



ASSEMBLY TESTIMONY

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ASSEMBLY TESTIMONY

This is a bi-monthly magazine for the propagation of the Word of God and thus the encouragement and edification of the people of God.

Advisory Editor : A. M. S. Gooding

Editor: B. Currie

Correspondence relative to Editorial matters should be addressed to:

The Editor, 49 Glenburn Road, Dunmurry, N. Ireland, BT17 9AN.
Telephone (01232) 621343.

Secretary/Treasurer : William Neill, 109 Lurgan Road,
Banbridge, Northern Ireland, BT32 4NG.
Telephone (018206) 24238.

Committee : Tom Armstrong, Thomas Beggs, Ronnie Johnston,
James McKeown, James Moore, Roy Reynolds.

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Friends residing in England, Scotland and Wales may kindly forward their donations to :

John Glenville, 16 Trelawney Road, Saltash, Cornwall, PL12 4DD.
Telephone (01752) 846889.

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Editor's Message

On every hand and in every walk of life there is a need. Declining moral standards in high places, lying, cheating, perjury, adultery have left men bewildered and despondent. There is a great need. Economists have identified it, politicians clamour for it, entrepreneurs need it, newspaper editors write about it and the ordinary citizens would welcome it. What is it? It is a MAN! We who read the word of God know the man they will get — he will be a superman, a statesman of a kind, but Satan's man. Some of us believe he is already alive and waiting in the wings until the church is raptured to heaven and subsequently he will be revealed.

Is there not a similar need among the saved? Do we not crave a particular kind of man? What is the need of the day? Let the wise man answer, "a faithful man who can find?" Prov.20.6. Life in the world is marked by give and take; principles are compromised for the sake of expediency and cosmetic unity; standards are never absolute and those who promote an absolute standard are deemed bigoted and narrow minded. Such thinking can pervade the minds of the saints until there is much unprofitable and sceptical questioning.

A faithful man will be unswerving in his devotion to God and his obedience to His Word. Faithfulness is a qualification for all service and is demanded in stewards, "it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful," 1Cor.4.2. It is much valued by God, "Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with Me," Ps.101.6. It will bring its own reward both now and at the Judgment Seat, "A faithful man shall abound with blessings," Prov.28.20; "the LORD preserveth the faithful," Ps.31.23; "Well done, thou good and faithful servant," Matt.25.21,23.

With such blessings promised we would expect to find many in the Bible described as 'faithful'. But there are so few, it seems to be a non too prevalent characteristic. Among the few who are personally described are the following, from each part of the Bible.

Num.12.7, "My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house."

Neh.7.2, "he was a faithful man, and feared God above many."

Neh.13.13, "I made treasures over the treasuries, Shelemiah the priest, and Zadok the scribe, and of the Levites, Pedaiah: and next to them was Hanan the son of Zacuur, the son of Mattaniah: for they were counted faithful, and their office was to distribute unto their brethren."

Isa.8.2, "I took unto me faithful witnesses to record, Uriah the priest, and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah."

Dan.6.4, "he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him."

1Cor.4.17, "Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord..."

Col.1.7, "Epaphras our dear fellowservant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ..."

Col.4.7, "Tychicus, a beloved brother, and a faithful minister and fellowservant in the Lord..."

Col.4.9, "Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother..."

1Pet.5.12, "Silvanus, a faithful brother..."

Rev.2.13, "Antipas was my faithful martyr..."

If the testimony is to be perpetuated this is our great need. 2Tim.2.2, "the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." As the apostle covers four generations in one verse, the men who are required are not clever, educated, verbose but FAITHFUL. The rarity of such is underlined by the Psalmist, "Help, LORD; for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men," Ps.12.1.

The question asked by the wise man was, "a faithful man who can find?" Where is he? Can he be trained? Some think he must be a hard, legal, ungracious, unloving, overbearing man. Not so brethren, the men we need are those who will stand uncompromisingly, yet graciously, for the truth of God and, in fact, be just like the Lord Jesus, "from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness," Rev.1.5.

May the year upon which we have entered, see a greater devotion in the lives of the saints and a desire begotten in the hearts of some to be worthy of the description, 'faithful'.

COMMITTEE NOTES

The imminence of the coming millennium is further emphasised as we enter the year 1999 — the last of the 1900's. The daily countdown to the year 2000 is ongoing in some newspapers and the continuing publicity regarding the Millennium Dome, etc., concentrates the minds of many on the future.

As to the past, it is almost 2000 years ago since Mary "brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn," Luke 2.7.

Recent controversy would indicate that little or nothing of Christ or Christianity will be found in the plans of men for the coming year 2000. How sad — still no room for the Son of the Highest.

Every believer will, however, remember that He who came in by way of the manger — God Incarnate, and went out by way of the cross, the suffering Man and the conquering God, is coming again. How secure and glorious the promise, and without dates or times, "I will come again."

The magazine continues to be dependent upon the faithfulness of a God who never fails. Likewise we are indebted to those who enable the work to continue by their prayers, practical fellowship, and the contribution of written ministry. The control, circulation and accounting of the magazine are in the capable hands of the Editor, the Secretary, and the Accountant, and we are deeply thankful for their diligence in these operations.

We are thankful for the letters of appreciation from readers of the magazine, and we trust that all who read may be blessed and edified.

BEHOLD YOUR KING

(Meditations in Matthew)

by Jim Flanigan (Belfast)

18. The Kingdom Parables (Ch.13)

The opening words of this interesting chapter are most significant. "The same day went Jesus out of the house and sat by the seaside." "The same day...out of the house...by the sea." What an eventful day that had been. It was the day that the Pharisees had held council how to destroy Him. It was the day they had rejected Him in His three-fold greatness. It was the day they blasphemed the Spirit of God and thereby committed the unpardonable sin. It was the day He announced a new relationship, greater than natural ties. On that day He, in figure, left the house of Israel and began a ministry by the sea, which is ever a symbol of Gentile nations. He went into a ship. He was physically out of reach of the multitudes, but they could hear His voice. All this is so apt a picture of present conditions. The Saviour has gone out of reach but His voice is yet heard, with a message of grace particularly relevant to Gentiles.

He will speak in parables, taking the familiar things of life to illustrate things spiritual. There follow seven parables of the kingdom and an eighth parable which deals with the responsibility of those who presume to teach. We must not confuse the kingdom with the church. The church may indeed be in the kingdom but the kingdom is more extensive than the church and there are two lines of truth which must be distinguished. These seven parables will describe the course and character of the kingdom from the commencement of our Lord's ministry and during His absence and until He returns at the consummation of the age. It is the kingdom in a mystery form. Prophets who knew about a kingdom had not however envisaged a kingdom quite like this, with the King absent. Hence these are things "new and old." It will be shown that not everything in the kingdom is genuine, whereas, of course, everything in the church is. A kingdom is the domain of a king. Often in a kingdom there are subjects who are not truly subject. The kingdom of the heavens is the rule of the heavens on earth, but there are those in that kingdom whose allegiance is feigned and nominal, and this will be judged.

The first parable, that of the sower, tells of opposition to the kingdom in a three-fold way. It is the work of those old enemies, the world, the flesh, and the devil. Some seed will fall on the hard-trodden wayside. The birds of the air snatch it away and there is no growth. Other seed will fall into shallow stony ground where there is promise, until the sun comes up and the scorched seed is withered. Again, some seed will fall among thorns, where it is choked. Jesus later explains to His disciples. The field is the world. The seed is the Word. It is the work of the wicked one to catch the seed away. With some there is a fleshy, emotional response which does not endure. With others, the cares of the world or the deceitfulness of riches choke the word. Rich and poor alike are vulnerable. But in spite of the opposition of the devil, the flesh, and the world, there is yet good seed which falls into good ground and bears fruit.

A second parable tells of tares being sown among the wheat. This is still

opposition, but in the form of imitation. The tares are “darnel”, a poisonous grass which bears a resemblance to the true wheat. Our Lord later explains this parable also. While men have slept the enemy has been busy. Is it yet so in our day? It is not our business, and indeed it is not possible for us, to purge the kingdom from the offending darnel. The Lord of the harvest and His angels will attend to that at the end of the age.

Another parable likens the kingdom to a grain of mustard seed sown in the field. There is a small beginning but phenomenal outward growth. How small indeed were those beginnings. A manger in Bethlehem. A carpenter's home in Nazareth. A few fishermen. A despised Jesus. An upper room. A cross and a tomb outside Jerusalem. What a great professing Christendom has grown from these. Birds of the air which would snatch away the good seed actually lodge in the branches of this great tree. The unclean birds are caged in a system of their own making, Rev.18.2.

There is yet another parable which portrays the outward growth of the kingdom. A woman kneads leaven into three measures of meal until the whole is leavened. No Jew would ever have understood leaven as a symbol of anything but evil. How soon did the leaven of evil doctrine corrupt the fine flour. Almost every aspect of Christ's person and work has been corrupted somewhere in Christendom. His essential deity; His real and pure humanity; His virgin birth; His miracles; the virtue of His cross; His bodily resurrection; His visible ascension and the promise of His return; these have all been “leavened”. These fundamental doctrines are today being down-graded, doubted, denied, and destroyed, in many a pulpit in Christendom. But if all this seems discouraging, and causes us to wonder if there is anything good in the kingdom, yes, indeed, there are yet three more parables which will show that there is that which is real and genuine and precious to the Lord. There is treasure in the field. There is a goodly pearl to be purchased. There are good fish in the net. Look at Israel. There will yet be a remnant nation, His own peculiar treasure. See the church, a pearl of great price for His glory. From the nations there will be those, who, like the sheep of another parable in Matthew 25 will enjoy millennial bliss with Him. There is indeed a genuine thing within the Kingdom in all aspects. There is always something for Him.

Did the disciples understand all these things? They said that they did. Well then, they must be like diligent householders and bring out of their treasures things new and old. They would of course have knowledge of things which had been taught of old by Old Testament prophets and Psalmists. But these twelve were now highly privileged men, recipients of new revelation of new things of a new economy. The old things would need to be reiterated and restated. The new things would need to be explained and expounded, and this was their responsibility as those instructed in matters of the kingdom.

The parables are finished now. The people are amazed, as ever, at the Saviour's wisdom. Is He not the carpenter's son? Are not the names of His mother, and His brethren and sisters, well known to them all? How does such an One do such mighty works and possess such knowledge? Their unbelief robs them. His mighty works were limited there because of it. As he said, a prophet is now without honour except in his own country.

In chapter 14 the days will get darker still, with the murder of John Baptist, the King's friend and forerunner.

—to be continued (D.V.)

Assembly Testimony Bible Class

by J. Riddle (Cheshunt)

ESTHER

(2) EXIT VASHTI

Read Chapter 1

The best comments on any part of the Bible are generally found in the Bible itself. You couldn't possibly do better than the following when it comes to the book of Esther — “Verily Thou art a God that hidest Thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour,” Isa.45.15. As we said in our introduction, God may not be named in the book of Esther, but His hand is constantly seen. How about this for another appropriate comment: “Behold, He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep?” Ps.121.4.

The way in which the book of Esther displays the providence of God, makes it quite unique in the Bible, and we don't have to wait long before it all starts to happen. The opening two chapters alone describe three principal events:

- (1) The Removal of Vashti.
- (2) The Selection of Esther.
- (3) The Loyalty of Mordecai.

1) THE REMOVAL OF VASHTI

A) The Feast of Ahasuerus, v1-9

This incident is set against the background of a remarkable feast made by Ahasuerus for “all his princes and his servants; the power of Persia and Media, the nobles and princes of the provinces...”, 1.3. The feast lasted for approximately six months, and was followed by a further feast, lasting seven days, for “all the people that were present in Shushan the palace, both unto great and small...”, 1.5. Shushan (Hebrew), or Susa (Greek), was the winter capital of the Persian Empire, and was situated some two hundred miles east of Babylon. Daniel saw the place in a vision (see Dan.8: it's worth reading the whole chapter since it describes the rise of the Medo-Persian Empire and its defeat by Greece), and Nehemiah served Artaxerxes there (see Neh.1.1).

The outstanding feature of the narrative in v1-9, is its detail. In describing the extent of the kingdom: “This is Ahasuerus which reigned, from India even unto Ethiopia, over an hundred and seven and twenty provinces...”, 1.1. In describing the excellence of the kingdom: “He shewed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honour of his excellent majesty...”, 1.4. Just look at the detail in the description of the feast in the “court of the garden of the king's palace,” 1.6-7. Even the drinking vessels are said to be “diverse one from another,” 1.7

Since “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God,” we can be excused for

asking the question, 'Why so much detail?' In view of the fact that we are reliably informed by competent historians that the feast was called to settle details for the invasion of Greece, we could also ask the question, 'Why the absence of detail?' After all, the book does not mention this most important event.

i) Why the surfeit of detail? We must remember that Esther describes people who, unlike the exiles who had returned to Jerusalem, possessed little — if any — interest in the glory of God. His glory was of no apparent concern to either Esther or Mordecai. They act without reference to Him. When God's glory is neither sought nor considered, human glory gains the ascendancy, and the graphic detail here emphasises this fact. We cannot doubt the magnificence of the Persian court, but it was Godless glory. This is what God says about it all: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me...", Jer.9.23-24. Paul cites this passage in 1Cor.1.31. The assembly is a place where, "No flesh should glory in His presence," and where, "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." See also 1Pet.1.24-25.

The Lord Jesus described the glory of Solomon as follows: "Consider the lilies of the field ... And yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these," Matt.6.28-29. Solomon's court must have been breathtaking — the queen of Sheba certainly found it like that: "there was no more spirit in her," 1Kgs.10.5. But the glory of Solomon was very different from the glory of Ahasuerus. Read 1Kgs.3.5-15.

ii) Why the absence of detail? The proposed invasion of Greece by Persia was of undoubted importance in the purpose of God. See again Dan.8 and, additionally, Dan.11. The fourth Persian king in v2, is most probably Ahasuerus or, to give him his other name, Xerxes. But that is of minor importance in Esther. The welfare of God's people is much more important than the rise and fall of nations. That is why emphasis is placed here on what seems to be a comparatively unimportant internal problem. It is also the reason for the assignment of just two verses, Lk.3.1-2, to seven Very Important People by human standards, and three whole chapters, Lk.1-3, to seven even more Very Important People by divine standards, although utterly obscure by human standards. God's seven are infinitely more valuable to Him than the world's seven. The Lord Jesus stands, of course, incomparably alone.

B) The Refusal of Vashti, v10-12

This paragraph raises some most interesting questions, although we must not lose sight of the fact that the entire story emphasises the providence of God.

i) Was Ahasuerus drunk? "On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine," v10. Let's take stock of the facts in endeavouring to assess the situation. We are told that there was "royal wine in abundance, according to the state of the king." We are also told that "the drinking was according to the law; none did compel: for so the king had appointed to all the officers of his house, that they should do according to every man's pleasure." John C. Whitcomb ('Esther — Triumph of God's Sovereignty', Moody Press) writes as follows: 'Usually the king pledged his guests to drink a certain amount, but now they could drink as much or

as little as they desired.’ Whitcomb continues by quoting Herodotus: the Persians “are very fond of wine, and drink it in large quantities ... It is also their general practice to deliberate upon affairs of weight when they are drunk ... sometimes, however, they are sober at their first deliberation, but in this case they always reconsider the matter under the influence of wine.” In all fairness, we are not told that this was a drunken revel, and we can only note that there was “wine in abundance” with no prohibition on over-indulgence nor upon abstemiousness. It would perhaps be perverse to add, “but knowing human nature ...!”

As to the king himself. The word “merry” in itself does not necessarily signify drunkenness. But it might be helpful to consider other occasions where the phrase is used: “And Abigail came to Nabal; and, behold, he held a feast in his house, like the feast of a king; and Nabal's heart was merry within him, for he was very drunken...”, 1Sam.25.36. “Now Absalom had commanded his servants saying, Mark ye now when Amnon's heart is merry with wine...”, 2Sam.13.18. If the verse had said, ‘the heart of the king was merry’, then it could be construed to mean elation and joy. But, “merry with wine” does imply, at the very least, that he was not entirely sober!

ii) *Was Vashti justified in refusing to appear?* It could be argued that she should have come at the king's request, irrespective of his insobriety or otherwise. It could be argued that the king only wished to display the beauty of his wife. On the other hand, it could be argued that the request was unreasonable, particularly since after six day's drinking, the company would hardly clap politely, and murmur admiring approval! Perhaps it is hardly appropriate to superimpose Christian virtues on a Persian court, but it's worth remembering New Testament teaching: “Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered, 1Pet.3.7. Ahasuerus doesn't seem to fit in there very well, does he?

C) The Advice of Memucan, v13-22

Vashti lost her crown, and ‘Women's Lib.’ was banished. It would be rather interesting to see what would happen today, wouldn't it?! Listen to the advice of Memucan, spokesman for the “seven princes of Persia and Media”: “Vashti the queen hath not done wrong to the king only, but also to all the princes, and to all the people that are in all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus. For this deed of the queen shall come abroad unto all women, so that they shall despise their husbands in their eyes...”, 1.16-17. Notice that it is “all women” in v17, and “the ladies of Persia and Media” in v18. The former means women in general, whilst the latter means ‘the ladies of the aristocracy’ (Whitcomb), i.e. the wives of the seven princes. The resulting decree required that “all the wives shall give to their husbands honour, both to great and small,” v20, and “that every man should bear rule in his own house, and that it should be published according to the language of every people,” v22. The last phrase is rendered by JND as follows: ‘and should speak according to the language of his people’ with the footnote, ‘i.e. should speak his own tongue.’ The meaning is a little obscure, but presumably indicates that ‘the rule of the husband in the house was to be shown by the fact that only the native tongue of the head of the house was to be used in the family.’ C.F.Keil.

At first glance, all this seems quite remarkable in view of Biblical teaching. God had said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him," Gen.2.18. It is very important to distinguish between the two words, "help meet." Eve was a "help" to Adam: not to lead or guide him, or to exercise authority over him: but to "help" him. On the other hand, Eve was not in any way inferior to Adam. She was his counterpart and answered to him in every way — she was "meet for him." Rightly understood, this does not produce male despotism and female subservience. The New Testament says, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your husbands, as unto the Lord," that is, with the devotion in which they submit themselves to the Lord. "Husbands, love your wives ... so ought men to love their wives as their own bodies...", Eph.5.22-28. See also Col.3.18-19 and 1Pet.3.1-7.

The royal decree now seems a little less impressive. It is very one-sided, and stresses the obligations of Persian wives with no reference to the obligations of Persian husbands. In summary, it falls far short of Bible teaching on the subject.

—to be continued (D.V.)

MEN OF GENESIS

by J. E. Todd, England

8. Joseph and his clothes

We have noted that in the book of Genesis the lives of many men of God centre around a single feature. In the case of Joseph it is the clothes he wore.

THE GARMENT OF HIS FATHER'S LOVE

'Now Israel loved Joseph more than all this children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a long garment with sleeves,' Gen.37.3 (R.V. margin). The favour bestowed with this type of coat was exemption from manual labour because of the length of the garment and its sleeves. Jacob had other reasons to love and trust Joseph, for he kept his father informed of his brothers' evil behaviour. 'Joseph brought unto his father their evil report,' Gen.37.2. Their behaviour was dangerous, 'Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, ye have troubled me to make me to stink among the inhabitants of the land ... and I being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me, and slay me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house,' Gen.34.30. Such parental favour provoked the jealousy of his brothers, 'When his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him,' Gen.37.4.

'Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God,' 1Jn.3.1. God has expressed His love for the believer by clothing him in the garments of salvation. "I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He hath clothed me with the robe of righteousness," Isa.61.10. The fact that the believer can testify to the assurance of salvation because of the love of God is often the cause of jealous criticism by the world at large, including many religious people.

THE GARMENT OF HIS PURITY

‘She (Potiphar's wife) caught him (Joseph) by his garment, saying, Lie with me: and he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out,’ Gen.39.12. The garment Joseph left behind as he fled, refusing to commit immorality, was in fact the symbol of his purity. “How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God, v9. It was falsely interpreted by Potiphar the unbeliever, ‘When his master heard the words of his wife ... his wrath was kindled,” v19.

‘Flee fornication,’ 1Cor.6.18. ‘Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity (love), peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart,’ 2Tim.2.22. As Christians we are to flee immorality in all its forms. Sexual intercourse is to take place only within the bonds of scriptural marriage. To be pure we must flee from the immorality which is rife in the society around us.

THE GARMENT OF HIS SUFFERING

‘Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him hastily out of the dungeon: and he shaved himself, and changed his raiment, and came in unto Pharaoh,’ Gen.41.14. When called from prison to the presence of Pharaoh, Joseph put off his prison clothes. Those prison clothes speak of his suffering for righteousness sake. He had been imprisoned because of lies told against him by Potiphar's wife, 39.17, false judgments made about him by Potiphar, 39.20, and neglect by the butler who should have shown gratitude, 41.19. But Joseph bore it patiently for the Lord was with him, 39.21.

Jesus said, “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven,” Matt.5.10-12.

THE GARMENT OF HIS PRESENTATION

Joseph could not appear in the presence of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, in his prison garb. This necessitated a change of clothes, suitable for the occasion. ‘He shaved himself, and changed his raiment, and came in unto Pharaoh, Gen.41.14. This reminds us of the parable of the necessary wedding garment, Matt.22.11-14. ‘He (the king) saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless,’ v12. But as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ we are suitably attired to stand in the presence of the King of kings and the Lord of lords. ‘Have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb,’ Rev.7.14.

THE GARMENT OF HIS REWARD

‘Then Pharaoh ... arrayed him (Joseph) in vestures of fine linen,’ Gen.41.42. Guiding Pharaoh's action was God's will that Joseph should be rewarded according to the promises of God, Gen.37.5-11, for his faithfulness and honouring of God. The Lord Jesus Christ says to His disciples, “Thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just,” Lk.14.14.

Joseph's fine linen garments were symbolic of his being raised to the ranks of the Egyptian nobility. When the church is raised to heavenly glory it is said of her, ‘To her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints,’ Rev.19.8. —to be continued (D.V.)

The Kings of Judah and Israel

by Graeme Hutchinson (Belfast)

Rehoboam (Paper 4)

Following the division of the Kingdom, the first king to be installed over the nation of Judah was that of Rehoboam. Although he only reigned for 17 years - 1Kgs.14.21 - the spiritual climate in Judah during his reign was sadly one of departure and defeat - 'And Judah did evil in the sight of the Lord ...' 1Kgs.14.22. Therefore, with such a background we need to deepen our understanding of the life and times of king Rehoboam.

(a) His Family

The sad character of Rehoboam's reign over Judah can, in part, be traced back to the legacy received from his father - Solomon - and his mother - Naamah. 1Kgs.11.4 records that through multiplying wives, Solomon not only disobeyed the directions of Deut.17.17, but he left the gate open for Satan to enter. One example of the impact that Satan's entrance had on the nation can be found with Rehoboam's mother, for on three separate occasions the Word of God reminds us of her full title - 'Naamah an Ammonitess' (1Kgs.14.21, 31; 2Chron.12.13). Obviously scripture stresses her lineage for a reason, but what was so significant with the nation of Ammon? Consider the following:

Originated in Sin

Gen.19.38 reminds us that Naamah came from a nation that was born out of a sinful relationship between Lot and his younger daughter. Although Moab emerged at the same time under similar conditions, one descendant - Ruth - was later to enter the Israelite royal family (Ruth 2.2; 4.13) and make a positive impact, the same *cannot* be said of Naamah. We do well to apply the instruction of Paul in 2Cor.6.14 to the issue of marriage - 'Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers'.

Organised Idol Worship

As an Ammonite, Naamah would have worshipped the idol-god Molech/Milcom - 1Kgs.11.5,7,33. This organisation was known to sacrifice children upon altars 2Kgs.23.10 - and thus it is not surprising that the Word of God refers to it simply as an abomination. Undoubtedly it was through the influence of his mother that Rehoboam endeavoured to replicate the worship practices of neighbouring nations - 1Kgs.14.24. Obviously if you leave the door ajar for Satan you can expect an avalanche! This section would also stress the importance of cultivating good skills as parents, as and when necessary. Solomon could say in Prov.22.6 - 'Train up a child in the way he should go: And when he is old, he will not depart from it'. For Rehoboam, his training was inappropriate and was evident throughout his life - we must avoid this at all costs.

(b) His Frailty

By the time Rehoboam was 46 years of age, the king of Egypt - Shishak -

invaded Jerusalem and took away many items that belonged to the nation of Judah (1Kgs.14.25; 2Chron.12.9). Whilst this may not appear unusual for any king to engage in battle against the enemy, the significant point to remember is that Egypt appears to have fully penetrated the boundary of Judah. Furthermore, this invasion was the first serious attack against Judah by any foreign power since the reign of Saul. Thus, it is profitable to explore the incident in a little more detail.

The Reason

2Chron.12.5 makes it clear why Shishak was able to penetrate the nation of Judah - 'Ye (Rehoboam) have forsaken me .. therefore ..'. In other words, given the spiritual condition of Rehoboam, Egypt was able to enter enemy territory. There is an obvious application for ourselves. By pursuing a path that is displeasing to God we leave ourselves open to attack from the enemy (Eph.6.13).

The Result

Not only was Egypt able to enter the land of Judah but, as 1Kgs.14.26 and 2Chron.12.9 record, all the treasures of the houses that belonged to the Lord and Rehoboam were plundered. Failure to live in a right way before God not only allows the enemy to enter, but also robs us of the opportunity to enjoy all the treasures that Christians can (and should) enjoy - Eph.3.16.

The Repentance

In order to be fair toward Rehoboam, it is necessary to illustrate that upon humbling himself, God allowed a partial reprieve - 2Chron.12.6-8. However, this incident reflects more favourably upon God than Rehoboam. Such is the patience and long-suffering nature of God that He always seeks to observe a glimmer of genuine repentance, and once shown, He will respond in some favourable way.

(c) His Fluctuations

Consistency was hardly an accurate way to describe the life of Rehoboam. On the **down** side, 2Chron.10.13 records how Rehoboam failed to follow the advice and guidance given by the old (and experienced) men of Judah. Perhaps this is a problem within the assemblies today - Tit.2.3-9. On the **up** side, 2Chron.11.17 records how, for three brief years, the nation pursued the ways of David and Solomon and was strengthened accordingly. On the **down** side, 2Chron.12.1 illustrates that upon establishing the Kingdom he forsook the commandments of the Lord. Finally on the **up** side, we have already considered 2Chron.12.6, where Rehoboam shows some tenderness toward the Lord and his prophet.

How unlike Rehoboam were the early Christians - he was changeable; they were consistent (Acts 2.42). How apt are Paul's instruction to Timothy concerning the Word and the various instructions contained therein: '*continue* in them' (1Tim.4.16).

(d) His Failure

Perhaps the one verse that signifies the general problem in the life of Rehoboam can be found in 2Chron.12.14: 'And he did evil, because he *prepared not his heart* to seek the Lord'. In other words, whilst one may question the decisions Rehoboam made with his head - especially in 2Chron.10 - the problem was not intellectual,

rather emotional; not with the head, rather with the heart. However, in order to develop the importance of having a 'prepared heart' we must consider two of Rehoboam's relatives - David and Jehoshaphat. Consider:

The Danger of Decline

Even though centuries separate the reign of David and the record of the New Testament, the testimony of Scripture remains consistent regarding David: 1Sam.13.14 and Acts 13.22 - a man after God's own heart. It is sad to consider the decline in the spiritual condition of the king from David to his grandson Rehoboam. Obviously spirituality is not something that we inherit on an automatic basis from our forefathers, rather we must individually labour for such an accolade. In other words, if we are blessed with a godly ancestry we should be extremely thankful and endeavour to perpetuate the same characteristics, not represent a departure.

The Capacity for Change

Even though Rehoboam 'prepared not his heart to seek the Lord' it is encouraging to notice that this pattern was reversed some years later by one of his descendants. For instance, 2Chron.19.3 records the words spoken by Jehu concerning Jehoshaphat - 'thou .. hast prepared thine heart to seek God'. If our backgrounds do not serve to *help* us in our service for the Lord, they definitely should not stand as a *hindrance*. Remember, the Lord takes no thought for what our relatives are like, His only concern is that we have a heart for Him and His work.

See paper 1 for details of Bibliography/Figures —to be continued (D.V.)

ANNOUNCEMENT

Due to increasing years and declining health, our dear brother, John Glenville, has decided this will be his last year serving the saints as a Committee Member of this magazine. Our brother has given unstinted, faithful and very valuable service since 1958. In fact he is the longest serving member of the committee and we wish to record our very sincere appreciation of all that he has done. We can only know part of that service, but his record is on high. We wish him well and trust he will be enabled to continue to service the saints in his oral ministry.

Until the end of the year gifts can be directed to brother Glenville or brother Neill as indicated inside the front cover. Thereafter it will be convenient for us to have all gifts directed to our Treasurer:—

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"Assembly Testimony Magazine"

PAPERS ON PROPHECY

by The Late W. W. Fereday (written in 1897/98)

VOLUME 2

11(b)—The Bride, the Lamb's Wife

The next step is the presentation to Himself, and for this we wait: "That He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing: but that it should be holy and without blemish,' Eph.5.27. This takes place when He descends into the air to receive His blood-bought Bride to Himself. The last Adam is to have a partner in His dominion, even as the first. She shall sit with Him on His throne, even as He now sits with the Father on His throne.

*Thou too shalt reign — He will not wear
His crown of joy alone;
And earth His royal bride shall see
Beside Him on the throne.*

What a transformation His grace will effect in that day! The Church will then be glorious; each member of it bearing His own heavenly image. No spot or wrinkle will be seen. Every bit of worldliness is a stain on the garment of the Bride. Wrinkles are signs of decay. Alas! there were many to be seen before the great Apostle of the Church went to his rest. He saw love declining, zeal waning, and the world creeping in on every hand. But the holy, yet loving, hand of the Lord Jesus will remove all in that day. Everything that would remind of wilderness, failure, shall be obliterated. The Church will then be holy, not only in nature, but in ways. She will be without blemish also. In the midst of much that grieves and disheartens now, how joyful and elevating is the contemplation of it! After showing that in doing all this Christ loves the Church even as Himself, well does the Apostle close by saying: "This mystery is great: but I speak in regard of Christ and the Church," Eph.5.32.

Turn now to Rev.19.1-10. There we have the marriage supper of the Lamb. It must be carefully observed that this is a heavenly scene preparatory to the appearing of Christ with all His saints. This scene is therefore entirely distinct from that which is described in Psa.45. There we have the Messiah present on earth with His sword girded upon His thigh for the subjugation of all His foes, and for the establishment of His glorious kingdom. At His right hand stands the Queen in gold of Ophir, but we must not understand her to be the Church of God. It is Israel, the earthly associate of the Messiah, as the Church is the heavenly Bride of the Lamb. To Israel it will then be said, "Thou shalt no more be termed forsaken, neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah: for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married. For as a man marrieth a virgin, so shalt thy sons marry thee, and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee," Isa.62.4,5. The mutual affection of Messiah and Israel will be found fully expressed in the Song of Solomon.

But the Church's association with the Lamb is heavenly in its character; the

nuptials are brought before us in Rev.19. We do not regard this as the presenting to Himself of Eph.5.27. That is the first thing after the meeting in the air, and is entirely between the Bridegroom and the Bride. The marriage supper is the public event when all friends of the Bridegroom are called together to share in the general joy.

This apparently immediately follows the judgment of Babylon the Great. When the false woman is thus dealt with, all heaven is filled with triumph and praise. While earth is mourning over her overthrow, the courts of heaven are resounding with Alleluias. Then the true Bride is seen: "And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of many thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice and give honour to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready," Rev.19.6,7. From this point we hear no more of the four-and-twenty elders. We believe them to represent the whole company of the heavenly saints, *i.e.*, the believers of Old Testament times and the Church of God. Now that the Bride is brought forward as such, the symbol of the elders is dropped. The different classes of saints fall into their respective places, and are henceforward shown in their own particular relation to Christ.

What a moment of joy that will be for Christ and for us! He will then see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied. He will see, at least in measure, that He has not laboured in vain nor spent His strength for nought. His blessed heart longs for the time when He will surround Himself with all those for whom He died. He will not rest until He has finished the thing and has us all at home in the Father's house in glory. In contemplating future glories, we are apt to think principally of the bliss that will then be *ours*. But let us think of *Christ's* part in the matter. It is the day of the gladness of His heart. His were the sorrow and woe; His shall be the blessedness and joy. He is worthy of it all.

The marriage supper is not described in detail. It would not accord with the general character of the Book of Revelation. A few sentences are written, but that is all. We read, "His wife hath made herself ready." This does not imply any sort of human fitness, which could have no place in heaven, but simply (so we judge) that she has put on the garments which divine grace has provided. According to His riches in glory, all is given, that the heavenly Bride may be found a suitable companion for the Lamb.

But though there is no such thing as human fitness, the excellent deeds of the saints, wrought on earth through the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit, are had in remembrance at the wedding feast. "And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness (*lit.* "righteousnesses") of the saints," Rev.19.8. Never will Christ forget the good works of His own. His eye notes and His hand records every little reproduction of Himself, whether in general walk or in active service. Even a cup of cold water for His sake will be remembered above, no small encouragement, surely, for all who really seek the honour of His Name. In this sense, we are weaving our garments now. Solemn, yet blessed thought for us all!

—to be continued (D.V.)

Characteristics of Declension (Judges Chap. 5) and Some Suggested Remedies (Eph. Chap. 6)

by D. S. Parrack, Somerset, England

PART 3

Whilst being conscious of the unenviable position in which the Israelites were, we are reminded as New Testament believers that unlike them, "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds," 2Cor.10.4, and it is well that that is the case, "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood" where carnal weapons might possibly avail, "but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places," Eph.6.12. Having so warned us, Paul reveals something of the spiritual armoury which is available to us and without the use of which we will very soon succumb to the enemy's attacks. We are encouraged to make use of the whole weapons system both defensive and offensive, but before we consider attack we must ensure that we are suitably protected. "Having your loins girt about with truth," v14. That is, we are able to be free from those encumbrances which would cause us to stumble, as would have done the long flowing robes which, in times of strenuous activity, needed to be tucked up out of the way. Timothy is encouraged to "Neither give heed to fables and genealogies which minister questions rather than godly edifying which is in faith," 1Tim.1.4. He is warned against those "desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor whereof they affirm," 1Tim. 1.7. To "refuse profane and old wives' fables and exercise thyself rather unto godliness," 1Tim.4.7, and to "Take heed unto thyself and to the doctrine, continue in them, for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee," 1Tim.4.16. The teachings of men will tend always to that of the scribes and Pharisees, of whom the Lord Jesus said, "They bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders," Matt.23.4. His desires for us are exactly the opposite. He assures us that, "If ye continue in My word, then are ye My disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free," Jn.8.3,12. Holding of truth in love, both in word and action (see Eph.4.15) is essential for our defence. It frees us from carnal and legalistic entanglements whilst safeguarding us from licentious indiscipline.

However, in case we are deluded into thinking that only a negative attitude of not succumbing to error is required, we are told of "the breastplate of righteousness," v14. This raises a very practical matter for it will show how much our knowledge of the truth really means to our hearts. Are we for instance so vitally conscious of the imminence of the Lord's return that our lives, as distinct from what we say, reflect our conviction. John assures us that, "Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth

himself even as He is pure,” 1Jn.3.3. The Lord Jesus said that, “If a man love Me” as against just saying so, “he will keep My words,” Jn.14.23. Nothing will make us easier targets for Satanic attacks, particularly via outsiders, than if we lead lives which do not accord with our professed beliefs. A life of positive righteousness will not free us from attack, indeed such lives often provoke spiritual hostility, as in the case of Job. But James says, “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations — blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him,” Jas.1.2,12. A life of practical holiness gladdens the heart of the Lord Jesus and this in itself should encourage us to cultivate it.

Then, if we know the truth and it is being worked out in our lives, our feet will itch to be “shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace,” v15. We will, as a direct result of our heart's experience, have a desire to evangelise, and from our understanding and acceptance of truth, have the ability to do so. So much effort is wasted because we will not follow the sequence of Scripture. We can never make real to others what is not real to ourselves. Ahimaz was full of zeal when he entreated Joab to allow him to be his messenger, but he had no answer to the question, “Wherefore wilt thou run my son, seeing thou hast no tidings ready?” He ran nevertheless, but the only message he could give was, “I saw a great tumult, but I knew not what it was,” 2Sam.18.22,29. “How shall they preach except they be sent?” asks Paul. “As it is written, how beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things,” Rom.10.15. This is godly order. It is God sending those who have been prepared in heart and who, in consequence, are able to share the message with others because they have themselves received, understood and acted upon it. This need not shut any of us out. It should give us a desire to be so enabled and awake in us the wish to be in the path of blessing by being in the path of obedience.

“Above all” says Paul, “taking the shield of faith wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked (one),” v16. “Now faith” we are told, “is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen,” Heb.11.1. It is not a vague abstract virtue unrelated to realities. Faith is nothing by itself, it must be centred on an object or being and there must be grounds for an individual placing their faith in the said object or being. Misplaced faith is as useless as no faith at all, it is in fact worse, for it can lead to a false sense of security. What then is to be the centre of faith for us? It is of course the blessed Person of our Lord Jesus Himself. However little we know of His word, however small may be our understanding of what He has accomplished, a simple trust in Him as a living Saviour will give us the assurance of eternal security. But what are the grounds on which we base such a claim? Why, “The Scripture saith, whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed,” Rom.10.11. We trust unreservedly in the Lord Jesus, and do so with confidence, because of the promise of His word. That is very elementary, it is what we teach the children, but this is all faith is. Now there is of course a development of this faith, this trust, this confidence. How does this come about? By the measure in which our knowledge of the Lord Jesus increases and the extent to which we seek out and appropriate to ourselves the promises of His word. Now, when the devil

attacks from a particular direction we can have confidence in the person of Christ because of the truth of His word applied to that specific attack. The devil may say that my circle of friends is limited because of my Christian profession, as indeed it almost certainly will be. But I can say that even if I had no earthly friends at all “He (the Lord), hath said I will never leave thee nor forsake thee,” Heb.13.5. This is not just what I would like the situation to be, or even what I hope it might be, it is what “He hath said” it is, and so I can rest securely in Him because of His promise. So by taking His word and applying it to our daily living, the effectiveness of our shield is increased and the fiery darts fall harmlessly at our feet.

—to be continued (D.V.)

Sanctification

by H. W. Graham (Eiré)

Many a good word is put to a wrong use, and the word sanctification is certainly one which is very often employed in a sense different from, and contrary to, its use in Scripture. So, before looking at the subject we must define the term.

In the Bible it generally means to set apart, hallow, dedicate, consecrate. It is the setting apart of things or persons for a special purpose, as opposed to the common usage. It does not necessarily imply a change in the composition of the article or the condition of the person. Sanctified wood does not become gold nor is it improved as timber.

The first occurrence of the word concerns the Sabbath which God sanctified, Gen.2.3. It was to be a day set apart from the others in its use. It was not different in length or weather. A field or a house could be sanctified, Lev.27.14,19. Mount Sinai was sanctified, Ex.19.23. The tabernacle and its furnishings were sanctified, Ex.29.44; 40.10,11. The gold and the gifts in the temple, Matt.23.17,19. Food can be sanctified, 1Tim.4.5. Nations were called “sanctified ones” for the fulfilling of God’s purpose in the destruction of Babylon, Is.13.3. An unbelieving husband or wife is sanctified, 1Cor.7.14. The Father sanctified the Son, Jn.10.36, and the Son sanctified Himself, Jn.17.19. Here it very clearly refers to setting apart for a special mission, and not to any improving or purifying of the Son of God.

With regard to the sanctification of Christians, in order to clearer understanding, we will consider it under three headings: before conversion, at conversion, and after conversion.

SANCTIFICATION BEFORE CONVERSION

Please open your Bible and read 2Thes.2.13 and 1Pet.1.2. In the former we read of “salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.” In the latter of “sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus

Christ.” This sanctification precedes belief and obedience and is with a view to salvation and sprinkling of the blood. It means that God by His Spirit lays hold of sinners, separates them from the careless and unheeding, burdens them about eternal things, convinces them of sin and guilt and they are brought to faith in Christ. This is the common experience of all who have been saved. They were no different from others but were made to differ. Without this sanctification none can be saved. It is by the operation of the Spirit of God, not by the persuasion or earnestness of the preacher.

