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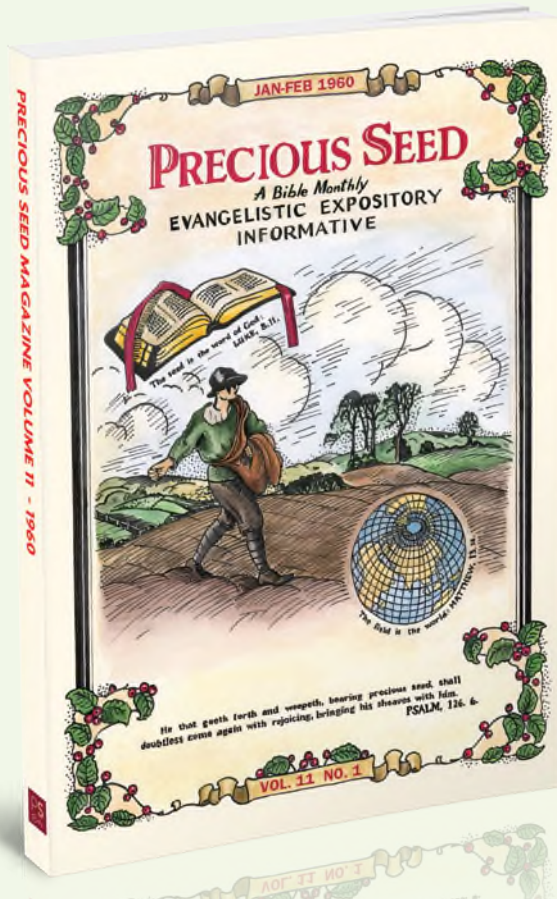
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'Let a bear robbed of her whelps meet a man,
rather than a fool in his folly', Prov. 17. 12

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

'And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness', 1 Tim. 3. 16

Verses 14 to 16 of chapter 3 constitute the core, climax, and key to 1 Timothy and explain Paul's reasons for writing. The focus is godliness. It is more than correct beliefs; it is the outworking of those beliefs in holy living. This is what the erring Ephesian elders and other false teachers were tragically undermining. Our broken world of sin and sorrow desperately needs to encounter faithful witnesses to Christ, not only by lip, but modelling true godliness. The assembly is collectively called to bear testimony to Christ, as the pillar and buttress of the truth, v. 15.

Whilst godliness must be realized and exhibited in our lives as God's people, verse 16 shows that it has had its ultimate expression in Christ, incarnate and glorified. This verse contains a pithy and polished summary of the truth that the church defends and displays, six sublime statements about Christ.

The first two lines present Christ's work **accomplished**. 'Manifested in flesh', JND, describes the period when Christ was visibly present on earth as man, Heb. 9. 26; 1 Pet. 1. 20.

His heavenly pre-existence is implied. 'Justified in the spirit', RV, refers not to the Holy Spirit but to the 'spirit realm' into which He was raised from the dead – to possess a glorified spiritual body. 1 Peter chapter 3 verse 18 ESV forms a close parallel, 'put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit'.

The next couplet describes Christ's work **proclaimed**. 'Seen of angels' carries an active sense 'to show oneself'. Christ presented Himself to the angelic hosts upon His triumphant ascension to the throne of God, 'Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him, 1 Pet. 3. 22. Christ descended below angels in His humiliation; He rose far above them in His exaltation. 'Preached unto the Gentiles'; in the gospel, Christ is proclaimed to the nations. The word suggests an imperial herald proclaiming the message of the emperor. He speaks with dignity, clarity, and authority. So should we.

The third couplet proclaims Christ's work **acknowledged**. 'Believed on

in the world'; the preaching of the gospel has resulted in the exercise of faith on the part of multitudes the world over. 'Our testimony among you was believed', 2 Thess. 1. 10. 'Received up in glory' NKJV, describes the circumstances of Christ's ascension, attended by glory, Acts 1. 9. If the first statement has God come down to dwell with man, then this final statement has man received up into the dwelling place of God. The movement of thought is from the earthly realm, to the heavenly, back to the earthly, and finally back to the heavenly. This structure emphasizes the comprehensive nature of Christ's work in space. He has brought together the earthly and heavenly spheres of existence. He reconciles needy men and women to God. Correspondingly, godly people are heavenly minded, Col. 3. 1-4.

We are grateful to the Lord's servants who have laid before us the fruits of their meditations during the past year, and we look to Him for blessing and guidance in the year ahead.

Ken Totton

Ministry Articles Editor

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PULL-OUT

YPS

By ANDREW DUTTON

1 Peter 5

By **STEPHEN G. BAKER** Liverpool, England

Part 6

As I suggested in my previous article, First Peter can be summarized under four general headings:

1. Salvation,
2. Sanctification,
3. Submission, and,
4. Suffering.

Chapter 5 falls into the book's final section under the main heading of suffering. In this chapter Peter is going to remind us:

- A. That he was a witness of the sufferings of Christ, v. 1;
- B. They were not alone in their suffering, v. 9;
- C. Suffering is short term and glory will follow, v. 10.

If you are currently suffering for your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, you will find this chapter a great source of strength and encouragement.

The example of the Chief Shepherd, vv. 1-4

Peter addresses the elders who are among them. An elder is not meant to 'lord it over God's heritage', a lovely description of the people of God, but to be an example to them, v. 3. Literally, this means to make an impression on them and so become a pattern that is worth following. So, Peter sets out to encourage and appeal to elders, but he is doing it as a fellow elder, and witness of the sufferings and glory of the Lord Jesus. There is nothing worse than someone teaching you theory because they have no personal experience of what they are talking about. Beware of people like this.

There is a sense that this short section is about two things – being shepherded and shepherding others. God's protective and preserving plan is that shepherds (elders, overseers) recognize that they are responsible to the 'Chief Shepherd' – the Lord Jesus. This will keep them grounded and humble before God, which is what the second section is mainly talking about.

Verse 2 outlines their responsibilities.

1. Feed God's people;
2. Remember they belong to God;
3. Be among God's people and aware of their spiritual health and wellbeing;
4. Do the work willingly and not because they are forced to;
5. Do not be motivated by money.

The section ends as it started by bringing the focus back to the Lord Jesus. Verse 1 reminded us of the sufferings of Christ and the future glory that shall be revealed. Verse 4 stresses that when the Chief Shepherd appears the elder will receive 'the victor's unfading crown of glory'.¹

God resists the proud, vv. 5, 6

Peter now writes to the younger believers about respecting others and thinking less of themselves. There is self-confidence about youth that fades as the years roll by. There were rash things that we did or said when young that we look back on and wonder, was that really me? It is therefore pertinent that Peter reminds his younger readers about these issues.

Is Peter only advising that respect should be shown to the elders of the church, or is he talking more generally about respect for older people? I feel it is the latter, but accept that in the context he could be talking about the men he has just been addressing. Either way, the second phrase covers everyone. The whole concept of submission has often been limited to teaching about husbands and wives, but it clearly has wider implications in this passage, cp. Eph. 5. 21. Submission has within it the idea of making a choice to honour and respect someone else. In general terms, a believer's mindset should be one of humility, where they give preference to another.²

The rest of this section explains the

attitude that lies behind this way of thinking. Peter says, 'be clothed with humility'. What we wear is seen by everyone and humility should be part of the way we think and behave so that we are literally seen to be clothed in it. God loves humility and we find no better example of humility than the selfless thinking and behaviour of the Saviour, Phil. 2. The Lord Jesus stated, 'I am meek and lowly in heart', Matt. 11. 29. The lesson is that when we are proud, we bring ourselves into conflict with God and He resists us and is opposed to us. The promise of Matthew chapter 11 is that humility in service brings rest to the soul of the believer.

The action we need to take is stated clearly in verse 6. The phrase 'humble yourselves' means that you are allowing yourself to be humbled by God. The process of humbling could be through suffering, persecution, problems, etc. But you need to humble yourself under the mighty hand of God. Do not wait for God to bring you into circumstances that bring you low. God is not in the business of humiliating you (that is a negative idea of shame) but sometimes God humbles us through difficult times to teach us to be grateful, trusting, caring, and thoughtful. The next section is the process by which a believer should humble themselves.

Cast your care upon Him, vv. 7-9

While the humbling process is going on, we should cast all our cares, our worries and anxieties upon God. The idea of 'casting' is 'to deposit something with someone',³ like money in the bank. We are being encouraged to commit all our cares to God once for all. That means all of our worries as a group, not just as each one arises. All that we have now and all that is to come should be deposited with God.

The reason that this is rational and plausible is that 'He cares for you' NKJV. You are his concern. You are His child. He loves you. You belong to Him and your concerns are His concerns. What a great reassurance in troubling times.

Verse 8 brings us to a series of instructions. 'Be sober' – be mentally self-controlled. 'Be vigilant' – be awake and watchful. The Christian knows that one of the reasons for the tough times in life is that we have an enemy who is relentless in his desire to destroy Christian faith and anything that is pleasing to God.

We are specifically told here that the Devil is our adversary. His name reminds us of his character – he slanders God's people and makes false accusations against us. A brief look at the story of Job will remind you of what he is capable of. His roar is that of a hungry, angry beast, hungry for his prey, but thank God we have been given protection through the word of God.

We are called to resist the Devil but not by disrespectful prayers, songs, or threatening language.⁴ We have to use the Bible, the sword of the Spirit⁵ to withstand his attack. Notice that the verse says, 'whom resist stedfast in the faith'. 'The faith' usually refers to the scriptures, the word of God. Use the Bible as your weapon of choice. That is what the Lord Jesus did when attacked by Satan in the wilderness⁶ and so should we. The challenge is – how well do I know the Bible?

Another source of encouragement is that you are not alone in your suffering, v. 9. Other believers are experiencing exactly the same circumstances as you are – it is not personal; it is normal.

To Him be glory, vv. 10, 11

God has a big purpose for His people that will work out just as He has planned. The journey to the end goal might be tough but God's plans will come to fruition. This will happen for a number of reasons:

1. He is the God of all grace. The idea of 'all grace' reminds us that He has enough grace available, and the quality of His grace is such that there is no circumstance that it is not capable of handling.
2. God has called us into His eternal

glory. We are heading towards eternal blessing despite setbacks and difficulties.

3. The One who guarantees that it will eventually happen is 'Christ Jesus'. He is 'the author and finisher of . . . faith'.⁷

But suffering is part of the pathway to glory, v. 1; though the process of humbling will be tough there is a guaranteed 'after that'.

God promises four things will come after suffering. In fact, Peter says that the suffering is only for a little while, focusing on the fact that it will end, cp. 2 Cor. 4. 17. What a help when trying to get things back into perspective!

Finally, in verse 10, four outcomes of suffering are highlighted:

- i. Be made perfect,
- ii. Be established,
- iii. Be strengthened,
- iv. Be settled.

Let us look at each of these in turn:

i. Be made perfect

The root of this word 'perfect' means 'to fit or join together' or getting all the parts into the right relationship and connection.⁸ The general sense is of bringing something to a completed state.⁹

ii. Be established

The word 'stablish' has a similar root to the word 'stedfast', 1 Pet. 5. 9, and is the very word used by Christ in His exhortation to Peter, Luke 22. 32. Possibly Peter remembers this when he uses the word here.¹⁰ One of the end results of believers' sufferings will be that they are established in their character.

iii. Be strengthened

I understand that this is the only place in the New Testament where this word is used. Often the word is used with a negative prefix which ends up meaning to lack in strength or to be sick. As believers we draw our strength from the Lord and in Christ we can be 'strong in the Lord'.¹¹

iv. Be settled

This phrase is omitted in some

manuscripts, but the basic idea of the word is to lay foundation or to ground securely.¹² We may often feel that life is uncertain, but on that day we will be on a secure foundation eternally. Peter is strengthening his brethren!¹³

Peace be with you all, vv. 12-14

The rationale for writing the Epistle is given in verse 12 – to exhort the believers to stand firm in the true grace of God. Silvanus, the amanuensis, is a faithful and trusted brother.

Whether Babylon is a literal place or describes another city has been written on extensively and I cannot add anything to the discussion. The point is that either a church or a sister is sending greetings to the saints Peter is writing to, along with his son, Mark. Again, we do not know if Mark is John Mark, Acts 12. 12, or another Mark. Understanding these details does not add to or detract from the meaning of the text.

Peter concludes in verse 14 with his personal greeting to the believers. In effect he is asking them to show brotherly love to each other. It is vital that we love our fellow believers and that we actually express that love. Love is only really seen when it is expressed.

The final phrase is beautiful – 'Peace be with you all that are in Christ Jesus'. Peace is uniquely reserved for those who are saved. The wicked do not know peace¹⁴ but the believer has come to know the 'Prince of Peace'.¹⁵ What a lovely end to a letter

Endnotes

- 1 KENNETH WUEST, *The New Testament: An Expanded Translation*, Eerdmans, 1994.
- 2 Rom. 12. 10.
- 3 See, for example, K. S. WUEST, *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament*, Eerdmans.
- 4 Jude 9.
- 5 Eph. 6. 17.
- 6 Luke 4. 4, 8, 10, 12.
- 7 Heb. 12. 2.
- 8 Other uses, cp. Matt. 4. 21; 1 Cor. 1. 10; 2 Cor. 13. 11; Gal. 6. 1; Heb. 10. 5; 11. 3.
- 9 Matt. 21. 16; Luke 6. 40; 1 Thess. 3. 10.
- 10 Cp. 1 Thess. 3. 13; 2 Thess. 2. 17; Jas. 5. 8; Rev. 3. 2.
- 11 Eph. 6. 10.
- 12 It occurs in: Matt. 7. 25; Heb. 1. 10.
- 13 Luke 22. 32.
- 14 Isa. 48. 22.
- 15 Isa. 9. 6.

Ezekiel the Seer Part 1

THE GLORY OF GOD DEPICTED

By **GRAEME ANDREWS** Wallingford, England

Introduction to the prophecy

Ezekiel is possibly the most neglected prophetic book in the canon of scripture.¹ Introductory matters to cover are abundant but we will constrain ourselves to those outlined in verses 1 to 4 of chapter 1.

The book's scribe

Ezekiel's name means 'God strengthens'. While the prophet's ministry is one long slog of judgement, chapters 1 to 33, the message ultimately turns to restoration, a rebuilt temple and a revised status for the nation – strengthening God's people. The prophet was probably thirty years old when he began his prophetic ministry, this being the most reasonable explanation of the 'thirtieth year', 1. 1.²

Ezekiel comes from a priestly family, 1. 3. His life to date would have been focused on future temple service. The only profession he ever entertained was suddenly taken from him. Far from home, and unable to fulfil his life's work, we see that God had other plans for him. It is practical to note that God is in control, and when circumstances negate spiritual desires there is still a God who sovereignly calls us to service. The case study of Ezekiel proves that such service can be unique and unexpected. Additionally, Ezekiel shows that his preparation for priestly service did not go to waste. His background comes to the fore in the book.³

He was a contemporary of Daniel and Jeremiah – albeit they ministered in different locations. Jeremiah being a 'homeworker' in Jerusalem, Ezekiel was one of the two major prophets held captive in Babylon. In exile, Daniel ministered in the capital, functioning in the highest courts of power, whereas Ezekiel ministered 'in the midst of' / 'among' God's exiled people, 3. 15. The location of his ministry would furnish him with a

favourite term employed throughout, 'in the midst'.⁴ God requires servants in diverse locations to address differing needs.

The book's summary

Ezekiel's prophecy describes the glory of God. In chapter 1, it is **described**, in chapter 10 it **departs**, and finally, in chapters 40 to 48 it **dwells**. The final words of the book remind us of this fact: *Jehovah Shammah*, 'The Lord is there'.

God's glory does not just exist in happy days of spiritual prosperity. The majority of the book is one of judgement.⁵ Judgement is described as God's 'strange work';⁶ it is not the natural disposition of His loving heart⁷ but occurs due to His infinite holiness. God judging does not diminish His glory; the entire vision of God's glory is set within the context of God acting judicially.

The vision of the prophecy

This is one of the most detailed visions of God and is divided into three roughly equal sections:

1. The purveyors of God's throne, vv. 4-14 – four living creatures

These 'living creatures', further defined as cherubim,⁸ are described in detail. Their overarching appearance was human, v. 5. But, evidently, they had four faces (see table 1 for possible interpretations) and wings, two of which stretched upwards touching the next cherubim, perhaps suggesting that they bore up the platform above on their wings,⁹ and two of which covered their bodies.

2. The progress of God's throne, vv. 15-21 – four wheels

The wheels did not function independently of the living creatures, see vv. 19, 21. They are described as a 'wheel in the middle of a wheel', v. 16, and seem to have a gyroscope or globe-like structure, allowing them to travel in different directions without turning, v. 17. The picture is one of activity and movement, all of which occurred under the direction of the 'spirit', v. 20.¹⁰ The existence of wheels suggests that God's throne is not merely a chair but a chariot.¹¹ It also showed clearly that Jehovah was not limited to Judah.

3. The platform and God's throne, vv. 22-28 – the firmament and throne

Seemingly carried by, or self-supporting above, cherubim wings, was a solid platform, radiant and bright. Above which we see a sapphire throne. Finally, we reach the vision's apex, the throne-sitter. He has the likeness of a man marked by amber, the appearance of fire, and immense brightness, vv. 26, 27. Considering the details in verses 4 to 25, we may feel somewhat shortchanged as we reach the climax of the vision. The explanation for this is twofold. First, it safeguards against a contradiction of scripture – after all, 'no man hath seen God at any time', John 1. 18. Second, it safeguarded the seer. The conclusion of the chapter finds Ezekiel prostrate and bowed before God; what he has described is as much as his human frame would be able to communicate. (See Table 1, *opposite*).

The vision is comprehensive. Notice the repetition of the number four, emphasizing universal sovereignty, cp. 37. 9. Throughout, a 'fire' motif reoccurs, suggesting to us the holiness and purity of God. In essence, the scene is one of judgement. The historical background is the fall of Judah. In symbolic fashion, the vision in verse 4 is couched in terms that would remind us of hostility and judgement. References to a 'whirlwind' coming from the 'north', the location the Babylonian hordes would have travelled to attack Jerusalem,¹³ conjure up a scene of chaos and calamity.

