to the Galatian churches he spoke as a father figure, Gal. 4. 12-20. Perhaps no passage better exemplifies the habitual care of the apostles than Philippians chapter 2, where the mind of Christ is demonstrated in the selfless service of Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus. In a Christ-like manner,

Paul and his co-workers poured themselves out for the Philippian saints, Phil. 2. 17-30. Paul himself experienced his fellow-saints' care on his way to imprisonment in Rome, Acts 27. 3; 28. 13-16. The Acts and the General Epistles reveal that the other apostles also exhibited the same care for the churches that Paul and his co-labourers did, Acts 4. 32-37; 1 John 3. 18.

Compassionate leadership

The local church's authority structure is especially designed for the spiritual nurture of the children of God. Christ condemned 'hirelings' in leadership who did not really care for the flock, John 10. 13; their unfaithful Old Testament counterparts were similarly reprehensible, Ezek. 34. True overseers feed the flock like shepherds, leading them to rich pastures in God's word, Acts 20. 28. They are vigilant against spiritual wolves from the outside and heretics from the inside, vv. 29-31, thereby ensuring that sound doctrine is the basis of the saints' spiritual health. Elders are to 'take care' of the local church with paternal attention, 1 Tim. 3. 5. Considering their collective qualities, 1 Tim. 3. 2-7; Titus 1. 6-9, they ought to be gentle, considerate, patient, wise examples who are governed by the scriptures and benevolently minister to the saints with Christ-like servant leadership. They are not domineering or dictatorial, 1 Pet. 5. 3, preferring to adopt their Lord's lowly mind, John 13. 14. They do not serve for human praise or temporal reward, preferring to labour for the Master's approbation, Heb. 13. 7; 1 Cor. 4. 1-5.

Spiritual gifts function in the context of the local church. This is not restricted to the actual meetings of the assembly; rather, it includes the interaction of the different members of the fellowship. Both 1 Corinthians chapter 12 and Romans chapter 12 locate the function of gifts within the body, 1 Cor. 12. 20-31; Rom. 12. 5-8, 16. The gifts are to be used lovingly, for mutual edification, 1 Cor. 13; 14. In love, the saints teach, encourage, rebuke, correct, and forbear each other, Col. 3. 12-17. Lying, fleshly anger, and immorality have no place in our interactions, and we are to be quick to forgive one another when our



fellow believers repentantly seek it, Eph. 4. 25 – 5. 7. We are to pray for one another and share out of our physical and emotional resources, 1 Thess. 5. 11-22.

Each demographic in the local church has its unique way of showing care within the fellowship. For example, wives submit to their husbands, who in turn lead and lay down their lives for their wives, Eph. 5. 22-33. Older men are reverent assembly anchors, offering stability to the fellowship, Titus 2. 1, 2. Older mothers help instruct their younger counterparts, vv. 3-5. Meanwhile, the younger people offer a pattern of sound speech and action, vv. 6-8.

Providing physical care

The Church's care is further seen in the way that she carries out Christ's teaching to specially support the weak and vulnerable. As in ancient Israel, particular emphasis is placed on the needs of widows and orphans, Jas. 1. 27; 1 Tim. 5. 3-16. The latter passage delineates principles for their support, making sure not to squander the saint's support on people who manipulate the system.² Elsewhere, the scriptures advocate helping the deserving poor, as opposed to the merely indolent, 2 Thess. 3. 10-13. Acts chapters 4 to 6 show the dynamic nature of the church as they ministered to the poor – even divesting themselves of property to supply the needs of the indigent. The twelve and Paul were fully agreed on helping the poor in their respective spheres of service, Gal. 2. 10, and the offering for the believers affected by the Claudian famine, Acts 11. 28-30,

occupied the apostle to the Gentiles' attention, 2 Cor. 8; 9. Although this activity on behalf of the vulnerable was churchwide, it does not negate the fact that it was administered at the local church level, 1 Cor. 16. 1-4. Every local church is to consider prayerfully how they may contribute to the needs around them and abroad, giving preference to their fellow-saints, Gal. 6. 10.

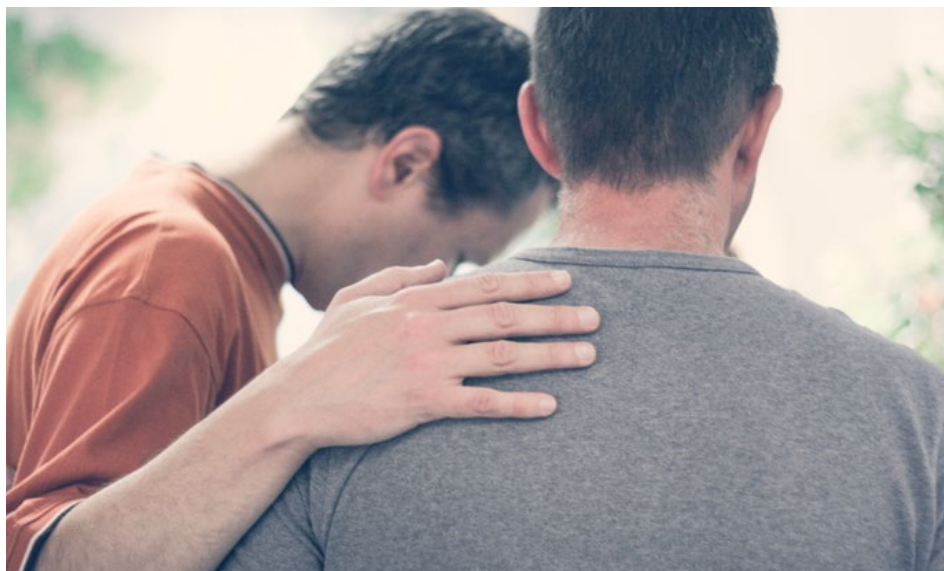
Love in action

- 1 *Prayer.* While corporate prayer is vitally important, one cannot ignore personal intercession on behalf of the saints, 1 Thess. 5. 17, 23; Jas. 5. 16. Our care for one another should lead us to the throne of grace to remember the needs of our fellow-saints.
- 2 *Hospitality.* Increasingly, people in the modern western world are alienated from their neighbours. Opening our homes presents excellent gospel opportunity towards the lost, and also goes a long way towards building strong bonds of loving fellowship among the saints in the local assembly.
- 3 *Visitation.* Care in the local assembly might lead someone to visit their fellow believers in the hospital, or to stop by the home of 'shut-ins' who are no longer able to attend public meetings. Giving someone who is a caregiver for a disabled loved one a break could be a welcome act of service. Babysitting for a busy mother can also go a long way towards encouraging our younger sisters.
- 4 *Sharing.* Everything from giving fellow believers a ride to the

meeting, to lending or giving books on spiritual subjects are practical demonstrations of Christian care.

- 5 *Communication.* Hand-written notes, emails, texts, and phone calls are all useful ways of reaching out to our fellow believers. It is all about interest. We need to show that we think of one another between our public gatherings. We also need to manifest our willingness and availability to help one another in times of need. Staying in touch keeps one from unhealthy insularity and emphasizes the interconnectivity of the local church. We share a common life in Christ, Col. 3. 3, 4; Acts 2. 42.
- 6 *Gathering.* The public meetings of the local church are an excellent place for mutual edification and encouragement. As Hebrews chapter 10 verses 24 to 25 puts it, 'And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching'.
- 7 *Meals.* Although the assembly in Corinth grossly abused the concept of a fellowship meal – tacking it on to the Lord's supper and indulging their fleshly passions – having a regular or periodic meal together provides excellent opportunities for spiritual conversation, encouragement, and relationship development. Not all local churches have the facilities or resources for this, but, if possible, it is useful from time to time.

Opportunities for demonstrating care are practically limitless, for they flow out of the personalities, gifts, and resources of the saints. May the world around us see a loving outpost of heavenly care when they behold the local churches that the Lord has planted.



Endnotes

- 1 D. M. LLOYD-JONES, *Authentic Christianity*, Vol. 1, Crossway, 2000, pg. 140.
- 2 See KEITH KEYSER, 'The Indispensable Widows', *Precious Seed* 58. 2, 2003.

THE EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

Part 7

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

Warnings and answers, 2. 4-19

The clever deceiver, vv. 4-7 – beguiling ‘with enticing words’

This paragraph, and indeed this whole section to verse 19, begins with a connection to what has gone before. ‘And this I say’, v. 4, refers back to the necessary awareness of ‘all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge’ resident in Christ, referred to in verse 3, and a true appreciation of the depths of this wisdom and knowledge ‘hid’ in His person. This will be a bulwark against the intrusion of false teachers and false teaching in the assembly.

The nature of the deceiver and the deception is indicated in the balance of verse 4. The deceiver is following the example of the serpent’s beguiling of Eve in the Garden of Eden, 2 Cor. 11. 3. The deception is based on clever oratory, ‘enticing words’, manipulating the audience. This phrase is only found here in the New Testament. It is reminiscent of the persuasive language to be used by the coming world dictator to deceive the nations and ensure his universal acceptance by them.¹

Evidently, the apostle is deeply concerned about the possibility of the assembly succumbing to this deception and wants to give them a suitable antidote. He indicates that while he is absent ‘in the flesh’ yet he is with them ‘in the spirit’, just as he was at Corinth, 1 Cor. 5. 4. He is delighted to note the order of the assembly, no doubt communicated to him by Epaphras, v. 5. In fact, the word ‘order’ is better translated ‘dignity’ and this brings ‘joy’ to the apostle. A dignified assembly is a thrill to the believer and an excellent testimony to the world.

Their position ‘in Christ’/‘in him’, vv. 5-7

The true antidote to the clever deceiver is to have a vital and fundamental awareness of the superiority of Christ and their true position in Him. This truth is reiterated three times in these verses.

They are established in [*eis*] Christ v. 5. The word ‘stedfastness’, used only here in the New Testament, has the idea of being established based on their ‘faith in Christ’. They had not only begun well; their initial faith had brought their salvation, but they hadn’t stopped there. They had become established by the continuation of their faith. The preposition used is *eis* [into], indicative of a dynamic faith which not only serves them well initially, but ensures a life of devotion to Christ.

They have to walk ‘in him’ v. 6. The apostle can therefore appeal to them on the basis of the nature of their reception of Christ. The word ‘received’, v. 6, means to be ‘delivered by tradition’.² Their faith had not been exercised as a result of some spurious truth; it had been handed down by tradition, see also 2 Tim. 2. 2. They were to continue walking ‘in him’. As they had confessed ‘Christ Jesus the

Lord’ at conversion, so they were to walk consistent with the name. The good tradition Paul speaks of here should be contrasted to the ‘tradition of men’ in verse 8.

They are rooted and built up ‘in him’, v. 7; the third reference to their link to Christ. The two metaphors are taken from agriculture and architecture, cp. Eph. 3. 17. In the first, the source of sustenance is indicated, ‘as ye have been taught’. In the other, security, ‘established in the faith’, by the teaching of the body of Christian doctrine appreciating the mystery, even Christ, v. 2. The resulting effect would be that they would be super-abounding in the truth, excelling therein with thanksgiving, v. 7.

The vain philosopher, vv. 8-15 – spoiling through ‘philosophy and vain deceit’

The second main warning is against the philosopher who engages in illusions, following the traditions of men and the world order, involving cosmic powers who control that world. Essentially, it is intellectualism with unhealthy motivation.

The basic problems are articulated in verse 8 as ‘philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world’. The latter two phrases indicate the source of the first. In this context, philosophy is essentially Jewish sophistry based on Judaistic teaching. It is combined with ‘vain deceit’ or empty illusion. It is fostered by the ‘tradition of men’ and ‘the rudiments of the world’. ‘Rudiments’ has in it the idea of elements or building blocks

	The caution	The character of the intruder	The method adopted	The answer – Christ is the answer in each case
vv. 4-7	‘Lest any man’	The clever deceiver	The clever deceiver	‘Christ Jesus the Lord’, v. 6 ‘faith in Christ’, v. 5 ‘walk ye in him’, v. 6 ‘rooted and built up in him’, v. 7
vv. 8-15	‘Lest any man’	The vain philosopher	The vain philosopher	‘In him dwelleth all the fulness the Godhead bodily’, v. 9 ‘after Christ’, v. 8 ‘in him’, vv. 9, 10 ‘in whom’, v. 11 ‘by . . . Christ’, v. 11 ‘with him’, vv. 12 (twice), 13
vv. 16, 17	‘Let no man’	The legal judge	The legal judge	‘The body is of Christ’, v. 17
vv. 18, 19	‘Let no man’	The idol worshipper	The idol worshipper	‘Holding the head’, v. 19

of the world, i.e., the elemental forces or cosmic powers which control the present world order in opposition to God. Before our conversion, 'we were in bondage under the elements of the world', Gal. 4. 3, which Paul further describes as 'the weak and beggarly element', v. 9, and is surprised that the Galatians desired to be in bondage to them again.³

These philosophers wanted to 'spoil' the Colossian believers. The word 'spoil' means being taken as 'booty' or being 'carried away captive'. Their freedom in Christ would be lost; essentially, they would be kidnapped by their oppressors. Christ would no longer be supreme in their thinking. The apostle calls upon them to 'beware', to perceive the problem at hand and to take the necessary steps to avoid it. These steps are given in the balance of the verses in this section.

The answer is again to be found in Christ. In this connection the apostle focuses their attention on three significant antidotes to the philosophical troulbers: the supremacy of Christ, vv. 9, 10; the significance of their baptism, vv. 11, 12; and the total triumph of Christ at Calvary, vv. 13-15, spoiling the controlling powers behind the pagan philosophy and publicly shaming their empty illusions. The powers of evil are totally defeated.

The supremacy of Christ, v. 9 – greater than all cosmic powers in the world

Greek philosophy and the traditions of men, v. 8, are no match for Him. The only remedy for the Colossian believers, and for us, is to let Christ be the rule of our life, rather than the empty rhetoric used by the philosophers! The answer was to be 'after Christ', v. 8, not 'after the traditions of men' nor 'after the rudiments of the world'.

The all-sufficiency of Christ is attested in verse 9, 'in him dwelleth all the fullness [*pleroma*] of the Godhead bodily'. In contrast to a myriad of hierarchy between God and men as attested by the Colossian heretics, the plenitude of deity – among which can be mentioned omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, and



eternality – is embodied in Christ. He is utterly superior to them all. Worship is due alone to God – all other worship is idolatry.

Not surprisingly, these particular attributes are clearly attested in the Gospel of John. His **omniscience** was evident in His interview with Nathaniel, chapter 1. On the first public meeting between them our Lord Jesus asserted, 'Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile', v. 47! He knew the inner character of Nathaniel. No wonder he was surprised, 'Whence knowest Thou me?' Nathaniel worshipped, 'Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel', v. 49. What a challenge to us; He knows us too!⁴

What a night it was for Nicodemus in John chapter 3. The Lord's omniscience was seen in 'answering' Nicodemus before he asked a question! References to Ezekiel and Numbers didn't seem to satisfy Nicodemus. The Lord was keen to assert His authority and credentials to the teacher of Israel. In an amazing verse He indicated to him His **omnipresence**, 'And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven', v. 13. Nicodemus must have been astounded that the One standing before him had come down from heaven and was in heaven at the one and the same time!

The **omnipotence** of Christ is seen in several of the miracles in John – turning the water into wine in John chapter 2, healing the nobleman's son with a word at a distance in John chapter 4. No situation was too difficult. Similarly, a word of authority brought Lazarus from the dead!

The **eternality** of Christ is stated in verse 1 of the Gospel of John, 'In the beginning was the Word'. Verse 2 appears to be simply repeating the doctrine affirmed in verse 1. However, a closer examination indicates that verse 2 not only affirms the eternality of Christ but indicates His **independent eternality**, which teaches the eternal Sonship of the Lord Jesus.