SANCTIFICATION AT CONVERSION

In the New Testament all believers are called saints, holy ones, or sanctified ones, 2Thes.1.10. Even the unspiritual Corinthians were sanctified in Christ Jesus and called saints, 1Cor.1.2. Every believing sinner is, at conversion, cut off from his old standing in Adam and blessed in Christ. He is set apart from the position of guilt and condemnation in which he had been and is in Christ where there is no condemnation, Rom.8.1. Let us be clear on this point, read Heb.10.10-14. It is here stated in the clearest of terms that by the one perfect sacrifice of the cross, believing sinners are once and for all and for ever sanctified. To this sanctification nothing can be added nor subtracted. It is as complete at the moment of conversion as it will be in the eternal glory. By the death of Christ, who suffered without the camp that He might sanctify the people by His own blood, sin has been put away from before God and sins have been borne away from the believer, Heb.13.12; 9.26,28. The believer is sanctified in Christ Jesus and there can be no more question of guilt, or judgment or penalty. He has been separated from these by the cross and has acquired a perfect standing before God, accepted in the Beloved, Eph.1.6. He has been set apart for God from a world that crucified and rejects Christ. He died to its abuse and its applause, its religion and its politics. This sanctification is the common lot of every believer, of the babe in Christ and of the mature man of God.

SANCTIFICATION AFTER CONVERSION

It must be kept in mind, however, that sanctification is not only positional but practical, not only of standing but of state. It is of this latter that Heb.12.14 speaks: “Holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.” Unless there is some measure of practical sanctification, separation to God from evil, there is no salvation. Therefore Peter exhorts: “As He which has called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation,” 1Pet.1.15. This practical holiness is in all manner of living. It is to reach spirit, soul and body, 1Thes.5.23. It affects moral conduct, 1Cor.6.11, even in the intimacies of domestic life, 1Thes.4.1-7. It involves separation from filthiness of the flesh and spirit, from moral and religious evil, 2Cor.7.1.

The word of God in the power of the Spirit is the means of producing this holiness. The Lord Jesus prayed: “Sanctify them through Thy truth, Thy word is truth,” Jn.17.17. And He sanctifies His church by the Word, Eph.5.26. Ps.119.9 teaches that it is by heeding the Word that our way may be cleansed. The reading, meditating and studying of Scripture carried on daily and continually will purify the life of the believer and make him to be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet

for the Master's use, 2Tim.2.21. The goal is, to be sanctified wholly, 1Thes.5.23. Obedience to the instructions of the Lord will result in "perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord," 2Cor.6.14; 7.1. It is no matter of boasting and empty talking. Sanctification is separation from evil unto God, and full sanctification would be perfect separation from evil and perfect dedication to God.

It is evident then that sanctification means neither the improvement nor the extinction of the old sinful nature. The former is impossible and the latter will not take place while we are in this mortal body. Before conversion the believer had one nature wholly sinful. Since, he has two natures, one still wholly sinful, the other completely holy. In eternity he will only have the latter. Meanwhile he is to mortify his members which are upon the earth, Col.3.5, and fortify the new nature, 1Pet.2.1,2.

MY CONVERSION AND CALL (56)

by Walter A. Boyd (South Africa)

The two most important things in life are being saved and knowing that one is in the will of God. Yet how often we lose sight of these fundamental pillars to a happy life! It is a good thing to recount the experiences of life and trace the hand of God as He directs and steers.

My childhood began in the town of Ballymena, Northern Ireland and was associated with the assembly at Harryville. There were nine children in the family and the way of salvation was understood clearly from very early days. Sunday School, Children's Meetings and Gospel Meetings were normal activities that had a major influence in shaping my childhood days. It is now as I look back, that the immense value of teaching the Holy Scriptures to children is clear.

During the Spring of 1967, two Evangelists, Messrs. James Martin and Thomas McNeill, came to an area on the outskirts of Ballymena town for a series of Gospel meetings. I clearly remember being present at the erection of the portable hall in preparation for the meeting in Ballykeel but I had no serious thoughts about salvation until after a few weeks of the series. At the end of the sixth week Mr. Martin announced that unless there was a definite interest in the seventh week, the meetings would end. That comment was the first word in six weeks of preaching, that reached my soul! I began to think periodically during the next week about eternal matters but still no deep soul interest.

On the Lord's Day evening commencing the eighth week of meetings, the Spirit of God spoke to me very definitely during the meeting. I have no recollection of what was preached in the meeting but I realized I wasn't ready for the Rapture. I recall deciding that I was going to be saved that night, no matter what else happened. That step was important, until then I had drifted, so to speak. Occasionally I had thoughts of salvation to a greater or lesser extent, but never settling in my heart that salvation was what I needed and wanted. The pleasures of the world and its attraction were never much of a problem to me, but what hindered me from being saved was

just old-fashioned procrastination. I always intended to be saved — sometime.

On coming home from the meeting that Lord's Day evening, I went straight to my bedroom and began poring over the pages of my Bible. For quite a time I wrestled in my mind — "How could I be sure?"; "Did I have enough faith?" These were genuine questions in my heart that needed to be addressed; they were not ploys placed there by Satan, but as a child I wanted to be absolutely sure of salvation. After about an hour and a half of reading different tracts and passages of Scripture I read Isaiah 53. As I read verse five, the light of the glorious gospel dawned upon my young sinful heart — "with His stripes we are healed." The question was — "am I willing to take God at His Word?" I saw Christ as the Saviour of sinners upon a cross of shame and the peace of forgiveness filled my soul when I placed my trust in Him — should the Lord come I was ready.

Teenage years were much as any other young person in assembly fellowship, they comprised the very ordinary routine of meetings, but there was nonetheless a steady diet of solid teaching from the Word of God that has since stood me in good stead. At sixteen years of age I was baptised and received into the fellowship of the Harryville assembly. I was always delighted to attend a missionary report meeting; and from a very early age was interested in taking the gospel to some of the remote places in the world so often spoken of in missionary meetings. Was that just the romantic dream of boyhood? I have no doubt that it was not, but was rather the working of the Holy Spirit in preparing the ground for the future. Sometimes that desire would lie dormant for long periods, but it took very little to bring it to the surface. An early memory of a definite stirring by the Holy Spirit was listening to Mr. Philip Thompson reporting of the Lord's work in Tanzania. Having read 1Chron.29.5, he threw out the challenge to the audience — was I willing? The question, left unsettled, burned in my heart for months.

In 1978 as a young married man I heard Mr. David Armstrong from Harryville assembly speak in a ministry meeting of the need for a definite experience of committal to the Lord as found in Romans 12.1. That summer night when I returned to our home from a small ministry meeting in Carnlough Gospel Hall, I did just that. I was willing to consecrate my service unto the Lord, 1Chron.29.5; to present my body a living sacrifice, Rom.12.1. I shared the experience with my wife Maud, and from that moment in our lives there was a definite desire to do the Lord's bidding at whatever cost.

Over the intervening years there were various interests in missionary work, but uppermost was the continent of Africa. In 1983 we were further directed towards the continent, but this time more specifically South Africa, as a result of a report given in Enniskillen by Mr. Kenneth Elliott. We had moved to live in Enniskillen in 1980 because of employment and were happily involved in the work of the assembly there. From that initial pointer towards South Africa until we arrived was a period of seven years. During these years we kept busy in the assembly at Enniskillen, especially in children's work and series of gospel meetings around County Fermanagh. As I was a serving Police Officer, I was curtailed in my movements around the border areas, but we spent as much time as possible and engaged in gospel work wherever we could with reasonable safety. Seeing the blessing of the

Lord in His work in these days of preparation was another important pointer for us. One thing we learned in these years, God is never in a hurry! "It is no vain thing to wait upon the Lord."

The process of clarification of the Lord's will for us was step by step over those years. Many important lessons were learned in the scriptural manner; "line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little there a little," Isa.28.13. Often one becomes impatient when it appears that God doesn't move at the same rate as we. Learning to recognize and obey the Lord's timing is vital. Our approach to the elders of the Enniskillen assembly, where we had been in fellowship for over nine years, met with a hearty response and we were commended to the Lord's work in South Africa by the assembly.

On the 10th February, 1990 we arrived at Cape Town airport and from there took our first steps in following the Lord's guidance in this great land. Our arrival in South Africa did not mean the end of learning; since then we have been learning still further lessons in obeying His will as a servant. Sometimes the lesson is learning to recognize the Lord's will in the circumstances of life and on other occasions the lesson is about responding to that will. We have to be continually reminded that, irrespective of the pressures to do otherwise, the supreme test for any servant is willingness to obey The Master, whatever the perceived cost.

"AS FOR GOD, HIS WAY IS PERFECT" 2 Samuel 22.31.

"THE LORD IS AT HAND" — Philipians 4-5

PAST

O Saviour, Lord, Thou art "at hand",
Thy grace from far has brought me near;
Rescued me from Satan's band,
Delivered me from Judgment's fear.

PRESENT

Grace "multiplied" assures me still,
Thou art "at hand" in daily task;
In circumstances good or ill
Thy grace grants help for all I ask.

FUTURE

The "Blessed Hope" is still more grace!
For though earth's scene is dark and drear,
Soon shall I see Thee face to face;
I am "at hand", Thy voice I hear.

* * * * *

"Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid". Matt.14.27

(H. T. Kimber, Australia)

Good Tidings from Heaven

CHOICES

With the relative affluence of the UK it is customary for us to be spoilt for choice, to the extent that making up our minds can be a real problem. What will we select from the well-stocked shelves of supermarkets? Where will we go for our holidays? What type of car will we purchase? What clothes will we wear? What gifts will we choose for loved ones?

But in the matter of salvation, choice is restricted for there is only one means whereby our sins can be forgiven and our souls be saved. There is only one Saviour who can save from hell. "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved," Acts 4.12. In the wisdom of God this will avoid confusion. We are not advised to choose our own way but must accept God's offer of salvation in the substitutionary death of His Son. Whatever the country, clime, culture or creed, there is only one door to heaven—Christ Himself. "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved ..." Jn.10.9.

Irrespective of race or religion, social status or academic achievements, salvation is obtainable only by trusting Christ. There is no priest, prophet or patriarch who has the power to save the soul eternally.

'Life is found alone in Jesus,
Only there 'tis offered thee.'

Do not allow yourself to be misdirected, do not lose your way in the maze of men's ideas and philosophies, but listen to the tender, pleading voice of the One who loves your soul and died that you might be in heaven with Him forever. "He that believeth on Me hath everlasting life," Jn.6.47. "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," Matt.11.28.

The choice is yours—Christ or the world, sin or salvation—it may seem relatively unimportant but it will affect your eternal destiny. No other choice can ever be more crucial or have such far-reaching consequences. Your decision will not only affect you for the years of life but for the ceaseless eternity. No one can make the choice for you, many will try to influence your decision but ultimately you must decide.

In Matt.27.22, Pilate asked, "What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ?" The multitude replied, "Let Him be crucified." He received a letter from his wife urging him to "have nothing to do with that just Man," Matt.27.19. The Jews protested, when they noticed a weakening of Pilate's resolve, "If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend," Jn.19.12. Advice was coming from every quarter but the onerous decision was Pilate's alone. The cry of the multitude and the priests prevailed. Pilate bowed to pressure and made the wrong decision—fatal choice, to be regretted eternally.

What will you do with Jesus? Your choice will determine where you will be in eternity, for there are but two destinies, heaven or hell and when life is over, the rest of your eternal existence will find you in one of these two places.

'And each his solemn choice must make,
No neutral ground can be.
It must be Christ or death's deep lake
For all eternity.'

No earthly gain, no fleeting fame, no passing pleasure, no companion's friendship could ever compensate for the loss incurred by making the wrong choice in relation to Christ. Decide for Christ today and be assured of heaven eternally.



ASSEMBLY TESTIMONY

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ASSEMBLY TESTIMONY

This is a bi-monthly magazine for the propagation of the Word of God and thus the encouragement and edification of the people of God.

Advisory Editor : A. M. S. Gooding

Editor: B. Currie

Correspondence relative to Editorial matters should be addressed to:

The Editor, 49 Glenburn Road, Dunmurry, N. Ireland, BT17 9AN.
Telephone (01232) 621343.

Secretary/Treasurer : William Neill, 109 Lurgan Road,
Banbridge, Northern Ireland, BT32 4NG.
Telephone (018206) 24238.

Committee : Tom Armstrong, Thomas Beggs, Ronnie Johnston,
James McKeown, James Moore, Roy Reynolds.

This magazine is supported solely by the freewill offerings of the Lord's people. No member of the committee, author of articles or any other person connected with the magazine receives payment, remuneration or gratuity of any kind. This magazine is not to be sold.

Friends residing in England, Scotland and Wales may kindly forward their donations to :

John Glenville, 16 Trelawney Road, Saltash, Cornwall, PL12 4DD.
Telephone (01752) 846889.

Friends residing elsewhere should please forward gifts to:

William Neill, at the above address.

Please make all cheque, money orders, etc., payable to "Assembly Testimony Magazine."

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BEHOLD YOUR KING

(Meditations in Matthew)

by Jim Flanigan (Belfast)

19. Martyrdom and Miracles (Ch.14)

Dispensationally we have arrived at a most interesting chapter. The King has been rejected and in the previous chapter a mystery form of the kingdom has been announced in parables which describe the course and character of the kingdom during the absence of the King. Now we have the condition of things which will prevail during the days of the King's rejection and this is pictured in the three incidents which comprise the chapter.

First we have the murder of John Baptist, an illustration of the persecution of the godly and the testimony. This is followed by the miraculous feeding of the five thousand, a picture of blessing for Gentile multitudes in this present age of grace. Then the storm, depicting the care of the Lord on high for His perplexed disciples in the troubled sea.

The Herods were perhaps without exception, evil men. They were puppet despots, their authority being conferred on them by Rome. This Herod is Herod the Tetrarch of Galilee, son of Herod the Great who massacred the innocents after the visit of the wise men from the East. He had imprisoned the faithful John who had dared to denounce his adulterous relationship with his brother Philip's wife. Now there is a feast in celebration of his birthday, with the customary indecencies reminiscent of that other feast recorded in Esther ch.1, to the embarrassment of Queen Vashti. In the height of the revelry and dancing Herod made a rash promise, which, because of those present, he must keep. His troubled conscience told him the thing was wrong, but he must save face, as they say, and he gave the solemn edict. John Baptist was to be beheaded in his dungeon and the head of the faithful prophet was to be presented in a dish to the young dancer. Of course an evil woman was the instigator of it all, cunningly manipulating the circumstances. A king and a woman! Politics and religion! It has ever been so through the ages, until the alliance of priests and soldiers in the trial of our Lord, and the coalition of religious and civil authorities in the Acts of the Apostles, and it will be so until the scarlet woman rides the beast in the days of vengeance after the rapture of the church. Politics and religion joined in opposition to, and persecution of the saints of God.

As with the martyr Stephen in a later day, devout men attend to the burial of John's precious remains and come to tell the King. The Saviour's reaction is quiet and dignified. He departs in silence to a desert place, but His disciples and a great multitude follow Him. There might well have been a manifestation of justified anger, but instead we read of His compassion and a gracious healing ministry.

It is now toward evening. The day is fading as the sun is setting. It seemed a reasonable suggestion of the disciples, that He should send the multitude away, to buy victuals in the nearby villages before nightfall. Those were kindly words of the Saviour, "They need not depart." He would not send them away hungry. But the need was great. It was beyond human ability to meet it. Their resources were meagre, five loaves and two fishes. John is even more explicit in his Gospel, when he says that the loaves were barley loaves, a cheaper cereal, the fishes were small, and it was just a lad who had them. The crowd numbered some five thousand men besides women and children. It was indeed a need greater than the scant supply. But the King was Lord of land and sea and He quietly took the harvest of land and sea and bade His disciples to distribute to the seated multitude. He had given thanks and blessed the food. They did all eat and were satisfied and twelve baskets of fragments remained. It is a fitting picture of this present age. Twelve baskets remain for Israel after the great need of Gentile nations has been suitably met. John writes that they would have made Him King there and then, but He retired to the mountain-side to pray, apart and alone, and His disciples below, on the sea.

That night was a troubled night on the sea of Galilee. The wind was contrary and the waves boisterous and the King was not with them. But He was watching from on high. What a picture of this present age. How many saints are in a storm. How many are perplexed and afraid. The Saviour knows. In the fourth watch of the night, as the dawn approached, He came to them. He may sometimes delay, but He will come to succour His afflicted people. He walked on the sea. He put the thing which troubled them beneath His feet, but still they were afraid. Then those lovely words of cheer, which He would still speak to every frightened saint, "It is I; be not afraid." Peter wanted assurance, and Jesus said, "Come". Poor Peter; his courage failed him in the water as indeed it would fail him again in the moral storm of that last night of our Lord's trial before Caiaphas. An outstretched hand responded immediately to his cry for help. They came into the ship together, Peter and his Lord, and the wind ceased. It is no wonder that they worshipped Him, and acknowledged, "Thou art the Son of God."

They came to land at the dawning and the country was stirred with the word of His coming. They brought their sick, their diseased, seeking but to touch the hem of His garment, for just to touch Him brought health and healing.

The King's faithful ambassador is dead, but the King lives and the miracles continue. He will yet come face to face with the Herod who murdered His forerunner, but that is another chapter of the story.

—*to be continued (D.V.)*

ERRATUM — In the last issue of this article, on page 6, four lines up from the bottom, the word now should have read not.

"As he said, a prophet is **not** without honour except in his own country."

Assembly Testimony Bible Class

by J. Riddle (Cheshunt)

ESTHER

(4) ENTER ESTHER, PART A

Read Chapter 2.1-11

Esther chapters 1 and 2 describe God's provision for His people. Haman has not yet come to power, and his infamous plan to eradicate the Jews has not yet been implemented. But God fully anticipated the attempted genocide of the Jews, and was already working for their deliverance. The significance of the opening two chapters becomes very clear indeed as the story unfolds. We have already examined the first of the three principal events described. These are:

- 1) The Removal of Vashti
- 2) The Selection of Esther
- 3) The Loyalty of Mordecai

Before studying this chapter it might be helpful to notice that the book of Esther is not alone in displaying the providence of God. How about Acts 18.1-3? "After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth; and found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them. And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers." First of all, God moved Claudius Caesar to expel the Jews from Rome. There was no one higher in the world than the Roman Emperor — but that was no obstacle to God. Secondly, God overruled in the education and training of two obscure Jews. Claudius and Aquila and Priscilla were poles apart, and only God could put his hand upon people so diverse to further His purposes! As a result of it all, Paul found shelter and employment at Corinth. Just think about it: God did all this in order to plant an assembly in that wicked city.

But you don't have to go further than the birth of the Lord Jesus Himself to see the providence of God displayed. Once again, God moved the Roman Emperor: ...And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed ... and all went to be taxed, every one to his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth ..." Lk.2.1-7. The decree of Cyrus (Ezra 1.1) is another clear example.

All this should make us think seriously. Well, if it does not have this effect, then it certainly should! God works silently behind the scenes — **in all our lives**.

Now, back to Esther 2, and to the second of the three principal events through which God provided for His people:

2) THE SELECTION OF ESTHER

The chapter commences with a remorseful king. The statement, “he remembered Vashti,” apparently carries the thought of affectionate remembrance but, in view of the decree, there was little Ahasuerus could do about the situation. After all, the decree was irreversible: see 1.19. However, his courtiers had a good idea, but it was not such a good idea for the Persian girls. ‘Little imagination is needed to appreciate the horror caused by the round-up of these girls, whose fate it was to be carried away from their homes to be secluded for life as the king’s concubines. What a liability to be beautiful!’ J. G. Baldwin, *The New Bible Commentary, Revised*. This statement is well supported by v14, and the expression “round-up” is not exaggerated. The whole business was at “the king’s commandment and his decree.” v8.

There are three strands to this part of the story: (A) Esther and Mordecai, v5-11; (B) Esther and Hegai, v12-15; (C) Esther and Ahasuerus, v16-20. We will consider the first of these now, and the remaining two in our next study.

A) ESTHER AND MORDECAI, v5-11

Esther plays a passive role. We know that she was “fair and beautiful,” v7. We also know that she was assigned “seven maidens” and given “the best place in the house of the women,” v9. Mordecai plays a more active role. Notice:

i) **His ancestry, v5-6.** Think about these verses: they are more than bald statements of fact. In the first place, we have the **providence of God**. “Now in Shushan the palace there was a certain Jew, whose name was Mordecai ...” He could have been in Babylon, or Persepolis, or Ecbatana. But he was in Shushan! Was it purely coincidence — a quirk of fate? We know better than that. We’re back to our introduction! God is in control of our movements.

Secondly, we have the **government of God**. He was a Benjamite, the great-grandson of Kish, “who had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captivity which had been carried away with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away.” The Babylonian captivity was the direct result of Judah’s disobedience. Disobedience always brings captivity. See Tim.2.25-26.

ii) **His adoption of Esther, v7.** “And he brought up Hadassah (meaning in Hebrew, ‘myrtle’) that is, Esther (meaning, it is generally assumed, in Persian, ‘star’), his uncle’s daughter ... whom Mordecai, when her father and mother were dead, took for his own daughter.” Notice, yet again, the providence of God: had someone else adopted Esther, she might have been anywhere but in Shushan.

Esther had nothing outside Mordecai: her old life had come to an end in her parent’s grave. It’s like that with us too. We have nothing outside of Christ. We too have been placed in a different family. Paul quotes Hosea in Rom.9. “And that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had afore prepared unto glory, even, us, whom He hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? as He saith also in Osee, I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not my beloved. And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there

shall they be called the children of the living God.” v23-26. See also Rom.8.15 and Eph.1.5.

iii) His instruction to Esther, v10. “Esther had not shewed her people nor her kindred: for Mordecai had charged her that she should not shew it.” See also v20. Haman soon discovered Mordecai’s ancestry (3.6), but Esther’s nationality was not known to either Haman or Ahasuerus until 7.4. Whilst, again, the withholding of this information was providential, and Mordecai presumably had Esther’s best interest before him, we must not take this as a spiritual precedent. Paul was very happy to reveal his connections: “There stood by me this night the angel of God, Whose I am, and Whom I serve ...” Acts 27.23. He is most positive in Rom.1: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ ...” v16. See also 2Tim.1.8, “Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God.” So far as we are concerned, it is a case of ‘nailing our colours to the mast.’

“Ashamed to be a Christian!
Afraid the world should know
I’m on my way to Zion,
Where joys eternal flow!
Afraid to wear Thy colours,
Or blush to follow Thee!
Forbid it, O my Saviour,
That I should ever be.”

Now, let us suppose that Esther **had** declared her nationality. Yes, it is pure speculation, and perhaps we should not do it! Possibly, Haman would not then have attempted to eradicate the Jews. Her confession might have saved an awful lot of trouble. Well, we just don’t know, of course. But we do know that a clear confession of Christ at the earliest possible opportunity can save us from a lot of awkward situations later on. When people know that we belong to Christ, they often seem to know that there are certain things which we avoid, and so we don’t have to end up making weak excuses when the “crunch” comes.

iv) His concern for Esther, v11. “And Mordecai walked every day before the court of the women’s house, to know how Esther did, and what should become of her.” She was no longer in his custody — that had passed to “Hegai, keeper of the women,” v8. We just need to remember that this isn’t the Western World of 1999. This is Persia BC 478 or thereabouts. In commanding Esther not to disclose her nationality, Mordecai was evidently endeavouring ‘to make the best of a bad job.’ She was certainly not free to pursue life outside, so he was anxious that she should progress to the best possible position inside. That would, at the very least, make life more tolerable for her. Hence his daily concern for her welfare. There certainly does not seem to be anything particularly selfish in his motives.

All of which reminds us of the concern which, as believers, we should show to each other. “And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it,” 1Cor.12.26. See also 1Jn.3.16-18.

—to be continued (D.V.)

The Kings of Judah and Israel

by Graeme Hutchinson (Belfast)

Asa (Paper 5)

King Asa was the grandson of Rehoboam - 2Chron.12.16; 14.1 - and his reign marked the first serious attempt at raising the spiritual climate in Judah. Although the revival failed to sustain a promising start, the reign of Asa allows us to ponder some of the necessary ingredients for spiritual restoration - national or personal. The following are some of the more prominent.

(a) Consistency

Although Asa fluctuated in a similar way to his grandfather, the swings were nothing as frequent. For instance, once Rehoboam had resided over three brief years of spiritual prosperity - 2Chron.11.17 - he forsook the law and led the nation astray - 2Chron.12.1. Asa, on the other hand, appears to have ruled well for thirty-five years, before falling prey to the weaknesses of the flesh. It was only the remaining five to six years of Asa's life that were sadly characterised by departure and sin - 2Chron.16.1,13. It is possible, in the case of Asa, to sub-divide the point on consistency into two separate fields:

In Behaviour

2Chron.14.2-7 record some of the positive things that Asa enacted during the initial years of his reign. For instance, he dealt with idolatry (v3), he encouraged devotion to God and the Law (v4) and he used the period of peace wisely by fortifying the nation against future attacks (v6). Surely we should be doing the same to-day. *Fleeing* from those things that would displace the Lord from our lives - 1Jn.5.21. *Following* after the Lord and His Word - 1Tim.6.11. *Fortifying* ourselves against the enemy.

It is almost impossible to believe that the words of 2Chron.16.12, 'in his disease he sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians', actually refer to the same king. Sadly scripture is a testimony to the fact that many characters start promisingly but fail to sustain their spiritual momentum until the end. BEWARE! In any race, the importance of pacing yourself through the *whole* race is important, ensuring that sufficient resources are available for the duration and not just the start, 1Cor.9.24-27.

In Battle

During the course of Asa's reign, there were two major incidents with other nations. Initially it was with Ethiopia - 2Chron.14.9-15 and then with Syria and Israel - 2Chron.16.1-6. In the first case, Asa responded in a very commendable fashion by praying for direction - 2Chron.14.11 - whereas in the latter he was more dependent upon himself - 2Chron.16.2-3.

Although it may appear that Asa was merely using natural methods to counteract the threat posed by Israel - he engaged a third party (Syria) to distract Israel from their activities in Ramah - there were a number of faults. Firstly, unlike the battle

with the Ethiopians, Asa did not ask the Lord for guidance (v8). Secondly, he depleted the resources within the house of the Lord to pay for his actions (v2). Finally, whilst the approach received some short-term gain (v5), with the Israelites leaving the site of Ramah, the long-term was less encouraging (v9). Thus the record of Asa should teach us a lesson - taking situations into our own hands rather than leaving them with the Lord is sure to fail.

(b) Communion

To the natural eye, the balance of power between the Ethiopians and the army from Judah was unequal. 2Chron.14.8 records that from the two Southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin, the total number of warriors stood at a mere 580,000. From Ethiopia the number was one million (v9). In such circumstances, Asa did the only thing possible - he prayed (v11). Although we must react to problems in a similar way (Jam.5.13), it is important to consider some of the features of Asa's prayer.

Reverence

The words that Asa uttered to the Lord were ordered in such a fashion that we marvel at the respect shown. For instance, not only was the proper title used - 'Lord' - but the wording was personal and affectionate - 'Lord *his* God' - and - 'O Lord thou art *our* God'. Are we able to approach the Lord in prayer in such a fashion?

Confidence

Irrespective of the size of the Ethiopian army, Asa was confident that the Lord would be able to overthrow them - 'it is nothing with thee to help ..'. How important it is for us to develop characters that are marked by faith - trusting the Lord even when the circumstances appear hopeless.

Dependence

Although the world would interpret *confidence* and *dependence* as two features that could not possibly co-exist together, the Christians know different. Being confident in the Lord implies that we are dependent upon Him. Matthew Henry makes an excellent point: 'We do not say, Lord, take our part, for we have a good army for thee to work by; but, take our part, for without thee we have no power' (1994, Vol.2, p.735).

Intelligence

In this brief prayer, Asa showed a remarkable grasp of theology! - 'let not (mortal) man prevail against thee' (v11). In other words, Asa was tenacious enough to suggest that if the Ethiopians were to prevail over the nation of Judah then God's intrinsic feature of omnipotence would be brought into question - impossible! Such words were only possible because the king had steeped himself in the Law and its content (v4). Perhaps we fail to see answers to our prayers because we fail to deepen our understanding of the One we approach.

(c) Commitment

Although there are many points that we could use to illustrate the commitment that characterised the reign of Asa - for the most part - we must consider the content of 2Chron.15.16. For such was the determination to carry through the reforms, Asa was prepared to remove one of his own relatives from a position of influence.

Maachah - likely grandmother of Asa (1 Kings 15.2) - was a descendent of the rebellious Absalom, and it appears that she inherited the same disobedient streak, for she refused to destroy her idol.

Perhaps this would be an acid test for our own commitment to the things of God - being prepared to address wrong, even when it is being perpetrated by members of our own family. Sadly, as David Newell remarks: 'How often in a local assembly has the truth of God been sacrificed on the altar of family loyalty!' (The Minor Prophets, 1992, p.166).

(d) *Correction*

Twice in the recorded passages of Asa's reign, we are informed that he was approached by messengers of God - Azariah (2 Chron. 15.1-7) and Hanani (2 Chron. 16.7-9). In the first case, the prophet was used to *challenge* Asa - 'Be ye strong .. let not your hands be weak..' (v7), whereas in the latter it was a necessary word of *correction* - 'because thou hast .. therefore ..' (v7). Although the response to the words of Azariah was good, the same cannot be said with Hanani. For instance, once told about the error of his ways, Asa responded with anger and irresponsible behaviour - oppressing the people (2 Chron. 16.10). However, Asa is not alone with such an attitude - Ahab (1 Kings 22.8) was another who had a similar attitude to God's messengers. Perhaps it is a worthwhile question to ask ourselves - how do we respond when we read the Word of God and it cuts right across our own actions? Is it with *avoidance, anger or acceptance?*

See paper 1 for details of Bibliography/Figures

—to be continued (D.V.)

PAPERS ON PROPHECY

by The Late W. W. Fereday (written in 1897/98)

VOLUME 2

11(c)—The Bride, the Lamb's Wife

There are guests at the supper. "And He saith unto me, write, Blessed are they which are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb," Rev.19.9. Who are these? Not angels, for they are never said to be "called". The term is only used of objects of redeeming grace, *i.e.*, of men. Are not these the *friends* of the Bridegroom, as John the Baptist said in his day? Jn.3.29. Heb.12.22-24 comes to mind also. There we have the different companies in "the heavenly Jerusalem", and among them "the spirits of just men made perfect" as distinct from "the Church of the first-born ones." These are plainly the saints of the Old Testament dispensation. They will share in the common joy of the marriage-day, though not included amongst the myriads who form the Bride.

Need we wonder that the angel thought it necessary to add, "These are the true sayings of God"? The glory of the scene is so wonderful, the relationship so intimate, the blessedness so vast, that the heart needs, as it were, to be assured that it is really God's intention to make it all ours. Oh, that the thought of the future acted more

powerfully upon our lives in the present! Seeing that we look for such things, what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness!

We will now pass to Rev.21. There we have the Bride shown under the symbol of a city — the holy Jerusalem. Many figures are borrowed from the Prophet's description of the earthly city, and are here given a heavenly turn by the Spirit of God. Every reader should carefully observe that this chapter does not describe the Bride's home, but herself. This is necessary to remark, as many have read these glowing utterances as referring to heaven. Some may wonder why such a symbol should be used of the Bride of the Lamb. We must remember that she is to be associated with Him in all His future government. When He administers the government of the earth, His Bride will share in His honours. Viewed as in connection with the earth, she is set before us as a city, radiant in glory, and illuminated by the divine presence.

How full of meaning are the words "*the Lamb's wife.*" The title "*the Lamb*" reminds us of the sufferings and death of the Blessed One. The Church is called to have fellowship with His sufferings during the present time; and, in consequence, shall participate in His glory. The suffering comes before the glory. Let us remember this. It may help us in some of the circumstances through which we may have to pass for His Name's sake.

It should be carefully observed in Rev. 21, that verses 1-8 speak of eternity, and that verse 9 carries us back to the millennium condition of things. Verses 1-8 follow the description of the great White Throne, which will be set up at the very end of time, when the heavens and the earth are no more. The language of the verses clearly refers to a condition settled for all eternity, whether for the blessed or for the lost. But the succeeding verses carry us back to the time-state. Does not the mention of the vials and the plagues prove this? And if confirmation be needed, we would refer the reader to the mention of "nations", "kings", and "healing", 19.24-26, 22.2. Such expressions would not be used if the eternal conditions were being described. Chap.21.9—22.5, we have no doubt, shows the Lamb's wife in her millennial attire.

To behold this glorious vision, John was carried away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain. It is good to get far above all the mists and swamps of this poor world, and to enter into God's thoughts. The Spirit of God delights to show what the Church is to be in the future, that it may have power over our souls during the present. It was a fairer sight that was shown to John than Moses beheld when with God on the heights of Pisgah. The one was earthly, the other heavenly; the one was soon marred by the sins of God's people, the other will retain its God-given perfection for ever.

In describing the Holy Jerusalem the Spirit uses a great many charming figures, all very full of meaning. Our space will not permit of a detailed examination of them all; we must content ourselves with a few brief remarks. But we earnestly commend the study of this chapter to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ. It will amply repay care and patience. The Spirit of God is here showing the glories with which grace will invest the Church in the coming day. What more pleasing or elevating study for our hearts? What more sanctifying in its effects?

First, she is said to have “the glory of God”. Hope has given place to realisation, expectation to possession. For this the Lord Jesus prayed to the Father, and for it we rejoice in hope. Then the Church will be a perfect light-giver. “Her shining was like a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal.” Her shining has been sadly marred here. She has suffered the world and other things to come between her and her Lord. It is only as He shines on His own that they are able to reflect His glory before the eyes of others.

Next we read of “a wall great and high.” This suggests the twofold idea of separation and security. Alas! the Church has not been careful to exclude all evil during her sojourn on earth; but in the glorified state “there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth.” Separation from evil will then be perfectly carried out. Also, what security is there! No more thieves and robbers occur, and the roaring lion no longer going about seeking whom he may devour. And, what is even more blessed, no more evil hearts of unbelief to lead us astray!

There are gates, implying intercourse with the outside world. The heavenly redeemed will not keep to themselves the blessing of God, but will gladly dispense them to all around. Angels are at the gates. Their place is not to rule, but to serve. They are content to be the heavenly porters of the city. No jealousy is in their hearts. They know their place, and fill it for God; and they admire the grace which has called redeemed men to an incomparably higher place and relationship. God is glorified in it all, and that is sufficient for them.

The gates bear “the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel.” This fact has been viewed by some as showing that the earthly Bride is contemplated in these chapters. But there is no need thus to understand the statement. The names are on “*the gates*” which, as we have said, speak of intercourse with the outside world. Now it is plain that God will administer the earthly part of the inheritance by means of Israel. We regard this connection with the heavenly Bride to be as follows: The latter will be the inner circle of government and in the closest association with the King; Israel will be the outer circle of government and will be in direct contact with the people of the earth. Even in present day administration these differences may be seen; the Cabinet being the inner circle in connection with the Sovereign, lesser officers forming the outer circle who come into more direct contact with the people.

The wall of the city has twelve foundations, and on them are inscribed “the names of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb.” This reminds us of Eph.2.20. The Church is built on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets. They were the vessels inspired by God to bring out the truths, as far in advance of Old Testament revelation, that are needed for the present dispensation.

—to be continued (D.V.)

Due to recent illness and advancing years our former editor, Mr. A. M. S. Gooding and his wife (Kilmarnock), are finding it increasingly difficult to maintain correspondence and acknowledge gifts received by them. They deeply appreciate the continuing kindness and interest of the Lord's people and request their prayers and consideration at this time.

Characteristics of Declension (Judges Chap. 5) and Some Suggested Remedies (Eph. Chap. 6)

by D. S. Parrack, Somerset, England

PART 4

That our defensive armour may be complete, we are encouraged to “take the helmet of salvation,” v17. The Thessalonians were also encouraged to wear “for an helmet, the hope of salvation,” 1Thess.5.8. This piece of armour was for the protection of the head, where thought patterns originated. The believers at Thessalonica had not been sure quite what to think “concerning them which are asleep.” Had they missed the blessing in that they would not be there when the Lord Jesus, true to His promise, returned for His people? Would, or could, there ever be a reuniting with believers whose bodies had died and been buried? In considering these matters their thoughts were troubled and confused. Now this is a dangerous position to be in and one which Satan will exploit to the full. Paul sets out to clarify their thinking. “I would not have you to be ignorant brethren,” he says, “concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not even as others which have no hope,” 1Thess.4.13. The answer to all muddled thinking is the clear teaching and application of the word of God. That is why the apostle includes in the passage concerned, “This we say unto you by the word of the Lord,” 1Thess.4.15. From not knowing what was really going to happen, Paul leads the believers to a position where their thoughts were safe from the onslaughts of doubt because they are guarded by “the hope of salvation,” the assured avowal of God that both “the dead in Christ” and “we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together,” 1Thess.4.16,17. There is no room left for vague speculation rather a positive and certain hope in which to stand. How easy is it to let our minds run away with themselves in unguarded moments, when perhaps we are mentally or physically tired? That ‘the thought is father to the deed,’ is a saying which though not found as such in Scripture has often proved to be true for most of us. Of “him that hath an evil eye” we are told “As he thinketh in his heart, so is he,” Prov.23.6,7. If we play with sins in our minds we will soon find those very same sins working themselves out in action. We would do well as regards our thought life, to remember the apostle’s injunction. “Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things,” Phil.4.8. Here is a catalogue with which our minds can be taken up and upon which we can profitably meditate. By so doing we can share the blessedness spoken of concerning the man, “Whose delight is in the law of the Lord and in His law doth he meditate day and night,” Ps.1.2.

In considering the final item in our armoury, our thoughts switch from defence to

attack. The weapon is to be “The sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God,” v17. This weapon is unique for it “is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart,” Heb.4.12. More can be accomplished by the sword of the Spirit than by the keenest surgical instruments. Even in the hands of the finest surgeon they can at best probe and dissect the physical bodies of men. But it is after all, not our physical ills which are the most serious, our spiritual sicknesses, the maladies of our hearts, are cause for much greater concern. Here only God's word can reach and we can rely on nothing else to be effective in these spheres. In our campaigning for the souls of men, our own thoughts, our own ideas, will count as nothing. There will always be intellectuals cleverer than we are, debaters more skilled in the use of rhetoric, orators more able to arouse emotions, writers to stir men's imaginations. In the ultimate it will be the Word of God alone that can prevail for it contains not the puny thoughts of man but it is the living oracle of God Himself. With such a weapon we can enter the conflict with confidence. Men who will never submit to logical argument or religious theory will have their inner selves laid bare to their own view and this is a very sure beginning on the road to conversion.

But our warfare is not in soul winning alone, or at least it ought not to be. There are areas in our own lives, in our local assemblies, amongst believers generally, which are held in domination by spiritual forces opposed to our Lord Jesus. This may be the result of false teaching, or ignorance, or even plain selfwill. In these spheres too there is need for aggressive action with the Scriptures. Now by the aggressive, we most certainly do not mean fleshly bigotry or even carnal zeal. If we really mean what we sometimes say as to the truth of God's Word being for all His people, surely our love for them would make us wish for them the best and not to be “tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the sleight of man,” Eph.4.14. Other believers will not be attracted by our own pet ideas, nor with a sectarian creed, however stoutly propounded. But the opening up of God's Word in simplicity and love, in faithfulness and affection, will accomplish what all the theorising in the world cannot achieve. Do we feel that the gatherings of God's people are lacking the enjoyment of spiritual blessings which are the birthright of the saints? This lack will never be redeemed by an avowal to ‘put them right’. But neither will it be by a wringing of the hands, by unhappy compromises, or by jumping aboard whatever bandwagon is the current vogue. For Timothy, in the middle of a warning of coming perilous times when even believers would, “turn their ears away from the truth,” Paul's remedy is “Preach the word, be instant in season and out of season, refrain, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine,” 2Tim.4.2,4. It is this perseverance in the faithful teaching and ministry of God's Word that will prove itself as not merely the most effective weapon, but indeed the only effective weapon in our spiritual warfare.