The vision is concessive, recognizing human inability to fully comprehend God. The Hebrew word *ka* 'like' or 'as' permeates the chapter. Note also the recurrences of 'likeness' and 'appearance'. 'Centuries ago the great Greek philosopher Plato expressed the frustration involved in trying to describe God when he said, "it is hard to investigate and to find the framer and the father of the universe. And, if one did find Him, it would be impossible to express Him in terms which all could understand"''.¹⁴ This perhaps explains the lack of attention given to this passage and difficulties in the underlying text.¹⁵ To try and provide a drawing of the throne is a difficult enough task but to fathom the depths of God's glory is a mammoth task. Let us propose some helpful suggestions concerning the character of our God encountered here:

- 'Fire', 1. 4. God acts in **purity**. The fire is 'infoling itself', suggesting a self-sufficiency. Perhaps the scenario was reminiscent of the burning bush; thus, we are truly standing on 'holy ground'.
- 'Straight feet . . . like the sole of a calf's foot', v. 7. God acts **consistently**, with **integrity**. A man's foot has an orientation towards a particular direction, 'whereas a rounded hoof lacks specific orientation, the intention was probably to indicate that the cherubim had no predisposition to start off in any particular direction, but awaited guidance'.¹⁶ All movements are aligned to God's will.
- 'Wheels', vv. 10, 11. God possesses complete **mobility**. The omnipresence of God is implied.

- God is no mere local deity.
- 'Full of eyes', v. 18. God acts **intelligently**. The omniscience of God is implied.
- 'Noise of great waters . . . voice of the Almighty', v. 24. God acts with **authority**. The omnipotence of God is implied.
- Hands, v. 8. God acts **powerfully** and **competently**. His people's sin did not restrain Him.
- 'Ran', v. 14. God acts with **rapidity**. Judgement had come and was accomplished with restless activity.
- Wings touching each other, v. 11. God's activities are marked by **unity**.
- Wings covering their bodies, v. 11. God's servants are marked by **humility**. When God is moving all things associated with His glory must unite in perfect harmony and humility. Let it be so in our lives as we seek collectively to serve God.
- Went 'straight forward', v. 12. God acts **purposefully**. There is no deviation in His ways; He does not require a contingency plan.
- 'Firmament . . . terrible crystal', v. 22, 'the appearance . . . of the glory of God', v. 28. God acts **gloriously**. All that is contained in this vision, every single minute detail, whether about the throne, the wheels, the cherubim, is there to share something of the glory of the infinite God to finite minds.
- 'Bow', v. 28. God acts with a view to future **mercy**. God's faithfulness continues even when He judges.

Concluding the vision is the central figure sitting 'above' and 'upon' the throne. Ezekiel's sight of the divine is couched in human terms, God appears

as 'a man'. It is a wonderful devotional thought to appreciate that a theme that is prefigured here symbolically is reality now in the person of Christ. There is a man in the glory, on the throne, in whom dwells 'all the fulness of the Godhead bodily', Col. 2. 9.

Endnotes

- 1 CHARLES LEE FEINBERG, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel: The Glory of the Lord*, Moody Press, 1982, pg. 12.
- 2 A wide variety of explanations to this time notation have been suggested, including some reference back to the reforms of Josiah.
- 3 Ezekiel was pre-eminently suited to chronicle the new temple and system of worship in chapters 40 to 48.
- 4 'Among' or 'in the midst' (Heb. *betok*) is employed 116 times, CONSTABLE states this is 'more than all the other Old Testament books combined'.
- 5 Chapter 33 verse 28 is the turning point, as judgement gives way to restoration.
- 6 Isa. 28. 21.
- 7 God delights in mercy, Mic. 7. 18, and takes no delight in judgement, Ezek. 33. 11.
- 8 Chapter 10. 15, 20.
- 9 See verse 23. Note: this is not the only way to understand this difficult passage and it may be that the platform and throne above were self-supporting.
- 10 Numerous references to the 'spirit' appear throughout the vision, see vv.12, 20. In verse 12 we have the article with 'spirit' and this may mean that the Holy Spirit is in view. While verse 20 references the 'spirit of the living creatures', MACKAY helpfully points out 'it was out of keeping with their role as throne attendants that they should be the one who possessed the authority to decide the route to be taken by the divine throne. The phrase instead referred to the Spirit of God (cf. 11:24), or the Spirit of the Lord (11:5;37:1)'. JOHN L. MACKAY, *Ezekiel – A Mentor Commentary. Volume 1: chapters 1 – 24*, Christian Focus Publications, 2018, pg. 90.
- 11 While chariot seems a most appropriate description it should be noted that in ancient times wheels or casters were added to thrones (chairs) to facilitate their movement. The vision of God's throne in Daniel has wheels, Dan. 7. 9.
- 12 PEARSON notes that the church fathers employed the four faces as emblems of the evangelists in differing ways. Jerome, for example, sees the faces as follows: Matthew = the man, Mark = the lion, Luke = the Ox and John = the Eagle.
- 13 Cp. Jer. 1. 14.
- 14 MARK ROOKER, *Holman Bible Commentary (Volume 17): Ezekiel*, Broadman & Holman Publishing, 2005, pg. 19.
- 15 LAMAR EUGENE COOPER, SR, *New American Commentary: Ezekiel*, Broadman & Holman Publishing, 1994, pg. 63.
- 16 JOHN L. MACKAY, *op. cit.*, pg. 88.

Table 1: The faces in chapter 1 verse 10

Face of animal	View 1 – Gospel equivalents	View 2 – characteristics of the cherubim	View 3 – the glory of God above all (Rabbinic interpretation)
Man – the front	Luke	Intelligence/ Wisdom	Highest created being
Lion – the right side	Matthew	Majesty and power	Highest wild beast
Ox – the left side	Mark	Patient service	Highest domesticated animal
Eagle – the back	John	Swiftness and discernment	Highest of birds

Note: while it is common to see the linkage between the animals and the Gospel records, this being the view of the early church,¹² the rabbinic view matches more closely with the context of Ezekiel.

THE 'I AM' STATEMENTS OF SCRIPTURE

1. OLD TESTAMENT

By **MERVYN WISHART** Belfast, Northern Ireland

When God made the different parts of His creation, He gave them names – day, night, heaven, earth, seas, Gen. 1. 5, 8, 10. God also named the rivers that flowed out of Eden, 2. 10-14; and Psalm 147 verse 4 tells us that 'He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names'. But He gave to Adam the responsibility of naming every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air, Gen. 2. 19. Then, after the Fall, 'Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living', 3. 20.

The name of Jehovah revealed

At Horeb, God reveals the wonder of His own name to Moses, whose attention was arrested by the sight of a bush that burned with fire, but was not consumed, Exod. 3. 2. When God called to Moses out of the bush, He announced Himself as 'the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob', v. 6. The children of Israel had been in bondage in Egypt for 400 years, and now God says to Moses, 'I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt', v. 10. Moses' first reaction was to say, 'Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh?' v. 11, but he was soon to learn that it was unimportant who he was and all-important who God is.

Moses' next question was, 'When I come unto the children of Israel . . . and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, 'I AM THAT I AM . . . Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you . . . this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations', vv. 13-15. His name is I AM – Jehovah (*Yahweh*), derived from the Hebrew of the verb 'to be'.

In chapter 6, the Lord tells Moses, 'I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name

of God Almighty, but by my name JEHOVAH was I not known to them', v. 3. While the name Jehovah is found many times in the Old Testament, its meaning was never really known until it was revealed to Moses at the burning bush concerning God's plan to redeem His people from Egypt. Indeed, God did not fully reveal Himself to the world until His Son came to be our Redeemer, Heb. 1. 1, 2.

The name I AM THAT I AM reveals something of the character of Jehovah: He is holy, eternal, immutable, self-sufficient, and compassionate.

His holiness

In the King James Version, the first mention of the word 'holy' is in Exodus chapter 3 verse 5. Jehovah revealed Himself as a God who is separated by an infinite distance from evil and defilement, and, in both the Old Testament and the New, He commands His people, 'Be ye holy; for I am holy', 1 Pet. 1. 16; cp. Lev. 11. 44.

His eternity

'I AM THAT I AM', Exod. 3. 14. The *Newberry Bible* gives the meaning of this as, 'I continue to be, and will be, what I continue to be, and will be'. The same verb is employed in verse 12, and the God who is eternal has an eternal name, v. 15. This name contains each tense of the verb 'to

be'; so it could be translated, 'I was, I am and I shall always continue to be'. Three times in scripture, God is spoken of as 'the everlasting God'.¹

His immutability

What Jehovah is now at this the latest moment of time, He ever was; and what He ever was, He ever will be.

In the days of Malachi, Israel was at a low ebb spiritually. Yet, in spite of the failure of His people, the Lord said, 'For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed', 3. 6. In the New Testament, James writes of 'the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning', Jas. 1. 17.

In Hebrews chapter 1 verses 11 and 12, there are three statements that affirm this truth: 'thou remainest'; 'thou art the same'; 'thy years shall not fail'. He remains; He remains the same; He remains the same for ever. There are no furrows on the brow of the Almighty; His powers do not diminish with time and His glory will never fade in time or eternity.

His self-sufficiency

He is the bountiful Creator, who opens His hand, and satisfies the desire of every living thing, Ps. 145. 16. In his sermon at Mars' Hill, Paul said, 'Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things', Acts 17. 25. In return He requires nothing from His creatures to sustain Him. He said, 'If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof', Ps. 50. 12. He never needs to take counsel from men, Isa. 40. 14. Job's conclusion was, 'I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee', Job 42. 2. He can bring His thoughts and plans to pass unaided, 'thou canst be hindered in no thought of thine', JND.

His compassion

In the context of revealing Himself as Jehovah, His compassion for His people shines through. 'Then Jehovah said: Seeing I have seen the distress of My people . . . and I

have heard their cry . . . surely I am acquainted with their griefs: and I am come down to deliver them', Exod. 3. 7, 8 SPURRELL.²

Some composite names of Jehovah

Jehovah Jireh – the Lord will provide, Gen. 22. 14

He provided a lamb for the burnt offering, v. 8; 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world', John 1. 29. He provides for His people's every need, Phil. 4. 19. Our God has unlimited resources; in the superlative gift of His Son, 'how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?' Rom. 8. 32.

Jehovah Nissi – the Lord my banner, Exod. 17. 15

When Amalek came to fight with Israel at Rephidim, Moses told Joshua to choose out men and engage with them in the valley, while Moses, with the 'rod of God' in his hand, climbed to the top of the hill. When he held up his hand, Israel prevailed; when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed, vv. 9-11. So Aaron and Hur helped to steady Moses' hands until the battle was won. The Lord told Moses to record it for a memorial in a book, and he built an altar there, which he called *Jehovah Nissi*. Amalek remained a constant enemy of Israel, and Christians have a persistent battle

with the enemy, the flesh. Our sinful nature, 'the old man', has neither been removed nor improved, Eph 4. 22. Moses' uplifted hands remind us that prayer is a vital part of our armour, Eph. 6. 18.

Jehovah Shalom – the Lord our peace, Judg. 6. 24

Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would bear the name 'Prince of Peace', Isa. 9. 6. Peace with God was purchased at the cross, Col. 1. 20. The 'peace of God' is the experience of all God's children as they progress in their knowledge of 'the God of peace', Phil. 4. 7; Rom. 15. 33.

Jehovah-Tsidkenu – the Lord our righteousness, Jer. 23. 6; 33. 16

God is 'a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he', Deut. 32. 4. Jehovah acts in grace towards men, but always in accordance with His righteousness. Speaking of the cross, Paul writes, 'he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him', 2 Cor. 5. 21. 'Righteousness and peace have kissed each other', Ps. 85. 10. There is perfect harmony and equity in all God's ways.

'The love of God is righteous love, inscribed upon Golgotha's tree; Love that exacts the sinner's debt, yet, in exacting, sets him free'.
HORATIUS BONAR

Jehovah Shammah – the Lord is there, Ezek. 48. 35

The prophet Ezekiel was sent to the rebellious nation of Israel, Ezek. 2. 3. In his first vision of God, he was with the captives by the river of Chebar, and the heavens were opened, 1. 1. When he went into the plain, again he saw the glory of the Lord **standing** there, 3. 23. Then he saw the glory **rising up**, 10. 4; the glory **departing**, v. 18; the glory above the cherubim as they stood at the east gate of the Lord's house, v. 19; and the glory **coming into the house**, 43. 4. At the end of his vision of the new temple, Ezekiel is told about the gates of the city, and that 'the name of the city from that day shall be, The Lord is there', 48. 35 – *Jehovah Shammah*.

The promises of Jehovah

In the book of Isaiah, from chapter 40 onwards, there is a definite link between the 'I AM' statements of Jehovah and the 'I will' promises that follow; the 'I AM' statements add great weight to the promises. Scripture warns us against putting too much dependence on the promises of men, Isa. 2. 22. A promise may be made with good intentions, but because the person making it is mortal there can be no certainty of it being kept. How trustworthy, then, are the promises of Jehovah? He who says 'I AM' can confidently say 'I will'.³

The promises of Jehovah are made by the One who cannot lie and who cannot die. Peter describes them as 'exceeding great and precious promises', 2 Pet. 1. 4.

Endnotes

- 1 Gen. 21. 33; Isa. 40. 28; Rom. 16. 26. These further references are worthy of note: 'even from eternity to eternity thou art God', Ps. 90. 2 JND; 'the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity', Isa. 57. 15; 'I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty', Rev. 1. 8.
- 2 HELEN SPURRELL, *A Translation of the Old Testament Scriptures from the Original Hebrew*, Kregel, 1987.
- 3 See, for example, Isa. 41. 4; 42. 8; 43. 2; 44. 3; 45. 2; 46. 4.



UGANDA

By **STEPHEN G. BAKER** Liverpool, England

The background to our involvement in the work in Uganda

I have posted Bible teaching videos and audio on various social media platforms for many years. My initial aim was to make Bible teaching available to believers in the UK who may not have come across New Testament church truth as it is taught among believers who gather in the way with which readers of this magazine may be familiar. To my surprise, and in a way that would majorly extend my sphere of service, the people who showed the most interest in Bible teaching were from Pakistan, and then Uganda. This was around July 2019 in Uganda, Pakistan being a year earlier.

Sanya Charles, a local pastor in Musoto, Mbale, contacted me and asked if I would be willing to meet him to study the scriptures together once a week online. My response was that I was willing to consider it. Still, there were some issues that we needed to discuss initially. I was concerned that it was not profitable to spend a lot of time disagreeing and debating where he saw the scriptures differently in several fundamental areas of church doctrine, i.e., the leadership structure of a local church (elder-led as opposed to pastor-led), the specific roles of men and women in assembly gatherings, the concept of the church as a body where all members have a vital role, and the cessation of the apostolic era and the gifts that were associated with that period. I knew that there would no doubt be other issues. My initial

response was not to ensure that Sanya agreed with my point of view, but that he was open-minded and willing to look honestly at what the scriptures teach, as we should all be!

The response was most encouraging. In brother Sanya's words – 'If there are things that I have never seen before in the scriptures, I want to know' and 'I am willing to obey the word of God as long as you can show me clearly what they teach'. I have to say that this attitude was refreshing, and we would be wise to adopt the same attitude when studying the scriptures. We started studying 1 Corinthians the following week, and, after that, we moved on to 1 Timothy, and nearly six years later, we are still studying together. The only difference is that some other elders join each week where possible. I say 'other elders' because Sanya quickly accepted that his role as the sole pastor was not biblical, and he is now one of the elders in the assembly in Musoto, along with a couple of other brothers.

The development of radio work

In October 2021, Sanya asked if I would consider helping him set up and broadcast a weekly radio programme. After looking at the costs, which were minimal in UK terms, it was agreed that it was a good idea. The programme is for one hour each week on local FM radio and reaches as far as 100 miles from Mbale. It is listened to by many people. We called the programme – 'Bringing God's



Word to your world'. The aim is to preach from the Bible on a verse-by-verse basis. Over the last few years, we have studied the Epistle to the Romans, Mark's Gospel, and John's Gospel; we are currently studying Genesis. As a result, we know of many people getting saved. One of these people was Peter, the chief of the rural village of Sakiya. He has since witnessed in his own village, people have been saved, baptized and a small assembly established. The potential of this work is staggering.

Our aim

Over the years of our involvement with Uganda, our aim has been to encourage local companies of believers to develop New Testament church practices. Paul Jenkinson of Kilmarnock has been visiting other areas of Uganda for many years, and so his help was invaluable when he accompanied me on my first visit to meet the saints in March 2022. I have since been on three more occasions.

My recent visit – January 2025

Carole and I had a very encouraging visit to Uganda at the end of January 2025. We arrived in Entebbe on the 14th of January. We stayed overnight in Nansana (which is a district of the city of Kampala). Our driver picked us up the following day, and we travelled to Mbale in Eastern Uganda. Our first stop was at the radio station in Mbale, having put our bags in our accommodation. It was a privilege to present the programme in person with Sanya Charles instead of doing





it online from my home in the UK. The radio programme is always very encouraging as many people listen, and many phone in and ask questions about what we have been dealing with.

On Thursday, we travelled nearly five hours to Naminyinga. This was a tough journey and was hard on the vehicle we used. A good number of believers gathered to hear the word of God. Sanya travels to this rural village every four or five weeks to help them with Bible teaching and encourage them in the things of God.

Our journey was much shorter on Friday as we travelled to one of the two assemblies in Butebo area, Kashibayai. They were delighted to see us and especially to meet Carole. There were many young people and children at the meetings. We spent from 11 a.m. until 4 p.m. teaching the word of God. I met with the elders from this

assembly the following Monday. I felt it would be good to go over several points that might hopefully be helpful to them and give them some direction regarding their practices and activities as an assembly.

We spent the weekend with the saints in Musoto, Mbale. It was a very encouraging visit. The believers here are making really good progress. There is a great interest in the teaching of scripture, and many couples and families have dedicated their time to the service of God and to understanding the word of God. I also spent some time with the overseers from this assembly the next day as they wanted to discuss various issues and seek guidance about things they faced. There is opposition in the area to their stance on New Testament church truth, so they need to be encouraged and know that others are standing with them.

