



# 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.

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## *Editor's Message*

We have reached a point in the calendar which many thought the church would not see. The great hope of the rapture when all the saved will be caught up to be forever with the Lord, has been to the forefront of our thinking as we approached the end of the millennium. He promised He will come and His promise is sure. We remember the last promise He made, "Surely I come quickly." We cannot doubt His integrity. He who cannot sin and will not forget His own will come and this event cannot be long delayed.

Down through the ages, as difficulties have arisen and the dark days increased, the saints have been longing for His coming. We are no different. We all have our own personal problems which concern our family, our health, our employment and much more. We have collective difficulties as there are many not prepared to walk the path laid out for us in the Holy Scriptures. We lost good men whose advice and counsel were most helpful. We could almost feel like giving up!

Instead of giving up we are encouraged to look up! This the Psalmist did, 5.3, "My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will **look up**." When we cannot see things clearly and are wondering what to do, we can come to Him for His touch, Mk.8.25, "After that He put his hands again upon his eyes, and made him **look up**: and he was restored, and saw every man clearly." We can take to ourselves His encouraging words for a people in the future, Lk.21.28, "**look up**, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh." Said Paul, Rom.13.11, "And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed."

Dear saint, as you go through the trials of life, do not look around, do not look to men, do not even look to self, but **look up**. There is One at God's right hand who can and will meet every need of His people and will soon come to remove them from every sorrowful situation. Rev.21.4, "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." Rev.22.3, "And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and His servants shall serve Him: And they shall see His face; and His name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever."

The unequalled glory of this causes John's cry to echo in our hearts, "Even, so come Lord Jesus."

## COMMITTEE NOTES

Not only do we enter another year, but, somewhat to our amazement, we enter a new millennium. At such a time we look back and “remember all the way which the Lord thy God led...” Deut.8.2. We are bound to give thanks for His unflinching faithfulness who has preserved and blessed us another year. But we also look forward and with anticipation, recall the words of Christ to disconsolate disciples, “I will come again...” Jn.14.3 “Who shall declare His generation...?” was the sneering question asked concerning the silent Sufferer led from Pilate's Judgment Hall to be crucified but after two millennia His Name is revered worldwide, “He is leading many sons unto glory” and there is a people on earth who love Him and long to see His blessed face. We cannot and will not forget His love.

We wish to express our sincere gratitude for all the help we have received from the Lord's beloved people and acknowledge with a sense of indebtedness the service of prayer that many have maintained on our behalf. We thank all who, with exercise, have submitted articles and those who continue so kindly to facilitate distribution. The freewill offerings from individuals and assemblies move our hearts in gratitude to our faithful God and the letters of appreciation from dear saints in so many lands are a real encouragement.

We are especially grateful to our Editor for his careful selection and screening of material, the Secretary and his wife for their hospitality and labour of love, so cheerfully undertaken and so efficiently carried out, the Accountant for his valued services and our beloved brother John Glenville for his faithfulness and help over many years. Our brother's association with the magazine has been a long and happy one and we pray the Lord's richest blessing upon him and his dear wife.

May we continue to be favoured with your prayerful and practical support and may the Lord graciously continue to bless His own through the publication of the magazine.

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### PSALM 110

He sits at God's right hand until  
His enemies are made His stool.  
'Till God sends out from Zion's hill  
His sceptre strong with which to rule.

The Lord swears and will not repent  
“Thou art a priest for evermore”  
Just as Melchisedec was sent  
So Christ will rule from shore to shore.

Thy people will be willing then,  
In holy splendour clothed by Thee.  
Thyself like youthful morning when  
The glist'ning dew on all we see.

The Kings will know His wrath that day  
And places will be filled with dead.  
He'll drink of Kedron by the way  
Therefore will He lift up His head.

Matthew J. Cordiner (*Kilwinning*)

# **BEHOLD YOUR KING**

(Meditations in Matthew)

by Jim Flanigan (Belfast)

## **24. The Return to Judea (Ch.19)**

Our Lord now leaves Galilee, commencing His final journey to Judea, to Jerusalem, and to Calvary. In great and customary grace He makes time for the multitudes that follow Him and He heals their sick.

It must be conceded that the passage that now follows has been the subject of much controversy among great and godly men, yet there are important and abiding principles concerning marriage which must be agreed by all. It is important to note that the Pharisees who now approach the Saviour with their question have no real interest in His answer, nor would they have any willingness to learn from Him. They came “tempting Him”. Their motives were not pure. They were seeking to involve Him in an ongoing debate among the various Rabbinical schools. Among the Rabbis the differing opinions about the grounds for divorce were legion. On the one hand there were those who held strictly to the sanctity of family and the married state, and who spoke with reverence of “the four mothers”, Sarah, Rebakah, Leah, and Rachel. With such, divorce was a last and regrettable resource. At the other extreme there were those who treated women with contempt and sanctioned divorce for the most trifling and ridiculous causes. It would not be profitable to enumerate these here.

Our Lord Jesus, as He had done before in what is known as “The Sermon on the Mount”, directs the Pharisees, not to tradition or to Rabbinical opinion, or even to the Talmud, the accepted code of Jewish civil and canon law, but to the Scriptures. What an example He has given us when problems arise, that we should resort to the Word itself for answers to those problems. “Have ye not read?”, He asks. The Creator who at the beginning made them male and female and instituted the marriage state, purposed that the union of man and wife should be an indissoluble unity which constituted them one flesh. It was never envisaged that this divine arrangement for mankind should be disrupted by divorce.

But the Pharisees now have another question. If this were so, was the teaching of Jesus in conflict with that of Moses who commanded a writing of divorcement when a wife was put away? Moses never commanded divorce. He tolerated it for the hardness of their hearts. He commanded the bill or letter of divorce for the safeguarding of the rights of a divorced wife, but from the beginning such a situation was never the divine intention. Whosoever therefore would put away his wife and marry another woman, committed adultery. In the parallel account in Mark 10:11-12, this is just how it reads but it is well known that in Matthew’s account there is included an exception clause which reads, “except it be for fornication.” It is this clause which has occasioned difficulty for some.

The question must be asked, “Why does our Lord use the word “fornication”, as

distinct from the word “adultery”? There must surely be some reason for Him to distinguish the two words in one sentence. Our Lord never gives consent to divorce for adultery. Fornication is not the same thing. It is to be noted that this clause is in Matthew’s Gospel, the Gospel with a distinctly Jewish readership in view. Jewish culture and marriage custom had a betrothal period before marriage which was not known among Gentiles. Others have written fully on the subject, as Alfred Edersheim who writes, “A distinction is made between betrothal and marriage.” But he continues, “From the moment of her betrothal a woman was treated as if she were actually married. The union could not be dissolved except by regular divorce.” Any unchastity on the part of the betrothed woman during this period was fornication. It was not adultery, though treated as such. Our Lord uses the distinguishing word. Such fornication during the betrothal period, when it was discovered, dissolved the marriage arrangement by divorce. This was the only ground for divorce, fornication, not adultery.

All this raises the question in the minds of the disciples as to the wisdom of entering into such a binding marriage relationship at all, but the Lord points out that while at times there may be various and valid reasons for celibacy, such a celibate state was not for all men, and the union of man and wife was, after all, a divine institution.

It seems so fitting that immediately following all of this they bring little children to Him. Is it not one of the blessings and privileges of marriage and parenthood, to bring children into the world and then bring them to the Saviour. The disciples rebuke the parents but Jesus gently rebukes the disciples. He lays His hands on the little ones and blesses them and continues His journey southward to Jerusalem and to the cross.

Then there is the sad story of a very rich young man whose riches were unfortunately greater than his desire for Christ. An apparently upright and honourable life there had been, but if a man is not prepared to have Christ before all else, he lacks the real treasure. He went away sorrowful. The cost was too great. Mark says that Jesus, beholding him, loved him. Would the Master really have asked him to give up all? Or was this a divine testing of the reality of the man’s desire after spiritual treasures? He failed the test. It was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a man to enter heaven either by means of his riches or with his riches.

Peter however, remarks to the Lord that he and his colleagues had not been so. They had forsaken all to follow Him. What recompense would they have? The Lord will occupy them with coming glory. There would be a day of regeneration for Israel. The Son of Man would sit on the throne of His glory, and in that day they would share His glory with Him. If they shared now in His rejection they would share then in His exaltation. They would be recompensed an hundredfold and it would be worth it all. The principle is still the same, as expounded by Paul in 2Tim.2.11-12.

*—to be continued (D.V.)*

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The “ideal” is our aim but the “actual” is our experience.

*—J. Douglas*

# Assembly Testimony Bible Class

by J. Riddle (Cheshunt)

## ESTHER

### (9) FAVOUR WITH THE KING, Part 1

#### Read Chapter 5

The three days of fasting are over, and Esther fulfils her promise, “So will I go in unto the king...”, 4.16. There are three main paragraphs in this Chapter: (1) Esther approaches the throne, v1-2; (2) Ahasuerus accepts her invitations, v3-8; (3) Haman anticipates victory, v9-14.

#### 1) ESTHER APPROACHES THE THRONE, v1-2

These verses remind us of our approach to another throne. “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need,” Heb.4.16. Ahasuerus “sat upon his royal throne in the royal house.” However splendid the scene, it cannot compare with “the throne of the Majesty in the heavens,” Heb.8.1. Esther was not at all sure that the throne of Persia would prove to be a throne of grace,” but *we* know that the “throne of the majesty in the heavens” *is also* a “throne of grace.” Notice:

#### A) *Her alarm before the king*

*i) Esther was uncertain.* What kind of reception would she receive? Would the golden sceptre be extended to her? She had explained the position to Mordecai in ch.4.11. There was tremendous risk involved: “So will I go into the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish I perish.” It is all far removed from Heb.4.16 and 10.19, “Let us *therefore* come *boldly* unto the throne of grace... Having therefore, brethren, *boldness* to enter the holiest...” This does not mean that we approach God irreverently or carelessly: we must never abandon “the fear of the Lord.” But we are able to “come boldly.” The expression suggests freedom of speech. We can take everything “to the Lord in prayer.” We can come “in full assurance of faith.” Esther certainly didn’t come that way!

Perhaps this is an opportunity to say that service for God often carries risk. The church at Jerusalem described Barnabus and Paul as “men that have hazarded (‘given up’ JND) their lives for the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ,” Acts 15.26. Priscilla and Aquilla certainly exposed themselves to risk: “Who for my life laid down their own necks,” Rom.16.4. (‘Who for my life staked — risked, hazarded — their own neck.’ JND. Notice the singular, ‘neck.’)

*ii) Esther was uninvited.* “Whosoever... shall come unto the king in the inner court, *who is not called*, there is one law of his to put him to death... *I have not been called* to come in unto the king in these thirty days,” 4.11. There is no such

restriction so far as we are concerned: “In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God,” Phil.4.6. The Lord Jesus taught, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you,” Matt.7.7. We have an unqualified divine invitation in Heb.10.22, “Let us draw near...” James says, “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God...”, 1.5

*ii) Esther was unenthusiastic.* She was willing to approach the king, see 4.16, but you could hardly expect her to relish the task! How about us? Has prayer become a chore, a duty that must be performed? David didn't think so: “My voice shalt Thou hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto Thee, and will look up,” Ps.5.3.

### **B) Her approach to the king**

*i) Where did she come?* She came to the throne of Persia, to the highest possible authority in the kingdom. She could not have gone higher. We have already noticed that we approach “the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.”

*ii) When did she come?* “Now it came to pass *on the third day...*” You'll have no difficulty with that! “He rose again the *third day* according to the Scriptures.” We approach God on the basis of Christ's death and resurrection. We “by Him do believe in God, that raised Him up from the dead, and gave Him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God,” 1Pet.1.21.

*iii) How did she come?* “Esther put on her royal apparel...” We too have ‘royal apparel.’ Garments suitable for the presence of God. Once, like Joshua, Zech.3, we were “clothed in filthy garments.” But listen to this: “Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with a change of raiment...” We have been “made the righteousness of God in Him,” 2Cor.5.21. God has “made us accepted in the Beloved,” Eph.1.6.

We must make sure that those garments are always worn. Peter describes God's people as a “holy priesthood” in offering “spiritual sacrifices” in the “spiritual house.” He also uses the expression “royal priesthood” in connection with our testimony before others: “that ye should shew forth the praises of Him Who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light”, 1Pet.2.1-10. It is in connection with the latter that we are told: “Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof,” Rom.13.14. But what about the future?

When I stand before the throne,  
Dressed in beauty not my own;  
When I see Thee as Thou art,  
Love Thee with unsinning heart:  
Then, Lord, shall I fully know,  
Not till then, how much I owe.