What is to be the end result of our availing ourselves fully of “the whole armour of God?” It is “that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand,” v13. We are not promised exemption from evil times, but we may know, by His grace, the proving of the promise that, “A thousand shall fall at thy side and

ten thousand at thy right hand, but it shall not come nigh thee,” Ps.91.7. May we, in our own day, be enabled to stand firm even in the midst of declension and apostasy. Let us keep to the right pathway, so that it can be said of us that “thou walkest in the truth,” 3Jn.3. Let us foster and encourage the family spirit and “love the brotherhood,” 1Pet.2.17. In simplicity of heart, confessing our own inability, may we have grace to be always “Looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith,” Heb.12.2. Let us prove the armour of God to be all that it claims to be by putting it to personal use. In so doing we shall be kept free and happy in the Lord, enjoying to the full our present spiritual inheritance and bringing joy to the heart of the Lord Jesus, through whom the inheritance is given in such abundance.

(concluded)

The Bible and Baptism

by H. W. Graham (Eiré)

Before reading this article on the subject of baptism please pray to God for light and guidance and be sure you are willing to obey the truth. Then open your Bible and read the following passages with their context: Matt.28.19; Mk.16.16; Acts 2.38,41; 8.12,13,37; 9.17,18; 10.47,48; 16.15,33,34; 18.8; 9.4,5; Gal.3.27; Rom.6.3,4; Col.2.12; 1Pet.3.21. With these Scriptures in view we will consider seven simple questions.

WHO WERE BAPTIZED?

Those who received the apostles' word concerning repentance, Acts 2.38. Men and women who believed Philip and his preaching, Acts 8.12,13,37. Saul who had confessed Jesus as Lord and is called a brother, Acts 9.5,17,18. Those who had received the Holy Spirit, Acts 10.44,47. Lydia whose heart the Lord had opened and who had been judged faithful, Acts 16.15. The jailer and all his household who had believed, Acts 16.33,34. Many Corinthians hearing, believed and were baptized, Acts 18.8. Twelve men who had been baptized as disciples of John were baptized again as believers on the Lord Jesus Christ, Acts 19.4,5. In these examples we see the carrying out and the results of the Lord's commission to teach (make disciples) and baptize them, and he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, Matt.28.19; Mk.16.16. Not one example nor even a hint is found in Holy Scripture of the baptism of any but believers. If any affirm that infants were included in the households baptized they must prove it. Infant sprinkling involves fundamental error for it teaches that infants are thus made children of God and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven; that their ingrafting into Christ and engagement to be the Lord's are thus signified. This is downright falsehood. Infants after christening are still children of wrath even as others, Eph.2.3.

WHO BAPTIZED?

Philip the evangelist baptized the Ethiopian, Acts 8.38. Ananias, a disciple, baptized

Saul of Tarsus, Acts 9.10. The six brethren who accompanied Peter baptized Cornelius and his family, Acts 10.48; 11.12. Paul personally baptized some of his converts, and left his fellow-labourers to baptize the majority, 1Cor.1.14-16. The conclusion is that a disciple of Christ can baptize. Neither pope, prelate, priest, pastor or preacher is requisite.

WHERE WERE BAPTISMS CARRIED OUT?

The only positive answer is: in water. In no case is it possible to be dogmatic about the place where any Christian was baptized. It may have been in rivers, pools, the sea, or baths, but it was in water. God seems to have purposely omitted details that no rules may be imposed. Certainly a consecrated building was not a necessity. Let none be so foolish as to bring up the old wives' fable about the scarcity of water in Palestine. Any reader of the Bible can see that in those days it was a land of abundant water.

WHEN WERE BELIEVERS BAPTIZED?

The three thousand converts on the Day of Pentecost were baptized the same day (Acts 2.41). The Ethiopian, listening in his chariot to the preaching of Philip and seeing water, requested to be baptized and it was carried out there and then (Acts 8.36-39). Saul, who seems to have been physically prostrate after his conversion, was baptized three days later (Acts 9.9). Cornelius and his household were baptized at the close of the meeting in which they were saved (Acts 16.33). If this scriptural order were observed it would largely keep down the number of false professions that bring reproach on the Lord's work and name.

WHAT IS BAPTISM?

The word baptize means dip. Practically every scholar of every denomination says so. The Church of Ireland prayer book lays down that the priest shall dip the subject to be baptized, but permits pouring in case of infirmity. Dipping was almost universally practised until the 14th century and in Scotland until the Reformation. In the Eastern Churches it is the custom until the present time. Philip and the Ethiopian went both down into the water, he baptized him and they came up out of the water (Acts 8.38). Baptism is dipping.

WHAT DOES BAPTISM MEAN?

According to 1Pet.3.21 it (like Noah's ark) is a figure of salvation. Noah in the ark passed through the waters of judgment and was safe in the ark. The believer's sins have been judged but the judgment did not reach him sheltered in Christ. The ark bore the weight of the flood and Christ bore the penalty of His people's sins on the cross. Baptism is a figure of what took place at the cross. That is why in Rom.6 it is brought before us as a figure of our death, burial and resurrection with Christ. Christ died and the believer was crucified with Him (Gal.2.20). Christ was buried and the believer with Him. Christ was raised and the believer was raised with Him. This He shows by being buried with Him in baptism and living in newness of life (Col.2.12). As many as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ (Gal.3.27). Baptism is making publicly known that I belong to Christ, confessing Him before men, taking sides with Him before His foes and in His rejection. Modern methods

have been introduced such as hand-raising, card-signing, standing up, going forward, etc. These put human devices in the place of what God commanded.

WHY BE BAPTIZED?

There is one all-important reason: the Lord commands it. Peter in the name of the Lord commanded them to be baptized (Acts 10.48). This was to Gentiles just as he had previously commanded Jews to repent and be baptized (Acts 2.38). You may argue, reason, boast and talk loudly, but until you have been baptized you have not taken the first step in discipleship.

One final word, the Bereans were commended for searching the Scriptures daily, whether certain things were so (Acts 17.11). "Go, and do thou likewise." (Lk.10.37).

WISDOM'S HOUSE — No. 1

by J. Adams (N. Ireland)

INTRODUCTION

In these papers it is our intention to focus on "Wisdom's House" as seen in Prov.9 and to associate with it relevant assembly truth from various groupings of seven, found in other parts of God's word. It is our desire that these considerations will be blessed of God and lead to a strengthening of assembly testimony.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE HOUSE:

In Prov.9.1 we read, "Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars." It is a solid structure that has the completeness and perfection of seven pillars. Such a structure is a New Testament assembly, which is described as "house of God," 1Tim.3.15. An early reference to such a company is Acts 2.41-42, in which the seven pillars are brought to our attention.

1. The pillar of a **SOUND CONVERSION** - 'They that gladly received His Word';
2. The pillar of a **TRUE CONFESSION** - 'were baptised';
3. The pillar of a **HAPPY COMMENDATION** - 'were added unto them';
4. The pillar of **SCRIPTURAL CONDUCT** - 'continued in the Apostle's Doctrine';
5. The pillar of **SAINTLY COMPANIONSHIP** - 'fellowship';
6. The pillar of **BLESSED COMMEMORATION** - 'breaking of bread';
7. The pillar of **SWEET COMMUNION** - 'prayers'.

Unfortunately there is the possibility of pulling down the house through folly, Prov.14.1, "Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with their hands." By removing any of these pillars the testimony will become weak just like Samson who had removed from his head seven locks of hair, Jgs.16.19. It would be our desire to stabilise and build up that which has been constructed by God.

1. The pillar of a SOUND CONVERSION. - “They that gladly received His Word.’

What does it mean to gladly receive His Word? This begins when the Word comes in the power of the Holy Spirit resulting in conviction of sin. That is, we learn what we are by nature and by practice and thus feel our guilt, defilement and need of cleansing. Then comes the understanding of the exclusive manner of salvation, Acts 4.12, and by exercising one's responsibility the sinner trusts the Lord Jesus and receives the great blessing of eternal life. Jn.3.1-6; Acts 16.30-31.

2. The pillar of a TRUE CONFESSION. - “Were baptized.”

The Bible has nothing to say about sprinkling as a mode of baptism. Nor has it anything to say about children's baptism. It speaks clearly about water baptism but by immersion and that for believers only. There are just two NT ordinances, Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Both are instituted in the Gospels, celebrated in the Acts and explained in the Epistles.

Baptism is a command of the Lord - Matt.28.19; Mk.16.16.

Matt.28.19 is the Lord's EDICT to the evangelist.

Mk.16.16 is the Lord's EXPECTATION of the convert.

These are seen in operation in Acts 8.36-38. Notice both went down into the water. This obviously negates any thought of water in a bowl or some small container, this passage teaches baptism by immersion.

Thus the subjects of baptism are believers only, ‘They that gladly received His Word,’ Acts 2.41.

The mode is by immersion in water. The authority comes from the Lord Himself. What is the meaning of baptism? This is found in Rom.6.3-4. Baptism is the identification of the believer with the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus and thus professing to walk in newness of life.

It is also a declaration to the world that I am saved and am a new creature in Christ, 2Cor.5.17. The old man, that is all that we were in Adam, has been judicially put to death, and we now display the features of the new man, that is all that we are in Christ as part of the new creation.

3. The pillar of a HAPPY COMMENDATION. - “were added unto them.”

The adding implies the importance of individual responsibility in seeking to gather scripturally where the Lord has placed His Name. This is clearly a company of believers called out from all others in a locality with a common bond and purpose as seen from Acts 2.41-24; 4.31; 9.26; 1Cor.1.2. Now baptized and acknowledging the Lordship of Christ they function together as a local church. The seven pillars we are considering, will be seen. It is clearly a company which can be identified. The Apostles wrote to such, and in Acts 20.17 Paul called for the elders of such a company. There will be within these local assemblies those raised up by the Lord to lead His people. Those brethren are known as bishops, elders or overseers, Acts 20.17-18. There will be servants or deacons also Phil.1.1. In each company there will be gift recognised, 1Cor.1.2.

4. The pillar of SCRIPTURAL CONDUCT. - “continued in the Apostles' Doctrine.”

We learn from 1Tim.3.15 that behaviour in the house must be Scriptural. Everything must have ‘Thus saith the Lord.’ The holy presence of God demands godliness of life. Such has been seen in Eden's garden; in the Tabernacle; in the Temple; and now in the assembly. Jacob learned that God's House is a Holy Place, Gen.28.17, and he called it a dreadful place. It is a place where we should fear to sin. It is wrong to sin anywhere but especially where the Lord manifests His Presence, see Acts 5.5. We do well to note this Scripture for some will even provoke discipline on this very subject. Some may judge it is unscriptural to bring business matters into the assembly, suggesting that if business dealings fall short of the Divine standard the issue is not doctrinal error. However, it is a moral issue which is sinful and corrupt, and cannot be overlooked. It is necessary for all believers gathered in assembly fellowship to be very conscious of the fact that our manner of living has a bearing upon the local testimony. This truth grasped and practised will help us in business life and private life to seek to live above the standards of the world.

Those saved in the early Acts were not permitted to add their own thoughts, likes or dislikes. All behaviour must be in accord with God's dwelling and character. The same applies in our day. Much damage has been done by the introduction of unscriptural innovations and the dispensing of clear Scriptural precepts.

—to be continued (D.V.)

THE FIRSTBORN

by John B. D. Page (England)

In Bible times the firstborn son meant more than just seniority in a family, but positional honour was conferred upon him which was not bestowed on any other younger sons. For the significance of this unique honour in a family, we need to turn to the aged patriarch Jacob blessing his twelve sons: to the eldest he said, “...thou art my firstborn, ... the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power,” Gen.49.3. the word “excellency” occurring here twice, denotes ‘superiority’ or ‘pre-eminence’ and it is related to two spheres — “dignity” and “power”. With this definition of “firstborn” in mind, let us consider briefly the occasions when the word “firstborn” is applied metaphorically to Israel, the Church, and Christ. We will look first at Israel, the Lord's chosen nation.

ISRAEL THE FIRSTBORN

When speaking to Moses in Egypt about His people the Lord said, “... Israel is My son, even my firstborn,” Exod.4.22. This did not mean that Israel originated first in the family of nations but it expressed the Lord's purpose that, among the nations which had already existed for many centuries, Israel would be His firstborn among them in the sense of pre-eminence.

This was stated clearly later by Moses in a discourse to the people when he said, "... Jehovah thy God will set thee supreme above all nations of the earth." Continuing, "And Jehovah will make thee the head, and not the tail;" explaining this metaphor he said, "and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath," Deut.28.13; J.N.D. Such world-wide supremacy and prominence, or rather pre-eminence, among the nations has not yet been realised by Israel, although it was seen to some degree during Solomon's reign. It awaits fulfilment in Messiah's millennial kingdom on the earth.

THE CHURCH OF THE FIRSTBORN

Believers are described once as "... the church of the firstborn, ..." or literally "the assembly of the firstborn ones," as found in Heb.12.23. Reading this for the first time, those early Hebrew Christians may have reflected upon several Scriptures such as the Lord's command to their forefathers, the Israelites, "Sanctify unto Me all the firstborn ...," Exod.13.2, which means that every firstborn was set apart exclusively for God. A principle here may be applied to believers indicating that our *lives* should be separated unto the Lord and lived for His glory. Again, those early Hebrew Christians may have recalled how God told Moses concerning Aaron and his sons, "... sanctify them, that they might minister unto Me in the priest's office," Exod.28.41. Today, we, as believers, are priests (not ordained by a hierarchy), rendering *our service* to the Lord. Furthermore, they may have thought of the Israelites whom the Lord commanded: "Keep the Sabbath day to sanctify it,..." Deut.5.12. Observance of the Sabbath was for setting it apart to worship the Lord. As believers, not just one day a week but all *our time* should be for glorifying the Lord.

CHRIST THE FIRSTBORN

The Scriptures apply the term "the firstborn" as a title to the Lord Jesus before His Incarnation and in His Resurrection glory, but never during the days of His flesh. When the Gospel writers state that He was "the firstborn son" of the virgin Mary, Matt.1.25, Lk.2.7; this refers to His earthly *manifestation* which is expressed doctrinally: "God was manifest in the flesh," 1Tim.3.16. As a title "the firstborn" relates to His *relationship* in several spheres not in the sense of a beginning but of pre-eminence. These titles, four in the New Testament and one in the Old, will now be considered chronologically.

The Firstborn in Creation: This is the only one of these references when the eternally pre-existent Christ is in view: "the firstborn of every creature." This is not in the sense of having been created as alleged by false teachers. Its significance is not of being first in rank among created beings but of pre-eminence as their Creator. All beings, both celestial and terrestrial, both visible and invisible including all angelic hierarchies, were created by Him and for Him, 1Col.1.15f. Hence, as "the firstborn" He is foremost positionally in all realms of creation.

The Firstborn in resurrection: "the firstborn from the dead," Col.1.18, cp. Rev.1.5, or literally "the firstborn from among the dead." Those persons in the past who had been raised from the dead, died later but Christ died, arose from the dead and lives for evermore. His resurrection from among the dead gave Him priority

over all those still to be raised from the dead. As “the Firstborn from among the dead” means that He is first in position in relation to the future resurrection of both the just and the unjust. The resurrection of the just will be before the millennium and that of the unjust after the millennium. And so, the Risen Christ has the priority and the pre-eminence in this realm.

The Firstborn in the Church: “The firstborn among many brethren,” Rom.8.29. All believers are foreknown and predestinated by God to be conformed to the image of His Son in the sense of resemblance to Him, so that He might be “the Firstborn” among them. The thought is that He, as “the Firstborn,” should be supreme among “many brethren” — not among merely a few but rather numerous brethren throughout this age of grace.

The Firstborn in the Millennium: “And again, when He bringeth in the first begotten into the world, He saith, And let all the angels of God worship Him,” Heb.1.6. “And again,…” — this infers an additional OT quotation to those cited in the last verse, which is misleading. Preferably, the adverb “again” should follow the verb “bringeth” as in the margin: “And when He bringeth again the firstborn into the world, He saith, And let all the angels of God worship Him.” The Second Advent of Christ is in view. For the First Advent, He was “sent” or “came” into the world, but for the Second, God “bringeth again” His “Firstborn into the world.” Then, and not before, “all the angels of God (will) worship Him” fulfilling the ancient prophecy of Deut.32.43 (LXX) which the writer quotes. Universal worship during the millennium will be ascribed to Him, for He alone is worthy of it.

The Firstborn in Dominion: “Also I will make Him My Firstborn higher than the kings of the earth,” Psa.89.27. Much of this psalm is Messianic and millennial. The “Firstborn” is a metaphorical title that refers only to Christ. In this verse Jehovah expresses His intention to exalt His “Firstborn” to regal supremacy. During the millennium, Messiah will be the matchless Monarch and all other monarchs will be subject to Him.

In conclusion, this title, “the Firstborn,” sets forth the unsurpassed excellence of Christ in this age and the age to come.

LEAVE THE FUTURE — (Selected)

*“Leave the future” — let it rest
Simply on thy Saviour’s will.
“Leave the future” — they are blest
Who, confiding, hoping still,
Trust His mercy
To preserve them safe from ill.*

*Thus, like travellers in the dark,
Following the appointed way,
Though no beacon-fire they mark,
Still their faithful spirits say,
“We will follow —
Jesus leads to perfect day.”*

*Let the present moment pass,
With a blessing on its head;
And as Time metes out his glass,
While our sands are numbered,
Use the present —
Soon ’twill sleep with ages fled.*

*When with mists thy joys are clouded,
And when darkness fills the air —
When with sin thy soul is shrouded —
Then to Calvary repair;
Jesus gives thee
Beams of pure refulgence there.*

MY CONVERSION AND CALL (57)

by John McCann Jr. (Brazil)

Amongst the greatest privileges one can have, is to be born and nurtured under the sound of the Gospel, to have a home where God's Word is feared and honoured and where parents seek the spiritual welfare of their children as their highest priority. Such was my background and from my earliest days I was taught my need of God's Salvation. Sadly these privileges, as in the case of so many, were lightly esteemed. Truly they do not change the wayward sinful nature or guarantee the child's salvation. Only God's Grace can reach and save even the most favoured.

In 1968, Gospel Meetings came to an area near Tandragee, N. Ireland. By this time, my five older sisters were already saved, leaving only my older brother and myself without Christ. This older brother took an interest, and professed salvation in these meetings. This spoke loudly to me, as I knew the Lord was coming and I was in danger of being left behind alone. The result was I made up my mind to listen intently in the meetings and to seek salvation. Sadly that series of meetings finished leaving me still without Christ. However I thank God that the desires for salvation did not leave me and during the winter of 68-69, I often had thoughts about my soul.

In the month of May 1969, a series of meetings came to the Kilmore Gospel Hall. Upon hearing that they were starting, I resolved to seek for reality with all my heart. However Satan, in the first week or so, was busy to hinder us thinking, but God had His Own Way of working. After the meeting one night, I, along with my sister, went to take home some of the believers' children from the Lurgan area. Upon arrival at one home, we noticed an ambulance was parked outside and soon the mother of this family was carried out. This somehow spoke to me and made me think about eternity and all my interest in my soul returned. For some days I tried to come and trust and believe but all to no avail.

On the 29th of July, shortly before going out to the meeting, I was in my room with my Bible seeking, as I had often sought, for a verse to give peace to my soul. Many of the well known verses like Jn.3.16, Is.53.5-6, I had read and reread. At that moment I remembered that I had heard so many tell of being saved through these verses and I was understanding nothing. This came as a shock to me, as I realized that perhaps there was no salvation for me and that I had already sealed my choice for hell and the lake of fire forever. I trembling, went to the meeting and listened almost having lost hope of ever being saved. The second preacher that night spoke on sin but emphasised the Work of Christ to cancel the sinner's sin. I listened with interest knowing that this was what I needed. The meeting ended and I went directly to the car. I wanted to be alone. I turned over in my mind what Christ had done upon the cross and a verse learned in the Sunday School came before me. It was the words of 1Pet.2.24, "who His Own Self bare our sins in His Own Body on the tree". Without feeling anything or seeing anything, I understood that He had taken my place and had died for me. I simply understood, that the judgment that my sins deserved had fallen on Christ, and all that was needed was for me to rest upon Him. Already the dread of making a false profession made me wonder was salvation so

simple. I said nothing but went home with the others. Once home, I went straight to the bedroom and without thinking what I was doing, bowed my knee to thank God for giving His Son for me. The joy of assurance of salvation, filled my soul, and I knew all was well for eternity. How it still gives us joy to remember those first moments of love to Christ.

Kilmore was, and is, a small assembly and in 1976 when received to fellowship, I sought to be a help in whatever way possible. Around the time of my reception, the two brethren who carried the main responsibility of the assembly were called home. One of these brethren, the late George Dawson, had sought to encourage us to have a burden about the lost. Before his death he used to bring us with him to the neighbouring villages. We continued with this exercise in the giving out of tracts and in open-air work. In 1979, I had my first visit to the South of Ireland. This visit showed us something of the darkness and need of those who have never heard the Gospel. From that time forward I felt a burden to pray that God would guide us as to our future. In 1984 I was married and together with my wife Christine, we prayed that we might be able to know God's plan for our future. We felt a burden about the South of Ireland and although Brazil did occur to us, we sought to keep it out of our minds.

During 1985, we eventually spoke with the Kilmore brethren about our thoughts about the South of Ireland and asked them to pray for us. From that moment it became clear that this door was closed and yet the burden about our future remained. Brazil again and again came before us and yet we felt unwilling to move without clear divine guidance.

About this time, a series of Gospel Meetings came to the Glenanne assembly in South Armagh. A large number of young people were attending and many were relatives of my wife including her two brothers. One night, brother Tommie Wright invited us to his home, and spoke with us about the need of Brazil. We explained exactly our situation, and our fears of missing the way. We were encouraged to ask for a clear token of God's will in seeking an answer to prayer. Later, both of us decided before God to ask for the salvation of one of these relatives. The following Monday, I read in Judges 6, of how God had given Gideon the second sign before sending him to do His will. I really felt it was a word from God for us. Later that morning we heard that my wife's cousin had been saved. That evening I showed my wife this passage and once again we prayed, especially with a burden about her brothers. Two days later, God's guidance became clear, when her younger brother trusted Christ.

Even though we were thereby clearly shown it was Brazil where God desired us to be, we felt an exercise that God might open the way. Much could be written about the following months but finally in January 1987 our visa was applied for along with brother Gregg Buchanan's. We expected to join 6 missionary couples who were then in the Rio Grande do Sul, but such was not to be. When our visas were granted in October 1987, two of these brethren, brother Wilfred Glenn and Sam Curran were already with Christ having died within one week of each other. Over the past years we have come to know something of the vast need of this state where millions still have never heard the Gospel. We often wonder, why are others not being raised up to come over and help in the vast harvest of souls. "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the Harvest, that He will send forth labourers into His Harvest" Matt.9.38.

Good Tidings from Heaven

"WHAT IS TRUTH?"

Unless information is proven to be true, it cannot be relied upon and it can never be a basis on which to act. How many have acted on information which they thought was correct, to discover later, perhaps too late, that they had been deceived. Likewise as we consider the plethora of religions and cults today, we may well survey the whole scene of confusion and ask, "What is truth?"

I unhesitatingly refer you to the unerring Scriptures of truth, the Word of Him that cannot lie. The sacred text contains many truths which are vital for you to learn and will bring you untold blessings if you bow to them. Ignore them, listen to the lies of "the devil that deceived them," Rev.20.10, and you will place yourself in escapable peril.

Let us consider six truths which are most relevant to you and your eternal destiny.

1. UNIVERSAL SIN

"For there is no difference: for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God," Rom.3.22,23. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned," Rom.5.12.

Because of this there is no one who is fit for heaven without experiencing God's salvation and what the Saviour taught Nicodemus in Jn.3.7 is true of all, "...ye must be born again."

2. THE UNDYING SOUL

"God... breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul," Gen.2.7. Your body will die and decay but your soul is immortal. It cannot be drowned, burned or buried and when your brief life on earth is over, you will continue to exist in eternity — have you addressed the all-important question, 'Eternity Where?' Will it be to enjoy pleasures inconceivable in heaven forever, or to endure pain unimaginable and unrelenting in the fire unquenchable?

3. THE UNIQUE SON

The Lord Jesus Christ is "the only begotten of the Father," Jn.1.14.

So many truths pertain to Him which we unashamedly state and confirm in a day when they are assailed on every hand — His eternal Deity, His immaculate conception by the Holy Ghost, His Virgin birth, His sinless life and stainless walk, His sacrificial, sin-atonement death, His literal, physical resurrection from amongst the dead and His bodily ascension to the right hand of God. We point you to Him as your only hope of heaven, for 'Life is found alone in Jesus.'

4. HIS UNLIMITED SACRIFICE

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son..." Jn.3.16; "...He should taste death for every man," Heb.2.9; "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world," Jn.1.29; "Who gave Himself a ransom for all," 1Tim.2.6.

When Christ suffered at Calvary, He provided salvation for every sinner everywhere. Have you trusted Him as your personal Saviour? If not, your folly is inexcusable.

5. AN UNCOMPLICATED SALVATION

No energy or expense on your part. God makes no hard conditions or impossible demands — you have only to trust Christ. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life," Jn.3.36; "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on Me hath everlasting life," Jn.6.47; "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," Acts 16.31.

6. UNENDING SUFFERING

"And these shall go away into everlasting punishment..." Matt.25.46; "Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched," Mk.9.44,46,48.

This will be the portion of all who fail to trust Christ. The pain will never be alleviated, the remorse will be endless and the torment without respite. If not saved, I plead with you to consider this, 'Can thy spirit the swellings of sorrow endure, or bear the impenitent's doom?'



ASSEMBLY TESTIMONY



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ASSEMBLY TESTIMONY

This is a bi-monthly magazine for the propagation of the Word of God and thus the encouragement and edification of the people of God.

Advisory Editor : A. M. S. Gooding

Editor: B. Currie

Correspondence relative to Editorial matters should be addressed to:

The Editor, 49 Glenburn Road, Dunmurry, N. Ireland, BT17 9AN.

Telephone (01232) 621343.

E-mail: AT@bcurrie.free-online.co.uk

Secretary/Treasurer : William Neill, 109 Lurgan Road,
Banbridge, Northern Ireland, BT32 4NG.
Telephone (018206) 24238.

Committee : Tom Armstrong, Thomas Beggs, Ronnie Johnston,
James McKeown, James Moore, Roy Reynolds.

This magazine is supported solely by the freewill offerings of the Lord's people. No member of the committee, author of articles or any other person connected with the magazine receives payment, remuneration or gratuity of any kind. This magazine is not to be sold.

Friends residing in England, Scotland and Wales may kindly forward their donations to :

John Glenville, 16 Trelawney Road, Saltash, Cornwall, PL12 4DD.

Telephone (01752) 846889.

Friends residing elsewhere should please forward gifts to:

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BEHOLD YOUR KING

(Meditations in Matthew)

by Jim Flanigan (Belfast)

20. Crumbs from the Table; Bread in the Wilderness (Ch.15)

The Lord Jesus detested and repeatedly denounced the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees. The disciples remarked that He had offended the Pharisees, but the King will judge hypocrisy wherever it is found. Our chapter begins with a religious criticism of the disciples for eating with unwashed hands. It was a transgression of the tradition of their elders. There was nothing in the Mosaic law about such, but Judaism had an oral law which had been committed to writing by the Rabbis and called "The Talmud". This they reckoned to be not only equal to the written Mosaic law but actually superior to it. The Talmud contained endless, sometimes ludicrous, additions to the law as given to Moses, and the Talmudical regulations regarding eating and washing and the manner and means of washing were complicated to say the least. The Saviour points out to them that they, in a more serious way, transgressed the commandment of God. They had a clause in their Talmud which released a man from the obligation of the well-known fifth commandment that a man must honour his father and his mother. They might indeed have been offended, these scribes and Pharisees, but they were hypocrites. They were blind leaders of the blind, concerned with outward show and neglecting the inner purity of the heart and mind.

The King leaves them. He travels north to the borders of Tyre and Sidon and is met by a distraught Canaanitish woman. What a contrast to the religious hypocrisy He has just left in Jerusalem! The woman implores Him as the Son of David. Did she think that such an approach would grant her favour? She had no rights in David, this Gentile woman, but the awful state of her demon-possessed daughter had brought her in faith to the feet of One whom she truly believed to be the Son of David, the Messiah. The Saviour, testing her faith, hides His grace momentarily. He was only sent, He says, to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. She worshipped Him. Her cry was compelling, "Lord, help me." Still Jesus will test her. She was an outsider. It was not right to take the children's bread and throw it to dogs. "Truth, Lord," she acknowledges, but argues that even those little dogs under the table eat of the crumbs which fall as the children eat. It was, like the faith of that centurion in Capernaum, greater faith than He had found in Israel. "O woman, great is thy faith." In that very hour her daughter was healed. How such incidents as these must have cheered the heart of the Saviour, rejected by the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees but received by the faith of a Canaanitish woman, just like that Samaritan outcast of Sychar.

Our Lord travels south again, towards the sea of Galilee. He went up into a hill by the lake-side and, as ever, the multitudes came. Well did Isaiah write: "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light," Isa.40.2. It was the land of

Zebulon and Naphtali. It was Galilee of the Gentiles, and the light was shining upon them. They brought their lame, their blind, their dumb, their maimed, and many others. They brought them right to His feet and He healed them. What days were those! The multitude wondered and glorified the God of Israel

But now a former problem recurs. "I have compassion on the multitude" He says. For three days they had been with Him, these throngs. They were hungry. It was, of course, the disciples who had the problem, in spite of what He had wrought before in similar circumstances. "Bread in the wilderness?" they exclaim, and such a multitude! In reply to His question they say that they have seven loaves and a few little fishes. Again, as formerly, he commands the crowds to sit on the ground. The King will do everything in an orderly fashion. Besides, they need rest as well as food. He still provides both for the obedient soul.

He took the seven loaves and the fishes. He gave thanks. He brake them. He distributed to His disciples who in turn distributed to the multitude. Four thousand men there were, and women and children. They did all eat and were satisfied and there were gathered up afterwards seven baskets full of fragments. How dignified it all was. How similar to the feeding of the five thousand it was.

It is important to note the references to the two miracles in the next chapter (ch.16.9-10; and see also Mark 8.19-20). These references are important because some critics there are who say that there was but one feeding of the multitude and that the writers of the Gospels have confused and duplicated the record of this miracle. Here, however, the Saviour Himself refers to two separate and distinct occasions. There were five thousand fed, and there were four thousand similarly fed. That there were two miracles is confirmed by the Lord Jesus.

What is the significance then of the seven loaves and the seven baskets, and of the three days that the people were with Him. All is perfection. In the study of Bible numerals, these numbers three and seven speak of completeness and perfection. The third day too, might remind us of resurrection. One day, when the King returns to earth, there will be twelve baskets, and seven baskets, for Israel. The nation will enter into blessing and into government. A risen and glorified Messiah will ensure the millennial blessing of the people whose scribes and elders once rejected and crucified Him.

The Saviour now dismisses the multitude and journeys to Magdala, home of that other once demon-possessed woman whom He delivered, and who, it seems, followed Him ever after right to Calvary and to the Garden Tomb. Who has not heard of Mary of Magdala?
—to be continued (D.V.)

Moral courage is power to resist fashionable error and maintain unfashionable truth.
—S. G. Goodrich

* * *

Prejudice is a time-saver — it enables you to form a judgment before you gather the facts.
—Unknown

Assembly Testimony Bible Class

by J. Riddle (Cheshunt)

ESTHER

(5) ENTER ESTHER, PART B

Read Chapter 2.12-23

We have already noticed that the opening two chapters describe three principal events (1) The removal of Vashti; (2) The selection of Esther; (3) The loyalty of Mordecai. So far as the selection of Esther is concerned, we suggested in our last paper that there are three strands to this part of the story: (A) Esther and Mordecai, v5-11; (B) Esther and Hegai, v12-25; (C) Esther and Ahasuerus, v16-20. We have considered the first of these, which brings us to:

B) ESTHER AND HEGAI, v12-15

We have already noticed that Hegai, “keeper of the women,” was most impressed with Esther, and that he had “preferred her and her (seven) maids unto the best place of the house of the women,” v9. There is little need to comment on the procedure described in v13-14. R. Sinker (Ellicott’s Commentary), writing on v3, says it all: ‘Called Hegai in v8; a eunuch whose special charge seems to have been the virgins, while another, named Shaashgaz, v14, had the custody of the concubines. *The whole verse shows, as conclusively as anything could do, in how degrading aspect Eastern women were, as a whole, viewed.* It was reserved for Christianity to indicate the true position of woman, not man’s plaything, but the help meet for him, able to aid him in his spiritual and intellectual progress, yielding him intelligent obedience, not slavery.’ J. G. Baldwin says: ‘Though these girls had every luxury, and could choose any adornment to enhance their beauty, they returned from the king’s presence to the house of the concubines, mere chattels, awaiting the king’s pleasure, if indeed he ever remembered them again.’

The statement that Esther was “fair and beautiful,” is confirmed by the fact that “she required nothing but what Hegai the king’s chamberlain, the keeper of the women, appointed. And Esther obtained favour in the sight of all them that looked upon her,” v15. She needed no adornment (see v13): the “oil of myrrh” and “sweet odours” were sufficient. Whilst there can be no comparison between the situation at Shushan and the Christian wife, we are at least reminded of 1Pet.3.3-5: “Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible...”.

We are also reminded that if Esther entered the presence of Ahasuerus in the sweetness of the cosmetics provided by Hegai, we “are unto God a sweet savour of Christ,” 1Cor.2.15. When Paul received the gifts from the assembly at Philippi, he described them as “an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing

to God,” 4.18. The two words rendered “*odour of a sweet smell*” occur in Eph.5.2 which describes the fragrance of Christ Himself.

C) ESTHER AND AHASUERUS, 16-20

“And the king loved Esther above all women ... so that he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti.” This was followed by “Esther's feast.” It all looks very romantic. Until, that is, we read v19: “And when the virgins were gathered together the second time...”. Whilst the passage does not give the purpose of this gathering, there can be little doubt that it was for the same reason as the first, v2-4. We must remember that Ahasuerus was a polygamist, and was constantly adding to his harem. It all contrasts starkly with Eph.5: “Christ also loved the church, and *gave Himself* for it,” v25. Ahasuerus gave Esther a crown and made her a feast: Christ “gave Himself.”

But there's something else. Esther “obtained grace and favour” in the sight of Ahasuerus because of her beauty. But we enjoy divine grace in its truest sense. See 2Tim.1.9, “Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace...”

Chosen, not for good in me,
Wakened up from wrath to flee...

We were “chosen ... in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love,” Eph.1.4.

Let's face it, the whole affair was shallow and empty. It was all outward show. Ahasuerus was only interested in beautiful women and sensuality. It all turned on “fair young virgins,” v2-3, and pleasing and delighting the king, v4,14. The whole court was obsessed with this — in exactly the same way as society today. Youth, beauty, physical attraction ... There is “nothing new under the sun.” Society has yet to learn that, “As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman which is without discretion,” Prov.11.22. Natural beauty is temporary, *but our spiritual beauty in Christ is eternal.*

We come now to the last of the three principal events described in the opening two chapters of this book:

3) THE LOYALTY OF MORDECAI

This is described in 2.21-23. We have already noticed that Esther ch.1,2 describe God's prior provision for His people. A crisis loomed and God knew all about it. The removal of Vashti, the selection of Esther, and now, the loyalty of Mordecai, were all part of God's providential care for the Jews. Mordecai uncovered a plot to assassinate Ahasuerus, and the culprits were duly “hanged on a tree,” v23. Two statements are particularly significant.

A) “*Esther certified the king thereof in Mordecai's name,*” v22. Mordecai could have remained silent about the plot. After all, Ahasuerus was a heathen king. He was Emperor of Persia, and the land of his fathers was not just a province in the mighty Persian Empire. But he took steps to save the life of the king. On the other hand, perhaps Mordecai was acting in his own interests, and in Esther's interests. Had Ahasuerus died, Esther would no longer be queen, and Mordecai would have no

representation at court. Whilst we cannot know what was in Mordecai's mind, we do know that God was again at work behind the scenes. We also know that Rom.13 teaches that we are "to render to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour," v7. This is because "the powers that be are ordained of God," v1. 1Pet.2 reinforces this: "As free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness (wickedness), but as the servants of God. Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. *Honour the king,*" v16-17.

B) "it was written in the book of the chronicles before the king," v23. Mordecai could have sought recognition for his loyalty to the king. Had he done so, events could have taken a totally different course. The happy consequences of his humility are spelt out very clearly in ch.6. The man who sought no honour for himself, became "the man whom the king delighteth to honour." This recalls 1Pet.5. "Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. *Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time,*" v5-6. But it also recalls another "Man Whom the King delighteth to honour." He sought no recognition on earth. "Tell the vision (on the Mount of Transfiguration) to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead," Matt.17.9. The Lord Jesus waited the Father's time, and "God hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name that is above every name," Phil.2.9. —to be continued (D.V.)

The Kings of Judah and Israel

by Graeme Hutchinson (Belfast)

Jehoshaphat No. 1 (Paper 6)

Jehoshaphat, the son of Asa, 2Chron.17.1, was king of the Southern nation of Judah for 25 years. Unlike his Northern contemporary, Ahab, Jehoshaphat was, for the most part, a spiritual man. Within 2Chron., four chapters are devoted to his life (17-20). We can summarise the record as follows:

(a) 2 Chronicles 17: A Focused King

The beginning of Jehoshaphat's reign over Judah was encouraging. Whereas his father had ignored the Lord towards the end of his career (16.12) Jehoshaphat was determined to seek Him, 17.4. Instead of his father being his model, the king took one of his forefathers, David (17.3). In this intriguing chapter we can note the:

- *Fortification (v1-2)*

Determined to guard against the influences of the Northern Kingdom, 17.1 reminds us that Jehoshaphat was quick to erect defences against the opposition. We too are engaged in warfare, 2Tim.1.3-4, and proper use of the 'whole armour of God,' Eph. 6.10, is essential. What is true of the believer individually is also true collectively within the assembly. Safeguarding against enemy intrusion is vital for the healthy survival of the assembly.

- *Separation (v3-6)*

With idolatrous practices pervading the Northern Kingdom, it is interesting to note that Jehoshaphat ‘sought not unto Baalim’, v3. Certainly at this stage of his life, the king was prepared to be different from his contemporaries. Moreover, v6 indicates that his heart was ‘lifted up’ not for bad — as happened to Uzziah, 26.12 — rather it was in the ‘ways of the Lord.’ The result was that the king was rewarded in ‘abundance’, v5. Do we follow the call of 2Cor.6.17: ‘Wherefore come out from among them and be ye separate’? The record of Scripture illustrates that such people will be rewarded.

- *Education (v7-9)*

Three years into his reign, Jehoshaphat sent five princes, v7, nine Levites, v8a, and two priests, v8b, to teach the law throughout Judah. A number of practical points can be gleaned from the verses. Firstly the teachers were *numerous* (and varied). D. B. Long remarks that ‘this would give balance and variety to all the teaching, something best done through different types of teachers rather than a stereotyped one-man-ministry type of arrangement’ (Revival; A Study in Biblical Patterns, 1993, p.173). The same arrangement should hold for assemblies following New Testament principles, Acts 13.1. Secondly, the teachers were *named*. Proven men, not novices selected on the spur-of-the-moment! The same should hold today, Acts 11.26, 13.1 and 16.2-3. Finally, for Deut.17.20 to be fulfilled, the teachers were *necessary*. Focusing on the law, v9, and spreading it throughout the nation guarded against sin and departure. The same prominence must be given to the Word of God today, Acts 18.26 and 20.27.

- *Remuneration (v10-13a)*

Diligence to the Lord and His Word was repaid with peace, v10, praise, v11, power, v12, and prosperity, v13. In the spiritual sense, these blessings will accrue to the believer who similarly regards the Lord and His Word. The promise spoken by the Lord to Eli is appropriate: ‘them that honour Me I will honour,’ 1Sam.2.30.

- *Protection (v13b-19)*

Having placed such value upon the land, it was necessary that adequate protection was given. Amongst those assigned with the responsibility were Amasiah ‘who willingly offered himself unto the Lord,’ v16; Eliada, ‘a mighty man of valour,’ v17; and Jehozabad, ‘ready prepared for the war,’ v18. Men who were not only *equipped* for the job but *eager* to do it! Within every assembly there is a need for believers (especially men, who are equipping themselves for the work, knowledgeable in the Word, and showing an eagerness to follow the instructions. Timothy is one (male) example, 2Tim.2.15; 3.15 and Phil.2.22, while Priscilla is another (female) example, Acts 18.16 and Rom.16.3-4.