Many more examples could be given but the fact that the incarnate Christ embodies all of the attributes of deity is surely sufficient for the Colossian believers not to be duped by intellectualism and empty illusion. They must grasp the enormity of the majesty and greatness of the One in whom they have placed their faith, v. 5.

The completeness of the believer, v. 10

Intimately linked with the 'fullness [*pleroma*]' of Christ is the completeness of the believer, 'ye are complete [*pleroo*] in him'. This brings out the prospective realization of perfection in the believer. We are complete (*pleero*) in Him, 'of His fullness [*pleroma*] have all we received', John 1. 16. There is no lack, no need to turn to other sources.

In fact, as if to emphasize the absolute sufficiency of the resources we have, the apostle wants us to appreciate the headship of Christ in the realm of all principality and power, cp. 1. 18; 2. 19. He created them, 1. 16; hence, He has primacy over them – no need for Colossians to worship any other! Far from being only one of a system of graded powers, the Lord Jesus is their very head! This means that all their activity and movements, their energy and life are under His complete control and we are complete in Him!

Endnotes

- 1 As indicated in Dan. 7. 8, 20, 25.
- 2 F. F. BRUCE, *The Epistle to the Colossians*, William B. Erdmans Publishing Company, 1984.
- 3 The same word is also used elsewhere: Heb. 5. 12 and 2 Pet. 3. 10 and 12.
- 4 Other evidences of omniscience are seen, e.g., John 2. 25; 13. 1, 11 and many other references.

The Son of God HIS HUMANITY

By **BERT CARGILL** St Monans, Scotland

Part 3

Introduction

At the incarnation, the Son of God became a **real man**. His body, soul and spirit were all as real as ours are. He spoke about His body which He gave for us, Luke 22. 19, His soul being troubled, John 12. 27, and His spirit which He commended to God when He died, Luke 23. 46. Inwardly, in His mind and soul, He was able to think and to feel all the emotions which we experience. Outwardly, and physically, He looked like other men who lived at that time, so that when people saw Him they saw a man who looked like themselves.

Although a real man like any other man, He was not in any way sinful like every other man. In fact, He was a **perfect man**; perfect in every way, with no faults or defects – something that no one else has ever been or can be. When we say He was perfect, it also means that He was perfectly and completely human, not partly human. And not partly human and partly divine, but completely human and completely divine, indivisibly and simultaneously in one unique person. We cannot understand all this completely, but we do accept the truth of it, for that is what God has revealed to us in His word.

Because we are made of 'flesh and blood', He 'took part of the same', Heb. 2. 14. He did not take on the nature or form of an angel but took on a human body, v. 16. 'He was made in the likeness of men' and was 'found in fashion as a man', Phil. 2. 7, 8. He became one of us so that He could save us. He was in every way a man, but with one very important difference which we must always emphasize – He was totally without sin, Heb. 4. 15.

Think of some examples of how real was His humanity.

He was born a real baby

Mary His mother carried Him in her womb and brought Him into the world naturally and normally as a real human baby, Luke 2. 7. She wrapped Him in baby clothes and laid Him in a manger-bed; she nursed Him at her breast and cared for Him, 11. 27.

He grew up as a real boy

We read about Him when He was eight days old, 2. 21, when He was twelve years old, v. 42, and when he

was thirty years old, 3. 23. We are not told very much at all about His childhood and His early life, but we know that He was an obedient child at home, 2. 51, and that He increased in wisdom and stature. He developed mentally and physically like other boys do, v. 52. He had other brothers and sisters in His human family, Matt. 13. 55, 56; John 7. 3-5.

He worked as a real man

He was known as 'the carpenter's

son', Matt. 13. 55, for Joseph was a carpenter. He was also called 'the carpenter, the son of Mary', Mark 6. 3. This might mean that Joseph had died and, as the oldest son in the family, our Lord Jesus took over his job to provide for the others, as a real man is meant to do. He was known and spoken of as Jesus of [or from] Nazareth, because that was His home town, Luke 4. 16, 34.

He had the feelings and emotions of a real man

We read about Him being hungry, thirsty, and tired after walking many miles, John 4. 6, 7, and sleeping during a voyage over the Sea of Galilee, Matt. 8. 24. He was sad and shed tears, John 11. 35, grieved and sorry, angry and disappointed, Mark 3. 5. He also rejoiced, Luke 10. 21, and marvelled, sometimes at faith, other times at unbelief, 7. 9; Mark 6. 6. He experienced hatred, rejection, betrayal and capture by enemies, John 15. 18-25. He felt pain and anguish, Luke 22. 44. It affected His body, soul, and spirit.

He experienced real-life circumstances

Many times He was alone, John 8. 1, but other times He depended on others for obtaining food, 4. 8, providing a boat for Him to use, Luke 5. 3, a donkey to ride on, Matt. 21. 2, a home to feel welcome and safe, Luke 10. 38; John 12. 1, 2. He always had complete control of all that happened but He experienced the threats and hazards of unpopularity, Luke 13. 31, of fleeing from danger, John 10. 39, 40, and of avoiding capture, Luke 4. 29, 30. He also completely submitted Himself to the will of God His Father, John 6. 38; Luke 22. 42. As a man He humbled Himself and became obedient to God all through His life, on to its end on the cross, Phil. 2. 8.

He died the death of a real man

He had the ability to save Himself from death, Matt. 26. 53, and no power could defeat Him, John 19. 11, but He experienced the bitterness of death in its full reality. He noticed the sorrow of those near and dear to Him, vv. 26, 27. His death came about by crucifixion, by blood loss,

by severe and acute damage to His body inwardly and outwardly. He felt unspeakable pain, anguish and thirst, v. 28. He took His last breath and His spirit left His body, Luke 23. 46. When Pilate's soldiers came to check what had happened, they found that He was 'dead already', John 19. 33. Blood and water flowed from a spear wound in His side afterwards. His dead body was taken down from the cross and buried in a new tomb, v. 41.

He rose from the dead as a real man

The One who appeared to His disciples after His resurrection was in a body which was recognized by Mary and then by the other disciples, as we read Luke chapter 24 and John chapters 20 and 21. He showed to them His hands and His feet and His side, John 20. 20, 27. He spoke to them, walked with them, and ate with them. They could recognize His voice, 20. 16; 21. 6, 7. He was a real man in a resurrection body which His disciples could see and touch, Luke 24. 39. It was not a body of flesh and blood but nevertheless a real body, a body of 'flesh and bones' with the new supernatural ability to appear and disappear at will, not subject to physical barriers.

In heaven today He is a real man

His manhood did not cease when

He went back to heaven. We often call Him 'The Man in the glory'. He was seen and recognized by Stephen and by John when they saw Him in heaven, Acts 7. 56; Rev. 1. 12-18. Now, as the mediator between God and man, He is 'the man, Christ Jesus', 1 Tim. 2. 5. Hebrews chapter 2 verses 9 and 10 tell us that the one who suffered death is the man who is 'crowned with glory and honour'.

He was a perfect man

The scriptures make it clear that this real man was a perfect man. This idea is strange to us, because we are not perfect and we are used to imperfect men and women all around us. In fact, no one is perfect, except the Lord Jesus Christ. We are all sinful, but He was sinless. This is very important, for if He had not been sinless, He could not have been our Saviour. Only a sinless man could bear sin's penalty and bring us forgiveness, 2 Cor. 5. 21.

We read that He 'did no sin', 1 Pet. 2. 22; He 'knew no sin', 2 Cor. 5. 21; and that 'in Him is no sin', 1 John 3. 5. He was 'holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners', Heb. 7. 26. He is 'the Holy One of God', Mark 1. 24, 'that holy One' who was born of Mary, Luke 1. 35.

He lived beside sinful men and women on earth, and became their

friend and helper, Luke 15. 1, 2. But He was never contaminated by their sin. Many times His enemies tried to accuse Him of doing wrong but they never could, John 8. 46. At His trial before Pilate, these enemies could find no valid accusation, except from false witnesses who could not agree upon what they were saying. Pilate had to give his verdict and three times he said, 'I find no fault in him', John 18. 38; 19. 4, 6. The thief on the cross beside Him said, 'This man has done nothing amiss', Luke 23. 41. The soldier in charge of the crucifixion said, 'Certainly this was a righteous man', v. 47.

Every testimony from God in heaven, Matt. 3. 17; 17. 5, from demons in hell, Mark 1. 24, and from everyone on earth who met Him is that He is perfectly sinless, pure and holy. The devil himself tried to tempt our Lord to sin, but every temptation failed, Luke 4. 1-13. During His lifetime, He 'was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin', Heb. 4. 15.

His life and service were perfectly balanced. Many people have good strong points in their character, but they will likely also have weak points. Our Lord Jesus had no weak points – everything about Him was good and perfect. He did not sin and He could not sin. He is the 'blessed man', Ps. 1. 1, and the 'perfect man', Ps. 37. 37.



Personalities in the Early Years of the Lord SIMEON

By **COLIN LACEY** Bath, England

During the eighteenth century, JOHN NEWTON, a converted former seaman and slave trader, wrote the following moving words in one of his many hymns:

‘How sweet the name of Jesus
sounds
In a believer’s ear!
It soothes his sorrows,
heals his wounds
And drives away his fear.

It makes the wounded spirit whole,
And calms the troubled breast;
‘Tis manna to the hungry soul,
And to the weary rest’.

There is no doubt that Simeon could have stood alongside NEWTON and sung these words with sincerity and conviction. Everything he had longed for was encapsulated in that same name, **Jesus** – Jehovah-Saviour. The deep-seated sorrows, wounds and fears that had afflicted this sensitive believer in Jerusalem ceased in a moment of time when he saw and embraced Jesus, God’s salvation, Luke 2. 25-35. He challenges us today as to how much the name of **Jesus** means to us! Does it satisfy our deepest longings and stir within us the desire to worship God, as Simeon did? Is our constant prayer, ‘We would see **Jesus**’, John 12. 21?

It is not uncommon to discover commentaries where the authors remark how little we know of Simeon. Indeed, RYLE states, ‘We know nothing of his life before or after the time when Christ was born. We are only told that he came by the Spirit into the temple’.¹ With due respect, nothing could be further from the truth! What Luke records of Simeon speaks volumes of his remarkable life

and character. Clearly, he was one of the comparatively few exceptions in the midst of a sea of spiritual departure in Jerusalem. There were few, even among the religious leaders, who could have been described as ‘just [faultless, guiltless, virtuous, obedient] and devout [reverential, pious]’, v. 25. If this were all we knew about him, it would be sufficient to highlight his immense spiritual stature, even before the birth of Christ; indeed, his local testimony was impeccable.

It is encouraging to note that, even during the darkest periods of the history of this world, God has always had individuals, or a remnant, who would keep His commandments and maintain the testimony, no matter how low the majority had sunk. If we covet a similar testimony to that of Simeon, it will be beneficial to highlight the features that he displayed and seek to cultivate them in our own lives. The world is growing increasingly alienated from God, spiritually and morally, and the Lord needs those among His people who are, like Simeon, ‘blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation’, Phil. 2. 15.

He looked and waited patiently for ‘the consolation [encouragement, comfort, consolation, solace, refreshment] of Israel’, v. 25. There was much in Jerusalem that could have distressed, discouraged and depressed him; however, he refused to be distracted by such things and embraced fully God’s promise that there were brighter times ahead for His people. He would, no doubt, have meditated constantly upon the words of the prophet Isaiah, ‘Comfort ye, comfort ye

my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned’, Isa. 40. 1, 2. It would have seemed to lesser men than Simeon that all this was just a forlorn hope. The religious leaders merely dampened the hopes of the people’s spirits with their legalism and negativity, whereas Simeon ministered consolation to them and fostered hope within them. Are we encouraging our fellow believers to look upwards and onwards to a brighter future? Are we comforting one another with these words, ‘For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven . . . so shall we ever be with the Lord’, 1 Thess. 4. 16, 17.

He was led by the Spirit. Before we are given any details about Simeon’s life, Luke directs us to the fact that ‘the Holy Ghost was upon him’, v. 25. His words and actions were directed by the Spirit; indeed, the Spirit is mentioned on three occasions in this short section, vv. 25-27. He never spoke or acted on his own initiative; therefore, nothing happened by chance in his life. It was not by chance that he lived in Jerusalem and entered the temple at this precise moment in time. On two of only four occasions in the New Testament when the term ‘led by the Spirit’ appears, it is the daily life of the believer that is in view and not specific occasions when believers gather together, e.g., to break bread, pray and teach.² It is not something that can be turned on like a light switch and power experienced on demand. If we are not ‘led by the Spirit’ for six days of the week, we will not be on the seventh. We are privileged, unlike Simeon, to live in times when the Spirit dwells within every true believer. God can, and does, impart great things to those who live in the good of this on a daily basis.

He listened to God’s voice through His word. Simeon’s statements at this time were not conjured up from his own imagination. It is clear that he had been totally immersed in the Old Testament scriptures from an early stage and his ear was open to receive what God had to say; indeed,

his name means, 'one who hears'. He had, without doubt, a particular place in his heart for the writings of Isaiah, who had lived and prophesied many years before in the streets of Jerusalem.

He learned about God's Messiah and His plan of salvation. The Spirit of God had taught him much from the word of God about Christ long before He came. The common belief among many commentators that he must have searched intently the face of each male child that was brought into the temple and wondered whether he was the Messiah is somewhat wide of the mark. Others living in Jerusalem at this time, who had not spent time meditating on the scriptures, nor experienced the ministry of the Holy Spirit to give them understanding, would have considered it impossible to identify an eight-day old baby as the promised Messiah; nevertheless, when Mary and Joseph brought Jesus into the temple, without a moment's hesitation or doubt, Simeon took Him in his arms and declared Him to be 'God's salvation',

v. 30. Even Mary and Joseph were amazed at how much he knew about the child, v. 33. He had, no doubt, learned through Isaiah's prophecy that suffering and rejection would mark Christ's pathway, vv. 34, 35. So detailed was his knowledge that he even foresaw the time when Mary would stand at the foot of the cross, and revealed to her that 'a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also', v. 35. How earnestly do we search the scriptures, with the help of the indwelling Holy Spirit, to learn more about the person of Christ? Christ's words challenge us, 'Search the scriptures . . . they are they which testify of me', John 5. 39. No one knew this truth better than Simeon. We have the great privilege, unlike Simeon, of possessing the complete word of God to instruct us and the indwelling Holy Spirit to minister Christ to our hearts. What a privilege; yet, what a responsibility to live in the good of these things!

He loved, unconditionally. Simeon was not motivated by a harsh, critical or vindictive spirit. He embraced all people in his affections, both Jews

and Gentiles. He longed for Israel to be comforted but he also foresaw the salvation of the Gentiles. He had learned from his meditations in the scriptures that the Messiah would be 'the glory of . . . Israel' but he also knew that He would be 'a light to lighten the Gentiles', v. 32. Luke, the writer of this Gospel, was a Gentile; therefore, it is interesting to observe that he mentions the Gentiles first, then Israel afterwards. Are we guilty of doubting that the gospel is intended for **all** people? Do we, at times, albeit only subconsciously, act as if some people are outside of the scope of God's salvation? Do we genuinely believe that '**whosoever** shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved', Rom. 10. 13?

It is to be hoped that enough has been said in this meditation on Simeon to convince us that, short though the passage is, Luke has told us a considerable amount about this truly remarkable believer. The Lord is no man's debtor; therefore, it is no surprise that He rewarded His faithful servant in a specific and personal way by promising him, through the Holy Spirit, 'that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ', v. 26. This must have been an immense inspiration and motivation for him to remain positive through one of the darkest periods in Israel's history. May the prospect that we 'shall see his face' and that 'his name shall be in [**our**] foreheads' in heaven, Rev. 22. 4, motivate us to faithful service for Him, until He comes or takes us to be with Himself.