Tuesday was spent with the believers in Sakiya. There are about twenty believers here. They have a very rural and simple lifestyle and need straightforward and encouraging teaching. It was delightful to hear Alozious (one of the elders from Musoto) open the word of God and teach them about baptism. Sanya and I then followed with some teaching on the coming of Christ. The faces of the believers were a delight to see as they seemed to be discovering for the first time that the Lord would come for the church and then, at a later stage, return with the church. It is an incredible privilege to see the joy on believers' faces when they learn truth for the first time.

In conclusion

Please pray for these believers in Uganda. The Lord is working among them, but they still have a lot to learn. There is no recent history of New Testament assemblies in this area of Uganda and they face opposition from unexpected sources, so they need the Lord's strength and encouragement in their service for Him. False teaching is quite normal in many church circles, and the influence of the so-called prosperity gospel and charismatic teaching is very powerful.

The saints in Uganda really value your prayers and are encouraged to know that they are not alone in their desire to know and obey the truth of scripture.



NEHEMIAH

A MAN OF PERSEVERANCE

By **TOM MERRIMAN** Carmarthen, Wales

Part 7

With the work of rebuilding and restoring Jerusalem's wall underway, the following three chapters deal with problems encountered as the work continued. Chapter 4 addresses external challenges. The united effort to build the wall angered the enemies of God's people, for it threatened their way of life. 'When Sanballat heard that we builded the wall, he was wroth, and took great indignation', v. 1.

The gospel changes the lives of individuals, even having an effect on society at large – something that is unwelcome to those content with the status quo.¹ Following the dramatic events in Philippi, the grievance of unbelievers in Thessalonica was that 'these that have turned the world upside down are come hither also', Acts 17. 6. Since God's people today also face varying sorts of opposition, the perseverance of Nehemiah, and the people encouraged by him are an example to us.

Early opposition took the form of verbal assault – mockery, vv. 1-6. This was followed by the threat of physical assault – military force, vv. 7-23. In both cases, the response of God's people was prayerful and practical.

Verbal attack – mockery, intended to dishearten the workers, vv. 1-6

Sanballat used five rhetorical questions to pour scorn on their meagre strength, security, sacrifice, steadfastness, and the stones that were buried in the rubble.² Tobiah joined in, suggesting that even a fox could break down 'their stone wall', vv. 2, 3. But it was symbolic of God's testimony, and He had not yet entered their thinking.³ However, these opponents were soon forced to recognize that 'God had brought their counsel to nought', v. 15. Verse 5 indicates that Sanballat's questions were uttered before the Jews, 'they have provoked thee to anger before

the builders'. This verbal assault had the double purpose of demeaning the work and the workers in the eyes of the enemy and disheartening the Jews in the hope that they would abandon the task.

Nehemiah and the people responded by offering up their prayer to God. They called on Him to 'hear', v. 4, and cause their reproach to return upon them, knowing that He did not regard such contempt as insignificant, 'they have provoked thee to anger', v. 5. Strengthened in mind before the Lord, they also responded practically, persevering in the work, 'so built we the wall'. They were encouraged to see the wall surrounding the perimeter of Jerusalem raised to half its height, 'for the people had a mind to work', v. 6.

The policy of Sanballat is reminiscent of that of Rabshakeh, who came from King Sennacherib to lay siege to Jerusalem in the days of King Hezekiah. Employing comparable rhetoric, his five carefully worded questions were calculated to dishearten the people of Judah, 2 Kgs. 18. 19-25. He even suggested that the Lord had sent him to destroy the land. Hezekiah's messengers tried to preserve the people from his words, asking Rabshakeh to speak in the Syrian language and not in Hebrew, but their request was refused, v. 26. Nevertheless, the ranks of Judah were unbroken. In a resolute display of obedience to Hezekiah's

command and faith in God, 'the people held their peace, and answered him not a word', v. 36. Rabshakeh reckoned the Lord to be no greater than the false gods the Assyrians had previously defeated. But his, and Sennacherib's blasphemy had been noted, and when Hezekiah brought the matter before the Lord, deliverance was assured.

As the gospel sounded out from Jerusalem to all Judea, in Samaria and to the uttermost part of the earth, those who stood for the Lord's testimony also faced derision, 'others mocking said, These men are full of new wine', 'when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked', Acts 2. 13; 17. 32. The Apostle Peter also warned that 'there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts', 2 Pet. 3. 3, so we can expect similar opposition.

The people of Nehemiah's day 'had a mind to work', and a right mindset is important for spiritual perseverance today. It is helpful to bear in mind the **expectation** the Lord Himself gave His followers, 'if they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you', John 15. 20. We also have His **example** – when verbally abused, He did not respond in kind, but 'when he was reviled, reviled not again', but responded prayerfully, committing His cause to God, 1 Pet. 2. 23. Peter says 'that ye should follow his steps', v. 21. The writer to the Hebrews encouraged us also to have the **end** in view, as an athlete having the eye on the finishing line, 'Let us run with patience [perseverance] the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus' considering Him 'that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds', Heb. 12. 1-3.

Prayerfully strengthened in the inner man, let us also be encouraged in the Lord's work practically. Paul wanted believers to 'stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; and in nothing terrified by your adversaries', Phil. 1. 27, 28. To see Jerusalem encircled was a blow

for their opponents. Similarly, the united testimony of God's people is a sign to the enemies of their destruction, and the saints' preservation by God.

Physical attack – military force, designed to disrupt the work, vv. 7-23

United, God's people had made undeniable progress. This drew the attention and indignation of a wider group including the Arabians, Ammonites, and Ashdodites who 'conspired all of them together to come and to fight against Jerusalem and to hinder it', v. 8. Mockery had failed to halt the wall's progress, so they turned to military methods.

Again, the response of God's people was prayerful, 'we made our prayer unto our God', and practical, 'and set a watch against them day and night, because of them', v. 9. Even so, discouragement set in. Key to the building and restoration work was a steady supply of materials, but it was reported that those responsible were exhausted because of the volume of debris. When later strengthened in mind, 'they that bare burdens', v. 17, were able to work single-handed, with a weapon held in the other. However, at this point, it seems the threat of an impending attack had caused them to succumb to fear, allowing the mocking echo to ring again in their ears, 'will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish?' v. 2. It left the people of Judah declaring, 'we are not able' to build, v. 10. This is the language of fear, not faith.⁴

Furthermore, those who lived nearest to the enemy dreaded the military threats, 'They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease', v. 11. The Jews' constant anxiety was shared time and again (ten times, v. 12!) contributing to the work halting, see verse 15. Practically, it was true – it may not have been in the power of the Jews to know or see the enemy until it was too late. They had lost spiritual perspective, allowing threats around them to cause them to lose sight of God, who knows and sees all things.⁵ If only

they had David's assurance that 'the angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them', Ps. 34. 7.⁶

Nehemiah took decisive action, providing them with a range of weapons to aid them practically. Swords, spears, and bows were suitable for close, medium, and long-range defence. However, these alone were insufficient, a truth earlier recognized by David, 'the Lord saveth not with sword and spear', 1 Sam. 17. 47. Next, beginning with the nobles and rulers, Nehemiah addressed their fear. 'Remember the Lord [*adonay*]', emphasizing His sovereignty. 'Great and terrible', describing His power, inspiring awe in His own people, but terror in the minds of His enemies. Perhaps the Jews' minds returned to the Lord's deliverance of Amalek into the hand of Joshua, and Gideon's victory over the Midianites.⁷ Nehemiah then encouraged each to fight for the Lord's heritage – their own families and houses, alongside whom he set them. Discouragement was overcome, and they 'returned all of us to the wall, every one unto his work', v. 15.

The work was more difficult thereafter, since 'every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon', but Nehemiah engaged his own servants in the work and to form a line of defence behind those who had feared the enemy, vv. 16, 17. Conscious that the workers were distributed over a large area, he used a trumpet call to rally God's people together to garner support from their fellows. But Nehemiah reminded them that the battle was not theirs, but the Lord's, 'our God shall fight for us', v. 20. As a good pattern of leadership, Nehemiah was found amongst those who worked in the daytime and kept watch at night. In the Lord's strength, they persevered and the work advanced.

The apostles had not been preaching long before 'the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees' joined together, using force against them. 'They laid

hands on them, and put them in hold', Acts 4. 1, 3. This was followed up with further threats, v. 21. But the apostles remembered that the Lord Jesus had also been withstood by the combined forces of Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles and the people of Israel, vv. 26, 27. Their response was prayerful and practical, 'they . . . prayed . . . they spake the word of God with boldness', v. 31. As the gospel spread, God's servants endured still greater suffering.⁸

Despite the prospect of verbal and physical opposition to the Lord's work, may we be stirred up by the words of the Apostle Paul to Timothy. 'God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind' unashamed of the Lord's testimony. 'Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus . . . endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ', 'watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry', 2 Tim. 1. 7, 8; 2. 1, 3; 4. 5.

As Nehemiah equipped the Jews with a range of weaponry, but called on them to trust in God, we do well to remember that in the field of spiritual conflict, 'the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God', 2 Cor. 10. 4. Nehemiah also called on them to defend themselves, and to come to one another's aid, and we are to 'put on the whole armour of God' and be found 'praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints', Eph. 6. 11, 18 – prepared ourselves, and supportive of others.

Endnotes

- 1 Cp. Mark 5. 14-18.
- 2 Contrast with Luke 19. 40.
- 3 Neh. 2. 10, 19.
- 4 Cp. the disposition of those who failed to enter the promised land, Num. 13. 31.
- 5 Cp. Matt. 14. 30.
- 6 Cp. 2 Kgs. 6. 8-17.
- 7 Exod. 17. 8-16; Judg. 7.
- 8 E.g., Stephen stoned, Acts 7. 54-60; James slain, 12. 2; Paul and Silas whipped and imprisoned, 16. 22, 23.

'Above the bright blue sky'

ALBERT MIDLANE

1825-1909

By **STEPHEN SHERWIN** Derby, England

The name of Albert Midlane may be unfamiliar to readers today, but the chances are many will be familiar with his most famous work, *There's a Friend for little children*, a hymn which has been sung in Sunday Schools around the world.

Albert Midlane was born in Newport, Isle of Wight, England on 23rd of January 1825. His father passed away before Albert's birth, leaving him to be brought up by a godly mother from whom, along with his sister, he received spiritual instruction. Later in life, Albert would recount how his mother, in times of trouble, would, 'lead me into a quiet room; and there kneeling by my side would she, with holy fervour, by prayer bring God into all her circumstances down here; or by sweet communion be with God above them all'.

Such godly influence made impressions upon a young Albert. The date of his conversion is not recorded, but it appears that he had been involved in Sunday School work, and it was whilst attending a Sunday School teachers' prayer meeting, he felt the conviction of sin, recognized his condition before God and put his trust in the Saviour. He was subsequently baptized at Castlehold Baptist Church, Newport. Initially he attended the Baptist Church but at the age of twenty-three he began to meet with believers in accordance with New Testament church principles and remained convicted of these principles for the rest of his life.

On 20 March 1851, Albert married Miriam Grainger of Newport and they were married for fifty-eight years until the time of Albert's death. They had two sons and one daughter. Miriam passed away on 13th January 1914.

His first employment was with a printer, but, after three years he left, and became an ironmonger's assistant. For fifty years he ran his own business. These activities, however, were to cease when he was declared bankrupt for the sum of £500 as a result of acting as a guarantor for a friend.

From an early age he had an exercise to write hymns. Two such examples are, *Hark! In the presence of our God* and *God bless our Sunday School* (which was set to the tune of the British national anthem). A source of potential influence in those early years was the Reverend Thomas Binnie, author of *Eternal Light!* *Eternal Light!* In total, Albert would go on to write over a thousand hymns and poems. A number of these hymns continue to be sung today. The hymnologist JOSIAH MILLER's conclusion was, 'His hymns are full of spiritual thought, careful in their wording, and often very pleasing without reaching the highest form of poetic excellence'. The same author also records that, 'for many years he had been dissatisfied with many hymns because of their combining prayers for pardon and praise for deliverance, and so being unfit for use in their entirety either for the guilty or the pardoned'.

Albert's hymns were published in many hymn books, including collections specifically for use with children. He compiled *The Bright Blue Sky Hymn Book*. All of the 323 hymns were composed by himself. When he was eighty, he compiled *The Gospel Hall Hymn Book* which contained 278 hymns of his own composition.

Albert's famous hymn, *There's a Friend for little children* was written

on 7 February 1859. Following a busy day at work but with a burden to write a hymn for young children, Albert sat down to write and by 2 a.m. he completed what would become his most well-known hymn. Interestingly, the order of the verses familiar to us today is different from how it was first composed – originally the order of the verses was: There's a rest, home, Friend, crown, song and robe. The hymn was first published in *Good News for the Young*, a publication for children edited by C. H. Mackintosh (C.H.M. – author of the famous series of books on the Pentateuch) and was set under the heading, 'Above the Bright Blue Sky'.

Although the hymn has been set to different tunes, the most enduring is the tune 'In Memoriam', written by Sir John Stainer (composer of the famous choral work, *The Crucifixion*). The story goes that during a meeting of the committee responsible for overseeing the music of the hymn book *Hymns Ancient and Modern* (enlarged edition, 1875), dissatisfaction was expressed at the available tunes for the hymn. The chairman of the committee, Sir Henry Baker, suggested that Sir John Stainer retire to another room and compose a tune. 'In Memoriam' was the result, a tune which has remained associated with the hymn ever since.

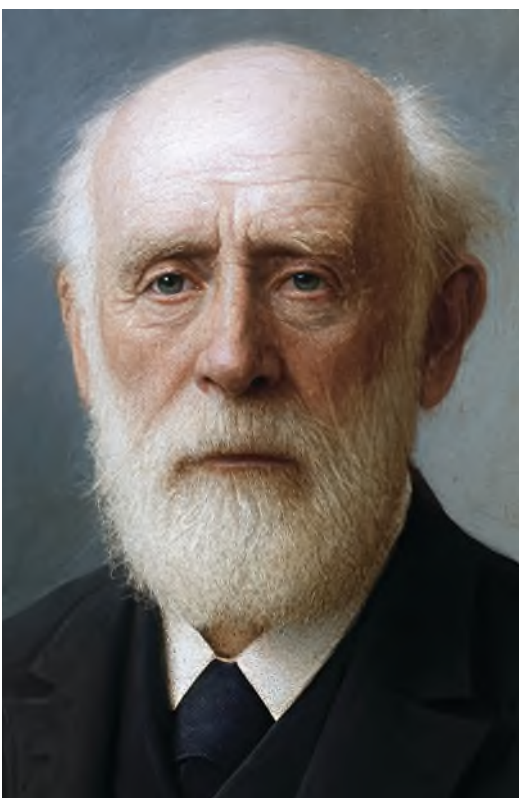
Both hymn and tune reflect personal cost to their authors. Albert was found by his wife in a state of collapse in the early hours of the morning following the completion of the hymn and had to receive medical attention. It seems that a hard day's work previously, and the intense effort in composition took their toll. 'But the hymn was completed', was Albert's happy verdict. The tune was named *In Memoriam* following the death of Sir John Stainer's young son, Frederick, in 1874.

The hymn rapidly gained popularity and was published in over 200 hymn books and sung by children literally around the world. Such was the popularity of the hymn that, fifty years after being written, the Sunday School Union organized

special services to commemorate the event and on 7 February 1909 many services were held, not just in England, to celebrate the well-loved hymn. The jubilee celebrations included a service in St. Paul's Cathedral, London, which Albert attended, during which three thousand assembled children sang the hymn. A special souvenir was published which incorporated the words, the tune 'In Memoriam', as well as a brief biography of Albert Midlane, of which it is recorded that many thousands were sold. Albert attended an open-air service in his own town which was held to commemorate the event at which he spoke to the assembled crowd concerning eternal issues. It would be the last time his voice was heard in public.

Whilst the hymn was enjoyed by so many around the world, it became a burden to Albert in the sense of having to deal with the correspondence of the appreciative public.

Albert never applied for copyright on any of his hymns. Doubtless, the publishing rights to *There's a Friend* could have proved to be very lucrative, but he wrote rather out of conviction than for any profit he might have derived. He spent



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long hours walking in the grounds of the ruins of Carisbrooke Castle. He once said, 'The twilight hour, so dear to thought, and the hushed serenity then pervading nature, have often allured my soul to deep and uninterrupted meditation, which in its turn, has given birth to lines which, had not these walks been taken, would never probably have been penned'. This lack of financial security led to the unfortunate circumstances of his bankruptcy. The matter would have left a blight on his character were it not for the fact that the bankruptcy became public knowledge. Many people generously contributed to a fund in his benefit and as a result he was able to pay off all debts, have the bankruptcy annulled, and use the balance to purchase an annuity to provide an income for himself and his wife.

His work brought him into contact with a number of well-known persons of his day. Having presented several volumes of his compositions to Queen Victoria, Albert, the Prince Consort, purchased a number himself as gifts for his friends. He became acquainted with C. H. Spurgeon who included a number of his hymns in the Metropolitan Tabernacle hymn book. Lord Tennyson, the famous poet, was a neighbour and encouraged him in his hymn writing.

On 11 February 1909, Albert suffered an 'apoplectic seizure' (a term of indefinite meaning – it could have been a stroke or a heart attack) from which he never recovered, passing away into the presence of the Lord in the late evening of 27 February. Truly he had gone to meet the Friend not just of little children, but of all true believers, 'above the bright blue sky'.

Albert is buried at Carisbrooke Cemetery, Isle of Wight. His memorial stone was paid for out of subscriptions from Sunday School children of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. Two of his own hymns were sung at the graveside, the first being a hymn which commenced, 'Star of the morning, rise, Dispense these shades of night'. The second was, 'There's a Friend for little children',

sung by Sunday School children. It is recorded that during the singing of the hymn, the burial of a little child was taking place some twenty yards away.

He left a lasting legacy in the hymns that he wrote and a number of his hymns are still sung today. They are worth seeking out for the truth they express. A gospel hymn, *The perfect righteousness of God* gets to the heart of the gospel message:

'God could not pass the sinner by,
His sin demands that he must die;
But in the cross of Christ we see
How God can save, yet righteous be.

The sin alights on Jesus' head,
'Tis in His blood sin's debt is paid;
Stern justice can demand no more,
And mercy can dispense her store'.