(b) 2 Chronicles 18: A Fallen King

What a change takes place with Jehoshaphat between chapters 17 and 18. In the former he was ‘against Israel,’ 17.1, in the latter he ‘joined affinity with Ahab,’ 18.1. In tracing the sad record of Jehoshaphat's compromise with the sinful king of Israel, we can notice the:

- **Reason**

2Chron.17.1 remarks that it was when 'Jehoshaphat had riches and honour in abundance' that he developed the disastrous and sinful union with Ahab. In the first instance, the 'riches' suggest that the material *prosperity* enjoyed by Jehoshaphat led to his downfall. The Scriptures faithfully record that, for those individuals blessed with riches, the tendency is for them to develop the notion of self-dependency, 1Tim.6.17. The 'honour' would convey the problem of *pride*. Thoughts of self-dependency created thoughts of self-importance! How true are the words of Solomon: 'Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall,' Prov.16.18. Moreover the *passage of time* may well have dimmed Jehoshaphat's ability to discern evil. For example, Scripture suggests that Jehoshaphat was around 52 when the events of 2Chron.18 took place (see 1Kgs.22.40,51,41 in that order). If he died when he was 60, 2Chron.20.31, then the events in 2Chron.18 took place towards the end of his life, and examples of men such as Noah, Gen.9.20-23, would highlight the dangers of old age!

- **Result**

The union or compromise with Ahab created numerous problems for the nation of Judah — not only during the reign of Jehoshaphat but also for many years thereafter. Initially the impact was felt *personally*. Not only was Jehoshaphat close to death, after being mistaken for Ahab, 2Chron.18.29-32, but the immediate family circle was affected as well. For instance, a friendly relationship with Ahab appears to have cultivated a similar relationship with his son, Jehoram, and Ahab's daughter (Athaliah), for they both married, 2Kgs.8.16-18! 2Chron. 20.35-37 also indicates that the desire to join with Israel was firmly embedded with Jehoshaphat — he repeated the same pattern with Ahab's son — Ahaziah!

The impact of the compromise was then felt *nationally*, for the legacy of the compromise recorded in 2Chron.18 lasted for many years. As 2Chron.21.4-6 records, the evil heart of Jehoram and the influence of his wife and father-in-law were such that he committed heinous acts of sin and wickedness.

The final area where the impact of the compromise was shown was *spiritually*. Not only was Jehoshaphat rebuked for working alongside an ungodly nation that 'hated the Lord,' 2Chron.19.2, but the end result was that his daughter-in-law tried, unsuccessfully, to destroy the whole seed of David, 2Chron.22.10. This attempt was unquestionably Satanic, for it was aimed at thwarting the purpose of God which sought to bring His Son along this royal line, Matt.1.8,16.

2Chron.18 stands out as a great warning chapter against compromise. Engaging in unholy alliances with the opposition creates problems for the individual believer which inevitably permeates the assembly. The end result is that spiritual decline is present for many years subsequent. Better to follow the guidance of Eph.5.11: 'have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness.'

In our next paper we shall consider the record of 2Chron.19 and 20.

See paper 1 for details of Bibliography/Figures

—to be continued (D.V.)

PAPERS ON PROPHECY

by The Late W. W. Fereday (written in 1897/98)

VOLUME 2

11(d)—The Bride, the Lamb's Wife

When the city was measured with the golden reed, its length, breadth, and height were found to be equal. Tested by divine righteousness no inequality or unevenness is detected. How different now! We often see much unevenness, if not positive crookedness, and it causes our hearts pain. But how complete the change in the day of glory! Christ's own perfection will be everywhere seen, to the delight and admiration of all. "And the building of the wall of it was of jasper," speaking of divine, though not Godhead, glory, Rev.4.3; "And the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass" — divine righteousness everywhere seen. The precious stones follow, into the details of which we cannot now enter. They show that every kind of beauty will be displayed in the glorified. God's own character will be seen in all; all His excellencies will be manifested as never before on earth.

Each gate was of one pearl. This reminds us of the well-known parable in Matt.13.45,46. From whatever point the holy city is viewed, there is the memorial of the deep love of Christ — that love which led Him into unutterable depths that we might be His for ever. "The street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass." "The street" is emblematic of intercourse. How sweet and perfect will this be with each other in the glory! Our intercourse is frequently marred here, through the unwatchfulness of our hearts. In glory it will be according to divine righteousness, agreeable to God, and a delight to us.

No temple was seen in the Holy City, in contrast with the earthly. Israel's metropolis will possess the Temple of God once more, Ezek.40, etc; at once a privilege and joy. But this cannot be for the heavenly saints, who are to enjoy a nearness to God peculiarly their own, through Christ's redemption. No part of the heavenly city is more holy than another; the presence of God and the Lamb fill it throughout.

Nor is there any need of created light, for the glory of God is there, and the Lamb is the lamp thereof. The homage of the kings of the earth will gladly be paid to the Lamb's wife, and the nations shall walk in its reflected light. Not only so, but from the Throne of God and of the Lamb, through the city, a river of blessing will flow, for the benefit of all. Eternally fruitful the glorified will be, and, during the millennial age, will minister to the nations for their healing. Creation's scars shall all be removed.

These are some of the glories that await us. Every sentence in Rev.21,22, is divinely full, and, blessed be God, divinely true. His own matchless grace will make it all good in all His own, for Christ's glory. These are glories and joys that will never fade. It is refreshing to contemplate the Bride in her eternal condition, after considering her millennial relationship and connections. When all things are made new, the Holy City, New Jerusalem, will come down from God, out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband, Rev.21.2. *Still a bride*. The freshness not departed, the first glow of love not vanished. The Bridegroom's love perfect for her, and hers perfect for Him, and that for ever and ever. —*to be continued (D.V.)*

SPRINKLING?

by H. W. Graham (Eiré)

The vast majority of people believe in infant sprinkling. Can it be possible that they are all mistaken and that a very small minority is right? It is quite possible and most probable. Where in Scripture is it found that truth ever lay with the majority? In the days of the flood, were Noah and his seven companions right or were the majority? Were the vast majority that condemned Christ to be worthy of death right, or were the few failing disciples? Following the analogy of Scripture it is not likely in the matter of infant baptism that the majority would have the truth.

When the matter is mentioned it is customary to be told that the Saviour said: "Suffer little children to come unto Me." Now if there is a passage of the Bible that witnesses against baby baptism, this is it. Children were brought to Christ, not for baptism, but that He should put His hands upon them and pray. The disciples rebuked those who brought them, but the Lord reprov'd the disciples, put His hands on the children and blessed them. He neither baptized them nor commanded His disciples to do so. He said that of such is the kingdom of God, not of children, but of such as become like little children, and thus receive the kingdom of God. The little ones of whom He spoke were those who believe in Him. Please read the following passages: Matt.18.1-14, 19.13-15; Mk.10.13-16; Lk.18.15-17.

It is also common to be told that as children were circumcised in the Old Testament so children should be baptized now. Supposing it were so, it could only apply to male children, and would give no ground for baptizing females. The argument is that as circumcision, the seal of the old covenant, was applied to children so the seal of the new likewise. But baptism is never described as the seal of anything. The Holy Spirit is the seal given by Christ Himself to those who are His, Eph.1.13; 4.30. Circumcision was first given to Abraham as a seal of the faith he already had, Rom.4.11. Then it was given to all who were Abraham's descendants by natural birth, without any condition as to the personal faith of the parents. It was a sign borne in the body that the person was of the nation of Israel and entitled to a share in the national blessings. The uncircumcised were cut off from the nation but this had nothing to do with individual salvation, Gen.17.9-14. If baptism corresponds to circumcision it is strange that Jews already circumcised were also baptized on believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, as happened at Pentecost, and on other occasions. Later when some insisted that baptized Gentile believers, must also be circumcised, it is most strange that the reply was not made that baptism had taken the place of circumcision, Acts 15.1-5.

Some bring forward such phrases as "The promise is unto you, and to your children," Acts 2.39, and say that therefore children should be baptized. But children here are descendants not babies just as in the phrase "children of Israel."

Others tell us that whole households were baptized on the faith of the head of the family. Usually the Gospel divides families, Matt.10.34-39, but there are cases when

every individual in a household believes the Gospel and as believers all are baptized. Such was the case of Cornelius, Acts 10.44-48; 15.7-9; Lydia, Acts 16.14,15,40; the jailer, Acts 16.30-34; Stephanas, 1Cor.1.14-16; 16.15. No infants are mentioned, all those baptized believed, were brethren, ministered to the saints. Some suggest that Lydia's children were baptized. They have to suppose that she was married, that she had children, that they were still infants and that they were with her in Philippi. Quite an imaginary foundation on which to build!

Another straw at which drowning baby sprinklers despairingly grasp is the phrase in 1Cor.7.14: "Now are they (the children) holy." Therefore, they say, such should be baptized. The fact is that the passage does not deal with salvation and baptism. It treats of the problem whether the believing partner in a marriage should separate from the unbelieving one. The answer is negative because the unbeliever is sanctified by the believer, not, of course, in a spiritual sense. The unbeliever is not saved and sanctified without personal faith and is not to be baptized. In the same way the children of such a marriage are holy (sanctified) but are not therefore the subjects of baptism.

Hannah dedicated her son Samuel to the Lord, 1Sam.1.21-28, and, so we are told, parents dedicate their children at baptism. Parents certainly should dedicate their children to the Lord, bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, Eph.6.4, teach them the Word and ways of God and pray for them and with them. All this is normally done by Christian parents who do not believe in infant baptism and without any ceremony of dedication.

It is the height of folly to teach a child that he has been born again at baptism and when he grows up to teach him that he must be born again. Or to tell him that at baptism he was introduced into some special class and later to teach him that there is no difference for all have sinned.

Infant baptism is a heathen practice which had its origin in Babylon and, like many other practices from the same source, was adopted by apostate Christendom. When the reunion of Christendom is brought about then infant baptism will be the basic lie of the false system.

After all it is anti-biblical and anti-Christian. Holy Scripture nowhere gives a shadow of authority for any such practice. In the Bible a Christian is one who has acknowledged Jesus as his Lord and has believed in Him unto salvation, Rom.10.9. This is obviously beyond the capacity of an infant.

All who have an interest in the eternal welfare of children should beware lest the first step in spiritual things is a step in the wrong direction. The first step is likely to determine the direction to be followed and the destiny to be reached. Baptism has absolutely no influence on the destiny of those who die in infancy, but it can have an influence for evil on those who live to the age of reason and are deceived into resting on it for salvation. It is clearly the duty of Christians to shun all complicity with a practice which has such fatal consequences in so many cases.

The positive teaching of Scripture is clear and plain for all who are not wilfully blind. It teaches the voluntary submission to baptism (not sprinkling) of everyone who has believed on the Lord Jesus Christ unto salvation and has thus become His disciple, Acts 8.36; Mk.16.16; Matt.28.19.

WISDOM'S HOUSE — No. 2

by J. Adams (N. Ireland)

THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE HOUSE:

In the previous paper we noted that the house in Prov.9.1 had seven pillars, and we have been applying this to those seven things mentioned regarding the assembly in Acts 2.41-42.

1. The pillar of a **SOUND CONVERSION** - 'They that gladly received His Word';
2. The pillar of a **TRUE CONFESSION** - 'were baptised';
3. The pillar of a **HAPPY COMMENDATION** - 'were added unto them';
4. The pillar of **SCRIPTURAL CONDUCT** - 'continued in the Apostle's Doctrine';
5. The pillar of **SAINTLY COMPANIONSHIP** - 'fellowship';
6. The pillar of **BLESSED COMMEMORATION** - 'breaking of bread';
7. The pillar of **SWEET COMMUNION** - 'prayers'.

We have briefly considered the first four.

5. The pillar of SAINTLY COMPANIONSHIP. - "fellowship."

1Jn.1.3 teaches that every believer has fellowship with the Father and the Son. In v7 we have fellowship with all other believers, 'If we walk in the light, as He is in the light we have fellowship one with another...' This has to do with divine life. However, in this paper, we are dealing with ecclesiastical fellowship in the assembly where we share in the joys and if necessary in all the tears of the assembly. It is like rowing a boat where we all pull on the same oars and at the same time. Moses came down the mount and asked, "Who is on the Lord's side?" Ex.32.26. He wanted to know who were in harmony with the mind of God. Those that danced around the calf had evident disregard for God's mind. To be on the Lord's side we are always on the side of His Word. If not on the side of His Word we cannot claim to be in fellowship. We must never go against His Word.

Fellowship is not merely to be enjoyed on Sunday morning. With Paul it was going in and going out with the saints continually, Acts 9.28. An expression of fellowship is seen in that we will be, as far as possible, in attendance at all the assembly meetings — the prayer meeting, the ministry meeting, the gospel meeting, etc. Fellowship with the Gospel, Ministry, Worship. Fellowship will be manifest in our giving, 'as the Lord has prospered us,' 1Cor.16.2

6. The pillar of BLESSED COMMEMORATION. - "breaking of bread."

The Breaking of the Bread was instituted by the Lord Himself and is celebrated on the first Day of the week, Jn.20.9; Acts 20.7; 1Cor.16.2.

Our authority is found by precept in 1Cor.11.23 and by practice in Acts 20.7. It is an expression of fellowship, 1Cor.10.16, and a feast of remembrance, 1Cor.11.24.

In Jn.20.24 we learn that Thomas missed out on that blessed occasion when the Lord Jesus stood in the midst and showed unto those few disciples that were present His hands and His side. Should it not be our deep exercise of heart to be present on the Lord's day at the breaking of bread, not alone bowing to His authority, musing

upon His agony, but also awaiting His soon coming again, lest at His coming He finds us at home?

As we remember Him we undoubtedly worship Him. We recall that the wise men from the east, Matt.2, worshipped when they saw Him. They opened their treasures and presented gifts - gold, frankincense and myrrh. We can see in the gold His Deity, in the frankincense His Holy Humanity and in the Myrrh His Suffering and His Love. It was all of Him and we need to remember that we gather unto Himself alone. When Thomas said, 'My Lord and my God' (only five words, but what words) he presented the gold. When asked to reach hither his finger and behold the Saviour's hands, he presented the frankincense. This can be gathered from the ascension, Lk.23.50, where His hands are proof of His identity and Holy Humanity. When asked to reach hither his hand and thrust it into the Lord's side, Thomas presented the myrrh. We worship when we are enabled by the Holy Spirit to present our appreciation of the Son to the Father. We recall that Simon 'took him up' and that Anna 'spoke of Him,' Lk.2. It may be I can only speak of Him in a simple way, like Thomas perhaps with very few words while others can present their appreciation of Him as they trace Him in all the Scriptures. Both aspects are true worship. May the Lord graciously help us then to grasp something of His Holy Humanity, His Sufferings and His Deity.

7. The pillar of SWEET COMMUNION. - "prayers."

Praying is a mark of a true child of God. It marked Paul at the beginning of his spiritual life, 'Behold he prayeth,' Acts 9.11. It was a prominent feature of assembly life, Acts 4.31; 12.5; Rom.15.30; Eph.6.18; 1Tim.2.1.

It is good to learn of an Elijah and a Daniel who prayed. It is also good when an assembly prays. There are four things that we look for in the assembly when it comes to the work of God and prayer is one of them.

- a) There must be **Purpose** in the work itself. The thought of enlargement, Isa.54.2. It is not just a matter of a few brethren deciding to try a few meetings. That word "try" rules out purpose. No, it should always be an assembly exercise to preach with purpose. Hence they will stretch forth the curtains of prayer, getting the whole assembly to pray with a definite burden for the souls of men.
- b) Next is **Progress**. If an assembly begins a work on the principle of trial it will likely never call for extra seating to be arranged. However should an assembly begin a work on the principle of purpose then there will soon be the need to lengthen the cords.
- c) The third thing is **Power**. I once lived beside a working corn mill driven by water. The power came from the big wheel. Once this wheel was started, only one thing could stop it. That was the miller shutting off the water supply. The lesson is clear, if we are going to have the power necessary in and for the work we must keep the wheel turning and never close off the source.
- d) Finally we must learn then what **Prayer** is. It is first having a regard for Him that is invoked. We learn however, if our prayer is going to be heard we must have no cherished sin, Ps.66.18 or unforgiving spirit, Mk.11.25 or carnal motive, Jms.4.3. There is no room for formality or asking amiss but a simple desire for the Glory of God. We must have a definite burden.

—to be continued (D.V.)

David's Mighty Men

2 Sam.23.8-39 and 1 Chron. 11.10-47

by D. S. Parrack, Somerset, England

Paper 1 — ELEAZAR

The roll of honour listing the mighty men of David's following during his rejection, twice recorded in Scripture, is somewhat akin to Paul's remembrances at the end of his Roman letter. What memories must have been conjured up for the apostle as each name was dictated to Tertius, yet how little is known by us of most of these so lovingly called to mind. In the case of David's captains, it is, as far as the majority are concerned, merely the name and place of origin which is given. With a few, however, we are afforded a brief glimpse of the actions which set them apart as a select company in the services and counsels of their king.

There was Eleazar (God is helper), second only to Adino, chief among the captains. Together with two of his companions and David, he found himself left to face the marauding Philistines when the rest of the people had fled. It may well be that we might feel ourselves as isolated in our Christian warfare as was this little band. The writer to the Hebrews envisaged such a feeling of loneliness when he wrote so comfortingly to remind them of God's promise and our response to it. "He hath said, I will never leave thee or forsake thee. So that we may boldly say. The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me," Heb.13.5-6. David on one occasion, found that not only were his followers unwilling to stand by him, but indeed spoke of stoning him for circumstances over which he had no control and for which he was no more to blame than they were themselves. We read that "David was greatly distressed — but David encouraged himself in the Lord his God," 1Sam.30.6. No recriminations, no reciprocal vindictiveness, but like the blessed Lord Jesus Himself, in willing trustfulness He "committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously," 1Pet.2.23.

The object of the enemy's attack was "a parcel of ground, full of barley." Such a seemingly small thing for which to stake the lives of the foremost leaders. But these men had known what it was to be short of food, to spend days and weeks in the mountains and wildernesses where sustenance was not easily found. They were responsible for the well being of those who had put themselves under their care, though they had run away, and food was of prime importance. How much store do we set on maintaining a food supply for the saints? How much experience have we had of hungering after the word of God so as to value its truths as worth standing firm for? The motives which will enable such a stand to be taken are not bigotry or legality, but a desire to see God honoured and his people nurtured.

Such warfare is not easy, it demands constant effort and vigilance. Of Eleazar we read, "He smote the Philistines till his hand was weary, and his hand clave unto the sword." Paul admonishes the Galatians, "Let us not be weary in well-doing" again

linked with a promise, “for in due season we shall reap if we faint not,” Gal.6.9. Physical and mental weariness we cannot avoid. Even of the Lord Jesus we read “therefore being wearied with His journey,” yet He had a source of supply ever present in fulness for He could say to his disciples, “I have meat to eat that ye know not of ... My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work,” Jn.4.32-34. It is this example which we are exhorted to follow, for we are told to “consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds,” Heb.12.3.

Though the odds were so great, indeed they were so great as to exclude a victory from human resources, the outcome was that, “The Lord wrought a great victory that day and the people returned after Him only to spoil.” Paul could write of the experiences which brought him to a point where “we despaired even of life, but we had the sentence of death within ourselves that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead” 2Cor.1.8-9. The outcome of his enforced distrust in himself was a positive trust in God for his then present circumstances, resulting in his exultant cry, “Thanks be unto God which always causeth us to triumph in Christ,” 2Cor.2.14. Whilst it was Eleazar who fought and the Lord who wrought the great victory, it was the people of God who reaped the blessing, returning only to spoil. What benefits we have received through the battlings of others; what enjoyments are ours because of the faithful continuance in truth by brethren in the past. May we not be found wanting in our turn to “endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ,” 2Tim.2.3 and to “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints,” Jude 3. Should we be so prepared, we will find that indeed “God is helper.”

—to be continued (D.V.)

PSALM 90

by C. Jones (Cardiff)

PAPER 1

The one hundred and fifty psalms are divided into five books. Each of these books corresponds with one of the books of the Pentateuch. Psalm 90 is the first psalm in the fourth book and this book, which contains Psalms 90-106, corresponds with the book of Numbers. In the fourth book we see the consequences of the failure of the first man, Adam, the victory of the Second Man, the Lord Jesus Christ, and His ultimate rule over all things.

Psalm 90 is entitled “A Prayer of Moses the man of God.” It is the oldest psalm and, apart from the book of Job, is probably the oldest of the Scriptures. It was written by Moses in the wilderness after the events recorded in Num.14. The children of Israel arrived at Kadesh-barnea and twelve men were sent by Moses to spy out the land of Canaan. Because the evil report of ten of the men caused the people to fear and refuse to go up to possess the land, they were condemned by God to wander in the wilderness for a total of forty years, until all over twenty years of age, a whole

generation, had died and been buried in the desert. Only Caleb and Joshua wanted to do the will of God and they tried, unsuccessfully, to persuade the people to go up and possess the land. These two men ultimately entered Canaan.

The people had seen clear evidence of the power of God and His care and love for them. Whilst their families were sheltered by the blood of lambs they had seen the first-born in Egyptian families killed. God had brought them out of Egypt and through the Red Sea, and had destroyed Pharaoh's chariots. They had been protected, fed and guided by God right up to Kadesh but there they refused to believe and trust Him. Despite God's goodness to them they had often, in the past, complained, disobeyed and failed to trust God, and now judgment fell.

We shall divide the Psalm as follows:

v1-6: The Eternal God and Mortal Man;

v7-11 Sin and Wrath;

v12-17 Grace and Blessing.

The Eternal God and Mortal Man, v1-6

Moses, the man of God, had himself been sorely tried during the journey through the wilderness by the behaviour of the children of Israel, and in the midst of trial, disappointment and change he speaks in the first verse of Psalm 90 of the God who had been their dwelling place, their refuge and help in all generations. Moses' trust was in the eternal, almighty God who never changes, Mal.3.6, Heb.13.8, Jas.1.17. The word used for Lord in this verse is *Adonai* which means Sovereign Lord, Master, Ruler or Owner, One who should be obeyed. *Adonai* is the plural form of the word and makes us think of the Trinity.

God was the God of Moses' father and the patriarchs, Exod.3.6 and Moses could look back to the experiences of Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. We can look back over the years which have elapsed since the time of Moses and can learn of God's holiness, grace, love, power and faithfulness in His dealings not only with the patriarchs but also with Moses himself and men like Joshua and David. We know of the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ, His crucifixion, resurrection and promised return. We know too of the life of Paul and God's care for the church and each of us to the present day, and we can gratefully say with Moses "Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations," v1. In His sovereignty, grace and love, God has cared for, protected and preserved His people and will continue to do so. In Him is our comfort and rest for "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms..." Deut.33.27.

Verse 2 reminds us that before creation there was the eternal, self-sufficient God "from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God." In Co.1.17 we read of the Lord that "...He is before all things, and by Him all things consist."

The following verses, 3-6, stress the frailty of man and the brevity of life. These thoughts are in complete contrast to those in the preceding verses of the eternal, infinitely powerful, sovereign God. We are dust "...dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return," Gen.3.19.

People die and return to dust. This is a very solemn thought, but those saved by

grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ know that although the body "...is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption," 1Cor.15.42, and Paul goes on to say "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ," 1Cor.15.55-57. Death is not a haphazard event. God is in control and determines the time of death. It is He who says "...Return, ye children of men," v3. God decides when men die and return to dust.

God is outside of time, but being omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent, Ps.139, He knows every detail of all that happens and is in ultimate control of all things. To us a thousand years is a very long period of time in which so much happens in the history of the world. To God, however, it is as "...yesterday when it is past..." v4, 2Pet.3.8, or a watch (three hours) in the night. Men are carried through this brief life as with a flood flowing along. Life is like a short sleep, v5, or grass that springs up and then withers, v6. As the hymn says, "Life at best is very brief," it soon passes, Job 8.9; Ps.39.5,103.15,16; Jas.4.14, 1Pet.1.24.

The devil would blind the minds of unbelievers, using the pursuit of wealth, pleasure, status and all manner of distractions so that they do not face the realities of the brevity of life, the existence of heaven and hell and the fact that "...it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment," Heb.9.27. By the grace of God the believer has a sure hope of eternal bliss in heaven, Col.1.5, Ps.16.11. Unless they are saved before death or before the Lord returns, unbelievers have no hope, Eph.2.12, 1Thess.4.13.

—to be continued (D.V.)

Elisha and the Three Kings

by R. Webb (England)

2 Kings 3

The three Kings were in sore trouble. Two of them were ungodly men, the other a backsliding servant of Jehovah.

Jehoram was the son of Ahab. He began to reign over Israel in Samaria. 'He wrought evil in the sight of the Lord, v2, 'Nevertheless he cleaved unto the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which made Israel to sin,' v3. However, he did purge away some of his parents' grosser evils, v2.

The King of Edom was just a man of the world with no relationship with God.

Jehoshaphat was King of Judah. How could he associate himself with such a pair with any expectation of aid or blessing from God. When he returned from helping Ahab at Ramoth — Gilead the prophet remonstrated with him thus, 'Shouldest thou help the ungodly and love them that hate Jehovah?' 2Chron.19.2.

When he joined himself with Ahaziah in a commercial enterprise, he was divinely

informed that Jehovah would break his ships, a catastrophe which really happened, 2Chron.20.35-37.

What is sorely needed amongst God's saints is the spiritual energy to say 'No', at whatever cost, when invited by the world to co-operate with its schemes. The three Kings sought to subjugate Mesha King of Moab.

2Kgs.3.7. When Jehoshaphat was invited to help he replied 'I am as thou art, My people as thy people, My horses as thy horses.' Oh the shame of it; should he not rather have said, 'I am opposite of what thou art'?

We have got to stand firm for God in this day. There are many who say you must move with the times. Jeremiah clearly states, 'Stand ye in the way and see and ask for the old paths where is the good way and walk therein,' Jer.6.16.

The allied Sovereigns took a route to avoid Moab's fortified cities and found themselves with no water and Jehoram cried out in despair. Jehoshaphat asked if there was available a prophet of Jehovah by whose means they might inquire of him, v11, and they go to Elisha. Jehoshaphat acknowledged 'the word of Jehovah is with him.' If he had sought the word of God before venturing forth he would not have found himself in such a difficulty. Elisha bade Jehoram go to the prophets of his father and mother, knowing well that he sought water not God. However, in v14 Elisha distinguished between God's servant, even though in a backsliding condition, and the evil men with him.

His next words are remarkable, 'Bring me a minstrel.' His spirit was checked while the ungodly were before him. He felt it imperative to abstract himself in order to get into proper touch with God. How we all need at times to get alone with God. While the minstrel played, the hand of Jehovah came upon Elisha, and he prophesied the Lord would meet their need and victory over rebellious Moab should follow. How good is our God!

God's way of blessing on this occasion contains some very important principles. The scene of it was a valley, ie, the low place which is the place of repentance and self judgment. When God's people get down low enough before God the blessing is never lacking. Ditches have to be dug in order to hold what God had to give. The deeper the ditches, the more water they got, the greater the blessing from God. We must never limit God.

There is a lot of earth to be done away with ere the blessing of God can really fill our souls. It is very remarkable the blessing came in the morning when the meal offering was offered, v20.

Frequently in the Scripture do we find the blessing at the hour of sacrifice. Keeping contact with our Lord and the remembrance of His death will enable us to war successfully against His foes and ours.

Nothing can be right that arrests one's spiritual progress or silences one's testimony.

J. Douglas

* * *

Freedom is not the right to do as you please but the liberty to do what you ought.

W. Trew

MY CONVERSION AND CALL (58)

by Jim Beattie (Ontario, Canada)

I was born on February 3rd, 1943 in Belfast, Northern Ireland. My parents were Christians and both were very active in an evangelical Baptist church. Without exaggerating, I can say they had only two goals for their life: the will of God for themselves; and the will of God for their children. Both parents are now at home with the Lord.

Through the searching of the Scriptures, my parents became exercised about gathering to the Name of the Lord and came into assembly fellowship firstly in Parkgate Gospel Hall and then in Bloomfield in Belfast. They taught us from our infancy that we needed to be saved and, of course, we sat under the Gospel every Lord's Day evening. As long as I remember I wanted to be saved. I never had any doubt that this was the all-important issue of life.

I was naturally shy and it embarrassed me when people asked me if I was saved. I suppose because of this, I told people who asked me, that I was saved even though I knew I wasn't. Some would ask me when and how. I know they meant well, but because of my shyness I made up a story telling people a time, place, and manner how God saved me. It was not a false profession in the normal sense of the word. I knew it was false and the longing to be saved never left me.

In 1952, my father came to Canada and settled in Hamilton, Ontario. In 1953, he sent for my mother and the four children. I was bothered that I had this false profession and thought I could get rid of it when we moved to Canada. But people had heard that "I was saved" and I felt forced to go on with my profession.

In the summer of 1957 I spent a couple of weeks with some boys. As far as I knew they were from homes where the parents were not saved. Some professed to be saved during the time we were together and this troubled me. They did not have the blessing of a Christian home, yet they were saved and I wasn't. I remember struggling over my false profession one evening and finally I faced the fact that I could go on no longer in my lost condition. I did not tell anyone. I just determined that I was not going to delay any longer, but try to get the matter settled.

Having heard the Gospel all my life, I assumed I would know how to be saved. I had memorised Bible verses and listened to others tell how they were saved. I had spoken to my friends about the importance of being saved as well as pointing out to them that it was "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us..." Tit.3.5. What I didn't realise was, "There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God," Rom.3.11. I thought I understood. During the rest of 1957, God patiently taught me I did not understand — that I was lost.

I believed salvation was not by works. I tried to "believe", and to "see" the Lord Jesus dying on the cross for me. I tried everything that people said had made them

a child of God. It was hopeless. On January 1st, 1958, as I sat in a New Year's Day meeting at the Kensington Avenue Gospel Hall in Hamilton, Ontario while someone ministered the Word to the Christians, I reviewed the previous months of useless effort. As I sat there, it dawned on me that I was going down to hell and couldn't do a thing about it. This was where the Lord had been patiently bringing me to in the previous months. I knew that moment that I was a lost sinner.

Just then, the verse I had tried so hard in the previous months "to use" to be saved, Acts 16:31, was brought back to my mind. But the words, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved" took on new meaning. I had thought it had been telling me to believe and be saved. In fact, it was telling me to "Believe **on the Lord Jesus Christ.**" My focus had been on believing. I had left the Lord Jesus out of the picture. At that moment it was different. I understood for the first time it was not believing that saved, but the Lord Jesus. I did not understand much at that moment, but I knew I was saved.

Almost immediately, I felt I was in a dilemma. The Christians believed I was already saved and I had been acting the part. I was too embarrassed to tell them that I had just been saved. Eleven months passed before I told anyone. My younger sister expressed a desire to be baptized and I had been quietly pondering taking the same step. I especially recall telling my mother that I had not really been saved until the beginning of the year. Mother had difficulty believing that I had not been saved all along, but as the years went by she finally accepted that the former story was just made up.

I was baptized on November 16th of 1958 and received into assembly fellowship in the Kensington Avenue Gospel Hall the following Lord's Day. Although many who knew me might not have thought so, I felt shy and was reluctant to take public part. I did it, but it took a lot out of me and the last thing I expected was that I would ever be in the work of the Lord. I had no desire for it. I told others who expressed interest in it that I would never be a preacher.

Yet there was an interest in spreading the Gospel. Two other younger brethren my age, helped by the encouragement of those older than we, became involved in children's meetings, open-air meetings, as well as helping in the regular gatherings of the assembly. We also purchased a printing press and printed tracts for a number of years for our own use and the use of others. Although I had a longing to reach out with the Gospel, I still felt inadequate at preaching and, though I wondered if it might be possible. I really never expected to be in the work of the Lord full time.

What made me seriously consider the possibility was a servant of the Lord speaking to me at a small conference in Victoria Road, Ontario, northeast of Toronto. This brother, whom I hardly knew at that time, came up to the car I was sitting in and said to me and to another young brother, "I expect to see you in the work of the Lord some day." This was the first time I ever thought anyone would seriously consider that I might be suitable for the work. It came as a surprise — especially when it came from a man who was respected amongst God's people. That was the beginning of my exercise toward full time work. Nothing changed at that time. I continued to help in the local assembly as well as open air work and printing. I also

had a Sunday School class. Yet now at the back of my mind was the question as to God's plan for my life in this direction.

In 1964 I graduated from the School of Medical Technology and began working in a hospital in Hamilton as a Medical Laboratory Technologist. My superiors had hopes I would continue training for an advanced degree and take charge of the department I was in. But I was now thinking about the need of the work of the Lord. During my teenage years, I had done a lot of reading of missionary books and pioneer works and my concern was for the people who had never heard the Gospel. We had tried our open-air work in the outlying areas of the large city of Hamilton.

Eventually I was made acting charge of the Haematology department in the hospital. In 1968, the chief pathologist wanted me to have further training in a larger hospital in view of making me full charge of the department. I was concerned about this. I was not unwilling to take further training, but it would mean that the hospital would be out three months wages for me for this further training. I felt that if the hospital invested time and money in my further training and I left for the work of the Lord soon after, it would be a poor testimony to give them nothing back for it.

One evening I went downstairs to the family room to pray about the Lord's will. I asked the Lord if He would ever want me to be full-time in His work. I told the Lord I felt it was only fair to the hospital that they knew if ever I would be leaving them for the Lord's work. I prayed about this for a long time, but as I prayed a Scripture reference kept coming to my mind and I was finding it distracting. It was not my practice to especially look for isolated Scriptures to confirm God's will to me. Thus it did not strike me that the Lord might be seeking to speak to me in this way. Finally, in exasperation, I thought I would look up the Scripture reference so that I could continue to pray without distraction. I looked up Is.61.1, not knowing what it said, I read "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; He hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound," Is.61.1. I have to say that I literally trembled when I read it. I believed that the Lord was answering the question that I had been praying about.

With that in mind, I spoke to the chief pathologist and explained that although I had no time frame in mind, I believed I would eventually leave the hospital for the work of the Lord. He said that in view of the possibility of my eventual leaving, he would start looking for someone else to take the charge position. I expressed my happiness with that. On my lunch break later in the day, I went out and sat in my car and read "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasure of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward," Heb.11.24-26. I felt content that I had been willing to let go of opportunity in this world even though I had no definite time in mind for the work of the Lord.

But from that moment, doors began to open. As my wife, Joyce, and I prayed more about the work of the Lord, we felt we should approach the brethren about it.

One evening I called one of the elders on the phone to ask him if I could discuss with the elders our going into full time work. His response was, "Jim, we have been waiting for this." I did meet with them and they were of one mind that we should go into the work of the Lord. That was in the latter part of 1968 and in January of 1969 we moved to Bothwell, where we still reside. Brother Metcalf from Sarnia, Ontario, and I teamed up together and worked in the town of Wallaceburg about 30 miles away. We went into the town not knowing a single person living there. God in His grace saved souls and after a few years an assembly was planted.

As we look back to those first days and over the years that have passed, we can only thank God for His grace and goodness. The years since God saved me have been happy years and the work of the Lord has been very satisfying. I have never had a single regret that I left Medical Technology behind. My greatest desire is that the years ahead will bring more glory to the Lord than all the years that are past.

WORSHIP

TUNE; SUPREMACY ("Thou art the Everlasting Word")

Utter perfection fills our gaze,
As we His path retrace,
Undeviating in His ways,
And full of truth and grace;

REFRAIN: As each fresh glory comes to view,
Worship and praises burst anew.

His thoughts were pure, His words were clear,
With all authority,
So powerful, tender and so dear,
In lovely harmony;

His wonders, miracles and signs,
Declare His Sonship true,
He graciously with sinners dined,
Yet welcomed in by few;

His glorious Person, works and ways,
Engage and thrill our heart,
And will to everlasting days,
Food for our souls impart;

Matthew J. Cordner, *Kilwinning*

Good Tidings from Heaven

"ALTERNATIVE MEDICINES"

With an increasing awareness of the potentially dangerous side-effects of drugs and medicines, many people are now resorting to other therapies in the hope that a cure can be effected without the hazardous risks of prescribed treatments. So great is the swing towards alternative medicines that it is now a multi-million pound business and customers are prepared to pay substantially for treatments perceived to be safer.

There is however, a disease which rages within every human being, which is behind every ill affecting humanity and for it there is only one cure. Many have tried other means to bring about a remedy but their efforts have been frustrated. I refer to the plague of sin which has affected the lives and souls and destinies of all since the creation of man. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for all that hath sinned: "Rom.5.12. It resulted in the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden and since then its sinister presence has been known and felt in every heart.

Its seriousness was reflected upon by James, who wrote, "...and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death," Jms.1.15. Paul recorded, "For the wages of sin is death;..." Rom.6.23. God had earlier issued this warning, "...the soul that sinneth, it shall die," Ezk.18.4. Prophets, at various times, had informed the nation of Israel of the consequences of sin, stating that their sins had separated between them and God, Is.59.2. Be warned — sin defiles, sin disappoints, sin damages, sin deceives, sin debases, sin destroys and worst of all, sin damns.

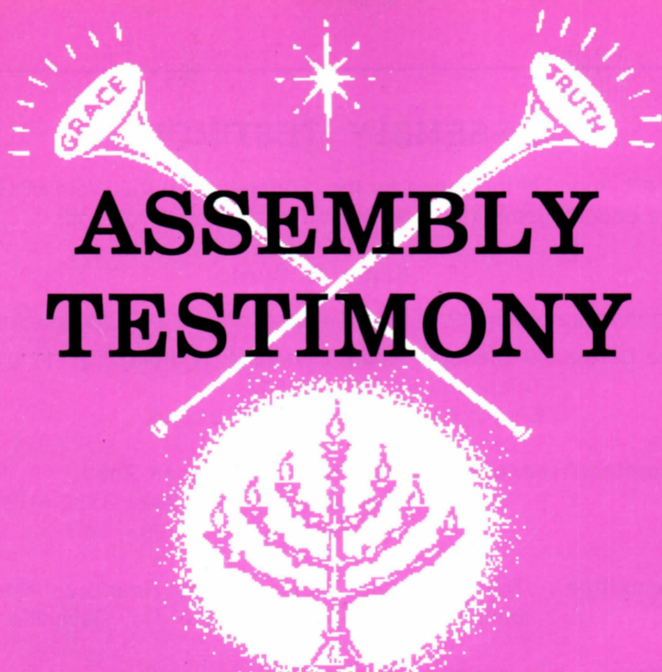
After the disobedience of Adam and Eve, God asked Eve, as yet unaware of the seriousness of their act of rebellion, "What is this that thou hast done?" Gen.3.13. God, even then, knew full well the sad legacy of their sin — broken hearts, blighted lives, bereaved families, disease, destruction, death and ultimately damnation.

Alas, there are diseases today for which there is no known cure and research continues unabated to provide relief from many distressing conditions. I am glad that with confidence, having experienced its power in my own life, I can tell you there is a tried and proven remedy for 'the worst of all diseases.' It is the precious blood of Christ. Faith in Him who died for sins upon the cross, will instantaneously and eternally deliver you from the dread consequences of your sins. Do your sins trouble you? Have you been awakened to understand the horrendous consequences of unforgiven sins?

Then, my friend, let me tell you of the great Physician whose cleansing and keeping power I have known for over thirty years. He can heal your sin-sick soul and give you the assurance that your many sins have been pardoned and no longer may you dread banishment from God. All this He can offer you freely — no payment or penance is needed, since on the cross, He paid in full the price of your freedom. Are you prepared to abandon all your futile efforts and cast to the wind your worthless plans and ideas and trust Him alone for cleansing and pardon?

There is no other remedy, there is no other Saviour, 'Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved,' Acts 4.12. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life," Jn.3.36.

Sin is deadly, sin is serious and without the Saviour, its penalty is inescapable. Dare you hesitate? — come at once, come as you are, trust Christ and know the healing touch of the Saviour of sinners.



ASSEMBLY TESTIMONY

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ASSEMBLY TESTIMONY

This is a bi-monthly magazine for the propagation of the Word of God and thus the encouragement and edification of the people of God.

Editor: B. Currie

Correspondence relative to Editorial matters should be addressed to:

The Editor, 49 Glenburn Road, Dunmurry, N. Ireland, BT17 9AN.
Telephone (01232) 621343.
E-mail: AT@bcurrie.free-online.co.uk

Secretary/Treasurer : William Neill, 109 Lurgan Road,
Banbridge, Northern Ireland, BT32 4NG.
Telephone (018206) 24238.

Committee : Tom Armstrong, Thomas Beggs, Ronnie Johnston,
James McKeown, James Moore, Roy Reynolds.