Simeon inspires us to pray:

'Open our eyes, Lord
We want to see Jesus,
To reach out and touch Him
And say that we love Him.
Open our ears, Lord
And help us to listen,
Open our eyes, Lord
We want to see Jesus'.

- CULL



Endnotes

- 1 J. C. RYLE, *Bible Commentary – The Gospel of Luke*.
- 2 Rom. 8. 14; Gal. 5. 16, 18.

What does the Bible tell us about the future?

The Marriage and Marriage Supper of the Lamb

Part 5

By **RICHARD CATCHPOLE** South Norwood, London, England

The direct reference to these two subjects comes in the closing book of the Bible and connected with events that are a precursor to the fulfilment of God's prophetic programme, Rev. 19. 7-9.

The bride

Commentators are divided regarding the identity of the Lamb's 'wife', is it 'Israel' or the 'Church' dispensationally?

The metaphor of a bride and bridegroom to describe the relationship of the Lord to His people is frequently used in the Old Testament regarding Jehovah's relationship to Israel.¹ Although Israel is described as an 'apostate wife', nevertheless the nation is yet to be restored and that future restoration and blessing will certainly have the joy of a wedding about it, Isa. 62. 4, 5.² However, identifying the bride with Israel is not without its problems. Notable amongst them is that John the Baptist, the greatest of the prophets and the closest to Christ, described himself as being 'the friend of the bridegroom' thereby disclaiming any personal place in the bride of Christ.³

It is sometimes stressed that nowhere is the metaphor of a 'bride' used in relation to the church. It is, however, clearly implied in Ephesians chapter 5 verse 31, where Paul, having quoted in the previous verse Genesis 2 verse 24, 'For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh', then says, 'This is a great

mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church'. The language, 'a great mystery', implies that the relationship that existed between Adam and Eve as husband and wife finds a parallel in the relationship between Christ and the Church. While the metaphor of a bride is only inferred in Ephesians chapter 5, that is not the case in 2 Corinthians, where Paul refers to the assembly at Corinth as a 'chaste virgin', 2 Cor. 11. 2. In comparing the two chapters, in the former, the subject is the Church, embracing every believer from Pentecost to the Rapture, in the latter, a church locally, the assembly at Corinth.

The bridegroom

Usually, at a wedding the focus and centre of attention is the bride, but, on this occasion, it is the Bridegroom. That He is spoken of as 'the Lamb' surely recalls what He suffered to acquire a bride.

The marriage of the Lamb

'The marriage of the lamb is come and his wife hath made herself ready', Rev. 19. 7. Behind the language there lies an oriental pattern of marriage which consisted of three stages.⁴

1 **The betrothal stage:** When the bride was espoused or pledged to the groom. Although these

marriage contracts were often initiated when the couple were still quite young, they were, nevertheless, legally binding. In Jewish culture, this stage was akin to virtual marriage, as illustrated in Matthew chapter 1 in the relationship between Mary and Joseph. Verse 18 refers to Mary as 'espoused to Joseph', but in verse 19 Joseph is described as 'her husband' and in verse 20 Mary is called his 'wife'. With that in view, the marriage of the Lamb is still in the betrothal stage, as suggested in the language of 2 Corinthians chapter 11 verse 2.

2 **The presentation stage:** At the appointed time the Father would send to the house of the bride servants carrying the proper legal documents, who would then lead the bride to the home of the groom's father. The custom varied, but, when all was ready, the father of the bride would place the hand of his daughter into the hand of the boy's father. The boy's father would then place the hand of the girl into the hand of his son, at which point the marriage would be fully ratified. In the experience of the Church, this stage is referred to in Ephesians chapter 5 verse 27, 'That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish'. This presentation of the Church will take place in heaven following the rapture, probably shortly after the Judgement Seat of Christ and prior to the Lord's manifestation in glory.

1 **The celebration stage:** The marriage supper, or marriage feast, is comparable to today's wedding reception. In the case of oriental weddings, the marriage supper, did not always follow on immediately from the wedding ceremony. The bridegroom's friends would be invited to the supper, at which time the bridegroom would joyfully display his bride and they would rejoice together. An example of such a supper, is the marriage

in Cana of Galilee, John 2. 1-11. In New Testament days, the length and cost of the supper was determined by the wealth and resources of the groom's father.

Revelation 19 verses 7 to 9 are concerned with the second and third of these three stages.

The chapter opens with a time pointer, 'after these things'; chapter 18 beginning in the same way, links together chapters 17 to 19. In chapters 17 and 18, the focus is upon Babylon, a vast commercial, political and religious empire that will serve as the capital of the kingdom of the Man of Sin in the last days. In chapter 17, the subject is religious Babylon, seen under the guise of 'a harlot', while in chapter 18 the subject is political and commercial Babylon under the figure of 'a city'. Since Genesis chapter 11 and the temple-city of Babel, it has been the ambition of men to bring together religion and politics in one vast system, something that will be realized in 'Babylon' of the future day. But, like Babel, and the later Babylon, this vast system is destined to be overthrown by the Lord, the description concluding with the lamentation of monarchs, merchants, and mariners, all who had profited from its commerce and favour. But, while earth laments, heaven is exhorted to rejoice, Rev. 18. 9-20. A summons answered with a chorus of hallelujahs, 19. 1-4. Another summons is given, 'Praise our God all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, great and small', vv. 5, 6.⁵ The resounding praise of these opening verses is based on three things: 'the great whore' has been judged; 'the Lord God omnipotent reigneth'; and 'the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready'. With the removal of the 'great whore', the time has come for the true bride to be brought forth.

'To her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white'; the godly attire of the Lamb's wife stands in marked contrast to the gaudy adornment of 'the mother of harlots', Satan's counterfeit bride, arrayed in purple and scarlet and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, 19. 8; 17. 4. The fine

linen of the bride's wedding dress is described as 'the righteousness of saints'. The verse must be viewed in the light of rewards given at the Judgement Seat of Christ. The word 'righteousness' is a plural one denoting 'righteous acts', their works have been judged, necessary adjustments have been made, and she is given, by divine appointment, to be arrayed in that which speaks of her own moral beauty and glory. We cannot pass over that without thinking of our own responsibility in this matter. When our history is reviewed will we be seen to have contributed to the wedding garment? So, He will present the Church 'to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish'. The verb 'present' [Gk. *Paristemi*] means 'to place beside', and speaks of Christ's presentation of the Church to Himself 'without one spot of defilement or wrinkle of age, sacred, pure, without any stain of blame, a beautiful bride'.⁶

The marriage supper of the Lamb

'Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb', 19. 9. Many able Bible teachers assert the marriage supper takes place in heaven. They observe that at verse 1 John speaks of events in heaven and at verse 11 that he saw 'heaven opened' and so they conclude that everything recorded in between must take place in heaven. But is that so? In determining the answer attention must be given to the identity of those called to the marriage supper and how they come to be present on that occasion.

A pointer to the identity of those called is surely found in the words of John the Baptist quoted earlier who, describing his own relationship to the Lord, took up the illustration of a 'bridegroom' and 'the friend of a bridegroom', identifying himself as akin to the latter, and we suggest the position of Old Testament saints, John 3. 29. Added to that, the Lord's own teaching in the parable of the ten virgins helps to further identify those 'called' as embracing, in context, tribulation

saints. The virgins waiting to go into 'the marriage' ['wedding feast' JND] are obviously to be viewed as distinct from the bride, Matt. 25. 1-13. Likewise, this third stage is seen in the parable of the marriage for the king's son and those invited to the wedding and equally the parable of men who wait for their Lord 'when he will return from the wedding'.⁷ Since it appears that Old Testament saints are not raised until the commencement of the millennial reign⁸ and, if, as the parables intimate, saints on earth are waiting for the return of the bridegroom from the wedding to go in with Him to the feast, it seems evident that the marriage supper must take place on earth and not in heaven. Old Testament saints, the restored nation of Israel, Gentiles saved during the tribulation all called to join in the celebrations. We have already said the celebration of a traditional eastern wedding could last several days, and some suggest that the marriage supper is virtually 'parabolic' of the millennial age. Understood thus the statement in Revelation chapter 19 verse 9 is simply anticipatory of what was yet to transpire.

Whatever our understanding of these events, one thing is certain. What a glorious prospect lies before us!

Endnotes

- 1 See, for example, Isa. 54. 5; Jer. 3. 1-20; Ezek. 16. 1-59; Hos. 2. 1-23.
- 2 J. RIDDLE notes on *The marriage and marriage feast of the Lamb*.
- 3 LEWIS SPERRY CHAFER, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 4, pg. 129.
- 4 H. L. WILLINGTON, *The King is coming*, pp. 41-49.
- 5 Most commentators view the rejoicing of verses 5 and 6 to also be in heaven, but is that so? Clearly, the 'great multitude' of verse 6 is different to the 'much people' of verse 1 and both companies are distinct from the bride. The 'great multitude' of verse 6 is described in verse 5 as 'all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great'. 'Small and great' relate generally to social distinctions that pertain upon earth, which, in the opinion of the writer, favours the view that this company is upon earth!
- 6 J. RIDDLE notes on *The marriage and marriage feast of the Lamb*.
- 7 Matt. 22. 1-14; Luke 12. 35-37.
- 8 See Dan. 12. 2; Rev. 11. 18.

The Twelve Tribes of Israel

NAPHTALI

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

In our series on the twelve tribes of Israel readers will have sensed that we reached a mountaintop whilst looking at Judah, so far as the purposes of God are concerned. We gave the reasons and background for this in the series introduction and in the article on Judah itself.^{1, 2} Many of the remaining tribes inevitably exist somewhat in Judah's shadow and that would certainly be true of Naphtali.

Taking our place in God's purposes

Of the twenty-or-so listings of the tribes throughout scripture, Naphtali brings up the rear in eight of them. The same could be said of its position in the camp of Israel as they journeyed. We know precious little about Naphtali himself, unless we stray into rabbinical writings. They were the last tribe to have their land allotted and one of the first to succumb to Assyrian invasion, Josh. 19; 2 Kgs. 15. 29.

Why would this be? Why do only some tribes get the limelight? No-one likes to be last or overlooked; is God in some-way partial? Far be the thought. He may well order affairs so that some are placed towards the forefront with others bringing up the rear. He will isolate Peter, James and John; he will order the church with comely and uncomely parts, and he will order the family with headship. But leadership and responsibility are unenviable things and limelight can be a burden. Naphtali was no less a tribe for their place in the big scheme of things and, like them, we

need to accept how God chooses to order his affairs. It is a happy thing to be simply doing what God wants us to be doing, where and how he wants us to be doing it.

Wrestling with God in His providence

Naphtali was Rachel's second surrogate son of Bilhah. Literally, his name means 'wrestling' because, as Rachel said, 'With great wrestlings have I wrestled with my sister, and I have prevailed', Gen. 30. 8. True to form, then, Naphtali's beginnings are steeped in the ongoing struggles of Jacob's family. Hardly a surprise really. After all, Jacob came into the world wrestling with his brother and he would later wrestle with God. It was the story of his life, although we would have to say that, on balance, his struggles were wrought in faith. It is not so clear-cut with Rachel, though her words concerning Naphtali could be translated, 'With wrestlings of God [*elohim*] have I wrestled with my sister'. Wrestling isn't necessarily a bad thing if it draws us out of the mediocrity of walking by sight into



a battle that contends for us to walk by faith.

Enjoying the blessing of God's privilege

Fast forward from Rachel's words at his birth to Jacob's words at the family conference in Genesis chapter 49 and we have some very different sentiments being expressed, 'Naphtali is a hind let loose: He giveth goodly words', v. 21. Moses' words are similarly pleasant, 'O Naphtali, satisfied with favour, and full with the blessing of the Lord; possess thou the west and the south', Deut. 33. 23. We can only speculate as to why these words were so favourable, but what is certain is that in the process of time, Naphtali certainly would know the blessing of the Lord. When we come to the New Testament, the Lord's primary ministry was not in Judea but in Galilee, the territory of Naphtali, Matt. 4. 13. What a privilege, what a glorious blessing for the peoples of Capernaum, Chorazin and Bethsaida! How sad they lacked faith and were rebuked by the Saviour – it had not always been that way.

Believing when challenged in God's power

Men from Naphtali 'willingly offered themselves' and valiantly supported Deborah's confrontation with Jabin, king of Canaan, Judg. 5. 9, 18. They also responded to Gideon's call and fought courageously against the Midianites. These were significant victories that demonstrated great faith and it is heartening to see the willingness of the tribe to step forward when needed. Even though for the most part they were out of the spotlight, they did not allow that to define them when God needed them out up-front. In a similar way, at one point or another, we may be called to serve God in different capacities. We must not talk ourselves out of stepping up to the fore when required. Rather, we must be ever open to the call of God upon our lives in whatever direction it may take us. Easy to write, easy to say, not so easy to do – but if Naphtali can, then with God's help so can we.

Endnotes

- 1 Precious Seed, Vol. 72, Issue 2, 2018.
- 2 Precious Seed, Vol. 74, Issue 2, 2019.

An overview of the Book of Ezra

By **MALCOLM DAVIS** Leeds, England

Introduction

Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther complete the historical books which form the earlier part of the Old Testament. They follow the books of Chronicles, which rehearse the history of the mediatorial kingdom of Israel and Judah up to the beginning of the Babylonian exile. They record the Lord's dealings with the Jews after they had been taken into captivity.

Ezra and Nehemiah concern the remnant of Jews who returned to Jerusalem, while Esther concerns the majority who stayed within the empires which had taken them captive. These three books are parallel with the three final prophetic books of the Old Testament, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, who all prophesied to the Jewish remnant which had returned from Babylon, and should be read in conjunction with them.

Purpose of the book

The book of Ezra shows how the Lord fulfilled His promises, given through the pre-exilic prophets, to restore Israel to their Promised Land. He moved heathen monarchs to show favour to the Jews, and raised up leaders and prophets for the great task of restoring His chosen people. This book records the first two stages of the return of the remnant of Jews from Babylon. First, the Persian emperor Cyrus, by a benevolent decree, encouraged the Jews to return to Jerusalem in order to rebuild the temple of the Lord at Jerusalem. Zerubbabel, a descendant of the kings of Judah, led the first return to Jerusalem in 536 BC. Ezra, a Zadokite Levitical priest and scribe, led the smaller return about eighty years afterwards, in 458 BC, by a similar decree of Artaxerxes, a later Persian king. His task was to beautify the rebuilt temple, to re-establish the

worship of the Lord there, and to teach his fellow-Jews the law of the Lord.

Analysis of the book

Chapters 1 to 6: The return of the Jewish remnant under Zerubbabel, and the rebuilding of the temple (536-515 BC).

Chapters 1 to 2: The return to Jerusalem.

Chapter 3: The rebuilding of the brazen altar, and the laying of the foundation of the temple.

Chapter 4: Opposition to the work, and its interruption.

Chapters 5 to 6: The work is restarted, further opposition to it is overcome, and the temple is completed and dedicated.

Chapters 7 to 10: The return of further Jews under Ezra, and the expulsion of the heathen wives (458-457 BC).

Chapters 7 to 8: Ezra's journey to Jerusalem.

Chapters 9 to 10: The problem of the mixed marriages is reported to Ezra, confessed by him in prayer, and resolved.

Dates and historical setting of the book

605 BC: The beginning of Judah's seventy years of exile and the 'times of the Gentiles'.

605, 597, and 586 BC: Nebuchadnezzar deports Judah to Babylon in three stages.

