

# PreciousSeed

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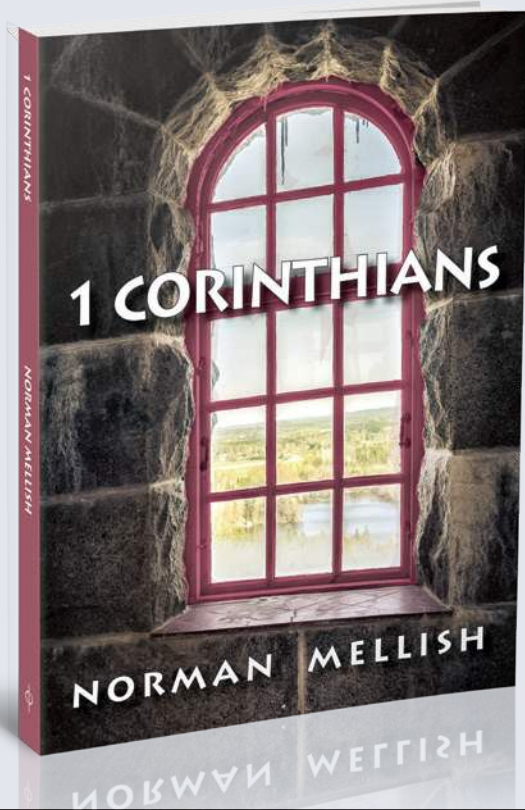


'The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb', Isa. 11. 6

PS  
Magazine



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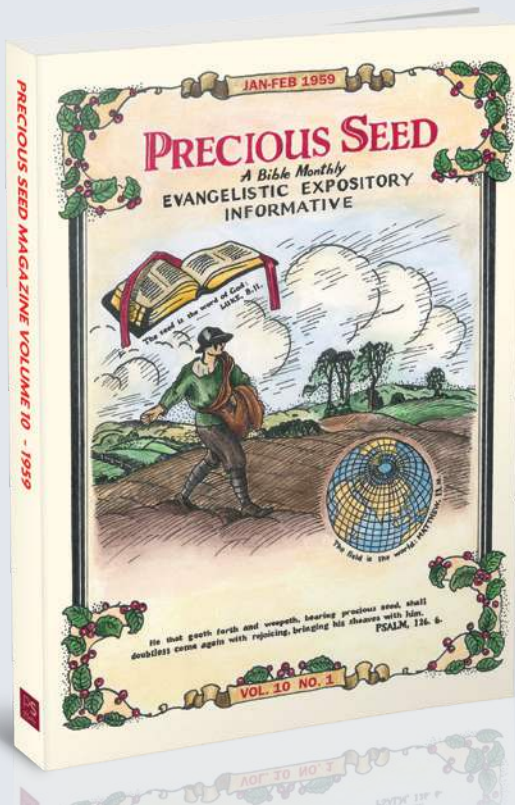
This Epistle was written for the purpose of encouraging the Corinthian assembly to move carefully in their service for the Lord, and also for the generations that have followed to know what the Lord desires as we worship and minister to Him. The primary role of the assembly, like the tabernacle of old, is not for us to evangelize the world. It is that there might be a place where the will of God is carried out, and from which worship might ascend to God.

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**Volume 10 in our reprint of archive material covers the year 1959.**

As with previous volumes in this series, there is the same mix of articles. There is something for younger believers. There is a continuation of J. H. LARGE's series entitled *When thy Son asketh thee*, which became a Precious Seed booklet. The various studies in John's Gospel, started in the previous volume continue here, as well as A. G. CLARKE's series *Concise Notes on the Levitical Offerings*.

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## ‘What doest thou here, Elijah’, 1 Kgs. 19. 9

When God asks a question, often His purpose is to get the individual to think about the answer for themselves. Whilst God knows the answer, He wants us to reflect, perhaps even to do a spiritual ‘stock-take’, assessing what we do for the Lord and why we do it. Such was the case here with Elijah. He was not in ‘a good place’ physically, emotionally, or mentally. Despite the cry of the people on Carmel, 18. 39, Elijah saw that things had not really changed, for Jezebel had now merely redoubled her efforts to exterminate the prophets of God, and particularly him, 19. 2, 3. He felt that he was no ‘better than . . . [his] fathers’, v. 4. Rather than consult the God whom he had proved at Cherith, Zarephath, and Carmel, Elijah chose to flee. However, in wondrous grace, God came to Elijah to speak with him and to encourage him. Perhaps there is a glimpse here of the work of the Holy Spirit as Elijah is brought to appreciate the truth of his situation, as distinct from his perception of it.

For many of us, 2024 was a difficult year. Some of the developments

we had hoped for, and worked for, have not materialized quite as we had hoped. However, may we take courage from Elijah’s situation. We do not always see ‘the big picture’. We do not see all that God is doing.

In the work of Precious Seed, we have been encouraged by the growing overseas interest in the magazine articles and books. Indeed, over 55% of our magazines go abroad to support the Lord’s servants and people. We have agreements to translate our materials into nine languages and we are seeing some of that teaching printed and distributed in India and elsewhere. The major challenge is that our funding comes largely from the Lord’s people in the UK, and the spiritual decline in the homeland is beginning to impact upon what we can do. Our financial reserves have dwindled significantly, and we face some hard decisions ahead as we try and steer the work forward until the Lord comes. However, be assured that we will make every effort to maintain our core work of the magazine and books as long as we can.

Some of you may have noticed that two of our trustees have also left us, Stuart Scammell and Stephen Baker. Whilst Stuart had not served with us as long as Stephen, he brought a helpful perspective and contribution to the Trust. We are thankful that he will continue to contribute, albeit not as a trustee. Stephen Baker has served with us for twenty years. In that time, he has written articles and contributed to our books, written answers for our Q&A page, edited the Reports section (now discontinued), as well as editing the YPS magazine since November 2009. We wish them both well in what the Lord has called them to do, and we register our thanks and acknowledge that they will be missed.

As we all get older, we recognize the need to recruit new trustees, and we welcome Graeme Andrews and Robert Davies. Please pray for the work, those who give so much of their time to maintain it, and for its continuing value spiritually.

**John Bennett**

Chairman and General Editor

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### PULL-OUT

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# Recording time and days in scripture

By **JEFF BROWN** Nantgarw, Wales

## Introduction

As we live our fast-moving, instant communication, 21st-Century lives, I wonder if we have ever stopped and considered how we are affected by the different divisions of time – days, weeks, months, seasons, and years. Why are there twenty-four hours in a day, twelve months in a year, and 365 days in a normal year? Not only our everyday lives, but scripture also is based on the same time divisions, for when God created the sun and the moon it was for the benefit of His creation to know His appointed times, and also the division of days and years as He originally set it to be!

## Days, months, seasons, years

All these time divisions have a plausible scientific explanation, being governed and controlled by astronomical and terrestrial constants. The twenty-four-hour day is based on the time it takes the Earth to make one rotation on its axis. The month is based on intervals between new moons, i.e., the length of time it takes the moon to orbit the Earth. The seasons are governed by the changing positions of the Earth in relation to the sun (equinoxes, solstices). The year is the time the Earth takes to make one revolution of the sun, which is approximately 365 days and six hours. This explains why every four years we must add a day, February 29th, in a leap year; it also accounts for the Spring and Autumn equinoxes falling on slightly different days each year. Although all of these time-markers can be scientifically explained, yet the factors that they all rely on were created by God for just that purpose! But what about the week? Where does the origin of that come from?

## The week

Throughout the Earth, the seven-day week is almost universally accepted and observed without much thought – yet really it is a living testimony to the fact of creation! All the human time-markers that we have just considered – the day, the month, the seasons and the year – can be explained concerning the Earth's relation to the

sun and the moon. Yet the week has no astronomical basis at all! It can only be accounted for in relation to its establishment at creation and has been engrained in human order ever since! We notice that God's creative work, Gen. 1. 1 – 2. 3, fits within the timescale of seven days. The number seven is significant in scripture as it refers to rest and completion. So, the seven-day cycle (one week) should be a reminder to us of God's perfect, completed work in creation, but also as a template for work and rest in the human cycle, Exod. 20. 8-11; 31. 17.

## The day in scripture – is it twenty-four hours?

A good basic rule when studying God's word is that if scripture can be taken literally in its context and when compared with similar passages, then it should be taken literally! The comparing of scripture with scripture is essential. God's word seeks to make His mind and will known to mankind, and because of this we should accept what is written at face value with its ordinary literal meaning, unless there are clear reasons otherwise. It has been suggested by some that a day in scripture could be any length of time, often quoting the 'Day of the Lord', and also the summary, Gen. 2. 4. Again, we often refer to the day of grace, which has continued for the last 2,000 years! It must be admitted that the word 'day' in scripture sometimes can indicate an extended period of time. However, we should

also note that whenever the word day is connected to a number, e.g., seventh day, third day, etc., then the context always demands it to be taken literally – meaning one day of twenty-four hours duration!<sup>1</sup>

## The 'days' of creation, Gen. 1. 1 - 2. 4

It might be good to ask the question: 'Is a day in Genesis chapter 1 a period of twenty-four hours as we understand a day to be?' Some have suggested it to be a long period of time, perhaps thousands or even millions of years, so that geological time scales can be accounted for. Yet, if we accept this argument, then by the seventh day Adam would be one 'day' old; we would then have to accept that Adam would be thousands (or even millions) of years old by the seventh day when God rested, Gen. 2. 2. However, Genesis chapter 5 verse 5 clearly states that Adam was 930 years old when he died!

The present writer believes that each day of creation in Genesis chapter 1 was of a twenty-four-hour period; this was the simple way in which a day was measured before calendars and clocks. God distinguished between light and darkness and between morning and evening to show structure and completion of one day. Genesis chapter 1 verse 14 talks of 'seasons . . . days, and years', yet, if the days were not actual twenty-four-hour time periods, then confusion exists regarding seasons and years! In Exodus chapter 20 verse 11, we read, 'for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day'. This verse speaks of Israel's Sabbath, a day of a normal week to follow six normal days before it. To be consistent we must accept that Israel's Sabbath was a normal twenty-four-hour day, but **also** be consistent to **all** the verse and accept that the days of creation were normal twenty-four-hour periods of time.

## The 'days' of scripture

In our 21st-Century language, we can also, like scripture, refer to a day in different ways. When we talk of, say, yesterday or Tuesday, for example, we are obviously referring



to a twenty-four-hour period of time. However, we can also refer to a day as a protracted period of time; we might, for example, be comparing aspects of today's generation to what it was like 'in my day'. So with scripture; whether a day is a twenty-four-hour period of time or a much longer time period will depend on the context. We have already discussed the use of the word day to convey twenty-four-hour periods in the days of creation; we will now examine three instances where the use of the word 'day' demands a protracted period of time in every instance! We shall look very briefly at the 'Day of the Lord', the 'Day of Christ', and the 'Day of God'.

### The Day of the Lord

This expression occurs mainly in the prophetic section of the Old Testament.<sup>2</sup> It has to do with God's dealings and intervention with Israel and world affairs (the nations). This period commences after the church has been caught up at the rapture, so it has nothing to do with the church. It involves mainly judgement, wrath and destruction and their effect on

humanity on Earth! It begins at the commencement of the seven-year tribulation period and continues on to the end of the present Earth's history (as we know it) with the consummating judgement that ushers in the new Earth, 2 Pet. 3. 10-13; Rev. 20. 7 – 21. 1.

Biblical descriptions of the Day of the Lord by the prophets have had their partial fulfilments and foreshadowing in Earth's history, but never a complete fulfilment! Peter, quoting Joel on the day of Pentecost, used careful language to indicate that what was taking place was a partial fulfilment of Joel's prophecy, Acts 2. 16, but he never indicated that it was a complete fulfilment. Again, Peter seems to indicate that the Day of the Lord begins unexpectedly after the rapture, 2 Pet. 3. 10, and continues to the end of the present Earth's history.<sup>3</sup>

### The Day of Christ ... of Jesus Christ ... of our Lord Jesus Christ ... of our Lord Jesus

Clearly the Day of Christ and the Day of the Lord are completely different.

The first is an expression unique to the New Testament while the second is mainly found in the Old Testament. The first is associated with comfort, joy, and anticipation, e.g., 1 Cor. 1. 8; 2 Cor. 1. 14, while the second is associated with wrath, darkness, and judgement on the Earth. The Day of Christ seems to parallel the 'coming' [Gr. *parousia*] of Christ for His people, yet the word used for 'coming' indicates both an arrival and the resultant presence of the one coming.<sup>4</sup> This would indicate, then, that the Day of Christ is also a protracted period of time, which would include the rapture and some events that will follow – including the Judgement Seat of Christ, 2 Cor. 5. 10, the marriage of the Lamb and the marriage supper of the Lamb, Rev. 19. 6-9.

The Day of Christ will be an experience unique to the believer. The work of God that commenced in the life of an individual believer at salvation will be brought to a perfect conclusion at the rapture, Phil. 1. 6. The anticipation of this should regulate our lives now, vv. 9, 10, and should also be a powerful incentive to us in view of that day of review at the judgement seat of Christ, 2. 16, 2 Cor. 5. 10.

### The Day of God

This expression is only found in 2 Peter chapter 3 verse 12. By studying the literal meaning of the verse, it would appear that when the Day of the Lord ends at the dissolution of the present heavens and Earth, then the Day of God begins with the establishment of the new heavens and new Earth, 'wherein dwelleth righteousness', v. 13. In this eternal state, the Day of God, righteousness will be a permanent, unchanging feature. Before that time, the Day of the Lord, righteousness will actively subdue any opposition to God's will.

#### Endnotes

- 1 The reader is encouraged to read: Gen. 8. 3 (150 days); Num. 13. 25 (forty days); Jonah 1. 17 (three days); and Acts 1. 3 (forty days).
- 2 Isa. 2. 12-19; 13. 6-11; Joel 1. 15; 2. 1-11, 31, 32; and Zech. 14. 1-11 being amongst the nineteen specific references to it.
- 3 See also: 1 Thess. 5. 1-3; 2 Thess. 2. 2, 'day of Christ', lit. 'day of the Lord'.
- 4 See: 1 Thess. 2. 19; 3. 13; 5. 23.



# Words at the Cross

## The word of compassion for His mother, John 19. 26

By **MERVYN WISHART** Newcastle, Northern Ireland

Part 4

### The crowd at the cross

As the Lord Jesus prayed alone in the garden of Gethsemane, a great multitude would soon arrive to arrest Him; and, thereafter until His death, He would be surrounded by crowds of people. Matthew records that a great multitude came with swords and staves, Matt. 26. 47. The next morning, when He stood before Pilate, Mark speaks of 'the multitude' crying aloud, 'Crucify him', Mark 15. 8, 14. On the road to Calvary, Luke records, 'There followed him a great company of people', Luke 23. 27.

At the scene of crucifixion, Luke speaks of a crowd at the cross, 'And all the crowds who had come together to that sight, having seen the things that took place, returned, beating [their] breasts', 23. 48 JND. Psalm 118 verse 12 prophesies, 'They compassed me about like bees'.

### The company of those who loved Him

In contrast to the many who thronged around, only a small number of those who loved Him stood by the cross. The first word of John chapter 19 verse 25, 'Now', introduces a different group to those previously mentioned in the chapter. It distinguishes the loyal group of His followers from the crowds of mockers who passed by, the malefactors who reviled Him, the priests who were jeering, and the soldiers in their callous indifference.

John mentions five people: four women and one man. A comparison between Matthew, Mark, and John's accounts identifies the four women.<sup>1</sup> The first mentioned by John is Mary, the mother of Jesus. Second, His mother's sister, Salome, the mother of Zebedee's children, James and John. Then Mary, the wife of Cleophas, the mother of James the less and Joses. And finally, Mary Magdalene. The

one man was John the apostle. Of the eleven remaining disciples, John was the only one who stood by the cross. He mentions himself last, and does not disclose his own name, nor his mother Salome's name.

Each of this group of five had a deep love for Christ. John would later write, 'We love him, because he first loved us', 1 John 4. 19. They thought nothing for their own safety. Their life was linked with the man on the centre cross. To be near Him in His hours of suffering meant everything to them. In verse 18, John wrote, 'There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear'. The soldiers were carrying out orders, doing their duty; but each of these five was there because of their devotion to Christ. 'Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it', S. of S. 8. 7.

### His word to Mary

Three of the seven sayings of the Lord Jesus from the cross were directed to God, Matt. 27. 46; Luke 23. 34, 46. Three times He spoke directly to individuals who were near the cross: the repentant malefactor (whom we considered in the previous article), Mary His mother, and John the apostle.

It is worth noting the four references to 'His mother', John 19. 25, 26, emphasizing the closest of all earthly relationships. Her heart must have been filled with immense sorrow as she witnessed her firstborn son nailed to a cross between two criminals. What a scene it was of shame, humiliation, and untold suffering!

At least five times in the New Testament we read of Mary experiencing trouble. As she stood at the cross, her mind might well have gone back to the day when the angel Gabriel visited her home in Nazareth

and announced to her that she was to have a son, Luke 1. 26-37. 'She was troubled at his saying', v. 29, and it was the precursor of more troubles to come.

Mary and Joseph had travelled a long journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, a distance of over sixty miles. The birth of the child was imminent, so what a disappointment it was when they arrived to find that there was **no room in the inn**. Mary did the best she could in the situation, 'and she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger', Luke 2. 7.