### **C) Her acceptance by the king**

“She obtained favour in his sight: and the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand.” We have already noticed that Esther had no right to



enter the king's presence, and therefore she was only accepted on the basis of grace. As John C. Whitcomb says: 'The spiritual application to the gospel message is remarkable. Because of our sin, we cannot enter the presence of an infinitely holy God. But this same God, in His incomparable love and grace, has provided a plan whereby even the worst of sinners may enter His presence and touch, as it were, His golden scepter (American spelling).' As Whitcomb points out, the picture is imperfect in view of the character of the ruler himself.

The sceptre displayed the right to rule: hence Esther's acceptance was invested with the highest possible authority. Notice Heb.1.8.

Our acceptance is in Christ Himself. "But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus Who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption", 1Cor.1.30.  
—to be continued (D.V.)

# The Kings of Judah and Israel

by Graeme Hutchinson (Belfast)

## *Joash (Paper 10)*

Stemming from Jehoshaphat's compromise with Ahab, 2Chron.18, and the marriage of his son (Jehoram) to Ahab's daughter (Athaliah), 2Chron.21, the nation of Judah experienced much departure and sin. It was not until his great-grandson, Joash, was installed as king that the nation began to move in more spiritual paths. Scripture records:

### *(a) His Background*

Sadly for Joash, he was not blessed with a godly home or a stable throne. 2Chron.22.10-12 records two factors, good and bad, that were to have a dramatic impact on his early life:

#### *• Iniquity of a grandmother*

Athaliah was all that her own mother, Jezebel, represented. Sinful, in that she evidently exerted a strong influence over her husband and later over her own son (Ahaziah), 2Chron.21.6; 22.3. Moreover, she was driven by Satan in that she attempted to destroy all the seed royal and so eradicate the line that led to Christ. For six years she ruled over the nation of Judah, usurping the divine order and promoting the idolatrous practices of Baal, 2Chron.24.7. As a grandmother to Joash, she was not the best example or model for a young king to follow! Surely this is a testimony, and trophy, to God's sovereign will; bringing out from such a family a man who, for at least part of his life, served the Lord, 2Chron.24.2.

#### *• Influence of a godly marriage*

Thankfully the truth of Rom.5.20 was in operation, for God had, by grace, provided a godly couple that were to save the life of Joash. Whereas Jehoram and

Athaliah epitomise the godless marriage, Jehoshabeath<sup>1</sup> and Jehoiada, v11, are representative of a marriage that was spiritual<sup>2</sup>. In the case of Jehoiada, the priest, the record of Scripture would bear testimony to his:

- (i) *control* (2Chron.23.1-10)
- (ii) *courage* (2Chron.23.14)
- (iii) *conviction* (2Chron.23.18-19; 24.12)
- (iv) *commitment* (2Chron.24.16)

For Jehoshabeath, it appears that when it came to rescuing Joash, she took the lead, 2Chron.22.11. The New Testament parallel would be Aquila and Priscilla who both took Apollos under their wings, Acts 18.24-26, and went to great lengths in their service for Paul and the church, Rom.16.3-4. Therefore, when it comes to the question of marriage both Old and New Testaments concur; we marry in the Lord, 1Cor.7.39; we marry one who has the same spiritual interests; we marry to improve our service for the Lord.

### **(b) His Birth**

Given his kind aunt and generous uncle, Joash was spared almost certain death from his grandmother, Athaliah. 2Chron.22.12 records that he spent six years of his life dwelling in the house of God. From such a verse we can make two observations:

#### **• The Preparation**

Known only to God, Joash was to commence his reign over Judah at the tender age of seven, 2Chron.24.1. What better preparation was possible for one who would soon be charged with the responsibility of ruling the nation and keeping the law, Deut.17.19, than to be brought up in the temple! Perhaps it was here that he observed Jehoiada's concern for the 'House', and this would have been instrumental in forming his own opinions and interests, 2Chron.24.4. If God, by His grace, places us in a home where His name is revered, we should be deeply thankful, it is a tremendous privilege and honour.

#### **• The Picture**

Whilst in the Old Testament we have Athaliah, Herod in the New Testament is surely the equivalent, Matt.2.16. Both individuals attempted to thwart God's will, both were unsuccessful! Although, at this early stage of his life, Joash may remind us of the Lord Jesus, it is not long until sin and departure are in evidence, 2Chron.24.22. Thus, for every present-day Christian, the goal is to be more conformed to the image of the Lord. Sadly for many of us, we too are like Joash, only reaching such lofty standards in a sporadic fashion, never anything of permanence.

### **(c) His Behaviour**

Once installed as king, the reign of Joash was to last for forty years, 2Chron.24.1. During this period we can summarise his activities in the following way:

---

1 Jehoshabeath was daughter of Jehoram and sister of Ahaziah, v11, and thus she was an aunt to Joash.

2 Notice from verse 12, where Jehoshabeath and Jehoiada resided, the house of God. The inclusion of the word 'them' would stress the union and solidarity that existed within the marriage.

### • *Relationship with Jehoiada*

Unquestionably, as 2 Chron. 24.2, 14 would record, the influence that Jehoiada had over the king was for good. During the lifetime of Jehoiada, Joash not only walked before the Lord in a pleasing way, no doubt embracing his marriage, v3, but the nation also enacted the necessary offerings on a continual basis. However, it was clearly Jehoiada that was the driving force. Whilst spiritual companionship is a blessing, the test comes when we must stand alone. Are we like Joash, liable to falter? Timothy, despite all his personal inhibitions, 1Tim.4.12, was fully equipped to continue the work started by his spiritual father and mentor, Paul.

### • *Restoration of the Temple*

Following a lengthy period of idolatry, the house of the Lord was in need of repair, 2Chron.24.4,7. After some delay, 2Kgs.12.6, Joash went about raising sufficient money for the rebuilding exercise. Initially he ordered the priests and Levites to go throughout the land and collect the temple taxes required by the Law of Moses, Ex.30.12-16. Once this approach had proved fruitless, the king erected a chest, 2Chron.24.8, (or was it Jehoiada? 2Kgs.12.9), and the people had to bring their taxes to the temple. The result was that the people gave in 'abundance', v11, and the restoration was completed, v14. In our day, just as in Joash's, there is a real need for believers who are able to discern the need within the assembly and direct the work (and workers) so that the need is met. The application can, of course, be taken literally as well as spiritually!

### • *Reaction to Jehoiada's Death*

'Joash seemingly was as easily influenced to do evil after the priest's death as he was to do good before' (Merrill, Bible Knowledge Commentary, 1986, p.637). Initially the problems stemmed from his tendency to listen to man rather than God, 2Chron.24.17, and this led again to the introduction of idolatry. Whilst the son of Jehoiada, Zechariah, and hence Joash's own cousin was prepared to speak out against this depravity, he was stoned to death under the instructions of the king in the temple court, v21. The final end of Joash was when he went out to war against a 'small company' of Syrians; the nation was defeated, v24, and he was assassinated<sup>3</sup>, v25. Thus, we have presented the importance of developing spiritual backbones! Having the right principles, from Scripture, and sticking by them, irrespective of who dies and what contrary advice is offered.

### (d) *His Burial*

2Chron.24.25 records that when it came to the question of his burial, Joash had no portion with the kings that had served before him. Sad to think that despite a privileged upbringing and a promising start, he ended his life under such depressing circumstances.

See paper 1 for details of Bibliography/Figures

—*to be continued (D.V.)*

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<sup>3</sup> Zabad and Jehozabad, the two men who killed Joash, were from Ammon and Moab respectively, 2Chron.24.26. Therefore, whilst from enemy nations, these two men sought to amend the unjust, and sinful, treatment that Zechariah suffered at the hands of Joash, v25.

# PAPERS ON PROPHECY

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

VOLUME 2

## 12(d)—Christ's Millennial Reign

5. We will now consider briefly what God will do in that day for the CREATION IN GENERAL. Man, by his sin, has not only brought ruin on himself, but has marred his home, and dragged down all the creatures dependent upon him. Thorns and thistles are marks of man's sin, much more the groans of the brute creation, Gen.3.18. Man, unlike angels, was constituted by God the centre of a system of things. The whole of this lower creation either suffers or rejoices with its head. This is its time of suffering. "We know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now," Rom.8.22. We who believe groan also in sympathy, our mortal bodies forming a link with the old creation. But we are alone in God's secret, as to where deliverance will come from, and when. Though it understands it not, "the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God." When Christ comes upon the scene, bringing with Him the whole glorified family of God, then the creation will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God.

What a change will then pass over this poor earth! Think of the wolf casting aside his savage instincts and dwelling peaceably with the lamb; the leopard lying down with the kid; the calf and the young lion feeding together; and a little child leading them all! Isa11.6-7; 65.25. Think also of the sucking child playing on the hole of the asp, and of the weaned child putting his hand on the cockatrice's den, and getting no harm! What days of peace and quietness for man and beast! There will be one solemn exception to this general deliverance—the serpent. "Dust shall be the serpent's meat," Isa.65.25. The reason is not far to seek. Under this form the tempter seduced our first parents, and thus brought in all the misery; this God will never overlook or forget. The curse pronounced in Eden will not be revoked in this case, Gen.3.14.

There will be physical changes also, at least in the land of Israel. Thus we read of a river flowing from under the threshold of the house of God, parting into two heads, going east and west, and fertilising wherever it goes, Ezek.47. We read also that "the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose," and that "instead of the thorn shall come up the fir-tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree," Isa.35.1;55.13. Barrenness will be practically unknown in the day of Christ's supremacy in the earth. Wonderful jubilee for this long-enslaved scene! Well may believers say "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."

6. Satan will then be placed under restraint. For a thousand years men will be spared temptation from without. If a sin appears (an exceptional thing, it would seem, Isa.65.20), men will not be able to blame any but their own evil hearts. During the whole period of the reign of Christ, the great adversary will be confined to the bottomless pit (or the abyss, Rev.20.1-3). This should not be confounded with Gehenna — the lake of fire. The one is a place of temporary confinement, the other

is his eternal portion, in common with ungodly men. Satan and his agents well know what is in store for them. When the Lord Jesus was on earth, demons recognised Him as their tormentor, and on one occasion besought Him not to consign them just then to the abyss, Matt.8.29; Lk.8.31. The time for this is Christ's appearing, and it is in order that the whole earth may know peace and rest under His holy and beneficent sway.

Thus will the tide of blessing roll on. Earth's deep scars will be divinely effaced, and human sorrows and afflictions will cease. Though the population will enormously increase, there will be plenty for all, for the earth will be prolific as never before. There will be no want for His subjects; every need will be abundantly supplied. Surely such a term of blessedness and peace will convince men that the service of Christ is better than that of Satan! Alas, no! No sooner will Satan be released from his prison than he will succeed in stirring up rebellion. Vast hosts will be got together to make war on the camp of the (earthly) saints and the beloved city (Jerusalem). Divine retribution will fall at once, without warning or mercy, Rev.20.7-10. Nothing remains to be done but the judgment of the dead at the Great White Throne, which will follow in solemn sequence. On this we need not now dwell, having already considered it in an earlier paper.

The reign of Christ as man being over, and all foes having been subjugated, Christ will deliver up the kingdom to Him who is God and Father. "When all things shall be subdued unto Him, then shall the Son also be subject unto Him that put all things under Him, that God may be all in all," 1Cor.15.24-28. Here we pause. Time is no longer; eternity is come.

—(Concluded).

## **Believers' Baptism**

### **A Defence of this important New Testament Ordinance**

by J. D. McColl (Australia)

The ultimate and final authority for all Christian practices is the Bible. The traditions and theories of men invariably lead the unwary astray, and always result, more or less, in developments patently foreign both to the letter and to the spirit of the Word of God. Failure to distinguish between matters that differ is a serious fault, while the custom of founding doctrine and procedure on analogies and inferences is eminently unsafe. Rites and ceremonies bolstered by reasonings and deductions have no appeal for the Christian whose solitary guide-book for faith and practice is the Scripture of truth.

One of the most fruitful sources of error is to be found in the confusion which arises from the constant use of such unmeaning terms as, "the church visible and invisible," "the church on earth and the church in heaven," "a sphere of privilege." These terms are labels, coined by men and attached to institutions and ideas for which there is no sanction in the Word of God. A misunderstanding of the phrase, "In a great house," 2.Tim.2.20, has led many astray. "The house" is neither

Christendom nor a sphere of profession: it is nothing more than a house used as an illustration to enforce a truth about the value of purity as an asset in service for Christ. We must contend for a simple acceptance of truths found in the Bible, without additions to suit the whims and pride of men, without ceremonial to align believers with the unauthorised paraphernalia of Judaised Christendom, for all that is practised within the misnamed "Christian Church" is not Christian.

**“. . . Knowing only the baptism of John” (Acts 18.24-28)**

Christian baptism is not a continuation of John’s baptism. John’s disciples were baptized on the confession of their sins and in anticipation of a coming Messiah. It was a baptism unto death, the due reward of their deeds, but not to Christ’s death. It was related to repentance as an outward act, in which an inward change found visible expression, but it was quite distinct from Christian baptism.