586 BC: Destruction of Solomon's temple.

The above events are recorded in 2 Kings chapters 24 to 25.

550 BC: Cyrus becomes ruler of the Medo-Persian Empire.

539 BC: Darius the Mede conquers Babylon for Cyrus, and the Persian Empire begins.

This latter event is recorded in Daniel chapter 5.

538 BC: The decree of Cyrus encouraging the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple.

536 BC: Zerubbabel leads a return to Jerusalem.

535 BC: The foundation of the second temple is laid.

535 BC: Opposition to the work causes the building to cease.

520 BC: The prophets Haggai and Zechariah encourage the remnant to restart building. Tatnai's attempt to stop the work is rebuffed by Darius.

516 BC: The temple is completed.

515 BC: The Passover is celebrated.

485 BC: Another example of opposition, the letter to Ahasuerus.

465 BC: Another example of opposition, the letter to Artaxerxes.

458 BC: Ezra leads the second return to Jerusalem on the authority of Artaxerxes.

457 BC: The problem of the heathen wives is reported and resolved.

All these events are recorded in Ezra, which is a primary historical document for them.

The Lord, through Jeremiah the prophet, had predicted that the Jews' captivity in Babylon would last seventy years, Jer. 25. 11-14; 29. 10-14. Accordingly, in 538 BC Cyrus, the Persian emperor, reversed the policy of his Babylonian predecessors and encouraged his subject nations to return to their native lands and to re-establish the former worship of their respective gods. He also gave his Jewish subjects the opportunity to take advantage of this new freedom of religion. By no means all his Jewish subjects took up this offer of limited freedom, however; many preferred to remain in the lands where their fathers had been held captive. But a small remnant of them decided to respond to Cyrus' decree and to return to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel, a lineal descendant of Judah, in order to rebuild the temple which

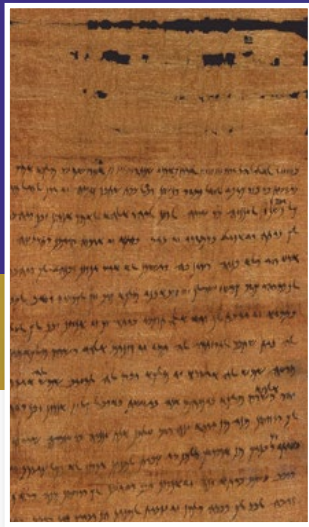
CHARTING THE SCRIPTURES EZRA

by Jonathan Black

הֶרְזָע - Ezra means 'help'.

'Let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold', Ezra 1. 4

'And with them the people helping them', Ezra 2. 68



CYRUS THE GREAT | CAMBYSES I (Xerxes) | DARIUS | XERXES I
 First return under Zerubbabel 538 BC ← Events in the book of Ezra (538-458 BC) Second return
 Captivity 605 BC 550 525 500 The book of Esther

DANIEL
 Message - Reconciliation
 Confession of one man
 on behalf of the nation

ZECHARIAH
 Message - Revelation
 A communication of the
 future of the nation

ESTHER
 Message - Reversal
 Commitment of one woman
 from the nation

ESRA
 Return / Reversal

The Elephantine papyri
 dated to 407 BC,

It mentions the Jewish high priest Johanan during Darius II's reign, mentioned in Ezra 10. 6 after the reign of Darius Ezra 6. 1 and during the rule of Artaxerxes Ezra 7. 1 supporting the chronological sequence.

The SON | The SCRIBE |

'The son of Seraiah', 7. 10

'Who was ready', 7. 6



Ch 1-6 Return of the people with Zerubbabel to build the temple

- 1 The proclamation of Cyrus to return as prophesied by Daniel
- 2 The population that returned, the people restored
- 3 The priority for the altar and the feast before the foundation
- 4 The problem of opposition to work from the Samaritans
- 5 The prophets Haggai and Zechariah help in renewing the work
- 6 The papyrus of Cyrus found by Darius and the Temple is finished



Under Zerubbabel Men 24254 Priests 4389 Levites 74 Singers 128 Porters 139 Nethinim. 392

'Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Abava, that we might afflict ourselves

Key words: Revive, help, the hand of our God, the word of the Lord. Writer Ezra

Prophets of God
Ezra 5. 2

'For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us', Ezra 8. 22

'Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite helped them', Ezra 8. 22

Return under Ezra 458 BC → ARTAXERXES I
Book of Esther 475 450
Third return under Nehemiah 444 BC → XERXES II
Events in book of Neh. (445-425 BC) 425 400

Ezra
Revive / Repair

HAGGAI
Message - Rebuking
Consider the ways
of the nation

NEHEMIAH
Message - Rebuilding
Constructing the
wall of the city

MALACHI
Message - Responsibility
Contempt for the sins of the
nation chosen by God

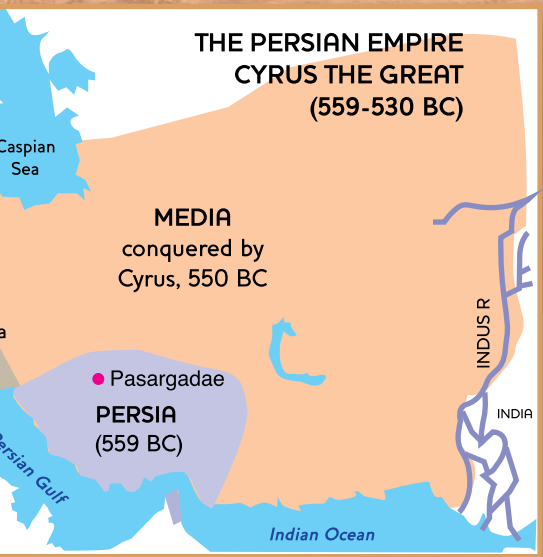
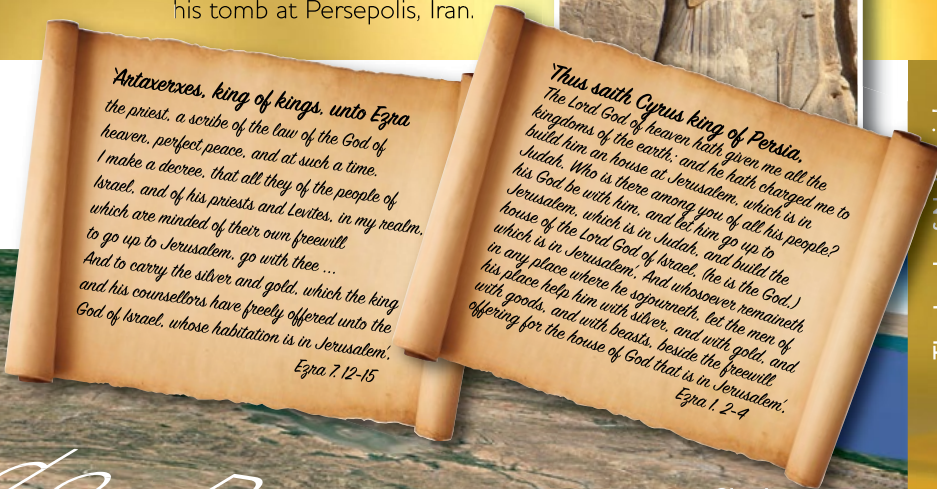


Relief of Artaxerxes II on his tomb at Persepolis, Iran.

The TEACHER | The PRIEST

'Ezra prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel', 7. 10

'Ezra the priest, even a scribe', 7. 11



Israelites 652 Servants 7737 Singers 200 Under Ezra. Males. 1154. Levites 38. Nethinim 220

... before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones', Ezra 8. 21

had been destroyed in 586 BC. They numbered just under 50,000 people altogether.

The book of Ezra is the historical record of both this first return to Jerusalem and Ezra's return some eighty years later. This was with a much smaller group of returnees, numbering about 2,000 people. It was a very chequered history, but one that was ultimately successful in its main objectives. Most of the record is written in Hebrew but two sections within it, which include the text of Persian documents, are written in Aramaic, which was the international diplomatic language of the Persian Empire, Ezra 4. 8-16, 18; 7. 12-26.

Author

Conservative scholars consider that there is no convincing reason to doubt the traditional Jewish view that Ezra is the author of the whole book. Ezra writes in the first person in chapter 7 verse 27 to chapter 9 verse 15. He could easily have written the surrounding chapters in the third person from other historical sources, especially since he is noted within the book as a skilful scribe. The books of Chronicles are also traditionally attributed to him, although some scholars have doubted that attribution. Ezra's activity is evidently to be placed within the reign of Artaxerxes I (465-414 BC), although his book may have been written somewhat later than that, perhaps about 400 BC.

Ezra, whose Hebrew name means 'helper', was a lineal descendant of Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron (Ezra 7. 1-5, being a son of Seraiah, the grandson of Hilkiah). Hilkiah was the high priest during the reign of Josiah who found the book of the Law in the temple, 2 Chr. 34. 15. Jewish tradition gives Ezra a vital role in the formation of the Old Testament canon and the beginning of traditional Jewish synagogue worship. During the restoration of the Jews to their Promised Land he worked alongside Nehemiah for a time, although his exact movements during Nehemiah's governorship

are unclear. He was of blameless character and one whose exemplary godliness Christians should follow today.

The book's message for today

In the book of Ezra, we can learn some of the principles which are to be applied in restoring the Lord's people to their rightful spiritual heritage in Christ, both individually and corporately. Here we learn concerning both God's side and man's side in such restoration. God is sovereign all through, but, equally, He prepares qualified leaders to accomplish His work in the hearts and lives of His repentant people. They are responsible before Him to fulfil the task of restoration. Here Zerubbabel and Ezra, in particular, are examples of spiritual leaders who led God's people out of Babylonish confusion and captivity into freedom and purity of life and worship. Ezra's godly character, especially, is worth studying in detail with a view to emulating it today. Prominent throughout the book is the place and power of 'the word of the Lord' in the spiritual, social, and civil life of His redeemed people. Sadly, spiritual truth is being lost today amongst those whose leaders devalue it and fail to teach it. By contrast, Ezra in his day firmly adhered to the word of God. For these reasons, the book of Ezra is well worth close study.

[This article is extracted from the Precious Seed publication: *Coming back from exile*, Old Testament Overview Volume 7]



Chairman's Notes

As another year draws rapidly to its close, for many 2019 has brought significant change. The political, economic and social landscape of the United Kingdom has altered quite dramatically. With the considerable upheaval and uncertainty that affects some of us, it is good to know that we have an unchanging God, One who could say, 'I am the Lord, I change not', Mal. 3. 6.

However, although we serve an unchanging God, there are times when the membership of the Precious Seed Trust has to change. Thus, after sixteen years in the work, Ian Rees has resigned from the committee. I know that this has not been an easy decision. Ian has contributed numerous articles to the Day by Day books, the Magazine and YPS, edited YPS for a time, and overseen the production of two popular and useful children's books.

The continuing concerns about his health, the purchase of the new building in which the assembly can meet, and the continuing work of shepherding that assembly in Tenby has meant it is time to re-focus. We will miss his contributions to meetings, but hope that he will be able to continue writing for us. We wish him, and the work to which the Lord has called him, God's richest blessing.

JOHN BENNETT

Chairman and General Editor

TWO KINGDOMS

A study in Matthew 12

By **SAM TAUFEEK** Toronto, Canada

Almost every man-made religion teaches that life is a probation period. This teaching, though quite popular in Christendom, is not biblical. In the corporate world, probation is a period for the applicant to prove himself. If life is a probation period given to us from God, then it is up to us to qualify ourselves for heaven or hell. The Bible does not impart such a teaching but rather warns us against it. Probation is a denial of our fallen nature and the depravity of mankind. Life is not a test, where some will pass and some will fail, but evidences that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

We read in Matthew chapter 12 about a miracle performed by the Lord Jesus Christ – a blind and dumb man possessed by a demon; a picture of the sinner. Only the Lord Jesus could heal him. He could not see the truth, nor could he hear it; ‘faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God’, Rom. 10. 17. The Lord in His grace made him free of the demon and healed him.

In the text, we can identify three types of witnesses to this miracle; the **worshippers** – who marvelled and praised God; the **doubters** – who asked for another miracle from above; the **accusers** – the Pharisees who said that the Lord Jesus cast out the demon by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of the demons. There is no greater rejection of the grace of God than witnessing a miracle performed by the power of the Holy Spirit and crediting Satan with such power and glory. No wonder the Lord called this the unforgivable sin!

The Lord addressed the third group by expounding solemn truth. We might summarize it as follows:

- 1 Satan has a kingdom on this earth and he will never fight against his own, vv. 25-27;
- 2 God is establishing His kingdom through the Lord Jesus Christ, v. 28;
- 3 The Lord Jesus described this

world as a house/palace of the devil, v. 29;

- 4 People are the goods (belongings) of the devil, v. 29;
- 5 The devil has complete armour; he is stronger than all who are in his kingdom and even stronger than many heavenly creatures, Luke 11. 21; Matt. 12. 29;
- 6 No one can enter the devil’s house except one who is stronger than him, Luke 11. 22;
- 7 Before the goods (belongings) could be freed (recovered), the strong man of the house must be bound first and his armour removed, v. 22.

So, we learn about two kingdoms: the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. Everyone is born in the kingdom of Satan and on the broad way leading to destruction. Whilst God wants everybody to know the reality of both kingdoms and willingly choose God’s, Satan will do everything in his power to keep his ‘goods’ in denial of both kingdoms.

Prior to the Lord’s redemptive sacrifice, Satan believed his goods were secure, v. 21. Through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, such claims were refuted. The price was paid.¹

What do the scriptures tell us about the kingdom of God?

- 1 At this point in time, it is spiritual.

One day, it will include all the kingdoms of the earth;²

- 2 The kingdom of God is characterized by the attributes of God;³
- 3 There is true freedom in the kingdom of God;⁴

Conversely, let us examine what the word of God says about Satan’s kingdom, which is characterized by:

- 1 False liberty, corruption and immorality, 2 Pet. 2. 19;
- 2 False peace, Luke 11. 21; John 14. 27;
- 3 Darkness and blindness, 2 Cor. 4. 4;
- 4 Love of earthly knowledge, Gen. 3. 5.

From the beginning, Satan has been tempting humankind with knowledge that feeds their proud nature. Today, science and the knowledge that it brings are what people depend on for answers. It has been said that the world’s knowledge is doubling every day. Though such knowledge and technology do offer help to many suffering people, we can’t imagine what the world will become when such knowledge falls under the full control of Satan.

Like any evil king, Satan seeks full control. The Bible tells us that his total control will be followed by his complete destruction. God’s judgement fell in the days of Noah and Lot and the day when He will pour out his final judgement on the kingdom of Satan is rapidly approaching.⁵

Though we are brought into the spiritual kingdom of God by the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, we should never forget that we are still surrounded by the dominion of Satan. We have all seen how damaging sin can be. Let us not go after what the world is offering, as it is all the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. As we were purchased by the precious blood of our blessed Redeemer, how can we walk back into the dominion of darkness?

Endnotes

- 1 Col. 2. 14; Heb. 2. 14.
- 2 Matt. 12. 28; John 18. 36; Rev. 11. 15.
- 3 Rom. 14. 17; 1 Pet. 2. 9.
- 4 Gal. 5. 1; John 8. 32, 36.
- 5 Gen. 6. 5; 13. 13; Matt. 24. 37; Rev. 13. 17; 16. 10; 2 Thess. 2. 10-12.

ASSURANCE

By **MICHAEL BUCKERIDGE** Grantham, England

I lay awake one night as a teenager with the darkness pressing in and the panic rising: 'Was I saved, or heading for the blackness of hell?' Eventually I opened my Bible; relief came as it opened at the words, 'Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine', Isa. 43. 1. Sometime later, a similar thing happened and again the Lord comforted through His word. The third time, however, there was nothing. I think my mum can still remember that night as I struggled! Some days after, Hebrews chapter 11 verse 6 hit me, 'But without faith it is impossible to please him' and the realization dawned that God would not always give me a fresh assurance because He had already given me plenty; it was up to me to simply believe what He had already said.