When reading these lines, one cannot help but be reminded of the words of Romans chapter 3 verse 26, 'that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus'.

Albert lived in anticipation of the coming of the Lord, summed up in the hymn, *Thine, Jesus, Thine*. The fifth verse says, 'Till Thou shalt come And bear me to Thy home, For ever freed from earthly care, Eternally Thy love to share – Lord Jesus, come!'

'Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus', Rev. 22. 20.

Sources

This article has been written with the help of the following resources:

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Chairman's notes

By **JOHN BENNETT** Chairman and General Editor

As Elijah and Elisha took their journey from Gilgal to Bethel, and from Bethel to Jericho, and over the Jordan river, it is interesting to note that the whole journey was set against the background that 'the Lord would take up Elijah into heaven', 2 Kgs. 2. 1. Exactly when and where that translation would take place seems unknown. Thus, Elijah says to Elisha, 'the Lord hath sent me to Bethel', v. 2, and 'the Lord hath sent me to Jericho', v. 4, and, finally, 'the Lord hath sent me to Jordan', v. 6. We are taught that for the life of the believer it is one step at a time. We might know that we are bound for glory, but we do not know when and where we will be when the Lord calls us home. Equally, we do not even know the next step of the journey. It is all in the Lord's hands. We are expected only to trust in the God who holds the future in His hand, confident that we are secure. As Elijah is taken up to glory, it is good to see in Elijah a man who started well, in 1 Kings chapter 17, and who finished well. He may have experienced some challenges in his life and service, but the Lord sustained him. We look to the Lord's provision that we might run our race and be able to say with Paul, 'I have finished my course, I have kept the faith', 2 Tim. 4. 7.

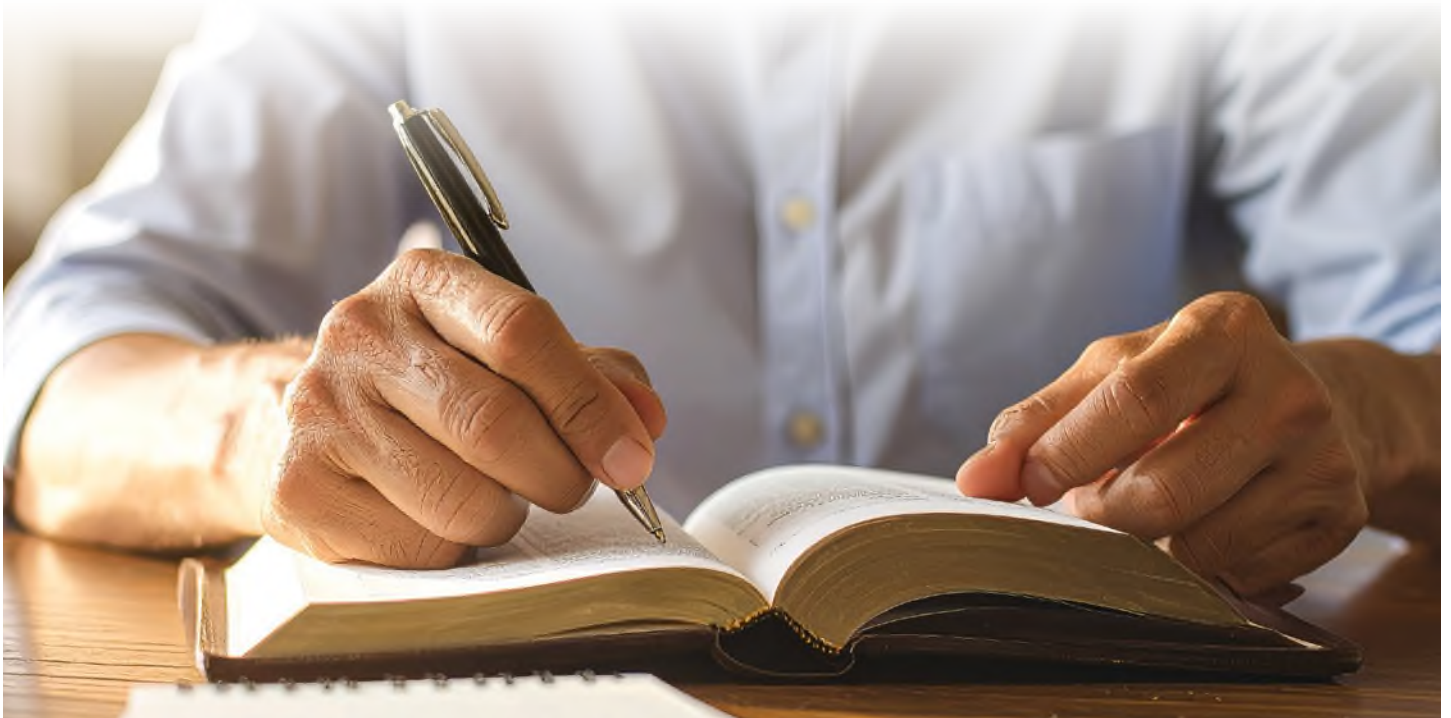
One of the purposes of this page is to express our thanks to Ken Totton who is retiring from the Precious Seed Trust at the end of this year. Ken has served on the Trust for over sixteen years. He took on the role of publications editor and was responsible for some of the biggest books in the Precious Seed portfolio – *New Treasury of Bible Doctrine* and the reprint of *Acts* by JOHN HEADING being just two of the many that carry his name as editor or author. He has been a prolific writer of articles, one willing to volunteer to write on a variety of topics and he has written with clarity. Finally, when Brian Clatworthy retired, Ken became joint ministry articles editor and brought the same analysis, insight, and dependability to that task. We are sorry to see him leave us, but we are sure that he will continue to write as he is enabled whilst he devotes his time to the work of the Lord in East Anglia and beyond. We wish him well in that work knowing that there is already fruit for his labours.

For those of us who remain in the work of Precious Seed, we would seek your continued prayerful support. Recruiting people to join the work is getting harder and we

would ask you to pray specifically for guidance in this and other matters that we face. We are thankful to Jeremy Singer (Bridge of Weir) for his willingness to join us and we continue to be encouraged by the writers that we have in countries across the world and we thank them for their exercise. They give of their time and use the gift that God has given them for the enriching and encouragement of God's people.

As all of us face financial challenges, we would also ask magazine subscribers to review the number of magazines that they are sent, particularly those who get magazines for the assembly with whom they are in fellowship. Whilst we are happy to supply them to whoever requests, good stewardship of our resources means we ask you to inform us, even if it is a reduction of only one magazine that is being requested.

We would draw your attention to the fact that we are now producing podcasts for those who use online streaming services. Perhaps if you are travelling as part of your work commitments, or on holiday, you could take/download some recordings of YPS material to listen to. The selection is growing, and we trust it will encourage a new generation to pick up the magazine to find similar things of spiritual profit.





Edited by
ANDREW DUTTON

YOUNG PRECIOUS SEED

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

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Editor's Introduction

Welcome to the November issue of YPS.

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

Remember that past and present YPS articles are also available as podcasts on Spotify and Apple Podcasts – search 'Young Precious Seed'.

Andrew Dutton

Seeing the world through a biblical lens – the impact of sin and God's resolution

ANDREW DUTTON, NORWICH, ENGLAND

In the previous article we considered the creation of humans, and the wonderful scene in Eden – man and woman in fellowship with God. The events of Genesis chapter 3 brought about a catastrophic change to God's creation. In this article, we are going to look at the implications of Adam's disobedience to God.

Loss of power

When Adam disobeyed God, 'sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned', Rom. 5. 12. With sin came physical death, which has passed to all human beings.

As Christians, most of us would love to live better, but we struggle with our moral frailty and inability to do the right thing. Romans chapter 2 teaches that people have an awareness of right and wrong, but they are often powerless to do what is right even though they have a deep-seated desire to do so, Rom. 7. 15.

Lack of power and a distinct tendency to do the wrong thing is normal in every human being. It is a direct consequence of the fall, Gen. 3.

Loss of privilege

Before Adam sinned, mankind had a privileged position in God's creation. He was made 'a little lower than the angels', Heb. 2. 7; he was crowned 'with glory and honour', v. 7; he was set 'over the works of . . . [God's] hands', v. 7. These statements teach that, as a physical being, Adam had a kingly glory over all of God's creation. With God's delegated power and authority, all things were in subjection to him, v. 8.

This privilege was lost when sin came in, 'But now we see not yet all things put under him', v. 8. Sin has not only affected mankind, but 'the whole creation groaneth', Rom. 8. 22; this includes the animal kingdom. There is aggression and violence between animals and a deep distrust between the animal (apart from domestic animals) and the human.

The writer to the Hebrews moves from considering the failure

of the first man to the glory of the second Man, the Lord Jesus. One that was also 'made a little lower than the angels', Heb. 2. 9, He became man, that He 'should taste death for every thing', v. 9 JND.

In a future day, the Bible predicts the Lord Jesus returning to rule His world. His kingdom will affect politics, finances, and morality. All creation will then also be in harmony, subject to a perfect, glorious Man, 'The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them', Isa. 11. 6.

Responsibility

After the disobedience in Eden, Adam blamed Eve and seemed indirectly to blame God for his sin, 'The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat', Gen. 3. 12. Yet it was Adam that disobeyed the command of God; he was accountable. Eve acted independently of Adam and Adam denied the responsibility God gave him to lead – this was against God's purpose in the order of creation. Paul explains that 'Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression', 1 Tim. 2. 13, 14.

From the point sin entered the world, it was indicated that there would be conflict between animals and humans, and a curse to the ground bringing sorrow, Gen. 3. 17. But also, there would be a continual ambition on both the part of males and females to dominate each other, Gen. 3. 16 – opposed to the complementary order in God's creation.

Resolution

This will all be reversed in the future when the Lord Jesus comes because, as 1 Corinthians chapter 15 and Ephesians chapter 1 teach, the Lord Jesus will bring everything under His authority and His control. He will then hand that regulated and ordered kingdom back into the hands of His Father, and God will ultimately rule as 'all in all', 1 Cor. 15. 28.



Gone, but not forgotten. Epitaphs of the kings of Judah

RICHARD SMITH, BRIDGE OF WEIR, SCOTLAND



All quotations are taken from the New King James Bible

3. A whole heart, Amaziah

Our behaviour is being observed from every angle by family, friends, believers, non-believers, and, most important by far, by the Lord Himself. Our conduct therefore must be righteous and worthy of the One who called us. Paul urged others to be imitators of him, and then to be a 'pattern of good works', Titus 2. 7, for others to follow. There is a difference between righteous works and good works. Righteous works are doing what is right. The Pharisees were very good at making sure their works were right. So right in fact that they 'despised others', Luke 18. 9, because their works didn't match up to the exacting standards set by the Pharisees. Righteous works often have a tendency to draw attention and glory to the person doing the works and, in the case of the Pharisees, often masked their less-than-righteous behaviour towards the poor, the less religious, their wives, and parents, etc. Saul of Tarsus was engaged in righteous works in his determination to rid the world of the gospel of Christ. He refused to behave unrighteously, so obtained legal permission to travel to Damascus to round up believers there. What he did was legally right but was far from good, as demonstrated by his vicious, irrational attacks on the church. Should we not practise righteousness? Didn't the Lord say to His disciples, 'I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven', Matt. 5. 20? Yes, He did. He was saying that *some* righteousness is not enough, and righteousness to be seen by others wouldn't suffice. Years ago, I bought a plaque for my study saying, 'Integrity is doing the right thing, even when no one is watching'. Righteous works become good works when done in devotion to the Lord.

In the case of Amaziah, he had a great start. He dealt with the traitors who had assassinated his father. He was not vindictive; he dealt with them under Levitical law, 2 Chr. 25. 4. He then went to battle with the Edomites and defeated them decisively. Even when his error in recruiting soldiers from Israel was pointed out, he reacted well and sent them home. However, his righteous works were done 'not with a loyal heart', v. 2. After his victory over the Edomites his heart was attracted to their gods, whom he set up as his gods to worship them. Then, in disobedience, he went to war with Israel, a war which he lost. He was taken captive by Joash, king of Israel, Jerusalem was compromised, and the precious vessels of the temple were taken away to Samaria. Eventually, his own people conspired against him and put him to death. His lack of full commitment to the Lord caused his own carnal impulses to take control, which skewed his behaviour, eventually into sin. Amaziah had a great start, but his whole heart wasn't in it. As a consequence, he had a humiliating end.

The challenge to the Colossians was, 'whatever you do, do it

heartily, as to the Lord and not to men', Col. 3. 23. Pause for a moment and think what that meant. Paul was addressing slaves in this verse. People who had no control over their lives at all. They often lived in the most appalling circumstances and had no say whatsoever in their own life. Gentile slave-masters were not subject to the laws of Leviticus, and many treated their slaves with great cruelty. In spite of this, Paul instructs them to do everything heartily. The word 'heartily' is also translated 'soul'. In other words, 'put your heart and soul into everything you do'. However menial, however hum-drum and tedious, half-hearted is not good enough. Paul speaks similarly in Ephesians chapter 6 verse 6 to slaves, that they should be 'as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart'. A heart half-full of Christ will be half-full of something (or someone) else. The result will be a compromise at best, but, at worst, could be failure, as was Amaziah. The Lord doesn't want half of us. SAMUEL M. ZWEMER said, 'Unless Jesus Christ is Lord of all He is not Lord at all!'¹

When Paul reviewed all that God had done in His sovereignty for our sinful souls in that magnificent explanation of the gospel, the letter to the Romans, his only conclusion was, 'I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service', Rom. 12. 1.

'Love so amazing, so divine,
demands my soul, my life,
my all'.²

HENRY VARLEY said, 'The world has yet to see what God can do with a man fully consecrated to him. By God's help, I aim to be that man'.³

What about me?
What about you?



¹ S. M. ZWEMMER, *The Solitary Throne: Addresses Given at the Keswick Convention on the Glory and the Uniqueness of the Christian Message*, Pickering & Inglis, 1937, pg. 9.

² ISAAC WATTS.

³ HENRY VARLEY, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/1990/01/world-has-yet-to-see/>.

Christian basics – Bible study

STUART SCAMMELL, CARDIFF, WALES

Any library is stacked full of books. In fact, the British Library in London contains over 170 million items of literature. Yet the Bible stands alone as a book far different from any other. It is the best-selling book of all time, over five billion have been sold. We read in 2 Timothy chapter 3 verse 16 that it is 'given by inspiration of God, and is profitable'. This means literally that its words are breathed out by God Himself and are good for us. It is an amazing concept that as we open the Bible, we are actually reading God's words to us.

God is our creator and just as the maker of a gadget would write a detailed instruction book, God's word, the Bible, is His instruction book to us. Psalm 119 verse 105 describes God's word as a lamp to light up the path of our lives – without God's word we stumble our way through life.

The word of God is dynamic, it is not just a history book or good advice; it is so much more. The Bible is living and active; it has the power to penetrate our hearts, Heb. 4. 12. As we read the Bible, God speaks to us, giving us challenge and guidance for our lives. In fact, in Jeremiah chapter 23 verse 29, we are informed that when we are living outside of God's instruction, His word can act as a hammer, breaking us in pieces; this shows us how powerful it is and how God uses it to speak directly to us.

In 2 Timothy chapter 3 verse 16, we are told of the great positive effects of the scriptures. They instruct or train us in righteousness. Verse 17 informs us that they equip us for every good work.

Knowing that the Bible is God-breathed should excite us. It is God's word to us, absolutely true and carefully designed for our good. We should want to read it more.

Ephesians chapter 5 verse 26 tells us that this exercise alone does a remarkable thing. Reading God's word purifies us; it uses the phrase, 'washing of water by the word'.

However, since the Bible is God's truth, we will be missing out if we don't attend more closely to it. When we study God's word, we will always benefit from it.

How should we do this?

How we study God's word is personal to everyone, and each of us must find the way that works best for us. But it won't just happen, we need to dedicate ourselves to it and allocate a time and a place to study.

You will need to create an environment where you can concentrate, without distractions. It is essential to have a good clear copy of an accurate Bible translation, a notebook and pen so that you can jot down your thoughts. It is important that you plan for your study and that you carefully

choose a book to go through. If you haven't been saved long or are starting to study your Bible seriously for the first time, then it would be good to start with a Gospel. In fact, a wise man once told me that I shouldn't stray far from the Gospels. So, I often return to them to learn more of my wonderful Saviour. It is always good to read and reread the whole book; this gives you a good overview and feel for the book, its places and people.

You have to learn a style of study that suits you. Sometimes it is good to go through a passage verse by verse, and some people love this method, and it enables them to look at the various phrases and understand what is meant by each of the God-breathed verses. You can look out for repeated phrases and key words to aid your understanding.

Another method is to study a passage looking for its challenges and encouragements. Some books lend themselves to this better than others. Whichever method we choose, it is always important to start by praying for help and understanding, and that the Holy Spirit will open our eyes to reveal His word to us.

There are many online helps that can aid our study; it is good to take advice from someone we respect that uses these tools. We can also ask about commentaries and concordances. It is good to discuss what we have learnt with someone that we trust too.

It is important that what we learn isn't just head knowledge and that we don't allow it to make us proud or arrogant. It is vital that we allow the scriptures to change us to be more like Christ.



Saints' CVs: Ira D. Sankey

BY JEREMY SINGER, BRIDGE OF WEIR, SCOTLAND

IRA D. SANKEY 1840-1908

From my childhood, I fondly recall *Sacred Songs and Solos*, a slim hardback volume containing an astonishing 1200 hymns. This book is more commonly known as Sankey's, after the name of its compiler. In this article, we will explore the remarkable life of Ira David Sankey.

Born in the USA in 1840, Sankey was brought up as a Methodist. He was born again at the age of 19. Sankey had a fine baritone voice, which he used for Sunday School work and church choirs.

Sankey fought in the American civil war on the side of the Union. During this conflict, General Sherman sent a signal to a besieged group of soldiers in his army. They were surrounded by Confederate enemies, who were intent on capturing their defensive position. Sherman's signal, held aloft on a pine tree trunk, read, 'Hold the fort; I am coming'. Philip Bliss repurposed this famous story as a Christian hymn, which later became one of the most frequently performed songs in Sankey's repertoire.