In Acts 19.4 Paul explains John’s mission and message, he states, “John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on Him, which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.” John’s preaching had two main elements. The first was a call to repent. What is meant is not a merely intellectual change of mind or mere sorrow for sin, still less doing penance, but a fundamental turnaround involving mind, attitude and action relating to God and sin. The second element in his preaching was the nearness of the Messiah’s presentation to the Nation of Israel. Their baptism by John would be an open confession and public acknowledgement of this twofold thrust of his message upon them. This resulted in a moral and spiritual condition suitable to the reception of their rightful King and Messiah, yielding Him full allegiance and obedience.

Baptism in itself did not clear them of their sin nor render them suitable before God. To state that baptism must precede repentance, and must precede remission of sins, is to teach a crude form of salvation by works. Linking Mk.16.16 “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned,” with Matt.3.11, “I indeed baptize you in water unto repentance...”, also with Acts 2.38, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins...”, also, Acts 19.4, abundantly establish the fact that baptism is linked with the essential requirements of repentance and faith, not as being itself essential to salvation and forgiveness, but as being one of the first evidences of the change which repentance and faith bring about.

John’s baptism in water gave place to baptism by the Lord’s disciples, Jn.3.22; 4.1-2; this took place before the cross, and was the beginning of what later was believers' baptism in the Lord’s name after the cross. “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized.” Acts 2.41 Following the Lord’s resurrection, He instituted a new thing, believers' baptism, replacing John's baptism, commanding His disciples to “Make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you,” Matt.28.19-20.

**“Is Baptism the introductory rite to a new order?”**

“Peter said unto them, Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the

Holy Spirit” Acts 2.38. That these words should not be understood to mean that remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit are secured by baptism is clear from comparison with other statements in Acts. For example, in the case of Cornelius and his friends, “the Holy Spirit fell on all them which heard the word,” and only thereafter were they baptised, and at Pisidian Antioch Paul declared that “by Him (the Lord Jesus) every one that believeth is justified from all things,” without making any reference to baptism at all, Acts 10.44-48; 13.39. These results follow repentance, the change of attitude toward Christ from unbelief to faith, which change is expressed in baptism, and without change baptism is but an empty form. In response to the words of the apostle, some three thousand people were baptized that day, and the condition on which the rite was administered that they “received his word,” that is, they responded to his message by trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ, and confessing His name in the way He had appointed, v41.

Throughout the apostolic age baptism is always associated with the preaching of the Gospel. The words of Acts 18.8 are authoritative and explicit: “Many of the Corinthians hearing, believed, and were baptised.”

Peter’s words in Acts 2.38 had a special message for his audience for they had with darkened understanding, hatred and self-will condemned and crucified Jesus as a blasphemer. Now He had been revealed as dying not for His own sins, for He had none, but for others. Straightway there followed a genuine repentance, a glad reception of the Word, and a willing submission to baptism as a public confession of the change and an open identification with the death of Christ. The evidence of true repentance was followed by the divine assurance, the gift of the Spirit. Their baptism was ‘in the Name of Jesus Christ,’ meaning, ‘so as to repose their hope and confidence’ in Him. In the case of Saul of Tarsus, the persecutor of Jesus, the divine requirements were similar. ‘Arise and be baptised and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord,’ Acts 22.16. This last expression, so reminiscent of Peter’s words, ‘Whosoever calleth on the name of the Lord shall be saved,’ Acts 2.21, is significant. This calling on the name of Christ, thus closely associated with baptism, and preceding it, necessarily involved belief in Him. “Be baptized and wash away thy sins,” not only put the responsibility upon them, but also stressed the need for an open recognition of their national sin in condemning and crucifying their rightful Messiah.

The immediate dependance and sequence of baptism on the confession of faith are made more explicit in the case of the Samaritans, Acts 8.12, of the Ethiopian eunuch, Acts 8.36,37, of Cornelius, Acts 10.47,48; 11.17, of Lydia, Acts 16.14,15, and of the Philippian jailor, Acts 16.31-34, but in these instances there is not the same emphasis on the inter-relationship between repentance and baptism unto the remission of sins. It should be remembered that there was not the same immediate and evident responsibility as with the men of Israel who had crucified the Son of God, or with Saul who shared the national sin of Christ’s rejection and death and who became the very embodiment of Jewish malignity. But in every case baptism was a public confession of faith in Him and a complete renunciation of the past. Let us ever remember that it is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that introduces us to the new order of things.

—*to be continued*)

# *Christian Conduct in a Modern World*

by Walter A. Boyd (South Africa)

## **No.2 — THE CONSECRATED LIFE**

### **(a) The Believer and God**

In the previous article we have established the priority of worship in the life of a believer. We will now examine how that priority can be manifested in the modern world. Paul's epistle to the Christians in the city of Rome is one of the most important documents ever to be written from a Christian's standpoint. It is outstanding among the writings of the Apostle. Its importance lies, not only in the fact that it is divinely inspired, but also in that it is the most comprehensive explanation we have of the Divine plan and purpose of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In the Acts of the Apostles, we have the proclamation of the gospel concerning the Person who is presented in the four Gospels. In the epistle to the Romans, we have the explanation of the gospel that is preached in the book of Acts. It forms a strategic foundation for the Epistles coming after it in a number of ways.

Romans chs.1-8 deal with the great subject of how a sinner is brought into blessing and what is involved in being thus brought in: condemnation as a sinner; justification as a saint and glorification in a day to come. Chs.9-11 deal with the position of Israel in relation to the gospel of Jesus Christ and God's dealings with the Gentiles. In these chapters, the reason is given for the delay in fulfilment of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants. In order to understand what God is doing in the present age it is necessary to understand something of the various dispensations and the different methods He employed in each. Chs.12-16, which are often called the practical section, give us the duties and responsibilities of a believer. The Holy Spirit gives an important balance of truth in the epistle; the transition from doctrine to practice is essential, since the Christian's conduct and behaviour must conform to his standing in Christ. The practical responsibilities of the latter part of the epistle are firmly rooted in the doctrines of the earlier part.

The consecrated life of Ch.12 finds expression as seen in the following breakdown of this section: Ch.13, the Christian Citizen; Ch.14.1 to 15.13, the Considerate Life; Ch.15.14-33, the Consecrated Servant and Ch.16, Concluding Salutations.

### **Chapter 12- The Consecrated Life**

Ch.12 commences by hitting a high point in terms of the demands upon life and then develops into the practical consequences for a believer in right relations with His God. If our life is ordered correctly and God has His deserved place, there will be no problem keeping other areas in harmony.



- (a) Ch.12.1-2 — The believer and God.
- (b) Ch.12.3-8 — The believer and the church.
- (c) Ch.12.9-13 — The believer and fellow Christians
- (d) Ch.12.14-21 — The believer and society.

### Ch 12.1,2 — The believer and God

These two verses form a climax as far as responsibility is concerned, for the whole epistle. Everything in the previous argument of the Apostle is leading up to them doctrinally and everything subsequent stems from them practically.

1) *The Exhortation* is addressed to “brethren.” Paul recognises their relationship together in Christ and only true Christians can be expected to respond to the call sounded in the mercies of God. When Paul presents the requirement to us, as sinners who have partaken of the rich and abounding mercies of God in salvation, he beseeches, he does not command. The Law said “thou shalt,” but here we are in the sphere of grace and the call is to our hearts to respond as we contemplate the favours that God has bestowed upon us.

2) *The Motivation* to respond in obedience is “the mercies of God.” The Apostle supports his exhortation with the best of all motives. Not only must we have a motive for what we do but also it must be the right one. Bring together all the blessings enumerated in the earlier chapters, not just chps.1-8, but right through to the end of ch.11 and you have what Paul is describing as the mercies of God. You can detect the Apostle’s *modus operandi*; meditation becomes motivation, mercies beget motives.

3) *The Presentation* of our bodies is the sacrifice demanded in the light of the mercies of God. We must recognise that we are not our own but have been bought with a price by the death of Christ. Therefore, I should present my whole being to God. This is not presentation for some great missionary exploit but rather consecration as a calculated decision, upon appreciation of the mercies of God.

The presentation seems to be:

A) *A Physical Sacrifice.* The Word of God has some important things to say about our physical body. In Cor.6 it is “the temple of the Holy Spirit.” In Rom.8 it will be “quicken” in resurrection. In Phil.4 it will be “fashioned like unto His glorious body.” The present world swings between two errors in relation to the body. On one hand it places great emphasis on the preservation, enhancement and care of the physical body to boost the ego, while on the other hand it encourages influences that wreck the physical frame through sinful living. Our concern ought to be its preservation for the glory of God in consecrated living.

B) *A Living Sacrifice.* All the Levitical sacrifices were intended for death, but here it is a sacrifice consisting of a life intended to be lived for God alone. The energy, ability and talents of life are to be used in the service of God. When has there ever been a greater stress laid upon living life to the full and personal enjoyment regardless of how we affect others? This is the age of putting self first. The consecrated believer reserves his life and energy for God, not for self.

C) *A Holy Sacrifice.* The body of a saint, who is consecrated, will be set apart for

God and available only to Him. It should be noted that we are not speaking of a holiness that stems from consecration but rather the consecration to God of that which is already holy. The moral defilement and pollution of the world falls to a new low every day. A consecrated life is one that is kept unspotted from the world and presented to God in a sacrifice.

**D) An Acceptable Sacrifice.** A life consecrated and so presented to God will gain His favour and acceptance. The connection between worship and being well pleasing to God as discussed in the first article, “The Priority of Worship,” should not be missed. There is no higher objective in Christian living than to be well pleasing to God. We should seek in every matter to “prove what is acceptable to God,” Eph.5.10. If we live to be acceptable to God in this life, the review at the Judgment Seat of Christ will produce the reward of eternal blessing for pleasing Him.

The presentation of a consecrated life in sacrifice to God is our **reasonable service**. Paul is speaking about priestly service to God; the word used is sometimes translated “worship.” Here we are getting down to the bedrock foundation of a life of worship and service. There is no service, however noble, that will be fully and completely rendered and accepted, except from a body presented to God. There is no worship, however costly, that will be fully accepted and pleasing to God, except from a life consecrated to God. Scholars have never resolved the problem as to the meaning of the word reasonable; is it rational, the obedience of the heart and mind in contemplation of the mercies of God? Or, is it logical, the only response a right thinking mind can arrive at, in light of the mercies of God? The original word is used elsewhere in both these senses; the conclusion therefore must be drawn from the context. In which case the argument seems to fall in favour of logical, as it is a plea made on the basis of mercies extended to and enjoyed by the child of God.

**4) The Transformation** of our minds is the hidden spring from which separation from the world, v2, flows freely. Inward transformation is a change that affects the outward appearance. If I am inwardly transformed I will not be outwardly conformed to the world. Many today say “as long as the heart is right that is all that matters.” That is exactly the point! My outward appearance reveals my inward condition. What is down in the well must come up in the bucket, therefore the appearance of a believer indicates what moulds their life and shapes their thinking. The transformation is affected by the renewing of our mind, that is, the whole person is transformed by the inward change in the mind that is being continually renewed by the Spirit of God. The other occurrences of the word “transform” are very instructive. In the gospels, we have the historical record of the transfiguration of the Lord Jesus (same word as transform), Matt.17.2, Mk.9.2. This does not give much help as to the meaning of the word but the other occurrence in 2Cor.3.18 is very helpful. Paul says, “beholding... the glory of the Lord, **are changed** into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” Two important principles are given here as the secret of the transformed life; **contemplation** of the Lord and **control** by the Holy Spirit. Each is of equal force to effect a transformed life and will evidence the balance of life expected of a saint in touch with his God. Observation of Christ and obedience to the Holy Spirit are the life changing factors

we find so elusive in this busy world. The old hymn "Take time to be holy, speak oft with thy Lord; abide in Him always and feed on His Word," has caught the essential elements of this practical truth. Meditation upon Christ will affect my attitude to this present evil age and will enhance my worship. Therefore, in meditation upon the Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit will make impressions upon the heart that demand obedience, a change of attitude or action. Obeying Him brings us into closer conformity to the Son of God and precipitates the change or transformation expected in these verses. There are no short-cuts to Christ-likeness and that same Christ-likeness the only route to "*proving what is that good and perfect and acceptable will of God,*" Rom 12.2. —to be continued (D.V.)

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# The Role of Sisters in the Assembly

by J. Grant (Scotland)

## NO.1 — INTRODUCTION

One of the greatest social changes which has taken place in the twentieth century is the role of women. The movement which started with the suffragettes over ninety years ago was fuelled by the work which women carried out during the 1914-18 war. This produced a change in the attitude of many women that eventually led to the modern feminist movement. Those who supported the drive for what was called "the equality of the sexes" regarded the place given to women as that of inferiors who were forced to perform menial household tasks and be treated merely as servants in their own homes. So effective has the "women's liberation movement" been that differences between men and women are seen as being merely biological. In every other way it has been decreed that it is only acceptable to view the sexes as equal and similar. Both are suited to fill any of the roles in life and both must have "equal opportunities" in the work place.