When the child was eight days old, He was circumcised, and then later taken by Mary and Joseph to the temple in Jerusalem to be presented to the Lord, Luke 2. 21, 22. Simeon, an elderly prophet, spoke directly to Mary, saying, 'a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also', v. 35. Simeon's prophecy was referring to the day when the Lord Jesus would suffer on the cross and bear the sword of divine justice, Zech. 13. 7. Mary would witness His suffering, and her soul would be pierced with the greatest sorrow of all.

Then there was the message received by Joseph in a dream, that, in order to destroy the young child, King Herod planned to slay all the children two years old and under. So, Joseph, Mary and the young child made the journey into Egypt and stayed there until the danger was past, Matt. 2. 13.

When He was twelve years old, Jesus accompanied Mary and Joseph to the temple, and on the journey home they discovered that He was not with them. They went back, and after three days they found Him sitting in the midst of the doctors, hearing them and asking them questions. Mary said, 'thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing', and He said, 'How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?' Luke 2. 48, 49.

Yet, in spite of the intensity of her sorrow at the cross, we do not read in any of the four Gospels one word of her complaining. Nor do we read of her fainting at the scene under the



unbearable burden of grief. She stood with great fortitude until the end.

Referring to John, the Lord said to Mary, 'Woman, behold thy son', John 19. 26. There is no hint of disrespect in the Lord addressing Mary as 'Woman'. Had He addressed her as 'Mother', it may have added to her sorrow. It is a mother's instinct to protect and provide for her children; but as she stood at the cross Mary must have felt helpless to do either. It also reminds us of the promise concerning the seed of the woman, '[her seed] shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel', Gen. 3. 15. While she could no longer care for Him, even in the agony of the cross He showed His care for her, and His provision for her future.

### The fifth commandment

The Lord Jesus was the only person who fully kept the written law of God, 'thy law is within my heart', Ps. 40. 8.<sup>2</sup> Even in the agony of the cross, He was mindful of the fifth commandment, 'Honour thy father and thy mother', Exod. 20. 12. As a child, He obeyed them, Luke 2. 51; as a man, He honoured them. The fifth commandment is not contingent on the parent being worthy of honour; it is an unqualified command.

He fulfilled the law in honouring His mother, and He bore the penalty for the law, which all others had broken. The law was given in the darkness at Sinai, Exod. 20. 21; the penalty for a broken law was paid in the darkness at Calvary, Matt. 27. 45. 'Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the

law, being made a curse for us', Gal. 3. 13.

### His word to John

John had fled from the garden of Gethsemane with the other disciples. But he returned, and is referred to briefly as the disciple in the palace, who was known to the high priest, characteristically not mentioning his own name, John 18. 15. Now he is standing near the cross, openly identified with the Lord Jesus, who did not rebuke him, but rather honoured him by committing to him the care of His mother, Mary. He said, 'Behold thy mother!' John obeyed, 'And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home', 19. 27. It seems that Mary's husband Joseph had already died. The last mention of him is when they were living in Nazareth, Luke 2. 51. His half-brothers were not yet believers, see John 7. 5.

Our God is the God of restoration, Ps. 23. 3, and not only did the Lord give John the high honour of His mother's care, He enabled him to write his Gospel, three Epistles and the book of Revelation. John was the only disciple who remained at the cross, and he was the first at the tomb after the resurrection.

Early on the first day of the week, when Mary Magdalene discovered that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance to the tomb, she ran to find two of the disciples, Simon Peter and John. They both ran to the tomb and John is mentioned as the 'disciple, which came first to the sepulchre', John 20. 8. Having seen

the empty tomb, 'the disciples went away again unto their own home', v. 10. What good news John was able to carry home that day, and what a balm of comfort for Mary!

### What does this saying reveal about God?

The compassion and care that the Lord Jesus showed towards His mother reveals the compassion in the heart of God. The compassion that He showed at His death had marked His whole life on earth. With the man who was a leper, 'Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean', Mark 1. 41. 'When he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd', Matt. 9. 36. Whether it was one person or a multitude, the compassion of Christ was towards all.

Our God is a God of compassion: 'The Lord is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy', Ps. 145. 8; cp. Lam. 3. 22, 23.

'How amazing God's compassion,  
That so vile a worm should prove  
This stupendous bliss of Heaven,  
This unmeasured wealth of love'.

MARY D. JAMES [1810-1883]

### What practical lesson can we learn from it?

We should endeavour to show to others the compassion that the Lord has shown to us. 'Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous', 1 Pet. 3. 8; cp. Eph. 4. 32.

The Lord rebuked the disciples for their unbelief and hardness of heart, Mark 16. 14. May He deliver us from being hard-hearted. Compassion is a scarce commodity in the world today. May the Lord enable us to be tender-hearted towards our fellow believers, and to those around us who need the Saviour.



### Endnotes

- 1 Matt. 27. 56; Mark 15. 40; John 19. 25.
- 2 See also, 'he will magnify the law, and make it honourable', Isa. 42. 21.

# 1 Peter 2

By **ANDREW DUTTON** Norwich, England

Growth is a concept that covers many aspects of life. Parents may recall the meticulous measurement and weighing of their newborn baby to monitor growth. Those involved in farming or gardening are interested in the optimum conditions for fruitful growth. The success of our world's economic and business systems is measured based on growth. 1 Peter chapter 2 is also concerned with growth, not physical, natural, or economic, but spiritual, Christian growth.

We can divide the chapter into two main sections:

1. Spiritual growth, vv. 1-10
2. The implications of spiritual growth, vv. 11-25

## 1. Spiritual growth, vv. 1-10

### Growth and lively stones, vv. 1-5

The opening of verse 1, 'Wherefore', looks back to chapter 1, 'Being born again . . . by the word of God', v. 23. It is the place of the word of God in the new birth that is emphasized. The Lord Jesus taught Nicodemus that 'except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God', John 3. 5. Water is referring to the word of God, cp. Eph. 5. 26.

In view of the new birth having taken place by the word of God, the same 'word' enables Christians to 'grow thereby', v. 2. The early practical lesson from the chapter is that the word of God is essential for Christian growth and, conversely, without it growth will be limited. How much priority do I give to the word of God?

But before dealing with growth, Peter presents five opponents to Christian growth. The exhortation is to '[lay] aside' these things, v. 1. The tense of the verb suggests a once-for-all act; to put off:

- 'All malice', v. 1 – VINE defines this as 'badness in quality; opposite of . . . excellence'.<sup>1</sup> Some suggest that malice is the root from which the other traits grow.
- 'All guile', v. 1 – KELLY defines this

as 'the reverse of . . . transparent truthfulness'.<sup>2</sup>

- 'Hypocrisies', v. 1 – this has the idea of playing a part, which can often be in a spiritual sense; it is both sobering and challenging that it is possible to portray an outward 'spiritual' life, whilst inwardly there is a distance from the Lord and His people.
- 'Envy', v. 1 – 'the feeling of displeasure' caused by the 'advantage . . . of others'.<sup>3</sup>
- 'All evil speakings', v. 1 – the idea of defaming character. Perhaps this is the outcome of the preceding sins. It is worth noting that Peter does not present some great moral sin, but 'all evil speakings', a problem damaging many assemblies of the Lord's people. May we heed the exhortation of James, 'Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be', Jas. 3. 10.

Peter introduces the Lord Jesus as 'a living stone', v. 4. The picture is a paradox, with two seemingly opposite descriptions for emphasis:

- Living – that which has life; here the context is spiritual life. The Lord Jesus is 'the life', John 14. 6; He is the giver of eternal life, John 10. 28
- Stone – that which is solid, firm, and dependable; it cannot be moved and is unchanging.

The Lord Jesus satisfies both descriptions and though 'rejected by men', v. 4 ESV, He was 'chosen of God, and precious', v. 4. 'Precious' is a key word through Peter's Epistles.<sup>4</sup> 'The stone which the builders refused is

become the head stone of the corner', Ps. 118. 22.

In verse 5, the idea of the Lord Jesus as 'a living stone', v. 4, is applied to believers, 'Ye also, as lively stones'. The concept of growth develops to encompass building, 'are built up a spiritual house'. Therefore, we as believers reflect what Christ is and are built upon Him. I take it that this is positional truth; it sets out what we are as Christians, even when we do not live up to it!

Before leaving verse 5, it is also important to note the expression, 'holy priesthood'. This is applied to every believer; none are excluded. The role is to 'offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ'. Much could be said about spiritual sacrifices, but I note three points:

- Paul exhorted the Romans to 'present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God', 12. 1. The context is that believers, together in one body, should fulfil their spiritual gift, to prove the 'will of God', v. 2.
- Paul also spoke of being 'offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith', Phil. 2. 17. This has the drink offering in view.
- Perhaps our most significant opportunity to offer spiritual sacrifices is in corporate remembrance of the Lord Jesus. Preparation is required by all believers in their worship of the Lord Jesus, expressed audibly by the males.

### Growth because of Christ, vv. 6-8

Peter returns to Christ as the stone, referencing Isaiah 28 verse 16. Six things are noted:

- God laid the stone
- It was laid in Zion
- Christ is the chief corner stone
- He is elect, chosen in the mind of God
- He is precious
- 'He that believeth on him shall not be confounded'.

One has translated verse 7 as, 'The preciousness of the stone is for you who believe'.<sup>5</sup> Christ is precious to the believer; the 'preciousness' is for us



to appreciate. May my appreciation of His preciousness grow! The opposite is true of 'them which be disobedient', v. 7. He is a 'stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence', v. 8.

### Growth in Christ, vv. 9, 10

In great contrast to the disobedient, Peter applies descriptions of the people of God from Exodus chapter 19 verses 5 and 6 to those that are in Christ. It is in these things that spiritual growth can be exercised:

- 'a chosen generation' or a 'chosen race', JND. This is now being in Christ, compared to previously being in Adam. The word 'generation' [*genos*] includes the idea of being begotten into a family,<sup>6</sup> a reminder of the new birth.
- 'a royal priesthood', bringing together holy and royal service, which was always separate for Israel. Through disobedience, the nation did not enjoy the privilege of experiencing God's desire for a kingdom of priests, Exod. 19. 6. As royal priests, it is our privilege to serve both God, with 'spiritual sacrifices', v. 5, and the house of God, in meeting the needs of saints.
- 'a holy nation' is a people separated to God. The Old Testament priests were separated from the people for their service to God. This 'holy nation' crosses continents and cultures and brings together the people of God, set apart from the world for Him.
- 'a peculiar people', or 'a people for a possession', JND. This includes the idea of purchase and, as such, redemption is in view. Because of the great redemption price paid, we are a people that belong to Christ.

These privileges are ours as believers in the Lord Jesus. May we enjoy the fullness of these blessings practically, and grow in them. Verse 10 reminds us that we 'have obtained mercy', something that we could never enjoy before salvation.

### 2. The implications of spiritual growth, vv. 11-25

Peter now turns to exhortations in view of what we are.

### Strangers and pilgrims, vv. 11, 12

The apostle's address to 'strangers and pilgrims', v. 11, is significant. *Paroikos* is the word translated 'strangers' and 'foreigners' in other references, also 'sojourner' in the Revised Version. VINE defines the word as 'dwelling beside' and 'to dwell in a place as a . . . stranger'.<sup>7</sup> The emphasis is on place. As 'pilgrims', there is a focus on the people, as NICHOLSON notes, 'a temporary resident who does not belong to the area'.<sup>8</sup> As believers living in the world, we are strangers who do not belong to the people around us. In view of this, Peter's exhortation is to live separated lives, calling us to:

- 'abstain from fleshly lusts', v. 11. Discipline is required to deal with all inward desires of the flesh, contrary to the will of God. Whilst fleshly lusts can include sins of an immoral nature, Peter has a far wider application in view, to include any selfish, or self-promoting ambition.
- have honest 'conversation' [manner of life], v. 12. *Kalos* is translated 'honest' and VINE includes 'good, admirable, becoming . . . fair, right, honourable',<sup>9</sup> in the definition. There is to be a beauty to our manner of life.

### Citizens, vv. 13-17

Moving from the type of life to live, Peter now deals with the relationship of the believer to this foreign place. This section deals with many aspects of authority and government across society and the believer is called to 'Submit', v. 13. This is 'for the Lord's sake', v. 13, and 'is the will of God', v. 15. Whatever the governmental system, ruler, or power in place, these are 'ordained of God', Rom. 13. 1, regardless of how good or bad we deem them to be. We are called to submit, unless our submission compromises our obedience to God, when we are to 'obey God rather than men', Acts 5. 29.

As citizens, we are also called to 'Honour all men', v. 17, recognizing the extent of God's love for the world, John 3. 16. Our attitude to all people should reflect God's *agape* love, even when faced with opposition.

### Servants, vv. 18-25

The theme of submission continues as Peter deals with servants. Just as citizens are to submit to government, regardless of the quality of rule, so the servant is to be subject to their master, when they are 'good and gentle', v. 18, but also 'froward', which has the idea of a 'contrast to . . . good'.<sup>10</sup> Unjust suffering may result from this attitude, but in taking 'it patiently, this is acceptable with God', v. 20. As believers, we are called to suffer, that we 'should follow his [Christ's] steps', v. 21.

The chapter closes by lifting the Christian from the temporary sufferings of life to the Lord Jesus. Peter outlines the perfections of Christ, yet He suffered more than any has suffered, and will ever suffer. Notice what the Lord Jesus did not do:

- He 'did no sin', v. 22, and, as the perfect Son of God, He could not sin.
- He did not respond 'when he was reviled', v. 23; He 'openeth not his mouth', Isa. 53. 7.
- He 'threatened not' when 'he suffered', v. 23; there was no retaliation.

The Lord Jesus is a perfect example of how to respond to suffering. He 'committed himself to him that judgeth righteously', v. 23. 'He passed the whole matter over to the righteous Judge, refusing to take any action in self-defence'.<sup>11</sup> May we, with the Lord's help, do the same.

#### Endnotes

- 1 W. E. VINE, *Vine's Complete Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, Nelson, pg. 388.
- 2 WILLIAM KELLY, *The Epistles of Peter*, Chapter Two, pg. 117.
- 3 J. B. NICHOLSON, *What the Bible Teaches, 1 Peter*, John Ritchie Ltd., pg. 63, quoting W. E. VINE.
- 4 'Precious' is used in Peter's Epistles: 'precious trials', 1 Pet. 1. 7; 'precious blood', vv. 18, 19; 'He [Christ] is precious', 2. 7; 'precious faith', 2 Pet. 1. 1; 'precious promises', v. 4.
- 5 J. B. NICHOLSON, *op. cit.*, pg. 69.
- 6 W. E. VINE, *op. cit.*, pp. 342, 343.
- 7 *Ibid*, pg. 583.
- 8 J. B. NICHOLSON, *op. cit.*, pg. 38.
- 9 W. E. VINE, *op. cit.*, pg. 309.
- 10 *Ibid*, pg. 138.
- 11 J. B. NICHOLSON, *op. cit.*, pg. 82.

# THE TEACHING IN THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS

## Part 7 – Change in the midst of decay

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

### For the inset

‘It’s obsolete, mate!’ These are the words I frequently heard working in a shop selling power tools and garden equipment, when the repair technician, usually with a hint of glee, let down a customer hoping for a cheap fix on some broken equipment. What I came to realize was that many products were designed to fail with time and had built-in obsolescence to maintain a steady income for manufacturers. When God instituted the old covenant along with its ceremonies, He designed it with built-in obsolescence. God’s plan was not to patch up the old, but to completely replace it with something new. As the writer to the Hebrews states, ‘In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth [“is becoming obsolete”, ESV] and waxeth old is ready to vanish away’, Heb. 8. 13.

Hebrews is a key that unlocks our understanding of the Old Testament. First, through this book we discover that the institutions and individuals in the Old Testament are ‘a shadow of good things to come’, Heb. 10. 1, and of ‘heavenly things’, 8. 5. There are vivid pictures of the person and work of the Lord Jesus in the Old Testament that provide an intriguing and wonderful resource to learn more about the Saviour. A second theme of Hebrews is that God designed the Old Testament law and its practices only to be relevant for a certain time, with a view to them being replaced altogether. This is important

information to develop an informed and intelligent appreciation of the Old Testament.<sup>1</sup> Since this is an expansive subject, let us pick up on several broad themes. Note that, in each case, God revealed beforehand that He would replace the institution with something better.

### An obsolete priesthood

‘We have such a high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens’, Heb. 8. 1.

At the outset, God provided a salient reminder that the Levitical priesthood was to be temporary.<sup>2</sup> In Numbers chapter 20 verses 23 to 29, Aaron the first high priest was taken up a high mountain as he was about to die.<sup>3</sup> On arriving, he was instructed by God to remove his priestly garments and place them on his son Eleazar. This indicated that the office of high priest had passed on to another, and so began a long line of many high priests<sup>4</sup> and priests in general, unable to continue their ministries because of death.

Many centuries previously, however, God had demonstrated that this limitation was not an afterthought. Rather, He always had a superior type of priesthood in mind, for which only one person who ever lived was qualified. The Melchizedek priesthood of the Lord Jesus, and the comparison with the Levitical priesthood, is described in Hebrews chapters 5 to 7. The context is provided by two Old Testament passages. First, the brief account

of Abraham at a point of weakness and temptation being strengthened and encouraged by a man called Melchizedek, Gen. 14. 18-24. Then, second, an oath made by God, Ps. 110. 4, ‘The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek’.<sup>5</sup> This psalm points to an eternal order of priesthood, brought about by the death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus, and His permanent presence at the right hand of God. This subject is enlarged upon in the article, *The high priesthood in Hebrews* in this series. As the Levitical priests under the old covenant offered sacrifices and served in an earthly sanctuary, so too the Lord Jesus has offered one sacrifice at the cross and through the power of resurrection ministers today in a heavenly sanctuary as the mediator of a new covenant.