This magazine is supported solely by the freewill offerings of the Lord's people. No member of the committee, author of articles or any other person connected with the magazine receives payment, remuneration or gratuity of any kind. This magazine is not to be sold.

Friends residing in England, Scotland and Wales may kindly forward their donations to :

John Glenville, 16 Trelawney Road, Saltash, Cornwall, PL12 4DD.
Telephone (01752) 846889.

Friends residing elsewhere should please forward gifts to:

William Neill, at the above address.

Please make all cheque, money orders, etc., payable to "Assembly Testimony Magazine."

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A. M. S. GOODING

5th January, 1915 — 3rd May, 1999



Our former editor, A. M. S. Gooding, is now 'at home with the Lord.' His earthly sojourn concluded early on Monday, 3rd May and his funeral took place from Elim Hall, Kilmarnock, on Friday, 7th May.

The large company, representing saints from all over the British Isles and farther afield, was an eloquent and fitting testimony to the high esteem in which our dear brother was held.

The service in the hall was opened and chaired by W. Houston, an overseer in Elim Hall and secretary of the Lord's Work Trust. The opening hymn was 'Some day the silver cord will break . . .', after which B. Currie led in prayer. J. R. Baker read from the Scriptures and brought a very appropriate message of comfort, appreciation and challenge, and a local elder, G. Burns prayed. The service was concluded by singing 'I am waiting for the dawning of the bright and blessed day.'

The interment took place at the local cemetery in Kilmarnock, where J. Dickson brought words of succour from 1 Thess.4 and L. Robertson, another local elder, prayed.

Prayer would be valued for our late brother's widow, his three sons and daughter, their respective wives and husband and their children.

EARLY YEARS

By D. C. Hinton (Uxbridge, England)

A. M. S. Gooding was born in Ipswich and brought up in the assembly which subsequently moved to Foundation Street. His mother died very early in his life, and he was brought up by his godly grandmother and other relatives. He was saved, baptized and brought into fellowship early in life. From then on his life was devoted to his Lord. The Word of God was always his sole criteria in making any decision.

His leisure time was spent in just two ways — studying the Scriptures and ministering to the needs of the small assemblies in East Anglia, together with some farther afield. He was greatly helped, along with other young brethren, by a local brother who took them to small gatherings to assist him.

He would tell of how his studying consisted of reading a verse by candlelight, meditating upon it and then writing down his understanding of it. Only then would he turn to commentaries, never earlier.

When the war came he objected to military service and was successful. Thus he became available to leave England and take up his position at John Ritchie Limited. This was a very great loss to believers in the south.

A. M. S. GOODING, 1915 - 1999 — A TRIBUTE

Our beloved brother was called Home to be with the Lord on 3rd May, 1999. In the latter days of his stay in hospital, he was longing to be 'at home' with the Lord he loved so much and served so well.

Our brother was born on 5th January, 1915 and was saved in Ipswich, England, in 1929 and began a long and fruitful oral ministry when he took his first gospel meeting at the tender age of 16 and ministered the Word at his first conference when just 18 years old. His rich and edifying ministry took him across the British Isles, USA, Canada and elsewhere. While born in England, he spent most of his life in Scotland and was a director of John Ritchie Ltd. for 33 years before resigning in August 1974 to devote all his time to the work of the Lord.

He was introduced as editor of this magazine in the January/February issue of 1967. However, he had a much longer association, his first article appearing in issue number 42 in 1959. When he took responsibility as editor, the magazine comprised 16 pages of 7½" x 5" format and in issue 169, September/October 1980, this was increased to 32 pages. (The same amount of material is now in 24 pages of A5 format). In his usual meticulous way he insisted in planning the way ahead and largely due to his persistence the present editor was introduced 'officially' as Assistant Editor in January 1984.

His wise counsel was greatly valued and relied upon by the committee of this magazine, who were happy to leave all editorial matters in his capable hands. His undeviating stance for the truths of the local assembly was seen in his reviews of 'the brethren' (Nos.98-100) and of the 'Swanwick Conference' (Nos.160-164), and his article 'Swanwick Again' in No.198.

Many saints benefited from his eloquent and expository ministry when he held his audience captivated as he made the most difficult of passages simple and brought

their practical implications to bear on both our individual and congregational lives. Who will forget his practical handling of Ruth and the Judges; his precision in Ephesians and Colossians; his proficiency in the parables of Matt.13 and the 7 churches of Asia; his powerful exposition of the Pastorals; his profundity in the Offerings and so much more besides? The foregoing combined with His perception and politeness in a Bible Reading and being the penman of a number of books indicate something of his overall ability and highlight the fact that he will be exceedingly difficult to replace.

He loved to relax in the home after a meeting when those gathered could profit from his long experience of assembly and family life. We enjoyed his rich tenor voice and wondered how such volume could come from so small a frame! He was a kind and sincere Christian gentleman in every respect and one who was continually, 'seeking the wealth of His people,' Est.10.3. We can say truly, 'to know him was to love him.' It is not often we will have the privilege of meeting such a man and he will be missed. We would covet the prayers of the Lord's people for his widow and children, the whole family circle, the assembly in Kilmarnock where he fellowshiped and for those who seek to carry on this magazine. To all who knew him and will miss him we say, 'remember your leaders who have spoken to you the word of God; and considering the issue of their conversation, imitate their faith,' Heb.13.7 (JND).
—(Ed. & Committee)

APPRECIATED AT LURGAN

By W. Turkington

On hearing of the home-call of our beloved brother and honoured servant of the Lord, Mr. A. M. S. Gooding, the minds and memories of the saints here in Lurgan went back to his first official visit to our annual Conference in 1959.

Our brother evidently felt that the Conference seemed to be somewhat one sided, tending to be for brethren only, so he took up for the Ministry on the Tuesday evening the noble women referred to in Romans ch.16. This left an indelible impression on the minds of all who heard, having with it the warmth and freshness of heaven. Today it is still spoken of as though it had been his subject on his last visit with us.

This seemingly set a trend for our brother during his many visits to the Conference. On these occasions he was always responsible for the Tuesday night meeting and it was his exercise to minister on some of the great women of both Old and New Testaments. They are too numerous to mention in detail but included Ruth and Naomi, Hannah, Mary the Lord's mother, Martha and Mary, the elect lady of 2nd John and a number of others. These were not only to the profit and benefit of the sisters but the brethren could always join in thanksgiving to God for those unforgettable seasons around His own good Word.

Added to this were his excellent openings and expositions of many parts of Holy Scripture in the Bible Readings, not shunning to declare the whole counsel of God.

The loss of such valued servants leaves us very much the poorer and we can but look to the Lord for others to be raised up to strengthen the things that remain in light of the near and imminent return of the Lord from heaven.

A PERSONAL REFLECTION

By H. Hunter (Kilmarnock, Scotland)

Arthur Gooding moved with his wife, Hilda, from Ipswich to Kilmarnock in 1942.

A compositor to trade, he was employed with the Christian publishers, John Ritchie Limited, going on to become Managing Director.

That he had a real gift from God was evident in the early years after conversion, taking his first conference while still in his late teens. It was in the ministry of the Word of God that he quickly matured, his movements extending not only to every quarter of the British Isles, but abroad to Canada, USA and South Africa. Eternity alone will reveal the many saints blessed and assemblies guided through his ministry. A balanced man, he knew the need of a healthy diet, giving ministry that was devotional, doctrinal, practical and prophetic, never constantly strumming the one string.

For many years he was Editor of this magazine "Assembly Testimony" and, although he did not write much from his own pen, when a commentary was published which undermined the order of gathering, he wrote counteracting such teaching and thus restated truth "most surely believed among us." Although some felt that it but publicised the commentary, he himself felt strongly that such teaching needed to be resisted and exposed and, like Paul, stood when others remained silent. Later from his pen came a book on Judges and he wrote the Epistles of John for the commentary "What The Bible Teaches." Thus he left a written legacy.

Although remembered largely for his teaching ministry, he was an able and powerful gospel preacher. Before he was commended to the work, he held series of gospel meetings in various places, particularly in Ayrshire, often with his friend and associate, the late Jack Hunter. God often honoured these labours and souls were saved. In 1957, their local assembly had an exercise to pitch a tent in the north end of Kilmarnock and Jack and Arthur preached and a time of blessing was experienced. Many there are in this country and beyond who date their spiritual birth to the time that they heard the gospel from our dear brother's lips.

A spiritual man, for many years he took his place among the overseeing brethren, where his help and counsel were valued. On 28th August 1974, he was commended by the assembly in Elim Hall, Kilmarnock, to full-time service and for 20 years moved extensively as mentioned earlier.

Although being in Scotland for the best part of 60 years, he never lost his English accent. He also had a beautiful singing voice, often being heard clearly in the gatherings.

Despite the heavy demands from elsewhere, he ever remembered his home assembly, having two series, first in February 1976, giving two weeks' ministry on prophecy, and in June 1996, a week on The Life of Abraham. Apart from addressing the Annual Conference on occasions, he was a regular at our Saturday evening meetings, often taking up a subject and then answering written questions. On such occasions, he never disappointed, but brought the Word of God in power and freshness.

These last few years, due to failing eyesight and increasing bodily weakness, his public movements became ever more restricted. Yet God preserved his mind and his

own assembly began to benefit by his presence and participation. Younger men gained much as they listened to him at the local Bible Reading. For the writer, the highlight was listening to him worship, often rising after the first hymn, taking an expression from it, and with a fertile mind he exalted Christ and, at the prayer meeting one felt here was a man who knew not only his Bible, but the God of the Bible.

Not a conversationalist or one for small talk, some found him a little distant, yet, when engaged in the Word of God and the things of God, he was most interesting. I have no doubt that he could be reckoned to be one of the most outstanding expositors among us today.

He used to tell us that not all would hear the “Well done, good and faithful servant” but one has no doubt that he has heard it and “now rests from his labours,” Rev.14.13.

BEHOLD YOUR KING

(Meditations in Matthew)

by Jim Flanigan (Belfast)

21. The Great Confession (Ch.16)

The very heart of this chapter is concerned with Peter’s great confession at Caesarea Phillipi. In the midst of religious confusion on this southern slope of Mount Hermon, Simon boldly acknowledges his Lord to be the Son of the living God. But before the confession there is opposition.

The Pharisees and the Sadducees were inveterate enemies and religious rivals. There was no correspondence between the ritualism of the one and the rationalism of the other. But from time to time they formed a strange and unusual coalition in a common opposition to the Lord Jesus, and so it is here at the beginning of our chapter. Earlier in his Gospel Matthew records that they both came to John’s baptism, ch.3.7. John called them “Offspring of vipers”!

They now come tempting the Lord and desiring a sign. What arrogance and unbelief is this. After all that miraculous ministry, of which they must have known, they desire a sign! Jesus knows their hypocritical intent. He rebukes them. They can look at the sky, He says, evening and morning, and predict the weather, but they are spiritually ignorant as to the signs of the times. The only sign for them now is the sign of Jonah the prophet. Jonah, in a figure brought back from the dead, preached to Gentiles and reaped a harvest of repentance and salvation. So would it be with the Saviour. These proud leaders of Israel would reject Him. They would live to see Him crucified, raised from the dead, and forgiveness of sins preached in His Name to Jew and Gentile alike. He left them, and warned His disciples to beware of the leaven of both Pharisees and Sadducees. Their doctrines were evil. Alas, Phariseism and Sadduceism, ritualism and rationalism, traditionalism and liberalism, live on in great Christendom, so that true believers still need to “Beware”.

With His disciples Jesus now arrives at Caesarea Philippi. The location is most

important. Caesarea Philippi had earlier been known as Baniyas. It had been named after the pagan god Pan. To this day there may be seen a grotto where stood the image of Pan. There is still evidence in stone of the worship of Pan at that place. Philip had refurbished and enlarged the town however, and had re-named it Caesarea. But there already was a Caesarea in Israel, on the Mediterranean coast, so the new Caesarea had to be distinguished, and what better way to honour Caesar and satisfy one's own ego than by combining the two names, Caesar and Philip, and calling the new town Caesarea Philippi. Not content with this, Philip also built a white marble temple there for the worship of the Emperor, who, it was believed, was a divine person. As well as all this, it is recorded that there were perhaps no less than fourteen Syrian temples erected there for the worship of Baal.

What confusion indeed was all this! Pan, Caesar, Baal, heathen deities with their temples, their shrines, their images and grottos! And it was just here that the Saviour asked the question, "Whom do men say that I the Son of Man am?" What did they think of Him, those who worshipped these other gods? Some, perhaps with a little knowledge of Scripture, thought, Elijah. Others (had they seen the Saviour weeping?) thought He was Jeremiah. Some did not attempt to be specific but simply thought, one of the prophets. But the disciples? What did they think? Peter does not hesitate. "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." There was indeed a Living God. These gods of the heathen, Pan, Caesar and Baal alike, were dead. They were lifeless deities. But Jesus was the Son of the Living God, and He was the Messiah. It was the revelation of the Father to the hearts of those who were willing, and Simon Bar-jona was, accordingly, a blessed man. If the Father had so spoken to Peter, then the Son also would speak. Peter was Petros, a stone, a piece of rock, now exhibiting the character of that Rock to which he belonged, and upon that Rock, Christ, Messiah, the new Church would be built. It would be unassailable and impregnable, so that nothing would prevail against it. The authority of heaven would be invested in Peter and his apostolic companions. Not in the temple now, not in Israel's scribes, priests or Rabbis, but to these lowly Galilean fishermen would the message of forgiveness be committed. Jesus now charges them that they should tell no man that He was the Christ. The nation had had its opportunity and its day of visitation, and had refused Him. They would now leave Mount Hermon for Golgotha.

The Saviour announces, in the clearest terms, His impending sufferings and death. The leaders of the nation would condemn Him. He would suffer many things of them and be killed. But He would be raised again, on the third day. Peter would not have it. He rebukes the Master and the Master rebukes Him.

There follows the appeal. It is an appeal to lose one's life and follow Him. That would be the profit anyway, if a man gained the world and then lost all that he had, his life, his soul. The encouragement to those who would follow was this, that one day there would be glory and in that glory there would be suitable reward. Indeed soon there would be a preview of that glory. They would see, albeit in microcosm, the kingdom, and the Son of Man in regal splendour. He would take some of them up the mount to grant them this foregleam of the kingdom. It would be a sight they would never forget. One of them, recalling it after many years, would write, "We were eyewitnesses of His Majesty," 1Pet.1.16. It would be worth losing the world to share in the glory of that world to come.

—to be continued (D.V.)

Assembly Testimony Bible Class

by J. Riddle (Cheshunt)

ESTHER

(5) ENTER ESTHER, PART B

Read Chapter 2.12-23

Chapter 3 commences with the most significant words: “After these things...” (It was, in fact, some four to five years after Esther’s enthronement: compare 2.16 with 3.7). It was only after God had providentially arranged matters of state for the good of His people, that Ahasuerus promoted “Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him, and set his seat above all the princes that were with him,” v1. In our introduction to the book of Esther, we noticed that Haman is a striking picture of Satan himself, and this now becomes evident.

A. THE IDENTITY OF HAMAN

“Haman ... the Agagite.” The name Agag, appears to be a title of the kings of Amalek. See 1Sam.15 and Num.24.7, “His (Israel’s) king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted.” After the battle between Israel and Amalek in Exod.17, God had this to say; “I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.” Moses subsequently built an altar, “and called the name of it JEHOVAH-nissi (the Lord my banner): for He said, Because the Lord hath sworn that the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation,” 4.14-16. Notice the margin reading of v16: ‘Because the hand of Amalek is against the throne of the Lord, the Lord will have...’ See also JND. Whilst 1Sam.15 describes the slaughter of the Amalekites, it is evident from 1Sam.30 that some survived and continued their implacable hatred against Israel. Haman therefore represents a nation with deep hatred of God’s people.

It is only right to add that there was evidently a place in Media, later incorporated into the Persian Empire, called Agag, and some commentators feel that this is really the meaning of the name.

B) THE GLORY OF HAMAN

We notice his exalted position: “Set his seat above all the princes that were with him.” This reminds us of Satan’s exaltation. Let’s say, first of all, that Satan was created by Christ. See Col.1.16, “For by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him.” This statement must include Satan himself. There are two passages which are often cited when describing Satan’s former glory.

i) Isaiah 14, which takes up “this proverb against the king of Babylon,” v1-11, and continues, “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which did’st weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north:

I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to the ground, to the sides of the pit,” v12-17.

ii) Ezekiel 28, which first addresses the “prince of Tyrus”, v1-12, and continues by addressing the ‘king of Tyrus, v13-19. Whilst there is some reason for saying that “Lucifer, son of the morning,” is the king of Babylon, there seems little doubt that the king of Tyre is the spiritual master of the prince of Tyre. For example, “Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God ... Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee,” v12-15.

Both Peter and Jude make it clear that although he is fallen, Satan must not be contemptuously dismissed. False teachers are “not afraid to speak evil of dignities. Whereas angels, which are greater in power and might bring not railing accusation against them before the Lord,” 2Pet.2.10-11. See the parallel passage in Jude 9-10.

C) THE AUTHORITY OF HAMAN

“And all the king’s servants, that were in the king’s gate, bowed, and revered Haman.” There was total recognition of his authority — but not quite, as we shall see later. Some centuries later, John wrote: “And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.” (Better, ‘the wicked one’). 1Jn.5.19.

D) THE ANIMOSITY OF HAMAN

“But Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence ... and when Haman saw that Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence, then was Haman full of wrath,” v2-5. One man refused to bow to Haman, just as there were “seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him,” 1Kgs.19.18. Just as some will refuse to bow to the Beast: “I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the Word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years, Rev.20.4. The animosity of Satan towards Israel will continue until the point when “he knoweth that he hath but a short time.” Rev.12 tells us that “he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child ... and the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed...”

But there was another Man Who refused to bow: Satan said, “All these will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me.” The Saviour answered: “Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve,” Matt.4.10-11. Hence Satan’s animosity towards Him. see Jn.8: “Ye seek to kill Me, because My word hath no place in you ... Ye seek to kill Me, a Man that hath told you the truth ... Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning...v37-44.

Notice that the king’s servants “daily” urged Mordecai to bow, v4. Potiphar’s wife “spake to Joseph day by day...” Gen.39.10. The Lord Jesus was “forty days tempted of the devil, Lk.4.2. Can we expect anything less?

But supposing Mordecai had bowed to Haman. It would have saved an awful lot of trouble, wouldn't it? After all, does it really matter ... What do you think? Just remember that today’s compromise is tomorrow’s surrender.

E) THE STRATEGY OF HAMAN

“Haman sought to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, even the people of Mordecai,” v6. “And the letters were sent by post into all the king’s provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day...” v13. It was a case of genocide. Ps.83 describes a confederacy of nations bent on exactly the same goal. “Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation; that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance,” v4. Rev.16 makes it clear that this confederacy will be initiated by Satan himself, See v13-14. Like Haman, Satan is certainly “the Jews’ enemy,” v10. ‘It is perfectly clear, then, that the titanic death-struggle of the book of Esther simply cannot be understood apart from the satanic purposes towards Israel which the general context of Scripture reveals.’ John C. Whitcomb.

‘That Haman’s attempted genocide of the Jews is not an inconceivable fantasy has been learned from the Nazi Holocaust. Gordis (R. Gordis, Megillat Esther) poignantly recalls:*

Anti-Semites have always hated the book and the Nazis forbade its reading in the crematoria and the concentration camps. In the dark days before their deaths, Jewish inmates of Auschwitz, Dachau, Treblinka and Bergen-Belsen wrote the book of Esther from memory and read it secretly on Purim.’

In order to achieve his end, Haman totally misrepresented the Jews to Ahasuerus; “There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws are diverse from all people; neither keep they the king’s laws...” v8. This was totally unsupported, and recalls the words of the Lord Jesus: “When he (Satan) speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own; for he is a liar, and the father of it,” Jn.8.44. We must be careful that we do not become “false accusers.” We must be careful to ensure that our apparent concern for the well-being of others, does not mask personal ambition.

Notice something else. The king made sure that the attempt on his life was thoroughly investigated — “and when inquisition was made of the matter, it was found out,” 2.23. But since his personal safety was not apparently endangered, Ahasuerus accepts the word of Haman without the slightest demur. Now, there is no investigation; the facts put before him are not subject to verification. Just make a note of Deut.17: “And it be told, and thou hast heard of it, and enquired diligently, and, behold, it be true, and the thing certain, that such abomination is wrought in Israel: then,” v4-5. And not till then. We do tend to accept juicy bits of scandal about the Lord’s people without verifying the facts, don’t we?

Before broaching the matter with the king, Haman and the Persian astrologers determined ‘the exact day of the year which would be most propitious for the destruction of Israel...’ J. C. Whitcomb. Reference to the occult, however, was subject to a higher authority, for “The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord,” Prov.16.33.

(F) THE INSENSIBILITY OF HAMAN

“And the king and Haman sat down to drink; but the city Shushan was perplexed,” v15. Haman had no care or concern about his victims, and we can be sure that Satan has no love for the souls of men either. —to be continued (D.V.)

* (Extracted from an article by Edwin M. Yamauchi, Bibliotheca Sacra, April-June 1980).

The Kings of Judah and Israel

by Graeme Hutchinson (Belfast)

Jehoshaphat No.2 (Paper 7)

With Jehoshaphat entering the last phase of his life, 2Chron.19,20 record a mixture of success and failure. Consider:

(c) 2 Chronicles 19: A Forgiven King

Returning to Jerusalem, Jehoshaphat was to face stern criticism for his sinful alliance with Ahab. The chapter neatly divides into three sections:

- *(v2-3) - Jehoshaphat reprimanded*

The prophet, Jehu, was the one given the task of correcting the king for his sin and departure. His own father, Hanani, had confronted Asa some years previous and was imprisoned for his actions (16.7,10). Undeterred from his own family history, Jehu takes a courageous stand against the wayward king and reprimands him directly and with force. Not only true in content but the message was balanced as well, mixing the negative (v2) with the positive (v3). We should take a stand in both camps: are we prepared to correct those that do wrong with a true and balanced message? Are we prepared to take correction from the servants of the Lord, as and when necessary?

- *(v4) - Jehoshaphat restored*

The little word 'again' would point to the fact that the king returned to the spiritual ways recorded in 2Chron.17.7. He was not embittered with the message, unlike his father, rather he was determined to make amends for his sin. Once fallen, the measure of our restoration will be visible from our desires to follow the Lord and lead others in similar paths (Lk.22.32).

- *(v5-11) - Jehoshaphat resolute*

Having been corrected for the sin of 2Chron.18 and restored to fellowship with the Lord, Jehoshaphat desired only one thing, to move forward. In commissioning the Judges, Levites and Priests we have clear guidance as to the way we should conduct our service.

- Character of the work* (v6,8). The servants had to be conscious that they laboured for the Lord and not man. All our service, irrespective of its nature, must be rendered as unto the Lord: 'Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God' (1Cor.10.31).
- Conviction in the work* (v7,9). In order to ensure against indolence and iniquity, the servants were to fear the Lord. Although 'fear' usually paralyses the servant, the 'fear of the Lord' emphasised the reverence expected, and the 'perfect hearts' necessary to effectively complete the work.

- (iii) *Compensation for the work* (v11b). Doing ‘good’ brought its own reward, a knowledge of the Lord’s nearness (Ps.37.23, 24). Is this how we conduct our service within the local assembly?

(d) 2 Chronicles 20.1-34: A Faithful King

What better way to test the genuineness of Jehoshaphat’s conversion than with a war! There can be little doubt that the ‘fear’ of 20.3 was different from that envisaged in 19.7, for the king was now faced with a ‘great multitude’ (v2). In this chapter we are able to observe Jehoshaphat under pressure. Consider:

• (v1-5) The Attitude

In the face of certain conflict, Jehoshaphat responded in a way befitting his restored character - he engaged in immediate and collective prayer (v4). Naturally speaking, the situation was impossible, however, being conscious of this he sought divine (and supernatural) help. When faced with opposition from the enemy, the early Christians were to do the same - Acts 1.14; 4.23, 24; 12.5. Is this our attitude to difficulties?

• (v6-12) The Approach

As king, Jehoshaphat took the lead in praying to the Lord. Unlike a formal recital of words, he actually expressed what was in his heart¹. Consider some of the features:

- (i) *Reverence* (v6) - Similar to the prayer of Jeremiah recorded in Jeremiah 32.17, Jehoshaphat was careful in the words he used to address God, ‘O Lord God’.
- (ii) *Recognition* (v6b) - the king was conscious that the One addressed in prayer was the ‘God in heaven’, the Omnipotent One. Having a proper view of God will inevitably influence how we pray.
- (iii) *Review* (v7-11) - Jehoshaphat knew the past dealings of God with Israel, and on the basis of past experiences, he was confident in his approach. Moreover, knowing that the land was ‘Thy (the Lord’s) possession’ (v11), Jehoshaphat argued that the land could not be given up lightly. The more we know the Word of God the more confident we will be and the more effective will our prayers be.
- (iv) *Realisation* (v12) - totally dependent upon the Lord, and, more importantly, aware of it!
- (v) *Representation* (v13) - the whole nation was at the prayer meeting!²

• (v14-17; 22-29) The Answer

First, by the mouth of Jehozaiel and then confirmed in reality, the Lord delivered the enemy into the hands of Judah. Although the promise was given, v17, the nation was sufficiently strong in faith to believe (v20). Recall the important phrase of James 1.6: ‘nothing wavering’. Is this characteristic of our prayers? Again we quote the truthful words of C.H. Mackintosh: ‘It is greatly to be feared that many of our so-called prayers never go beyond the ceiling of the room. In order to reach the throne of God, they must be borne on the wings of faith’ (Treasury, 1987, p.464).

• (v18-21) *The Appreciation*

Similar to the one leper in Lk.17.15, upon hearing the answer, the nation was quick to thank the Lord. Initially the response was one of worship (v18), but this was soon followed with singing (v21). Perhaps there is something significant in the order: first genuine devotion (worship and praise) and then expression of that devotion by song. Notice the same order throughout the Psalms, e.g. Ps.28.7.

(e) 2 Chronicles 20.35-37: A Forgetful King

The union mentioned in 2Chron.20.35 defies belief: 'Jehoshaphat king of Judah join(ed) himself with Ahaziah king of Israel'. Surely one who witnessed the pain of compromise and the joy of restoration would never repeat the same sin, he did! Ahaziah, the son of Ahab (1Kgs.22.51), was not worthy of such a union for the phrase, 'did very wickedly,' must surely refer to Ahaziah. Also 1Kgs.22.53 records that 'he (Ahaziah) served Baal, and worshipped him, and provoked to anger the Lord God of Israel, according to all that his father had done'. Jehoshaphat, like his father before, was sadly characterised by inconsistency for, notwithstanding the great exploits of 2Chron.19,20 he still succumbed to the weakness of compromise. Worse still, in 2Kgs.3.6-7 Jehoshaphat actually joined with Ahab's grandson, Jehoram!

Whilst there may be some difficulty in reconciling the two events recorded in 1Kgs.22.49 and 2Chron.20.35-37, are two separate events recorded or is it the one event with two interpretations? The truth still remains that Jehoshaphat had real difficulty in saying NO to the opposition. Surely we must learn from the past, Rom.15.4, and avoid the problems that inevitably arise when we compromise with the enemy.

Therefore, in looking at the character of Jehoshaphat there is much to commend him, both as a king and as a servant of the Lord. Sadly, any spiritual progress was somewhat blurred by his associations with Israel. We admire his determination to propagate the Word throughout the nation but mourn his inconsistency to maintain the standard for God.

¹ Some people pray: others say prayers. C.H. Mackintosh, 'How often are our prayers more like orations than petitions, more like statements of doctrine than utterances of need! (The Mackintosh Treasury, 1987, p.461).

² 'The healthy, happy, earnest, diligent soul will be sure to be found at the prayer meeting.' (The Mackintosh Treasury, 1987, p.467).

See paper 1 for details of Bibliography/Figures

—to be continued (D.V.)

There may be less in the local assembly than in the body. Again, there may be more in the local assembly than in the body. *J. Douglas*

* * *

We should have the Scriptures not for information but to have formation of character *J. Douglas*

PAPERS ON PROPHECY

by The Late W. W. Fereday (written in 1897/98)

VOLUME 2

12(a)—Christ's Millennial Reign

In our consideration of future judgments and glories, we have now arrived at that happy and glorious period which has been the theme of the Holy Spirit almost since the world began — the millennial reign of the Second Man, our Lord Jesus Christ. At various times, and in many ways, has the Spirit of God spoken of that epoch in the Scriptures of the Old Testament. Sometimes He presents us with a striking picture which, by the light of later revelations, the instructed mind cannot fail to understand; as for example, the appearing of Melchizedek, King of Righteousness, and King of Peace in Gen.14. On other occasions, we find Psalmists breaking forth into rapturous song, and depicting in glowing strains the glorious time that is coming for this poor sin-stricken earth; and later, especially in the days of Israel's declension and ruin, we find the Prophets borne along by the Spirit of God, and sublimely describing the glories and blessedness of the same wondrous period. Not that all who thus spoke fully understood their own utterances. They were frequently carried far beyond what their own minds could enter into. As we read in 1Pet.1.11, "Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that should follow." But whether Moses, Psalmists or Prophets wrote, it was one Spirit speaking through all, for the rest and joy of faith, and for the warning of the ungodly.

Our present subject is immense, and, if fully considered, would require a considerable volume to itself. As this cannot well be, and as it is important to be concise, we propose to deal with the coming millennium in the following order. We will endeavour to show what that glorious time means:—

1. For Christ.
2. For the Heavenly Saints.
3. For Israel.
4. For the Nations of the Earth.
5. For the Creation in General.
6. For Satan.

1. It will be the hour of Christ's supremacy as Man, not only over the heavenly part of the inheritance of God, but over the earthly also. This consideration should make it clear to every mind that there can be no millennial blessing until Christ comes. It used to be vaguely thought by many that the millennium will run its course prior to His appearing; His coming for judgment being placed by such expositors at the close of that period. But a Christless millennium is, to say the least, a very unsatisfactory idea, not at all sustained by the Word of God. If any of our readers has any doubt as to this important point, we earnestly beg them to consider carefully

Acts 3.19-21. We quote from the revised Version: "Repent ye therefore, and turn again that your sins may be blotted out (it is Peter's appeal to Israel), that so there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send the Christ who hath been appointed for you, even Jesus: whom the heavens must receive until the times of restoration of all things, whereof God spake by the mouth of His holy Prophets which have been since the world began." This shows that Christ will remain in the heavens until the hour of Israel's repentance, and then will appear for universal blessing. His coming is therefore clearly pre-millennial.

The foregoing passage refers, of course, to the earth only. To understand the full glory of that day, Eph.1.9,10, should be consulted. "Having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, for the administration of the fulness of times; to head up all things in the Christ the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth." (J. N. Darby's translation). Here we learn that God intends to make Christ the Head and Centre of a united system of heavenly and earthly glory. *Everything* is to be His. God has made known to us beforehand what His will and pleasure is, because of our connection, through grace, with Him who is to inherit it all.

Ps.8 will then receive its full accomplishment. The Son of man there spoken of is not Adam, but Christ. The divine purpose is there declared to set Him over all the works of God's hand. The first man had this grant of power from God, Gen.1.26-28, but failed to act for His glory. He sold himself into the hand of the enemy, and became his tool and slave. When the Second Man takes up the reins of universal government in God's due time, He will glorify God perfectly, and bring in full blessing for all beneath His sway.

Perhaps the earthly glory that is in store for Christ is not sufficiently thought of by the saints at large. It is, of course, thoroughly believed and understood that He has present glory in heaven, and every redeemed soul owns gladly that He is worthy of it; but His future glory in the earth has not the place it should have in the minds of many. Yet it is due to Him as an answer to His humiliation below. It is not sufficient that He is glorified in heaven. He never was dishonoured there. But it is a perfect delight to those who love His name that He is to be glorified and adored in the very scene of His rejection and shame. God will see to this. Here where His royal claims were scorned, every knee shall bow to Him; here where He was reviled and insulted, every tongue will confess Him Lord to the glory of God the Father. His Name shall be excellent in all the earth.

After all man's failure and sin, it is a relief to the heart to know that God has a Man in store to whom He can entrust universal dominion, and who will use it for His glory. The house of David, for whom God intended supremacy in the earth, miserably failed in the person of its choicest representative; the first great Gentile head (Nebuchadnezzar) to whom power was divinely entrusted after the failure of David's house, misused his might and authority; but God has One in reserve Who will succeed gloriously where they and all others have painfully failed.

The kingdom of Christ will be brought in by power and judgment. It is vain to cling to the notion of a peaceful subjugation of the whole world by means of the

Gospel. Scripture nowhere countenances the idea, though, blessed be God, it everywhere *proposes* blessing for *all*, if they believe the Gospel. Ps.45 vividly describes the coming of Christ to reign: "Gird Thy sword upon Thy thigh, O most mighty, with Thy glory and Thy majesty. And in Thy majesty ride prosperously because of truth and meekness and righteousness: and Thy right hand shall teach Thee terrible things. Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the King's enemies; whereby the people fall under Thee," v3-5. This is not Gospel progress, but unsparing judgment of enemies. David and Solomon together typify Christ in His reign. The first was a man of war. He was ever shedding the blood of his enemies, with the result that his son succeeded to a peaceful throne, and was enabled to reign in rest and glory. Thus will it be in the day to come. "By fire and by His sword will the Lord plead with all flesh: and the slain of the Lord shall be many," Isa.66.16. Then peace will follow on a righteous ground.

Righteousness and peace, therefore, will be the two great characteristics of the reign of Christ. Melchizedek shows this typically. His personal name means king of righteousness, and the name of his city means peace, Heb.7.2. "Behold a King shall reign in righteousness ... and the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quiteness and assurance for ever," Isa.1-17. Evil will be promptly put down, instead of being borne with in long-suffering as now, Isa.65.20, and peace will flow universally. Righteousness will then be exalted, and iniquity will hide its head.

—to be continued (D.V.)

REMINDER

Due to increasing years and declining health, our dear brother, John Glenville, has decided this will be his last year serving the saints as a Committee Member of this magazine. Our brother has given unstinted, faithful and very valuable service since 1958. In fact he is the longest serving member of the committee and we wish to record our very sincere appreciation of all that he has done. We can only know part of that service, but his record is on high. We wish him well and trust he will be enabled to continue to service the saints in his oral ministry.

Until the end of the year gifts can be directed to brother Glenville or brother Neill as indicated inside the front cover. Thereafter it will be convenient for us to have all gifts directed to our Treasurer:—

WILLIAM NEILL

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"Assembly Testimony Magazine"

WISDOM'S HOUSE — No. 3

by J. Adams (N. Ireland)

In our former considerations of the house in Prov.9, we have noted the CONSTRUCTION of the house, and now we come to:

THE CONFLICTS IN THE HOUSE:

While Prov.9.1 shows us the seven pillars of CONSTRUCTION, 6.16-19 bring to our attention seven things which will be the cause of CONFLICTS in the House. These can also be seen in 3 John.

Prov.6.16-19

3 John

| | | |
|---|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Proud look. | Loving to have the pre-eminence. | Their Arrogance |
| 2. Lying tongue. | Malicious words. | Their Ammunition. |
| 3. Hands that shed innocent blood. | Deeds. | Their Assassination. (Spiritual). |
| 4. Heart that deviseth wicked imaginations. | Not content therewith. | Their Aggression. |
| 5. Feet that be swift in running to mischief. | Forbidding them. | Their Anarchy. |
| 6. False witness that speaketh lies. | Casts them out of the church. | Their Accusation. |
| 7. He that soweth discord among brethren. | Prating against us. | Their Actions. |

Taken with Acts 20 we can find the grievous wolves. Anything that does not spare the flock is a wolf. Perhaps these are the beasts in Prov.9.2 that need to be killed!

COURAGE IN THE HOUSE:

Conflict is to be met by courage. Could we see courage in the 'mingling of the wine,' v2? This is not a weakening process but a strengthening one. We do well to ask what is it that makes the Christian strong and courageous? In 2Chron.17 we have Jehoshaphat, a man who strengthened himself against Ahab. Our thoughts also go to Eph.6.10-20, where we find the command to be 'strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.' The whole armour of God is at our disposal, but it must be put on. It is again worthy of note that there are seven parts to this armour. In our consideration of these things we can learn some spiritual lessons that should help us to strengthen ourselves in order to fight the foes coming against us. We make use of strength already provided as we lean upon Christ. It is always a great encouragement to know that the feeblest saints can find themselves 'Strong in the Lord.'

a) 'The Girdle of truth' We note Jehoshaphat was a 'WISE MAN' in that, 'he placed forces in all the fenced cities of Judah, and set garrisons in the land of Judah, and in the cities of Ephraim.' Is this not in N.T. language, putting on the 'Girdle of truth'? Truth heard, received and practised as we have in Eph.1.13. We love to see

David also putting on the girdle of truth as he takes off Saul's armour and puts on his shoulder the shepherd's bag containing five smooth stones chosen from the brook, and taking his sling in his hand, goes forth to meet Goliath, 1Sam.17.40. It was a force that proved too great for the giant yet one which the giant despised.

It is striving lawfully, 2Tim.2.5. It is to be Caleb-like, wholly following the Lord with that single eye of sincerity and truth, Num.32.11.

Take truth away from character and no man can stand. If the vessel be not clean then everything entering it becomes contaminated. Take truth from society and you are left with a jumble of unrealities without support or firmness.

b) 'Breastplate of righteousness.' At the moment of conversion Divine righteousness is imputed to the believing sinner and the issue is a righteous life. Joseph had on the breastplate of righteousness when he fled from that wicked woman, Gen.39.12. It was Joseph's concern that he should behave in a manner approved by God. When we obey Christ we always obey conscience.

In Jehoshaphat we again must note that not only was he a wise man but he was a **'WORK MAN'**. We read of fenced cities. For the child of God there must be the fence (wall) of separation from all that is evil whether it be moral or doctrinal. Like Timothy the good soldier, being strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, is a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, having purged himself from all that is evil and following after righteousness, 2Tim.2.1,3,15.

Thus we should constantly aim at exhibiting righteousness in the home, business, and every aspect of life.

c) 'Feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace.' Most argue that 'Preparedness' is the better word. Here we get something for the feet as the march begins. Paul could say, "I am ready to preach the gospel," Rom.1.15. The servant with the Gospel is the servant with a full Gospel which is not another, Gal.1.6. This is again illustrated in Jehoshaphat in that he was a **'WATCH MAN,'** — he set garrisons. Likewise Paul's feet did not stray from the path of the Gospel. For him the garrisons were set, the shoes were on his feet. How blessed it is to be in defence of the Gospel, Phil.1.7. Some may think it is only the evangelist in view, but we know that never has a battle been won by officers alone — the part played by the soldier has always been vital. The world still needs the army of Christian soldiers whose feet are shod with the readiness of the Gospel of peace.

d) 'The shield of faith.' The faith. All of unbelief set aside. Is this not the shield the Apostle Paul held forth in Acts 17.22-31. Seeing the altar with the inscription to **'THE UNKNOWN GOD'** he immediately preached the God he knew and the God that sinners need! Another picture comes from Jehoshaphat which again is the mark of the strong and true soldier of Christ. **'He took away the high places,'** He is now a **'WAR LIKE MAN'** removing that which is not of God. Thus our only defence is **'Faith in God'** and this shield cannot fail. Heb.11 presents us with a great list of heroes taking the shield of faith to subdue kingdoms and to obtain promises. It enabled them to stop the mouths of lions and quench the violence of fire. Let us arise to duty in this a dark day though the danger is great. Like a Gideon seeking by the help of God to throw down those altars of Baal, to quench all the fiery darts of

the Devil, and make sure we build up the altar unto the Lord, Jdgs.6.25,26.

e) **'The helmet of salvation'** "For by grace are ye saved," Eph.2.8. Such is the teaching of Holy Scripture concerning the knowledge of salvation. Just to know that I shall not come into condemnation. In Jn.5.24, we find five precious truths and among them is knowing that I am saved. These are 'Hearing'; 'believing'; 'Receiving', (Hath); then the one we are dealing with 'Knowing', (Shall not come); and finally 'Enjoying', (Is passed). Often it is said and it is verily true, the Work of Christ makes us safe while His Word makes us sure. Satan will always attack the Word. God said to our first parents, 'Thou shalt surely die,' but Satan replied 'Thou shalt not surely die,' Gen.2.17;3.4. God says by grace are ye saved through faith. Satan may cause some to doubt it. Those who publicly handle the Word of God, whether to saved or unsaved, have the great responsibility to be clear in their preaching, lest they add to the confusion, giving Satan fertile soil in which to work. Timothy could look back to childhood days when he was well taught though still a sinner, 2Tim.3.15. he sat under good preachers. After conversion he sat under a good teacher. We note this important feature seen in Jehoshaphat. He sent teachers, 17.7-9. he was a **'WELL TAUGHT MAN.'** It is a great privilege to be well taught in the things of God and, in our day, there is a great need for such Christians. Without the assurance of the Word of God there will be no helmet of salvation. No one can fight for Christ who is not loyal to Christ and His truth.

f) **'The sword of the Spirit.'** This is the spoken Word. Again we turn to King Jehoshaphat. 'He built castles in Judah, and cities of store,' 17.12. It is easy to note now that he was a **'WEALTHY MAN.'** Brethren, can we draw the sword of the Spirit? The Word of God must first be in before it can come out. Had Ruth not gleaned she would have had nothing to take up, Ruth 2.18,19. Are we wealthy when it comes to the sword of the Spirit?