It is not our purpose to discuss the issues of this movement in society, but we take note of the fact that some of its ideas have found their way into the thinking of believers. The Scriptural role of sisters is questioned, and in some places, discarded. The teaching of the Word of God is seen as a product of the cultural environment of an earlier age and its application to modern society regarded as a means of keeping sisters in a place of inferiority. We must note that discarding, or seeking to change, any of the teaching of Scripture is a fundamental error. As believers, we treat the Scriptures as our ultimate authority for all that we do. We will examine the role of sisters on the basis of accepting what Scripture teaches as authoritative, and therefore to be heeded and obeyed.

Before looking at our subject it is important to consider the honour which is

bestowed on women in the Word of God. In the account of creation we see this bestowed in a number of ways, Gen.2.18-25.

First we observe that there is no separate account of the creation of the females of all other creatures, but there is a separate account of the creation of woman. This immediately sets her apart from all other females created. In the case of animals etc. it may be argued that male and female differ only physically, but with man and woman the differences are far greater and more fundamental. The separate account of her creation marks out the woman as quite distinct and different from all other females and gives her a unique dignity beside the man.

Second we see that she is the only female who is taken from the side of the male. Adam declares that “she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” She is closer to man than any other female to male. This gives her a unique association with man.

Third we note that she is the only female specifically given a separate task to perform. She is to be a help suitable for the man. This gives her a unique responsibility.

Fourth we note that the Lord God “brought her to the man.” The relationship between husband and wife is on a much higher plane than the relationship between male and female of other creatures. As a wife she has a unique companionship with the man.

In the Old Testament Scriptures women often played a decisive part in the work of God. Deborah was a judge who, with Barak, defeated Jabin of Caanan, and delivered Israel. During this conflict, Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite took the opportunity which presented itself to her and slew Sisera, the captain of Jabin’s army, Jud.6.

The widow of Zarephath to whom Elijah was sent, 1Kgs.17.9, was used of God to preserve the life of the prophet during the days of drought and death. It was her barrel of meal which did not waste and her cruse which never lacked oil.

The great woman of Shunem, 2Kgs.4, offered hospitality to Elisha and refused any reward which the king could have been entreated to give her. When her son died she showed the strength of her faith in the midst of sad circumstances, revealing a stark contrast with the attitude of indifferent coldness shown by her husband. Like so many women before and since, she was more godly than the man she had married.

When the child Moses was born in Egypt, Ex.2.2, it is his mother who is credited with hiding him in the house for three months. It is true that in Acts 7.20 his father seems to get credit, and in Heb.11 both parents play a part in his deliverance. No one could doubt, however, the crucial role played by his mother in this drama worked out in heathen Egypt.

Although Elkanah has some good qualities it is his wife Hannah who shines more brightly in 1Sam.1-2. Her desire was for a man child. She clearly had the deliverance of Israel in mind and was prepared to give the child to the Lord.

These are some of the great women of the Old Testament, and that brief list is by

no means exhaustive. The New Testament also brings to our attention women of faith. The widow who went into the temple clutching two mites in her hands, Mk.12.42, little realised that the Master was watching her every move and assessed her “paltry” gift as worth more than the large amounts deposited by the others out of their riches.

It was another widow, a Gentile, who was commended by the Lord for having “great faith” when she entreated Him for her daughter, Matt.15.21-28. He tested her by His answer; “I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Her response revealed a keen spiritual perception beyond the ordinary.

What more could be said of Mary who poured the pure oil of nard on her Lord, Jn.12.1-9, the women who followed from Galilee, and those women who, with Mary the mother of Jesus, are found with the disciples as they wait the fulfilment of the promise that they would be baptised in the Holy Spirit, Acts 1.14.

All these women, and many others, have their part in Scripture and in the work of God in their generation. But what part did they play after the Day of Pentecost, when the church came into being, and what role do women have in the local assembly and in the work of the Lord today? As we consider the issues we will see that the New Testament role of women is vital and important. It has not been given to them to be mere spectators, looking on at the work and having little or no part in it. Their part may differ from that of men, but it is neither less important nor is it confined to what some consider to be “menial” tasks while others engage in what is of greater value. Our study of the Scriptures will show the dignity and glory associated with sisters who seek the mind of God from the word of God and fulfil the important role given to them.

—*to be continued (D.V.)*

## MY CONVERSION AND CALL (62)

*by James Martin (Northern Ireland)*

The writer was born at Lenaderg, two miles from Banbridge, Co. Down, N. Ireland. I was the youngest of a family of four, three boys and one girl. Our home was strict and religious but my parents were not saved. In 1931 my mother was invited to hear Mr. Joseph Glancey, a converted Roman Catholic, preach the gospel in Victoria Street Gospel Hall, Banbridge. She went on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday and midway through that third meeting she was gloriously saved. About one year later Mr. David Walker, from Aberdeen, came to the same hall for gospel meetings and on the fifth week my father was saved. This entirely changed our home. Morning and night the Bible was read and our parents prayed with us. During the following years I was taken to all the gospel meetings and special efforts in reach of our home.

In 1940 Mr. Walker returned to Banbridge for gospel meetings, for four weeks. During that time my companion got saved and I was very concerned. I spoke to Mr.

Walker and asked him to continue the meetings but he replied saying that he had arrangements made for meetings in Aberdeen and I had heard sufficient to lead me to salvation.

In March 1941 Mr. David Craig, Ballymena, came to Banbridge for gospel meetings and I attended nightly, deeply longing to know my parents' Saviour, but all seemed so dark and I concluded there was no salvation for me. On Tuesday 1st April, I was working in a grocery store and about 9.30 a.m. I got my Bible and began reading, trying to believe, but all to no avail. In my despair I closed the Bible convinced that hell was my destiny. Just then the words of Isa.53.5 came to my mind, 'But He was wounded for our transgressions.' I forgot about the believing and was occupied with the One who was wounded and I saw for the first time that I was in the 'OUR'. It was all for me. Six weeks later I was baptised and received into the assembly at Banbridge.

It was my custom to attend all the midweek meetings and one night in the prayer meeting the late Mr. T. H. McCabe gave out the hymn, 'Must I go and empty handed,' and before we sang he described the writer and the conditions under which the hymn was penned and appealing to us all he said, "we should set our hearts on seeing souls saved." All the brethren got down to pray and with my heart greatly touched I asked the Lord to guide me to some soul in need of salvation. About three weeks later I was asked to speak to some children in a Sunday School in a brother's home. Two days later I was informed of a young mother who was at the Sunday School and she got saved on the Monday. This begot a longing in my heart to see others saved.

In 1946 I left Banbridge to work outside Ballymoney, Co. Antrim, and was in fellowship in the Ballymoney assembly. After a few weeks the late Mr. Edmund Johnston asked me to take the gospel meeting. This was the first time I was responsible for an entire meeting but the Lord gave help. Mr. Johnston phoned on Monday to say that a young woman got saved after the meeting on Lord's day. This was an answer to prayer. During the next five years I had ten series of gospel meetings with fruit seen in salvation.

In 1951 I was asked to go to Co. Fermanagh for a long weekend and the small assembly of two brothers and two sisters pressed me to come for a series of gospel meetings. I replied that it was a long journey and I could not work in Ballymoney and preach every night nine miles outside Enniskillen. Mr. Bobbie McClean said, "there's a bed here and a bite to eat and the Lord will care for your future and your job." So I tendered my resignation and worked for six weeks to train a new man for my job.

A brother from Bushmills took me on his motorbike to Currien, Co. Fermanagh, and he stayed a few days with me. The meetings commenced with thirteen on the Lord's day and five on the Monday. I was very depressed and wondered if I had made a mistake. However, praying earnestly for divine guidance I got around the homes using brother McClean's car, since I had none of my own. When the meetings commenced I had £7 and as I paid for the petrol and oil for the car I was soon spending my last £1. On the Wednesday of the fourth week I was leaving a home

after praying with them when a young woman called me. She told me she had got saved the previous Lord's day after the meeting. I prayed with her and thanked God and when I got to the road, sat in the car with a tear in my eye and thanked the Lord again.

That night a brother put something in my hand and a dear sister gave me an envelope containing £5 and the following poem:

*In nothing be anxious.  
For see how tenderly the Lord is guiding thee,  
Does He not hold thy hands with love and understands?  
Listening when thou dost plead — supplying all thy need,  
In nothing be anxious.*

So by the middle of the fourth week I had seen a soul saved and my £7 was restored. This assured me that I was in the right way. The next day I promised the Lord that if He wanted me to preach the gospel I would neither write, phone or ask for meetings, and now after 48 years serving the Lord I have not gone back on my promise and I have not been out of work since 1951 and still have invitations to preach the gospel.

In 1952, while in Stornoway, Isle of Lewis, I got a letter from the two brethren of the Currien assembly asking me to return for more meetings. I commenced in October and the meetings continued for nine weeks. Six professed faith in Christ and the assembly increased from four to nine in fellowship.

I was married in 1953 to Elizabeth Sherrard from Coleraine and lived there for seven years. During this time the Lord spoke to me from Prov.24.27, "Prepare thy work without, and make it fit for thyself in the field; and afterwards build thine house." In 1962 I purchased a house in Ballymena and have lived there since. During these years I have had hundreds of series of meetings lasting from five weeks to 23 weeks and ranging through Northern Ireland, Canada, USA, Nova Scotia, Venezuela and Australia. Among those who were saved are a number now serving the Lord in Northern Ireland, Brazil, Eire, South Africa and Zambia.

As one looks back over these many years we can, in measure, join with Paul and say, "Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day," Acts 26.22. He also spoke of "God, whose I am, and whom I serve," Acts 27.23. We have sought to continue in the pathway of those who said, "We ought to obey God rather than men," Acts 5.29.

I pray that the record of my experience will prove a real blessing to many and be for His own glory.

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Paul turned this world into a cemetery and passed through it as a corpse.  
(Gal.6.14). —J. Douglas

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I have no time for novel interpretations — cream lies on the surface.  
—J. Darby

# Good Tidings from Heaven

## DO YOU JUMP THE LIGHT?

Last October many people were travelling into Paddington Station, London by train. This was a daily journey for many of the passengers. Another day in the city, in the office, some perhaps on holiday, tourists looking forward to visiting the sights and places of historic interest. It ended in disaster with many dead and scores injured. Such came very suddenly and unexpectedly. The journey was almost over and some were already moving to the doors to be first off when there was a tremendous crash. It is difficult to be definitive as to the real cause of the accident, but many say one of the trains went through a red signal, jumping the light. Some say this was done on previous occasions. Others say the light was obscured by cables and power lines. Whatever the excuse, a warning signal was not heeded and destruction and devastation were the result.

Dear reader, have you ever ignored a warning? Have you ever jumped a red light? I am not speaking about traffic signals that you observe while driving. I am speaking about warnings that God has left in His word for us. These are designed to spare us from the disaster of eternal death. Have you ever heeded the warning, "flee from the wrath to come"? Matt.3.7. God has warned us of coming judgment for all who reject His love and His provision of salvation through His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. 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.' God gave His Son to the awful death of the cross where He bare the judgment of God against sin and all who believe in Him can be saved because of the value of that work to God and His precious blood which He shed.

The warning is in Mk.16.16 'he that believeth not **shall be damned.**' Jn.3.18 'He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but he that believeth not **is condemned already,** because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.' Jn.3.36 'He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but **the wrath of God abideth on him.**'

Those who are saved are expected to raise the warning cry and those who hear are expected to take heed. The Lord said to Ezekiel, 'warn the people; Then whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning; if the sword come, and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head.' Ezk.33.3,4. Heb.11.7 'By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house.

You may say, 'I have heard all that before. I have ignored the warning and so far nothing has happened. I will get saved some time later in life when I have accomplished by ambitions.' Remember with the train at Paddington station there was a time when ignoring the warning and jumping the light was disastrous. Others may argue and say, 'I don't need that. My spiritual adviser told me there is another way. If I do the best I can I will get to heaven eventually' Remember a warning obscured will not avert disaster. Your argument is with God. Why not read your own Bible and check the truth of what is presented in this paper?

God will save, but only on His terms. Acts 16.30,31 'What must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.'





The header features two crossed trumpets. The left trumpet is labeled 'GRACE' and the right is labeled 'TRUTH'. Above the trumpets is a starburst. Below them is a menorah with seven lit candles, all set against a circular background.