### An obsolete covenant

‘By how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant’, 8. 6.

God did something truly remarkable in instituting the Old Testament. Moses reminded Israel shortly before his death, ‘For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?’ Deut. 4. 7, 8. Yet, this amazing covenant was conditional on Israel obeying God and was destined to fail. Moses had provided a timeline of events following either Israel’s obedience or disobedience, Deut. 28. The curses listed on Israel continuing in disobedience read almost like a prophecy of their 1,000-year history. Hence these promises were conditional and limited and needed replacing with ‘better promises’, Heb. 8. 6. By the time we get to Jeremiah the prophet, Israel has broken the old covenant in every way possible. God waited until this time to reveal His new unconditional covenant, primarily with Israel, but with the benefits extending far beyond that nation. The character of this covenant is described in Hebrews



chapter 8 verses 6 to 13.<sup>6</sup> It would be a covenant of inward reality, v. 10, and full and free forgiveness, v. 12. This is expanded upon in the article *The Old and New Covenants in Hebrews* in this series.

### **An obsolete sanctuary**

‘But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands’, 9. 11.

The tabernacle, or ‘earthly sanctuary’, v. 1 NKJV, the place where the Levitical priests served, is described in chapter 9 verses 1 to 11. There were indicators that this earthy sanctuary was fading. The magnificent temple structure built by Herod the Great, the earthly sanctuary of that day, was just an empty shell.<sup>7</sup> The Holy of Holies contained no shekinah glory and probably no ark of the covenant, as it had in the past. Although the disciples marvelled at the impressive stones and buildings, Mark 13. 1, 2, it was a fading institution, waxing old and ready to fade away. The Lord Jesus reminded them that ‘there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down’ and the temple and all its institutions came to a devastating conclusion with its destruction by the 10th Roman legion in AD 70. A vivid eyewitness account is provided by Flavius Josephus. We also learn in these verses that the earthly tabernacle was a picture of heaven itself, of a heavenly sanctuary, which Christ has entered based on the merit of His once and for all sacrifice, Heb. 9. 7, 11, 12.

### **Obsolete sacrifices**

‘Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me’, 10. 5.

On raising up the tabernacle for the first time, Moses encountered a problem. So overwhelming was the glory of God that ‘Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation’, Exod. 40. 35. The solution was provided by God in the early chapters of Leviticus through an elaborate series of offerings, usually involving animal sacrifices.

The treatment of the body and blood of these animals was particularly important. Sacrifice after sacrifice was offered, but ultimately the guilt of sin remained, and the continual nature of the sacrifices was a reminder of this.<sup>8</sup>

Psalm 40 verses 6 to 8, as quoted in chapter 10 verses 5 to 7, shows us that God always had something greater in view. ‘Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin thou wouldest not’, v. 8. Similar to the Old Testament offerings, the importance of both the body and blood of the Lord Jesus are emphasized in this section. However, the animals sacrificed had no choice in the matter. In contrast, the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus is founded upon His delight to do the will of God. It is through His will, leading to the offering of His body and blood, that we are cleansed and sanctified, with the knowledge of the guilt of our sins being removed forever, 10. 10.

### **An obsolete ministry**

‘But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry’, 8. 6.

The Old Testament priests had a two-fold ministry that ended with the destruction of the temple in AD 70. They had a Godward ministry, serving God in the sanctuary. However, the structure of the tabernacle, and later the temple, was designed by God to show ‘that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest’, 9. 8. There was a series of barriers that ultimately kept God at a distance and warned Israel to ‘keep out’. Most people could not enter at all. The veil prohibited any priest from entering the Holy of Holies, except for the high priest who could enter on one day in the year usually in fear, v. 7. The priests also had a ministry outside of the holy place as they served God’s people.

The more excellent ministry of the Lord Jesus, 8. 6, as our great high priest, is summarized in chapter 10 verses 19 to 22. Because of His resurrection and ascension, He is permanently in the heavenly sanctuary, and constantly available

to provide encouragement and support. Thus, we can confidently ‘enter into the holiest’, the heavenly sanctuary, at any time, v. 19, through the ‘new and living way’ that He has opened to us through His death on the cross, v. 20. Unlike the priests of the Old Testament who went out of the tabernacle into the camp to serve the people, we can freely enter into the presence of God where He can minister to us. We can do so, without fear, knowing that we are cleansed inwardly by the finished work of the Lord Jesus on the cross, v. 22.

This was a key message to some at the time who considered turning back to Judaism because of intense persecution being faced. They were returning to something fleeting and soon to pass away. This letter to the Hebrews reminded them, and us too, that as we hold fast to the Lord Jesus, v. 23, we build our lives on something permanent and on a Person who never changes. Twice, Hebrews describes the Lord Jesus as ‘the same’, 1. 12, 13. 8. Although we do not see Him now, by faith we look ‘unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith’, 12. 2.

### **Endnotes**

- 1 Failure to grasp this point has led to practices such as designated priests with robes, offering of incense, church altars, and Sabbath-keeping.
- 2 It is often called the Levitical priesthood since many of the details of the role and service of the priest are described in Leviticus.
- 3 Probably, he was carried, since Mount Hor, or Jebel Harun, near Petra, Jordan is a climb of over 4,400 feet and Aaron was 123 years old at the time.
- 4 Jewish traditions suggest that there were at least seventy-eight high priests from the time of Aaron until AD 70.
- 5 This verse is quoted five times in the letter to the Hebrews, 5. 6, 10; 6. 20; 7. 17, 21.
- 6 Which quotes from Jeremiah chapter 31 verses 31 to 34.
- 7 We should note, however, that the Lord Jesus still described the temple as ‘My Father’s house’, John 2. 16.
- 8 This is the theme of chapter 9 verse 12 to chapter 10 verse 18.

# VENEZUELA

By **WILLIAM TURKINGTON**

Venezuela has been a fruitful field for the gospel. The work of the assemblies began over 100 years ago through much sacrifice. Very faithful and godly men, raised and sent by God from foreign lands, laid a solid foundation and the Lord has given the increase. At present there are 205 assemblies in the country, but also in many places where the gospel is being preached the Lord is saving souls, and there is the hope that soon a golden lampstand may be established.

The Lord has also raised up men among the assemblies to go forth

with the precious seed and to teach His word capably. There are twenty-seven couples labouring at present. Noel McKeown and Stephen Redpath are the only ones now in the country commended from Northern Ireland, and Norman Turkington, who was born and raised here in Venezuela, was commended last year with his wife Hannah, from the assembly in Portage La Prairie, Canada. The Lord's work has suffered a great loss in the last four years, with the home call of five hard-labouring and capable brethren: Alirio Guerrero, Allan Turkington,

Jim Walmsley, Fausto Barroso, and Bernardo Chirinos. Also, the absence of missionaries from abroad, such as Uel Ussher, Paul Chapman, and Edward Smith, due to health issues, is very keenly felt. Two homes for the care of aged believers, two homes for the care of orphans and children with need, and several gospel schools are functioning also in total dependence on God.

Although the country has suffered an enormous economic collapse which contributed to scarcity of basic goods, such as food and medicine, and obliged several million to emigrate to neighbouring countries and elsewhere, the liberties for the preaching of the gospel have not





been hindered, and no doubt the lack of materialism has favoured the interest of many to seek spiritual help. At present, basic goods are not scarce, but available at prices which are far beyond the possibility of a person who earns a normal wage. Many receive help from relatives who have emigrated. Fuel is rationed and this creates difficulties for the Lord's servants who must do a lot of travelling.

The only state in Venezuela which did not count on permanent gospel activity up until the year 2010 was Delta Amacuro. We moved as a family to this state in 2014 having visited it regularly for evangelization since 2010. After several years of sowing and reaping, the Lord gave us the joy of seeing an assembly planted in Tucupita (capital of the state) in December 2022. Delta Amacuro has an estimated population of

around 160,000, of which a small percentage corresponds to the indigenous Waraos tribe. Many of these live along the banks of the Orinoco River in very humble dwellings and others live in the city. They have a different culture, a different language (although most would understand Spanish), and are very receptive. As a result of the preaching of the gospel, a number of these Waraos have been saved and are in fellowship in the assembly.

A major part of our work consists in teaching the word of God to the children. In these Bible classes, which are held in different places nearly every day of the week, we strive to teach the children verses of scripture and the basic truths of salvation. We pray that God will use His word to bring the light of the gospel into many families through their children.

Catholicism was in our country much before the gospel reached our shores, so it still has a steady grasp on the people. Nearly all other religious groups that exist have their representation here. Nominal evangelicals abound and are tirelessly propagating a different gospel. All this represents a challenge for us to spread more fervently the truth of God's word.

There is a vast need to take the gospel to the hundreds of small communities scattered along the Delta. This has been our desire, but we have been hindered by the need to maintain the work here in the city, and also by the difficulties of travelling by river to reach these remote places.

'Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of God may have free course, and be glorified',  
2 Thess. 3. 1.





# Three things that Jesus did

By **MALCOLM HORLOCK** Cardiff, Wales

‘There are’, of course, as the Apostle John said in the last verse of his Gospel, ‘many other things which Jesus did’ but I want us to focus in this article on just three. I want us to think of the time when the Lord Jesus did:

1. something which others **shouldn’t** do
2. something which others **wouldn’t** do
3. something which others **couldn’t** do.

## Something which no one else should do

I call to the witness box, an unnamed leper from a town somewhere in Galilee.

Luke tells us that ‘while [Jesus] was in one of the towns, there came a man full of leprosy . . . and Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him’.<sup>1</sup>

In those days, it was as if a leper carried a placard around his neck which said, ‘Do not touch’.

But our Lord didn’t send the hapless man, as Elisha had once sent Naaman, the Syrian leper, to wash seven times in the Jordan.<sup>2</sup> Nor did the Lord do as Naaman had expected Elisha to do; namely, to ‘wave his/His hand’ over the leprosy and to heal it.<sup>3</sup> Our Lord did not ‘wave His hand’. He ‘stretched out’<sup>4</sup> His hand and actually touched him.<sup>5</sup>

Doubtless, the Saviour ‘stretched out (not just, ‘put out’) His hand’ to touch the leper because the leper hadn’t dared come close enough for Him to touch him otherwise. What a moment that must have been! I wonder when the man had last felt a human touch?

By touching an unclean leper, anyone else would, of course, have automatically become ceremonially

defiled.<sup>6</sup> But, far from Himself becoming unclean, when doing that which no one else should do, Jesus makes the unclean to **be** clean: ‘immediately’, we read, ‘the leprosy left him’.<sup>7</sup>

## Something which no one else would do

I call to the witness box, Simon Peter, reclining in an upper room somewhere in Jerusalem.

We read that there, shortly before His suffering and death, Jesus took a towel and a basin full of water and washed the feet of His disciples<sup>8</sup> – including, I note in passing, those of Judas Iscariot.<sup>9</sup>

In New Testament days, the task of washing the feet of others was often performed by a slave – although, to the Jews of the time, feet-washing was regarded as such a menial and demeaning task that no Jewish slave could be required to wash the feet of his Jewish master. That duty was reserved for Gentile slaves.

Yet He, the disciples’ ‘Lord and Teacher’, stooped (quite literally) to perform the lowly task which not one of the twelve would carry out<sup>10</sup> – to do what no one else would do.





Not that this was the only time that our Lord stooped. He had:

- (i) stooped to write (twice) in the dust<sup>11</sup> when confronted by the scribes and Pharisees who had brought a woman ‘caught in adultery’,<sup>12</sup>
- (ii) stooped to lift young children in His arms that He might bless them<sup>13</sup>, and
- (iii) stooped to pull ‘sinking’ Peter out of the Sea of Galilee.<sup>14</sup>

But, chiefly, we would think of how He stooped from the heights of glory<sup>15</sup> and the very throne of heaven,<sup>16</sup> not only to the manger of Bethlehem,<sup>17</sup> but, also, how, when ‘found in fashion as a man’, He ‘continued to descend the stairway of condescending love by humbling Himself yet more’,<sup>18</sup> right down to the fathomless depths of death on a cross.<sup>19</sup>

This brings us to our third point.

### Something which no one else could do

This time, I call to the witness box, ‘a strong [“mighty”] angel’ from before the throne of God in heaven, Rev. 5. 2.

Scripture speaks of **all** angels as ‘mighty ones’<sup>20</sup> which ‘excel in strength’<sup>21</sup> and which are great in might and power.<sup>22</sup> But this particular angel is distinguished as ‘strong’<sup>23</sup> because he is to issue a challenge which must reach to the remotest bounds of creation: ‘Who is worthy’, he proclaims, ‘to open the scroll [which lies in the hand of the majestic Throne-sitter] and to break its seals?’ – symbolically, worthy to set in motion God’s future purposes for the earth.<sup>24</sup>

But ‘no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth [the realm of the dead] was able to open the scroll’. No one, that is, was deemed worthy to take up the challenge. No angelic being (such as Michael or Gabriel), not one of the righteous dead of Old Testament history (such as Abraham, Moses, or David), no New Testament apostle (such as Peter or Paul). ‘**No one**’ was counted worthy for the task.<sup>25</sup>

And why so?

Because ‘no one’ possessed the necessary credentials. ‘No one’, that is, until the one spoken of as the ‘Lamb’ comes into view.<sup>26</sup> And His qualification? The ‘new song’ of heaven declares His credentials, ‘You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, **because** you were slain, and have redeemed [“bought”, “purchased”] men for God by your blood’.<sup>27</sup>

Yes, we can say, that, at Golgotha, the Lord Jesus most certainly did something which no one else could do.

A psalmist once wrote, ‘None . . . can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him . . . that he should still live forever and not see corruption’.<sup>28</sup> Although,

in context, those words were written of man’s inability to buy back earthly life for someone when God claims it in death, the same can most certainly be said of purchasing ‘eternal redemption’.<sup>29</sup> ‘None . . . can’.

Only the Lord Jesus possessed all the qualifications necessary to redeem you and me – to be both God and man<sup>30</sup> (our ‘kinsman redeemer’, if you like) and to be entirely sinless – so as to offer Himself ‘without blemish to God’.<sup>31</sup>

Truly, we say with CECIL FRANCES ALEXANDER:

‘There was no other good enough  
To pay the price of sin,  
He only **could** unlock the gate  
Of heaven and let us in’.

#### Endnotes

- 1 Luke 5. 12, 13; cp. Matt. 8. 3; Mark 1. 41.
- 2 2 Kgs. 5. 10.
- 3 2 Kgs. 5. 11.
- 4 Not simply ‘put out’ His hand but ‘stretched out’ His hand. Contrast Jeroboam I, who ‘stretched out’ (the Greek Old Testament word *ekteinō* is the same as in Matt. 8. 3) his hand . . . which immediately ‘dried up’, 1 Kgs. 13. 4; in contrast, our Lord’s stretched out hand healed someone else.
- 5 Matt. 8. 3.
- 6 Dating back to the days of Moses, the law of God was clear; Num 5. 2, 3 RSV, ‘Command the people of Israel that they put out of the camp every leper . . . you shall put out both male and female, putting them outside the camp, that they may not defile their camp, in the midst of which I dwell’.
- 7 Mark 1. 42.
- 8 John 13. 4-17.
- 9 John 13. 26-30.
- 10 Peter was no more willing to wash unclean feet in the Upper Room than he was later to eat unclean foods in his vision on the housetop of Simon the tanner at Joppa, Acts 10. 9-14.
- 11 As lawgiver at Sinai – written twice with finger on tablets of stone.
- 12 John 8. 3-8.
- 13 Mark 10. 13-16. ‘The question arises whether it was strange children that were then brought into the house, or whether they were children of the house in which our Lord was then teaching, and who, we may imagine, were brought to Him to say good-night, and receive His blessing before being sent to bed. The latter supposition seems to me the more probable’, GEORGE SALMON, *The Human Element in the Gospels*, John Murray, 1907, pg. 395.
- 14 Matt. 14. 28-31.
- 15 John 17. 5.
- 16 Isa. 6. 1; cp. John 12. 39-41.
- 17 Luke 2. 4-7.
- 18 C. H. SPURGEON, *Our Lord in the*

*Valley of Humiliation*, Sermon 2281, preached at the Metropolitan Tabernacle on 5 June 1890, paragraph 15.