Ezk.37. The true prophet comes with the Word of God. There is a noise — he has something that will stir the soul and there is a shaking — something that will cause the soul to tremble. He is very conscious that these souls have been in furnace conditions in Babylon. Not alone dry but very dry.

Living in Babylon will dry the soul. His message is one of matter — breathing breath into the soul and bringing bones and putting them upon the sinews, flesh, skin. He begins with a note of encouragement in spite of prevailing circumstances resulting from long captivity. The Lord has asked, "Can these bones live"? The prophet answers, "O Lord thou knowest." He is a man who believes in the power of the Word. Ye shall live.

The bones coming together would remind us of the fractures that have occurred in Israel, now to be healed. Many are the fractures and divisions among God's people today as a result of worldly pursuits just like Israel with years spent in Babylon and the only remedy for recovery is the sword of the spirit. The sinews tell us of strength, thus no more weakness or fainting. Spend long enough away from God and the soul becomes dry and the saint weak. The flesh reminds us of support as they now receive wholesome food and so there are no more famine conditions. The honey and the milk are not found in Babylon. The skin teaches us of safety. For

Israel it is now no more open shame, they are once again protected from the corrupt and foul conditions of Babylon. The medical profession will warn about the danger of broken skin in relation to infection. Hence in the spiritual realm the importance of the skin. The breath takes our attention to satisfaction, there are no more graves. Israel in Babylon was to become like Sardis, Rev.3 having a name to live and yet to be dead and fruitless.

When it comes to the preaching of the Gospel there should never be departure from the sword of the Spirit to other things which can only be termed as worthless. Without the Holy Spirit, a sermon, or any innovation of man, will lack the noise to stir and the power to shake. We must see the effects of the message and its results. Hence the **'Sword of the Spirit.'**

g) **'Praying always.'** Jehoshaphat sought the Lord. Here is a **'WAITING MAN.'** Daniel was one such man, as was Elijah. These waiting men are for our encouragement, Jms.5.17. Fight for God and you will find the need for earnest prayer. When the battle rages you ought surely to begin to pray and that in all seasons. Jacob's wrestling meant he had the power with God.

These are the things that strengthen, and give safety in the midst of the spiritual battles.
—to be continued (D.V.)

MY CONVERSION AND CALL (59)

by G. Buchanan (Brazil)

I had the great unspeakable privilege of being born into a Christian home. I am thankful for a father and mother who put the salvation of their family in first place. We were taken along to all the Gospel meetings within driving distance of our home and I cannot remember a time in my life when I did not know that I needed to be saved. The coming of the Lord was the thing that troubled me most and many a time I wakened up at night thinking that the great event had taken place and that I was left for the judgment of God, Being healthy, I never thought much about death, thinking like the rich farmer in Lk.12, that I had many years!

At the age of nine, my twin sister, who went to be with the Lord nine years later, got saved. I will never forget her getting into the car and throwing her arms around our mother, saying, "Mummy, I got saved in the meeting." This was a loud voice to me as now I was the only one in the family not saved. I longed to be saved that night but these thoughts soon slipped past. On the farm we often cut down the thorn hedges and at night burned the thorns. On these occasions I went close to the fire thinking, "what must hell be like?"

On Lord's Day, 19th February, 1967, after the Gospel meeting without a thought about my precious soul, I was going upstairs to my bedroom when my brother Robert took me by the arm and said "If the Lord comes tonight you will be left

behind with the farm and all that belongs to it.” These words struck terror to my heart and as I lay down in bed my sin and guilt before a Holy God rose up before me and sleep left me. I had to have this great matter settled. The devil had put into my mind years before that salvation was so easy — only “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved,” and that when I wanted to get saved I would just do that. But it was not like that at all. That night I was as dark as a sinner could be. I tried to believe and waited but nothing happened.

After some time I went downstairs to speak to my father hoping that he could help me, although I knew that he could not save me. I remember well, he read to me some verses and tried to explain God's way of Salvation to me, but it seemed to become more difficult than ever. Finally he looked at me with tears rolling down my face and said “I will pray with you and then we will both go to bed.” After he prayed he went to his bedroom to cry to God for the salvation of his boy, whilst I stayed in the kitchen determined that I would not go to bed until I knew my sins were forgiven.

I sat there reading again and again the well known verses but I seemed to be in total darkness. At last, exhausted and weary, the thought came to my mind, “you will never be saved,” and I trembled at this thought as I saw before me only the flames of hell for ever and ever. In desperation I watched the tears fall to the page of my father's open Bible and thought there won't be even a drop of water to cool my tongue. In this moment of extremity my thoughts were turned to the work of Christ on the cross. I thought, “why did He die?” and immediately the words of Is.53.6 came before me, “the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” At that moment I realised that the finished work of Christ on the cross had satisfied the just demands of a sin-hating God and was enough to meet my great need and I simply trusted Him as my Saviour. What a relief to know that my sins were all forgiven and that I would never find myself in hell.

Two years later I was baptised and received into the assembly in Clogh, Co. Antrim, where more and more I learned to value the great privilege of being gathered to the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ in separation from all the sects and systems of men. I soon began to take part in the meetings in a simple way and as the years passed the assembly of God's people meant everything to me.

In July 1977 I was married, and together with my wife, our heart's desire was to give God and the assembly our very best. At this stage we had no thought whatever of being in full time service for God. We looked up to the Lord's servants as being giants in the faith and held them in the highest esteem. When the brethren invited me to be responsible for a month of speakers, in fear and trembling I took on this task; but this was something that brought us much joy and pleasure. It was our delight to have the preachers in our home and gradually I became bold enough to approach some of the Lord's Workers in other lands, and so it was a special delight to have a visit from a missionary brother.

In July 1984 I was introduced to Mr. John McCann (senior) at Bleary Conference and so I took the opportunity to invite him for a Lord's Day in Clogh, also a report meeting. He willingly came and stayed with us for a few days. During this time we

took our esteemed brother and sister for a little drive round the Antrim coast, but I will never forget how, sitting together in the car, Mr. McCann began to tell us about the Work of the Lord in Brazil. It was all so interesting but he finished up by saying, “you should be exercised about going to help, you should pray about it!” Now that was the farthest thing in my mind and I was shocked, mainly that he should seem to think that a simple young man like I could even count it a possibility of ever being a missionary! I was afraid to pray concerning this just in case it would all work out and I would find myself in a foreign land with a foreign language to learn! However the seed was sown in my heart and the thoughts of the need in Brazil never left me from that day on.

After much exercise before the Lord I did begin to pray about my life and what God would have me to do, and strangely found it very easy to pray about Brazil. Unknown to me my wife was going through the same experience. Many a time I stopped and thought, “here I am building houses and at the same time thousands dying in their sins!” This alarmed me and the burden got heavier as time went past.

It happened that around this time I received an excellent proposal in my work as a builder which brought me to a “crossroads” as I could see clearly it was either this or Brazil. I knew that I could never do it and the Will of the Lord at the same time. On Friday that same week the brother who came to take the children's meeting was in our home. Burdened and weary, I poured out my heart to that dear godly brother who spoke wisely to me and was able to help me from his own experience. We prayed together and after he left I was on my knees before God asking for help — afraid of going back, and at the same time afraid of going forward in obedience! I felt that if I refused to go to Brazil I could never ask the Lord for guidance again. That night I made up my mind — if the Lord opens up the way, I will go. What a joy filled my soul that moment I bowed to His will — the joy of obedience. The next morning at the front door of our home the thought came to me, “how could you ever go to a mission field?” At that moment the words of Phil.4.13 came straight to my heart, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” These words were a stay to me then and many times since.

I will never forget the night I made my exercise known to my brethren in Clogh. With tears in his eyes one dear brother said, “Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it.” They, with four neighbouring assemblies, were happy to commend us. The following year our visas were granted and a couple bought our house and all the contents without any advertisement. After eight years seeking to serve God in Rio Grande do Sul, we can only say that “God is faithful”, and the prayers and fellowship of the people of God have been a tremendous encouragement along the way.

NOTICE

Due to pressure of space in this month's Assembly Testimony, we have had to hold over some of our regular articles.

These will resume in the September/October issue, (DV).

Good Tidings from Heaven

“A COVER UP”

Many imply, at least by their actions, that if a deed done remains undetected and unknown to others, it is permissible. The cry is, “Cover up! Do not let it be known! Keep it a secret!” To achieve this many lies are told, deceit is rampant, bribery and corruption are involved and a web is spun to make it difficult to untangle the truth from the lies.

If men are so worried about the disclosure of their activity, it is undeniable proof that their consciences are smiting them. Yet there is an anomaly. If it is a great discomfort to have sin exposed to their fellows, why are these men not squirming with raging embarrassment when it is known to a thrice holy God. Nothing can be hidden from Him. Everything will eventually be brought out into the open. Heb.4.13, “Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.” Ps.90.8, “Thou hast set our iniquities before Thee, our secret sins in the light of Thy countenance.” Prov.15.3, “The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.” In spite of this truth men still try to cover their sin. God declares, “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper, Prov.28.13. Our first parents, Adam and Eve, tried to cover sin in the garden of Eden, Gen.3.7, “they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.” In the presence of God they discovered this covering was insufficient, thus Adam, while wearing the aprons, said to God, “I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and hid myself,” Gen.3.10.

It would be a wholesome thing for the reader to ask “What covering have I? How can I meet the gaze of God?” Many try to produce their own covering. Some try religion, others good works or philosophy etc., but let God's voice be heard, “Woe to the rebellious children, saith the LORD, that take counsel, but not of Me; and that cover with a covering, but not of My spirit, that they may add sin to sin:” Is.30.1

Wherein is a proper covering to be found? It must be somewhere because the Psalmist states, “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.” Ps.32.1. Is.61.10 records, “I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness ...” Note two matters in these verses which are exceptionally important. Firstly the covering is linked with forgiveness, and secondly it is something accomplished by God. No man can forgive sins, since every man has many of his own. How can a holy God forgive our sins and give us a covering which will protect us eternally from His holy eye? Let us consider two precious verses, Eph.2.7, “In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace; Acts 13.38, “through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins.” It can only be accomplished on the basis of the death and sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, God's well beloved Son. “Without shedding of blood is no remission,” Heb.9.22. His death has satisfied God's righteous requirements and allows God to fully forgive sins and take the forgiven sinners at last to heaven. If we return to God in true repentance, by faith we will hear Him say, “Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry:” Lk.15.22-23.



GRACE TRUTH

ASSEMBLY TESTIMONY



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ASSEMBLY TESTIMONY

This is a bi-monthly magazine for the propagation of the Word of God and thus the encouragement and edification of the people of God.

Editor: B. Currie

Correspondence relative to Editorial matters should be addressed to:

The Editor, 49 Glenburn Road, Dunmurry, N. Ireland, BT17 9AN.
Telephone (01232) 621343.
E-mail: AT@bcurrie.free-online.co.uk

Secretary/Treasurer : William Neill, 109 Lurgan Road,
Banbridge, Northern Ireland, BT32 4NG.
Telephone (018206) 24238.

Committee : Tom Armstrong, Thomas Beggs, Ronnie Johnston,
James McKeown, James Moore, Roy Reynolds.

This magazine is supported solely by the freewill offerings of the Lord's people. No member of the committee, author of articles or any other person connected with the magazine receives payment, remuneration or gratuity of any kind. This magazine is not to be sold.

Friends residing in England, Scotland and Wales may kindly forward their donations to :

John Glenville, 16 Trelawney Road, Saltash, Cornwall, PL12 4DD.
Telephone (01752) 846889.

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BEHOLD YOUR KING

(Meditations in Matthew)

by Jim Flanagan (Belfast)

22. The Transfiguration (Ch.17)

The Holy Mount! So Peter calls it come forty years later. He could never forget that day (or was it night?) when he and the brothers James and John had climbed that mount with the Master. They had left earth behind on a lower plane for a little while and they had been rewarded with a sight of glory which remained with them until the end of their lives. Was it Tabor? Or Hermon? Tabor, with its 1850 feet, could hardly be described as “an high mountain.” The majestic Hermon however, towered some 10,000 feet high, the highest mountain in the region. But whether Tabor or Hermon, it most certainly was “the holy mount” where the glory of the Saviour shone out beyond the guise of the carpenter, where the face of the Man of Sorrows was as radiant as the sun, and where Peter declares, “We were eyewitnesses of His majesty,” 2Pet.1.16.

Matthew and Mark say that it was after six days. Luke says that it was after eight days. There is no discrepancy. Luke counts the first and last days of that period; Matthew and Mark count the six intervening days only.

These three privileged men were to get, as the Saviour had promised, ch.16.28, a preview of the kingdom. They were to see that kingdom in miniature, in microcosm, and the King Himself gloriously pre-eminent in the midst of all. His garments, the Galilean homespun of His humble humanity, became dazzling white, white and glistening, white as the light, white as snow. In a holy dependency Jesus had gone up into the mountain to pray, ch.9.18. Heaven rewards the dependent Man and His disciples with a foregleam of the glory that is to be His as Jehovah's anointed King. His countenance and His raiment shine in that glory. What encouragement and moral comfort was this. Dark Calvary lay ahead. His visage would be marred there and cruel men would gamble for His stained garments at the foot of His cross, and they would write above His thorn-crowned head “This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.” But if the sorrows of Golgotha lay ahead of Him now, then kingdom glory lay beyond Golgotha, and it would be assurance for His disciples to know this.

As the glory shone the heavenly visitors arrived, Moses and Elijah. It was fitting that Moses should be there. He was the founder, under God, of that economy which was soon to be done away. His types and shadows had foretold the Messiah. It was fitting too that Elijah should be there. He was the great reformer and recoverer of the nation, leading it back as Moses had led it out. They engaged in holy conversation with the King. Luke says that they talked of His exodus which He was about to accomplish. How well Moses knew the word “exodus”! The King's departure out of the world would be of His own arranging, whatever men may think.

Peter's Jewish mind desires to stay here. He had objected to the predicted suffering in ch.16.22, but this glory was different! It was good to be here. Poor Peter! He makes two blunders. First, it was not in the purpose of God to stay here. The Master was on His determined way to Jerusalem and to Calvary. It was not yet time for the glory. Second, and perhaps the greater error was in these words, "One for Thee, one for Moses, and one for Elias." Is the King to be on the same level as the law-giver and the prophet? But no. The heavenly ones must not stay. The law and the prophets must withdraw. Jesus must be left alone in solitary glory. A bright cloud overshadowed them. This was no ordinary cloud. It was doubtless the Shekinah. It was "the excellent glory," 2Pet.1.17. The Father's voice came out of the cloud, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him." The Son would speak for the Father. The Son would declare all the purpose of God. The King must be supreme. Hear Him! The fearful disciples fell on their faces before Him. In kindness He touched them and when they lifted up their eyes they saw no man save Jesus only.

Now they must come down from the mount, but they would not preach what they had seen. Not yet. The nation had already rejected the King. Now He was on His way to Calvary to die, and the preaching of His Messiahship was finished. He had told them so at Caesarea Philippi, ch.16.20. Elijah had come to them in the ministry of John Baptist, and they had rejected him. It was all up with Israel. But down below, in the valley, on the plain, there was great need, and He would go among them and minister to them in spite of their unbelief.

A distraught father brings a demon-possessed boy to Him through the multitude. According to Luke he is an only begotten son, this boy, Lk.9.38. How the heart of that Blessed Only Begotten went out to him! The King does what His disciples could not do. Demons must obey Him, if not them, in their little faith. He rebukes the demon and delivers the child, and again, while in Galilee, announces His pending sufferings, death, and resurrection.

There follows, in Capernaum, the question of His paying the tribute money. This was a voluntary Temple tax, an annual half-shekel. Did Peter's master pay it? "Yes", Peter assured them, but when Peter came into the house the Saviour anticipated him and asked the question. "What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers?" Peter knew that it was of strangers. "Then are the children free" said Jesus. But He would not offend, or give undue cause for criticism. He directs Peter to go to the sea and to the fish with the money in its mouth to give to those who received the tribute. That closing expression in the chapter is very beautiful, "For me and thee." The Master, in grace and kindness, would associate Himself with His disciple in the littlest things of life and would make provision even for the payment of His servant's taxes. King though He is, He will take kind notice of His people, with all their failings. He is still the same.

—to be continued (D.V.)

Here we have the sorrow without the reason. There we will have the reason without the sorrow.

—A widow

Assembly Testimony Bible Class

by J. Riddle (Cheshunt)

ESTHER

(7) "FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS," PART 1

Read Chapter 4

In previous studies, we have used the expression, 'the providence of God.' Perhaps the time has come for a definition. The word "providence" comes from two Latin words: 'pro', meaning '*before*', and 'video', meaning '*I see*'. It therefore means, 'activity arising from foresight.' There is no supernatural intervention in the book of Esther, but the series of non-miraculous events clearly reveals the overruling hand of God. The silence of God does not mean that He has surrendered His sovereignty.

The providential care of God for His people now becomes strikingly apparent, as Mordecai apparently realises for the first time: 'who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom *for such a time as this?*' 4.14.

Three characters take an active part in the proceedings. We have already met Mordecai and Esther, but we now meet Hatach, one of the King's chamberlains. He plays a most important part in the story. We may not aspire to Mordecai or Esther, but we can all fulfil the role of Hatach! We can divide the chapter as follows: (1) The reaction of Mordecai, v1-4; (2) The role of Hatach, v5-10; (3) The responsibility of Esther, v11-17.

1) THE REACTION OF MORDECAI, v1-4

"When Mordecai perceived all that was done, Mordecai rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and bitter cry; and came even before the king's gate; for none might enter into the king's gate clothed with sackcloth," v1-2. (Eastern potentates expected their subjects to be deliriously happy at all times: compare Neh.2.1-2). Although Esther was "exceedingly grieved" when informed by her maids and chamberlains, it is evident that she was not aware of the reason for Mordecai's grief: see v5. Ahasuerus had not confided in his queen and, by our standards, she seemed strangely insulted from the outside world. Bearing in mind that God's people were in peril, let us ask some questions:

i) Are we concerned about the threat to our existence? Yes, we have eternal life. The Lord Jesus said, "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish," Jn.10.28. But we have a great enemy, and he is bent on destroying the testimony. Haman exhibited the character of his dark master who "as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour," 1Pet.5.8. But "we are not ignorant of his devices," for "Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light," 2Cor.11.14. Persecution is not nearly so successful as corruption.

But do we really care about the sad decline in spiritual power and faithfulness to the word of God? When Nehemiah learned that “the place which the Lord shall choose to place His Name there” was in ruins, he could have shrugged his shoulders and carried on serving wine to the king, but he “sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven,” Neh.1.4. Daniel was not a party to the sins which resulted in the Babylonian captivity, but he set his “face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes,” Dan.9.3. Paul “ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears” as he anticipated “grievous wolves” from without, and “men ... speaking perverse things” from within, Acts 20.29-31.

ii) Are we out of touch with the feelings of Christ? It would be rather unfair to criticise Esther. She was evidently cocooned from national life, and was blissfully unaware of the crisis. But what about us? The Lord Jesus wept over Jerusalem. Human misery touched Him deeply. See Mk.7.34, ‘And looking up to heaven **He groaned...**’ JND. In that sense, how much do we know of the “Fellowship of His sufferings?” We tend to become impervious and insensitive to human need. Generally speaking, we have surrounded ourselves with every creature comfort, and become quite unaware of a grieving Christ.

iii) Are we out of touch with one another? Ahasuerus certainly didn't communicate with his wife. Had he done so, a little queenly advice and good common sense might have nudged him in a completely different direction! The Lord's people need to be in constant touch with each other. Paul might have acted entirely on his own authority in Acts 15, but “**they** (that is, the local “brethren” v1) determined that Paul and Barnabas ... should go up to Jerusalem, unto the apostles and elders, about this question. And being brought on their way **by the church,**” v1-3. Fellowship is vital. We should add that assembly elders need to be in constant touch with each other, and in constant touch with the flock.

2) THE ROLE OF HATACH, v5-10

The frequent reference to Hatach leaves you with the impression that he is mentioned quite deliberately. He must certainly not be overlooked. “Then called Esther for **Hatach** ... and gave him a commandment to Mordecai ... so **Hatach** went forth to Mordecai ... and Mordecai told him of all that had happened unto him ... also he gave him a copy of the writing of the decree ... and **Hatach** came and told Esther the words of Mordecai. Again Esther spake unto **Hatach**, and gave him commandment unto Mordecai.” Now let us see what we can learn from all this:

i) No service for God escapes His notice. Hatach isn't one of the big ‘stars’ in the story (forgive the play on Esther's name!), but he does valuable work. The Bible is just full of such examples. What about Paul's nephew in Acts 23? Or the little captive maid in 2Kgs.5? Just think what would have happened if the sons of Merari had found it rather undignified to carry tent pegs and tent cords, and jettisoned them en route through the wilderness! None of us is in a position to compare different aspects of Christian service in terms of their importance. Everything is important, and everything is known to God.

ii) No service for God should be beneath our dignity. Hatach was one of the “king's chamberlains,” but he was quite willing to act as a messenger boy! The Lord Jesus was willing to act as a servant: “The Son of man came not to be ministered unto (that is, to be served), but to minister (that is, to serve), and to give His life a ransom for many,” Mk.10.45. Those of us who preach should never get ‘too big for our spiritual boots,’ and we shouldn't encourage others to do so either.

iii) No service for God should be undertaken without strict reference to His Word. Hatach was devoid of any ideas of his own! He had nothing to contribute to the dialogue between Esther and Mordecai. He simply repeated what he was told to say — without any embroidery. Our business is to communicate the word of God: nothing more, and nothing less. Hatach did exactly what he was told, and repeated exactly what he was told.

iv) No service for God should be undertaken without strict personal integrity. Esther obviously trusted Hatach implicitly. J. C. Whitcomb refers to ‘the delicate task she entrusted to him,’ and continues: ‘and Mordecai must have trusted him too, for he divulged to him Esther's true nationality and thus her dangerous position (cf. v8 - “for her people”).’ There was no tittle-tattle by Hatach. No betrayal of confidences. He was totally trustworthy, and could be safely relied upon to carry detailed information, v7, and important instructions, v8. At the same time he was at considerable risk. Just suppose Haman had found out about his visits to Mordecai.

We will consider the balance of the chapter in our study. God willing.

—to be continued (D.V.)

The Kings of Judah and Israel

by Graeme Hutchinson (Belfast)

Ahab No.1 (Paper 8)

King Ahab was the eighth ruler of the Northern Kingdom - Israel - and for over twenty years (874-853 BC) he emerged as one whose name is synonymous with weakness and sin. The record of Scripture bears testimony to:

(a) His Inheritance

1Kgs.16.25-26 provide us with an insight into the character of Ahab's father, Omri, and the condition of the nation that Ahab inherited. Although we all inherit the sinful nature from our parents, Jn.3.6, it appears that the character of Omri was especially replicated in the life of his son. For instance, in terms of the influence that Omri made on Ahab, we can make the following observations:

• *It was Strong*

1Kgs.16.25 illustrates that during the reign of Omri, a sad point in the nation's history had been reached - ‘(he) did worse than all that were before him.’ However, in the case of Ahab the maxim, like father like son, was true, for in 1Kgs.16.30 we read that ‘Ahab .. did evil .. above all that were before him.’ In other words, Ahab, whose name means ‘father's brother’, displayed all that was bad in his father. Within

any close environment, especially the home, we all have the power to exert influences over others - make sure that your influence is for good.

• *It was Serious*

1Kgs.16.26 states that Omri actually provoked the Lord to anger. This approach was repeated by Ahab, as 1Kgs.16.33 records. Thus, both father and son abused the long-suffering nature of God by their sinful practices and the end was that the Lord's anger was poured out upon them. An important gospel principle - if sinners abuse the long-suffering nature of God by refusing His offer of shelter, it will only end in them facing the awful outpouring of His wrath. For believers, we can provoke in a good sense: 'And let us consider one another to *provoke* unto love and to good works,' Heb.10.24.

(c) *His Iniquity*

Whilst scripture faithfully records the fact that Ahab's activities were reckoned as 'evil' by the Lord, 1Kgs.16.30, and his son, Ahaziah, followed in the same path 1Kgs.22.51-52, the comprehensive way in which his life is documented means that it is possible to identify various spheres wherein his sin was apparent. There are three specific areas:

• *Against the Will of God*

1Kgs.16.31 suggests that Ahab's marriage to Jezebel was a flagrant rejection of God's commandments. The writer stresses that no pressure was placed upon Ahab to enter into matrimony with Jezebel, rather '*he took to wife.*' Moreover, the important point to stress was that his wife was of pagan extracts and so he disobeyed Deut.7.1-6. The remainder of Ahab's life testifies to the implications of such disobedience -

(1) 1Kgs.21.5-8 record how the woman controlled the home, which was contrary to the original instructions of Gen.2.20-24 and the injunction given by Paul in Eph.5.22-24;

(2) through her union and subsequent position as Queen, Jezebel was able to *inculcate* the nation with her own paginate practices, 1Kgs.18, and eventually *infiltrate* the nation of Judah through her own daughter, Athaliah, 2Chron.21.5-6, with disastrous consequences. Surely there must be some truth in the saying: 'a wife will either make or break a man'! The life of Ahab is living testimony as to the importance of entering into marriage with the utmost caution and spiritual guidance.

• *Against the Men of God*

During the reign of Ahab, the Lord raised up the prophet, Elijah, to counteract the sinful practices of the royal throne. 1Kgs17.1; 18.17-19; 21.20 record that the prophet was faithful to his mission for, with great courage, he stood up against the sinful practices that were growing throughout the nation. Little wonder that Ahab could look upon Elijah and say 'O mine enemy,' 1Kgs.21.20, for he exposed all that was wrong in the nation. In the case of Micaiah, 1Kgs.22.7-28, another prophet, he too was faithful in his service, but Ahab said 'I hate him,' 1Kgs.22.8. In the New Testament period, the Lord Jesus was treated in the same way, Jn.15.18, and as his followers we can expect the same treatment, Jn.15.19. The more comfortable we feel in the world and the more enjoyable we find their practices, then the less fellowship we are enjoying with the Lord. Remember the words of Rom.12.2: 'Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould' (Phillips Translation).

• *Against the Word of God*

1Kgs.21.1-16 record the sad incident of Naboth's vineyard in Jezreel. Although we shall return to the narrative in the subsequent paper, it is important to outline why it was inappropriate for Ahab to even desire, let alone take, the vineyard that belonged to his neighbour. 1Kgs.21.3 illustrates that Naboth had a better grasp of the Scriptures than the king, Num.36.9 records that the land was to be passed down through the family line of Naboth, not used as a means of trade. Such was the faithfulness of Naboth that he was not prepared to sell the land for royal favour or material gain, 1Kgs.21.2. Are we as faithful to the Word as Naboth? Are you prepared to compromise some truth for personal gain?

(c) *His Idolatry*

The first king over the Northern Kingdom of Israel was Jeroboam, 1Kgs.12.20, and he established the worship of false gods (v28) that bore sad resemblance to the rebellious activities of the Israelites in Ex.32.4-8. As Ahab modelled himself on Jeroboam, 1Kgs.16.31, and with the association of his wife, Jezebel, he soon introduced false gods into the nation (v32-33). The idols were of a twofold variety:

• *Baal*

Baal was believed to control fertility in agriculture, beasts and mankind and thus it was important to secure their favour, especially in areas such as Israel where rainfall was low. 1Kgs.19.18 illustrates the powerful influence that Baal exerted over the nation and Jer.19.5 points to its depraved practices.

• *Asherah* (Darby Translation)

During the period of the judges, both Baal and Asherah figured prominently amongst the Israelites, Jud.2.13; 3.7; 6.30. Asherah was said to be figured as a wooden image implanted into the ground and adjacent to an altar of Baal. Sadly Ahab was not alone in his associations with Asherah, Manasseh introduced it into the Temple at Jerusalem, 2Kgs.21.3,7, but Josiah later burnt it, 2Kgs.23.4.

Whilst it is sad to observe that Ahab introduced images into a nation that had such strong connections with the true God, it is even more solemn to note the development in his sin:

- Initially Ahab 'served Baal', 1Kgs.16.31. Obviously under the influence of his wife he was introduced to such images. *Bad associations!*
- The next step for Ahab was that he 'worshipped', 1Kgs.16.31, the false gods. The bad associations led to improper *activities!*
- The final stage for Ahab was that he pursued godless *aspirations!* 'He reared up an altar for Baal,' 1Kgs.16.32, and 'made a grove (Asherah)', 1Kgs.16.33. His desire was to increase the popularity of the false gods, and 1Kgs.18.19 would suggest that he had some success.

Surely the record of Ahab's idolatry is proof that sin has a 'snow-ball' effect. It may all start with the company we keep, but soon it will reflect in our outward activities and finally the sin, no matter its nature, will become an imbedded desire. Surely prevention is better than cure: be careful as to who your 'friends' are!

In our next paper we shall consider Ahab's industry, influence, interests and immaturity.

See paper 1 for details of Bibliography/Figures —to be continued (D.V.)

PAPERS ON PROPHECY

by The Late W. W. Fereday (written in 1897/98)

VOLUME 2

12(b)—Christ's Millennial Reign

2. The Heavenly Saints are to have part with Christ in this dominion. By “the heavenly saints” we mean not merely the Church of this dispensation, but all whose portion is above.* We observe at least four classes of these in Scripture: (1) The Old Testament believers; (2) the Church of God; (3) the latter-day witnesses who lose their lives for the testimony of Jesus and for the Word of God; and (4) those who refuse to worship the beast and his image. The first two of these classes will be removed to heaven at the Lord's descent into the air, in order to facilitate their coming with Him at His public appearing, 1Thess.4.13-18; 1Cor.15.23,51-55; Col.3.4. The third and fourth classes will apparently be raised at His appearing, in time to have part in His administration of the kingdom, Rev. 6.9-11; 15.2-4; 20.4. All these are to share the reign of Christ. “The Saints of the Most High (or, high places) shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever,” Dan.7.18.

Here a difficulty may present itself to the minds of some of our readers. It has been asked: “Are the heavenly saints to be actually on the earth during the kingdom?” By no means; our home is above. Even Christ Himself will not be personally present on earth throughout that period, else where the need for a “prince” to represent Him in Jerusalem? Ezek.44.1-3; 45.7-25, etc. Matt.13.41-43, may help us here. First we read of *The Kingdom of the Son*, out of which all evil will be purged. This is the earthly part evidently. Then we read of *The Kingdom of the Father*, and it is in that that we are to have our place; “Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” Our position in relation to the earth is thus compared to that of the sun. We shall be the world's light-givers, and dispensers of divine blessing. We shall visit the earth with Christ at His appearing, and probably afterwards; but our own proper habitation is the Father's house above.

The thought of such dignity should influence our walk in the world now. This is what the Apostle brought before the Corinthians, when, in utter forgetfulness of what they had been called to, they carried their grievances against each other before the world. “Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? How much more things that pertain to this life?” 1Cor.6.1-3. Our association with Christ in the coming kingdom is thus referred to as a truth well-known in that day. How grievous the fall when Christians not only lost sight of their own future place as the world's rulers and judges, but even admitted

* The saints of the present period will, of course, have a closer and more intimate association with Christ than others. When He fills all in all, the Church, His body, has a special place, Eph.1.22,23.

the idea of standing before the Great White Throne to be judged themselves! The notion of a general judgment, to which we refer, is a serious dishonour to the accomplished work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Ere we leave this point, another important consideration must be briefly noticed. Our respective places in the coming kingdom will be allotted according to our walk and service in the present age. To the faithful servant the Lord will say, "I will make thee ruler over *many* things," Matt.25.21-23. This is frequently brought forward in the epistles as an incentive to godliness of walk and diligence in service, 2Tim.4.1,2; 2Thess.1.5; 2Pet.1.11. Let every Christian reader lay this seriously to heart. Suppose any to deliberately choose a path of ease and honour in this world, as the carnal Corinthians of old, will they — can they stand well in the approaching kingdom? 1Cor.4.8-14. Impossible. But if, on the other hand, any are willing to let the world go by for Christ's sake, content to bear the cross day by day, will He fail to reward them suitably in the day of His glory? In this way David acted towards the companions of his distress when he reached the throne. The Greater than David will be equally mindful of every bit of faithfulness to His Word and Name.

—to be continued (D.V.)

THE LORD'S SUPPER

by H. W. Graham (Eiré)

Please read the following passages of Holy Scripture carefully and prayerfully. Try to read them as if for the first time, leaving aside any ideas you have previously held on the subject: Matt.26.26-30; Mk.14.22-26; Lk.22.14-23; Acts 2.41-43; 20.6-11; 1Cor.10.16-21; 11.17-34. As you do so we venture to say that you will be surprised by the absolute simplicity of the whole proceedings. There is no reference to a consecrated building, no mention of a church official to preside, no consecration of the emblems, no dispensing of the supper, no receiving of the communion, no word of a sacrament, no partaking of the body and blood, no feeding of the soul. Most certainly there is no altar, no sacrifice, no mysterious movements nor mutterings, no mass.

When the ideas and practices added by men have been removed we can see the true picture. A company of disciples of Christ gathered together as a church of God, on the first day of the week. A loaf of bread and a cup containing the fruit of the vine. Eating the bread and drinking the cup together in remembrance of the Lord Jesus. A declaring of His death and a looking forward to His return.

It is the Lord's supper for it was instituted by the Lord. It is not the Father's supper for His children; it is the Lord's supper for his disciples. Fatherhood is not prominent; Lordship is. Please note the repetition of the title Lord in 1Cor.11,20,23,26,27,29,32. The Lord commanded: "This do." It is the disciple's place to do this.

The Lord presided at the institution and left no successor. So at the celebration no president is seen; neither pope, patriarch, prelate, priest, pastor, preacher, nor presbyter presides. All are disciples. None has the “right” to be there. It is most unholy daring to claim the “right” to partake. The Lord alone has “rights” there. Those who partake gladly own that it is of purest grace that they find themselves present.

Those who partake are a company of believing sinners, disciples of Christ, who have been baptized, Acts 2.41,42. It is not a casual meeting of believers. They have come together as a church, a church of God, a local congregation, 1Cor.11.18-22. The Church comes together in one place, the gathered saints partake of the Lord's supper. It is a collective act of the church, 1Cor.10.16,17. To carry the emblems to those who are not able to be present is an imitation of Rome.

The Lord Jesus took bread, the bread that was at hand for another purpose, the Passover. He took the cup and only incidentally do we know that it contained the fruit of the vine. The emblems are the loaf and the cup.

He gave thanks just as He did in feeding the multitude in Matt.15.36. He blessed just as in feeding the multitude in Matt.14.19. Indeed Matthew and Mark use “bless” in the case of the bread and “give thanks” in the case of the cup, showing that both words express the same thought. It does not speak of giving thanks “for the bread” or “for the cup.” There is no thought of consecration, much less of transubstantiation. That which was eaten was bread and they drank of the cup. “This is my body” is no more literal than “This cup is the new covenant.”

The Lord said: “This do in remembrance of me.” Not a word about eating the body and blood of the Lord, nor feeding on Christ. The Lord's supper is not the subject in Jn.6 which was spoken some time before the institution. In that chapter eating and drinking are symbolic, meaning believing and coming, Jn.6.35,51-58. In the supper the eating and drinking are literal. The bread and the cup bring before the Christian the incarnation and death of the Son of God with all that these imply. The partaking in common of the bread and cup signifies communion, fellowship, partnership in the one Saviour and the one sacrifice. All are of one heart and mind in this. Communion is not something given to us or received by us, it is the collective enjoyment of one common object.

As well as the remembrance it was also said that “Ye do show the Lord's death.” It is not a representation, as the mass claims to be, but a declaration, a proclamation. Just as in baptism there is a declaration made, so also in the Lord's supper each partaker testifies to his individual sharing in the common faith, and in the results that flow from the Lord's atoning death.

It is to be carried out “till He come.” When that event takes place the whole church will be caught up into His presence to be for ever with the Lord. Then we shall see Himself and shall need no emblems to bring Him before us. We shall see Him whom having not seen we love.

The eating and the drinking are to be done worthily, in a worthy manner. We

must partake of the supper with an examined, exercised heart and with spiritual discernment of its significance. It is neither a social occasion nor a fellowship meal. It is the Lord's supper and is meant to bring the hearts of the saints into a state of collective occupation with Christ Himself. This will always result in the outpouring of worship to our blessed God.

Dear child of God, your Lord and Saviour, with the cross looming before Him, said: "This do." You, in gratitude of heart, should seek to do just what He said according to the example of the disciples in Acts 20.7

WHEN? Upon the first day of the week . . .
WHO? the disciples
WHERE? came together
WHY? to break bread.

WISDOM'S HOUSE — No. 4

by J. Adams (N. Ireland)

In our former considerations of the house in Prov.9, we have noted: the CONSTRUCTION, the CONFLICTS and COURAGE with respect to the house. We shall now consider:

CATERING IN THE HOUSE:

We read in Prov.9.2, 'she hath furnished her table.' There is the necessity for Milk for the lambs; Meat for the developed; Medicine for the sick. These are essential to ensure the good health of those in the house.

We find seven ingredients for the diet of those who partake of the table in Gen.43.11.

1. 'The best fruits of the land' = EDIFYING MINISTRY.

It must be the best. Nothing stale but fresh from the Sanctuary. For instance, three things are mentioned in Lk.11.11,12, stones, serpents and scorpions. A stone is a hard ministry; a serpent is a dangerous ministry; and a scorpion is the worst of all, a disastrous ministry. None of this will come into the compass of 1Cor.14.3, 'edification, and exhortation, and comfort.' This will be produced by waiting on each other as led by the Spirit.

2. 'A little Balm' = HEALING MINISTRY.

Putting on the wound that which will first draw out the corruption and then that which will bring in the healing process.

3. 'A little Honey' = CHRIST EXALTING MINISTRY.

This is sweet and will attract the bees. Such ministry will attract the saints and therefore acts also as a gathering ministry. However, it has to be placed accessibly. Too often it is out of reach and above the heads of the saints.

4. 'Spices' = HEART WARMING MINISTRY.

There is no mention of the amount, it is an unnamed quantity. The saints who have become cold at heart need a ministry which will be stirring up. Spice is not put on a wound, it is for the heart.

5. 'Myrrh' = LOVING MINISTRY.

This is love shown firstly to Christ then to His own. In 1Cor.13 the myrrh is missing. What we have, what we do and what we profess are all of no value apart from the 'myrrh' of love.

6. 'Nuts' = PREPARED MINISTRY.

When feeding the sheep we move from the milk to the nuts. This ministry needs to be broken down to get to the kernel. Those who feed the saints need to break the shell to allow the hungry souls to benefit from the meat. Doctrine must be practically applied and not taught in a vacuum.

7. 'Almonds' = FRUITFUL MINISTRY.

Aaron's rod that budded brings before us fruitfulness and that out of death. Out of the deadness of a life without God there is now the production of fruit for His glory. Ministry should be designed to produce such in the lives of the saints. Spring has come, the winter is past and there ought to be the visible indications of growth showing the life of God in the soul. Happy are the saints where the table is spread with these dainties.

THE CHARGE OF THE HOUSE:

Prov.9.3. 'She crieth upon the highest places of the city.' This may find its counterpart in 2Tim.4.2,5, 'Preach the Word ... Rebuke, Reprove, Exhort ... Watch, Endure, Evangelise. These are seven exercises which must be seen as we view the progress of the house. The preaching (Gospel) or the teaching (Ministry) of the Word. In Nehemiah's day there was a cry heard, "Bring the Book." We all need to bring the book, in whatever sphere of service we are involved. May that desire increase and may there be more diligence as we find the Book. As we approach the Book we often feel rebuked. So little spiritual progress can be seen in our lives. We feel so far removed from the standard laid down. Then at times we are rebuked by ministry given from the Book and so often reproved. We must ever be thankful for those dear brethren who watch over us and would so often exhort us in the ways that please the Lord. For that spirit of endurance to continue teaching in spite of so little response.