'Hold the fort, for I am coming,
Jesus signals still;
Wave the answer back to heaven,
By Thy grace we will'.

In 1870, the renowned evangelist, D. L. Moody heard Sankey singing in Indianapolis. Moody immediately invited Sankey to join him, although the invitation sounded more like a demand. In his autobiography, Sankey recalls the encounter:

'Upon telling him that I lived in Pennsylvania, was married, had two children, and was in the government employ, [Moody] said abruptly, "You will have to give that up".

I was amazed, at a loss to understand why the man told me that I would have to give up what I considered a good position. "What for"? I exclaimed.

"To come to Chicago and help me in my work", was the answer.

When I told him that I could not leave my business, he retorted, "You must; I have been looking for you for the last eight years"¹.

After much prayer and pondering, Sankey moved to Chicago, where Moody was based. Within a year, the Great Fire of Chicago struck, devastating the city and bringing a pause to Sankey's musical ministry. However, the pair soon reunited and continued their gospel witness.

Starting in 1873, Moody and Sankey made several visits to Britain. Their meetings were attended by royal family members and famous politicians. Ordinary people also crowded to hear

the two Americans. Moody and Sankey hired large buildings to preach to thousands at a time. They held meetings in prime locations, including Glasgow's Kibble Palace, London's Royal Opera House and Cambridge's Corn Exchange.

Each meeting followed a similar pattern: Moody preached and Sankey 'sang the gospel'.² Sankey's hymns had a powerful spiritual effect. Here is the testimony of one young man, 'It was a few evenings ago . . . when Mr. Sankey was singing in the Free Trade Hall "Jesus of Nazareth Passeth By", that I was made to feel the need of my Saviour . . . and I took him to my heart there and then'.³

While many of Sankey's compositions were carefully prepared, sometimes he resorted to spontaneity, making up tunes on the spot. Sankey describes how he read a poem called, *The Ninety and Nine* in a Scottish newspaper, and the next day he was compelled to set it to music during a meeting.

'At this moment I seemed to hear a voice saying: "Sing the hymn you found on the train"! But I thought this impossible, as no music had ever been written for that hymn. Again the impression came strongly upon me that I must sing the beautiful and appropriate words I had found the day before, and placing the little newspaper slip on the organ in front of me, I lifted my heart in prayer, asking God to help me so to sing that the people might hear and understand. Laying my hands upon the organ I struck the key of A flat, and began to sing. Note by note the tune was given'.⁴

'There were ninety and nine that safely lay
In the shelter of the fold
But one was out on the hills away,
Far off from the gates of gold —
Away on the mountains wild and bare,
Away from the tender Shepherd's care'.

On the day Sankey died in 1908, he was heard singing under his breath, 'But oh the joy when I awake within the palace of the King'.

His rich musical legacy lives on. There are plenty of Sankey tunes available to stream on Spotify and YouTube. *The Sacred Songs and Solos* hymn book remains in print and is used widely across the UK.



¹ IRA D. SANKEY, *My Life and Sacred Songs*, Hodder and Stoughton, 1906, pg. 6.

² *Ibid*, pg. 25.

³ E. J. GOODSPEED, *A Full History of the Wonderful Career of Moody and Sankey*, 1832. H. S. Goodspeed, 1876, pg. 54.

⁴ IRA D. SANKEY, *op. cit.* pg. 249.

Reflections on the Cross

Part 4 The men at the cross

By **ERNEST ABBOTT** Singapore

The men are not as prominent as the women at the cross. The Lord's disciples fled when He was arrested, thus fulfilling the prophecy, 'I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad', Matt. 26. 31; cp. Mark 14. 27. The only disciple we find at the cross is John, the beloved disciple. He and Peter had followed Jesus into the high priest's palace. After Peter denied his Lord, we hear nothing of him until the resurrection. John was close enough to the cross to hear what the Lord said. It was at the cross in the final moments leading up to His death that the Lord entrusted the welfare of His mother to John. John, who would later pen a Gospel, was a first-hand witness to the crucifixion which he saw in terms of humiliation and exaltation, John 19. 19.

Nicodemus is found at the cross. Here was a man who was a member of the ruling religious Sanhedrin. He had come to Jesus by night and was told he must be born again, John 3. 3. Clearly, he had become a disciple of Jesus. Initially, a secret disciple, for, on an earlier occasion we find Nicodemus defending Jesus in an oblique way. Yet when it comes to the crucifixion, he came out into the open to be recognized as a true disciple. The cross had a transforming effect on him.

Touching a dead body made a person ceremonially unclean and excluded that person from celebrating the Passover, Num. 9. 10. He had to wait one month before he could celebrate the Passover, v. 11. The Lord was crucified at the time of the Passover, the high point in the Jewish religious celebrations. By participating in the burial of Jesus, Nicodemus had voluntarily excluded himself from the Jewish Passover, showing he was more concerned with the maker of the new covenant and the real Passover than with the old Jewish system.

Another man we find associated with

the cross is Joseph of Arimathaea. He, like Nicodemus, was a secret disciple, John 19. 38, and a member of the Sanhedrin. He used to fear the Jews, but not now. The cross changed that. He had seen what the Sanhedrin had done to his Lord, how they had accused Him unjustly, tried Him illegally, and killed Him mercilessly. No longer was Joseph timid or shy, for we read that 'Joseph of Arimathaea, an honourable counsellor, which also waited for the kingdom of God, came, and went in boldly unto Pilate, and craved the body of Jesus', Mark 15. 43.

Joseph was a rich man, for he had his own tomb ready, and he willingly gave this to be what he thought would be the final resting place of our Lord. This temporary resting place was in fulfilment of prophecy, Isa. 53. 9.

A Roman centurion was in charge of between fifty and 100 men. He would have been an experienced soldier and would have seen many crucifixions. He was no stranger to seeing people die in excruciating agony and pain. Yet the centurion at the cross recognized something different in



the Lord. He had witnessed the way He had died, not calling down curses on those who had crucified Him, but asking for the Father's forgiveness for them, Luke 23. 34. The centurion had also witnessed the unusual events surrounding His death. There was three hours of darkness, Matt. 27. 45; the rending of the temple curtain, 27. 51; Mark 15. 38; the earth tremor, the splitting of rocks, Matt. 27. 51, and the breaking open of some tombs, v. 52. Just as the Lord gave up the ghost, the centurion praised God, Luke 23. 47, and also then declared this was truly the Son of God, Matt. 27. 54; Mark 15. 39. It is not recorded if the centurion ever became a believer, even though he had seen the Lord give His life as a ransom for many, Mark 10. 45.

There were ordinary Roman soldiers at the cross. These men had no thought about the way they treated the dear Son of God. They subjected Him to humiliating and brutal treatment – a crown of thorns on His head, spitting, and mocking, Matt. 27. 29, 30. At the cross, it was the soldiers who gambled for the Lord's belongings, John 19. 23, 24. It was one of the soldiers who, upon seeing the Lord already dead, did not break His legs but plunged a spear into His side, vv. 32-34. It was the Roman soldiers who were set as a guard at the tomb, Matt. 27. 65, 66, and the same soldiers who fainted in fear when the angel rolled away the stone that sealed the tomb, 28. 2-4, and accepted a bribe, vv. 12-15, to lie about the resurrection. To them, sad to say, the crucifixion and resurrection of our Lord meant nothing.

Finally, there is Simon of Cyrene who was compelled by the Roman authorities to carry the cross of Jesus. We can only speculate as to the impact this had on him, the father of Alexander and Rufus, Mark 15. 21. It is possible that the Rufus mentioned by Paul, Rom. 16. 13, is the same Rufus mentioned by Mark. If this is the case, then his mother, Simon's wife, and brother, Alexander, were also believers. It is also possible that Simeon mentioned, Acts 13. 1, is the same Simon. It would seem that the whole family had become believers through Simon's encounter with the Lord in having to carry His cross.

DIVERSITY

Part 1

The assembly and the challenges of cultural diversity

by **CHRISTO BENITE** and **FRANK A. PROUDLOCK** Leicester, England

The global movement of people is a complex, emotionally charged, and sometimes tragic issue. Today, it is estimated that there are over 280 million international migrants,¹ often driven by the pursuit of better economic opportunities or education, or sadly, in some cases, because of conflict, violence, or persecution.² Many biblical characters were migrants. Some were forcibly displaced, such as Joseph, Daniel, Ezekiel, Esther, and Mordecai in the Old Testament,³ and Aquilla and Priscilla in the New Testament. Others like Naomi and Ruth, or Jacob and his family when they moved to Egypt, were economic migrants.⁴ Paul and his fellow workers travelled abroad for positive reasons, to spread the gospel and advance the work of God. In many examples, the purposes of God were worked out, often in profound ways shaping the course of history. It is moving to consider that the Lord Jesus, as an infant, was also taken by his parents to seek refuge in Egypt to escape Herod's massacre of infants in Bethlehem.⁵

From the outset, the New Testament church was an international community, Acts 2. 9-11, which became increasingly multicultural as the gospel spread around the world.⁶ Early assemblies, such as Corinth and Ephesus,⁷ were often established along major trade routes, and were places of rich cultural, ethnic, and social diversity because of the movement of people. This diversity could lead to tensions, and the New Testament letters are full of practical advice on how to navigate the challenges of multicultural communities. Here we consider some challenges that face us today.

Moving away from home

Many people move abroad

in search of better financial opportunities, higher education, or to support their extended families. However, believers may often find themselves under severe financial constraints due to a combination of high living costs compared to home, inflated fees for international students, and false promises of securing well-paid employment.⁸ In some cases, significant financial help is needed from family back home, or large loans are taken out to facilitate the move.

The reality of life in a new country can be far from what was expected. Often, only low-paying jobs with long, unsociable hours are available. For students, the financial investment can put immense pressure on succeeding academically and passing exams. A further burden is the expectation that parents and the wider family at home will be supported, and communities at home may be critical if this expectation is not met, without understanding the financial constraints believers may be under.

When receiving believers from overseas into fellowship we need to be mindful of their specific circumstances and the impact of the move they are making. Many of these believers face significant challenges behind the scenes, and it is easy to make surface-level judgements. We need to be welcoming and give people time to settle. Awareness, understanding, compassion, and prayer are essential, along with creating a supportive spiritual environment for those facing such pressures. As the Apostle Paul reminds us, 'Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ', Gal. 6. 2.

Settling into a local assembly

When believers move to a new country it may be unsettling to experience a very different culture. It can be a great blessing to meet Christians who share a common love for the Lord Jesus and are like-minded in their understanding of the word of God. However, differences may be encountered compared to home even amongst Christian communities. These could include the time and day of the week when meetings fall,⁹ expectations around what might be deemed appropriate or respectable dress when attending meetings, the use of musical instruments (or not) during worship, the choice and style of hymns, and the level of structure or formality in meetings. These differences can sometimes make believers feel 'homesick' for their former fellowship.

For the receiving assembly, these challenges offer an opportunity for deeper reflection. As in Acts chapter 17 verse 11, it may be necessary to search the scriptures to determine whether certain practices are scriptural or merely cultural. There may be a need for open conversations, rooted in scripture, to foster understanding when the manner of gathering is questioned. Misunderstandings may also arise around terminology. For instance, in some parts of the world, the word 'assembly' is often associated with Pentecostal movements. A letter of commendation can greatly help elders in the receiving assembly understand a believer's background and avoid unnecessary questioning when welcoming them into fellowship.

Finding a spiritual home and getting involved

Many believers move to Western countries drawn by the prospect of better economic opportunities. However, decades of moral and spiritual decline have affected companies of God's people. Believers may find themselves moving from regions where assemblies number in the hundreds to smaller gatherings in the West with a higher proportion of older

believers. This shift presents both a challenge and an opportunity. In smaller assemblies, believers are more visible and accountable. What might go unnoticed in larger congregations – such as arriving late, children making noise, or missing meetings – can stand out in a smaller company. However, the close-knit nature of smaller assemblies offers an opportunity for deeper, more meaningful fellowship. Believers from overseas can also have a profound positive impact by actively engaging in the spiritual life of an assembly.

Language barriers may be a hurdle, especially in gatherings where local accents may make communication more of a challenge. It is important for local believers to speak clearly and offer support, encouraging brothers from other countries to participate, whether through short prayers, scripture readings, or selecting hymns at first. The prayers of younger or new local believers can also be a great help in enabling brothers from other countries to find their feet.

God has placed great importance on the family unit, Col. 3. 18-21, but this can be expressed very differently across cultures, for example the role of parents in the marriage of a son or daughter. Regular family devotional times, that are common in the home country, may continue online after relocation. However, there may also be an expectation that believers prioritize these family devotions, even over local church gatherings. The dynamic between brothers and sisters may be different between cultures and this can be a challenge for both single and married believers. The role of sisters is important and an approach by a godly sister in clarifying any doubts or concerns to sisters arriving from overseas can be very helpful.

It is vital for believers arriving from overseas to overcome barriers of politeness and deference, which may come from a deep respect for older generations. This can be an issue when addressing older

believers who may need to clarify whether their first name can be used. The tendency to say ‘yes’ can be cultural, as saying ‘no’ may be construed as being unhelpful or rude. Believers from overseas may not feel comfortable in expressing their thoughts, with disagreements and resentment remaining buried. As with all those in the assembly, it is helpful to show hospitality and spend time with people away from the assembly gatherings to better understand the needs and circumstances of God’s people. As well as invitations to the home this could also include assembly days out, fellowship meals, or extended opportunities for fellowship after meetings have taken place.

The testimony of unity and diversity

We are naturally inclined to gravitate toward people who are similar to us, which can lead to the formation of cliques among believers either from the home country or from the same region. More seriously, this tendency can sometimes result in the establishment of separate assemblies, potentially even with meetings being held in different languages.¹⁰ We should remember that God never intended local assemblies to be monocultural. As always, the scriptures provide clear guidance.

In the early chapters of Acts, the world witnessed something it had never seen before. With the arrival of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost a new living entity was brought into existence, the church, the body of Christ, Acts 2. This diverse community, vv. 9-11, was united in acknowledging Jesus as ‘both Lord and Christ’, v. 36, and grew increasingly closer in their shared appreciation of Him. They continued ‘stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers’, v. 42. They were committed, not only to attending the breaking of bread, but also Bible teaching meetings, where God can speak to us, and prayer meetings, where we can speak to God. We also read, ‘and all that believed were together, and had all things common’, v. 44. Their practical love

for each other was a testimony to the world of the transforming power of the love of Christ to break down cultural barriers.

The world has hijacked the concept of diversity, yet diversity is God’s idea. Just as God, in creation, filled the earth with life, colour, and variety in the natural world, He desires diversity in the spiritual realm as well. We are called, as members of the body of Christ, to express both diversity and unity, 1 Cor. 12–14. Each of us has a unique role in this body and a spiritual gift to contribute. In this, we demonstrate the beauty of God’s design: a unified yet diverse church, empowered by the Holy Spirit and centred on Christ.

Endnotes

- 1 Estimate for 2020 from International Organization for Migration (IOM), United Nations Migration.
- 2 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.
- 3 Gen. 39; Dan. 1; Ezek. 1. 1-3; Esther 2. 5-7; Acts 18. 1-3.
- 4 Ruth 1; Gen. 47.
- 5 Matt. 2. 13-23.
- 6 In Acts chapter 2, the believers saved on the day of Pentecost were predominantly Jews and proselyte Jews. In accordance with the words of the Lord Jesus, the disciples would become, ‘witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth’, Acts 1. 8. We see this pattern being worked out as we read through the book of Acts, resulting in the church becoming increasingly global and multicultural. In seed form this can be seen with the salvation of a descendant of Ham, Acts 8. 26-39, a descendant of Shem, 9. 1-31 and a descendant of Japheth, Acts 10.
- 7 Acts 18, 19.
- 8 For example, see: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c97w1x2deyvo>.
- 9 Meeting times usually revolve around the work patterns specific to that country. For example, a believer may move from a country where long days are worked from Monday to Saturday to a country where ‘nine to five’ office hours are normal. Instead of meetings falling mainly during an extended period on the Lord’s Day, they may also occur on midweek evenings.
- 10 It is easy to make a judgement on such gatherings but we should consider what we would do in similar circumstances. For instance, someone who relocates from the UK or North America to another country may expect English to be spoken in the assembly they join, yet might criticise a non-English-speaking assembly back in the UK.

Words at the Cross

By **MERVYN WISHART** Belfast, Northern Ireland

Part 7

'When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost', John 19. 30.

The Bible begins with the account of the finished work of creation. 'Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them', Gen. 2. 1. The subject of John chapter 19 verse 30 is the finished work of redemption.

This was the sixth, the penultimate, cry of the Lord Jesus from the cross. Three words, in the English language, but one word in Greek. The word *tetelestai* is found twice in the New Testament, the other occurrence being verse 28 where it is rendered 'now accomplished'. In verse 28, the word is in His mind, 'Jesus knowing'. In verse 30, it is expressed with His lips. He said, 'It is finished'. The verb in both cases is in the perfect tense to stress the certainty of the fact expressed. J. C. RYLE wrote, 'The word is rich and full and replete with deep truths, there is an inexhaustible fulness in our Lord's words'.¹

It was spoken with a loud voice, adding emphasis to the amazing truth being expressed, Matt. 27. 50. Some of the meanings of *tetelestai* given by STRONG in his concordance are 'to end, i.e. complete, to discharge a debt, to pay, to accomplish, to make an end, to finish'.²

He made an end of the sacrifices of the Old Covenant

In the Jewish temple, sacrifices were offered, yearly, Heb. 10. 1, 3, daily, 10. 11, often, 9. 25 and repeatedly, 10. 11. There were so many required that one of the gates to Jerusalem was named 'The sheep gate', Neh. 3. 1. All were superseded by the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus who offered 'one sacrifice for sins for ever', Heb. 10. 12. The priests in the temple were effectively redundant when the Lord cried on the cross, 'It is finished', even though the rituals and sacrifices may have continued until the destruction of the temple in AD 70. Some continued in unbelief, but it is thrilling to read in Acts chapter 6

verse 7 that 'A great company of the priests were obedient to the faith'.