- 19 Phil. 2. 8. ‘She Stoops to Conquer’ is a comedy by OLIVER GOLDSMITH, first performed in London in 1773; our Lord’s great ‘stoop to conquer’ (cp. Rev. 5. 5 ESV), was certainly no comedy!
- 20 Joel 3. 11.
- 21 Ps. 103. 20.
- 22 2 Pet. 2. 11.
- 23 Cp. Rev. 10. 1; 18. 21.
- 24 Rev. 5. 1, 2 NASB.
- 25 Rev. 5. 3 ESV.
- 26 Rev. 5. 6.
- 27 Rev. 5. 9.
- 28 Ps. 49. 7-9.
- 29 Heb. 9. 12.
- 30 “A Saviour not quite God”, said Bishop Handley Moule, “is a bridge broken at the farther end” [(H. C. G. MOULE, quoted in the Prefatory Note to SIR R. ANDERSON, *The Lord from Heaven*, Kregel, pg. vi]. With equal truth, it must be said that a Saviour . . . not quite man is a bridge broken at the nearer end’, F. F. BRUCE, ‘The Humanity of Jesus Christ’, *Journal of the Christian Brethren Research Fellowship* 24 (1973), pg. 13.
- 31 Heb. 9. 14 ESV. See Exod. 29. 1; Lev. 1. 3, 10; 3. 1, 6; 4. 3, 23, 28, 32; 5. 15, 18; 6. 6 etc. Note, especially: ‘You shall not offer anything that has a blemish, for it will not be acceptable for you’, Lev. 22. 20 ESV; ‘if it has any blemish . . . you shall not sacrifice it to the Lord your God’, Deut. 15. 21 ESV; ‘you shall not sacrifice to the Lord your God an ox or a sheep in which is a blemish, any defect whatever, for that is an abomination to the Lord your God’, Deut. 17. 1 ESV. ‘The animals used for sacrifice in earlier days were required to be physically unblemished; the life which Christ presented to God on the cross was a life free from inward blemish’, F. F. BRUCE, *op. cit.*, pg. 206.

# Hermosillo, Mexico

By **TIM WOODFORD**

We appreciate the prayerful interest of the Lord's people as He faithfully preserves and furthers His work around the world. It was over fifteen years ago that my wife, Stephanie, and I were commended to the grace of God from Canada, and, in response to His call, arrived in the northwest of Mexico, to engage in language study and gospel activity. We have since made our home in Hermosillo, our state capital, of around one million souls. The Lord has blessed us with six daughters and one son. The country itself is immense and represents many areas still unreached with the true gospel. For example, it would take us forty hours to drive to Cancun, on the extreme opposite side. We are located about 300 km south of the United States border, and 115 km east of the coast of the Sea of Cortez. The region is semi-arid desert, with temperatures reaching 50 Celsius during the summer months.

The little assembly here had been recently planted when we arrived. By God's grace, it has continued on, and we are thankful for good signs of spiritual maturity and growth. There is a nice mix of younger and older believers, of saved couples and other believers who continue to pray for the salvation of their spouses. God has been gracious to equip men with shepherd care, who are engaged in guiding the assembly. Please pray for their preservation and encouragement. The next nearest assemblies are three and six-hours' drive away, so fellowship with other saints is a challenge. Sadly, this has resulted in several young single believers marrying unsaved spouses, rather than waiting on God's provision for them. Others have grown cold through discouragement, or gradual distancing from the Lord and His people. However, we are most grateful to God for the encouraging growth of devotion and conviction on the part of a number here, and we would value your prayers for their preservation.

While the physical climate here is mostly sunny, the spiritual climate is much more dismal. Roman

Catholicism has lost much of its influence in recent years to other religious elements of Christendom. Unfortunately, this has often caused further challenges to the spread of the gospel. So much twisting and distortion of the gospel has made it easier to witness to a Catholic person than the average 'evangelical' contact here. The ravages of 'another gospel' have taken their toll, with much emphasis placed on tithing and 'persevering' in order to remain saved. Emotional experiences take precedence over the reading and sound preaching of the scriptures. The fact that we never ask for money leaves some wondering whether we are 'actually a church', since that is one of the most expected features of such here.

In addition to the weekly gospel meeting, gospel witness has also taken the form of children's classes in various parts of the city; preaching in rented buildings; drug rehab centres; house meetings; hospital visits; literature distribution; and community suppers. We are encouraged by several who are attending with interest at present. After a large-scale Seed Sowers text distribution, in which a large part of the city was covered with 120,000 texts, Jesús started attending a nightly gospel series, thinking initially that he was a believer. After about three weeks, he became convicted of his sins and was gloriously saved. Rarely have we seen such clear and abiding evidence of divine life in someone in such a short amount of time. His hunger for the word of God and submission to its claims have been so refreshing for us to witness in the

years since. He has won the respect of the believers, and his effective witness among non-believers has made him a useful vessel in the Lord's hands. He has recently accepted the responsibility of sharing in the work of the oversight here. Please pray that his wife will soon be saved as well.

We stay active in writing a monthly article for *Mensajero Mexicano*, a digital magazine for Mexican and other Spanish-speaking believers around the world, in addition to occasional gospel tracts for *Publicaciones Pescadores*, an online and printed publishing ministry supplying gospel and Christian teaching materials at accessible prices.

We are currently preparing for our sixteenth annual conference and looking to God for His guidance and blessing. As a family, these are proving to be bittersweet days. After much prayerful consideration of the Lord's will for us, we have made the difficult decision to transition back to Canada, at least for this next chapter of our lives. There are two main factors that have motivated this planned move. First, our older daughters have begun, or are about to begin, their post-secondary studies, and we feel the need to be present to support them in this next phase. Second, we have felt for some time that the assembly and work here is now at a stage where it would be beneficial for us to step back and allow God to work with us out of the way.

We would value your prayers for us as a family, and for the work of the Lord in Mexico. We pray that God might 'equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen', Heb. 13. 21 ESV.







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 10544, Grantham, NG31 0HW, UK, and is available separately from the main magazine.

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## Editor's Introduction

Welcome to the February issue of YPS.

With a new year, we have some new series of articles. Stephen Baker introduces a series intended to help equip Christians to face issues of our day – 'Seeing the world through a biblical lens'.

Also, Richard Smith is back drawing lessons from the kings of Judah – 'Gone, but not forgotten – epitaphs of the kings of Judah'. There will be negative examples, but these are very instructive for dangers to avoid in practical Christian living.

I hope you enjoy this issue and find it to be helpful and encouraging.

Andrew Dutton

## Seeing the world through a biblical lens – Introduction

STEPHEN G. BAKER, LIVERPOOL, ENGLAND

Andrew Dutton has asked me to work on a new series with him. I am delighted to do this and to continue contributing to Young Precious Seed.

So, what are we trying to achieve? Hopefully, the title is self-explanatory. We want to revisit a range of topics and issues that face Christians today and discover what the Bible has to say about them. Our aim is not to be controversial or to directly disagree with what other people think (though this may well happen at some stage), but to highlight and focus on what the Bible has to say about each subject.

We live in a world of diversity, where everyone has an opinion; people are taught that no individual's view is more significant than anyone else's. Many people feel that there is no such thing as absolute truth and that one of the worst sins is to be dogmatic about what you believe. We beg to differ. We will not be discourteous or dismissive of other people's opinions, but we are convinced we can be sure of the absolute truth about the critical areas of life.

If I were an electrician, I would want to know facts about my trade, the principles on which electricity operates, and to be clear that what I was doing was right before I signed off a job and told my customer that things were working correctly and safely. If I were having heart surgery, I would be very concerned if my surgeon and all the theatre staff did not have a clear and accurate view of what they were doing before operating on me. I can hear you say that these are specialist disciplines that have developed over a long time so that we can trust them. But this is also the case with the moral and ethical issues we all face. How do I know?

I know because I have the manual from the manufacturer in my hands – the Bible. The Bible is the word of God. It has been proven to be an inspired document. Time has tested the Bible to be authentic. It is authentic in two ways:

1. What we are reading today is an accurate translation of what was initially written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek.
2. It has been demonstrated to be accurate in that what it teaches meets the needs of the human heart and has transformed the lives of millions who have come to trust in the author and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is not my intention to prove these two points to you as there are sufficient sources to testify to the truthfulness of these statements.<sup>1</sup>

So, we will take our information (truth) entirely from the Bible. We are not going to apply a subjective interpretation but quote the statements of the Bible and leave you to search and see if the truth stacks up – I think that is a fair approach.

I had considered giving you a list of topics and issues we will discuss, but it might be easier to see how things develop and where we go with this series. Really, I would love you to turn to YPS as soon as you get your *Precious Seed* magazine because you are so intrigued to discover what we will be discussing in 'Seeing the world through a biblical lens'. I hope you do, and that you will find it an important tool as you develop your convictions about life and living for God in the 21st century.

<sup>1</sup> There are many studies available including the following three books which are widely available:

F. F. BRUCE, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*, InterVarsity Press, 2000.

J. McDOWELL, *God Breathed, The Undeniable Power and Reliability of Scripture*, Shiloh Run Press, 2015.

B. M. METZGER, *The Bible in Translation: Ancient and English Versions*, Baker Publishing Group, 2001.



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

RICHARD SMITH, BRIDGE OF WEIR, SCOTLAND



## 1. Jehoram

In the series *We 4 Kings* we looked at the first four kings of Judah after the division of Israel under Rehoboam. In summary:

**Rehoboam:** was a king with **no conviction**.

There were three areas of conviction that we considered:

1. **The word of God** must be the only authority for our opinions and actions. Otherwise, we are subject to our own whims and those of others. We must read, understand, and live by the word of God.
2. **The house of God** is the place where God has set His name. For the Jews that was the temple in Jerusalem; for us it is the church. How highly do we value the principles of the church?
3. **The people of God** are extremely precious to Him. Our thoughts of the Lord's people are a strong indication of our thoughts towards Him.

**Abijah:** had **conviction** without **courage**.

**Asa:** possessed **conviction** and **courage**; but he couldn't handle **criticism**.

**Jehoshaphat:** was the best king since David, an excellent king, in fact! However, he lacked **consistency**. His mistaken marriage alliance with Ahab led to his son Jehoram marrying Athaliah, Ahab's daughter, and the result was disastrous for Judah.

**Jehoram's** first recorded royal act was to murder his brothers and some of the princes of Judah, 2 Chr. 21. 4. He followed his father-in-law's wickedness in the worship of Baal, and all the evil that accompanies idolatry. He made Judah go astray, v. 11. This caused the people to revolt. Previously, the Philistines and Arabians brought gifts to Jehoshaphat, 17. 11; during Jehoram's reign they returned and took back more than they had given, including his wives and most of his sons, 21. 16, 17. Finally, the Lord struck him with an incurable disease and he died in great agony, vv. 18, 19.

**Jehoram's** eight-year reign was a complete disaster. The people did not mourn him. They buried him in the city of David, but not in the kings' tombs. His youngest son Ahaziah became king, and he continued the lifestyle of his father and maternal grandfather, Ahab; his mother was his counsellor in doing wickedly, 22. 3. He reigned for one year and was murdered by Jehu, the incoming king of Israel. His mother set out to destroy the royal family of Judah and, although she failed, she nearly succeeded. What stopped her? God's plan will never be thwarted. The King of kings was to come from the line of Judah and the wickedness of God's enemies will never defeat God's plan. Despite Jehoram's vile behaviour, God had made a covenant (a promise) to David that his throne would endure; He would not break that promise, 21. 7.

In this series, we will be looking at memorable statements made about some of the kings, how they will be remembered. Of Jehoram, it was said in 2 Chronicles chapter 21 verse 20:

**HE DEPARTED WITHOUT BEING DESIRED (KJV)**

**HE DEPARTED WITH NO ONE'S REGRET (ESV)**

**NO ONE WAS SORRY WHEN HE DIED (CEB)**

The Message puts it more bluntly, 'There were no tears shed when he died—it was good riddance!' He caused Judah nothing but trouble and they were glad to see the end of his reign.

What makes such a devastating conclusion?

**His father's lapse:** How we behave will have an impact on us immediately and the effects of our sinful actions may be felt by others, sometimes for many years. Sexual sin, for example, can lead to many far-reaching problems for us and others. We must strive to maintain God's standard in our lives. However great Jehoshaphat was, his legacy in his son was a direct result of his disobedient alliance with Ahab.

**His fierce longing:** He wanted to be the unrivalled king; no one would get in his way. We must remember that we do not live unto ourselves. We have a responsibility to look on the needs of others (fellow-believers), but also to have a good testimony before the world. Position, power, and wealth are not sinful in themselves; sometimes how they are achieved can be!

**His final legacy:** His son Ahaziah

followed his behaviour. That

was Ahaziah's choice,

but his example was a

poor one. The effect

of our behaviour

on others cannot be

underestimated.

In the Lord's parable of the talents, the profitable servant was told 'well done . . . good and faithful servant', Matt. 25. 21. Let's strive for that epitaph rather than Jehoram's who 'departed without being desired', 2 Chr. 21. 20.





# Christian basics – joining a local church

ANDREW DUTTON, NORWICH, ENGLAND

In the last article, we considered the command for believers in the Lord Jesus to be baptized. This is an essential step for every Christian since the Bible teaches that baptism should follow salvation, Acts 2. 41. But the verse goes on to say that on the 'same day [they] were added'. Therefore, after the Lord Jesus had ascended into heaven, the example of the early believers was that they were saved, immediately baptized, and then added to a local church.

Let's look at **why** Christians should be part of a local church and **what** a local church is.

## Why?

The sequence in Acts chapter 2 is consistent with the teaching of the New Testament Epistles – that all believers in the Lord Jesus should be baptized and in the fellowship of a local church. The single exception is if a believer has been 'put away from' the church because of sin, 1 Cor. 5. 13, or false teaching, Titus 3. 10; in which case, repentance is expected and then restoration to church fellowship. As such, to be obedient to the teaching of the Bible, every believer should either be part of a local church, or making arrangements in life to join a local church.

## What?

'Church' is expressed in two ways in the New Testament:

- All Christians everywhere, since the Lord Jesus returned to heaven. The Lord Jesus said, 'I will build my church', Matt. 16. 18. This is described as 'the church, which is his body', Eph. 1. 22, 23, sometimes referred to as the 'universal church'.
- A local group of believers at a certain place. There are lots of examples in the New Testament, such as 'the church of God which is at Corinth', 1 Cor. 1. 2. This is often referred to as the 'local church'.

We are focusing on the local church and the importance of belonging to one. 'Church' comes from the Greek word *ekklesia*, meaning 'assembly' or 'gathering'. It is the group of believers, not the building they meet in. There are various features of a local church summarized in Acts chapter 2 verse 42:

- **'they continued stedfastly'** – the believers were committed to regularly meeting together.
- **'in the apostles' doctrine'** – all they did was based on the authority of the word of God; which is set out for us in the New Testament Epistles.
- **'and fellowship'** – because of a common bond in the Lord Jesus, they shared life experience together. The word means 'sharing in common'.<sup>1</sup>
- **'and in breaking of bread'** – they would meet to remember the Lord Jesus weekly, Acts 20. 7.
- **'and in prayers'** – they would meet regularly for prayer.

Local churches today should seek to follow this pattern.

## Practical points to note

If you are saved and baptized, but not part of a local church, the following points may help you:

- Commit to God to be serious about obeying His word, and ask for His help in arranging to join a local church.
- If you are very young and you attend local church gatherings with your family or Christian friends, there may be a need to wait until you are old enough to take on the responsibility of being 'in fellowship'. But now is an opportunity to learn what it means and still to be committed to the local church. Ask the Lord to prepare you and look forward to the time when you can be 'added', Acts 2. 41, to the church.
- If you go along to meetings at a local church, approach the elders to let them know of your desire to join the believers in fellowship. You could do this with the help of a parent or friend. Be aware that the elders will want to talk to you about the responsibilities of joining the fellowship; they will also want to be confident that you will fulfil the responsibilities.
- If you do not attend a local church, or don't even know of a church that seeks to function as described in the New Testament, you will need to find one. Ideally, this should be near where you live. JACK HAY has written a helpful booklet entitled *Which Church?* providing excellent advice on this subject.<sup>2</sup> Also, feel free to contact us at Precious Seed if you need any help.

<sup>1</sup> W. E. VINE, *Vine's Complete Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, Nelson, pg. 233.

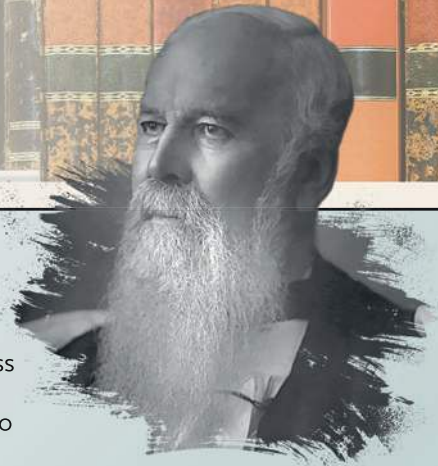
<sup>2</sup> J. HAY, *Which Church?*, Ritchie Christian Media, available at <https://www.ritchiechristianmedia.co.uk/product/hay-which-church>.





# Saints' CVs: J. C. Ryle

BY JEREMY SINGER, BRIDGE OF WEIR, SCOTLAND



## J. C. RYLE 1816-1900

### His background

John Charles Ryle enjoyed a privileged upbringing in Victorian England. The eldest son of a wealthy Cheshire businessman, J. C. Ryle was educated at Eton and Oxford. He captained the university cricket team and was also known for rowing. At a height of 6'4" (1.93m) he towered over his fellow students. However, disaster struck at the age of twenty-five when his father lost their family fortune in a banking crash. RYLE later recalled, 'We got up one summer's morning with all the world before us as usual, and went to bed that same night completely and entirely ruined'.<sup>1</sup>

Originally intending to take up politics, instead Ryle became an Anglican vicar. While we might not agree with some of his doctrinal standpoints or denominational associations, J. C. Ryle was a keen evangelist and a powerful communicator. We can still benefit from his teachings today.