# ASSEMBLY TESTIMONY

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## ASSEMBLY TESTIMONY

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**Editor: B. Currie**

Correspondence relative to Editorial matters should be addressed to:

**The Editor**, 49 Glenburn Road, Dunmurry, N. Ireland, BT17 9AN.  
Telephone (028) 9062 1343.  
E-mail: AT@bcurrie.free-online.co.uk

**Secretary/Treasurer : William Neill**, 109 Lurgan Road,  
Banbridge, Northern Ireland, BT32 4NG.  
Telephone (028) 4062 4238.

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

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# **BEHOLD YOUR KING**

(Meditations in Matthew)

by Jim Flanigan (Belfast)

## **25. Service and Suffering (Ch.20)**

Chapter 20 is in four parts, the first of which is the longest, comprising the first sixteen verses, almost half of the chapter, and dealing with service in the vineyard. The second part is very brief, where in three verses, 17-19, the Saviour foretells His suffering and death, and His ultimate resurrection. There follows the third section from verses 20-29, in which the ambitious mother of James and John seeks places of honour for her sons in the expected kingdom. Our Lord's reply is to explain that true greatness in the kingdom is not as it is in the world and He also predicts for them a share in His sufferings. The chapter closes with the story of two blind men whose sight is miraculously restored. These thirty-four verses range from the vineyard to Calvary and to the kingdom. The King is here in sovereignty in the vineyard, in suffering at the cross, and in miracle-working power in His kingdom.

It will be noticed that this parable of the labourers in the vineyard is a sequel to the Lord's words at the close of ch.19. "Many that are first shall be last," He had said, "and the last shall be first." This is repeated at the end of the parable in v16 of ch.20. There may be, as some suggest, a veiled reference here to the coming in of the Gentiles at a later hour than the Jews, to whom the Gospel came first. However, the dominant thought in the parable is that the Lord of the vineyard is sovereign and in His sovereignty He can reward His servants as He so desires. Peter had said, "Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed Thee; what shall we have therefore?" Would there be a particular reward for this? The parable expounds the Lord's answer.

To those who are the first to be hired in his service the Lord of the vineyard promises a penny a day, and this is agreed, but in the market place at the third hour, and again at the sixth and ninth hour, and even at the eleventh hour, he finds labourers who are idle and hires them likewise. The evening hour having arrived, the labourers are called to receive payment for their labour and there is murmuring. They present themselves, as directed, from the last to the first, from the eleventh hour labourers to those who had laboured from early morning. "They received every man a penny," and to those who had laboured all the day, through the heat of the Eastern morning and afternoon, this seemed unjust. Those who had wrought but one hour had been made equal to them and it did not seem fair. The Lord's answer is a blending of statements and questions. "Friend, I do thee no wrong." Had there not been an agreement for a penny? Take what was agreed and go. "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?" "Is thine eye evil, because I am good." So the last shall be first, and the first last.

What is the relevance to us, in the principles outlined in this kingdom parable? Two great lessons, at least, are here. First, the Lord of the vineyard has sovereign rights, which must not, dare not, be questioned by the labourers. He does what He

wills and is neither accountable nor answerable to any man for what He does. Happy is that labourer today who serves in the consciousness of the sovereignty of the Lord of the harvest. Second, that servant who serves for the glory of the Lord will not labour with his eyes on a reward. He will serve in the joy of serving Him who has called him. If the Lord will reward His labourers, as He has promised, then this is still sovereignty, but it is sovereign grace, that He should give reward for doing what was just a pleasure to do for Him.

Much of our Lord's ministry to His disciples was given as they walked along the highway. It was perhaps the opportune time to talk with them privately. Now, along the way, He will tell them of His forthcoming crucifixion. Notice that travellers to Jerusalem always go "up to Jerusalem." Even when, geographically, it might appear that the way to the City is down, from northern parts, still it is "up to Jerusalem." Apart from the fact that the City is some 2,500 feet above sea level, there may be an indication that there was a moral elevation in the City which was known as "The Holy City." "We go up to Jerusalem," the Saviour told them, and He alone knew all that Jerusalem held in store for Him. There would be betrayal, trial, and condemnation, followed by mockery, scourging and crucifixion. Jews and Gentiles would unite in rejecting Him. But He would rise again on the third day. Of course the disciples could not, or would not, accept it, as Peter had said on an earlier occasion when the Lord had made a very similar announcement about His death. "Be it far from Thee, Lord: this shall not be unto Thee," Matt.16.21-22. It was easier to think of glory.

There is a certain sadness, that then, at the very moment when the Saviour was speaking to them of His approaching betrayal and suffering, Salome, wife of Zebedee and mother of James and John, should approach Him with a request regarding her two sons. She desired places of honour for them at His right and left hand in His kingdom. There was something insensitive about it, that, almost in the very shadow of His cross they should be thinking of place in the kingdom. "Ye know not what ye ask," says the Lord. Then He asks, "Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptised with the baptism that I am baptised with?" They reply, "We are able." Notice that it is the sons who answer Him. If the initial request came from their mother, does it not seem that James and John at least knew of it, if in fact they had not prompted her to ask for them?

They would indeed share in His suffering. Although there were aspects of His sufferings in which no others could have a part, yet, in some respects, these disciples would suffer similarly to their Lord, being mocked, scourged, imprisoned, and even put to death for His sake. "We are able," they had said, and it came to pass. When the other ten disciples heard of it they were indignant. Why? Were they really upset that such a thing should be asked at such a time? Or does it rather suggest that they too coveted the positions to which the sons of Zebedee aspired? Were they angry that others were pre-empting them, stepping in before them? In any case, positions in the kingdom were the prerogative of the Father alone.

It is now that the Lord takes the opportunity to teach them again what true greatness in the kingdom really was. Of course He had already tried to teach them this when they had earlier enquired as to who was the greatest, Matt.18.1-4. In the kingdom, He explained, it was not the same as it was in the world. In the world men were ruthless, desiring, like the princes of the Gentiles, to exercise dominion and authority. Men of the world wanted position and place, but among these men who

were His disciples it would not be so. It was a paradox, strange but true, that in the kingdom if a man wanted to be chief, he must become a servant. The great ones among them would be those who were willing to be ministers and servants, deacons and bondslaves. Even the Son of Man in the midst of them had become a servant, and in His humility would be obedient to the extent of giving His life as a ransom for others.

They left Jericho now with a great multitude following. Notice the alleged discrepancy here. Matthew says that it was “as they departed from Jericho.” Mark also says, “as He went out to Jericho, Mk.10.46. Luke however says, “as He was come nigh unto Jericho,” Lk.18.35. There is no discrepancy. Some answer the difficulty by suggesting that these were two different miracles, one coming into Jericho and the other going out. Others think that the blind men called for mercy as the Lord and His disciples were approaching Jericho but that the healing actually took the place on the other side of the town as they were leaving. Perhaps the more likely explanation is that there were two Jerichos. There was an old Jericho and a new Roman town, just as today there are two Jerusalem and two Nazareths, old and new. If the miracle took place between the towns then both statements are true, going in to one, and coming out of the other. As to the fact that Matthew speaks of two blind men, whereas Mark and Luke speak of one, note that neither Mark or Luke say that there was only one. There is no mistake and no discrepancy, but as Matthew Henry quaintly remarks, “If there were two there certainly was one!” Does this Gospel of the Kingdom of Matthew speak of two because of the divided and blind condition of the Nation? The blind men did then what Israel will do in a day to come, they confessed Him as the Son of David, and in compassion the Messiah restored their sight. The miracle united them in a glad vision of Him whom they now followed in the way. So it will be with the Nation when the King comes.

*—to be continued (D.V.)*

## Assembly Testimony Bible Class

by J. Riddle (Cheshunt)

### ESTHER

#### (10) FAVOUR WITH THE KING, Part 2

##### Read Chapter 5 again

In Part 1 of this study, we suggested that this chapter can be divided as follows: (1) Esther approaches the throne, v1-2; (2) Ahasuerus accepts her invitations, v3-8; (3) Haman anticipates victory, v9-14. We have already given some thought to the first section of the chapter, which brings us to:

#### 2) AHASUERUS ACCEPTS HER INVITATIONS, v3-8

Instead of making her request at the king’s invitation, v3, Esther invited him to a banquet where he evidently expected the request to be made. Hence his second

invitation: “What is thy petition? it shall be granted thee; and what is thy request? even to half of the kingdom it shall be performed,” v6. But the request was delayed for the second time: “Let the king and Haman come to the banquet that I shall prepare for them, and I will do tomorrow as the king hath said,” v8. On the human level, this double delay hardly seemed sound policy. ‘Her second refusal was tempting fate. Postponing her real request another time was a most questionable gamble; any number of things could go wrong in the interval between the two dinners: the king’s benevolent mood could change, for example, or Haman could learn of Esther’s true feelings towards him, or of her relationship with Mordecai.’ Carey A.Moore.

Why the delay? Haman was the king’s favourite, and possibly Esther felt that her influence with the king was not sufficiently strong. Another banquet might get him in a really good mood! Or perhaps her courage failed at the last moment.

On the other hand, there was nothing underhand about Esther. Haman was present throughout. It must also be said that Esther’s actions certainly saved the king’s face. He might have been hard put to explain a sudden change of mind had Esther approached him without Haman present. But the circumstances described in Ch.8 gave Ahasuerus all the justification he needed.

One thing, however, is very clear: it was not God’s time. God had already determined that Ahasuerus needed a little insomnia plus some nice light reading to while away the hours! Having done that, He would then give Esther the opportunity and courage she needed to intercede for her people. We’re back to God’s providence: remember - ‘pro’ and ‘video.’ (God’s ‘video’ is infinitely far better than the other sort!). Now, what lessons can we learn from all this?

*i) We needn’t delay in making OUR requests.* We don’t have to catch God in the right mood. “The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and His ears are open unto their prayers.” 1Pet.3.12. Remember, “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace...” However, we must not forget that we should always approach the throne of God in a worshipful spirit, rather than blurting out our requests immediately.

*ii) We must not camouflage our real purpose.* If we arrange meetings for Gospel preaching, then let us make it quite clear that this is what we are about. People are hardly likely to be impressed if you advertise a talk on flower arranging, and then tell the audience that they’re hell-deserving sinners! (Not quite so exaggerated as you might think). Paul asked his brethren at Ephesus to pray “that utterance might be given unto me, that I might open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.” Eph.6.19-20.

*iii) We must be careful about rash promises.* Supposing Esther had asked for “half of the kingdom!” (Under current U.K. divorce legislation, she would, presumably, have got it!. Perhaps she should have asked for “half the kingdom”, and then ensured that her half contained all the Jews. That would have solved the problem!). Herod said exactly the same thing in Mk.6, only to be asked for the head of John the Baptist. Jephthah vowed “whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely

be the Lord's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering." Jud.11.31. We all know what happened: you can argue till you're blue in the face, the passage is clear: he "did with her according to his vow which he had vowed." v39. So be careful what you say — or sing.

### 3) HAMAN ANTICIPATES VICTORY, v9-14

Before we look at the end passage itself, it might be helpful to glance at the prophetic message of this book. At the end-time, the Jews will again be under threat of annihilation, and Haman, whilst a picture of Satan, as we have seen — is also a picture of the "man of sin." Consider the following:

*i) His name.* "This *wicked* Haman," 7.6. See 2Thes.2.8, "Then shall that *Wicked* be revealed..."

*ii) His power.* Haman's rise was meteoric, and he had the power of life and death throughout the Persian Empire. Rev.13 makes it very clear that the power of the "man of sin" is universal. (You will have to decide whether the "man of sin" in 2Thes.2 is the first or second beast of Rev.13! The question is not so easily answered as you might suppose! But both have universal power).

*iii) His pride.* Just listen to Haman boasting to his wife and friends. Now listen to another boast. "Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he, as God, sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God." 2Thes.2.4.

*iv) His hate.* Haman worked through political power for the Jews' destruction. It will happen again. See Rev.13.15.

*v) His death.* Haman's death was sudden and complete. One day he vaunts himself: the next day he hangs by his own rope. He was terrible whilst in power, but it was only for a few years — at the most some four or five years; compare 2.16 with 3.7. The end of the "man of sin" will be similar. "Whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming." 2Thes.2. 8. We should also notice that Haman had ten sons, and they were slain too. You might like to read Rev.17.2-13 in this connection.

Now, back to Esther Ch.5. The outstanding feature of Haman in this passage, is his pride: notice

#### A) His selfish pride

Pride can have some nice angles. We talk about "taking pride in our work", and about a 'proud father' or a 'proud mother.' But here is boastful pride.

*i) He was proud of his possessions.* "And Haman told them of the glory of his riches..." v11. He was soon to learn that "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth", Lk.12.15.

*ii) He was proud of his posterity.* "And the multitude of his children." Well, Ps.127 tells us that "children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is His reward," v3.

*iii) He was proud of his promotion.* "And all the things wherein the king had promoted him..." Listen to this: "Lift not up your horn on high: speak not with a

stiff neck. For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south; But God is the judge, He putteth down one, and setteth up another,” Ps.75.5-7.