A lack of assurance – lack of confidence – in one's salvation or a doctrine of the faith may affect many believers and there will be a variety of questions that trigger it. For example:

- Is the gospel / Bible true? Is it really the only way?
- I prayed so hard but it did no good; doesn't God care?
- Why didn't God work differently?
- Am I saved? Did God really do a work in my life?
- Why is there not more of an impact made? If God is so powerful, why is there not more of a difference in the lives of those who claim to be saved?

The following lines of thought have helped me when doubts come knocking.

The nature of faith

'And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform', Rom. 4. 21. Faith in the scriptures always has a foundation upon which to build. It is sad that our dictionaries have seen fit to add a definition of faith when it comes to 'religion' which ends by saying, 'based on spiritual conviction rather than proof'.¹ Under this heading I like to think about:

The assurance of His-story

Our God has left His footprint

clearly on the page of history. The argument of Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 15 is clear; the gospel is rooted in verifiable historical events. Paul states that if the resurrection didn't take place then, rightly, we would be the most miserable of men, v. 19. However, he, along with many others, could bear witness to the triumphant truth that 'now is Christ risen from the dead', v. 20. This changes everything for, this being so, our faith is not in vain and we can be 'stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord', v. 58.

Thus, faith responds to what it does not know, on the basis of what, or more importantly, who it knows, Heb. 11. 1.

The nature of God

When doubts come, there is the temptation to look inward and try to muster more faith. However, the Lord was clear; faith as a grain of mustard seed can accomplish great things. Why? Because it is the object of faith that is the determining factor. To know God, therefore, is to provide protection against doubt when we do not understand. Job's repentance was not sparked by an answer from God but a revelation

of God, Job 42. 5, 6; the question of Martha and Mary was not answered by an explanation of the delay, but an understanding of His power and sympathy, John. 11. 25-27, 33, 35, 40. How does God primarily reveal Himself?

The assurance of His word

'So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God', Rom. 10. 17. Although I wasn't entirely wise in just reading where my Bible opened, I was on the right track. Because Christianity is, at its core, a relationship, our faith is in a person and it thus follows that doubt is doubt about Him. It must prepare us for the darts of doubt from the devil to know what He has told us about Himself.

To trust someone entirely, we would want to know at least:

- They will not let us down, Heb. 10. 23; 13. 5b.
- They will be consistent, Heb. 13. 8; Jas. 1. 17; Mal. 3. 6.
- They can help in all circumstances; no power is too great for them, Isa. 40. 25, 26; Rom. 8. 35-39; Heb. 4. 16.
- They know what's happening, even if we don't, Isa. 40. 13, 14; 'Jesus knowing', John 13. 1, 3; 18. 4; 19. 28.
- They have our good at heart, Heb. 12. 5-10; 1 Pet. 5. 8; Titus 2. 14; Eph. 5. 26, 27; Rom. 8. 31

How good to remember that it is our 'great God and Saviour' who has saved us by His power, Rom. 1. 16; 1 Cor. 1. 18 and who keeps us by His power, 1 Pet. 1. 5, 'ready to be revealed in the last time'. When it comes to care:

'No one ever cared for me like Jesus;

There's no other friend so kind as He.

No one else could take the sin
And darkness from me;
O how much He cared for me'.

– SWAGGART

The nature of testing

There is a brilliant answer given in the film *God's not Dead 2*, to a teacher who is complaining that she can't sense God's presence in

the trial she is going through: 'You as a teacher ought to know better than anyone else that the teacher is always silent in the test!'

The assurance of His care

Romans chapter 8 verse 32 is a monumental statement of this: 'He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?' Love does not always step in at the first sign of difficulty, for it has the ultimate good of the loved one at heart. Time and again scripture shows how God dealt with the difficulties of His people, or we admire them for their God-given courage to face death. We forget, however, that their stories are finished whereas ours is not and, while we feel the power of their stories, we get frustrated that God isn't acting for us because we lose the perspective of time. Joseph's story is just a few pages long and yet involved years of suffering. At other times, we lose the perspective of eternity. How could Peter sleep the night before his execution? Because he knew that nothing, not even the sword, could separate him from the love of God. Death was not 'the final curtain', but rather the entrance to an 'eternal weight of glory', 2 Cor. 4. 17.



The nature of truth

Consider three questions about truth:

- Does it contradict itself?
- Is there other evidence for it?
- Can I see it work in my experience?

It is entirely logical to conclude that, if there is an all-powerful, all-knowing God who loves us, then we can be assured that He can and will keep His word. The empty tomb is powerful supporting evidence. What about in my life?

The assurance of His life within

John writes his first Epistle so 'that ye may know that ye have eternal life', 5. 13 and, 'that your joy may be full', 1. 4. David and John would agree that fundamental to that joy is His presence, Ps. 16. 11; 1 John. 1. 3, 4. Note the concern of the son when he was in the far country as he considered himself only worthy to be a servant, not a son; the distance from the father engendered a lack of assurance of his place in the family. Just as mutual confidence in earthly relationships demands effort, John, desiring us to know this joy and assurance, challenges us in the following ways:

- Are we seeking fellowship with God, 1. 3? This will involve walking 'in the light, as he is in the light', 1. 7, and actively abiding 'in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming', 2. 28. 'The joy that Jesus gives is the result of our disposition being at one with his own'.²
- Are we walking in obedience to Him? 2. 3-5; 3. 19-24. I was asked recently, 'How do I know that I am trusting Him?' The simple answer is obedience. Faith doesn't think about faith, it demonstrates its existence by doing what God says. James is blunt, 'faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone', Jas. 2. 17-26.
- What is our relationship with the world? We cannot love it and expect to enjoy the assurance of the love of the Father, for, 'if any man love the world, the love of

the Father is not in him', 2. 15.

- How is our relationship with other believers? To have fellowship with God we must abide in the light; the one who hates his brother 'is in darkness even until now', 2. 9. One way 'we know that we have passed from death unto life', is 'because we love the brethren', 3. 14.
- How sensitive are we to sin? John pulls no punches, 'Whosoever is born of God doth not commit [habitually] sin', 3. 9; also 4. 20; 5. 18.
- What do we confess? 'Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God', 4. 2.

The key to Doubting Castle

Bunyan's Christian, having spent many days beaten by Giant Despair in the dungeon of Doubting Castle, remembers something, 'What a fool, quoth he, am I, thus to lie in a stinking dungeon, when I may as well walk at liberty! I have a key in my bosom, called Promise, that will, I am persuaded, open any lock in Doubting Castle'.³

The woman with an issue of blood 'felt in her body that she was healed', Mark 5. 29. The Lord wouldn't leave assurance to her feelings but rather gave her a word of promise, 'thy faith hath made thee whole', v. 34. God's purpose is to bring many sons to glory, but in His ways glory always follows suffering. There will therefore be times when we will have to remember that truth is truth regardless of our feelings and when a God who cannot lie makes a promise, then faith will be 'confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ', Phil. 1. 6.

Endnotes

- 1 Accessed at <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/faith>.
- 2 CHAMBERS. Accessed at <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/1041-oswald-chambers-joy-strength-in-the-lord/day/24>.
- 3 J. BUNYAN. Accessed at <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/bunyan/pilgrim.iv.vii.html>.

Character Studies in the Book of Proverbs

Women of Vice, Voice and Virtue

By **JOHN SCARSBROOK** Killamarsh, England

Part 8

We cannot fail to notice as we read through the Proverbs that the wise man is totally impartial in his dealings with the various characters brought before us. He is forthright, honest, incisive and clear. We never find him sitting on the fence or giving advice in a vague, inconclusive manner. He deals with delicate and personal matters without ambiguity, and never will he bow at the altar of 'political correctness'!

It is evident from just a cursory reading of the book that the precepts given are all-inclusive. Men and women, old and young, educated or otherwise, each in turn will find clear guidance and instruction to apply in the varying circumstances of life.

The purpose in this final study of the series is to consider some of the verses that deal with matters of morality. We listen as the wise man gives counsel to husbands and wives, and to see the dignified place given to the woman by the word of God; a place which is denied to her by the modern concept of 'equality' and the strident voice of 'feminism'.

In the early chapters, we have noted that the wise man's instruction is to 'my son'. We see, however, that the responsibility of guiding the family is not solely that of fathers, but for both parents to speak with one voice; the mother's word carrying equal weight in directing the pathway of the children, e.g. 1. 8; 6. 20. Sad it is that in our society, with the marriage bond so devalued, many families have lost that balance.

From chapter 2 verse 16, throughout the book there is a persistent warning of the danger of becoming ensnared by one who is called the 'strange woman', 5. 3; 6. 24; 7. 5, etc. This woman is determined in her ambition to trap the unwary. She flatters, she entangles like a spider in its web. She has deliberately rejected the things of God, 2. 17, and now drags others down a pathway of immorality from which recovery will be almost impossible, vv. 18, 19. The way to avoid and resist the temptation to sin in this respect is given in chapter 2 verses 1 and 2. The wise instructor says, 'receive my words'; 'hide my commandments'; 'incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding'. In our 'enlightened' twenty-first-century, many men and women have lost any sense of shame. Adultery no longer carries a stigma and prostitution is considered acceptable, just an 'alternative lifestyle'. Yet the word of God remains unchanged, 'whoremongers and adulterers God will judge', Heb. 13. 4.

In chapters 6 and 7, clear warning is given regarding the folly of immorality and the dangers of giving licence to the flesh.

For the unregenerate, it is the pathway to hell, 5. 5; 7. 27. For the believer who succumbs to such temptation, it results in the ruin of a testimony and, possibly, irreparable damage to the Christian's potential for future service, 6. 32, 33. May we ever keep in mind the exhortation of the Apostle Paul, 'God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness', 1 Thess. 4. 7.

It is sad, yet instructive, to note that, having left on record the many proverbs as inspired by the Spirit of God, we should read of Solomon, in 1 Kings chapter 11 verse 1, 'But Solomon loved many strange women'. How vital it is to always remember, 'let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall', 1 Cor. 10. 12.

In chapters 8 and 9, the voices of two women are heard. One is the voice of wisdom; she stands in a prominent place and pleads with those who pass by to attend to her instruction. Her heart goes out to those who would be easily led astray; she knows the dangers of rejecting her wise counsel, freely given and more valuable than silver or gold, 8. 10, 11. We are reminded of the priceless treasure that we have in the complete word of God, instruction and guidance for every circumstance of life. Do we really heed it and value it as we should?

In chapter 9 verse 13, in contrast to the voice of wisdom, we hear the foolish woman. We will hurry past her; she is loud and objectionable. She has nothing of value to say to us, yet many of like minds will attend to her with disastrous results!

On our journey through the book of Proverbs, we pause to take a brief look behind some of the doors that we pass. In chapter 19 verse 13, and again in chapter 27 verse 15, we hear the voice of the contentious woman. On other occasions, the same word is expressed as the brawling woman. These are unhappy households; both husband and wife have

relinquished their responsibilities towards each other. There is no loving atmosphere in which to bring up a family. No testimony of saving grace to the neighbours. What a desperate need there is today for strong, united Christian homes and families to shine as beacons of light in a dark, dark world.

It is with a sense of relief that we turn to the virtuous women found in the book. There is a lovely expression in chapter 5 verse 18, where the wise man speaks of 'the wife of thy youth'. There is something very precious, very special in those words. To enjoy a marriage in which, after many years together, she is still 'the wife of thy youth' is a blessing indeed! It serves to emphasize to young believers the importance of being assured of the Lord's will in the choice of a husband or wife, and of being subject to Him in the life together. Such a marriage will be blessed by the Lord, 18. 22. A number of other women of commendable character have lessons for us in these chapters. There is the gracious woman, 11. 16, the wise woman, 14. 1, and the prudent wife, 19. 14. All these and more are brought together in the closing chapter, that delightful eulogy, the glowing tribute to womanhood that answers King

Lemuel's question, 'Who can find a virtuous woman'?

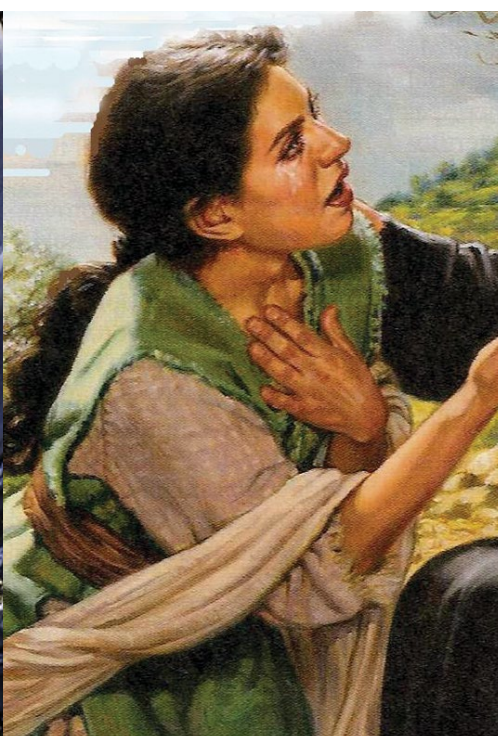
The scholars tell us that verses 10 to 31 are recorded in acrostic form based upon the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. It has been suggested that this is an aid to memory. The poetic structure has been lost in translation, but there is much practical truth here that we would do well to consider.

Those who know nothing about the word of God, yet insist on giving their opinion of it, would have us believe that the women of scripture are presented as inferior in some way! They are demeaned and imposed upon, mere chattels who must remain silent and subservient. Try telling that to the virtuous woman of chapter 31! Not only does she embody all the finest attributes of a wife and mother, but she is also intelligent, industrious and involved in a wide variety of activities. In verse 16, she is negotiating a land purchase, and meeting the cost of planting a vineyard from the sale of those things she has made, vv. 13, 24. She is a wise and astute business woman, yet has a heart to love and a hand to help the poor and needy, v. 20. The manner in which her husband is mentioned in verses 11, 12 and 23 would suggest that he owes a great deal to his wife for the position he has, and the respect he

commands. This is a truly equal yoke, a unity forged by the Spirit of God; a far cry from the pathetic caricature that men in their ignorance promote as 'equality of the sexes'.

The husband and wife in this chapter provide a number of pointers to a successful marriage. It is a marriage in which there is mutual trust, v. 11. Neither behaves in any way to give cause for suspicion. Each has complete confidence in the integrity of the other. There is a concern for each other's welfare, v. 12, and it is very clear that both husband and wife also have confidence in the other's ability to undertake their respective daily responsibilities. They are not so self-centred that the needs of others are ignored, v. 20, they will make available what God has given to them. Notice too the lovely family portrait in verse 28, children and husband alike quite willing to express publicly their love and appreciation to an outstanding wife and mother.

There is so much more we could learn from the characters of Proverbs. The book, like all the word of God, is inexhaustible. May these brief studies, however, be blessed of God as a help and encouragement to His people, as we await His return.



Paul the Priest

The Perfume of the Offering

By **STEPHEN FELLOWES** Skibbereen, Ireland

Part 4

Two scriptures from Paul's writings will occupy our thoughts in relation to this subject; the first one is in Ephesians chapter 5 verse 2, where we have the fragrance of **Christ's offering**; the second is found in Philippians chapter 4 verse 18, where it is the **Christian's offering** that is brought before us.