### His faith

Ryle described his conversion experience at Oxford in his autobiography. He arrived late to a service one day, just as the scripture reading was taking place. The reader carefully and deliberately emphasized each word of Ephesians chapter 2 verse 8, 'For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God'. RYLE said, 'Nothing I can remember to this day appeared to me so clear and distinct as my own sinfulness . . . the need to be born again . . . Before that time I was dead in sins and on the high road to hell, and from that time I have become alive and had a hope of heaven. And nothing to my mind can account for it, but the free sovereign grace of God'.<sup>2</sup>

Christianity in England was highly fragmented in the Victorian age. Many people wanted to reintroduce ceremonial ritual and return to Catholicism, whereas others were sincerely evangelical. Ryle was definitely in this latter camp. He said, 'No one ever reached heaven without repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ'.<sup>3</sup>

His heroes included historical individuals mentioned in previous articles in this series, including Tyndale, the Wesleys, and Whitefield.

Ryle knew much of tragedy throughout his life. He was married and widowed three times, with his first wife dying in childbirth and his second wife suffering a debilitating illness for several years.

### His writing

Due to his accessible style, Ryle's work is entirely readable today, more than a century after his death. He was a gifted communicator who intentionally employed simplicity in his speech and writing. 'Unless you are simple in your sermons

you will never be understood, and unless you are understood you cannot do good to those who hear you'.<sup>4</sup>

His most famous book is *Holiness*, which is an entirely balanced discussion about sanctification. The modern theologian J. I. PACKER describes this book as 'a masterpiece of pastoral indignation'.<sup>5</sup>

Ryle also wrote a commentary series called *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, covering all four evangelists across seven volumes. My personal favourite is his treatment of John. I remember rainy lunchtimes in my high school library in Liverpool, poring over Ryle's notes on the Lord Jesus' conversation with Simon Peter in John chapter 21. RYLE asserts, 'Well would it be for the church, if all "after-dinner" conversations among Christians were as useful and edifying as this'.

### Liverpool

J. C. Ryle was associated with Liverpool, which during his lifetime grew from a medium-sized town to a major metropolis. Although he worked in the South of England originally, Ryle moved to Liverpool in 1880 and served in the city for twenty years until his death in 1900.

The prime minister, Benjamin Disraeli, selected Ryle to be the first bishop of Liverpool. Ryle was noted for his evangelical disposition. He argued against the construction of a costly cathedral in the city, instead preferring to see money spent on building mission halls around the city.

### Quotes

There are many valuable quotations from Ryle, well worth memorizing. Here is a small selection.

- 'Fear not because your prayer is stammering, your words feeble, and your language poor. Jesus can understand you'. (from *A Call to Prayer*)
- 'Hell is truth known too late'. (from *Practical Religion*)
- 'Do nothing that you would not like God to see. Say nothing you would not like God to hear. Write nothing you would not like God to read. Go no place where you would not like God to find you. Read no book of which you would not like God to say, "Show it to Me"'. (from *Thoughts for Young Men*)

### Recommended reading

J. C. RYLE, *Holiness*. <https://www.gracegems.org/Ryle/holiness.htm>.

DAVID HOLLOWAY, *J. C. Ryle: the man, the minister, and the missionary*, The Christian Institute, 2022.

ERIC RUSSELL, *That Man of Granite with the Heart of a Child: A New Biography of J. C. Ryle*, Christian Focus Publications, 2001.

<sup>1</sup> J. C. RYLE, *Bishop J. C. Ryle's Autobiography: The Early Years*, Banner of Truth, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>3</sup> J. C. RYLE, *Repentance*. [https://www.gracegems.org/24/Ryle\\_repentance.htm](https://www.gracegems.org/24/Ryle_repentance.htm).

<sup>4</sup> J. C. RYLE, *Simplicity in Preaching*. <https://gracegems.org/18/Ryle-%20Preaching.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> J. C. RYLE, *Holiness*, Preface by J. I. PACKER, Evangelical Press, 1979.



# Reflections on the Cross

## Part 1 The Cross divides

By **ERNEST ABBOTT** Singapore

Although we know that the manner in which our Lord died was the subject of prophecy, Ps. 22; Isa. 53. 8, it is not until we get to the detailed narratives in the Gospels that we can see further significance in the arrangement of the crucifixion. From Luke chapter 23, we know that Jesus was crucified between two thieves. One of the thieves was saved and the other was lost. Even in the Lord's dying moments, He had time to speak to a thief who was repentant. This act symbolizes something much deeper than the conversion of the thief; it shows that the cross of Christ divides mankind. On the one side are those who acknowledge their true position as sinners in need of salvation and on the other side, those who reject the claims of the loving Saviour. The physical division of the cross between these two men would have been clear for all to see. The spiritual division was one that only God could see, yet it is one that we are privy to. The physical division symbolized the spiritual division of the cross.

Scripture does not tell us whether it was the thief on the right or the thief on the left who was the repentant sinner. The Lord talks about a judgement and division of the sheep and the goats. The sheep are to the right and the goats are to the left, Matt. 25. 33. The Lord uses the metaphor of 'sheep' to refer to those who have trusted in Him. The 'goats' are those who have mixed with His 'sheep', who bear some resemblance to His 'sheep', but are not His 'sheep'. It may be that it was the thief who was on the right who was the one to repent, and the one on the left was the one who did not.

The division between individuals is not the only place where the cross divides. The cross divides families, Matt. 10. 21. Missionary

Charles Marsh, in an account of his work in North Africa, outlines cases of people being converted to Christ who were then subject to murderous attacks from members of their own family. Testimonies abound of saints converted from some religion only to be subject to malicious attacks from their own kith and kin. We may know of cases where people have been ostracized by their family following their conversion. The cross of Christ does divide families.

People of the world are often talking about peace, but a peace which is only a cessation of hostilities between men. The gospel message is about peace between God and man, which leads to peace between man and man. However, the cross divides to such an extent that there may be hostilities. 'Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division', Luke 12. 51. The cross may bring the sword, but this is to be expected because what the cross stands for is antithetical to all that the world stands for.

The cross of Christ strikes at the very heart of people's concept of God. Religion would not have a god who condescends to become man and suffers a humiliating death. The god of man's imagination is easy-going, sometimes distant, unpredictable, even arbitrary. The God who is revealed by the cross of Christ is one who is loving, caring, intimately concerned about His creation and its redemption.

The cross divides the truth from falsehood, for the cross of Christ is a part of the revelation of God. Folk religions have no such revelation; they are founded in man's superstition and vain imagination.

The cross confronts and challenges those who seek signs and special

revelations. The Gospels record the Jews' penchant for signs, John 2. 18; 6. 30. Paul mentions the Greeks seeking for wisdom, 1 Cor. 1. 22. What both groups missed in the cross is that it is the greatest sign that could be given and displays the most profound wisdom ever displayed.

The cross challenges our value systems. On the one side of the cross, we serve God; on the other side, we serve mammon. We cannot serve both, Luke 16. 13. Do we try to cling to what is transitory or to what is eternal? The Pharisees serve as an example. Their love of money put them and kept them on the wrong side of the cross. They were like the thief who did not repent. Both derided Jesus. The value system adopted will determine how one views the cross and the Saviour.

The cross divides the wise and the foolish, Matt. 25. 1, 2, the perishing from the saved, the condemned from those who have everlasting life, John 3. 15, those who are in the kingdom of God from those who are not, those who are for Jesus and those who are against Him, Luke 9. 50, those who have life from those who are already under condemnation, John 5. 24, those who see and hear from those who will not see and hear.

The final division we shall examine is the one between Jesus and His God, Mark 15. 34. The One who was made sin for us, 2 Cor. 5. 21, was forsaken of His God. The perfect, spotless Lamb of God, who died in our place and on our behalf, knew what it was to suffer. Indeed, He said that it was necessary for Christ to suffer, Luke 24. 26. It seems that during this suffering, He was forsaken of His God. What loneliness, what solitude, what anguish must have racked His soul! Whatever the break was, He experienced forsakenness, which was the result of the cross. All this was done for us and our salvation.

As we can see from this brief survey, the cross of Christ divides, and, where it divides, the divisions have eternal consequences.

# NEHEMIAH

## A MAN OF PREPARATION

### – PRACTICALLY Part 4

By **TOM MERRIMAN** Tenby, Wales

#### Chapter 2 verses 11 to 20

In this passage, a change of scene is introduced, with Nehemiah's arrival at the site where the work of rebuilding the walls and gates of Jerusalem was to take place, v. 11. He had been released from his duty as cupbearer to the king and been granted access to the resources needed, but further preparations were required – this time of a practical nature. He had heard a report of the condition of the walls and gates but wanted to see these firsthand and survey the task ahead. Furthermore, since this was not a task to be undertaken alone, he needed to share his exercise with those he hoped would assist in the work, with some insight.

Tempting as it may be to get started immediately, practical preparation is prudent in certain aspects of our service for God. Our Lord indicated the importance of planning using two examples, Luke 14. 25-33. When building a tower, it makes sense to assess the material resources available, lest, having begun, the project be abandoned at foundation level, drawing ridicule. Before waging war, to consider how to best deploy human resources is necessary, lest the result be that of compromise with the opposing force. This He said to encourage a realistic view of following and serving the Lord, aware of the cost involved.

#### Rest

Travelling west, Nehemiah carried with him letters of authority for safe movement and to access the resources required to rebuild the walls and gates. It was a long and hazardous journey; one that Ezra had taken thirteen years earlier, acknowledging that God had 'delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and of such as lay

in wait by the way', resting for three days on their arrival, Ezra 8. 31, 32. Much work lay ahead of Nehemiah, but he and his companions had been travelling for four months; time was needed to rest and to assess the task in hand, v. 11.

When the twelve apostles returned to the Lord following the first part of the work for which He had commissioned them, His compassion toward their own needs was displayed. He called them apart to 'rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat', Mark 6. 31. When the multitudes again drew near, Jesus miraculously fed over 5,000 people. The disciples carried food to the gathered company, returning to Him for fresh resources. When the crowd was satisfied, there was sufficient for their own needs too.

The Lord 'knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust', Ps. 103. 14. Aware of our practical and spiritual necessities, He is ready to minister 'grace to help in time of need', Heb. 4. 16. Let us remember that amidst our labour 'one thing is needful' – time at the feet of our Lord, that we might be refreshed by His presence.<sup>1</sup> This will also help to equip us as we go forth in service.

#### Reconnaissance

Nehemiah was prepared to rise at unsocial hours. The darkness afforded him discretion until he was ready to share 'what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem', v. 12. It also offered a view of the city's condition at a time when an enemy might seek access. Departing the city from the west, by the 'gate of the valley' (probably named after the valley of Hinnom to which it opened), he travelled east, compassing the south of the city. It was a true report that he

had heard; 'the walls . . . were broken down, and the gates thereof were consumed with fire', v. 13. Thus far, Nehemiah had been mounted, but beyond the king's pool, access was limited, v. 14.<sup>2</sup> Before turning back, he proceeded a little further up the brook, likely on foot. This brought him into the Kidron Valley ('ravine', NASB), and, for the third time, 'night' is mentioned, v. 15. Having come to this low vantage point, he had some appreciation of the nature and size of the task ahead. Nevertheless, with the good hand of God upon him, Nehemiah could see the potential beyond the rubble.

Perhaps Nehemiah's journey took him to where our Lord later crossed this same valley on the way to Gethsemane one dark night. Matthew chapter 26 verse 39 records that 'he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt'. There, He had the measure of the tremendous task ahead of Him; that of bearing our sin. Yet, He was submissive to the Father's will. He 'for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame', Heb. 12. 2.

Our Lord was clear with those He commissioned – His followers would bear reproach for His testimony, 'If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you . . . all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me', John 15. 20, 21. However, they were also assured that the Spirit of God would come to them, equip them, and indwell them, 16. 7-15.

Thus, as we seek to honour the name of our Lord, often in spiritually bleak conditions, we should be realistic, but not defeatist, since every believer enjoys the Spirit's presence.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, let us remember the words of our Lord, 'Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven', Matt. 10. 32.

#### Exhortation

Whilst Nehemiah had surveyed the



walls with a 'few men' – trusted companions on the journey – his exercise had been kept private from those in Jerusalem, vv. 12, 16. But, having viewed the wall personally, he was ready to share the proposition without being considered naïve.

In a fine display of leadership, Nehemiah identified himself with those who had dwelt some time under these reproachful conditions, 'Ye see the distress that we are in', v. 17. This was no feigned speech, since, when he had first heard of the situation, he had shared their affliction; expressed in tears, mourning, fasting, and prayer, 1. 4. However, his positivity was affecting when he came alongside them with the call to 'come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach'. Long as the walls had lain in ruins, they did not need to remain that way.

Coming to Thessalonica, Paul and his companions came among those to whom they brought the word of God, being examples to them, 'ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction', 1 Thess. 1. 5, 6. Likewise, overseers are exhorted to 'feed the flock of God which is among you . . . neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock', 1 Pet. 5. 2, 3.



## Encouragement

Nehemiah added encouragement, v. 18. His words were not just those of an enthused man; God Himself had moved the king to grant the materials. Likewise, their words, 'Let us rise up and build', were accompanied by action. God's hand encouraged them to strengthen theirs to engage in this 'good work'.

Prior to our Lord's ascension, He told His apostles, 'I am with you alway, even unto the end of the [age]', Matt. 28. 20. As they went forth preaching, 'the Lord [was] working with them', Mark 16. 20. Having in view 'Jesus the author and finisher of our faith', conscious of His present position at the right hand of God, believers today can take encouragement from the writer to the Hebrews, to 'lift up the hands which hang down', Heb. 12. 2, 12. The Lord's servants have the privilege of being 'labourers together with God', 1 Cor. 3. 9.

## Empowerment

When the rebuilding plan became known, and God's people strengthened their hands for this good work, 'Sanballat [meaning "strength"] the Horonite, and Tobiah [meaning "Jehovah is good"] the servant, the Ammonite', v. 19, spoke out in mockery. These were of Moabite and Ammonite descent, and we met them earlier in the chapter, when 'it grieved them exceedingly that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel', v. 10. In verse 19, they were joined by Geshem (meaning 'violent shower'), the Arabian, and together they sought to put a dampener on the plans to restore the city walls. However, they were ignorant of the king's commission, saying, 'What is this thing that ye do? will ye rebel against the king?' Without explaining the authority under which the work would be performed, Nehemiah simply stated his assurance of God's enabling, whilst making plain that these three had no place amongst them, 'The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem', v. 20.

It is no surprise, when the people of God are united in a good work, that, betimes, the enemy joins forces against them. Some years earlier, following reforms made by Hezekiah, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, entered Judah, laying siege to their cities. He supposed that he could force them into submission and that Jerusalem would be given over to famine and thirst if they tried to resist his power. But Hezekiah had made preparation by diverting the water that had previously been springing up outside, to within the city. Sennacherib was unaware of the hidden water source supplied by the Gihon Spring that fed the pool of Siloam. Thus, Hezekiah encouraged the people of Judah, 'Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: for there be more with us than with him: with him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the Lord our God to help us, and to fight our battles. And the people rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah king of Judah', 2 Chr. 32. 7, 8.

Perhaps the meaning of the enemies' names reminds us of those who have 'a form of godliness, but . . . [deny] the power thereof'. But Paul assured Timothy, 'they shall proceed no further: for their folly shall be manifest unto all men', 2 Tim. 3. 5, 9.

Strong as the enemies of God's people are, we too have with us a hidden resource – the unseen presence of the Spirit of God who brings forth the word of God. Having in mind the Spirit, the Apostle John offered the assurance, 'Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world', 1 John 4. 4.

Thus, prepared personally and practically, we can have confidence in our Lord. Through Him we are able to overcome, and a work can be accomplished for His glory!

## Endnotes

- 1 Ps. 103. 14; Heb. 4. 16; Luke 10. 42.
- 2 Probably Siloah/Siloam – see Neh. 3. 15; John 9. 7.
- 3 Rom. 8. 9; Eph. 1. 13.

# TITLES OF JEHOVAH 3

## JEHOVAH-NISSI

By **MARK SWEETNAM** Dublin, Ireland

'Then came Amalek', Exod. 17. 8. The words hardly constitute a fanfare, but they nonetheless mark a crucial development in the history of the nation of Israel and of its wilderness journey. The victory that Israel would win, and Moses commemorate, at Jehovah-nissi was very different from the one that they had experienced on the banks of the Red Sea. There, the watchword had been 'stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord . . . The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace', 14. 13, 14. Now, though God was no less with them, and although Jehovah was still their banner, Israel could no longer stand still. Joshua must 'Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek', 17. 9. Battle must be joined on the plain. And Moses, along with Aaron and Hur, must ascend the hill, for there, too, the victory would be won.

At either elevation the battle would not be easy. On the plain, the battle raged 'until the going down of the sun', v. 12. Unaccustomed hands had to become familiar with the heft of the sword and liberated slaves rapidly acquire the skills of armed conflict. The fighting was man-to-man, face-to-face, hand-to-hand, intense, exhausting, and essential. On the hill, though remote from the clash and clamour of the conflict, Moses fought his own battle, with exhaustion, distraction, and despair. Aaron and Hur's task was demanding too, and just as vital to the eventual victory.

But, for all the effort on the plain and the endurance on the hilltop, it was abundantly clear that the victory, when it came, came from God. That lesson was vital, for before them lay a land that was theirs by promise, but which they would need to take by conquest. Had the disobedience at Kadesh-Barnea never happened, these men, who in Rephidim discomfited Amalek, would have crossed the Jordan as experienced warriors who had learned to depend on God. That lesson was important. So important that, when, a generation later, Israel did enter into the land, God left nations undefeated 'to prove Israel by them, even as

many of Israel as had not known all the wars of Canaan; only that the generations of the children of Israel might know, to teach them war, at the least such as before knew nothing thereof', Judg. 3. 1, 2.