*iv) He was proud of his privileges.* Listen to him in v12. Apart from the king, he was the sole guest.

It’s all summed up in Jer.9.23-24. “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...”

**B) His injured pride**

‘Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting in the King’s gate.’ v13. Pride of position consumes people. Revenge is the fruit of pride.

**C) His placated pride**

His wife and friends have the answer, v13. Revenge will be sweet: “Then go thou in merrily with the king unto the banquet.” Everything looked good for Haman. But Ch.6 follows. Pride itself is destructive. We leave ch.5 with Mordecai condemned to death by ‘a prince of this world.’ See 1Cor.2.8. —to be continued (D.V.)

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# The Kings of Judah and Israel

by Graeme Hutchinson (Belfast)

*Amaziah (Paper 11)*

Similar to other kings, Amaziah suffered from one weakness; insufficient strength to resist the enemy and so maintain the momentum of the early years. For most, the words of Gal.5.7 would have been appropriate: ‘Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth.’ Concerning Amaziah we can observe:

*(a) His Ancestry*

2Chron.24.27 and 25.1 provide insight into who Amaziah's father and mother were, Joash and Jehoaddan respectively. Although his reign of twenty nine years was to be similar to that of his father's, 2Kgs.14.3, his mother, if not in practice, certainly in name would have given much spiritual help. Jehoaddan means ‘Jehovah's Delight’ (Newberry margin). Moreover, she was of Jerusalem and so would have been well acquainted with the true God. Perhaps it was through her contribution that Amaziah knew what pleased the Lord and so was able to do that which was right in His sight, 2Chron.25.2. Rehoboam, 2Chron.12.13, and Ahaziah, 2Chron.22.2, were two kings who had no such privileges.

Certain characters in Scripture who progressed in the things of God can trace their routes right back to a godly mother. Timothy is one example, 2Tim.1.5; 3.15, and Paul spoke of one who performed such a role, Rom.16.13. Remember that to appreciate godly mothers is not only to follow the pattern of Scripture, Prov.15.20;



Matt.19.19, but is also to reproduce the character of the Saviour Himself, Jn.19.26,27.

### *(b) His Attitude*

Irrespective of the sad events that would have surrounded his coronation, Amaziah began his reign with his heart in the right place, toward God, 2Chron.25.3,4. Initially he executed Zabad and Jehozabad who had killed his father. In this he demonstrated two important features: knowledge, he knew the words of Deut.24.16 that judgment must be for personal sin and then obedience, he did not go beyond the Law. Within the assembly there is a need for such individuals, those who not only know the content of the Word but who seek to apply nothing less. Remember what was said of the Apostle Paul when he spoke to the elders of Ephesus: 'I shrank not from declaring unto you the whole counsel of God,' Acts 20.27, RV.

### *(c) His Army*

2Chron.25.5 provides information regarding his gift as a military man. In organising the defences, the verse would indicate a number of practical truths. He was structured, emphasising the role of the 'captains'; strenuous, going through the whole nation seeking suitable recruits and yet selective, only the 'choice' men were favoured that were twenty years old and over. Amaziah was obviously interested in defending his nation against any possible invasion or attack. Obviously from our own perspective there are two applications. Firstly, when it comes to defending the truth do we show the same commitment as Amaziah, 1Tim.1.18? Secondly, in the spiritual sense would we be classified as skilful handlers of the spear/sword, Heb.4.12, and shield, Eph.6.16?<sup>1</sup>

### *(d) His Associations*

Despite having an army of 300,000 Amaziah still felt the urge to hire an additional 100,000 'mighty men of valour' from the Northern Kingdom of Israel, 2Chron.25.6.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps this suggestion was sound in the military sense, but the man of God was to argue otherwise. The intended association was:

#### *• Unholy*

Amaziah sought help from a nation that had departed from God, 2Chron.25.7. Had the king not learnt from the example of Jehoshaphat, whose reign clearly demonstrated the disastrous consequences of unholy alliances? Clearly, the desire to succeed was greater than the desire to stay within the confines of the 'rulebook'. Remember the instruction of 2Tim.2.5, we are in a race; there is a reward to be won; but the crown is only awarded to those who obey the rules.

#### *• Unnecessary*

When Amaziah obeyed the warning of the man of God and sent the Israelites home, 2Chron.25.11-12 indicates that he was still victorious over the enemy, Edom,

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<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the example of Adoni-bezek in Jud.1.6 is an appropriate description of many present-day believers. Having neither thumbs, preventing the use of the sword, nor toes, reducing the likelihood of cutting a straight path through the Word, 2Tim.2.15.

<sup>2</sup> As the total number in Amaziah's army was only 300,000, greatly down on the size that prevailed under the reign of Asa, 2Chron.14.8, due to the losses sustained under Jehoram, 2Chron.21.17, and Joash, 2Chron. 24.24, he felt the need to supplement his army.

2Kgs.14.7; 2Chron.25.14. Thus, his father lost a war that he should have won because he departed from the way, 2Chron.24.24. Here, his son was victorious because he obeyed the word of the Lord. We too will only enjoy the sweetness of victory when we remain committed to God and His way, 2Tim.2.4.

It is also worth observing that although Amaziah defeated the enemy, he did not altogether avoid the consequences of his sin, 2Chron.25.10,13. Just look at what would have been avoided had Amaziah never hired the Israelites in the first place! Remember that whilst we have One who is gracious enough to forgive us our sins, yet we can still suffer the repercussions.

What an insight Amaziah received of God. Observe His *pattern*, we must depend solely upon Him and not look to others for help. His *provision*, the benefits of fellowship will far outweigh the cost, 2Chron.25.9; Heb.11.25. His *power*, able to destroy the enemy and deliver us safely from defeat.

#### **(e) His Arrogance**

Following the victory over the Edomites, Amaziah returned with an idolatrous heart, 2Chron.25.14. Perhaps he was only following the example of his father who similarly worshipped the false idols, 2Chron.24.18. However, notice what the arrogance was directed towards:

##### **• God's Word**

When the prophet asked Amaziah why he should worship idols who could not even save their own people, 2Chron.25.15, the king responded in anger, v16. Pride and feelings of self-importance can only result in one outcome: we fail to listen to the Word, for we feel that we know better!

##### **• God's Way**

Ignoring the Word of God led Amaziah down an avenue that was to prove disastrous. He asked for war against the Israelites, when no such instruction was given. Despite the king of Israel's refusal to engage in battle, notice the parable, 2Chron.25.18-20<sup>3</sup>, Amaziah obviously felt able to achieve victory. Result: Israel won; Amaziah was captured; the wall of Jerusalem was partly destroyed and the temple was ransacked.

When we fail to listen to God's Word due to our own feelings of pride and self-importance, the battle against the enemy will be lost, because we go in our own strength. Much better to have the attitude of Jehoshaphat, completely dependent upon the Lord when faced with the enemy, 2Chron.20.12.

#### **(f) His Assassination**

Although Amaziah survived being killed by the king of Israel, he still suffered the same death as that of his father: by means of a conspiracy, 2Chron.25.27. Sadly we have another king who commenced his reign in a positive fashion, only to fall away towards the end. Surely we must learn from these lessons, continue steadfastly, Acts 2.42.

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<sup>3</sup> The thistle, Amaziah, demanded of the cedar, Israel, that the cedar give his daughter as a wife for the thistle's son. For such haughtiness, the thistle was overrun by a wild beast, Israel.

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

# PROPHETIC PICTURES OF THE LORD

by J. E. Todd (England)

## 1. THE SERVANT

It is the prophet Isaiah who portrays the ministry of the coming Messiah as service to God. Isaiah declares that many serve God, Israel for example, 44.21, but God will be served supremely and perfectly by the Messiah. "Behold my servant, whom I uphold, Mine elect, in whom My soul delighteth", Isa.42.1. This Servant will serve God by bringing in a covenant with God which will enlighten all nations. "I ... give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles", v6. This will be a new covenant, "New things I do declare: before they spring forth I tell you of them", v9. This will result in great joy for all those who accept this covenant, "Sing unto the LORD a new song, and His praise from the end of the earth", v10. All this is fulfilled by the Lord Jesus Christ as quoted in Matt.12.17-21, "That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet", v17.

Again Isaiah prophesies, 49.1-13, and speaks of the servant of God, "My servant", v6, arising out of God's other servant Israel, v3. This prophecy speaks of Him as the Saviour of the world. "I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation to the end of the earth", v6. This is confirmed in the good news of Christ, as the apostle Paul quotes Isa.49.6, "Lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldst be for salvation unto the ends of the earth. And when the Gentiles heard this they were glad", Acts 13.46-48.

Yet again Isaiah prophesies of God's Servant, "His servant", 50.10. Here emphasising the Servant's obedience, the most necessary characteristic of a servant, v4-6. He would obediently declare what the Father told Him, "The Lord GOD ... wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned", v4. "The Lord GOD hath opened mine ear", v5, the opening of the ear is suggestive of life-long obedience. Of the servant in Israel the Scriptures say, "He shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an aul; and he shall serve him for ever", Exod. 21.6.

The Servant's obedience would continue with unswerving determination despite the difficulties and sufferings:-

"I was not rebellious, neither turned away back" v5.

"Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered ... to death," Mk.10.33.

"I gave My back to the smiters," v6.

"When he (Pilate) had scourged Jesus," Matt. 27.26.

"I hid not my face from shame and spitting," v6.

"And they spit upon Him," Matt. 27.30.

"I set My face like a flint," v7.

"Get thee behind me, Satan," Matt. 16.23.

But His service will finally triumph, “He is near that justifieth me ... Behold, the Lord GOD will help me; who is he that shall condemn me?” v8-9.

“Declared to be the Son of God ... by the resurrection from the dead,” Rom.1.4.

Once more Isaiah prophesies of God’s Servant, this time of His suffering as the sin-offering, “Behold, My Servant,” 52.13-53.12. “A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief,” v3. But, “Behold My Servant shall prosper,” 52.13 (R.V. margin). His offering would be perfect, final and complete.

“He was wounded for our transgressions,” v5.

“The LORD hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all,” v6.

“For the transgression of My people He was stricken,” v8.

“Thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin,” v10.

“For He shall bear their iniquities,” v.11.

“He bare the sin of many,” v12.

Finally, Isaiah prophesied of the liberating and joyful results of the Servant’s service. It is indeed, “Good tidings,” 61.1-3. “Good tidings unto the meek, he hath sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound,” v1. The Lord Jesus Christ publicly applied this prophecy to Himself in the synagogue at Nazareth as recorded in Luke 4.16-21. ‘He (Jesus) began to say unto them, This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears,’ v21. Then there is the joyful response of those who accept the good news. Beauty instead of ashes, joy instead of mourning and praise instead of despair, v3.

The Lord Jesus Christ fulfilled all these prophecies as the perfect Servant of God, providing a salvation available to all. “Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a Man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross,” Phil. 2.5-8. —*to be continued (D.V.)*

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## A CORN OF WHEAT

“Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone.”

— *John 12.24*

Be thou God's, “Corn of wheat;”

The end thereof is sweet,

Deep joy is in it.

Welcome the barren ground!

Here after will be found

Fruit to abide, abound —

On! and thou shalt be crowned!

God's joy is in it.

You either sow such a grain of wheat for others to benefit, or you may eat it! — i.e. consume it in self-gratification! But that will result in no fruit nor honour for God or others. The Lord Jesus said, “For this cause came I.”

# Believers' Baptism

## A Defence of this important New Testament Ordinance

by J. D. McColl (Australia)

### Paper 2

#### **Baptism does not bring us into newness of life!**

Rom.6.1-11 eloquently shows the present relationship of the believer to sin in view of his justification as stated in chaps.1-5. Does the justifying grace of God, and the propitiatory work of the Saviour, lead to a life of sin or a life of holiness? This is answered by Paul in 1-11 by the statement that the believer died to sin in the death of Christ. Christ died for us and for our sins, but it is also true that we died with Him as to our sin, and all that we were in Adam was put to an end then. In Him the believer died and in Him the believer rose. We were associated with Him in His death and we were associated with Him in His resurrection. That fact became a blessed reality to us when we believed. Baptism is the symbolic expression, or illustration of death, burial and resurrection. In it the believer affirms, expresses and declares his death, burial and resurrection with Christ. If it is observed that water baptism is the counterpart of the believer's spiritual union with Christ in death, burial and resurrection, the teaching of this great passage will be held in proper balance. Let it be underscored that faith alone brings us into spiritual union with His death and into newness of life with a risen Lord.

In baptism the believer confesses the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, not merely as historic facts; he also confesses to a spiritual experience, that he himself, through faith in Christ, has become associated with Him in His death, burial and resurrection, and that henceforth he is to reckon himself "to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus," Rom.6.11.