THE CHARACTER OF THE HOUSE:

The character of those who make up the house. Prov.9.3, 'she hath sent forth her maidens.' The individuals give character to the gathering and so to the house. In Jms.3.17 we find seven lovely maidens.

1. The 'Pure' maiden. Purity is a must in any assembly. Note well Heb.12.14.
2. The 'Peaceable' maiden. Ps.119.165 — Never be a disturber.
3. The 'Gentle' maiden. Meek like Moses.
4. The Tranquil maiden, 'Easy to be entreated'. In contrast to a Belial kind of person, 1Sam.25.17. Such a son or daughter cannot be spoken to.

5. The Fruitful maiden, 'Full of mercy'. Good fruits, just like Dorcas.
6. The Unbiased maiden, 'Without Partiality'. Very scarce at times, yet very necessary. Jms.2.2.
7. The Straight maiden, 'Without Hypocrisy'.

What a pleasure to meet saints and assemblies where these maidens can be seen. Job's three daughters are thus named as they bring out these precious traits, Job 42.14.

'Jemima' = Light of the morning. In this we see soul beauty. We must be honest.

'Kezia' = Breath of the garden. In this we see soul experience. We must be holy.

'Kerenhappuch' = Fullness of blessing. In this we see soul praise. We must be happy.

THE CONVICTION OF THE HOUSE:

Prov.9.4, 'Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither.' We need conviction as to the place. If there was more conviction there would be more loyalty and less departure.

There is one place of gathering as we have already seen in the beginning of our study, Acts 2.41.

There is one Person to whom the saints gather, our Lord Jesus Christ, Matt.18.20; 1Cor.1.10.

The believers now baptized, were added unto them. This is the moment when exercised believers are received into the fellowship of believers who meet and gather according to the Word of God. In Matt.18.20, the following features can be seen. There is a:

| | |
|----------------------|--------------|
| Place of gathering. | Where |
| Plurality of people. | Two or three |
| Pattern followed. | Are gathered |
| Partnership formed. | Together |
| Power acknowledged. | In My Name |
| Principle honoured. | There |
| Presence felt. | Am I |
| Promise given. | In the midst |
| Praise heard. | Of them. |

In Lk.22.11 some things are said about the place, it is an upper room, above street level. The place of high spiritual activity. Not the language of the street, but the language of Heaven. It is already furnished. We bring nothing into the place, nor do we take anything out of it. All the furnishings have been supplied by Him. They are found in 1Cor.12, where Paul speaks of diversities of gifts and he teaches how they function in harmony to the edification of the body. Not all the gifts in one person but each having some. Not a person choosing his gift or being educated for it, but God has set members as it has pleased Him. We need to know what He has given us and use it in humility and thus maintain harmony.

We trust these simple things will help to strengthen the testimonies of the Lord's people in days of declension. *—concluded*

David's Mighty Men

2 Sam. 23.8-39 and 1 Chron.11.10-47

by D. S. Parrack, Somerset, England

Paper 2 — BENAIAH

Another of those whose prowess marked him out as being “more honourable than the thirty” though “he attained not to the first three,” was Benaiah (Jah has built). It is encouraging to see that while his activities were undertaken in differing circumstances than those of Eleazar, they earned him the same recognition. Whilst we are encouraged to “covet earnestly the best gifts,” 1Cor.12.31, we remember that Timothy needed the exhortation to “neglect not the gift that is in thee,” 1Tim.4.14. God does not wish us to be so taken up with what we would like to do, that we refrain from doing that for which he has given us ability. We do not read of Benaiah, as we do of Abishai for instance, that “he lifted up his spear against three hundred and slew them.” His achievements were not commenced in the public eye nor were they of outstanding spectacle. “He slew two lionlike men of Moab; he went down also and slew a lion in the midst of a pit in time of snow.” A cornered lion, in the treacherous conditions of a snowy day, was something which could very easily have been given a wide berth, with the pious hope that in such circumstances it would probably die anyway. Who was around to see such an undertaking and to give the deserved acclaim? Solomon urges us, however, “whatever thy hand findeth to do, do with thy might,” Ecc.9.10, and we have the promise of the Lord Jesus that, “thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly,” Matt.6.6. This is not to say that recognition will come down here, but Paul does assure us that whilst “the good works of some are manifest beforehand — they that are otherwise cannot be hid,” 1Tim.5.25. To have left the lion may have been prudent, but could have easily exposed to danger any unwary or unsuspecting traveller passing that way. It is also, so often the case in assemblies, that a potential danger is not dealt with on the grounds that if left well alone it will disappear. This hope is seldom borne out in practice. “Know ye not,” asks Paul, “that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. Purge out therefore the old leaven that ye may be a new lump as ye are unleavened,” 1Cor.5.6-7. We are unfortunately prone to leaving such problems until God Himself has to intervene directly because of our laxity. This may bring chastening to a degree which would not have occurred had we lived up to our responsibilities, “for if we would judge ourselves we should not be judged,” 1Cor.11.31 (i.e. governmentally). In dealing with a little known but potentially deadly danger, Benaiah was rendering incalculable service to his fellow men as we may to our fellow saints.

Having so acted in obscurity, he is now called on for more public service. This is a principle in activities for the Lord, for “he that is faithful in that which is least,

is faithful also in much," Lk.16.10. He has proved himself trustworthy and is now faced with a situation very like that which his leader, David, had faced in the past. "An Egyptian, a man of great stature five cubits high, (Goliath was six cubits and a span) and in the Egyptian's hand was a spear like a weaver's beam." How awe-inspiring a sight, but how comforting to be able to look to that even more terrible challenger of God and His people and to remember his defeat. This is not a lion lurking in a pit but a direct challenge to God's people. Such a challenge must be dealt with publicly and in a convincing manner. In dealing with those causing upset at Corinth, Paul is quick to disillusion them concerning their sneering jibe, "his letters are weighty and powerful but his bodily presence is weak and his speech contemptible. Let such an one think this," he says, "that such as we are in word by letters when we are absent, such will we be also in deed when we are present," 2Cor.10.10-11. He leaves them in no doubt that he will use the authority given him by the Lord to safeguard the believers from those he calls "false apostles, deceitful workers, - (Satan's) ministers," 2Cor.11.13-15. Whilst we cannot claim authority in the way that Paul could, as an apostle, it is given to brethren to use the authority of the Word of God in the defence of saints. The degree to which we can do this effectively is dependent on the extent to which the truth of that word has been appropriated for ourselves and the measure of our preparedness to rest solely and confidently upon it. Benaiah does not go down to the enemy with an even bigger spear than that wielded by the Egyptian but with a staff. David in like manner, rejecting the armour of Saul, used a sling to slay Goliath, the same sling as was normally used by him to head off any sheep that were tending to stray and bring them back to the security of the flock. Both these men demonstrate that they were predominantly concerned with caring rather than warring, but that which had its primary use in the good of the sheep, could be used with devastating effect upon intruding enemies. So, while we read of "the sincere milk of the word," 1Pet.2.2 and "the comfort of the Scriptures," Rom.15.4 we are exhorted to include in our armour "the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God," Eph.6.17.

Against a man armed as was Benaiah, all the might of the enemy was of no avail and he was slain ignominiously with his own spear. What exploits might we achieve if we are prepared to accept and act on the truth that "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds," 2Cor.10.4.

Benaiah began in a small way and gradually developed and widened his sphere of service and usefulness. So much so that towards the end of David's reign we find him "over the Cherethites and Pelethites," 2Sam.20.23, the executioners and couriers, an elite palace guard. Later still, after the defection and execution of Joab, he reached the highest point of military rank and status, being appointed over the host of Solomon's army. May we too, by diligent attention to each service we seek to render, by cultivating an understanding and appreciation of the Word of God, and through it He of whom it speaks, know what it is to "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ," 2Pet.3.18. May our lives show by spiritual growth and development that it is true of us that "Jah has built."

—to be continued (D.V.)

PSALM 90

by C. Jones (Cardiff)

PAPER 2

Sin and Wrath, v7-11

Sin involves being unrestrained: instead of doing God's will, doing that which is right in one's own eyes, Jud.21.25. It is "... transgression of the law," 1Jn.3.4: it is lawlessness. The children of Israel had sinned, they had disobeyed God. They had failed to trust the eternal sovereign God and had refused to go up and possess the Promised land.

As a consequence of sin, they came under the wrath of God, v7, and were condemned to wander in the wilderness for forty years before going into Canaan. There is no such thing as sin hidden from God, v8, Ps.139.1-4, and v9-11 stress again the consequences of sin and the uncertainty, fear and distress caused to unbelievers by the inevitability of death. Those over twenty years of age knew the distressing truth that they would not reach Canaan and that they would die in the wilderness, Num.14.26-33. The wonderful truth for believers, however, is that the Lord Jesus Christ came "... that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage," Heb.2.14,15.

Moses mentions a life span of seventy years and adds that if a person lives longer the extra years are attended by increasing problems, v10, Ecc.21.1. This, of course, is true, and yet an aged believer, although longing to depart and be with the Lord, 2Cor.5.8 which is far better, Phil.1.21,23, so often has a peace that passes understanding, Phil.4.7 and a glowing testimony based on many years of walking with God.

Our life spans are limited as a consequence of sin. We read in Rom.5.12 "... by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." We do well to meditate on the holiness of God and His hatred of sin, Hab.1.13. His ways are not our ways, Isa.55.8 and the greater our appreciation of the power, grace and mercy of God, and of the love of God revealed to us in the life, sufferings and substitutionary death of the Lord Jesus Christ, the greater will be our hatred of sin, our love for God and gratitude for the wonderful salvation the Lord procured for us. Meditation on these things will increase our desire to obey and serve Him.

When we consider the dark despair and hopelessness felt by the children of Israel which are depicted in this psalm, and consider that the adults knew they would die in the desert, it all brings into sharp contrast the outlook for the believer. The eternal God planned our salvation before the world was. It is all of grace and through the suffering of the Lord Jesus Christ and the shedding of His precious blood, 1Pet.1.18,19. God "... saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, but is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel," 2Tim.1.9,10. If the Lord does not return before the believer dies,

1Thess.4.13-18 then death is the gateway to eternal bliss. In the light of all that we know and experience, what kind of people ought we to be "... in all holy conversation and godliness," 2Pet.3.11.

God's wrath against sin cannot be exaggerated, v11. We read "... our God is a consuming fire," Heb.12.29, Deut.4.24, and "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God," Heb.10.31. Just as our finite minds can by no means fully appreciate the love of God, Eph.3.19 nor the extent of the suffering of the Lord on the Cross, neither can we appreciate the awful wrath of God against sin. The flood in the days of Noah and the destruction of Sodom, Lk.17.26-29 give some insight into the extent of God's hatred of sin and His wrath. The closer we are to God the greater will be our appreciation of God's hatred of sin and our sensitivity to sin in ourselves. Also, the closer we are to God the greater will be our love and our reverence for Him and our awe of the Majesty on high.

Grace and Blessing, v12-17

The earlier verses of the psalm have been a preparation for the prayer which Moses now makes to God. There has been a stress, in the earlier part of the psalm, on the eternal, unchanging God who cares for and protects His people and hates sin. The nature and brevity of life have also been brought before us and Moses' prayer in verse 12 would make us consider our responsibility regarding the use of the time remaining in our lives. The number of our days is determined by God and we need to ask God to teach us to use time, energy and all the resources He has given to us, with the wisdom which only He can provide. God gives us wisdom when we study His Word and are taught by the Spirit as we meditate on what we have read.

We have today to use, we are not guaranteed tomorrow, Prov.27.1, Jas.4.13-15. Life is uncertain and the Lord could return at any second. If we have sought wisdom from God to use our time to His glory, in accordance with His perfect will, then He will supply the strength for us to complete the work He has given us to do, Deut.33.25. Our eternal, unchanging God gives us each day. His compassion never changes, it is "...new every morning..." and great is His faithfulness, Lam.3.23. Consideration of our responsibility for the use of time, that is our stewardship of this scarce resource, might lead us to see a need to adjust our priorities in the light of eternity and the Judgment Seat of the Lord Jesus Christ. We need to make the best use of every opportunity to serve God because the days are indeed evil, Eph.5.16.

Moses prays in verse 13, asking God to have mercy on "Thy servants." He intercedes on behalf of the children of Israel. They were being punished by God but were still His people. We saw in verse 1 that the word used there for Lord was *Adonai* (Sovereign Lord, Ruler). The word used for Lord in verse 13 is *Jehovah*, the covenant name of the God of Israel. This name speaks of the Eternal, Self-sufficient One. It is used in connection with God's purpose in redemption, Exod.3.14-16, 6.3. Moses knew God would again be merciful to His people and wondered how long it would be before His mercy and blessing would be seen. God was merciful and the next generation entered Canaan.

God's chastisement only benefits and "...yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby," Heb.12.11. Moses prays in verse 14 that they may receive mercy from God so that the rest of their brief days might be spent in God's mercy and grace. The disbelief of the Israelites was sin and sin comes between God and His people. But when God chastises His people and this is followed by confession of the sin and true repentance, God, who is "...rich in

mercy..." Eph.2.4, will bring them back into blessing. As believers, we know that "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness," 1Jn.1.9. If we repent and confess our sins, they will be forgiven and we can go forward and experience once again God's mercy and grace in our lives.

Moses asks, in verse 15, that they might experience as many years of gladness as they have experienced years in which God has afflicted them. He asks that instead of suffering under righteous judgment they might once again see God graciously working for them.

In verse 16 Moses prays for blessing on their children. After Kadesh-barnea, Israel's future in Canaan lay with the younger generation, for they would go forward to the Promised Land. In the days in which we live young children and young believers are being bombarded with false teaching and alluring advertising of all manner of products and activities. We need to pray for them fervently that they might be protected from the evil around them and that they might be blessed by God. Moses finally, in verse 17, asks God's blessing on their work. Here, when Moses speaks of the beauty of the "Lord our God" he uses the word *Jehovah* for Lord, which we have already considered, and the word *Elohim* for God. *Elohim* speaks of God's creatorial and governing power, majesty and omnipotence. If we have ordered our time, and if our work for Him is in accordance with His will and is done in the strength He provides and to His glory, then it will be blessed. Without Him we can do nothing, Jn.15.5, but with Him "...all things are possible," Matt.19.26. The believer who is empowered and directed by God will experience joy and satisfaction in serving God and He will be glorified. Believers are blessed in this life and can look forward to blessings in eternity. In the light of what we have been considering regarding our eternal, loving, holy God and Father and our brief lives and tendency to sin, we would do well to take to heart God's word to us in 1Cor.15.58, "...be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."
—(concluded)

Elisha and The Pot of Oil

by R. Webb (England)

2 Kings 4.1-7

In 1Kgs.3 we have Elisha ministering to the necessities of Kings. In chapter 4 He ministers to a widow and her sons. There is room in the Divine compassions for both the exalted and the lowly. The widow cried to Elisha for help and he responds, 'Tell me, what hast thou in the house?'. She said, 'Thine handmaid hath not any thing in the house save a pot of oil.' What a pitiful story is here, suggestive of the meditations which perplexed Asaph in Ps.73. The question as to why the godly suffer while the ungodly prosper has frequently been a sore puzzle to tried hearts. The dear woman had nothing left but debts and slavery for her sons.

Unbelief is apt to cry in such circumstances, '... all these things are against me,' Gen.42.36. But we know all is under His control and, 'that all things work together for good to them that love God,' Rom.8.28.

The greater the emergency the greater the opportunity for God to show Himself on behalf of His people. She sought the aid of the Man of God. This title is first applied to Moses in Deut.33.1. Moses cut himself adrift from the world so that he might be wholly for God. The Church in these days needs men of God.

What had Elisha for the distressed widow? Nothing as far as his own resources were concerned, yet he more than met her need. What have we to meet the need of souls? The knowledge and provision of, God.

What hast thou in the house? Nothing save a pot of oil, but there were great potentialities in the pot of oil though the widow knew it not. Whatever else we lack, every Christian has his or her pot of oil, i.e. the power of the Holy Spirit within. Let us use this in faith, and all our difficulties become as nothing. Elisha tells the widow to borrow empty vessels from her neighbours and fill them all. This she did, in private, until there remained no more empty vessels. Now observe a remarkable thing, the oil flowed while a vessel remained to take it. It was only when the son said there is not a vessel more that the oil stayed. What a great lesson is here — the blessing is limited by men only. In chapter 3 the Kings obtained water according to the depth of the ditches that were prepared. It is always man who limits the blessing. the widow's need was now met, so the prophet bade her, 'go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children on the rest.'

We have a debt to discharge, which only the power of the Spirit can enable us to discharge. Paul felt this deeply in Rom. 1.14, 'I am a debtor both to the Greeks and to the Barbarians, to the wise and unwise.' How he paid that debt is described in Rom.15.1. 'I have fully preached the Gospel of Christ.' We must pay our debt and for this the power of the Spirit is necessary and all sufficient. Elisha added, 'live thou and thy children on the rest.'

The power of the Spirit within enables us to live for Christ. Paul in Gal.2.20 says, 'I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.'

MY CONVERSION AND CALL (60)

by J. Thompson (N. Ireland)

I was born on the fourth of February, 1921 in Upper Ballinderry, County Antrim. In our home, no one was saved and the Bible was not read, yet there was a measure of the fear of the Lord and a great respect for the Lord's Day. On that day only essential work was done, all shoes were polished and potatoes washed on Saturday. We were sent to Sunday School and the religious service as soon as we were able to go.

When I was six years old, the late Robert Curran and William Bunting had five weeks of gospel meetings in Killultagh Orange Hall, where my father was Master, and, as some were under conviction of sin, they had a few more weeks in a farmhouse on the Tansey Road,

I remember one morning, early, being with my mother in the kitchen as she was baking bread, when my father came in and told her how he was saved during the

night. As a lost sinner he had received Christ as his Saviour. I remember him putting his pipe and tobacco into the fire; 2Cor.5.7.

“This day is salvation come to this house,” Lk.19.9, was true of our house, as with the house of Zacchaeus. My father bought a Bible, read it and sought to obey its teaching. He was later baptised as a believer and added to the assembly at Wallace Avenue, Lisburn, where he “continued steadfastly” until his home call to heaven. He also gathered his children, especially on the Lord’s Day and read the Word and prayed with us. He often read Rom.3, Jn.3 and Lk.16, regarding sin, salvation, heaven and hell and eternity. These Scriptures and truths never left me; they spoiled me for the world, its sins, pleasures and religions. I had learned the truth, “Ye must be born again” and it left me without peace until I was saved on the twenty-sixth of February, 1937 at the age of sixteen. Mother went to the Church of Ireland, loved her prayer book and was slow to bow to “thus saith the Lord.”

Early in 1937 gospel meetings commenced in a little hall on the Tansey Road, where a Mr. William Collins and others carried on a Sunday School work and a gospel meeting every Lord’s Day. I began to attend these meetings and came under deep conviction of sin.

On the twenty-sixth of February, I left the hall alone, as I wanted to be alone with God. That night I knew that it was my “time of visitation” and I was faced with the choice between Christ or the world that crucified Him, sin or salvation, heaven or hell for eternity. The desire to be saved had swallowed up every other desire and longing only for salvation, I called upon God, like the publican of Lk.18. “God be merciful to me a sinner.” Alone with God under the canopy of heaven, away from every distracting influence, God opened my eyes to “behold the Lamb of God” and to understand as never before that He died for me and for my sins. That moment, as a repentant sinner, trusting Him as my Substitute and Saviour my burden of sin was gone and the peace of God, real and divine, entered and I knew that all was well for eternity. On the road I just thanked God for giving His Son to die for me and for saving me. The words of Jn.3.36 gave divine assurance “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life.” The second half of the verse is equally true: “He that believeth not the Son shall not see life but the wrath of God abideth on him.”

Long before I was saved, I had a burden about my dear mother’s salvation, and as soon as I was saved, went straight home to her, put my arms about her and told her: “God has saved me and I wanted to tell you first”. I remember her reply “I am glad to hear it, for you needed it.” I recall my next words “Mother, you need it also. You are a good mother, but your goodness and your religion will never fit you for Heaven. Ye must be born again is God’s message to us all.” There was some resentment and some tears, but the Word of God got in.

Right away I obtained some gospel tracts and began to distribute these and to pray for the salvation of the unsaved. If I had not been already saved, on the twelfth of July, I would have been away with the Orangemen. Instead I got a bag of tracts and distributed them in the field at Ballymacash to all who would receive them. Today I recall some with whom I went to school; they are long since gone into eternity and were never awakened and saved.

In April 1939, when I was eighteen, I joined the R.U.C. and wherever I went I sought to take the Gospel to both policemen and civilians. Eternity will reveal the results. When stationed in Holywood, at the time when Lord Craigavon was Prime Minister, news reached me that there were gospel meetings in the Tansy Hall and Mr. Bob Dagnell, a good sound gospeller was preaching. It was possible to ride my bicycle from Holywood to home, take my mother to the meeting, cycle back to Holywood, in time to go on night duty at Lord Craigavon's residence. My mother heard the Gospel for the first time and in the mercy of God, was awakened and saved.

Later when stationed at Comber, I met a young lady who is now my wife. After exercise in prayer, we were baptised together in Apsley Street Gospel Hall and received into assembly fellowship on the same Lord's Day, each to a different assembly. We were married in March 1945, happily and in the Lord. I believe marriage to be the next important step after conversion, binding for life and indissoluble by man. "What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder," Matt.19.6.

Having been transferred to Newry in 1944, we set up our home there at Courtney Hill and became increasingly involved in Gospel work. In 1946 I was promoted and transferred to Roslea in County Fermanagh and in a year was put in charge of the station.

Our first child, David, was taken to Heaven at ten months. I remember getting on my knees beside his little body and saying to God "I have learned the solemn lesson that this world is not worth living for." "Only one life, t'will soon be past and only what's done in the will of God will last."

God graciously saved a number of the men stationed at Roslea and raised them up as living monuments of the grace of God. This gave much joy and encouragement to Mr. and Mrs. William Deering, also to the assemblies at Clones and Monaghan and all who came to help in the Gospel each Lord's Day.

Every Saturday evening when possible, the Gospel was preached in the open air in towns and villages in the Counties of Monaghan and Cavan. In Bailieborough, County Cavan, every Saturday for three months, the Gospel was preached, with 20 to 30 helpers from assemblies at Newry, Drumlough, Gransha and even Belfast. Mr. John Zebedee of Ebenezer, Belfast, Mr. Sandy McMurray of Donegal Road, and Dr. T. Hagan often helped us.

With Mr. Allen we had a few weeks' Gospel meetings in Stonewall Gospel Hall in Bailieborough with some fruit. The Deering family, Mr. and Mrs. Totten of Monaghan, my wife and many others laboured consistently to care for all who came to help in the Gospel. The judgment seat of Christ will bring a full reward.

In 1951 with promotion just ahead, after exercise in prayer, I made known my exercise to leave my secular employment and in absolute dependence on God alone, to devote all my time and energy to the Lord's work. A letter of commendation was given to me, signed by leading brethren in the Clones, Monaghan, Stonewall and Newry assemblies. All except one of those who signed are now with Christ.

"Having therefore obtained help from God, I continue until this day," Acts 26.22.

Good Tidings from Heaven

“URGENT”

The very sight of this word on an envelope or document compels us to act immediately to discover what is so demanding and important and cannot wait until another day. You would consider it foolhardy to ignore this word as the consequences of so doing could be catastrophic and costly and yet my dear friend unsaved, you are neglecting the salvation of your soul and there is without doubt nothing more urgent. No business crisis, no political dilemma, no health problem, no social or medical appointment can be more urgent than the salvation of your soul.

There are several considerations that cause me to make such a bold statement. I will ask you to ponder three soberly — death, the Coming of the Lord and the possibility of you wearying God by your persistent procrastination. You cannot forecast the specific time or date of any of these events and so it is most important that you are saved before any of them overtakes you.

Death—“It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.” Heb.9.27. “For we must needs die...” 2Sam.14.14. “The wages of sin is death...” Rom.6.3.

Some wealthy people in America have instructed that their bodies be deep-frozen and stored in refrigerated warehouses, in the hope that one day there will be a cure for all known diseases and then they will be revived to continue living in that elusive Utopia of which they dream. They are, however ignorant of this important fact that the body is only a house of clay and cannot live without a soul. “There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death:” Ecl.8.8. At the moment of death, the immortal soul leaves the body for heaven or hell and you have not the power to recall it from that unseen world. God alone possesses that power and will reunite body and soul in His own time. Think much of this, my dear friend—when you die, you leave your body and if not saved, you go immediately to hell.

The Coming of the Lord—Though the world is full of scoffers who make light of this great event, it will undoubtedly take place in spite of their unbelief. It must, for Christ Himself said, “And if I go...I will come again”, Jn.14.3

Angels announced to the disciples who had watched the Saviour ascending back to the Father’s house, “This same Jesus ... shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.” Acts1.11.

Paul the Apostle wrote to the believers in Thessalonica, “The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven...” 1Thess.4.16.

Dear reader, are you ready for the Coming again of the Lord Jesus? If not, this great event will sever your every hope of salvation and in a moment will seal your fate. Matt.25 teaches that only those who were ready went in and the door was shut.

Wearying God—There are many who presume upon the mercy and long-suffering of God but He has warned, “My Spirit shall not always strive with man.” Gen.6.3. “Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also?” Isa.7.13.

It is dangerous in the extreme for you to trifle with the great matter of salvation and continue to persist in unbelief—one day God will take your then decision as final, you will have crossed the boundary between His mercy and His wrath and there will then be no possibility of salvation.

In view of these solemn considerations, is not your precious soul’s salvation, a matter of unparalleled urgency? Attend to it without delay—“Behold now is the accepted time, behold now is the day of salvation.” 2Cor.6.2. Before it is too late, trust Him who did all that was demanded for your eternal salvation, believing that what He accomplished on the cross is fully sufficient to save you from hell and bring you to heaven. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” Acts.16.31.



ASSEMBLY TESTIMONY



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ASSEMBLY TESTIMONY

This is a bi-monthly magazine for the propagation of the Word of God and thus the encouragement and edification of the people of God.

Editor: B. Currie

Correspondence relative to Editorial matters should be addressed to:

The Editor, 49 Glenburn Road, Dunmurry, N. Ireland, BT17 9AN.
Telephone (01232) 621343.
E-mail: AT@bcurrie.free-online.co.uk

Secretary/Treasurer : William Neill, 109 Lurgan Road,
Banbridge, Northern Ireland, BT32 4NG.
Telephone (018206) 24238.

Committee : Tom Armstrong, Thomas Beggs, Ronnie Johnston,
James McKeown, James Moore, Roy Reynolds.

This magazine is supported solely by the freewill offerings of the Lord's people. No member of the committee, author of articles or any other person connected with the magazine receives payment, remuneration or gratuity of any kind. This magazine is not to be sold.

Friends residing in England, Scotland and Wales may kindly forward their donations to :

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Telephone (01752) 846889.

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BEHOLD YOUR KING

(Meditations in Matthew)

by Jim Flanigan (Belfast)

23. Precepts and Parables (Ch.18)

Sometimes the Saviour spoke in parables. Sometimes He enacted them. The enactment is simply a parable in action and such we have here at the beginning of our chapter. The contents of the chapter are built around two questions. The first was a recurring question among the disciples, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" The second was Peter's question, "How oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?" Had they but known it, the two questions were intimately connected, for true greatness was really a humility which would have no hesitation in forgiving. But the Lord graciously and patiently answers each question in detail.

Notice how the chapter commences, "At the same time." Literally it is, "In that hour." The Master had, in that hour, just demonstrated what true greatness really was. Though Sovereign of all and Lord of the temple He had just waived His rights and had conceded to pay tribute money. He could have resisted and justly refused, but as He explained to Peter, "Lest we should offend them...", and in humility He provided the tribute money both for Himself and Peter. This was greatness indeed.

He called a little child. How easily and freely and unafraid the children went to Him. How unlike He was to the austere and unapproachable Pharisees. He set the little one in the midst of the disciples and taught them. It was not human nature for man to be childlike. There must be conversion to be fit for the kingdom. The child did not press rights, did not arrogantly push its way, did not harbour malice, and did not aspire to worldly greatness. So the children of the kingdom must humble themselves and become as this child in their midst. As for those children who believed on Him, woe to that man who stumbled them. Here is assurance, if assurance were needed, that even little ones may believe on the Saviour, and we must not discourage or offend or despise them.

Offences would come, but woe to that man by whom they would come. It were better for him that he were drowned in the depths of the sea with a heavy millstone about his neck. So, the Lord exhorts, if any man had a failing in any respect, a trait of character which would tend to give offence to any of these little ones, let him deal ruthlessly with it. Was it a quick tongue? A hasty temper? An impatient spirit? A jealous nature? A haughty attitude? Let him hasten to get rid of such from out of his life. It was better that he live without it than die with it. The Father in heaven took constant notice of these little ones. They were precious to Him and the Son of man had come to save them. They were like little lambs, gone astray by nature, but meaning more to Him than those ninety-nine other sophisticated men who did not appear to need Him.

The Lord now returns to the question of offences between brethren. There was a proper and spiritual procedure to be followed and the initial purpose was not to assert rights but to gain the offending brother. "Go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone." Keep the matter contained between the two, the offender and the offended. If the problem could thus be resolved then happily that was the end of it. No others need to be involved. There was the sad possibility however, that the offender would not hear or respond. Go back to him again then, taking one or two others to help face the difficulty. Sadly though, he may also refuse to hear these, in which case it was now a matter for the assembly to judge. If there was no suitable response to the assembly then there would be a regrettable discipline and they would be in accord with heaven in such a spiritual and orderly judgment of the matter. Even where there may be apparent weakness, just a small company gathered to His Name and for His glory, the Lord would be in the midst of them and would be in agreement with heaven their spiritual and scriptural decisions.

This now raised Peter's other question, "How often do I forgive?" Perhaps Peter thought he was being magnanimous in suggesting seven times, but the Lord multiplies it by seventy, four hundred and ninety times! It is not to be taken literally of course, as if we should refuse to forgive the four hundred and ninety first offence. Jesus expounds a parable. A king had a servant who owed him ten thousand talents. The servant's wife, his children, and his property, could all be sold to pay the debt, but he pleaded for the king's patience and for time to pay. The king was moved with compassion and graciously cancelled the large debt. The servant however, had a fellow-servant who owed him a hundred pence. There was no comparison between what was owed him and what had been forgiven him, but callously he demanded immediate payment of the hundred pence. He would not listen to the pleas of his debtor, and had him cast into prison. But others were watching, and greatly grieved, recounted to their master what had happened. His lord was angry. Here was ingratitude indeed, one who had been forgiven so much refusing to forgive so little. One who had been the subject of great compassion and pity had denied compassion and pity to his fellow.

The lesson for us all is so obvious. Who can estimate how much we have been forgiven? Who can assess the greatness of the mountain of sins that have been blotted out? "How amazing God's compassion," who can measure it? And yet! Is there not so often amongst us an unforgiving spirit which denies to others what has been freely granted to us? This brings no pleasure to the Father. He forgave us when we were but poor sinners. These offenders envisaged here are our brethren, they are members of the same family and of the same body. We who have been forgiven so much, "Shouldest not thou also have compassion on thy fellow-servant?"

—to be continued (D.V.)

We live with men and visit God. Christ lived with God and visited men.

—W. Neilly

* * *

God is behind everything and there is nothing behind God.

—J. Douglas

Assembly Testimony Bible Class

by J. Riddle (Cheshunt)

ESTHER

(8) "FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS," PART 2

Read Chapter 4 again

In Part 1 of this study, we suggested that this chapter can be divided as follows: (1) The reaction of Mordecai, v1-4; (2) The role of Hatach, v5-10; (3) The responsibility of Esther, v11-17. We have already given some thought to the first two sections of the chapter, which brings us to:

3) THE RESPONSIBILITY OF ESTHER, v11-17

Mordecai had already urged Esther to intercede for the Jews before Ahasuerus, see v8. This section of the narrative emphasises at least three important matters:

A) The task seemed impossible, 4.11-12

Esther outlines court procedure: "Whosoever, whether man or woman, shall come unto the king into the inner court, who is not called, there is one law of his to put him to death, except such to whom the king shall hold out the golden sceptre, that he may live. "That in itself hardly seems a problem — after all, Ahasuerus wasn't away fighting the Greeks, and we might have expected king and queen to spend some time together every day. But the King's affection (see 2.17) seemed to be cooling off a little, and Esther has to say, "I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days." To put it in plain words, Esther is saying, "Sorry, but there's nothing much I can do about it."

It's all too familiar, isn't it? "We're living in the last days, you know ... people are gospel-hardened aren't they (are they?) ... it's in a day of small things (quoted from Zech.4) ... people are so materialistic ... more people in this country go to the mosque on Fridays than go to the Church of England on Sundays ... anyway, the Lord's coming back! The last remark seems to be an excuse for doing nothing! Nothing about preaching "the word; be instant in season, out of season." That is, we get on with gospel preaching whether the climate is favourable or not. All we seem to be doing is fighting a rearguard action, and any thought of expansion seems quite out of the question. It has become a battle for survival, rather than territorial acquisition. Well, Mordecai is having none of it:

B) The task demands intervention, 4.13-14

During the Great War of 1914-1918, Lord Kitchener appealed for volunteers to fight the Germans. His portrait appeared on posters throughout the country with his stabbing finger and the words, 'Your Country Needs *You*'. Mordecai was on the same wavelength: "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Only *she* had the opportunity to respect God's people. No one else

could do it — but see (ii) below. There are three challenging strands in Mordecai's statement:

i) *Failure on Esther's part would mean her own death.* "For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shalt enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; **but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed.**" Mordecai does not specify how this would happen: perhaps he was thinking of divine judgment. The lesson for us is very clear: failure to speak for Christ will mean the demise of our own testimony, and loss of reward at the judgment seat of Christ. The poor condition of many assemblies today, and the closure of many assemblies, is largely due to past failure in evangelism. It almost seems that sometimes assemblies reach a 'point of no return.' The assembly that holds its 'peace at this time,' and sits comfortably in its Gospel Hall, like Esther in the Persian palace, will ultimately lose its existence.

ii) *Failure on Esther's part would not mean the annihilation of the Jews.* The threat of genocide was very real, but Mordecai obviously believed in the inerrancy of God's promises: "For if thou holdest thou peace at this time, **then shall enlargement and deliverance arise from another place.**" These are telling words. Our failure does not mean the failure of God's purpose. God will continue His work, but we will cease to be "vessels unto honour." This is precisely Mordecai's point:

iii) *Failure on Esther's part would mean the loss of the honour she would otherwise receive.* Whilst Mordecai still does not mention God's Name, it seems clear that he had at least begun to recognise the providence of God. It now remained for Esther to fulfil the purpose which God intended for her. Mordecai does not speak with absolute certainty, but we can: Esther had "come to the kingdom for such a time as this."

Let's update this: if we believe that God controls and directs our movements, and has a plan for our lives, we can say, 'I have come to ... (wherever you live) for such a time as this.' God has placed us where we are for a purpose. If we fulfil that purpose, we will enjoy the Saviour's commendation, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." Paul was very conscious of the fact that he had 'come to prison for such a time as this'. "But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the Gospel," Phil.1.12.

C) The task requires intercession, 4.15-17

Esther accepts the responsibility resting upon her, but it wasn't just a case of sweeping into the king's presence, and hoping for the best! She was well aware of the risks involved. Her mission of intervention demanded a ministry of intercession. "Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; **and so will I go in unto the king**, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish."

But here is a problem: there is no mention of prayer to God. We have already seen from Neh.1.4 and Dan.9.3 that prayer was always associated with fasting. J. Sidlow Baxter writes: 'Can we really believe that in a crisis which threatened death

to every Jew in the Persian Empire, that there was no agonised calling upon the God of their fathers? Can we believe, too, that after the amazing deliverance which came to them, there was absolutely no voice of thanksgiving to God? There is only one possible interference — the silence was intentional! The absence of reference to prayer and thanksgiving to God in the book emphasises one of its major lessons. We discussed this in our introduction. The Jews should never have been in Persia at all, and whilst God was certainly at work behind the scenes, disobedience robs prayer of its power and effectiveness.

One thing is very clear, the Lord's work demands self-denial and disciplined prayer. This is something that we must never forget. —*to be continued (D.V.)*

The Kings of Judah and Israel

by Graeme Hutchinson (Belfast)

Ahab No.1 (Paper 8)

Further to our observations on the life of king Ahab, Scripture is careful to bear testimony to:

(d) His Industry

As the reign of king Ahab is devoted to such a large section of 1Kgs.16.28-22.40, it is not surprising that much can be said regarding his activities. Sadly, instead of being occupied with the Law and its implementation throughout the nation, Deut.17.18-20, his primary concern was self-preservation, irrespective of the cost. Consider the following points as a summary of his actions as king:

• *Unnecessary*

Following the long absence of rain in the nation, Ahab instructed one of his governors, Obadiah, to search the land for fertile pasture, 18.5-6. Whilst both men undertook this arduous task, it could have been avoided had the king enjoyed a closer relationship with Elijah, 18.1. Moreover, the drought had only been introduced by the Lord, 17.1, as punishment for Ahab's idolatrous practices. Therefore, Ahab's use of time was neither effective nor efficient, as his lifestyle was contradicting the Word of God. As Christians, we do well to remember that 'time is short,' 1Cor.7.29, and we must then redeem the time, Eph.5.16; Col.4.5.

• *Unacceptable*

A measure of heaven's attitude to the way that Ahab (and Jezebel) ruled the nation may be found in 1Kgs.18.18. The remaining verses, especially the token given to Elijah in verse 38, illustrate that whilst God is long-suffering He will eventually judge sin. Obviously many comparisons can be made between this incident and that of the Lord's death. The two sacrifices occurred around the same time of the day, 1Kgs.18.36; Matt.27.46; took place on similar locations, 1Kgs.18.19; Matt.27.33; had similar reasons, 1Kgs.18.37; Rom.5.8; and both had similar outcomes — blessing! 1Kgs.18.41; Rom.8.32.

• *Unwise*

Despite the wickedness that resided in the heart of Ahab, the Lord still granted some 'success' during his reign, 1Kgs.20.13. In the incident with the king of Syria, Ben-hadad, Ahab appeared to be very kind to the enemy (20.31-34), however, this was contrary to the Lord's will, v42. Thus, Ahab may well have 'fitted-in' to the present age, he tolerated sin! Within the assembly environment, such an attitude is to be avoided, known sin must be dealt with, 1Cor.5; behaviour must be consistent with the nature of our gathering, 1Tim.3.15.

(e) *His Influence*

In his role as king, Ahab had the *opportunity* to become a force for good, and so lead the nation into a period of spiritual growth and revival. However, throughout his twenty (+) years, his influence over others such as Hiel, 1Kgs.16.34, and Jehoshaphat, 1Kgs.22; 2Chron.18, was sufficiently strong to lead these men astray.

• *Hiel*

The restoration of Jericho had been forbidden by Joshua after the city had been destroyed by a miracle, Josh.6.26. Just as the king established idols in disobedience to the Lord, so Hiel was characterised by a rebellious heart. Significantly, 1Kgs.16.34 opens with the words, 'In his (Ahab's) days did ...'. Was the king merely setting the standard, and so influencing others to follow? Wonderful to think that when the Lord Jesus came into this world, he actually entered into this particular city, Lk.19.1, and saved Zacchaeus.

• *Jehoshaphat*

1Kgs.22.2 records a strange phrase in relation to the movements of Jehoshaphat, the king of the Southern Kingdom (Judah) - 'Jehoshaphat came down to the king of Israel.' Literally, Jehoshaphat was going up, for the direction was northwards! Spiritually the phrase is correct, the allegiance between the two men was a movement down for Jehoshaphat. Militarily, it nearly cost him his life, 1Kgs.22.32-33. Matrimonially, it cost him his son, for Jehoram, his son, married Ahab's daughter, 2Chron.21.6. We too must be careful to avoid harmful and sinful associations, they are bound to fail.