Christ's offering

The first three chapters of Ephesians lift us up to the lofty pinnacle of Pauline revelation, where we are seen as those who are 'in the heavenlies in Christ', possessors of all the spiritual blessings which are connected with such a position, 1. 3 JND. The power of God in salvation has been our experience and since we have links with Christ, then we must have links with all who are Christ's. These connections have bound us together to form the church, the 'one new man' created in Christ, 2. 15; the great mystery of the ages 'hid in God', 3. 9, but now revealed through God's chosen vessel, Paul.

Against this elevated background, the apostle calls upon the Ephesian saints to live their lives in a way that becomes such truth. Thus, in the remaining part of the letter he comes very much down to earth and shows us how doctrine must always have a practical bearing in our everyday life.

As we move into chapter 5, he commands the children of God to imitate God in the matter of showing forgiveness, 'be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you', 4. 32. He points them to the example par excellence – Christ and His self-sacrificing love. 'Walk in love', he exhorts them, 'as Christ also

hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour', 5. 2.

The particular aspect of the death of Christ being highlighted is not so much His suffering for sin under the hand of a sin-hating God, but more the burnt offering aspect of Leviticus chapter 1. This is borne out by Paul's references to Christ's devotedness and the sweet fragrance of His sacrifice to God.

In the burnt offering, the emphatic point is the total devotedness of Christ to the will of God even to the extent of the cross. There was only one blessed Man who was fully on the altar for God. All those details, the inwards, the legs, the head and the fat, indicate that nothing was held back and the result was a sweet odour to the nostrils of Jehovah.

Christ is always the perfect standard for His people and, as we ponder this verse, we should be challenged by the giving of Himself. Love is always displayed in giving; God's love for the world was manifested in the gift of His Son, John 3. 16. In this very Epistle we read, 'Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it', 5. 25, and deeply precious to every saint are the words of Paul when he speaks of 'the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me', Gal. 2. 20. He could

give no more and, at the same time, no less would have sufficed.

What am I prepared to give? Self-interest is always the last thing to die with us but if we are to 'walk in love' and be 'followers of God' then we must pay the price of self-sacrifice which is, unfortunately, much easier to say than to do!

The next statement in our verse focuses upon the beneficiaries of such self-sacrificing love; it concerns the good of others. He gave Himself 'for us'; this is not so much directly dealing with the truth of substitution but rather that His sacrifice was in our interests; it was us He had before Him. Of course, it was in the interests 'of all', 1 Tim. 2. 6, in terms of its full, unlimited provision, but here, in Ephesians, Paul is speaking to those who, by faith, have come into the good of it.

Such love ought to produce a definite response. Consciousness of His love for me will result in my love for His own.

The consequence of the offering is the glory of God. While it was for us, at the same time it was 'to God'. How we rejoice in the unspeakable pleasure that God has derived from the cross! It all ascended to heaven as a sweet, fragrant odour of joy and satisfaction to the heart of God.

If in Christ's love we have an example to follow, in God finding pleasure we have a goal to motivate us. Self-sacrificing love will often go unseen and unrecognized by others but to know that it pleases God should be encouragement enough to continually pursue the pathway of devotedness to His name.

The Christian's offering

As Paul comes to the close of the Philippian Epistle, he expresses his deep gratitude to the saints at Philippi for their practical fellowship with him in the work of the Lord. He speaks of 'having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God', 4. 18. Sometimes we are apt to look upon the practical matters of the Christian life

as being somewhat mundane and less important in comparison with more public ministry but it is delightful to see the elevated nature of all that is done in the Lord's name and for His glory.

In 2 Corinthians, when Paul is dealing with these very matters, he links them with the great example of Christ's giving, 'For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich', 8. 9, and then he connects them with God's indescribable gift, 'Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift', 9. 15.

If we are to appreciate the value God places upon 'ministering to the saints', 2 Cor. 9. 1, and be encouraged to act with full-hearted liberality, we need look no further than the actions of the Godhead.

Paul employs two statements in Philippians chapter 4 to describe such ministry. He speaks of it as:

'An odour of a sweet smell'. Just like the language used in Ephesians in relation to the Lord's sacrifice, our minds are taken back again to the sweet savour offerings of the first three chapters of Leviticus. The burnt offering reminds us of the fragrance of a life consecrated to God; the meal offering speaks of the only man who lived that life perfectly; and the peace offering typifies the sweet fragrance of the joy of fellowship with divine Persons. To think that God will in like manner receive a sweet odour rising from the practical expression of fellowship is precious indeed.

'A sacrifice acceptable'. Because it cost something and was evidently done with a willing heart it was 'wellpleasing to God'. Philippians, in many ways, is a book about sacrifice, especially chapter 2, where we are given examples of those who put others first, from Christ, the supreme example, down to Paul, Timothy and Epaphroditus. All in their own particular ways paid the great price of sacrifice.

Now, says Paul to the Philippian saints, God values your sacrifice too; it has brought pleasure to Him. This reminds



us of those words of exhortation at the close of the Epistle to the Hebrews, 'By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name. But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased', 13. 15, 16. The writer speaks of Christian sacrifice in the most embracing way; it involves the praises of our lips, as we act in the capacity of holy priests, but it also involves well-doing and distribution to the needs of others.

We often delight ourselves in the tabernacle teaching of the book of Exodus as we learn the great typical lessons that it unfolds to us, but, on a very practical level, all that was used for the construction of the tabernacle and its service was a free-will offering from the children of Israel, Exod. 25. 1-9.

The brass for the brazen altar, the shittim wood and gold for the ark of the covenant, the materials for the coverings and clothes, down to smaller but no less precious offerings of oil, spices and gems for the breastplate; all of this and more was contributed from willing hearts for the glory of God. God did not want it from a people who were merely conscripted to give but rather from hearts that felt compelled to give! God calls their contribution 'my offering' and 'an offering unto the Lord', 25. 2; 35. 5. To an unlearned eye, it may have appeared as something simply given to Moses, the leader of the nation, or to Aaron, the high priest, but no, it was given to the Lord! Our minds cannot but recall the record concerning Mary in the Gospels as she was criticized and misunderstood for pouring upon her Lord the box of precious ointment, 'Why trouble ye the woman?', the Lord could ask, 'for she hath wrought a good work upon me', Matt. 26. 10.

'O Lord of heaven and earth and sea,
To Thee all praise and glory be;
How shall we show our love to Thee
Who givest all?

We lose what on ourselves we spend;
We have as treasure without end
Whatever, Lord, to Thee we lend,
Who givest all'.

– WORDSWORTH

1 Thessalonians Chapter 1

A Model New Testament Church

By **PETER DAVIES** Swansea, Wales

Introduction

I have chosen this title for the first chapter because it is the way the apostle describes this remarkable company of believers, 'ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia', v. 7. Their lives gave indisputable evidence of a real work of God's grace which was manifested in those beautiful virtues of **faith**, **love** and **hope**, of which he speaks in verse 3. It is interesting to note that when he introduces the letter he makes no reference to the qualifications of the authors, only their names, v. 1. It seems that they had no need to establish their authority but merely share their affection for each other. It was remarkable indeed that a church had been planted there in the first place, seeing they had only been able to stay in Thessalonica for such a short period of time, about three weeks. Yet, in that small space of time, the hand of the Lord had moved mightily among them. For, from Acts chapter 17 verse 4, we learn that, 'some of them [Jews] believed . . . and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few'. So, in such a short time, many had come to faith in Christ, before God's servants were forced to move on because of bitter opposition from the unbelieving Jews living there. The wonderful thing about this young company of believers was that they continued faithfully in spite of the opposition. What, then, was the secret of their success? How were they able to continue in the face of the severe attacks of the enemy? In this first chapter of his letter, Paul answers these questions.

Their security, v. 1

Notice how Paul addresses them, 'The church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ' – not in Thessalonica but 'in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ'. What a lovely touch that is. They could be in no safer hands, the hands of the Father and the Son. Not only was He their God but their Father too, assured of His constant care and counsel. This reminds us of the words of our Saviour in John chapter 10 verses 28 and 29. What security! What shelter they would experience there. As the psalmist records, 'He

that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty', Ps. 91. 1.

Their strength, v. 3

What a commendation he gives them in this verse. He speaks of three outstanding characteristics: 'your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope'. **Work of faith** – their faith was not passive but active. Initially evident by their turning to God from idols, the God of whom they had heard but had not seen. The message they heard was a convicting, convincing and converting word.

As Paul says in Romans chapter 10 verse 17, 'faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God'. But it was not only faith at work in their conversion but in their continuance, for, 'we walk by faith, not by sight', 2 Cor. 5. 7. Paul commends them further for their **labour of love** – this is summed up for us at the close of the chapter, in the words 'to serve the living and true God', v. 9. They had been worshippers of false gods but now they have found the **true** and the **living God**. Their idols were deaf, dumb, blind and lifeless, but the God they had turned to is alive, so much alive that we live through Him physically and, more so, spiritually by the strength and power He gives. That **labour of love** was expressed in two ways: in suffering; and in service.

Their suffering, v. 6

'Having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost', v. 6. They encountered the blast of persecution from the earliest days of their conversion. The opposition was severe and so fierce that they persuaded the Apostle Paul to leave the city in peril of his life, Acts 17. It was no easy path for them; they would have to face the enemy without the help of God's servants, but they did not mourn about it and complain. They experienced the joy of the Holy Spirit. Neither did they lie low for a time until the storm passed; they became emboldened by the Spirit and continued to serve.

Their service, v. 8

'For from you sounded out the word of the Lord', v. 8. That is the opposite to keeping quiet about it! They heralded it forth; they preached the word! Not just in Thessalonica either, but throughout the whole area round about 'Macedonia and Achaia'. What was the motivating power? It was **love**; it was a labour of love, for the Lord and also for the lost. They followed the example of Paul, who could say 'the love of Christ constraineth me', 2 Cor. 5. 14, and, again, 'For to me to live is Christ', Phil. 1. 21. What is our motivation

in life? Is it Christ, self, or selfish goals, such as my home, my family, my work, my business, or my pleasure? Is this the reason we are living such defeated lives and seem fruitless in our endeavours? These saints prospered in their service, souls were being saved, lives transformed because their service was a labour of love, not some irksome duty that they felt they must perform. Perhaps our next point might help to throw light on our problem.

Their separation, v. 9

They 'turned to God from idols', v. 9. The Apostle John was concerned about this when he wrote his first letter, 'Little children, keep yourselves from idols', 1 John 5. 21.

These dear believers had turned their back on the idols that once dominated their lives to serve the living and true God. They gave of themselves to His service. This was their number one concern and desire – all else must take second place, for an idol is anything in my life that takes the place of God. When the Lord was asked which is the first and greatest commandment, His reply was, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind', Matt. 22. 37. Notice, in verse 6, Paul says, 'ye became followers of us, and of the Lord'. Their eyes were no longer on the things around them; they were no longer interested in the old way of life, the way of the

world – they followed in the way of the Lord.

Their satisfaction, v. 10

'Wait for his Son from heaven', v. 10. What an occupation! What a prospect! They had new hopes and aspirations, all centred in the Saviour, whom they had come to love and serve. They could truthfully sing 'Take the world, but give me Jesus, He is more than life to me'.¹ Here we see their **patience of hope**. Waiting for His coming at any moment, to see Him, to be with Him and to be like Him, to behold His glory, and to share in it by amazing grace. Are we waiting? We are nearer by 2,000 years than they were. We are closer than every other generation before us. Behold, the bridegroom is coming! Will we be ashamed at His coming? Will we be doing something, or be somewhere, where we would not like Him to find us? That would not be the case with these Thessalonian believers; they were eagerly waiting for and expecting Him to come!

Their salvation, v. 10

'Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come', v. 10. Notice how carefully the Spirit guided Paul to write these words. 'Delivered' is in the past tense, not the future. Our being saved from wrath to come has already been accomplished! Paul reminds us in Romans chapter 8 verse 1, 'There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus'. At the cross, He paid the price to the full. Our debt has been settled forever. This verse is emphatic; we will not go through the great tribulation, the day of His wrath. The preposition 'from' could be better translated 'away from'. So the church of God, which includes every believer in our Lord Jesus Christ, will be caught up to glory before that terrible Day of the Lord comes. Glory, everlasting glory be to Him who bore the cross!



Endnote

1 Hymn written by Fanny J. Crosby.

THE GOSPEL OF MARK

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

Part 8

As we continue in the Galilean ministry of the Lord, we come to:

The call of Levi, vv. 13-17

As we shall see from this second section, the Lord calls Levi from the receipt of custom to become one of His disciples. Although none of the Gospel writers record much about this incident, each adds a distinct touch.

The context, v. 13

The Lord was by the sea and, as we see in this Gospel, this was a common retreat for the Saviour.¹ His purpose was to withdraw from the scene in the house and from the clamour of the crowd and the opposition of the rulers. His desire, as was seen here, was to teach and to impart the message that the multitude needed – forgiveness of sins.

It is clear from the vocabulary used that the crowd continued to come. HIEBERT comments, ‘The imperfect tenses picture successive groups coming out to Jesus, and each group receiving His teaching. Mark alone noted this fact here’.² They did not come as one mass but gathered over a period. In that time, the Lord spoke to the different groups as they approached.

It is interesting to see that Levi was sitting at the receipt of custom. He was gathering the fruits of his collaboration with the Roman authorities, which was probably some port or trading tax levied at that point. As he was allowed to take a percentage of the taxes gathered, he could well have been a wealthy man.

The call, v. 14

Mark records that it was ‘as He [the Lord] passed by’. The opportunity was at that very moment. Levi seems to have caught the urgency of

the situation for his was a decisive response to the call that came.

The Lord’s words were simple and direct, ‘Follow me’. There could be no simpler message than that contained in these two words. They came with all the authority of the Lord, issued as a command. There had to be a response of one sort or another. However, one commentator states, ‘Follow me may be rendered “be following me or continue following me”. Jesus prescribed a new life-style, not a temporary errand’.³

The cost of obeying the call must not be underestimated. Levi was probably a wealthy man but to leave his post at the crucial time of tax collection was to cut his ties with the Roman authorities, to sacrifice affluence and luxury for an unknown road. It is Luke who tells us, ‘he left all’, 5. 28. There was no question in Levi’s mind. He took the decisive and irrevocable step, and he took it willingly. He chose to follow, not as a single or occasional thing but as a new character of life.

The communion, v. 15

The reality of Levi’s step of faith in following the Saviour is seen in this verse. Although the two events, his call and his meal, may have a short period of time between them, nevertheless they demonstrate the commitment of Levi to his new Master.

Those present, by invitation it is assumed, were ‘many publicans and sinners’, v. 15. Levi would seem to have used his contacts amongst his fellow tax collectors to bring them together to meet the Saviour. There may well have been those amongst his former friends and colleagues who would wonder at the reasons for Levi’s change. They were given the

opportunity to meet the Lord who had changed his life and his outlook upon it.

Luke tells us that it was ‘a great feast in his own house’, 5. 29. Whilst this indicates something about Levi’s wealth, it also tells us of the extent of his desire to reach sinners with the gospel through the Lord Himself. These were people who would have been excluded from the synagogue and from other places of communion with the religious leaders and common people. Thus, it was the home of Levi that is used as the venue. Perhaps there are some practical lessons in evangelism that we can learn from the example of this man.

The condemnation, vv. 16, 17

Levi’s actions were not welcomed by the Pharisees. They viewed social contact with the publicans as defilement. In their eyes, such activity was not that of a godly man. Hence, they stood in condemnation and judgement of the Lord.

It is to be noted that the Pharisees did not approach the Lord with their question. They approached the disciples. Whether this was because the disciples were on the fringe of the large company, whereas the Lord was at its centre, we are not told. However, we can imagine that the question would raise doubts in the minds of the disciples, as it was a question raised by the leaders of the day.