#### **Water cannot save us, but what baptism in water symbolises can, 1Pet.3.20-22.**

Verse 20 reads, "...when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water, or, were brought safely through the water". The reference in Heb.11.7 reads, "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house..." The flood waters were not a type of baptism; it is not a type and an antitype but of two types corresponding with each other, i.e. the ark in the flood waters and baptism. The ark going through the waters was a figure of that which our baptism as believers is also a figure, i.e. the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Just as Noah and his family in the ark were separated by the waters of the flood from the sinful and doomed world in which they formerly lived, so believers are separated from the world and its sinful associations by the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, of which baptism is the symbolic expression. In this way baptism is the answer (demand) of a good conscience toward God. That which my conscience demands (requires) in order to be a good

conscience toward God, is found in the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, which is symbolised in my baptism. It tells that I am no longer in Adam fallen, but in Christ risen. The flood fell upon the Ark, and so all the waves and billows of divine wrath went over Christ when He stood as Surety at Calvary. But the Ark did not remain under the deluge. It was by these same waves of death borne to a new world, and all who were in it. As believers all our sins have been put away, all that we are as sinners has been ended, put out of sight, and now raised up in Christ to a new life, in a new world. Therefore, water baptism is the expression of the believer's identification with Christ in all this.

### **Household Baptism and Infant Sprinkling. What does the Bible teach?**

The baptizing of a household is one thing but 'Household Baptism' is something else. The former is fully supported by Scripture, the latter is answered by a stoney silence from the Word of God. There is not a single verse in support of such a theory. What are the supposed benefits of household baptism? It professes to introduce unregenerate persons into a sphere of external profession. But this is to change a divine ordinance into a mere ceremony, and encourage hypocrisy.

The practice of the book of the Acts is clearly consistent, and abundantly plain: "Then they that received his word were baptized," Acts 2.41; "When they believed ... they were baptized ... both men and women," Acts 8.12; "If thou believest with all thine heart thou mayest," Acts 8.37; "Many of the Corinthians hearing, believed, and were baptized," Acts 18.8. This connected sequence must not be tampered with or changed in any way. The argument based on Acts 16.31, that the household of the jailor at Philippi was baptized on the ground of the faith of its head, is fallacious, for the words are not, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be baptized, thou and thy house,' but 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house.' The household believed, therefore the household rejoiced, and the household was baptised. Otherwise we have a picture of a household baptized and rejoicing, not because its individual members had believed, but because one of them had! Nothing is said of the composition of the household, but if there were an infant in it then that infant must have shared in the rejoicing as well as in the baptism.

The argument drawn from 1Cor.7.14, "The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband else were your children unclean; but now they are holy," is equally an argument for the baptizing of an unbelieving wife or husband. The argument is rather that as no woman would think of leaving her children because she had become a Christian, but would remain with them because of her love for them and to discharge her obligations to them, and as remaining with them is not inconsistent with her new relation to Christ, neither then is remaining with her unsaved husband inconsistent with it. The only question is whether the husband is willing to remain with her, a question that does not arise in the case of her children. The passage has nothing whatever to do with baptism.

Baptism of children, baptism of adults, and baptism of a household in virtue of the faith of the head, or both parents, are practices unknown to Scripture; they are defended not by appeal to the plain meaning of the Word of God, but by arguments drawn from alleged Scriptural analogies. The only baptism to be found, whether in

the teaching of the Lord or of his apostles, is the baptism of believers, those who by their own act of 'receiving Christ,' Jn.1.12, have become Christians.

To support the theory of 'household baptism' and 'infant baptism' reference is usually made to "the house of Stephanas," 1Cor.1.16 baptized by Paul, and in 1Cor.16.15, it is said they "addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints. Babies do not normally serve, they need to be served. There is also the "house of Lydia," Acts 16.15 and the advocates of "infant baptism" make much of "Lydia's baby." But all this is speculation, and we have to suppose that she had a family and brought them all the way to Philippi from Thyatira. The 'household' mentioned could have been her retinue of servants, who could carry her merchandise. We are told in Acts 16.40 that there were "brethren" in the house of Lydia, who were comforted by Paul and Silas, before they departed. On the matter of the 'sprinkling of infants' do not let us be deluded by the superstition that such an act of sprinkling a few drops of water on a child's face, and whatever words may accompany the act, can in any way regenerate that child's spirit, or in any way affect its spiritual welfare in time or its destiny in eternity. See how the truth of the Gospel is disguised out of recognition, and its purpose thwarted, and how myriads of people are deceived into supposing that all is well with them because they have been baptized, whereas they are still in their sins, the wrath of God abiding on them, John 3.36. —*to be continued (D.V.)*

## ***Christian Conduct in a Modern World***

by Walter A. Boyd (South Africa)

### **Paper 3**

#### **No.2 — THE CONSECRATED LIFE (Continued)**

##### **(b) The Believer and the Church**

Romans ch.12 continues from the high point of verses 1-2, to show the practical consequences in a believer's life that is in a right relationship with God. Paul is showing what many have found experientially, that if we are right with God personally, we will have little trouble in our relationship within the assembly, v3-8. Carnality and pride are both the products of the flesh and ought never to be seen. They are the cause of so many problems in assembly life. The only way they can be manifested is through those who know nothing of the truth of consecration in v1-2, experimentally. A life consecrated to God will not be easily provoked to mar relationships in the assembly.

##### **Ch.12.3-8 — The Believer and the Church**

The consecrated life is now viewed in its relation to the Church of God. Hitherto, the life of the believer has been dealt with in its individual aspect. We now see that the consecrated life cannot be lived in isolation, other believers must be taken into account. In these verses, as in 1Cor.12, the Church is likened to a human body with

its unity of life and diversity of operations. The consecrated life fits into the harmony of the overall activity of the body and works for the good, not of the individual member but for the whole body. We contribute to the functioning of the body by putting effort into the local assembly which, while not being a microcosm of the body, certainly has body-like features and characteristics. A believer's contribution to assembly life ought to be for the benefit of the whole assembly. This is a basic premise that is often ignored. In the present selfish world, there is a danger that we can be affected by the common attitude, "what can I get out of it for myself?" A truth to be remembered is that we get out of assembly life in blessings, what we put in, in terms of spiritual effort.

In v3, the apostle stresses a **Right Attitude to Self**. The basic requirement is that there should be an adjustment of outlook in respect of self. Gifts given by God, are not for self-praise but for the blessing of other members of the body. Whatever place we have been given to occupy in the Church of God, there is no room for pride or high esteem of self. Whatever ability has been bestowed by God, its exercise ought to be for His glory and the good of others. This, of course, cuts across the thinking of the modern world in which we are encouraged to have a sound self-esteem. Indeed, the world tells us that many personal dysfunctional problems are the result of a low self-esteem. This is clearly contrary to God's Word. These truths are emphasised by the Apostle as follows,

The *Advice of the Apostle* in these matters is not based on worldly wisdom, nor indeed out of mere experience. His words are inspired by the Holy Spirit and designed for the good of the believer and the Church. The words of Paul are those of one who has received the grace-gift of apostleship which enabled him to speak with authority. These are not suggestions by a servant of God but rather a direct command through His apostle to "*every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think...*"

His advice highlights the **Avoidance of Self-Esteem**. One of the distinguishing marks of the consecrated life is humility. It is possible for a believer to think "highly" of himself in the sense that he thinks himself better than or superior to others. This is pure conceit and is a great danger. In light of the mercies of God in v1, we should have "low" thoughts about self and "high" thoughts of Christ. That being the case, we will exhibit the humility of Phil.2, where in v3 we are each to "*esteem other better than ourselves.*" This has nothing to do with relaxing a firm stand for the truth of God but certainly has everything to do with my attitude in standing firm. It will not change my position on essential doctrine but will change my attitude to other believers in matters of relationship where no Scriptural principle is involved.

*Appreciation of God's Gift* will mean that instead of high-mindedness, there will be sober-mindedness. There must be a sensible and humble approach to the matter of place within the Church and the gift that God has bestowed upon us. In the matter of gifts, everyone is involved and not just the individual. Gifts are not for the selected few of superior ability. God has given to "*each one the measure of faith*" which enables him to fulfil his own particular responsibilities within the body. This must be understood and appreciated to ensure the harmony intended by God and the blessing needed by every member of the body. This is not the faith of conversion



(the context is clear about that) it is rather, that God assigns to each the measure of faith necessary for our particular gift and its functioning within the body for His glory.

Having established in v3 the necessity for a right attitude to self, Paul then moves in v4,5, to the **Recognition of the Body**. The figure of the body is introduced at this point in his reasoning to demonstrate the relation of Christians to each other, their unity and the variety of their gifts, yet all in harmony. Paul advances the lesson by using a direct comparison to the human body and the Church. V4 takes up the reality of the human body as a figure and states three elementary facts; (1) it is one, (2) it has many members, and (3) each member has a different function. "*Many members ... one body ... all members have not the same office.*" In verse five he applies those facts to the Church, not by direct comparison to just say that the unity and variety within the church is similar to the human body. It is more that they are a body, they are **the body of Christ**. A unique entity, has never been seen before that will enjoy relations with Christ in glory and be the eternal display of His grace in glory. We are, he says, one body in Christ and members one of another.

Having identified the features of the body with gifts, he now shows in v6-8, the unity and variety within the body of Christ expressed in the possession and practice of the various gifts. We have the **Responsibility of possession**. The various gifts according to the grace given to us (see v3), are grace-gifts bestowed upon us by the grace of God. Without going into detail, seven gifts are enumerated.

**Prophecy** — impartation and interpretation of Divine revelation

**Ministry** — service of God and for the benefit of the body

**Teaching** — exposition and explanation of the truth

**Exhortation** — encouragement of the saints from the Scriptures

**Giving** — support of the work of God

**Rule** — exercise of authority in leadership

**Showing mercy** — relief for the needy

Each gift is necessary and for the good of the Body as a whole.

With the various gifts identified, the Apostle then attaches to each its own **Responsibility of Practice**. The response of practice must measure up to the responsibility of possession. They are to be exercised in the fullness of stewardship and with the glory of God in view.

Prophecy — "*according to the proportion of our faith.*"

Ministry — "*let us wait on our ministering.*" (Its continual exercise)

Teaching — "*on teaching.*" With patient instruction.

Exhortation — "*on exhortation.*" With loving encouragement.

Giving — "*with simplicity.*" With liberality.

Rule — "*with diligence.*" With diligent determination.

Showing mercy — "*with cheerfulness.*" With full hearted cheerfulness.

If each member exercises his gift appropriately, there will be perfect harmony and consistent growth of the Body will be the result. The purpose of the Church's presence in the world will be fulfilled and glory will be brought to God and Christ. The consecrated life is thus a life of useful service. —*to be continued (D.V.)*

# The Role of Sisters in the Assembly

by J. Grant (Scotland)

## No.2 — THE SPREAD OF THE GOSPEL

They had worked with Paul in the spread of the gospel, but now their fellowship in this work had come to an end. A dispute, the nature of which we are not made aware, had destroyed the bonds of service, and now they were at variance with each other. Yet these women, who may have been Euodias and Syntyche, had been part of the group who expended time and effort in their zeal for the spread of the good news of salvation. They were not regarded as “junior” members of the group of workers. Wuest translates the words of Paul in Philippians chapter 4 regarding them as “women of such a character that in the good news they laboured and contended in perfect co-operation with me as a team of athletes would.” These godly sisters were part of the “team of athletes” and Paul’s concern was that the brother whom he addresses as “true yokefellow” should help these women who had laboured with him in the gospel to settle their dispute, so that their fellowship will be unimpaired and the work of the gospel will again be furthered with their help.

But, how did they labour in the gospel? It is clear from the teaching of Paul in other Scriptures that they did not preach publicly when the assembly was gathered together. Public testimony in this way is limited to the males. It is significant that while it was women who were first at the tomb on the morning of resurrection; it was to women the message of the angel came; “He is not here: for He is risen, as He said. Come see the place where the Lord lay,” Matt.28.6; it was to women that He appeared, as they ran to bring the news of the resurrection to the disciples, and before whom they bowed and held His feet in worship as He said “Be not afraid;” yet the public witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus in 1Cor.15 is that of men only.

It is, however, a very narrow view of gospel work, which limits it to the man who is preaching on the platform. Such preaching is the Scriptural means of declaring the truth, but it is not the only means of labouring in the gospel. What then is given to sisters to do?

Looking back again to the words of Wuest: “they contended as a team of athletes would,” it is clear that these two sisters poured effort into the gospel with as much commitment as Paul. They did not see themselves as being excused service in the gospel because they were women. The role was not inferior then and it is not now. It is different from that of men, but assembly gospel witness suffers greatly when it is not carried out. Married women, whose husbands are out at work, will find that they can become much closer to the local community than their husbands. They meet other women and will quickly become aware of the fears, difficulties and problems, which many face. This is not done in a spirit of interfering in the affairs of others, but in a spirit of godly concern. The shallow, stressful society in which we

live has created loneliness and problems which few are willing to share. Willingness to help and share the burden will mark godly women in a world where few care for others.