To the men on the hilltop, the relationship between Moses' unraised hands and the balance of the battle was clear to see. To those on the plain it would, perhaps, have been less obvious, but the name that Moses gave to the altar, 'Jehovah-nissi' – 'the Lord my banner' – made the lesson evident and enduring for all. The God who had already proved Himself sufficient to supply His people's need for nourishment in the wilderness was also the God whose standard would lead them to victory. The importance of the lesson of the encounter with Amalek is underscored by the fact that here we have the first reference in scripture to writing, 'And the Lord said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book', v. 14. At Rephidim, Israel had asked the almost unthinkable question 'Is the Lord among us, or not?' v. 7. Jehovah-nissi provided a definitive answer to that question.

The altar and the book both declared divine sufficiency – God would fight on behalf of Israel – but they

also spoke of human dependence. Although God guaranteed ultimate victory, and although He would be Israel's standard battle-by-battle, the war would be a long one, 'the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation', v. 16. God had provided His people with water at the stroke of a rod, but Israel was learning that He would not always work like that, that sometimes victory would come slowly – almost imperceptibly – won gruellingly blow-by-blow and battle-by-battle but won certainly and ultimately beneath the glorious banner of Jehovah.

The lessons of Jehovah-nissi were lessons for the whole nation, but Joshua occupies a prominent role in the narrative, a role that is all the more striking, given that this is his first appearance on the pages of scripture. Many and valuable are the lessons that can be learned from Joshua's preparation to lead God's people. A consideration of the relationship between Moses and Joshua is an instructive study both for those who lead God's people and those who are exercised about future leadership. Even at this early stage, Joshua surely learned from Moses about the importance of prayer and the value of supplication on behalf of God's people. But the real lesson he learned was in the battle and from the book. To effectively lead God's people, Joshua needed to learn the importance of constant and strenuous conflict with Amalek. There can be little doubt that he learned the lesson well. It is telling that his career in scripture, which began with an altar and a book, ends with a book and a great stone, Josh. 24. 26. As, in his final days, he set up the stone on the other side of Jordan, did his mind go back to the day when he first led God's people in battle and appreciated, for the first time, that he fought beneath the banner of Jehovah?

At every stop between Egypt and Sinai, God had vital lessons to teach His people about the realities of wilderness living. But those lessons do not exhaust the significance of these passages, for 'whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our



learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope', Rom. 15. 4. Like Israel, we can learn general lessons about the character of God and the reality of our dependence upon Him. But we can learn more specific lessons from the context and the character of the encounter with Amalek.

The opening sentence of the narrative – 'Then came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim' – provides us with some important information about the context – geographical and chronological – of the battle. It is significant that Amalek came. Israel, at this point, was a nation on the move, and we might have expected conflict to arrive when their progress brought them upon another nation. That would be the case later, as they entered the land; their advance would bring them into enemy territory. But that is not the case here. Israel's pilgrim journey had just begun. The people 'pitched in Rephidim', v. 1, at the start of the chapter and it was to Rephidim that Amalek came, determined to stymie Israel's progress before it had hardly started. That fact tells us something about this new enemy that Israel faced. 'Pharaoh and Amalek represent two different powers or influences; Pharaoh represents the hindrance to Israel's deliverance from Egypt; Amalek represents the hindrance to their walk with God through the wilderness. Pharaoh used the things of Egypt to keep Israel from serving the Lord; he, therefore, prefigures Satan, who uses "this present evil world" against the people of God. Amalek, on the other hand, stands before us as a type of the flesh'.<sup>1</sup>

And a fitting type he is, this grandson of Esau, who preferred the temporary satisfaction of a mess of pottage to his birthright, Gen. 25. 29-34. The flesh is not an enemy that we must seek out or who is encountered only as a consequence of spiritual advance. Rather, we meet him as soon as our Christian journey begins, and that first encounter inaugurates an ongoing campaign of ceaseless and exacting warfare.

The identification of Amalek with the flesh is supported by the time, as well as the location, of Amalek's arrival. Israel had just received water from the stricken rock. 'That Rock was Christ', Paul tells us, 1 Cor. 10. 4, and the water that flowed from the rock under the stroke of Moses' rod can hardly but remind us of the 'living water' that the Saviour promised the Samaritan woman in John chapter 4 or the 'rivers of living water', John 7. 38. The stream from the smitten rock speaks of the Holy Spirit. Those who had been redeemed from Egypt 'all . . . [drank] the same spiritual drink', 1 Cor. 10. 4. The type falters here, for, in our experience, there was no interval between our deliverance from sin and Satan and our reception of the Holy Spirit; it was on believing that we 'were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise', Eph. 1. 13, and we must not allow the typological presentation to confuse the clear teaching of the New Testament on this point. Having said that, the structure of the narrative, and especially the way in which 'then came Amalek' juxtaposes the battle with the stream from the rock, is a vivid illustration of the truth that 'the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other', Gal. 5. 17. Until water gushed from the stricken rock, Amalek never troubled Israel. But when the rod fell and the water flowed, 'Then came Amalek and fought with Israel'. 'It is when the Holy Ghost thus takes up His abode in us . . . that our conflict begins'.<sup>2</sup>

All this being so, Israel's encounter with Amalek has for us a more than historical interest. Rather, it tells us something about our conflict with the flesh. Firstly, it reminds us of the need for conflict. At Rephidim, Israel could not stand still as she had at the Red Sea. Joshua had to choose out men, arm them, and send them into the battle. So, our conflict with the flesh is not a passive thing. Crucify, Gal. 5. 24, mortify, Rom. 8. 13; Col. 3. 5, beat and subdue, 1 Cor. 9. 27, are the verbs of our conflict, summoning us to strenuous and stringent efforts. So the conflict is arduous. It is also incessant – 'from generation to generation', Exod. 17. 16.

Israel would repeatedly encounter Amalek throughout her history; though repeatedly defeated, it would repeatedly reappear. Under the judges, under the monarchy, and even in exile, Esther 3. 1, Amalek would dog the nation. So it is in our conflict with the flesh. By God's help we may discomfit it for a time, but never, this side of the rapture, will we win a victory so decisive as to banish it for ever. Constant vigilance is required, and a constant readiness to join the battle once again.

The need constantly to do battle with the flesh is a daunting and even depressing reality. But the lesson of Jehovah-nissi is that we need not despair. In our struggles, the Lord is our banner and ultimate victory is assured, Exod. 17. 14; cp. Num. 24. 20. In the meantime, we do not struggle unassisted. The sight of Moses, Aaron, and Hur on the hilltop reminds us that, in this spiritual conflict, we have access, by prayer, to the power of God. This is paramount – without the uplifted hands of supplication, all the struggle will issue only in defeat.

Moses reminds us of the vital importance of prayer. But we can look beyond the mere man with drooping arms who stood on the hilltop above the battle to an unfailing and unwearying Man who appears 'in the presence of God for us', Heb. 9. 24. He appears there alone, without assistance, and needing none. 'The hands of our great Intercessor can never hang down. His intercession never fluctuates'.<sup>3</sup> He 'tends with sweet, unwearied care the flock for which He bled'.<sup>4</sup>

Exodus chapter 17 is replete with lessons. On the plain, upon the mountain, and at the altar, we see principles in operation that are vital for our spiritual development. May God help us all to learn the valuable lessons of Jehovah-nissi.

#### Endnotes

- 1 C. H. MACKINTOSH, *Notes on the Book of Exodus*, Pickering & Inglis, pp. 213, 214.
- 2 *Ibid*, pg. 215.
- 3 *Ibid*, pg. 219.
- 4 WILLIAM ARNOLD, 'There is a fold'.

# Studies in the twelve (minor) prophets 10

# HABAKKUK

By **KEN TOTTON** Cambridge, England

We know very little about the prophet Habakkuk, but he was probably a contemporary of Jeremiah. A prophet's message is much more important than the man himself.

His prophecy predicts an imminent Babylonian invasion, suggesting that he lived in Judah around the end of Josiah's reign. At the Battle of Carchemish, 605 BC, Egyptian forces were routed by the Babylonians. Jerusalem was next in line and was attacked in 597 BC.

The book is unusual in that it records a frank **dialogue** between the prophet and God, rather than messages specifically addressed to the people. The ways of God puzzle the prophet. How can a just and holy God, 1. 13, use the ruthless and despicable Babylonians as the instruments of His judgement? It raises the question of theodicy, the righteousness of the ways of God as regards evil – specifically His use of evildoers to accomplish His sovereign purposes. The answers that he obtained hold good for the whole household of faith, happily resulting in a psalm, ch. 3.

It becomes clear that, in the end, God will destroy the cruel and arrogant Babylonians, even though He uses them to achieve His disciplinary purposes, cp. Isa. 10. 5-19.

Habakkuk's message is timely for today, in which the problems of human existence, pandemics, unjust wars, and apostasy in Christendom press heavily upon thoughtful minds. Perplexed people ask, 'If there is a righteous God why doesn't He intervene?' For very many of God's people, faith is on trial as never before.<sup>1</sup>

Faith and patience in response to God's sovereignty is the essence of Habakkuk's message.

1. **Problems** of faith, ch. 1
2. **Principle** of faith, ch. 2
3. **Prayer** of faith, ch. 3  
'Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,

but trust Him for His grace.  
Behind a frowning Providence He  
hides His smiling face'.

COWPER.

## 1. Problems of faith

### (a) Habakkuk's first problem, 1. 2-4

He laments that Judean society is full of violence and evil, the oppression of the weak and all kinds of abuses. He cries, and no one seems to hear, not even God! His problem is created by God's **silence!**

Are we sufficiently concerned about spiritual conditions amongst us, cp. Rev. 2, 3, or have we become indifferent?

### Divine answer, 1. 5-11

God answers that He will raise up the Babylonians to sweep down upon the land and subdue Judah as punishment for her sins. Having despised the Lord's rule, they will have to submit to Babylonian rule.

Faith in God is never mere blind acceptance. To have questions about the ways of God and to experience doubt and difficulty is quite different from unbelief. As we follow Habakkuk's dialogue, we are emboldened to bring our own difficulties to God, with a view to understanding and accepting His ways. Mindful that our Bible is much larger than Habakkuk's, our attitude should be, 'What saith my lord unto his servant?' Josh. 5. 14.

### (b) Habakkuk's second problem, 1. 12-17

The prophet recognizes God's justice. His conviction that salvation will follow judgement assures him that Judah will not die nationally,

Hab. 1. 12. The nation would not be obliterated. But now another problem is created, this time by God's **action**. How can a holy God use the cruel Babylonians as His chosen instrument? Will those merciless predators never be brought to account, v. 17?

### Divine answer, 2. 1-4

To seek an answer, Habakkuk stations himself on his watchtower, 2. 1, symbolizing his openness to God. Watching and praying belong together. We should be on the alert before we pray, and having prayed we should look for answers.

God answers him, v. 2. As a result, he is to communicate the vision on tablets, so that 'those who read might run', i.e., people would be able to respond immediately by obeying its clear directions and spread the message. Divine illumination is not for personal one-upmanship, but to be humbly shared with others.

The prophet is reassured that **the vision** concerning God's righteous rule 'will surely come', v. 3. God will be faithful to His promises. In fact, God's purpose hastens to its goal, albeit it may seem delayed. It will surely come to pass in God's good time.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Principle of faith

Until then, the righteous are called to live in obedience and faithfulness to God, drawing strength from His promises even in dark times.

'The just shall live by his faith', v. 4 (RV margin, 'in his faithfulness'). Faithfulness assures permanence. Faithfulness is, for the prophet, a practical matter; it means integrity, fidelity, steadfastness under all trials and provocations. When Moses was supported by Aaron and Hur, 'his hands were **steady** [same word] until the going down of the sun', Exod. 17. 12. Underpinning faithfulness is the reality of faith in God.

A living faith in God determines our conduct; doctrine and ethics, belief and practice must therefore go hand in hand. Those living in faith experience fullness of **life**, Hab. 2. 4. They survive the ordeal of judgement and emerge chastened and victorious.



## Woe oracles against the Babylonians, 2. 5-20

In marked contrast to the faithful, those who are inflated with overweening pride (such as the Babylonians), and who rely on themselves, will be brought to destruction.

These woes expand the basic message of chapter 2 verse 4. The proud conquerors will overstep their remit, and God will judge them. We may analyse the passage as follows:

1. their conquests, vv. 6-8
2. their greed, vv. 9-11
3. their oppression of conquered peoples, vv. 12, 13
4. their humiliation of conquered peoples, vv. 15-17
5. their idolatry, vv. 18, 19.

Yet, there are some precious expressions of faith amidst the wicked abuses of chapter 2. Beyond the weary days of man's inhumanity, faith envisages the day of Jehovah's universal supremacy, 'For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea', v. 14. And in majestic contrast to worthless idols of wood and stone, 'the Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him', v. 20.

Although Habakkuk appreciates God's special providence over Israel, he is equally clear that Jehovah's rule embraces the whole earth; the destinies of all nations are in His hand. For the time being, Babylonians may worship idols, they may 'sacrifice unto their net', 1. 16, i.e., glory in their military power, but the Lord will show His supremacy by utterly destroying the boastful conqueror, idols and all. God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble, 1 Pet. 5. 5.

## 3. Prayer of faith

### Petition of faith, v. 2

The prophet recalls the awesome deeds of the Lord in the past and calls for His intervention. He acknowledges the reality of **divine wrath** yet pleads for mercy. Before the presence of God, Habakkuk both trembles and is reassured. DAVIDSON notes, 'The poet prays for the renewal of God's past work in the future, though he cannot think of that work without alarm'.<sup>3</sup>

## Power of Jehovah, vv. 3-15

Verses 3 to 15 celebrate the coming of God, a theophany. A good case can be made for rendering this passage vividly in the present tense.<sup>4</sup> The historical actions of God at the Exodus and the conquest of Canaan are powerfully and dramatically present to the mind of the prophet and point to the manner of His future intervention.

Temán, v. 3, locates the all-conquering God as coming up from the south as at the Exodus; plague and pestilence are divine punishments on evil doers, v. 5, whether Egyptian (cp. Exod. 7), or Israelite.

Rivers symbolize timeless continuity and their great flood waters oppose the progress of God's people, v. 8. Yet the rivers Nile and Jordan felt the power of God's judgements.<sup>5</sup> Their waters can be parted when God so wills.

The sun and moon standing still, v. 11, recalls the victory at Gibeon, Josh. 10. 12, 13.<sup>6</sup> The implication is that God will once again triumph over His enemies just as He did then. Arrows suggest thunderbolts from the heavenly Archer; the resultant thunderstorms deluge the landscape and divide the terrain by rivers, with 'the deep' recalling the unleashing of the underground waters of the flood catastrophe, Gen. 7. 11.

God 'threshed' the nations of Canaan in His wrath, coinciding with the deliverance of His people. 'His anointed one' denotes the chosen nation that He has made His own. Amidst His wrath against Egypt, He remembered mercy to Israel. In this connection, the leader of 'the house of the wicked', v. 13, would be Pharaoh.

### Profession of faith, vv. 16-19

Contemplating the irresistible power and glory of God's future intervention, vv. 3-15, Habakkuk is overwhelmed. Characteristically, however, his faith shines through, 'Yet I will quietly wait for the day of trouble to come upon people who invade us', v. 16 ESV. According to SPURGEON, 'faith is reason at rest in God'. From one standpoint, nothing has changed. Ungodly nations still devour the defenceless, and iniquity abounds

much closer to home. Yet Habakkuk sees that, unerringly, God is at work, cp. 1. 5. His kingdom will surely come.

Verse 17 pictures the total devastation of Judah's rural economy, the usual effect of invasion by foreign armies. But what a magnificent response from the prophet, v. 18! His circumstances are truly heart-breaking and bewildering, but he delights in the God of his salvation. God makes him surefooted like the hind – even in difficult and rocky places, cp. Ps. 18. 33. Not merely a survivor, but an overcomer, a conqueror, cp. Rom. 8. 37.

## To summarize

1. Conundrums: Habakkuk teaches us that we may well be puzzled at the ways of God, even though enlightened by scripture. But we trust God and rest in Him that all will be made plain in His own time.
2. Agencies: God uses whoever or whatever He wills to humble us and work out His gracious purposes; His chosen instruments might well be unpleasant.
3. Circumstances: We may be required to go through experiences that perplex us and cause us distress. But that should drive us to watchfulness, Hab. 2. 1, petition, and faith, v. 4, and praise 3. 17-19.
4. Delays: Answers may not come immediately, but God's delays are certainly not His denials, 2. 3; and in the meantime, the faithfulness and the fellowship of the godly will enable us to endure, v. 4, and ultimately to triumph, 3. 19.

## Endnotes

- 1 From the Dead Sea Scrolls it appears that the book was highly valued in the Intertestamental period, characterized by similar political turmoil. It speaks to every age when evil seems to be in the ascendant and where godly people struggle to understand the ways of God.
- 2 Hebrews following the Greek Septuagint version of the Old Testament, modifies 'it' to 'He' – Heb. 10. 36, 37. 'He' thus personalizes the oracle and points to its fulfilment in the coming Messiah.
- 3 A. B. DAVIDSON, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges, Cambridge University Press, pg. 83.
- 4 See RV margin, NASB, NET, NEB.
- 5 Exod. 7. 20-24; Josh. 3. 15-17; Ps. 114. 5.
- 6 A possible allusion to God answering prayer, Josh. 10. 14.