But, as the social and moral outcasts of the nation, did not the publicans and sinners need a Saviour? The Lord was not in the midst of such a company because He sought the friendship of sinners but because He sought their salvation and blessing. He ‘came . . . to call . . . sinners to repentance’, v. 17. May we never lose sight of those that need a Saviour, whatever their status in society!

Endnotes

- 1 See Mark 1. 45; 2. 13; 3. 7, 13; 4. 1; 5. 21.
- 2 HIEBERT, *op. cit.*, pg. 71.
- 3 EDWARD HINDSON (ed.), *The King James Study Bible*, Logos software resource.

MINISTERING TO WIDOWERS

By **DAVID BRAUCH** Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, USA

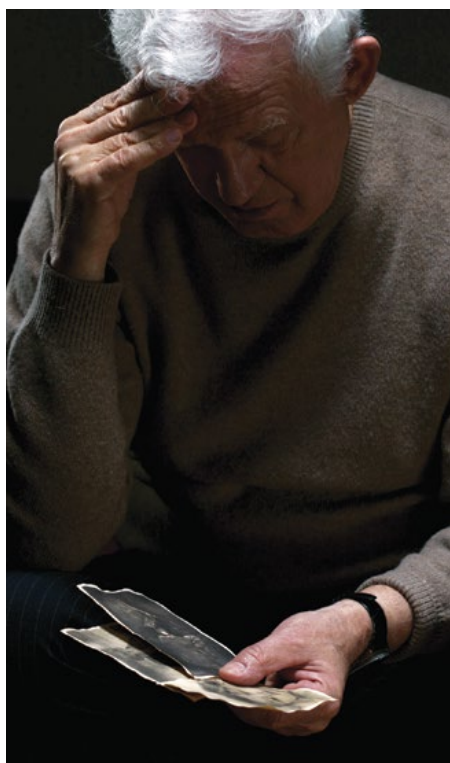
For many years, my wife and I hosted dinners for international students every four to six weeks. However, about ten years ago, God clearly redirected the focus of our hospitality ministry toward widowers. This occurred when two of the husbands in our neighbourhood lost their wives within a few months of each other. With one couple we were having a Bible study – the wife was a weak believer, but the husband was a sceptic. The second couple lived next door. We had a fairly good relationship with this couple. Also, several times we had gone out to dinner and had taken in a few musical presentations with them. On a few occasions we shared the gospel with them. On her deathbed each of us had the opportunity to question her regarding personal faith in Jesus Christ. Neither of us were convinced one way or another.

As most acquaintances do, we attended the funerals of each and expressed our heartfelt sympathies to these men and their extended families. Two passages which we found appropriate were: 'Better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting; for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart', Eccles. 7. 2; 'Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep', Rom. 12. 15.

The Spirit impressed upon us that the steps we had taken were fine for a start, but that was not to be the end of our mourning with/for them. It occurred to us that these neighbours had not only lost their life companions but the primary housekeepers. Specifically, neither of these men had done much, if any, cooking, and their grown-up children lived remote from them. Shortly after the first lost his wife, we sensed the Lord leading us to invite him over for a meal. We decided to make the atmosphere and meal as pleasant as

possible. This involved setting a nice table for them. My wife made a special point to make a complete and tasty meal, along with freshly-made rolls and pie for dessert. Beforehand we were concerned how the conversation would go, as the widower was a sceptic. However, we decided to ask questions about him and his wife and let him talk, unburdening himself. To summarize, the experience went well – he seemed to genuinely appreciate our efforts and he felt comfortable in sharing. We determined to invite him over monthly or every six weeks.

Shortly after the next-door neighbour's wife died, we invited him to join us also. At the same time, we invited another neighbour, a man of approximately the same age, who has been living alone for over thirty years, since he and his wife divorced. From the outset these three got along well. The fact that they come from different walks of life has not been a problem. From the start they have felt comfortable with and have shown interest in each other's lives.



Before these dinners, we usually pray that the Spirit of God will open up a time for spiritual exchange. We don't conduct a formal Bible study, but have had a number of lively biblical discussions where the gospel has been discussed and clearly presented. We have given the Gideon New Testament, pointing out salvation verses, such as 1 John chapter 5 verse 13. Sadly, the first widower we hosted passed away suddenly.

Not long after this, some of the Gideon men with whom I formerly distributed New Testaments lost their wives. We questioned if we should invite them to our existing group, or should we begin one with just believing widowers. Realizing that we are growing older, and that we both have limits to our strength and time, we prayerfully invited the first Gideon widower to join us. He was formerly the postmaster of our township. From the start the original guests welcomed the latter, and good camaraderie has continued. Since then several other Gideon widowers have joined us. All those present have learned a considerable amount about the different occupations in which each was formerly engaged.

Typically, these men stay around for several hours afterwards. Sometimes we continue our dinner-time conversations. Alternatively, at our encouragement, one of our widowers will bring pictures of himself and his family (on vacation) and/or of him at his former work setting. On other occasions we've shown DVDs of excellent and accurate presentations of some biblical subject or issue. At the end of each, the gospel is clearly presented.

Frequently, we'll do a slide show of some location in the world that my wife and I have visited, such as Israel or Turkey, and its biblical sites. Finally, between get-togethers my wife occasionally prepares an extra amount of homemade soup or other entree which we drop off with one or more of our widowers. In summary, it is our prayer that our simple efforts will take some of the 'sting' out of losing one's wife for our widowers and offer us continuing opportunities for sharing the gospel with them.

The Establishment of Itawa Gospel Hall Assembly, Ndola, Zambia

By **HENRY MWENYA** Itawa, Zambia



Itawa Township is a low density residential area comprising council, private and company housing. The township is separated from the city centre by the Kafubu River, from which water is supplied for almost half of the city. The township is the closest to the airport.

Kansenji Township is another one of the low density residential areas of Ndola, but on the other side of the city centre, located about five to six kilometres from Itawa. The assembly in Kansenji meets at Kansenji Gospel Hall, which was established in 1958. This was the only English-speaking assembly in Ndola at the time. Therefore, all believers who wanted to attend meetings conducted in English had to travel to Kansenji from all corners of Ndola. There were quite a number of vernacular or Bemba-speaking assemblies in different locations of Ndola. However, it was, and still is, generally believed that better biblical teaching is available in English-speaking assemblies, hence the reason for some believers travelling long distances to go to meetings in Kansenji.

There was concern raised by some brothers that there was need to establish another English-speaking assembly on the other side of Ndola, and Itawa was chosen as being more accessible for south-eastern parts of Ndola. The move was seen as helpful in easing the burden of believers travelling long distances to go to

Kansenji. In fact, there were already a few people coming from Itawa who attended meetings at Kansenji.

One Friday in April 1984, after the prayer meeting in the evening, one brother brought up the subject of establishing an assembly in Itawa, reminding others that the idea has been talked about for some time but had not been put into action. From that, fifteen volunteers offered their time and energy to the proposed work, and they decided they would go for door-to-door outreach, starting the following day, which was a Saturday. Having started, the pioneers agreed that the work was to be done every Saturday.

As the work continued, they decided that it was better that they met at some place in Itawa for Sunday services, enabling them to direct people they shared the gospel with where to come for meetings. One brother, who had a house in Itawa and was not part of the group but was believed to be saved, was approached. By God's providence, he gave them permission to use his home for meetings. They would meet there every Saturday before going for outreach, and also on the Lord's day. It was in this house where the first breaking of bread in Itawa was held. The meetings continued in this house for a period of one year, before the small company moved to Dzikomo Primary School within Itawa. While at the primary school, the Bible study meeting on Tuesdays

was introduced, but could not be held at the school because the pioneers were not sure if the school authorities would allow them another meeting during the week. Therefore, they approached another brother who lived in Itawa, but gathered with the saints at Kansenji, for permission to use his home for Bible study.

By this time, some of the original volunteers had gone back to Kansenji Gospel Hall, leaving only three from the original group. However, there were some believers of like mind in and around Itawa, who gathered with other churches near their homes because of the distance to Kansenji. When they heard that believers of like mind had started meeting in Itawa, they came and joined the company.

The outreach, though very extensive, saw very few converts who were baptized and received in fellowship and who continued steadfastly in the meetings. In most cases the people preached to claimed they were also believers belonging to other denominations. However, as time went on, people got saved and were added to the assembly, while other believers came from other towns by reason of employment and started gathering at Itawa.

There came a time when there were too many Christian groups gathering at the school at the same time, resulting in so much noise that it was difficult to understand what the preacher was saying. At the same time, the school authorities started increasing rents indiscriminately. Therefore, in 1998, it was decided that the assembly should apply for a plot in Itawa so that it could build its own assembly hall. This was done and the plot was given, not on the expected area near the school but on the eastern end of Itawa closer to the airport.

The construction of the hall started around 2000 and the meetings shifted into the new incomplete building in June 2007. Work on the hall and surrounding plot has continued since. There are still some members from the early years of the assembly; none of the pioneers of the work are there but some do visit once in a while. In the goodness of God, the work continues.

'On the way to the match'

Crete Gospel Hall in Anfield, Liverpool stands just a stone's throw from Liverpool Football Club's stadium, the sixth largest football stadium in England, with a seating capacity of 54,000. It has been the home of Liverpool Football Club since 1892, long before the assembly at Crete Gospel Hall occupied the building.

On a match day, the area is gridlocked with cars and hordes of people mill around the streets, all in very high spirits! For many years the proximity of the Gospel Hall to the ground was seen as an inconvenience, with great difficulty parking on a Sunday when a match was being held and meetings having to be rearranged around football matches.

In early 2010 it was realized that, rather than a hindrance, this was actually a huge opportunity. All these people are literally on our doorstep. The idea was raised and, after much prayer and consideration, a group of local Christians from the assembly, together with others, decided to take action and seek to reach these people. A bright and attractive 'LFC' (Liverpool Football Club) leaflet with a clear gospel message was produced. Many thousands of this leaflet have been given out over the years.

The format is the same now as it was then. About an hour before kick-off, a table is set up outside the hall serving tea, coffee, biscuits and sweets – the deal being that if a tea or coffee is taken a gospel leaflet must be taken as well! The table is manned by a few friendly believers so as not to be too confrontational and so that people feel comfortable to come and take refreshment.

We have found the table to be very popular with the crowds, and we

have many regulars who come along for a drink and a chat and who freely take the leaflets. We've also become very friendly with the local unofficial 'parking attendant', Mick. He always grabs a handful of leaflets and insists on giving them out!

At the same time, others will stand in certain strategic positions around the ground handing out leaflets. Sometimes it is difficult to keep up with the demand when handing out the leaflets, although when one person refuses, it is very common for everyone in the stream of people behind that person to refuse too! If this happens, we have found that it is best to pause and restart a short while later.

Since 2016 we have produced a gospel 'postcard' style leaflet for every match, with a picture on one side (to grab the attention of the fans) and a message on the other. We are very careful to ensure that any images used are licensed correctly as, on occasions, officials from the club do come and take a leaflet, presumably for inspection.

The text on the reverse of the card essentially contains three sections, the first being a commentary on some situation at the club; examples recently were the new stadium and its benefits, the £142M transfer fee for a player, or 'Last Match Victory' when Liverpool were on the verge of qualifying to play again in Europe. The middle section then builds a link to enable the gospel



to be presented in the last section. For example, for the £142M transfer fee for a player, the middle section discusses the value of a human life and the final section brings in the gospel with the death of the Lord Jesus being proof of our value to God.

The leaflets are designed to be read in less than a minute and to be easily understood by the supporters. On a typical match day, we can give out around 1500 leaflets. Many leaflets are put straight into pockets, so we always pray that when they are brought out later they'll be read. A result of producing a leaflet for every match is that some people actually seem to be collecting them! We heard a story of a man who took a handful and gave them out in one of the local pubs and compared their collection, not the method of distribution we intended! On at least one occasion, players have received a leaflet as well.

We have heard of the leaflets reaching many parts of the country and, indeed, the world. There are also many visitors from Northern Ireland and with a strong Northern Irish representation in the Liverpool assemblies they always hear a familiar accent! We appreciate the support of local believers from the assemblies in Liverpool, Warrington and Manchester in this work.

We hope that our experience may help others in looking for different avenues of service when it is difficult to encourage people to come into a church building.



WORD FOR TODAY

By **BRIAN CLATWORTHY** Newton Abbot, England

Oklah (Food, fuel, meat)

'Ol (Yoke)

Olah (Ascent, burnt offering)

The use of a yoke or harness in modern-day farming, especially in the West, would be regarded as a somewhat backward step, almost anachronistic, yet even today in many Third World agrarian economies, the use of animals, especially oxen yoked together to pull loads, is still a common sight.

In the Old Testament the Hebrew word for yoke, *'Ol*, occurs over fifty times. It usually refers to a wooden bar or harness to couple animals together so that they could pull heavy loads in tandem. Typically, the harness was fitted onto the animal's neck to bind them together so that their combined strength would make the task much easier, as for example, in 1 Kings chapter 19 verse 19 where Elisha demonstrated his unique strength and ploughing ability with twelve yoke of oxen. In Numbers chapter 19 verse 2, reference is made to the red heifer, on which no yoke had been laid, i.e., it must not have done any work in its lifetime so that it would be wholly dedicated to the Lord. A similar prohibition was applied in Deuteronomy chapter 21 verse 3 to the heifer whose neck was broken to make atonement for an unsolved murder. In this instance the prohibition included the requirement that 'the heifer should never have worked'. 'The heifer's immaturity and physically



intact state symbolize the human victim's innocence'.¹ Overall, the various references to yoke in the Old Testament are both literal and metaphorical, and emphasize the twin concepts of subjection, or, on occasions, bondage to the will of others and service to others. For example, it is used metaphorically in part of the blessing bestowed upon Esau in Genesis chapter 27 verse 40, where Isaac pronounces that eventually Esau would tear off Jacob's yoke from his neck.

Rehoboam refused to lighten the heavy yoke that Solomon had placed on Israel, 1 Kgs. 12. 4, and ultimately his intransigence led to the division of the kingdom, v. 16. In Jeremiah chapter 27 verse 2, Jeremiah was instructed by God to 'make yourself straps and yoke-bars, and put them on your neck', ESV. This signified that it was God's will for Judah to serve and be in submission to the rule of Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah made it clear, however, that this particular yoke was self-inflicted because of Judah's sins, Jer. 14. 2. Conversely, in Leviticus chapter 26 verse 13 God told Israel that He had broken the bars of their Egyptian yoke and that they would be slaves no longer, cp. Hos. 11. 4. This presupposed, of course, that they would then belong to God and serve Him alone, Lev. 25. 42, 55.

A third and familiar aspect is also developed in the Old Testament, and that relates to not being unequally yoked. This was a literal prohibition in respect of animals such as the ox and the ass, as in Deuteronomy chapter 22 verse 10, which is part of the wider provisions for forbidden combinations developed in Leviticus chapter 19 verse 19 *et seq.*

In the Septuagint (LXX) the Hebrew word *'Ol* for yoke is translated by the Greek word *zygos*, and this noun and the rare verb *heterozugos* occur together seven times in the

Greek New Testament. In each occurrence its use is metaphorical, not literal. Whilst the Pharisees sought to 'yoke' the people to the Mosaic law, making their lives burdensome, Christ encouraged His followers to take on His yoke, which He described as easy to bear with a light burden, Matt. 11. 29, 30. Christ's commandments must, however, be complied with, and they are considerably easier to keep. The institution of slavery is equated to 'being under a yoke', in 1 Timothy chapter 6 verse 1 ESV, and whilst the Bible does not condemn slavery *per se*, nonetheless the effect of the Mosaic law and Christianity continues to make significant sociological change in this context, e.g. Philemon 21. The New Testament again takes up the theme of not being unequally yoked when the Apostle Paul forbids the Corinthians from having any relationship with unbelievers, 2 Cor. 6. 14, which is a salutary warning to us today, especially to those younger believers who are contemplating marriage.² But we should all be conscious of this prohibition in all areas of our lives, otherwise we may well find ourselves easily compromised in relation to our faith.