(f) *His Interests*

The incident with Naboth's vineyard, recorded in 1Kgs.21, enables us to unveil the king's heart and examine what was foremost in it and in his mind. The passage indicates his:

• *Aspirations*

1Kgs.21.1-2 record that the vineyard of Naboth was situated beside the palace, and Ahab reckoned that it would make a suitable vegetable garden. Temptation is always a real problem, which, as the lives of Eve, Gen.3.3, Achan, Jos.7.1, and David, 2Sam.11.2, record, is never far from us. Remember that we too have a weak sinful nature that willingly responds to tempting forces. A much better approach is to follow the instruction of Paul in 2Cor.10.5, 'bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ'. Disciplining our minds to consider spiritual matters leaves no room for temptation!

• *Attitude*

Once the God-fearing Naboth courageously rejected the advances of the king, it says that Ahab was 'heavy and displeased', v4. The same response is recorded in 20.43 when the prophet conveyed the divine displeasure resulting from Ahab's actions. Such phrases serve to highlight the bad spiritual condition of the king, he was resentful of people who stood for the truth. Nowadays, unbelievers will resent the Christian who makes a stand for God, Jn.15.19, but there is a reward, Jam.1.3-12.

• *Accountability*

Notwithstanding the fact that 1 Kings 21 stresses the role that Jezebel had in the murder of Naboth, v14, the Word of God still holds Ahab accountable,v19. This principle, also applied to Adam in the Garden of Eden, Rom.5.12, stresses the fact that God holds the male personally responsible as head. To reject God's divine order, like Ahab and Jezebel, can only result in disastrous consequences. Moreover, God is faithful to His word, for the punishment foretold in 21.19 is fulfilled in 22.38.

(g) *His Immaturity*

1Kgs.20.43 and 21.4 bear testimony to the childish attitude of the king, when reprimanded he sulked! Despite nearing the end of his reign, Ahab still bears the hallmarks of a young child. Not having his own way left the king discontented, displeased and depressed. Matthew Henry remarks: 'we find Paul content in a prison, Phil.4.11, but Ahab discontent in a palace,' 1994, Vol.2, p.540.

Whilst the believer may exhibit the features of a child at conversion, Matt.18.3, we must 'grow in grace' 2Pet.3.18, and emerge as men, 2Tim.3.17. Remember the words of Paul in 1Cor.14.20: 'Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.' Importantly, the word for 'men' in this verse, teleios, is better rendered as 'full age,' Heb.5.14).

See paper 1 for details of Bibliography/Figures —to be continued (D.V.)

PAPERS ON PROPHECY

by The Late W. W. Fereday (written in 1897/98)

VOLUME 2

12(c)—Christ's Millennial Reign

3. Israel's part in the millennial kingdom will, of course, be in the earth, according to the terms of Jehovah's promise to their fathers. The Land of Canaan is to be theirs for an everlasting possession, and Jehovah will plant them in it with His whole heart and with His own soul, Jer.32.41. All their backsliding shall be forgotten and their sins forgiven, the law of God being henceforward divinely written in their hearts and minds. Ere these blessed results can be attained, Israel (the whole twelve tribes) will have to pass through terrible discipline in righteousness, Judah in the land and the ten tribes outside of it. But the remnant that shall be left after the sifting will be converted to God. "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour My Spirit upon thy seed, and My

blessing upon thine offspring: and they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the watercourses. One shall say, I am Jehovah's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto Jehovah and surname himself by the name of Israel", Isa.44.3-5.

When the nation is thus right with God He will be able to use them as His instruments in dealing with others, and this in a twofold way. First, He will by their means put down enemies — Edom, Moab, and Ammon in particular escaping the devastating hand of the King of the North for this purpose, Dan.11.41; Isa.11.14. Then He will make them channels of blessing to all that are left of the nations. Mic.5.7-9 is very interesting in this connection: "And the remnant of Jacob shall be among the Gentiles in the midst of many people as a dew from Jehovah, as the showers upon the grass that tarrieth not for man nor waiteth for the sons of men. And the remnant of Jacob shall be among the Gentiles in the midst of many people as a lion among the beasts of the forest, as a young lion among the flocks of sheep: who, if he go through, both treadeth down and teareth in pieces, and none can deliver. Thine hand shall be lifted up upon thine adversaries, and all thine enemies shall be cut off." Here we have Israel's twofold mission; as a lion among the beasts they put down foes, and as a dew from Jehovah they dispense blessing all around.

Jerusalem in that day will be the metropolis of the earth. It is Jehovah's chosen dwelling place, the spot that His heart desires as His settled abode and rest, Psa.132.13,14. He has spoken glorious things of it, and intends to make it an eternal excellency, the joy of many generations, Psa.87.3; Isa.60.15. His presence will cause it to be called "Jehovah Shammah" ("Jehovah is there"). To that centre the representatives of the nations will annually go up to pay their court to the great King and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles, Ezek.48.35; Zech.14.16.

The sanctuary of Jehovah will be restored to Israel in the millennial day. Many particulars as to this and the redistribution of the land among the tribes will be found in Ezek.40.48. Well may all who behold Israel's blessing then say, "Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion; for great is the Holy one of Israel in the midst of thee," Isa.12.6.

The prosperity of Solomon's day, when all Israel sat peacefully every man under his vine and under his fig-tree, eating and drinking and making merry, was as nothing compared with what God will vouchsafe to His people in the reign of David's greater Son, 1Kgs.4.20-25. David was led of the Spirit to describe the blessedness of that time in Psa.122, and was carried far beyond himself into rapturous worship and praise. Faith, as it contemplates the future, breaks out into: "Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel"; while the enemy from without can only say with sadness, "Alas! who shall live when God doeth this?" Psa.122.18; Num.24.23.

4. The nations of the earth will then receive their full portion of blessing in connection with the people of Israel. God's mercy to His chosen will be abundantly spread abroad. His way will be known upon earth and His salvation among all nations. The name of Jehovah will be excellent in all the earth, and all nations will call Him blessed. Israel will not then be the coldly conservative people that they

have been in the past, but will gladly share with others the rich blessings vouchsafed to them by God. But universal blessing cannot be until the millennial day. In vain do Christians speak of the whole world being converted by means of the Gospel as at present preached. The thought is well intentioned, we are sure, but it is nevertheless a great mistake. Ethiopia will doubtless soon stretch out her hands unto God, but not as the result of Christian labour. It will be brought about by Jewish instrumentality, when Christ is here reigning on His throne in Zion. The divine intention by means of the gospel of the grace of God is to “take out” from among the nations a people for His Name. The body of Christ is still in course of formation, and is being composed of believers from among Jews and Gentiles.

In the Church, the distinctions of Jew and Gentile have no place, Col.3.11. In the millennium they will reappear, though in blessing. The Jew will have chief place in the earth; the Gentile will be blessed subordinately. “Thus saith Jehovah of hosts; it shall come to pass, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities; and the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before Jehovah, and to seek Jehovah of hosts; I will go also. Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek Jehovah of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before Jehovah. Thus saith Jehovah of hosts: In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you,” Zech.8.20-23. Their kings will be their leaders in this. The nations will have their respective kings in that day, but they will all recognise the supremacy of the Lord Jesus, as King of kings and Lord of lords, Rev.21.24-26; Psa.122.10,11.

Conversion, if not absolutely universal then, will be very nearly so. “*All Israel shall be saved,*” Rom.11.26, and apparently the great majority of the surviving Gentiles also. The words of Zechariah quoted above, point to this, and we are told elsewhere that “the glory of Jehovah shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together”; also that “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of Jehovah, as the waters cover the sea”; and that the Spirit of God shall be poured out upon *all flesh*, Isa.40.5: 11.9; Joel 2.28. Yet we read in Psa.18.44,45, “As soon as they hear of Me, they shall obey Me: the strangers shall submit themselves (marg. ‘yield feigned obedience’) unto Me. The strangers shall fade away, and be afraid out of their close places.’ Compare this with Psa.66.3; 81.15. From these, and other passages, it would appear that some will bow falsely, and merely because they are in the presence of a power that is impossible to withstand. It was so with some in the early days of Solomon’s kingdom, 1Kgs.1. Such, with others, perhaps born during the Lord’s reign, will be only too ready to listen to the suggestions of Satan when he is released for a little season at the close, Rev.20.7-9. What is man! Grace does not attract him; and even glory will not permanently convince him! —*to be continued (D.V.)*

God causes His truth to dawn upon us rather than to burst upon us.

—*W. Neilly*

* * *

The best way to meet the need of a future generation is to serve the present one.

—*J. Douglas*

“Stay in” or “Come out” WHICH?

by H. W. Graham (Eiré)

Reading the New Testament you will find that every young convert had to abandon the religious community in which he had been reared. Idolaters separated from the heathen temples. Disciples of John the Baptist turned away from their teacher, and then his following dwindled, Jn.1.37; 3.30. Jews, when they were able to lay aside the chains of prejudice, came out from the synagogue and temple with its divinely appointed ritual. One and all were gathered together as one flock, churches of God, churches of Christ, churches of the Saints. From such churches the gospel was sounded forth, 1Thes.1.1,8.

Modern worldly wisdom and satanic ingenuity have discovered another way more pleasing to the flesh in the believer, less repulsive to the ungodly and more profitable to the devil's interests. So young Christians are counselled to remain in the religion in which they were reared, in which they had been kept in the dark about their need of salvation, where the gospel was not preached and where conversion was denounced. They are to remain and be a testimony. This means that a Unitarian who has been saved by the Son of God is to remain where the truth of the Trinity is not held. The converted Roman Catholic is to continue at Mass and to bow down to the host. The convert from Jehovah's Witnesses is to stay under the soul destroying teaching of that system. The Episcopalian is to attend the teaching of baptismal regeneration. The Presbyterian is to listen to the teaching that the christening of an infant signifies and seals its ingrafting into Christ and its engagement to be the Lord's. They are all to support financially the spread of these anti-Christian doctrines, to encourage those who denounce the gospel, to associate in religious activities with the enemies of Christ. They are to feed their souls on chaff, drink of the living waters from the poison bottle and learn divine truth by hearing false doctrine. And all this is witnessing for Christ! It is, in fact, open disloyalty, blatant denial of Christ and downright disobedience to the word of God.

But, says one, we must mingle with people in order to bring the gospel to them. Certainly so, but we are not to do evil that good may come. We can contact the drinker without sitting down with him at the bar, the dancing enthusiast without frequenting the dance hall, the immoral person without visiting the dens of vice and the religious people without partaking in their false religion.

But, says another, did not Christ and the apostles frequent the synagogue and the temple were all was not right? Certainly they did. But remember that the Jewish religion was of divine origin and established by the Old Testament. Which of the religions mentioned above can claim this? Then, both the Lord and his apostles went to the synagogue because there was liberty to read and expound the Scriptures. Can one imagine them listening without protest to false doctrine? They went in and preached the very doctrine that was rejected in the synagogue. Christ spoke of God's favour to the Gentiles, provoked the wrath of hearers and was thrust out, Lk.4.27-30. The apostles preached that Jesus was the Christ and that God had raised from the dead the One whom the Jews had crucified, Acts 17,1-3. They were also cast out.

They went to the synagogue, preached the gospel and some were saved. Then the preachers were rejected and left, but they did not go out alone, they took the young converts with them, Acts 19.8,9. Christ went into the Jewish fold, called His own sheep by name and led them out; among the Gentiles the same happened and there was one flock and one Shepherd, Jn.10.3,4,16. We repeat that Christ and His apostles did not go in to listen to the soul-destroying teaching of ungodly men but to proclaim the whole truth of God which would save sinners and bring them out to be disciples of Christ. If a “synagogue” can be found where there is liberty to do just that, it may be entered.

When young Christians remain in association with the evils we have mentioned above they defile their souls, spoil their spiritual appetite and deprive themselves of all spiritual activity. They do not bear witness to Christ, nor to the gospel for their mouth is shut.

But why is such counsel ever given by preachers to their converts? Often it is because the preachers themselves have a guilty conscience and are walking in disobedience to the word of God in this matter. Naturally they do not wish their spiritual children to get ahead of them. Some are seeking the friendship of the ungodly religious leaders with the vain hope of thus furthering the gospel. Before the mind of others is the dream of popularity and the avoidance of that which is the result of whole-hearted discipleship the reproach of Christ, Heb.13.13.

It has often been noted that the advocates of the policy of young Christians remaining in the religious community in which they were reared, are themselves forced to admit its failure. Knowing well that spiritual progress is almost impossible in the churches they form meetings, societies, missions or unions where there can be some fellowship, testimony and teaching. They thereby admit, to use a phrase of the late W. P. Nicholson, “that live chicks cannot thrive under a dead hen.” Their way is completely illogical as well as unscriptural. If the so called churches are of God no outside organisation is required. To add to what God has established is to question His wisdom and His ability to care for His children. In the New Testament churches all that is necessary is provided through the ministry of those whom Christ has gifted, the care of the elders, the Holy Spirit’s power and the Scriptures. There is the place of fellowship, of worship, of teaching, of training and of gospel activities. It is the only thing established by Christ and all the energies of the Christian should be devoted to its edification and extension. These human organisations are the half-way house of men who are not willing to go the way of whole-hearted obedience to the word of God, lest they lose the favour of the clergy. They seek to serve two masters and end up earning the scorn of one for their duplicity and the disapproval of Christ for their lack of obedience.

In contrast with man’s: “Stay in”, we have God’s: “Come out”. To those in connexion with heathen religions it is: “Come out from among them, and be ye separate,” 2Cor.6.17. To those linked to the Jewish religion the exhortation is “Let us go forth unto Him (Christ) without the camp, bearing His reproach, Heb.13.13. To any who may be in Babylon (the harlot mother of Rome, with her harlot daughters) corrupt christendom, the command is: “Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins.” Rev.18.4.

Man says: “Stay in”. God says: “Come out.” “We ought to obey God rather than men.” Acts 5.29.

Christian Conduct in a Modern World

by Walter A. Boyd (South Africa)

No. 1 — THE PRIORITY OF WORSHIP

“... For it is written, thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve,” Lk.4.8.

Hebrews chapter eleven is the great chapter of faith, as exemplified in the lives of ten individuals and the nation of Israel, v1-31. Others are alluded to without exact mention of their exploits of faith or identity, v32-40. The life of faith for these individuals gained them a good report, which was pleasing to God. It is significant that the first three men mentioned: Abel, (v4) Enoch (v5) and Noah (v7), manifested the priority of the life of faith. Their faith was woven into a life of service for God and dependence upon Him. Yet, the order in which they appear is not just chronological. Examine God’s record of their lives and you will find by an obvious emphasis, a pattern that pleases God and that we do well to follow.

Each individual’s life had one predominant feature; Abel, his *worship*, Enoch, his *walk*, Noah, his *witness*. The Spirit of God shows what is acceptable to God in the life of faith. God wants worship as the foundation for a walk that is pleasing to Him. This is the source of acceptable service. Worship manifested in our daily walk with God will give character to our witness in a sinful world. These three lives bear eloquent testimony to the words spoken by the Lord Jesus in Lk.4.8, “thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and Him only shalt thou serve.” Very often we hear the idea that we have been saved to serve; is this correct? Surely the teaching of Scripture is that we have been saved to worship. Only from a heart that moves daily in the attitude of worship will there be acceptable service. The absence of daily worship in the heart is the reason for a life that excludes little fragrance — a bland testimony that creates no impression in the world. Herein you will find the clue to the anomaly of a life that bears little fruit for the Lord, in spite of much activity. Worship can never be replaced by any substitute no matter how cleverly designed.

Worship has become clouded in the busyness of the modern world and being elusive has been subjected to many attempts to create an acceptable substitute. Worship will affect every department of our lives. It is not just the adoration of our great God in prayer, it is much more. True worship finds expression in our daily lives in the community in which we live. It is not the pious activity of sanctimonious souls in a cocooned environment or in the cloisters of a chapel. True worship will give vitality and verve to Christian living in society and to godly service in the assembly, and that for His glory. Therefore, the priority of a Christian’s life should be worship.

We may not accomplish what Abel, Enoch and Noah did, but we have their example and should seek to emulate them. We may not be called upon to worship

in such a way or in a country that results in the wrath of others being provoked, so that we face loss of life or property. While it is the hope of every worshipping saint, we may not have the privilege of walking with God until the Lord comes to catch His own away. However, our lives should be a witness for God and His standards of righteousness in a wicked world. Whatever our sphere of service or the intensity of faithfulness demanded, God expects the worship of our hearts to be manifested for His glory and that it should be the well-spring of a faithful walk and fruitful witness. Without acceptable worship, our walk and witness will be deficient.

Seeing then that worship is so important: what is worship? Many think of worship as an activity that takes place only at certain times in certain places and following a prescribed liturgy. We may shun the outward ceremony and ritual of the established Churches and yet subtly prescribe a form of worship by expected phrases of order or thought. This may initially seem to be spiritual, but often it is the opposite, and may be just our substitute for a lazy mind and a lethargic heart. Beware that in trying to sound spiritual or perhaps even to be spiritual, we do not allow the flesh to become active. Acts of worship are the result of a worshipping heart. Worship is from a heart in the right condition before God. This is described graphically by the Psalmist in Ps.45 as his “heart inditing (flowing over/bubbling up) a good matter.” Worship is a spiritual activity, which is prompted, energized and executed in the power of the Holy Spirit. It cannot be mechanically initiated, nor sustained by fleshly means. Worship is the outpouring of the heart in appreciation to God and Christ; praise, honour and adoration being directed to Them in the power of the Holy Spirit. It may be done individually or collectively, silently or audibly, momentarily or continually.

There are two words used in the New Testament for worship. *Proskuneo*, which has the idea of bowing down before God in humble adoration, see Matt.2.2. *Latreuo*, which has the meaning of reverent veneration reserved solely for God, see Phil.3.3. Inherent in both terms is the idea of giving to God that which is acceptable. These words and the related subject of worship show that worship is not just the outpouring of a heart’s appreciation to God but also that we give ourselves and of our possessions. It affects our innermost attitude to life and ought to be a feature of our lives day by day. The most common mistake we make is to think that worship is reserved for the remembrance of the Lord on the Lord’s Day. Hence, the remembrance supper is often mistakenly called “the worship meeting.” Certainly, if we do not worship at the Remembrance Supper we have missed the mark, but that is only one of the many places and times for worship. All services ought to be performed with a worshipping spirit.

Does Rom.14.1-18 not show that consideration of weaker believers is acceptable to God and therefore worship? Does Rom.15.16 not show that preaching the gospel is also worship? Phil.4.18 describes a monetary gift to the Lord as worship. 1Tim.2.1-3 shows that responsible citizens will pray for the authorities of the land, as the evidence of a life lived in godliness and honesty; such a life will be “good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour.” Surely Heb.13.15 is the pinnacle of worship for the child of God. “By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name.” Praise

and adoration of God, offered through the person of the Lord Jesus Christ is the essence of worship. Rom.12.1-3, describes the most painful kind of worship as that of presenting bodies a “living sacrifice.” This is our reasonable service or offering of worship and is the necessary foundation for any other type of worship. We may use the sweetest language ever heard in praise; we may have the biggest gift ever given; we may preach the greatest sermon ever heard; but if we are not as the Macedonians in 2.Cor.8.5, who “first gave their own selves to the Lord,” it will all be for nothing. It will be like the man of 1Cor.13, who without love for God does great deeds and has a great gift, yet he “is nothing” and “profits nothing.”

The practical implication of the Scriptures’ teaching on worship is heart searching. Can I participate in collective worship if I have not been worshipping in private? It would be difficult. Does God accept my financial giving to the Lord in its fullness as worship if it does not come from a worshipping heart? Will anything be able to compensate for my refusal to bow in worship to the claims of the Lord in Rom.12.1? A consecrated life is the basic prerequisite for every form of worship in which I intend to engage. This may well be the cause of many of the long and embarrassing pauses experienced in our prayer meetings and remembrance meetings. A spirit that is constantly worshipping in private will never have to be forced into action in the public gatherings of the assembly. Worship cannot be produced at a moment’s notice from a heart that has been neglectful of the sanctuary and private experience with God. Worship cannot be augmented by the use of extravagant language in addressing God since some of the richest worship has been couched in the simplest language. Contrary to common and unenlightened thought, worship is not enhanced by the better use of language, or the better presentation of truth. We may create a better sermon to be uttered before the Father and find we are engaged in the same activity as the proud Pharisee in Lk.18. Worship can only come from a heart in communion with God.

A common practice is for brethren who are never heard in the remembrance supper to be away frequently preaching on Lord’s Day evening. This is plainly contrary to what God desires and should be corrected by the soul that wants to please the Lord and make his life count for God. In a large assembly, you may not participate audibly in every remembrance meeting, but to be always silent is not the bent of a worshipping life. It would be expected that those brethren who have a responsibility to invite speakers for the Lord’s Day gospel meeting would ensure that with appropriate exercise of heart before the Lord, they invite men who enjoy the confidence of their local company of saints in this matter of worship. Older brethren used to tell us that we have no right to be speaking to sinners about the Saviour if we have not first been speaking to the Father about the Son. This is still good advice!

In conclusion, worship in all its aspects is the foundation of a walk before God and will be the foundation for effective witness to the unsaved. If my worship is deficient, my walk, however orthodox will be deformed, and my witness, however vocal will be defective. Wandering feet will never be found on the same body as a worshipping heart. Many assembly and personal problems and disorders are just symptoms of a deeper problem — the lack of worship. —*to be continued (D.V.)*

David's Mighty Men

2 Sam. 23.8-39 and 1 Chron.11.10-47

by D. S. Parrack, Bognor Regis, England

Paper 3 — URIAH

Perhaps the saddest and most melancholy episode in the life of David centred around another of his captains, Uriah (Flame of Jah). The first thing recorded about this man was that he was a Hittite. Indeed it appears to be almost a part of his name, that by which he was known of men, Uriah the Hittite. The Hittites were one of the original peoples inhabiting the land of promise prior to Israel's exodus from Egypt. They were by nature and choice implacable enemies of God's people, antagonistic to their well being. Uriah, however, as his very name implies, demonstrates that it was true of him as of Ruth, "The Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust," Ruth 2.12. Nevertheless, the adjunct to his name kept his origins fresh in both his own mind and the mind of his companions. Whilst the cultivation of a morbid reflection on the past is to be avoided, it behoves us to remember the place where we once were, our natural state, our darkened hearts. The Israelites were commanded so to do when first they began to enjoy the fruits of their God-given inheritance. At the commencement of their recital of God's deliverance and redemption they were to acknowledge that "A Syrian ready to perish was my father," Deut.26.5. In describing to the Corinthians the characteristics of those who "shall not inherit the kingdom of God," 1Cor.6.9, including fornicators, adulterers, thieves, drunkards, Paul adds "and such were some of you." To the Colossians he could say "You that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works," Col.1.21. "The saints which are Ephesus" were reminded of a time when they "were dead in trespasses and sins — and were by nature children of wrath even as others," Eph.2.1-3. In every case cited the immediate context shows that God has brought us out of such a position, that He has "delivered us from the power of darkness and hath translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love," Col.1.13. Such a calling to mind of what we were will have positive results. It will keep us humble, by showing us that in ourselves we have nothing of which to boast. "What hast thou that thou did not receive?" 1Cor.4.5. It causes us, as we have borne in our hearts something of the mercy of God, to exclaim as did Paul, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God," Rom.11.13. It demonstrates to unbelievers the power of God to change lives. The reaction to such a testimony will vary widely. Paul was conscious that his witness produced a variety of responses, but could say nevertheless "we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved and in them that perish," 2Cor.2.15. However unappreciative man might be of a transformed life, God is joyed by the savour of Christ in his saints.

Of David, God was prepared to say that he "did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord — all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite," 1Kgs.15.5. The only redeeming feature in this appalling incident is the character and

bearing of the one so despicably betrayed by both his wife and king. To receive a royal summons to act as a liaison between Joab and the king must have appeared as a high honour. Little could Uriah have dreamed of the unworthy motives that prompted David to recall him to the capital. There is, however, no sign that such honour caused either a sense of superiority or slackening of zeal on the part of its recipient. Not only did Uriah forbear from going to his own house, but he “slept at the door of the king’s house, with all the servants of his lord.” He had, as seen in his answer to David’s puzzled questioning, a heartfellowship with those who had no opportunity of rest and ease. “My lord Joab, and the servants of my lord are encamped in the open fields; shall I then go into mine house to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife.” Though circumstances had separated him from his fellow soldiers he was with them in spirit, longing after them. Opportunities may well come to us of opting out from the pressure of spiritual warfare. It is easy for us to talk in such circumstances of periods of lying aside but we need to be very sure before a relaxation of effort that is not dictated by our own carnal inclinations and natural desires. It may be that such a course may be advocated by a seemingly trustworthy source putting forward legitimate reasons. How unlikely was the vehicle of temptation and incitement for Uriah, yet he was enabled to withstand the pressure put on him. If he was able, through loyalty to his fellow-soldiers and captain, to stand firm how much more ought we to stand for a far worthier Lord. For “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 of escape, that ye may be able to bear it,” 1Cor.10.13. Paul reminds Timothy that “no one enlisting as a soldier entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier,” 2Tim.2.4. Such a steadfast loyalty and devotion, which counts the promises and praises of this world as of little worth, will indeed bring pleasure to “the captain of our salvation,” Heb.2.10.

Joab had no difficulty in putting into execution David’s treacherous plot. Ironically it was Uriah’s known bravery which made it appear quite natural for him to be assigned the most dangerous point in the attack. What a reputation to have and for us to covet, a preparedness to risk all and be utterly burnt up in the service of his king and his people. Paul was greatly cheered on occasions by companions of such mettle. He commends the house of Stephanas in “that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints,” 1Cor.16.15. Epaphroditus was one who “for the work of Christ was nigh unto death, not regarding his life,” Phil.2.30. Of Priscilla and Aquila he writes, “My helpers in Jesus Christ, who have for my life laid down their necks,” Rom.16.4. Such loyalty, and disregard for self can be motivated by nothing other than love, for “love is strong as death, jealousy is cruel as the grave — many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it,” S of S.8.6-7. Uriah’s devotion led him to very death itself, but what a triumph his life had been. Giving himself constantly and unsparingly in the cause of his king, for whom he fought to bring glory and renown together with deliverance and blessing for his people.

May we know what it is, in spite of the natural failings of men, ourselves or others, to be caught up in the all consuming love of Christ to the end that we might be enabled both “to lay down our lives for the brethren,” 1Jn 4.16, and to willingly and intelligently obey the injunction to “present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service,” Rom.12.1. *(Concluded)*

Christ our “Burnt Offering”

by D. M. Clark (Stoney Creek)

All of the five offerings, in Leviticus, give a different view of the work of Christ. The Burnt Offering is the first of the five offerings dealt with, but for the sinner, the logical arrangement of the offerings begins in the reverse order in which they are recorded.

We sense the activity of sin in the **Trespass Offering**, our conscience is pricked, we have trespassed God's law and feel our guilt.

In the **Sin Offering** a deeper work is wrought and we realise that sin is working from within us. Sin is the root and sins are the fruit.

In the **Peace Offering** Christ has made peace with God for us. This offering is a bridge between our former standing as guilty sinners and our present standing, “justified (acquitted, declared righteous and given a right standing with God) by faith,” Rom.5.1. Also, Col.1.20: “And, having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself; by Him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.”

In the **Meat or Meal Offering** the glories of the Person who accomplished our Salvation are brought before us. Christ in all the perfection of His humanity endured the cross. How intense those sufferings must have been to a Perfect Man.

In the **Burnt Offering** we observe Christ the Son giving Himself wholly and absolutely unto the Father. Sin is not in question in this offering.

This is the first in the sequence of the offerings from God's perspective. It is most instructive for us, for while we rejoice in the work that Christ has done in removing our sins, we must also enter into the value of Christ's sacrifice as God sees it.

Christ, in all the excellence of His Person, gave Himself wholly to God in the absolute and utter devotion of His heart. He could say in Jn.10.17: “Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again.” We stand in amazement and marvel at such an expression of love. The Lord Jesus, in absolute perfection, and obedience, fulfilled all the Father's will.

As we consider this feature of Christ's sacrifice, Eph.5.2, becomes more meaningful to us “...Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet savour.” This is the Burnt Offering view of Christ's death.

Although Jesus, the Son of Man, as the Sin Bearer, was forsaken of God, His communion with the Father, as Son of God, was never affected. At that time the Father found absolute satisfaction in the Son, who was wholly devoted to fulfilling His Will. And the Son, found all His delight in pleasing the Father. Ps.40.8, “I delight to do Thy Will, O my God: yea, Thy law is within my heart.” During His sojourn here He could say, in Jn.1.18, “No man hath seen God at any time; the only

begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.” That Father-Son relationship could only be deepened by the perfection of Christ's sacrifice.

Heb.10.5-7, “Wherefore when He cometh into the world, He saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast Thou prepared Me: in burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin Thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of Me) to do Thy will, O God.”

The Burnt Offering, Meal Offering and the Peace Offering are spoken of as “sweet savour offerings,” Lev.1.9, 2.2, 3.5. This suggests the delight that God found in the offering. This cannot be said of the Sin Offering and Trespass Offering for God could find no delight in having to execute judgment against sin.

In the Sin Offering the one presenting the sacrifice placed his hand on the head of the victim which then became his substitute by dying in his stead. In the Burnt Offering, once again, the person offering the sacrifice placed his hand on the head of the victim, but in this instance all of the virtue and value of the sacrifice was transferred to the person offering it. For the believer, Christ as our Burnt Offering, brings us into all the favour and standing that He has before God so that we are “accepted in the Beloved.”

Except for the skin of the Burnt Offering all of the sacrifice was totally consumed on the altar. The total consumption of the sacrifice shows that it was offered wholly to God, even as Christ offered Himself entirely to God. It is a witness to the devotion of the Lord Jesus in fulfilling God's will.

The priest was to have the skin of the Burnt Offering, Lev.7.8. Although the priest could only be a witness to the sacrifice, the skin was given to him as a constant reminder of what he had seen. Similarly the Lord Jesus has given us the remembrance supper as a constant reminder of His death.

We see in the emblems of bread and wine the entire compass of the work of Christ, as typified in the five offerings, and they have their place as we remember Him. However, that which corresponds to the Burnt Offering aspect of Christ's death expresses a deeper apprehension of Christ's work. In it Christ is presented to God. Our occupation is with the value and worth of the sacrifice as seen in God's eyes. How God's heart must rejoice when He hears the praise and worship of His people as they glorify and exalt His Son?

One of the chaplains of her late Majesty, Queen Victoria, had been preaching on the Second Coming of the Lord, and afterwards, in conversation with the preacher, the Queen exclaimed: “Oh! how I wish that the Lord would come in my lifetime!”

“Why”, asked the chaplain, “does your Majesty feel this very earnest desire?”

The Queen replied with quivering lips, and her whole countenance lighted up by the deep emotion — “I should so love to lay my crown at His feet.”

INGERSOLL AND BEECHER

At a meeting once, where both the late Colonel Robert Ingersoll, a celebrated infidel lecturer in U.S.A., and Henry Ward Beecher were present, the noted agnostic, Colonel Ingersoll, had spoken at some length and had brilliantly put forth his agnostic views. It was expected by those present that Beecher would have replied to these attacks, and would have defended Christianity, but not a word did the old man say.

At last the Colonel Ingersoll remarked: "Mr. Beecher, have you nothing to say on this question?" The old man slowly lifted himself up from his attitude and replied: "Nothing: in fact, if you will excuse me for changing the conversation, I will say that while you gentlemen were talking my mind was bent on a most deplorable spectacle which I witnessed today".

"What was it?" at once inquired Colonel Ingersoll, who, notwithstanding his peculiar views of the hereafter, was noted for his kindness of heart. "Why", said Mr. Beecher, "as I was walking down town today I saw a poor, lame man with crutches slowly and carefully picking his way through a cesspool of mud, in the endeavour to cross the street. He had just reached the middle of the filth, when a big, burly ruffian, himself all bespattered, rushed up to him, jerked the crutches from under the unfortunate man, and left him sprawling and helpless in the pool of liquid dirt which almost engulfed him".

"What a brute he was", said the Colonel. "What a brute he was", they all echoed.

"Yes", said the old man, rising from his chair and brushing back his long white hair, while his eyes glistened with their old-time fire as he bent them on Ingersoll. "Yes, Colonel Ingersoll, and you are the man. The human soul is lame, but Christianity gives it crutches to enable it to pass along the highway of life. It is your teaching that knocks these crutches from under it and leaves it a helpless and rudderless wreck in the slough of despondency.

"If robbing the human soul of its only support on this earth — religion — be your profession, why, ply it to your heart's content. It requires an architect to erect a building; an incendiary may reduce it to ashes".

The old man sat down, and silence brooded over the scene. Colonel Ingersoll found that he had a master in his own power of illustration, and said nothing. The company took their hats and departed.

Baptism is not the act of a moment but the fact of a lifetime.

—A. Allan

* * *

The college of every man in the assembly is his own home.

—J. Douglas

MY CONVERSION AND CALL (61)

by Larry Steers (Toronto, Ontario)

Precious are the words of the hymn “Preserved by Jesus when my feet made haste to hell.” Eternity will reveal how many times and how close to the precipice of the eternal burnings our Christless souls came. The day of salvation is the most precious moment in life. The main features of my conversion are as follows. Brevity demands the omission of many details.

My first birth occurred in a little country house in southern Ontario, Canada. My parents, at the time, were not saved. Mother knew the gospel well, having attended a Gospel Hall Sunday School, but father had no exposure to the simple presentation of God’s way of salvation. As a result of gospel meetings held in the community hall of our small village he was brought under the conviction of sin by the Spirit of God, and through the words of Jn.3.16, trusted Christ. My mother professed a short time later and as a lad of five I witnessed the baptism of both parents.

A change in our home was immediately evident. The Bible was read at the table every day. My younger brother and I attended a Gospel Hall Sunday School, series of Gospel meetings and special children’s meetings. From an early age I was convinced that the Bible was the Word of God, that I was a sinner on the Broad Road and would be in hell if I was not saved. The truth of the rapture filled my soul with fear, for I would be left behind.

During my early teen years, Dad spent many weeks in a hospital. His firm hand upon an increasingly rebellious son was missing. Many unsaved friends and a desire to participate in their activities took me away from the influence of the gospel. The prodigal character of Lk.15 was evident as I became determined to escape from the restrictions of home.

Recklessly, I conceived a plan that would take me 150 miles from home to the city of Toronto under the pretext of furthering my education. Like many young men, I felt that my mother was “out of touch” and could easily be deceived. One vital detail in my scheme was missing as I had no place to stay upon my arrival in Toronto. Who can fathom the burden of a Christian mother for a careless unsaved son? Quietly working behind the scenes and with other believers, a boarding place had been found. Before leaving home she presented me with a slip of paper on which was an address where I could obtain a room.

Never will I forget arriving at that house and the gospel texts on the walls. An old gentleman asked for my help to build a fence in the back yard. I helped build that fence with Mr. Gordon Johnston, a missionary from Venezuela. Gospel Hall preachers were the men I was attempting to get as far away from as possible. That first night in Toronto, and much against my will, I sat in the Pape Avenue Gospel Hall and listened to brethren Harold Paisley and Albert Joyce preach the gospel. Impressions were made for eternity that evening.

The stay in Toronto was short. Dropping out of school and unable to find a job, it was necessary to return home. Finding employment 30 miles away from home, I became immersed in all the worldly activities I could find.

Arriving home from a sporting event on a Friday evening, I discovered that Dad was seriously ill. The next morning he was taken by ambulance to the hospital. There are moments inscribed upon the memory that time could never erase. One of those moments in our experience occurred while standing beside my brother in the doorway of our father's hospital room. He looked at us and gave a feeble wave. The last words he spoke were "Good-bye boys." He passed away that night.

The great battle for the soul had commenced. I was deeply troubled but Satan will not release his victims easily. In spite of the inward turmoil, I resolved that unsaved friends would see no tears in my eyes and determinedly braced myself for three days. Upon conclusion of the funeral service, family members were given the opportunity to pay their last respects. When they all rose and gathered around the casket, I refused to join them. When they all sat down and the casket was about to be closed for the journey to the cemetery my wilful resolve was shattered and a proud sinner broke. I stood and alone made my way to my father's side. Looking at him, the tears flowed. He was in heaven and I was on the way to hell. At that moment I was certain that God was speaking to me for the last time.

Returning home from the cemetery, ignoring the large crowd which had gathered in the house, I made my way upstairs to my bedroom burdened about my soul. That cold January afternoon I trusted Christ while reading Jn.5.24.

Often when one is telling their conversion the statement is made "I have no regrets." I have two. First, that I never trusted Christ earlier in life, second, that I never had the opportunity to stand before Dad, look into his face and say "Dad, I just got saved."

I was baptised in the same river in which my parents were baptised and was received into the fellowship of a little country assembly. Later, I returned to Toronto having secured a teaching position. As a teacher I was at liberty to use many summers for gospel work. This would involve going door to door in the afternoons and preaching in the evenings in areas of Ontario where there were no assemblies. A little blessing was seen in some of these places. It eventually became evident that our exercise in the gospel necessitated resigning our teaching position. With the encouragement of various brethren and in fear and trembling, we responded to the command of our Lord: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel," Mk.16.15.

When you know God's heart you will never question God's will. The will of God is His expression of His love for me. The greatest knowledge for man to possess is to know God's will, (it is all in the Word of God!); and man's greatest achievement is to do it! Those who seek to please God, are those who seek to know, then do the will of God!

Good Tidings from Heaven

"IGNORANCE?"

Society is marked by education and knowledge. Few would want to be thought of as being ignorant. Parents encourage, sometimes pressurise, their children to do well at school; more are attending University; night classes are full. All this is with the end in view that we will not be considered ignorant and uneducated.

However, there are serious and spiritual matters concerning which the majority of the population is ignorant. Let us consider just three.

The risen, exalted and glorified Lord Jesus Christ gave His assessment of a company in Rev.3.17, "thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." Here are people who are **IGNORANT OF THEIR AWFUL PLIGHT**. They looked at themselves and thought all is well. We can almost hear them saying, "We have no obvious needs. We are materially well off and are enjoying a good lifestyle." Unconsciously, they undergo an examination which is deep, internal and most revealing. The result of the diagnosis is as serious as it is unexpected. Instead of assessing the external, this divine Examiner lays bare the internal. This is in accord with the Old Testament prophet who recorded, "the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart," 1Sam.16.7. The question to be answered by the reader is, "How would my life appear in the assessment of the Lord Jesus?" If there never has been the soul saving experience of the new birth, then regardless of all the external trappings of religion, respectability and good works, my inward state is appalling and severely deficient in His sight.

In Lk.19.44 again we read the words of the Lord Jesus, "thou knowest not the time of thy visitation." These people were **IGNORANT OF THEIR AMAZING PRIVILEGE**. Out of all the people and cities in the world, He chose them — What a privilege! Many who read this paper have had the amazing privilege of being familiar with the glorious message of the gospel. 1Cor.15.3, "Christ died for our sins;" Rom5.6, "when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly; v8 But God commendeth His love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Yet you never have responded and accepted the Saviour as your own. Those in Luke 19 were bound for and hastening towards judgment as a result and thus the tender hearted Saviour weeps. They did not realise their wonderful opportunity and never would experience peace. What they needed could only be obtained through their acceptance of the One who died on Calvary to satisfy the claims of God's throne and open the way back to God. It causes Him concern that you reject Him and are heading for eternal damnation. Does it not give you any thought or concern? Have you ever wept over your dreadful sin?

You may dismiss all that has been written above and pooh-pooh the idea of eternal punishment. Some will teach the Satanic theory of annihilation and seek to comfort themselves with the unscriptural theories of men. They are like those in Matt.24.39, "knew not until the flood came, and took them all away." They were **IGNORANT OF THE APPROACHING PUNISHMENT**. They rejected the preaching of the godly Noah and life was continuing as normal. SOCIAL LIFE v38 "eating and drinking," and PERSONAL LIFE "marrying and giving in marriage," continued. But there was a sudden intervention of God, v38,39, "knew not until." Their unbelief did not stop the judgment of God. There was a sudden and unexpected interruption of their plans when God moved, "and took them all away." The waters above the earth combined with those beneath and led to the overwhelming deluge. In a day to come, the fire that is above will combine with that beneath and sweep this ungodly world in divine judgment.

Dear reader, are you aware of this or are you already living in ignorance? Are you ready to meet God or, ostrich-like, do you hope it will never happen? The Bible states, "prepare to meet thy God," Amos 4.12. Ignorance will not be an excuse. The only answer is found in the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, "Who gave Himself a ransom for all," 1Tim.2.6. Jn.3.16, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."