# Thoughts on Second Kings chapter 5 Part 2

By **JOHN TINKLER** Red Row, Northumberland, England

In the previous article we considered the revelation of the little maid for the cleansing of Naaman, her master.

Verse 5 of the chapter informs us of the king's actions for his well-respected soldier/servant. The little maid had not mentioned the king or any price that needed to be paid for Naaman's cure, but this is the message that was delivered to the king of Israel. Was this the king of Syria seeking a quarrel which could have possibly brought the nations into conflict? Here we have the wrong place, the wrong person, and the wrong price. God's message is without money and without price.

However, Elisha heard of the king's reaction and urged him to send Naaman and his entourage to him and to know 'there is a prophet in Israel', v. 8.

Naaman arrives at the prophet's house and fully expects a personal audience. Clearly, Naaman had a problem not only with his leprosy but also his pride. ROSS gives four helpful points regarding Naaman:<sup>1</sup>

- The *plague* that *haunted* him – "he was a leper", v. 1.
- The *pride* that *hindered* him – "he . . . went away in a rage", vv. 11 and 12.
- The *plea* that *helped* him – "his servants came near", v. 13.
- The *power* that *healed* him – "now I know", v. 15'.

The cure was not what Naaman thought or expected. This reminds us of the man in John chapter 9. The Lord says only seven words to him, 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam', v. 7. He obeyed and came back seeing. Elisha's message was similarly simple, straightforward, and sufficient. The message of the gospel is just the same. Sadly, men still have ideas of getting cleansing from sin by

their own methods but to no avail. We note verse 10 of our chapter:

- Where to go – Jordan.
- What to do – dip seven times.
- What would happen – 'thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean'.

Elisha never touched or saw the leper. The words of the preacher may be eloquent, but the hearer needs to act by the leading of the Spirit and be cleansed from sin.

Naaman had servants who pleaded with him to do what the prophet said. Think of the battles in his professional life in which he had been victorious. But here was his own personal battle, and his tactics did not match that of the instructions given. It certainly was wise counsel, to urge. The servants also came near and reminded Naaman it was a simple act – 'Wash, and be clean', v. 13. So, he acted accordingly. The man who had frequently given orders received an order. What was the result? He was cleansed.

- He had a new skin, v. 14 – outward.
- He had a new heart, v. 15 – inward.
- He had new paths, v. 19 – onward.
- He had new worship, v. 18 – upward.

It reminds us that the gospel is for the whole man, 'Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature', 2 Cor. 5. 17.

God had given deliverance to Syria but also to the man Naaman. What a difference it made to him. Note, 'I thought', v. 11, becomes 'I know', v. 15. His cleansing was followed by a clear confession, cp. John 9. 25, 'one thing I

know'. There was also a change in his conduct, v. 18 – the living God was to be worshipped and He alone. Thus, Naaman left in peace, something he had not known since his leprosy was discovered.

It is sad to think that the story does not end there. We note the attitude and actions of Gehazi. He was Elisha's messenger of what was required for Naaman to be cleansed, v. 10, but now seeks to seize the opportunity to pursue Naaman for the bounty his master had refused, v. 20.

As Elisha knew what action was needed by Naaman for cleansing, he was aware of the covetousness of his servant. Gehazi's sin is revealed; he coveted and concealed, but the man of God rebuked his sin. Naaman went away from the presence of Elisha cleansed whilst Gehazi went away from his master's presence with leprosy cleaving to him. A man so close to the prophet of God, He had seen much evidence of God's power at work through Elisha. He had witnessed his master's refusal of the gold and gifts, but they had captured his mind. To his condemnation he lied and became a leper. The sin of covetousness is seen; hidden for a while, but not to the man of God.

Following Naaman's cleansing, he had a desire to worship the living and true God, and we are reminded of Paul's words regarding the Thessalonians, 'ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God', 1 Thess. 1. 9. We may not be much in the eyes of the world, but the Lord can use even a little service for Him to bring others to cleansing from sin.

'O use me, Lord, use even me,  
Just as Thou wilt, and when,  
and where,  
Until Thy blessed face I see,  
Thy rest, Thy joy, Thy glory share'.<sup>2</sup>

## Endnotes

- 1 ALEX ROSS, *Some great things from my Bible*, Alex Ross (Private publication).
- 2 Hymn by FRANCES R. HAVERGAL, 1872. *Believer's Hymn Book* number 410.



# ELISHA

## PART 2

### Elijah's mantle 2 Kings 2

By **ANDREW BENNETT** Sound, Shetland

It was a time of change in the life of Elisha. He had been called by Elijah and had followed after him. What had happened is that his mentor and friend Elijah had been taken home to heaven. What was he to do?

Elijah had served in the northern kingdom with Elisha and scripture records that the people were wicked, godless individuals who took the northern tribes deeper and deeper into sin. The statement is often repeated that they 'did evil in the sight of the Lord', e.g. 1 Kgs. 15. 34; 16. 30.

Elisha had been called in 1 Kings chapter 19 as Elijah was moving out of a place of loneliness and discouragement. He had been restored with a new understanding about how God was working and had called Elisha.

The mantle was cast upon Elisha, v. 19. The mantle is the garment of a prophet and marked an individual as such, Zech. 13. 4, as mouthpieces of God to deliver messages to the people and to the rulers. The casting of the mantle upon Elisha indicated the summons to the office of prophet.

Elisha remained with Elijah, learning from him until this point where Elijah was taken, and he was left. What did he do? He continued the ministry. However, as we shall see in succeeding studies, it was a different type of ministry from that of Elijah.

Two men had gone to the Jordan, two men crossed over, but only one passed back. Elisha had learnt the lessons from Elijah well. He had been living with and learning from him. We can think of the two on the road to Emmaus when the Lord drew near. They were heavy-hearted, going back sad at the

events that they had seen. Yet, on that occasion, the Lord opened to them the scriptures and expounded the things concerning Himself – they spent time with Christ learning of Him, Luke 24. 13-35.

Elisha spent time with Elijah learning about his experiences and dealings with God. One of the essential lessons for service is to spend time with the Lord learning and waiting before we go out – before the mantle is passed there needs to be time spent in the quiet place. Moses was forty years in the backside of the desert. Paul was three years in Arabia and there are others who spent time quietly learning before they ever picked up the mantle and continued in service. For many of us, we dislike having times when we are waiting and learning. We always want to be busy doing things. The lesson we learn here is that before someone can be of any use in public there needs to be the time spent in private, alone with the Lord.

He had been told many times that Elijah would be leaving him, and Elijah had asked him to tarry, but he had declined, 2 Kgs. 2. 2, 4, 6. This was the time for Elisha to continue. He had been called, taught by Elijah, and now the time had come for him to stand alone. There are many saints who have been mentored by older saints. However, as with Elisha, there will come a time when those older saints, like Elijah, will be called home. Their service complete, they will go, and we will be left to stand. How will we get on?

In verse 7, fifty men of the sons of the prophets stood afar off. They watched as these two men went on into the distance. Are we those who are standing watching whilst others go on into the distance?

These sons of the prophets only went so far, they never continued. What Elisha received was a special revelation which those fifty men missed because they did not go on – they did not even know that Elijah had gone to heaven.

When we go on in spiritual things then it may, as for Elisha, get lonely. But as the two went on, v. 11, they talked. How precious that communion and conversation must have been as Elijah was about to go to Heaven. No one else heard, but how important that time was!

Elijah was taken up and Elisha left. Elisha must have felt the loss of Elijah, as we may when certain saints are called home. But, as he had overcome the pressure from the sons of the prophets, v. 5, and not been deterred as he had been told that Elijah would be taken, v. 6, so here again he had gone on. If these men had achieved their objective, then Elisha would have remained – he would never have made the full distance or accomplished what God had for him to do. In our Christian life there will always be those who seek to hold us back. May we, like Elisha, face the challenges and not be held back!

The mantle fell, v. 13, and Elisha picked it up. He identified himself with the work of Elijah – identified himself with a man who had gone to glory. Elisha rent his own clothes v. 12, discarding those garments associated with his former life, to take up the mantle of Elijah. Thus, the work continued, vv. 19-22, and the judgement fell, v. 23. Elisha was never the same after he took up the mantle of Elijah. Before the chapter finishes, he has performed three miracles. The man who had received the new identity exerted a new influence. Might we challenge ourselves to take up the mantle, that we might become more like Christ, the Man who has gone to glory.

# Towns and cities in the life of the Lord

## Part 7

# NAIN

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

This village of Nain is located in northern Israel, in the region known as Lower Galilee. It lies fourteen kilometres or eight-and-a-half miles south to south-east of Nazareth. In the context of Luke's Gospel, it would be 52.5 kilometres or thirty miles from Capernaum and it lay between Mount Tabor in the north and Mount Moreh in the south, just above the Jezreel Valley.

The city is mentioned only once in scripture and that is in Luke chapter 7, but how remarkable it is.

It was a city marked by sadness, v. 12, but one where the Lord exhibited sympathy to the bereaved widow, v. 13. It was a city in which Luke records two statements of the Lord, vv. 13, 14, and made restoration of a son to his mother, v. 15, which generated a significant response from those that observed, vv. 16, 17.

However, before considering the passage relating to Nain, let us note the context in which Luke puts this account.

The opening phrase of the passage states, 'And it came to pass the day after', v. 11. We should ask, 'the day after what?' It indicates that the visit to Nain followed immediately upon events in Capernaum that are described in the preceding verses. There the Lord had been approached by the Jewish leaders of the town on behalf of a Roman centurion who had a very sick servant or slave.

If we avoid bringing our 21st-century view of slavery to the passage, we should think about this request. In first-century terms, the one that was sick was only a slave! Surely, another one could be purchased from the slave market. Why expend such time and effort? Whilst such comments may be deeply offensive to people today, they enable us to see the

concern and compassion exhibited by the centurion, and by the Lord in responding to his request. They put a value upon human life far above that which was the common view of the time.

We might also note that Capernaum was thirty miles from Nain. On foot, the main means of personal transport in that day, it was a distance that would take a whole day to make. What, then, was the important business that the Lord had to do as part of His visit to Nain? Why take the journey?

With that background, let us consider Nain as a place of:

### Sadness

Note, 'there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother', v. 12.

What was the Lord's business whilst in Nain? All that we read of in relation to the place is the detail of this funeral procession for the widow's son. What was the focal point of the scene? Luke states, 'a dead man carried out', v. 12.

There was a time, perhaps still in existence in some places, when a funeral procession carried enormous respect. It is true that for significant figures of state that is still true. The normal things of life are put on hold for a brief time as a mark of respect for the individual who has died, but also for a moment of reflection and sympathy for the relatives who have

been left. This is where our attention is directed!

I want us to appreciate, in the measure that we are able, the sadness here. As a widow, she had lost a husband. We must not lose the significance of that event. Many readers may know how devastating it is to lose a life partner, someone with whom they have lived for thirty, forty, or fifty years.

But this was only a part of this woman's experience. The funeral procession she was now following was that of her only son. This son had been the one to take up the responsibility for the care and financial support of his mother. There was no welfare state in those days. There was no social security, care home, or care in the community provision. Without a son, this woman would be destitute, struggling to process a double bereavement and a significant financial crisis as well! Her situation was extreme!

This is why the context of this passage is so valuable as it enables us to think of the Saviour's compassion in healing the slave who was at the point of death in Capernaum. Whilst others might attach little value to human life, the Lord cared. He exhibited it in Capernaum and here again in Nain! What a joy for us, as Christians, to know that we have a High Priest who is 'touched with the feeling of our infirmities', Heb. 4. 15.

### Sympathy, v. 13

We have posed the question as to why the Lord made His journey. Why travel the thirty miles from Capernaum to Nain? The reason is given us here – the plight of the poor widow we have considered. This was not 'mere coincidence' that brought the Saviour to the city gate at just this time. Luke tells us, 'when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her'. We might paraphrase it by saying, 'His heart went out to her'. This is what compassion means. It is an assessment and action of the heart.

At any funeral there will be a mix of people and attitudes present. There will be those who, because of



their connection to the dead person, will be feeling deep sorrow. They will be grappling with their own emotions. Others may be present out of respect for the bereaved, struggling with a sense of their own impotence when faced with mortality. But here is something that distinguishes the Lord from the crowd. He sees the woman, picking her out from that crowd following the coffin. He sees the intensity of her grief and uncertain future. He has compassion!

Should we not ponder that thought in the darkest moments through which we pass? The Lord knows. The Lord cares. The Lord has compassion! But what does that mean in this instance? Let us note that the Lord takes the initiative. He moves towards the widow and speaks to her. It is not the grand but empty gesture of the politician or celebrity. It is the action of one who cares and who can change the situation for this widow.

### **Defining statements, vv. 13, 14**

The Lord says, 'Weep not', v. 13. In essence, He says, 'cease weeping as there is no need to continue'.

Remembering the Lord's words in the house of Jairus when confronted with the dead girl, He said, 'Why make ye this ado, and weep? the damsel is not dead, but sleepeth', Mark 5. 39. He was greeted by laughter and scorn. Examining the Lord's words here, we could imagine the response of the unbelieving. But we must remember that the widow

was in the presence of One of whom John chapter 1 verse 4 records, 'In him was life; and the life was the light of men'. He was the One who spoke and brought the worlds into being. He is the One who upholds all things by the word of His power. He is the One who said to Martha, 'I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live', John 11. 25.

Thus, we ask the question, thinking of the words of the Lord to Jeremiah, 'Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me?' Jer. 32. 27.

This brings us to the second statement, 'Young man, I say unto thee, Arise', v. 14.

The sceptic might say that claims are justified by actions. Here is the evidence that the Lord is in absolute control and that He has the power to meet this situation, for death cannot exist in the presence of the Prince of life. The young man was raised from death!

But we should notice what preceded this statement – 'he came and touched the bier', v. 14. This was remarkable. For an orthodox Jew it was unthinkable, for it brought ceremonial uncleanness. As we consider the person of the Lord Jesus, this could not be so. Remember, Mark chapter 1 records it, that a leper came to the Lord seeking cleansing from his dread disease. Verse 41 tells us, 'Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I

will; be thou clean'. As here, so there. No ceremonial uncleanness could result, for the leprosy was banished, as death was banished here.

Have there been times in your life when you have doubted – doubted the ability of the Saviour in a particular situation? In human terms, you have felt that you were in a situation so complex that it was beyond human resolution, where you felt utterly helpless to avoid it and its outcomes. God said to Abraham, when He told him that Sarah would bear him a son, 'Is any thing too hard for the Lord?' Gen. 18. 14.

### **Restoration, v. 15**

'And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother'.

The sceptic may scoff but this young man had been dead for at least twenty-four hours and was on his way to be buried. Now, says the verse, he 'sat up, and began to speak'. His return to life was genuine. It was not a young man still desperately ill whispering a few words in weakness. He 'began to speak' and, no doubt, continued in that vein. It was not the gradual response of someone coming out of a coma, because he sat up. More than that, the Lord 'delivered him to his mother'. He dispensed with the coffin and walked to meet his mother. What a restoration!

### **The response, vv. 16, 17**

'There came a fear on all: and they glorified God', v. 16.

First, there was a reverential awe and genuine wonder. Like the disciples on the Sea of Galilee, Mark 4. 41, they might have asked, 'What manner of man is this?' Second, 'they glorified God'. It is a feature of Luke's Gospel that the outcomes of the Lord's actions brought glory to God.

Thus, as we leave Nain, let us remember what it reveals to us of the heart of the Saviour, His compassion and care, and the reminder it gives us of the great High Priest that is ours. As we contemplate His power, may we bow in reverential awe, and may it challenge all of our hearts to glorify God in all that we do!



# Journey of the Ark of the Covenant Part 1

By **STEPHEN FELLOWES** Skibbereen, Ireland

The ark of the covenant is a most interesting and instructive study in scripture. To fully analyse it we would need to consider it's:

1. Construction, Exod. 25
2. Covering (mercy seat), Exod. 25
3. Contents, Heb. 9
4. Coverings, Num. 4
5. Course.

It is the last of these subjects that we purpose to consider. We will trace three significant journeys taken by the ark, namely through the Jordan river, around the city of Jericho, and up to the city of Jerusalem. These three areas of scripture will yield several searching lessons connected with the ark of God and will cover quite a scope of teaching as we endeavour to apply the principles from each journey. The Jordan will present truth relative to the believer personally, Jericho will relate to the believer and the world, and when we follow the ark to Jerusalem there are vital lessons that readily apply to the believer and the assembly.

## **Jordan – Josh. 3; Deut. 8. 7-10; Rom. 6. 6, 11**

Jordan was a natural barrier to the Promised Land. To be in the good of the land that God had promised His people, it was essential to cross the Jordan.

## **Destiny**

God had purposed a people for the land. We see in the book of Genesis that God had brought them out of the loins of Abraham. In Exodus, by blood and power, He would bring them out of Egyptian bondage and from thence into His presence as priests in the book of Leviticus. Numbers will reveal that in His faithfulness, and despite their unfaithfulness, He would bring them through the wilderness, then, ultimately, they would be brought into the land as we read in both Deuteronomy and Joshua.

They were truly a people of **destiny**.

Failure to enter the land would rest foursquare at their own feet.