He accomplished the will of God on earth

This was something that animal sacrifices could never do. They died unwillingly and unwittingly. 'In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God', Heb. 10. 6, 7. On one occasion when His disciples brought the Lord Jesus food to eat, He said, 'My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work', John 4. 34. In anticipation of the work which He would complete on the cross, He said in prayer to His Father, 'I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do', John 17. 4. What a cry of victory from the cross, 'It is finished'.

Every prophecy fulfilled regarding His life and death

Although neither Pilate nor the soldiers knew anything of the scriptures, God saw to it that every prophecy relating to the death of the Lord Jesus was fulfilled. The words of John chapter 19 verse 24 are significant, 'These things therefore the soldiers did'. God was in control of everything that happened at Calvary.

The words of Peter bear out the truth, 'For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done', Acts 4. 28. The words of Paul are similar, 'And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre', 13. 29.

All of the types and prophecies in the archives of the Old Testament concerning Him were now complete. Micah foretold the place of His birth. Isaiah revealed He would be born of a virgin. Zechariah spoke of the King who would come to Jerusalem meek and lowly and riding on a colt the foal of an ass. Daniel foretold His death, 'Messiah [shall] be cut off, but not for himself', 9. 26. 'To Him give all the prophets witness', Acts 10. 43. All was being accomplished.

He paid in full the price of our redemption

That the believer could be set free from sin's penalty and power, our Redeemer shed His blood on the cross. John could not refrain from expressing his doxology of praise, 'Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood', Rev. 1. 5.

An unnumbered throng in heaven sing the new song, 'Thou art worthy . . . for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation', 5. 9. There are dialects spoken in remote parts of the world that have never been written, but how wonderful to remember that with every tongue the great Redeemer will be praised.³

He defeated Satan and the powers of darkness

The words spoken by the Lord to the serpent in the garden of Eden were, 'And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; he shall crush thy head, and thou shalt crush his heel', Gen. 3. 15 JND.

The words spoken by the Lord in the garden of Gethsemane were, 'When I was daily with you in the temple, ye stretched forth no hands against me: but this is your hour, and the power of darkness', Luke 22. 53. The combined forces of darkness were arrayed against Him, but He prevailed over them all, Rev. 5. 5, cp. Col. 2. 15.

He became answerable for the broken law

'Christ hath redeemed us from

the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree', Gal. 3. 13. He was the only man who ever lived on earth who fulfilled the law in every respect. He magnified the law and made it honourable, Isa. 42. 21. He became answerable before a holy God for the transgressions of others, 53. 5. 'But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons', Gal. 4. 4, 5.

The glory of God was seen in a finished work

This is seen in three examples:

1. The building of the tabernacle by Moses, 'And he reared up the court round about the tabernacle and the altar, and set up the hanging of the court gate. So Moses finished the work. Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle', Exod. 40. 33, 34.
2. The building of the temple by Solomon, 'So was ended all the work that king Solomon made for the house of the Lord', 1 Kgs. 7. 51. 'The priests brought in the ark of the covenant of the Lord unto his place . . . And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the Lord', 8. 6, 10.
3. The rebuilding of the temple by Zerubbabel, 'And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai . . . And they builded, and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel', Ezra 6. 14. 'I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts', Haggai 2. 7.

God was glorified in the 'finished work' of Calvary

The tabernacle and the temple were constructed to a divinely given specification. When they were finished, each was filled with the

glory of the Lord. In an infinitely greater measure, God was glorified in the finished work of His Son at Calvary. He could say, 'Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him', John 13. 31. He was glorified as the Son of man by suffering the death of the cross.

1. **'It is finished'**, John 19. 30. 'Whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him', Eccles. 3. 14. The finality of the work of Calvary.
2. **'It is enough'**. David sinned by numbering the children of Israel. The Lord sent an angel to destroy Jerusalem. As he was destroying the city there came a moment when the Lord said to the angel, 'It is enough, stay now thine hand', 1 Chr. 21. 15. When the judgement ceased, the angel stood between earth and heaven, v. 16, at the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. From 2 Chronicles chapter 3 verse 1, we learn that it was there the foundations of the temple were laid in Mount Moriah. What a picture of Calvary is presented in this threshing floor. It was the place of a sure foundation. There the sword was stayed, and the judgement was past. It was at Moriah the place of sacrifice. A picture of the sufficiency of the work of Calvary.
3. **'It is done'**, Rev. 21. 6. Clearly, it is the voice of the Lamb who speaks, cp. 1. 8; 22. 13. JIM ALLEN points out that the word used, *gegonan*, is a comprehensive plural word; it summarizes all that now has been completed to bring the purposes of God to fruition.⁴ The cross was the foundation, the new creation is the fulfilment. The glorious outcome of the work of Calvary.
4. **'He has done [it]'**, Ps. 22. 31. 'They shall come, and shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that he hath done it', JND. The Saviour who accomplished the work.

"It is finished!" sinners, hear it,
Tis the dying victor's cry
"It is finished!" Angels, bear it,
Bear the joyful truth on high:
"It is finished!"
Tell it through the earth and sky.

"It is finished!" all is over,
Yes the cup of wrath is drained;
Such the truth these words discover,
Thus the victory was obtained;
Tis a victory,
None but Jesus could have
gained.

Crown the mighty conqueror, crown
him,
Who his people's foes o'ercame!
In the highest heaven enthrone
him!
Men and angels, sound his fame!
Great his glory!
Jesus bears a matchless name'.
[THOMAS KELLY, 1769-1855]

The practical lesson for every believer

The letter to the Colossians was read publicly to the gathered assembly. How thrilling it must have been for those believers to be reminded of these precious truths concerning Christ and the blessings of our union with Him.

As the reading of the letter drew to a close, one brother must have been surprised to hear his name mentioned, with a message directly for him. 'And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it', Col. 4. 17. To every Christian there comes the challenge of an unfinished task.

Endnotes

- 1 J. C. RYLE, *Expository thoughts on the Gospel of John, Volume 3*, Banner of Truth.
- 2 JAMES STRONG, *Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, Hendricksen.
- 3 The word used in Acts chapter 2 verse 8, 'tongue', is the word meaning 'dialect'.
- 4 JIM ALLEN, 'Revelation' in K. STAPLEY and T. WILSON (eds.), *What the Bible Teaches*, John Ritchie.

Lessons in prayer from Gethsemane

By **PHILIP COLLIER** Melbourne, Australia

In this article, we briefly consider the time the Lord Jesus spent in the Garden of Gethsemane. There, we will see Him under immense pressure and in deep anguish of soul as He anticipates the work of sin-bearing. We will learn His primary purpose was prayer, to lay bare His troubled heart and to affirm His unyielding submission to the Father's will. For us, there is much in this intimate scene to soften our hearts, and many valuable lessons to learn from the Saviour. As we see Him cast upon God, let us humbly ask, 'Lord, teach us to pray', Luke 11. 1.

Gethsemane

It was late at night as the Lord Jesus and His disciples moved through the dark streets of Jerusalem. They left the city, crossed the Kidron valley and began their ascent of the Mount of Olives, heading to a familiar place, a peaceful olive grove known as 'Gethsemane'. This was a place to which the Lord Jesus and His disciples regularly retired to escape the demanding and curious crowds of pilgrims that thronged Jerusalem at Passover time.

Early the next morning, the Lord Jesus would stand silently before Pilate. He would be falsely accused, shamelessly humiliated, mercilessly beaten and unjustly condemned to a criminal's death. As He entered Gethsemane just hours before, He knew every excruciating detail of the path that lay ahead. Not only the unrelenting hatred and cruelty of sinful men, but the abandonment of God as He bore the full penalty for sin alone. And so, this would be a momentous and climactic night. A night of unprecedented sorrow and heart-rending anguish. A night spent in earnest and contending prayer as He anticipated and prepared for the abhorrent reality of His sinless soul being made sin for us. That prospect hung as a dark and foreboding cloud upon the person of the Lord Jesus as He entered the garden.

The name 'Gethsemane' means oil (or olive) press. Here the

olives would be crushed to reveal their inner richness. So too, in Gethsemane, the Lord Jesus would be crushed with the weight of anticipation, revealing the inner richness of His lovely character.

Deliberate prayer

As Judas Iscariot and his co-conspirators made their plans to arrest the Lord Jesus, the Saviour purposefully retired to the seclusion of Gethsemane. Leaving eight disciples at the entrance of the garden, He instructed them, 'Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder', Matt. 26. 36. His purpose in coming to Gethsemane was clear; as Calvary drew ever nearer, He longed for a time of communion with the Father.

It was late, possibly close to midnight, when the Lord Jesus reached Gethsemane. Since arriving in Jerusalem a few days earlier, His days had been filled with activity and marked by a growing tension. Both Jesus and His disciples were physically exhausted and emotionally drained. The preceding day had included the preparations for the Passover, while the evening hours involved eating the final Passover meal, the identification of Judas as the betrayer, the institution of the Lord's Supper and the momentous lessons of the upper room ministry, John 13-17. Notwithstanding His aching tiredness, one thing remained before Judas' arrival would set in train the

events that would propel the Lord Jesus to the cross. He must pray!

Quietness and solitude were the traits that drew the Lord Jesus to Gethsemane. Here was a place free from distraction and disruption. Here was a place where He could privately and purposefully commune with the Father. Neither His exhaustion, nor the presence of Peter, James, and John, who had accompanied Him into the garden proper, would keep Him from going a 'little further', Matt. 26. 39, to enter 'the holiest of all' and to pray three times.

The lesson for us is clear. As the Lord was purposeful and deliberate with regard to the priority and place of prayer, so must we be. If we are serious in our longing for communion with God; if we understand the need for His light on our pathway; if the reality of our daily dependence on Him burns within us; if our commitment to obeying His will is genuine, we must give priority to prayer. The Lord Jesus practised this in His own life,¹ and likewise taught the importance of having a private place for prayer, Matt. 6. 5, 6.

To be deliberate in our prayer does not diminish the need for spontaneous prayer through the course of each day, as circumstances dictate. However, the importance of making time, and having a place for prayer, should not be compromised.

Earnest prayer

With the attention to detail characteristic of a physician, Luke highlights the physical extremity of the Lord Jesus as He prays. Luke alone observes the appearance of an angel from heaven 'strengthening' the Lord Jesus, Luke 22. 43. Then, in verse 44, he carefully chooses four unique words to record his observations. He speaks of the Lord being in 'an agony' and tells us the result of that agony was that He prayed 'more earnestly'. Both words are unique in the Greek text and deservedly so as the Lord's agony was unique, as was the earnestness of His prayer. Then Luke records the physical impact of that agonizing

and earnest prayer, pointing to blood-tainted 'sweat' and the 'great drops' that formed and fell to the ground. Again, both words are unique in the original language and appropriately so as the Saviour uniquely agonized in prayer. Why is Luke driven to use such unprecedented language to describe this scene? Because of the unique character of the events which he is recording – the divine sufferings of the Saviour.

To pray 'more earnestly' – as Luke describes – is to pray with more intensity, with more fervency, with a burning sense of need. To underscore the intensity of the Lord's prayer in Gethsemane, the writer to the Hebrews says that He offered up 'prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears', Heb. 5. 7. In mentioning this more earnest prayer, Luke does not record the words that the Lord Jesus used in that prayer. Perhaps it was that words were not sufficient to express the need? And so this more earnest prayer was not defined so much by what the Lord Jesus said, as by the absence of words and the parallel appearance of large drops of blood-tainted sweat on His blessed brow.

How earnest, fervent, and intense are our prayers? Do we fall victim to prayer that is without heart, without burden, without thought, and without expectation? The honest answer is that we do. But a glimpse of the Saviour, prostrate on the ground in Gethsemane, confronts us with a stark contrast and a wonderful example. His earnestness was such that words were inadequate, while large, blood-stained drops of sweat formed on His brow and fell heavily to the ground. Of course, His extremity was unique and we will never match the depth of His divine suffering, but the path of life will inevitably confront us with experiences that compel us to pray. Not just formal, mechanical, empty prayer, but more earnest prayer. It is a great encouragement to know that the Lord Jesus has taken this path before us. He knows our need, feels our burden, groans with

understanding empathy and aches with heart-felt sympathy. And so, by means of His own human experience He has been fitted to undertake for us as our Great High Priest, Heb. 4. 14-16. Paul describes a further provision for prayer, Rom. 8. 26, when words fail to express our need, when we struggle because 'we know not what we should pray for as we ought', then it is we must pray more earnestly, resting on the assurance that the Holy Spirit makes up for our failure to articulate the need by making 'intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered ["too deep for words" ESV]'.

Submissive prayer

There is an enduring echo from Gethsemane, found in the words, 'nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done', Luke 22. 42. Three times the Lord Jesus prayed and three times He voiced this unwavering commitment to the Father's will.

As He prayed, the Lord Jesus likened the work of the cross to a cup which He must drain to its last, bitter drop. The very thought was repulsive and abhorrent to Him. As we hear His words, 'if it be possible, let this cup pass from me', Matt. 26. 39, we ask was the Lord Jesus expecting the Father to take that cup away, to propose another means of dealing with the sin question? No! The Lord Jesus knew there was no other way. Redemption's price demanded His death. He alone was qualified to bear 'our sins in his own body on the tree', 1 Pet. 2. 24. His prayer was not for a last-minute change of plan, it was the uninhibited unburdening of His troubled soul as a dependent man. A real man, subject to all the limitations of manhood, including the repulsive prospect of suffering and dying as a man on the behalf of men and, more agonizingly, of being forsaken of God when His suffering would reach its climax. In offering this prayer, the Lord Jesus teaches the vital lesson of what it means to lean in full dependence on the Father.

Rather than questioning the Father's will, the Lord Jesus elevated it to a place of uncompromising priority.

Standing as a sentinel alongside the Lord's earnestness in prayer was His unwavering conviction that there was no better, nor more important, path than that of obedience to the Father's will. Nothing would discourage or distract Him from that path. How unlike Christ we can be in this matter! Too often, the thoughtless and impulsive ease with which we act and react relegates God to observer status in our lives, and the will of God to a nice-to-have rather than a non-negotiable necessity. What damage is done, what blessing is lost, when we allow self-will rather than the Father's will to have sway.

ANNA JANE GRANNIS puts it beautifully in her poem *An Exchange of Wills*:

'I want my heart so cleared of self,
That my dear Lord may come,
And set up His own furnishings,
And make my heart His home.

And since I know what this requires,
Each morning while it's still,
I slip into that secret place,
And leave with Him – my will.

He always takes it graciously,
Presenting me with His,
I'm ready then to meet the day
And any task there is.

And this is how my Lord controls,
My interests, my ills,
Because we meet at break of day,
For an exchange of wills'.

Conclusion

There is much to learn from the Lord's time in Gethsemane. Prayer is a prominent lesson, but even there we have barely scratched the surface. May the Lord help us to study in the 'School of Gethsemane' and to draw out vital and practical lessons in Christlikeness.

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Endnote

1 Mark 1. 35; Luke 5. 16; 6. 12; Matt. 14. 23.

TITLES OF JEHOVAH 6

JEHOVAH TSEBAHOT

THE LORD OF HOSTS

By **ANDREW WARE** Melbourne, Australia

'O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid', 1 Sam. 1. 11. That this is the first time this title is uttered by human lips is remarkable. Not by a mighty king leading an army of faithful warriors, but by a desperate, childless woman crying to the Lord for a son in a time of faithless men. In a moment that cannot help but touch our hearts, there is Hannah, distressed and 'provoked', v. 6, making a vow before the Lord that, should He give her a son, she would give her child to Him 'all the days of his life', v. 11.

What follows cannot deal with this topic fully, as the title 'Lord of hosts' occurs more than 240 times in the Old Testament, making it one of the more common titles of our God, and certainly the most numerous as considered by this series of articles.

Although most English versions render the Hebrew word *tsebahoth*¹ as 'hosts', it is not used in a way that is common in modern usage. The first time the root word² is used, it is in Genesis chapter 2 verse 1, 'Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them'. In chapter 1, creation is formed and filled, and it is to this filling, found chiefly in days four, five, and six, that this word refers. The air, the sea, and the land were bursting with the creation the Lord God had wonderfully made. A sky filled with the stars and a world teeming with life – these are 'all the host of them', pointing to the vastness and greatness of all that is under the Lord's control.

The second time it is mentioned, it refers to armed forces. Genesis chapter 21 verse 22 records of Abimelech that 'Phichol [was] the chief captain of his host'. He was the general of his army – and, for the most part, this is how the term is used, to designate a military force.³ So, when we come to the title, 'the Lord of hosts', *Jehovah Tsebahoth*, it conveys the thought

that Jehovah has a vast angelic army at His disposal. Perhaps 'the Lord of Armies' is more understandable to modern minds.⁴ It reminds us that the Lord is a warrior, Exod. 15. 3, who will fight on behalf of His people.

With many first mentions in the scriptures, there is within it something of the way the theme or doctrine will be developed throughout the remainder of the Bible – and so it is with this title. First, it is a name linked with the house of God. This sets the stage for the way in which the title is connected to days of decline in the nation, which in turn leads on to the lovely truth that it is a title linked to God's deliverance.

The house of God

1 Samuel chapter 1 verse 3 tells us that Elkanah went each year 'to worship and to sacrifice unto the Lord of hosts in Shiloh'. In Joshua chapter 18, it was at Shiloh where the tabernacle was set up, v. 1. This would be where the children of Israel gathered to receive instruction, v. 8; where the nation was encamped before settling in the land, v. 9;⁵ and where guidance from the Lord was sought, v. 10. This was the place of the house of God, where God dwelt among His people and it is here in 1 Samuel chapter 1, that He is first identified as *Jehovah Tsebahoth*. As we will see, it was a time of decline in Israel, which was

a tragedy, for the Lord longed to 'dwell among them', Exod. 25. 8, to be their God and for them to be His people.

We see this thought further developed, particularly in the Psalms. Psalm 84 is a sustained appreciation to God for His dwelling place – 'how lovely is Your tabernacle, O Lord of hosts', v. 1 NKJV. The title occurs four times, the most in any psalm.⁶ Space does not allow elaboration of Psalms 24 and 48, which point forward to a future day when the Lord Jesus, identified in each as the Lord of Hosts,⁷ will enter and reign from Jerusalem, having physically returned with the armies of heaven.⁸ It is interesting to note a specific link of the title with the ark of the covenant. In 1 Samuel chapter 4 verse 4, Hophni and Phinehas, treating it like a lucky charm, took the 'ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts, who dwells between the cherubim' NKJV, to battle against the Philistines. They brought it from Shiloh, but it did not save them; neither would it ever return there, for it would be captured by the Philistines,⁹ and, after a significant interlude,¹⁰ instead going to Jerusalem in David's reign after he moved the tabernacle there, 2 Sam. 6. How lightly Hophni and Phinehas treated divine things, but the Lord of hosts is 'jealous for . . . [His] holy name', Ezek. 39. 25, and dealt with these ungodly men.