Perhaps Paul has in mind here not only the inherent danger of close alliance or union with unbelievers, but the inevitability of enslavement to that which is contrary to the mind of God. 'What portion does a believer share with an unbeliever?', 2 Cor. 6. 15 ESV.

For further reading/study

Introductory

Yoke in LELAND RYKEN, et al. (eds.), *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, pg. 975.

Advanced

'Ol, in *Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, Vol. 3, pp. 400-402.

Endnotes

- 1 BERNARD M. LEVINSON, *Deuteronomy, Introduction and Annotations*, (JSB), pg. 413.
- 2 Whilst this is a yoke to be avoided, God does encourage the young to take up the yoke of self-discipline in their lives, so that they might know future blessing, Lam. 3. 25-27.

Book Reviews



The Nine Beatitudes Craig Munro

Paperback, 94 pages, Published by John Ritchie Ltd, 40 Beansburn, Kilmarnock, Scotland.
ISBN-13: 978 1 912522 49 1.

This is the second book in a series bearing the overall title 10-1. The author's plan is to deal with important subjects identified by numbers in a descending order, hence *The Ten Commandments* is followed now by the Nine Beatitudes, the words spoken by the Lord Jesus at the opening of those chapters usually referred to as 'The Sermon on the Mount' in Matthew chapters 5-7.

These 'blessings', which have been the subject of written and spoken ministry over many years, provide for us certain moral features which should mark those who belong to the Kingdom of Heaven. Some expositors confine these principles

to a yet future day of kingdom manifestation. MUNRO, while allowing for dispensational teaching, explains in clear detail that they have a present and practical voice for believers today.

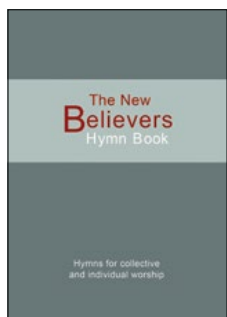
The characteristics of each beatitude are outlined, followed by the anticipated outcome promised by the Lord Jesus to those who manifest these qualities.

The scripture references given to substantiate the narrative are reproduced in full as footnotes. While this limits the amount of text on some pages, this reviewer found it preferable to have the verses quoted ready to hand, rather than constantly

having to break into the flow of the subject to find and read the appropriate scripture.

Throughout the book the reader is encouraged to see the Lord Jesus as the perfect example of each statement in turn. He alone can truly display all moral perfection and ultimately receive the acclaim and blessing bestowed upon the One to whom the kingdom rightfully belongs.

Although this book would not claim to be in any sense an exhaustive work on the subject, it encourages and challenges the reader to an exercise of self-examination and further study of these verses.



The New Believers Hymn Book

700 Hymns, Hardback. Published by John Ritchie Ltd, 40 Beansburn, Kilmarnock, KA3 1RL.
ISBN: 978-1-912522-38-5.

Hymns and hymnbooks, suitable for the regular meetings of the Lord's people can be a very sensitive, and on occasion, controversial subject. In many places today there is an inclination toward the use of twenty-first century arrangements, many of which were written for solo voice or guitar accompaniment and do not readily adapt for congregational singing. Many simply have repetitive lyrics and lack the doctrinal accuracy and scriptural depth evident in the writings of previous generations.

A new edition of the well-loved and widely used *Believers' Hymn Book*, first published by John Ritchie Ltd in 1884, is now available, having undergone a major revision. The revisers have acknowledged that around 80 hymns in the present edition are seldom used and retain archaic sentiments

which would find little resonance with many believers today; these have been removed. They have, however, expanded the book to include more than 300 other hymns, making a total of 700 in all. Among these are some ninety poetic works from *Remembrance Hymns* by ISAAC EWAN.

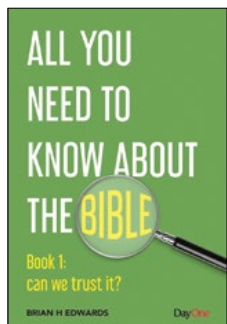
The hymns are arranged in alphabetical order and a subject index is added with rather more detail than in the previous edition. A comprehensive metrical index is also included, invaluable to the hymn precentor. An index of first lines is given as in all hymn books together with a separate list of authors. However, the list of first lines of all verses other than the first is omitted, presumably to avoid making the book too bulky.

The choice of hymns is

primarily those with suitable sentiments for the Lord's supper, but the selection would be equally appropriate for use in ministry meetings and conferences.

A music edition is not yet available, nor a large print edition. At present, the publishers are considering a leather bound version, a little smaller than the production edition, as many believers prefer a personal copy.

The publishers of *The New Believers Hymn Book* have successfully provided a balanced and widely acceptable selection, though any compilation of hymns will inevitably attract criticism from some quarter. We need to allow for a certain amount of poetic licence and remember that we draw our theology from the scriptures and not from the hymn book!



All you need to know about the Bible Brian H. Edwards

Paperback, 6 volumes, each of 144 pages. Published by Day One Publications, Ryelands Road, Leominster, HR6 8NZ.
ISBN's 978-1-84625-584-7, 585-4, 586-1, 587-8, 588-5, 589-2.

This review concerns not just a book, but a whole set of books amounting to 864 pages in total. Don't, however, be put off by the sheer volume of writing, nor indeed by the rather pretentious title. This is one of the best works on the subject to pass through my hands in recent times.

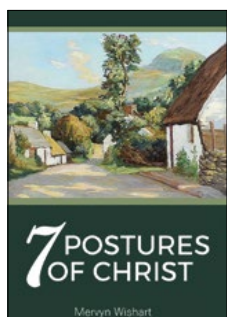
EDWARDS has written over twenty books and engaged in many conferences often involving Christian apologetics and creation ministries. His writing, as his speaking, is certainly not the laborious product of dry academia, but lively and engaging, holding the reader's interest. He has undertaken an examination of the evidence for the Bible, not just as an ancient work of history and literature, but as the living word of God, vital for every age and

unique in its presentation of the only way of salvation for mankind. Starting with the question in the first volume, 'Can we trust the Bible?', the theme is continued by considering the claims made for ultimate truth and absolute authority within the scriptures themselves. The third volume takes time to trace the content of the Bible, how it was written and how it developed over time, followed by a consideration of manuscripts, translations and versions in book 4. The author then faces up to the critics of scripture both ancient and modern who maintain that errors and contradictions abound. The discoveries by scholars, scientists and archaeologists, however, unite to confirm the accuracy of the Bible. The conclusion is that

the faith of the believer is not 'blind', while man's wisdom founders upon the unassailable rock of the word of God.

The final section bears the simple title 'Enjoy your Bible'. This is a timely word for all believers, many of whom give little time to the regular or systematic reading of scripture. A brief outline of scripture is given, together with a suggested reading plan and an exhortation to the reader to spend time in the divine presence each day.

A thoroughly recommended work.



Seven postures of Christ Mervyn Wishart

Paperback, 128 pages. Published by John Ritchie Ltd, 40 Beansburn, Kilmarnock, Scotland.
ISBN-13: 978 1 912522 62 0.

As the Psalmist takes up his pen to write, he immediately directs our attention to one man whom he calls 'blessed' or 'happy'. He notes particularly where he does not walk, when he does not stand and with whom he does not sit. Only the Lord Jesus could fully satisfy such a standard of moral perfection and we are privileged to watch Him as, in those few brief years, He measured out, step by step, that pathway 'from Bethlehem to the tree'.

WISHART has put together a delightful study from the gospel records, noting the various occasions when the Lord walked, stood, sat or adopted other postures, and at the last 'bowed His head'.

When we consider, and can identify with, these actions so familiar to us, it brings

into focus the very real and perfect humanity of the One, 'Who, being in the form of God . . . was made in the likeness of men'.

We watch Him as He 'stooped down' to write in the dust of the temple court, words which defy speculation, yet served their purpose. We see Him stand up to read in the synagogue at Nazareth, having 'found the place' He sought – another lovely touch of His humanity. Then to observe all eyes fastened on Him as He sat down to teach.

The outstretched hand of the Saviour catches our attention as miracles of healing and cleansing follow, while, in similar manner, life is restored at Nain's gate and in Jairus' house, where tears of grief are turned to tears of joy.

One small point is that whilst I appreciate the emphasis is upon the Lord's earthly pathway, rather than closing the book with the Lord on the cross, perhaps a mention could have been made that Mark in his Gospel does remind us that in ascension the Lord sat on the right hand of God.

This is an ideal book to read from in preparation for the remembrance on a Lord's Day morning. The narrative is supported by appropriate verses from hymns and the devotional themes provide much food for meditation. Thoroughly recommended for all believers.

Question Time

Conducted by
Richard Collings

QUESTION

Can a Christian commit the unpardonable sin?

ANSWER

This question reminds me of an incident that occurred many years ago at a gospel meeting in a small assembly in one of the South Wales valleys. Throughout the service I noticed that an elderly lady was in considerable distress and at the close she told me that she thought she had committed the unpardonable sin and therefore her eternal doom was sealed. No amount of reasoning from the scriptures could alleviate her obvious distress, and the matter remained unresolved. I subsequently learned that despite her continued commitment to the gospel meeting, she raised the same issue with all speakers but could never be pacified.

The anxiety experienced by this lady is not unique to her; it is something that many others have suffered, either at some time or over a period of time. In many instances, the cause is a lack of understanding as to the context and meaning of the verses, but when the Lord's words are correctly understood the anxiety abates. In other cases, the root issue is not spiritual but psychological in that the person concerned may be suffering from depression or mental weakness. In these situations, the probability is that they will continue to worry even after having matters explained to them and, perhaps, they would be well advised to seek some medical help in addition to spiritual support.

In responding, the primary matter that requires clarification is, 'to what sin does this question relate', for the phrase 'the unpardonable sin' does not occur in any of the commonly used translations of the scriptures. In Matthew chapter 12, the Lord Jesus said, 'Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come', vv. 31, 32. The other occurrence of these words is found in Mark chapter 3 verses 28 and 29, and these two references are the only ones that are generally described as relating to 'the unpardonable sin'.

Matthew chapter 12 is a critical point in the Gospel narrative. Despite many attesting proofs of His authenticity, the nation had rejected Christ's claim to Messiahship throughout His public ministry. That rejection intensified in chapter 12 when the Pharisees held a council against Him, 'how they might destroy him', v. 14. However, their ultimate rejection, and the step beyond which there was no possible forgiveness, occurred when they heard of the Lord healing a man who was demon possessed, blind and mute but said, 'This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils', v. 24.

Throughout His life, the Holy Spirit had borne testimony to who Jesus was and what He had come to do. Despite the irrefutable evidence thus provided, the Pharisees wilfully refused to accept the witness of the Holy Spirit. Instead of recognizing the Holy Spirit as being the source of Jesus' power, and accepting Him as God's Son, the Pharisees attributed His power to the devil. The Lord describes this, the grossest of all possible sins, as being 'blasphemy against the Holy Ghost', v. 31, and such is its seriousness that it can never be forgiven, neither in this age nor in the age to come.

It is not without significance that we do not read about this sin in any of the Epistles, nor is there any warning given concerning it. Taking that into account, and bearing in mind the context in which the Lord issued this extreme warning, I am convinced that this 'unpardonable sin' relates exclusively to the time when the Lord was on earth. As such, it is not possible to commit this sin today and, therefore, a Christian can never be guilty of doing so, even though some may worry they have done. The very fact that a person worries about it is one sure proof that they have not, for those who had committed it during the Lord's lifetime were so hardened in their hearts they had no care that they were guilty. In relation to those who are His, the Lord Jesus promised, 'I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand', John 10. 28. Therefore, we need have no fear in respect of this particular sin; it is impossible for a Christian to transgress in this way.

The Precious SEED Committee

Chairman and General Editor:

JOHN BENNETT

19 Alfreton Road, Pinxton,
Nottingham NG16 6JZ

Treasurer:

MICHAEL BUCKERIDGE

PO Box 10544, Grantham NG31 0HW

Secretary:

JOHN SCARSBROOK

34 Metcalfe Avenue, Killamarsh,
Sheffield S21 1HW

Ministry Articles Editor:

SANDY JACK

YPS:

STEPHEN BAKER

*Editors can be contacted through the
email address below or by post to the
Chairman.*

Other Trust Members:

**Jonathan Black, Brian Clatworthy,
Richard Collings, Frank Proudlock,
Stephen Sherwin, Ken Totton.**

*All committee members can be contacted at
secretary@preciousseed.org
or via **0044(0)1142 511700***

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PO Box 10544, Grantham, NG31 0HW.
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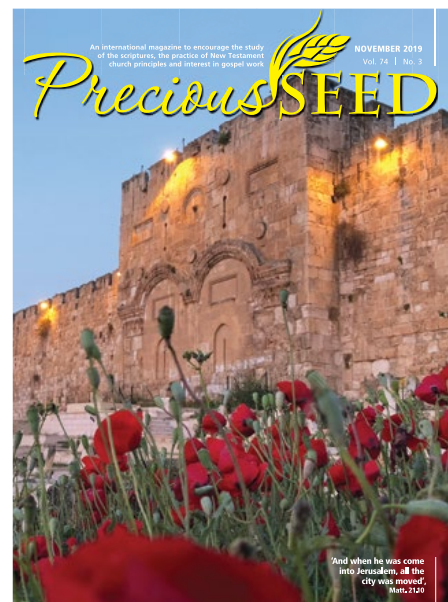
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'And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved', Matt. 21. 10.

In ancient times gates were not simply thoroughfares but were often meeting places, as well as places where business and legal transactions took place, Deut. 21. 19; Ruth 4. 1, 11; 2 Sam. 15. 2. Historically, there were eight gates giving access into the city of Jerusalem, although some today include a ninth gate known as Tanner's Gate. Our picture shows the Golden Gate, which is located on the eastern side of Jerusalem and, originally, it was used to give access to the Temple Mount, but has been walled up since medieval times. Some suggest that this gate was not open for general access to the Temple Mount but restricted to the High Priest and his helpers when dealing with the ashes of the red heifer, Num. 19. 1-10, and the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement, Lev. 16. It is possibly the oldest gate located in Jerusalem's old city walls, and some of the building stones may well date back to the First Temple period. The gate is called in Hebrew the Shushan Gate or the Gate of Mercy. According to Josephus, Antiquities 15.11(7), a secret passage connected the Antonia Fortress to the inner temple at the eastern gate. The prophet Ezekiel records for us that the glory (Shekinah) of the Lord left the First Temple via this gate, moving to the Mount of Olives, Ezek. 11. 22, 23. It is interesting to note that throughout the history of the Second Temple Jews considered that the visible sign of God's presence – the Shekinah – was absent. But though the Shekinah was absent from the Second Temple, it was clearly visible at times in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, e.g., on the Mount of Transfiguration, Matt. 17. 5; cp. Ezek. 10. 4 with 2 Pet. 1. 17. He also frequented the Second Temple when He visited Jerusalem, John 2. 13-22. Tradition has it that it was through this gate that our Lord's triumphal entry was made into the city of Jerusalem in fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy, Zech. 9. 9; Matt. 21. 1-10. It is Ezekiel who later predicts that the same divine glory – the Shekinah – will appear once again at the end-times through the eastern Gate and fill the temple of the Lord, Ezek. 43. 1-5; 44. 1-4; cp. Isa. 4. 5. One day, however, there will be no temple in the city of God for, as John reminds us, 'its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb', Rev. 21. 22 ESV. Finally, the Lamb will be all the glory of Immanuel's land.

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