Joshua begins his book with a sixfold emphasis upon the fact that God had given them the land; 1. 2, 3, 6, 11, 13, 15. Everything they possessed was a divinely bestowed gift from the heart and hand of the God of sovereign grace.

Moses, in the book of Deuteronomy chapter 8 verses 7 to 10, gives a detailed description of the wealth and fullness of the land of Canaan. He speaks about the vitality of a land with brooks, fountains, and springs; of a land with variety, containing wheat, barley, figs, and honey; a land with volume that would never run out, having no scarcity or lack, and with valuable metal in its hills.

All of this is most suggestive to the believer in the present age of grace. We too are a people destined to enjoy an inheritance, but this inheritance is something that God would have us enter into this side of heaven. Canaan does not answer typically to heaven, because, amongst other reasons, it must be conquered to be enjoyed, but it is a picture of our present enjoyment of all the blessed things we have been brought into by our union with Christ. In the Epistle to the Ephesians, Paul reminds us of all the richness of the blessings that God has lavished upon us, we are 'blessed . . . with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ', Eph. 1. 3.

## **Description**

The ark is referred to seventeen times in Joshua chapters 3 and 4 and thus plays the key role in relation to crossing the Jordan. It is instructive to note the titles that are given to the ark. It is without question a beautiful type of the person of our Lord Jesus Christ – a study of the construction of it as outlined in Exodus chapter 25 will establish this. But here we note that it is called:

### a) **'The ark of the covenant of the Lord your God', Josh. 3. 3.**

This title reminds our hearts of the absolute and essential deity of our Lord Jesus and takes our thoughts back to the glory of the gold that overlaid the ark within and without, Exod. 25. 11. At the beginning of his Gospel, John announces unequivocally the absolute deity of our blessed Lord by telling us that 'the Word was God', John 1. 1. This statement alone is sufficient, but scripture is full of this glorious truth. May our hearts ever be aligned to the words of Thomas when he expressed, 'My Lord and my God', John 20. 28.

### b) **'The ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth', Josh. 3. 11.**

This title is one of supremacy. We recall the words of Paul in Colossians, 'that in all things he might have the preeminence', Col. 1. 18. Christ must always be given the place of supremacy; just as the ark would be uplifted on the shoulders of the priests so Christ must ever be supreme amongst His people.

### c) **'The ark of the testimony', Josh. 4. 16.**

This, of course, reminds us that into the ark was put the testimony, i.e., the law, cp. Heb. 9. 4. Prophetically, our Saviour could say, 'I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart', Ps. 40. 8. His was a heart wholly and solely devoted to the will of God, the only man who upheld every principle of the law and acted according to it in every detail of His perfect life.

## **Depiction**

In the crossing of the Jordan, we need to delineate exactly what is typically portrayed:

- a) The ark is Christ.
- b) The Jordan speaks of death. Compare John baptizing in the Jordan, Matt. 3. 5, 6.
- c) The twelve men represent God's people.
- d) The city of Adam connects with Romans chapter 6 verses 1 to 11.
- e) The Promised Land is a picture of the inheritance.



With this clearly before our minds, we can see that the crossing of the Jordan speaks vividly of the association of the believer with Christ in death in order to come into the good of the inheritance.

We need to distinguish between the crossing of the Red Sea and the crossing of the Jordan.

Crossing the Red Sea is typical of **my salvation**; it is the death of Christ **for** me which brings me out of Egyptian bondage and introduces me to the pilgrim pathway through the wilderness.

But in the crossing of the Jordan, the type is of **my identification** with Christ; it is my death **with** Christ which brings me into the good of the inheritance.

Israel was told, 'When ye see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, and the priests the Levites bearing it, then ye shall remove from your place, and go after it', Josh. 3. 3.

They followed that ark down and through the opened waters of the Jordan. When the feet of the priests touched the river, the Holy Spirit



of God states that the waters of the Jordan went back to the city of Adam, Josh. 3. 16.

This brings us to the Epistle to the Romans, and chapter 6 in particular.

In chapters 1 to 5 of Romans, Paul shows us how that Christ has died for our sins. In doing this He has laid down a righteous basis upon which God can justify the believing sinner, thus clearing him of every charge of guilt and enabling him to say, like David, 'Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven', Rom. 4. 7.

But, when we come to chapter 6, the truth being taught is that **I have died to sin**. This is one of the most vital truths for the believer to grasp, and why Paul lays stress upon our understanding, '**Knowing** this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin', Rom. 6. 6.

The 'old man' comprises everything that I was in Adam, all that I am from my birth to my conversion. At the cross, Christ not only died for what I did – my sins – but He died for what I am – myself! Paul uses similar language, albeit in a different context, in the Galatian Epistle, 'I am crucified with Christ', Gal. 2. 20.

So, we can see the beauty of the type in the crossing of the Jordan. The waters of the river of death go back to the city of Adam, the people of God follow the ark through the river and into the promised inheritance, likewise the death of Christ goes back to Adam and deals with everything that I was in my identification with Adam.

'My Adam's standing He destroyed,  
And set my soul above  
The ruins of this wretched world -  
So boundless is His love!  
The new creation now is mine,  
By grace in it I stand,  
In resurrection power, upheld  
By God's almighty hand'

MIDLANE

Paul will develop in Romans chapter 6 that the new link with Christ will lead to a new type of life, a life no longer under servitude to sin but

under the lordship of Christ. In baptism, we told everyone that we are now identified with Christ and the weighty responsibility upon us is that we must give evidence to this in a practical way.

## Distance

There is one other point worthy of consideration.

Before the Israelites passed through the Jordan, they were instructed that 'there shall be a space between you and it, about two thousand cubits by measure: come not near unto it, that ye may know the way by which ye must go: for ye have not passed this way heretofore', Josh. 3. 4.

Evidently there was a **practical** reason for this distance (approximately 3000 feet). There had to be the distance for such a large company of people to see the ark.

But there is also a **moral** lesson to be learned from the distance between the people and the ark. We must never ever become over-familiar with things that are holy. When we consider the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, we take the place of the privileged three disciples in the garden of Gethsemane who went so far but must remain a stone's cast away from their Saviour, Luke 22. 41.

This principle holds true whether we are considering the virgin birth of Christ, or His true and yet sinless humanity, or the sensitive subject of His trials by Satan in the wilderness, or the depths of His sorrow of heart in Gethsemane where He anticipated what it would be to be made sin for us. And what shall we say of Calvary with its unspeakable agonies and deep unfathomable mystery where, forsaken by God, He endured the totality of divine wrath against sin.

Oh, let us pause and think before we speak, and let our thoughts be high and holy, our hearts humbled, and our words governed only by the language of the sacred scriptures when we deal with the most holy of subjects, our blessed Lord. Let all undue familiarity be banished and let us maintain the distance between us and the ark.

# William Lincoln (1825-1888)

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

‘I hope you will not talk about William Lincoln, for I am only a saved sinner’.<sup>1</sup> From such a beginning, perhaps it would be inappropriate to write this article, or one on any other servant of the Lord, but we do so, like others before us, with the desire to encourage all in their obedience and faithfulness to the word of God and its principles.

Lincoln was born in Bethnal Green, London in 1825, his parents dying when he was very young. Apart from the early loss of his parents, he was also widowed before the age of thirty, marrying his second wife, Mary Elizabeth Wilson, in 1855. There were no children from either of his marriages.

He was first stirred as to his need of salvation by the reading and re-reading of a book by Philip Doddridge.<sup>2</sup> Whilst the book brought a realization of his sin, he was brought to faith by other means at the age of seventeen. The zeal of this newly saved young man led him to study for a year under the Church Missionary Society (CMS), intending to seek service for the Lord in India. This was not to be realized, the CMS council rejecting his request ‘owing to hereditary consumption’<sup>3</sup> in the family.<sup>4</sup>

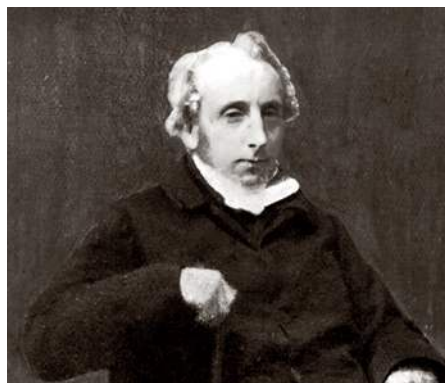
Following this seeming setback, he entered King’s College, London, ultimately becoming an associate.<sup>5</sup> In 1849, Lincoln was ordained at Preston by the Bishop of Manchester. He served in the established church there for some years before becoming curate at Saint George’s, Southwark, London. As curate, he preached mostly at a district church but drew large numbers to hear him. In 1859, Beresford Chapel in Beresford Street, Walworth, became vacant, and Lincoln applied for the living, and got it – a defining moment, for Lincoln was thereafter identified with Beresford Chapel.

Although attendances started small, numbers were attracted by his powerful preaching. BEATTIE comments, ‘There was soon scarcely

a sitting to be obtained in a building holding about one thousand three hundred people, and weekly the chapel was crowded to excess’.<sup>6</sup> Over the next three years, Lincoln’s study of the scriptures led him to realize that he could not continue in the established church. That break with the Church of England came in November 1862 when, as PICKERING notes, ‘He read out his reasons for so doing on a Sunday evening to a congregation which crowded the building to the utmost’.<sup>7</sup>

The occasion of his secession was a very memorable one for a number of reasons. His congregation reduced in number as many refused to follow him.<sup>8</sup> Lincoln was also baptized by immersion at a nearby Baptist Chapel. Although friends urged him to be baptized outside of London, he expressed determination that it should be done in his own neighbourhood, giving testimony to his newfound light. This was also the moment when he wrote the book for which he is perhaps best known, *The Javelin of Phinehas, Or, Christ’s Own Judgment Upon Christendom*, which was published in 1863.<sup>9</sup>

As the work at Beresford – continued, changes began to be made. Although gradual, they were made as the congregation’s understanding of scripture grew. As PICKERING notes, ‘Many attempts were made to get Lincoln to join one or other of the various denominations; but his expressed determination always was, “never to join anything or any party,” but to cleave to the Lord alone. His purpose and joy ever was to press the



truth of gathering to the Lord’s Name alone’.<sup>10</sup> After about a month, the Lord’s Supper was celebrated every Lord’s Day, albeit in the evening. This practice continued for a while before it took its place in the morning. Equally, old practices were abandoned; the large organ on Sundays was given up, and the stained-glass windows were covered.

On one subject Lincoln was particularly persuasive. He maintained that there should be time devoted to the consecutive teaching of scripture after the breaking of bread on the Lord’s Day mornings. It was in this ministry that he was so used of God and from which much of his written ministry is drawn.<sup>11</sup> Although much of his service was confined to Beresford Chapel and London, Lincoln only ever regarded himself as ‘a teacher, chosen of God to minister to the Saints, a pastor among many others’.<sup>12</sup> He continued there for twenty-six years before, after a period of failing health, he was called home in 1888.

## Endnotes

- 1 Quoted in DAVID J. BEATTIE, *Brethren. The story of a great recovery*, John Ritchie, 1944, pg. 87.
- 2 PHILIP DODDRIDGE, *The rise and progress of religion in the soul*, American Tract Society, 1828.
- 3 ‘Tuberculosis, also known as consumption, is a disease caused by bacteria that usually attacks the lungs, and at the turn of the 20th century, the leading cause of death in the United States’ – found here: <https://www.lung.org/blog/how-we-conquered-consumption>.
- 4 DAVID J. BEATTIE, *op. cit.*, pg. 87.
- 5 King’s College, London, is one of the UK’s most historic and prestigious universities and the AKC (Associateship of King’s College) is the original award of the university dating back to its foundation in 1829.
- 6 DAVID J. BEATTIE, *op. cit.*, pg. 88.
- 7 HENRY PICKERING, *Chief men among the Brethren*, Pickering and Inglis, 1918 (1968 reprint), pg. 107.
- 8 ‘For the sake of allegiance to his Lord, and obedience to His Word, he surrendered worldly prospects and emoluments [payments for work] of no ordinary character’, *Ibid.*
- 9 A copy can be read here: [https://www.brethrenarchive.org/media/357941/the\\_javelin\\_of\\_phinehas\\_or\\_christ\\_s\\_own.pdf](https://www.brethrenarchive.org/media/357941/the_javelin_of_phinehas_or_christ_s_own.pdf).
- 10 HENRY PICKERING, *op. cit.*, pp. 107, 108.
- 11 He gave ‘lectures’ on Ephesians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Hebrews, 1 and 2 Peter, the Epistles of John, and Revelation. He also wrote on Philipians, and Genesis, amongst other broader subjects.
- 12 DAVID J. BEATTIE, *op. cit.*, pg. 89.



# QuestionTime

Conducted by  
**Frank A. Proudlock**

## QUESTION

**Why do Christians sin and how can we overcome sin?**

## ANSWER

Before I became a Christian, my understanding of right and wrong was shaped by various influences - my upbringing,<sup>1</sup> the opinions of my peers, and societal norms absorbed through the media. Morality was fluid and subjective. However, when I became a Christian, a process of re-education began, with a much clearer standard of right and wrong defined by God's word. Sin became personal, as God was now real and alive, and living a life to please Him became a priority.

Yet, it was not long before I realized that, despite my desire to do God's will, the pull towards sin was still present. Sometimes, this pull was subtle and deceptive. This struggle can be a shocking and disturbing realization for many new believers – the 'flesh' nature remains even after salvation. The flesh represents the unconverted part of our human nature, inherited from Adam, which will only be fully removed when we reach heaven. It does not improve over time and, if anything, gets worse. It is often the key factor leading Christians into sin. The Apostle Paul captures this internal conflict, 'For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would', Gal. 5. 17.

Thankfully, God has provided several resources to help us resist sin and recover when we fall:

1. **The Spirit of God:** When a person becomes a Christian, they are permanently indwelt by the Holy Spirit, one of the persons of the Godhead who inwardly empowers us. The Holy Spirit is grieved when we sin, Eph. 4. 30. We are called to 'walk in the Spirit' so that we do not fulfil the desires of the flesh, Gal. 5. 16.
2. **Forgiveness:** Our relationship with God, as His children, is secure when we become believers. However, sin can disturb our fellowship with Him. When we do fail, God promises to forgive us if we confess our sins, 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness', 1 John 1. 9.
3. **The word of God:** God's ultimate goal is to conform us to the image of His Son, Jesus Christ. Romans chapter 8 verses 28 and 29 explains that, 'all things work together for good', specifically to make us more like Christ. This transformation often happens unconsciously as we immerse ourselves in scripture. Paul writes, 'But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the

Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord', 2 Cor. 3. 18. As the psalmist declares, 'Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word', Ps. 119. 9.

4. **Our hope:** The hope of seeing the Lord Jesus face to face and becoming like Him should profoundly influence how we live. This hope has a purifying effect upon our lives, 'And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure', 1 John 3. 3.
5. **Our identity in Christ:** Baptism symbolizes our union with Christ in His death and resurrection. It points to a profound truth: we have died to sin. This addresses the misconception that grace permits ongoing sin, 'Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?' Rom. 6. 1, 2. This is known as **positional truth** – a reality that God has established for us, independent of our behaviour. Paul urges us to 'likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord', v. 11.
6. **A way of escape:** Temptation is inevitable, but God has promised that we will never face it without a means of escape. 'There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it', 1 Cor. 10. 13.
7. **Fellowship:** God has not left us to struggle alone. The fellowship of other believers provides encouragement and accountability. Solomon reminds us that, 'Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up', Eccles. 4. 9, 10.

In conclusion, while Christians still struggle with sin due to our fallen human nature, God has provided us with powerful resources to resist sin and grow in holiness. Through the Holy Spirit, God's word, the hope of seeing Christ, and the support of fellow believers, we can live lives that reflect our new identity in Christ, even amidst the ongoing battle with sin.

### Endnote

- 1 The author was not raised in a Christian home.

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'The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb', Isa. 11. 6



### 'The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb', Isa. 11. 6

Wolves are the largest and most powerful members of the biological family of animals including dogs, foxes, and coyotes. There are three distinct species of wolves: the grey wolf, the most widespread and varied, with over thirty subspecies; the red wolf; and the Abyssinian wolf. They differ in size, colour, environment, and behaviour.

In the biblical record, the wolf is a beast to be feared. As a carnivore, it hunts in packs and feeds upon other animals that it captures and kills. Speaking of the sheep under the care of the hireling, the Lord warned of the consequences of the attack of the wolf, 'the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep', John 10. 12. The 'catch' involves extreme violence and causes terror amongst the other sheep who fly in every direction. Similarly, Paul informed the Ephesian elders that 'after . . . [his] departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock', Acts 20. 29. Their reputation as merciless killers seems cemented.

With that reputation in mind, it is interesting to read of the difference that will be effected in the animal during the millennial reign of Christ. The prophet Isaiah tells us that 'the wolf also shall dwell with the lamb', Isa. 11. 6. To inhabit the same space means that the wolf's carnivorous nature will disappear. The lamb's natural fear of becoming the wolf's next victim will be removed. The change in feeding habits is confirmed later in the prophecy, 'The wolf and the lamb shall feed together', 65. 25. As the verse goes on to suggest, the carnivores will become herbivores and they, the wolf and the lion, 'shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain'.

What a transformation the Lord will bring upon the earth when He comes to reign! For the believer, we look forward to a change that will come sooner. Paul reminds us, 'In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality', 1 Cor. 15. 52, 53.

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