We cannot help but see a reminder of the centrality of the house of God, and a warning against treating the things of the Lord lightly. The God of the house is *Jehovah Tsebahoth*, and He will guard it.

Days of departure

The context of 1 Samuel chapter 1 is a time of decline for Israel. The closing verse of Judges sums up the situation: 'every man did that which was right in his own eyes', Judg. 21. 25. The high priest, Eli, was a weak man, who knew the sin of his sons. Along with what we have already seen about their use of the ark, they were 'corrupt', 1 Sam. 2. 12 NKJV, they 'despised the offering of the Lord', v. 17 NKJVmg, and

they ‘hearkened not unto the voice of their father’, v. 25. These were ungodly priests in the Lord’s house, and their father could not control them. Eli was weak in other ways; he lacked spiritual sight as surely as his own eyesight was fading, 3. 2, for he believed Hannah was drunk when she was praying, 1. 12, 13. Things were not as they should be in Israel, and it is in these circumstances that God is made known as the Lord of hosts.

Again, we see that this theme accompanies the use of the title as scripture progresses. It is most heavily used in the prophetic books. JUKES notes, ‘especially in those who most keenly felt the failure of Israel in the promised land, the name meets us constantly’.¹¹ Indeed, more than half of the uses in the Old Testament are found in Isaiah and Jeremiah alone, both dealing with the decline of Judah. One example will need to suffice. Isaiah chapter 1 records the rebellion of Judah and contains that prophecy’s first use of the title, ‘the Lord says, the Lord of hosts . . . “Ah, I will rid Myself of My adversaries, and take vengeance on My enemies”’, v. 24 NKJV. Sadly, God’s people were now His enemies, for they had departed from their God. There was much human weakness and failure. But, as we

shall see, God was, and is, not weak. No, He is mighty; He is the Lord of hosts.

Deliverance

In 1 Samuel chapter 1, Hannah cried to the Lord of hosts out of her need. Her prayer in verse 11 is one marked by a deep acknowledgement of this: she was in ‘affliction’, and was ‘in bitterness of soul’, vv. 10, 11. We should never forget that we do not pray to a God who is in any way limited, and the Lord of hosts moves to deliver His people. In her son, Samuel, Hannah’s prayer is wonderfully answered and her praise in chapter 2 reminds us of this, ‘I rejoice in thy salvation’, v. 1.

When David took up his feeble weapons against Goliath, he was aware that it was ‘in the name of the Lord of hosts’ that he was facing the giant, 17. 45. Although there was an army at his back, they were of no help, ‘dismayed, and greatly afraid’, v. 11. Instead, David knew he needed *Jehovah Tsehaboath*, and He was there, and through Him the people of God experienced deliverance that day by the hand of a shepherd boy.

The repeated couplet in Psalm 46, ‘the Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge’, vv. 7, 11, also dwells on this theme. In times

of ‘trouble’, v. 1, there is the certain comfort that the Lord of hosts is there, and able to deliver. At the end of the psalm, the Lord says through the psalmist, ‘be still, and know that I am God’, v. 10, the time for human action is over, the Lord of hosts will act. Not only to be a ‘refuge and strength’, v. 1, but to ensure that He ‘will be exalted in the earth’, v. 10.

In James chapter 5, the ungodly ‘rich’ are condemned, v. 1, as those who have mistreated God’s people.¹² Among other things, they are told to ‘weep and howl’, v. 1, they are also warned that their ‘gold and silver are corroded’, v. 3 NKJV, and, significantly, that the cries of those they cheated have ‘entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth’, v. 4. It is the Lord of hosts who still sees His needy people and will deal with their oppressors. What wonderful comfort, even for us today.

Space has not permitted a thorough treatment of this wonderful title of the Lord of hosts. However, from this first mention we are reminded of the solemnity of dealing with the house and things of the Lord, and that the Lord of hosts is still at work despite days of failure, and that He is a wonderful deliverer.

Endnotes

- 1 Different lexicons and dictionaries give slightly varying transliterations of the Hebrew, and there are a variety of Hebrew words which English versions render ‘hosts’. However, *sābā* (STRONG’S H6635, ‘army’) is the root word behind them. We commend the reader to the study of these words.
- 2 *Ibid.*
- 3 Exod. 15. 4; Judg. 4. 15.
- 4 The NET version has ‘the Lord of Heaven’s Armies’.
- 5 KJV has ‘host’ but it is a different Hebrew word, *maḥānē*, which is perhaps better rendered as ‘encampment’ or ‘camp’.
- 6 In verse 8, the title is ‘Lord God of hosts’, an extended form of the title which is also used elsewhere, e.g., Ps. 89. 8; Isa. 3. 15.
- 7 Pss. 24. 10; 48. 8.
- 8 Rev. 19. 14.
- 9 1 Sam. 4. 11.
- 10 1 Sam. 5 and 6.
- 11 ANDREW JUKES, *The Names of God in Holy Scripture*, Kregel, 1972, pg. 155.
- 12 The title occurs twice in the New Testament, here in verse 4 and Romans chapter 9 verse 29, in both cases the KJV has the Greek transliteration ‘*sabaoth*’.



ZECHARIAH

By **JEREMY HOLIFIELD** Deri, Wales

'How great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty!'
Zech. 9. 17

Zechariah's ministry is overwhelmingly positive. In a region of our Bible that is unsurprisingly less visited, due to the focus being upon Israel and matters of judgement, this prophecy stands out among the minor prophets 'as a beacon upon the top of a mountain', Isa. 30. 17. The principal message of the book could be summarized in the words of Zechariah chapter 9 verse 17, 'how great is his [God's] goodness, and how great is his beauty!'

He does not, as other prophets, denounce the sin of God's people and serve warning of penalty. This is entirely fitting, given Zechariah was a young man, Zech. 2. 4. As Solomon recognizes, 'knowledge and discretion', Prov. 1. 4, are desirable characteristics of youth.

The euphoria that had accompanied the returning faithful had been dampened by a number of factors. We read, in the early chapters of Ezra's history of this period, of small numbers relative to the task in hand, some undertaking work they were not especially skilled to do, what appeared to be insuperable opposition from influential people, and a realization that it was unlikely that the glory days of a bygone era would return. Does this resonate with you in our situation today?

In such circumstances, Zechariah reminds them of the unfailing 'goodness' of their covenant-keeping God towards them, and the 'beauty' of the character of their coming King. In what might have been considered to have been a 'day of small things', Zech. 4. 10, he makes them mindful that they have a great God and a glorious future guaranteed. Similarly, 'it doth not yet appear what we shall be', 1 John 3. 2.

The structure of this book is evident:

The eight visions (chh. 1-6) – the foes of Israel (Will they be conquered?)

With their anticipations not being realized as they had imagined when leaving Babylon, the minds of these returnees must have been filled with questions regarding the intentions of their God. The visions serve to provide affirmative answers to these unspoken questions.

The series of visions took place in one night and are bounded by:

- **Introduction** (Ch. 1. 1-6) – The Prophetic Call – Learning from the past.
- **Conclusion** (Ch. 6. 9-15) – The Prophetic Climax – Looking to the future.

First vision – the man among the myrtle trees, 1. 7-17

Question answered: Is our God among us or not?

Content: Israel may be outcast but is never forgotten by their God.

Second vision – the four horns and the four carpenters, 1. 18-21

Question answered: Will our enemies be dealt with?

Content: Pictures the overthrow of Israel's opponents.

Third vision – the man with a measuring line, ch. 2

Question answered: Will our city regain her splendour?

Content: The restoration, re-populating, and prosperity of Jerusalem.

Fourth vision – the high priest, ch. 3

Question answered: Will our defilement be removed?

Content: Portrays Israel cleansed and fulfilling their priestly purpose for God.

Fifth vision – the candlestick, ch. 4

Question answered: Will Israel be a testimony for God again?

Content: Effective testimony is only in the power of the Spirit of God.

Sixth vision – the flying roll, 5. 1-4

Question answered: Will the Law be effective once more?

Content: The earth will be governed according to righteous law enforcement.

Seventh vision – the ephah, 5. 5-11

Question answered: Will evil practice be dealt with?

Content: Wickedness will be curtailed and judged.

Eighth vision – The four chariots, 6. 1-8

Question answered: Will our God exert His rule in the earth?

Content: The rule of heaven is to be established in the world.

The four messages, chh. 7, 8 – the fasts of Israel (Should they be continued?)

During the captivity they had introduced a number of mournful fasts, 8. 19, to commemorate various tragic events associated with them going into captivity:

- Fast of the tenth month – The siege of Jerusalem, 2 Kgs. 25. 1
- Fast of the fourth month – The capture of Jerusalem, 2 Kgs. 25. 3
- Fast of the fifth month – The destruction of Jerusalem, 2 Kgs. 25. 8
- Fast of the seventh month – The murder of governor Gedaliah, 2 Kgs. 25. 25

In reality, in the keeping of these fasts they were feeling sorry **for** themselves rather than **about** themselves. They were lamenting the effect, i.e., God's judgement, instead of the cause, their sin. Resenting more than repenting.

Now, two years after the visions had been given and two years before the temple reconstruction was completed, Ezra 6. 15, a deputation was sent to the house of God to enquire if it was relevant any longer to maintain these fasts, Zech. 7. 2-3.

We do well to review betimes the

relevance of what we do and why we do it! The unequivocal message of this book is ‘that that dieth, let it die’, 11. 9. We are too insistent upon maintaining extra-biblical practices which have lost pertinence.

Reasons are given in the messages as to why they should discontinue with these fasts; two negative reasons from their past in the first two messages, found in chapter 7, and then two positive reasons from the future in the final two messages in chapter 8.

The four messages each begin with the formula ‘the word of the Lord’, Zech. 7. 4, 8; 8. 1, 18.

Message 1: 7. 4-7

First reason to discontinue (negative): These fasts were not for God’s glory but ‘for yourselves’, v. 6.

- They were of their own instituting and being sustained for selfish motives.

Message 2: 7. 8-14

Second reason to discontinue (negative): The events they commemorated happened because they ‘refused to hearken . . . [to] the words which the Lord of hosts hath sent in his spirit by the former prophets: therefore came a great wrath’, vv. 11, 12.

- Effectively they were lamenting God’s judgement and thereby begrudging it.

Message 3: 8. 1-17

First reason to discontinue (positive): The prospect of the Lord’s return. ‘I am returned . . . so will I save you, and ye shall be a blessing: fear not, but let your hands be strong’, vv. 3, 13.

- The prophetic present is used in verse 3. This event has not been realized yet but is spoken of as a certainty. Amillennialists struggle here!

Message 4: 8. 18-23

Second reason to discontinue (positive): The potential to attract. The fasts were to become feasts so that ‘the inhabitants of many cities . . . many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord’, vv. 20, 22.

- God does not want His people to dwell in despondency. Negativity does not attract.

The two burdens, chh. 9-14 – the future of Israel (What can be contemplated?)

- **Chh. 9-11 – the rejection of the King when He came in grace**
- **Chh. 12-14 – the return of the King when He comes in glory**

The final six chapters portray prophetic events and reveal the career of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Zechariah has more information about the Messiah than all the other minor prophets taken together. Though there are references to the Lord elsewhere in the book, cp. Zech. 3. 8; 6. 12, 13, the final six chapters are replete with some significant details of the coming King.

First burden – the rejection of Messiah the King, chh. 9-11

These chapters establish that Israel’s near enemies, and empires that were to arise, will be dealt with alike in

judgement by God. A careful reading will reveal that these prophecies have only been fulfilled in part. There remains much that is, even now, yet to be fulfilled. The reason why not all has been accomplished as God asserts it will be is that the nation of Israel rejected Messiah the King that came unto them ‘having salvation’, Zech. 9. 9; Matt. 21. 5. Their evaluation of His worth was ‘thirty pieces of silver’, Zech. 11. 12, the price the Jews covenanted with Judas for delivering up the Saviour, Matt. 26. 15. Consequently, God says ‘I will no more pity the inhabitants of the land . . . they shall smite the land, and out of their hand I will not deliver them’, Zech. 11. 6. This has been the experience of the nation ever since and will continue to be so until they recognize the Lord Jesus as the king they have rejected. This is foretold in the remaining chapters of the book.

Second burden – the return of Messiah the King, chh. 12-14

The second burden is entirely future even from our standpoint, with the exception of a solitary glance back to the smiting of the Shepherd in Zechariah chapter 13 verse 7. In a ‘day’ to come, repeatedly referred to in these closing chapters, Israel will gaze upon the one ‘whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him’, 12. 10, when ‘his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives’, 14. 4. The return of the Lord Jesus to the earth to reign is a necessity if God’s promises to Israel are to be realized. In grace, ‘there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David . . . for sin and for uncleanness’, 13. 1. The once rejected Monarch ‘will say, it is my people’ and they shall say, ‘The Lord is my God’, 13. 9, and ‘The Lord shall be king over all the earth: in that day’, 14. 9.

Conclusion

Thus, Zechariah’s uplifting book is brought to an exulting conclusion. His ministry had the desired, positive effect. We read in Ezra chapter 6 verse 14 that the people ‘builded, and they prospered, through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo’. His words retain the same impact as we consider ‘how great is his [God’s] goodness, and how great is his beauty!’ Zech. 9. 17.

The structure of this book is evident:

8 Visions Chh. 1-6	4 Messages Chh. 7-8	2 Burdens Chh. 9-14
Ch. 1. 1-6 Introduction	1st Message Ch. 7. 1-7	1st Burden Chh. 9-11
Vision 1 - Ch. 1. 7-17	2nd Message Ch. 7. 8-14	2nd Burden Chh. 12-14
Vision 2 - Ch. 1. 18-21	3rd Message Ch. 8. 1-17	
Vision 3 - Ch. 2. 1-13	4th Message Ch. 8. 18-23	
Vision 4 - Ch. 3. 1-10		
Vision 5 - Ch. 4. 1-14	8 Visions Chh. 1-6	
Vision 6 - Ch. 5. 1-4	● The Foes of Israel – Will they be conquered?	
Vision 7 - Ch. 5. 5-11	4 Messages Chh. 7, 8	
Vision 8 - Ch. 6. 1-8	● The Feasts of Israel – Will they be continued?	
Ch. 6. 9-15 Conclusion	2 Burdens Chh. 9-14	
	● The Future of Israel – Will can be contemplated?	

The life and times of Elisha ⁵

The Shunamite, the son and the seer

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

These 'last days' are characterized by the exchange of truth for lies and corresponding lawlessness, 1 Tim. 4. 1, 2; 2 Tim. 3. 1-9, 13. The Lord Jesus predicted it, saying, 'Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold', Matt. 24. 11, 12 NKJV. One nineteenth-century author mournfully described his times in words similar to twenty-first century conditions, 'Man is busy today blocking up his windows to keep out the light. Almost every day we hear of some fresh piece of infidelity in religious high quarters. Man will eventually shut out the light of revelation, and the light of law, and even the light of nature, and nothing will be left but the darkness of apostasy'.¹ Elisha ministered in a similar time of declension, yet he repeatedly demonstrated God's power. The darker things become, the greater the contrasting light of the Lord's glory shines.

Faith in difficult times

Elijah and Elisha served the Lord amidst great Israelite apostasy. Wicked King Ahab promoted the cult of the Sidonian storm-god Baal and his consort Ashtoreth, 1 Kgs. 16-18. In the law, the Almighty forewarned the disciplinary measures that such unfaithfulness would produce. Disasters like famine, warfare, and infertility – of the crops, animals, and people – would ensue, Lev. 26. 14-41; Deut. 28. 15-68. Both Elijah and Elisha performed miracles that counteracted many of these negative consequences – bringing famine-relieving rain, 1 Kgs. 18, healing waters, 2 Kgs. 2. 19-22; multiplying food, 1 Kgs. 17. 8-16; 2 Kgs. 4. 1-7; and raising the dead, 1 Kgs. 17. 17-24; 2 Kgs. 4. 32-37. The last sign displays the Lord's compassionate power on behalf of His prophet and a faithful family.

On the hill of Moreh's southern slope lay Shunem, midway between Mount Carmel and Abel-meholah, Elisha's ancestral home. It was a convenient resting place on the prophet's two-day route between visiting family and his regular spiritual labours. Second Kings chapter 4 verse 8's

'one day' indicates in Hebrew a close connection with the previous story of the miraculous multiplication of oil for the widow and her sons.² That sign showed the Lord's faithfulness in supplying the needs of His deceased servant's impoverished spouse and progeny. Similarly, the next story shows His provision for His prophet, as well as highlighting His care for the Shunammite who faithfully supported Elisha.

She is described as a 'notable woman', v. 8 – probably indicating that she was 'prominent' or 'wealthy'.³ Besides her high societal station, she was a spiritual and discerning wife. That she promoted real godliness may be seen by her hospitality towards Elisha. She went further by urging her husband to add a permanent guestroom for the itinerant prophet. This was particularly important in the ancient world, for inns were infrequent and varied greatly in quality.

The room was furnished with simplicity, yet also with practicality and comfort. It was not ostentatiously adorned with every luxury, demonstrating her

understanding of Elisha's needs. BELLETT observes, 'These are the sympathies in the spirit between the children of God. She could receive a prophet in the name of a prophet, according to the tastes of a prophet'.⁴ The Lord Jesus later explained that such hospitable support would be unfailingly rewarded, Matt. 10. 40-42.

Her discernment of the truth is revealed by her suggestion to her husband, 'Look now, I know that this is a holy man of God, who passes by us regularly', v. 9. 'Man of God' was a common designation for the Lord's prophets, 1 Kgs. 12. 22; 13. 1; 2 Kgs. 1. 9-13, but her adding 'holy' emphasizes that the Shunammite perceived his faithfulness to the true and living God. In that era of the Baal-and-Ashtoreth-prosperity-gospel, religious charlatans sought to lead disciples after their perverse doctrines. Today, things are no different, Acts 20. 29, 30, as HAVNER says, 'The modern variety of religious go-getter may dazzle us with brilliance and efficiency, but he does not make us think first either of holiness or God. We are weary of the success and happiness school. We need holy men of God who are in touch with Headquarters, who remind us of another world than this'.⁵ Another adds, 'Perhaps his conversation, and doubtless the entire behaviour of the prophet causes her to acknowledge his character. She does not judge by her first impression, but waits for outward evidences to enlighten her. She has the sober good sense of faith'.⁶

He comes to make his blessings flow

Elisha wanted to recompense the Shunammite for her kindness, offering to intercede for her with the authorities. Her statement, 'Among my people I am living', NETmg, indicates her satisfaction with her stable living situation. But there was still something missing. Gehazi explains that they did not have a child, and her husband was elderly. Consequently, Elisha called the woman and prophesied of the birth of her son the next year, v. 16. At first, this seemed too good to be true to the incredulous woman. Yet,

earlier scriptures show that God did this for other infertile women such as Sarah, Rebekah, Manoa's wife, and Hannah. He would miraculously bless her with a son, but also glorify Himself by working through this child in his subsequent life.

After some time elapsed, tragedy befell the family. The boy suddenly fell ill and died – probably succumbing to sunstroke. In her extremity, his mother did not abandon her faith; instead, she continued to seek God's help by looking towards His prophet. Although she respected her husband's authority and told him that she was going to see Elisha, apparently she did not disclose their son's death. She only told him 'It is well', v. 23 – literally, 'shalom', meaning 'peace'.⁷ In any case, he did not appear to be as attuned to spiritual things as his wife, and so did not comprehend the reason for her journey. The Bible does not explain why she shut him in the prophet's chamber, but it may be that she was circumventing cultural demands to bury the child immediately.

For her part, the Shunammite rapidly fled to the man of God desperately seeking deliverance. 'Did I ask a son of my lord? Did I not say, "Do not deceive me"?' v. 28, piteously asked the woman. Her words indirectly questioned God's methodology, yet her presence there demonstrated her ongoing faith in Him. The Almighty was not toying with her; rather He wanted to bless her by revealing His resurrecting power. Actually, He was preparing her for far greater blessing.

Far as the curse is found

Because the Lord had not revealed it, Elisha was initially unaware of the Shunammite's problem, v. 27. Nonetheless, as a true spiritual shepherd, upon discovering the boy's death, the prophet took steps to resuscitate him. His instructions to his servant display the haste required in such a serious situation and resemble Christ's later instructions to His disciples on their proclamation of the kingdom to Israel, Luke 10. 4. Firstly, he sent

his staff with Gehazi, the symbol of the authority of his prophetic office, v. 31. But death's strong bands were not going to be broken by proxy. The servant returned with the message that the staff had not effected any change in the boy. Accordingly, Elisha and the Shunammite returned to her home for more direct service.

The prophet entered the room that had so often been a place of rest for him. Its simple furnishings testified to the Lord's faithful provision and the Shunammite's believing kindness toward His seer. God had certainly not forgotten the faith of this woman; thus, it would be the scene of a tremendous restoration to life. Initially, Elisha prayed fervently, but the Lord made him wait before divine power was exercised. Oftentimes we pray for things and wonder why we do not receive immediate action. No doubt the Lord has numerous reasons for this, but in part it develops patience and dependence on the part of the petitioner. His own mentor, Elijah, sent his servant seven times before the coming of rain was manifested, 1 Kgs. 18. 41-46. After supplicating the Almighty, Elisha fully identified with the boy by matching his physical position in every respect.⁸ After this identification 'the child became warm', v. 34, and Elisha restored him to his mother.

The weight of history

Second Kings chapter 8 offers the sequel to this incident. Years later, the Lord used Elisha to warn her to leave the land in view of a coming famine; consequently, she dwelt in the land of the Philistines for seven years. Afterwards, she went to the king to appeal for the restoration of her property. Providentially, Gehazi was there recounting some of his master's miracles. At just the time when he was describing the restoration of the Shunammite's son, she came to plead for her property. Having heard this amazing story of resurrection, the monarch appointed an officer to grant her request, vv. 5, 6.

Centuries later, the Lord Jesus came at just the right time to Nain, which was near to Shunem. There He

encountered a grieving widow with the pallet of her deceased only son. FLANIGAN comments, 'It is a story of sorrow and of tears, of compassion and pity, of wonder and of power. The desolation and anguish and awful loneliness created by sin and death are eclipsed at the gate of Nain by the glory of the Saviour. God Himself, incarnate, was indeed visiting His people'.⁹ The Lord told her not to weep – and in language similar to Elisha's 'take up your son' – Christ told the young man to arise; thus restoring him to his mother, Luke 7. 14, 15. Clearly, the Lord delights to repair families and provide for those who are suffering.

In these dark days, the unchanging God continues to reveal Himself as 'the resurrection and the life', John 11. 25. He graciously saves those who trust in Him, because He is 'the way, the truth, and the life', 14. 6. Even if people reject this testimony, He remains the same holy, good, and merciful Saviour. What is more, He never deserts His own, and faithfully meets their needs, Heb. 13. 5, 6.

Endnotes

- 1 C. A. COATES, *An Outline of the Book of Exodus*, Purnell & Sons, n. d., pg. 43.
- 2 J. RAWSON LUMBY, *The Second Book of the Kings*, Cambridge University Press, 1891, pg. 35.
- 3 Compare JND and NASB.
- 4 J. G. BELLETT, *Short Meditations on Elisha*, Galaxie Software, 2004, 20.
- 5 VANCE HAVNER; accessed here: <http://vancehavner.com/devotion-of-the-day-297/>
- 6 H. L. ROSSIER, *Meditations on the Second Book of Kings*, Believer's Bookshelf, accessed here: <https://www.stempublishing.com/authors/rossier/2KINGS.html#a04b>
- 7 Both Elisha and she use the same word to indicate well-being in verse 26.
- 8 GOODING explains, 'being a prophet is not merely that you have the authority [as seen in the staff]; it is sharing your very life . . . I need men who have come alongside me and warmed me with their own vital life in Christ'. DAVID W. GOODING, *Apostasy and Revival: Ten Studies on Major Themes in 1-2 Kings*, Myrtlefield, 2018, pg. 58. Brackets mine.
- 9 JIM FLANIGAN, *Day by Day: Moments with the Master*, PSP, 1994, pg. 127. He adds, 'Death must yield before the divine command . . . a foreshadowing of that day when death, now annulled, will finally be destroyed and all tears shall be wiped away'. *Ibid.*

Towns and cities in the life of the Lord

Part 10

BETHSAIDA

– light bringing responsibility

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

Bethsaida joins Jerusalem and Capernaum among the New Testament's most prominent cities. Rather than its size or location, it was significant because of the Lord Jesus' momentous ministry in and around it. At least three of the twelve disciples – Peter, Andrew, and Philip – came from the city, John 1. 44, and it was singled out for special censure for its resistance to the extraordinary evidence presented by the Messiah's sign-miracles, Matt. 11. 20-24. The scriptures record Bethsaida as an especially favoured place for messianic evidence, as well as a solemn warning for neglecting divinely-revealed light.

A tale of two Bethsidas

The exact location of Bethsaida is disputed. In fact, scholars debate whether there are two different towns of that name or merely one.¹ Among the Sea of Galilee's professional anglers the possibility of more than one community called 'house of fishermen' would not be unlikely. But only one city has unambiguous mention in the extrabiblical literature – Bethsaida Julias.² Those who contend for two cities argue that 'Bethsaida of Galilee', John 12. 21, was on the west side of the Jordan³ river; whereas, 'Bethsaida Julias' was on the east side of the Jordan. While interesting, whether or not there are one or two cities does not affect any doctrinal or factual point in the Bible.

Proclamation and persuasion

Several key miracles in the Lord Jesus' ministry occurred at Bethsaida. One reads of it in connection with the discipleship call of Andrew, Simon Peter, and Philip. The first of these men was previously a disciple of John the Baptist, John 1. 37, 40, but followed Christ at the prophet's identification, 'Behold the Lamb of God', v. 36. As they followed Him, He dialogued with them, asking them what they were looking for. This is a fundamental question for all human beings. Happily, these two men

wanted to spend time with the Lord in His domicile. To desire communion with the Lord is the highest aspiration of human existence. He welcomed them, saying, 'Come and see', v. 39. Andrew then invited his brother Simon – soon to be nicknamed 'Peter' – to meet Jesus. CARSON observes, 'He thus became the first in a long line of successors who have discovered that the most common and effective Christian testimony is the private witness of friend to friend, brother to brother'.⁴

On the next day, Christ sought out and called Philip – a man who became a habitual witness for Him.⁵ This Bethsaida citizen sought out his friend Nathanael, and bade him 'Come and see' – using the same words that the Lord used earlier.⁶ Sincere seekers find that 'the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost', Luke 19. 10 NKJV. In conversation with Nathanael, the Lord revealed His messianic omniscience, commenting on the guileless Israelite's past, present, and future, John 1. 47-51. This led the seeker to believably confess, 'Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel', v. 49 NKJV.

Provision and protection

The feeding of the 5,000 and a

difficult journey on the sea of Galilee are two notable incidents that occurred around Bethsaida; collectively, they respectively demonstrate the Lord's provision and protection of His people. One author maintains, "These two miracles form one parable. The Bread of Life by His death brings hungry souls who receive Him into eternal blessing. As High Priest, He intercedes for His own, soon to come to where they are amid the storm scenes of this world, and take them to be forever with Himself".⁷

The feeding miracle is contrasted with Herod's sordid birthday banquet – a party that included a dissipated dance and John the Baptist's subsequent murder, Mark 6. 14-29.⁸ Rather than be unwitting spectators to debauchery and cruelty, the people who sat down on the grass were privileged to feast on the Bread of Life's perfect provision, Mark 6. 42. The former brought its guests into soul-corroding darkness; the latter meal produced soul-satisfying fellowship. Our Lord's miraculous feeding revealed His care for the hungry multitudes. By contrast, Herod showed his unbridled lust and overweening ego, which led to a self-snaring oath to murder God's faithful prophet. God's king was compassionate; Rome's vassal-monarch was cowardly and cruel.

After feeding the 5,000, the Lord sent the disciples to Bethsaida by ship. He remained behind to dismiss the crowds, showing how He does things decently and in order. As the disciples toiled in rowing, Christ prayed on a nearby mountain, vv. 45-47. This is a lovely picture of our High Priest's faithful intercession from on high on behalf of His people, Heb. 7. 25. He saw them labouring against the opposing winds and approached them in the night's darkest hour, Mark 6. 48. He came to them in their dire need, but they fearfully mistook Him for a spirit. He calmed their fears by calling out, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid", v. 50 ESV. He came to them, 'and the wind ceased', 51. Their terror was displaced by wonder – yet they still did not fully comprehend His power at that time, vv. 51, 52.

Our Saviour has not changed. When we face grave difficulties during

life's storms, He comforts us through His word, His people, and His providential protection. Some day He will come to take His people home to the Father's house; then storms and adversity will forever be passed.

“Through waves, through clouds and storms,
God gently clears the way;
We wait His time; so shall the night
Soon end in blissful day.”⁹

Progressive revelation

Bethsaida's next notable incident is recorded in Mark chapter 8 verses 22 to 26, which gives the account of our Lord's only recorded two-stage miracle: the healing of a blind man who initially saw 'men as trees, walking', v. 24, and, after further ministration, saw them clearly, v. 25. Interestingly, the Holy Spirit places this miracle in a section of the Gospel that details the disciples' unbelief and misunderstanding. Just before this healing, they misinterpreted the Lord's warning against 'the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod', v. 15. After the miracle, Christ revealed Himself further, leading to Peter's confession of His messiahship at Caesarea Philippi, v. 29. The blind man's progressive healing mirrored the growing spiritual insight of the twelve under the Lord's revealing ministry.

Promised judgement

The last aspect of Bethsaida's biblical importance relates to the



final judgement. Matthew chapter 11 introduces our Lord's evaluation, 'Then He began to rebuke the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done, because they did not repent: "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you"', vv. 20-22 NKJV. They were eyewitnesses to astonishing sign-miracles; nevertheless, they obdurately rejected the Saviour's person and teaching. SPURGEON explained this grievous sin's gravity, 'Hearing and rejecting the gospel is the crowning sin of all. Whatever else men are guilty of, if they have not rejected Christ, they have not yet reached the summit of iniquity'.¹⁰ Clearly, to see the Lord miraculously feed the masses, still storms, heal the blind, and transform lives was massively evidential. To neglect these works and ignore the Lord's incomparable teaching and impeccable life was a transgression of the most serious type. Men may regard gross immorality and violence as worse, but God clearly judges iniquity differently. Unbelief in the clear sunshine of Christ's light is evil of the most serious stripe. Bethsaida was favoured with great revelation, but light neglected and rejected brings a greater degree of punishment.

If Bethsaida and some of its neighbours were singled out for severe reprimand, what should we say regarding countries like the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States? Wycliffe, Tyndale, Whitefield, the Wesleys, Darby, Moody, and others will rise up in judgement against the many people who have easy access to the Bible and the preaching of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ yet neglect it. Bethsaida is a solemn reminder that light cannot be trifled with. As the Lord Jesus Himself warned, "'While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.'" These things Jesus spoke, and departed, and was hidden from them', John 12. 36 NKJV.

Endnotes

- 1 For an excellent summary of the archaeological and extrabiblical issues, see GORDON FRANZ, 'Text and Tell - The Excavations At Bethsaida', 4 February 2009 on the website Life And Land; here: <https://www.lifeandland.org/2009/02/text-and-tell-the-excavations-at-bethsaida/>. In personal conversation, brother FRANZ referred to Bethsaida of Galilee as 'Jewish Bethsaida'; whereas he contends that Julias was 'the Roman Bethsaida'. On the archaeology, consider also this quotation, 'Bethsaida is assumed to be the city (or village) at et-Tell or Khirbet el-'Araj. Because of Mark 6. 45, compared with v. 53, a second Bethsaida has been assumed. But *πρός* [pros] in v. 45 suggests only the direction (as opposed to *εἰς* [eis] in 8. 22); besides, "cross over" does not necessarily mean a trip to the other shore; according to JOSEPHUS (JOSEPHUS Vita 59), one crosses over from Tiberias to Tarichea'. A. FUCHS, in HORST ROBERT BALZ and GERHARD SCHNEIDER, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 1, Eerdmans, 1990, pg. 215. Brackets mine.
- 2 'When Philip, also, had built Paneas, a city, at the fountains of Jordan, he named it Cesarea. He also advanced the village Bethsaida, situated at the lake of Gennesareth, unto the dignity of a city, both by the number of inhabitants it contained, and its other grandeur, and called it by the name of Julias, the same name with Caesar's daughter'. FLAVIUS JOSEPHUS, 'Ant. 18. 28', *Works of Josephus*, Hendrickson, 1987, pg. 478.
- 3 Some aver that it is modern El Mesydiah. For a summary of the 'two city' view, see WILLIAM HENDRIKSEN, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, Vol. 1, Baker, 1953, pp. 216-218. For a general overview see R. H. MOUNCE, 'Bethsaida', *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. 1, Eerdmans, 1979, pg. 475.
- 4 D. A. CARSON, *The Gospel according to John*, IVP, 1991, pg. 155.
- 5 For example, Philip and Andrew bringing Greeks to Christ, John 12. 20-22.
- 6 One scholar noted, 'It is throughout the chapter of the *Eurekas*'. R. C. TRENCH, *Studies in the Gospels*, Macmillan, 1867, pg. 67. 'Eureka' is Greek for 'I have found it / him'. Quotation sent to me by MALCOLM HORLOCK.
- 7 E. L. H. OGDEN, *Day by Day through the New Testament*, PSP, 1979, pg. 58.
- 8 On Mark 6. 32: 'The reason why Jesus, together with his disciples, crossed the sea is told in Mark 6. 30-32 and Matt. 14. 12, 13: the disciples had just returned from a missionary tour, and needed rest and an opportunity to be alone with Jesus. On the busy, western shores - especially, in Capernaum - there was no opportunity for leisure. Then also, the shocking intelligence of the Baptist's cruel death had just reached Jesus. This, too, required reflection and quiet meditation'. HENDRIKSEN, pp. 217, 218.
- 9 PAUL GERHARDT, *Hymns For The Little Flock*, #55.
- 10 C. H. SPURGEON, 'Exposition of Luke 10. 1-22', *Metropolitan Tabernacle*, Vol. 39, Passmore and Alabaster, 1893, pg. 372.

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**'Let a bear robbed of her whelps meet a man, rather than a fool in his folly',
Prov. 17. 12**

The bear is a formidable beast, known for its strength and power. They are omnivorous and feed on a variety of foods, including berries, plant roots and shoots, small mammals, fish, and carrion. They often store food by burying it in shallow holes.

In biblical times they would have lived mainly in the forested areas of the country, their natural colouring giving them the ability to seemingly appear from nowhere and surprise their prey. When living in close proximity to humans, they are often regarded as pests. Being omnivores, they are attracted to human foods, and their large size and relatively aggressive temperament is unsettling to those who come into contact with them.

Imagine the impact of a bear when deprived of its young! Hushai uses the figure to illustrate David and his men – 'chafed in their minds', 2 Sam. 17. 8. They would be embittered and exasperated, smarting at the situation created by Absalom's rebellion. Any attack upon them would be met with the same ferocity as the bear exhibits in its mourning for its young. This is something for which the bear is known – an angry bear should be avoided at all costs!

What, then, of the fool in his folly? Why should he be considered more dangerous? The context suggests some of the traits of the fool that are to be noted and avoided. Most noticeably, the fool is impervious to correction, Prov. 17. 10. He assumes he is never wrong. Whilst the wise man is sensitive to the slightest reproach, the fool remains unmoved, even by the severest of punishments. He ploughs on in his chosen folly, ignoring any advice and counsel from others. Whilst he brims with confidence, he is empty of sense and reason. Those dragged along with him put themselves at severest risk.

The warning is sounded. Take great care what company you keep, 1 Cor. 5. 11; 2 Thess. 3. 14.

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