Quite apart from helping with the problems of others, the gospel can be spread in the ordinary conversation of daily life. Once again sisters have opportunities which may never be given to brethren. The writer remembers well a sister who told her neighbours, whenever opportunities arose, of the contents of the message to which she had listened at the gospel meeting on the previous Lord's Day evening. In that simple quiet way she was spreading the "good news" to many who would never come into the Gospel Hall.

But labouring together in the gospel presents sisters with other opportunities which men never have. When Paul came to Corinth, Acts 18.1, as far as we know, he was unknown in the city. He found there a believer, Aquila, whose trade as a tent maker gave Paul the opportunity of working with him in his daily occupation. This Paul did to supply his needs (what we would think today of a "full time servant" who decided to do this that he might not be chargeable to any) and he "abode with them," Acts 18.3. Here Priscilla, the wife of Aquila, could serve in a way that was not open to her husband. As the head of the house Aquila would welcome Paul into his home, but Priscilla would have the privilege of providing the necessary hospitality. This service is labouring "in the gospel" and must not be regarded as little importance. For many a servant of the Lord, the welcome given and the hospitality offered has provided cheer. Let no sister underestimate the effect on the meetings of a friendly welcome and a warm, spiritual atmosphere in the home, when a visiting preacher, perhaps feeling the loneliness of being away from his family and visiting an assembly where no one is known personally, is feeling a little "down". "Gospel preachers should not feel that way" you may say, but at times they do! Obviously the great part of the burden of entertaining and hospitality falls on the sisters and those who have given themselves to this work have learned that it requires disruption of their normal daily routine, sacrifice, energy and understanding.

Even then the scope of sisters work is not exhausted. The preacher speaks to those who come to the meetings, but who brings them? The trend today is to have the believers and their families at gospel meetings, with fewer present who have no family connection with the meetings. The writer knows sisters who can be relied on to bring "strangers" into gospel meetings. It is not wise for men without their wives, to invite women to come along to meetings, but sisters on their own can extend such an invitation, and the women who accept, and in some cases their husbands, have heard of the Saviour. Those who give themselves to this work and encourage many with whom they come into contact to come along to hear the gospel must be prepared for the time, effort and even disappointments which this work brings. It is, however, a vital service and the quiet unobtrusive manner in which it is consistently pursued will have its reward.

The work of sisters in the gospel is, thus, invaluable. Many a series of gospel meetings would have made little impact if it had not been for the quiet persistent work of sisters whose testimony in the area enables them to bring people to meetings, and whose prayers for the salvation of sinners are fervent and continual. An assembly with such sisters is blessed indeed! —to be continued (D.V.)

# Selected Poems

by Abraham Patterson (Dungannon, Co. Tyrone)

## An Evening with Christ — A Night to Remember

(A meditation on Luke 4.40-44)

*At the setting of the sun they came,  
And brought out all the blind, diseased and  
lame.*

*Not even one was turned away,  
That came to Jesus on that happy day.*

*His healing hand was laid upon each head,  
At His command, disease and sickness fled,  
Nor could it stay when He would give  
command,  
For even life and death are in His hand.*

*The cruel demons too were heard to cry,  
"Leave us alone, Thou Son of God most  
high."*

*At His command He broke the power of sin,  
Thus liberating those they dwelt within.*

*As night drew on, all to their homes, they  
went,*

*Not now with broken health or bodies bent,  
But all rejoicing, praising, eager now to tell,  
Of Jesus Christ who had done all things well.*

*Some that were blind, they lingered at the  
door,  
To view the sights they'd never seen before,  
The moon, the stars that twinkle up on high,  
In that vast canopy, we call, the sky.*

*Those who were deaf, who never heard  
before,  
Now stand in wonder, listening at the door,  
Hearing the dogs that bark and crickets sing,  
The murmuring brook, the joy of everything.*

*And now, though many years have all gone by,  
The same compassionate Saviour waits on high,  
To cleanse and break the power of in-bred sin  
And welcome all who put their trust in Him.*

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## Dust to Dust

(A meditation on Gen.3.19 "Dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return")

*Dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou  
return.  
These weighty words should cause your  
heart to burn,  
In ponderous thoughts regarding life's short  
stay,  
Where you will be when life has passed  
away?*

*Oh! where shall I be then, when life is o'er?  
No greater thought could mortal mind  
explore.*

*One of two destinies before you lies,  
It's hell's dark gloom or heaven's bright  
home on high.*

*This frightening thought no mind could  
comprehend,  
The vast eternity that never, never has an  
end:  
Countless as the grains of sand in depths  
of sea,  
Vast, vast eternity awaiting you and me.*

*What shall I do to gain the heavenly bliss  
And be assured of endless joy and peace?  
I'll trust in Him who bore my sins on  
Calvary's tree,  
Calmly, sweetly resting that He died for  
me.*

## MY CONVERSION AND CALL (63)

*by L. B. Carswell (Brazil)*

I cannot recall any occasion in my life when I didn't want to be saved. I respected those who were saved because I knew they will be among the citizens of heaven — I would have given anything to have what they had.

I attribute these desires to the sheltered and careful upbringing by my parents who, shortly after my birth were both saved and eventually received into the fellowship of the assembly in Banbridge, N. Ireland. As a result of their consistent effort to have their family of five under the sound of the gospel, the great gospel facts became engraved on my heart — I was convinced that the gospel was the key to happiness in this life and the next.

It wasn't until I was in my mid-teens that I really took the matter of my salvation seriously. At that time the imminence of the Lord's return became, what seemed to be, a daily worry. I couldn't continue running the risk of being left behind at the coming of the Lord so I decided that it was time I was saved.

A series of gospel meetings commenced in Drumnahare, Loughbrickland in the month of October 1973, the preachers being Mr. J. Martin and Mr. T. McNeill. I attended and listened with great interest. In the sixth week, after trying everything possible, all hope that I should be saved was taken away. Returning home after the meeting on the Wednesday night of that week I came to “an end of myself” and wondered how could I ever be saved. I remembered the good counsel given to me a few hours earlier — to read Isa.53.5 and this I did. Pondering over the contents of that verse I was directed, in thought, to the Cross and the reason for the death of Christ. It suddenly occurred to me that Christ had died for me — for my sins upon that Cross and that all I had to do was to rest on Him. This I did in that very moment on the 16th November, 1973. Fearing a false profession, I wondered if I was really saved but those words of Acts 16.31 chased away the doubts: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.” As a hopeless sinner I had believed on the Lord Jesus to the saving of my soul.

After my conversion to God, the prayer of Saul of Tarsus in Acts 9 seemed to be my prayer: “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” Six months later I was baptized and received into the fellowship of the assembly in Banbridge. Some dear brethren took me under their wing and introduced me to preaching the gospel in the open air. At that time the assembly had a Saturday night open air meeting the whole year round in the town centre and I soon became very much involved. I was introduced to Sunday School work and preaching on the Lord's Day evenings and in this way my interest in the gospel seemed to develop. I never thought that, one day, I would be preaching the gospel in a foreign land but had resolved that, if it was the Lord's will, I would do it. Secular employment took me to Cookstown in 1979 where I found lodgings with an elderly sister who was in the assembly there and, as I didn't

want divided interests between two assemblies, the brethren in Banbridge commended me to the fellowship and care of the saints of that Co. Tyrone town. Being convinced that the Lord guided me there made me very content and the assembly in Cookstown became a real spiritual home. At that stage I regularly visited the assemblies in Stonewall and Longford in Eire and, at times, thoughts of the possibility of living in that region dominated my mind but the assembly demands in Cookstown seemed to relegate my going to the Republic to an inferior place.

In 1984 I married my wife Beth and, together, we set up home in Cookstown. We shared the same interests and, even before marrying, had agreed that if it was the Lord's will for us to preach the gospel in another land we would go. However, our lives became centred on the work of God in the Mid-Ulster region.

In 1986 the firm for which I worked announced the closure of their premises in Cookstown and their intentions to relocate themselves in Antrim and requested that I move with them. This meant that we were abruptly uprooted from our snug corner and, after considerable exercise, decided to gather with the saints in Clonkeen. We were led to realise that no matter how much we think we are needed we can be done without.

Upon coming to Randalstown to live, thoughts of going to a foreign country increasingly occupied our minds — but so did the questions, ie, how could one be sure that it was God's will before taking such a big step? That particular question was answered for us at the Lurgan conference 1991 by Mr. F. Stallon giving ministry from 1Tim.4.1; “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly ...”. We resolved to wait for that unmistakable clear word from the Spirit. We weren't going to move until we were 100% sure. Other thoughts searched our hearts — How could we expect God to use us in a foreign land without first having used us here at home, and, in all good conscience, how could we expect the assembly to wholeheartedly recommend us to the grace of God without first having proved ourselves in their midst? We thought these reasonings had good foundation and were worthy of consideration. An opportunity to share in gospel meetings with brother R. Eadie in Clonkeen came in 1991 and we accepted the invitation hoping to receive further light as to the will of God. The meetings proved to be encouraging with much reason to conclude that going abroad was a big possibility — but we weren't sure. Other invitations quickly followed to help in meetings in Ballybollan, Ahoghill, Dunmurry, Magherafelt and Kells and were precious occasions of proving God and of becoming more convicted as to His will.

The formidable question was: “Which country?” Right away two countries were stroked off the list — Brazil was one — because I thought in my ignorance that they were well evangelized. Bro. T. Matthews remarked to me in private after a report meeting in Clonkeen regarding the more than 300 cities in the Rio Grande do Sul where, as yet, no gospel work was carried on. This was very illuminating.

After a period of resisting thoughts of Brazil a brother in Christ said to me one night; “Lindsay, If I were you I would consider going to Brazil.” This came as a shock but immediately I thought that I should. Praying about Brazil was very easy — we seemed to be at home in the Presence of God with these thoughts on our

heart. After “putting out the fleece” on a number of occasions we became convinced that it was Brazil for us — but we were afraid to take the next step.

At the beginning of 1992 I was meditating on the early chapters of Exodus about the reluctance of Moses to obey the call of God in spite of such clear indications. “What a foolish man,” I thought, “If I were Moses I would have obeyed much earlier.” Suddenly, my conscience smote and I concluded that I was as bad as he. I became thoroughly ashamed of myself in the Presence of God and Ex.4.14 made me very afraid: “And the anger of God was kindled against Moses.” How could I continue to disobey?

We approached the brethren of Clonkeen and related our exercise and they, without reservation, gave us the right hand of fellowship. So on the 9th of December 1992 we arrived in Brazil “assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them,” Acts 16.10

#### LOVE LIES BLEEDING

One's pen had once been pointed like a dart,  
Alas! 'tis wielded now with heavy heart,  
The sacred citadel of family life  
Asunder torn is now, by marital strife,  
Strife that runs its sordid, turbid course  
And terminates in unscriptural divorce.  
Here, a bleeding heart lies desolated,  
There, a loving marriage devastated.  
Oh! weep with me all ye that prize your home,  
And ope' with me the priceless, hallowed tome,  
That lauds the sanctity of wedded state,  
Ne'er countenances t'evil current spate,  
When broken lives and tender souls lie wounded,  
High time it is: let clarion call be sounded!  
Enough of this such miserable, craven preaching,  
This sophistry, this vain pretext for breaching  
Promised fidelity's “I will!” “I will!”  
Engraved, they remain in God's reckoning still;  
In spite of faithless friends, relentless foe,  
“From the beginning it was not so,”  
Let us denounce with each God given breath,  
The certainty of “one sin unto death,”  
As far as thus enabled to foresee,  
The adulterous marriage of a divorcee,  
Whose erst'while spouse does yet remain alive,  
But only wrests the Scripture to contrive,  
To overturn, to thwart and to frustrate,  
Decree divine, “Putting away I hate.”

*John Glenville (Cornwall)*

# Good Tidings from Heaven

## TRAVELLING TO A FIRE

Some while ago a number of people commenced a journey which, they thought, would take them safely to their desired destiny. They entered the Mont Blanc tunnel as they had done, perhaps, many times before. The travellers were all different. There were private cars, commercial lorries, men, women and children all on the same route. Unknown to them, before them lay disaster. They were unwittingly travelling to a fire!

I would remind each who is reading this little paper that everyone of us is on a journey also. It commenced the day of our birth and will not end until we arrive in eternity. We need to be aware that we are not creatures of time alone. The Word of God, the Bible, says in the Old Testament book of Genesis, in 2.7, "the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." This is confirmed in the New Testament in 1.Cor.15.45, "And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul..." My dear reader, we are bound for eternity. The biggest question you will ever face in life is, "eternity where?"

The Bible teaches there are only two places, heaven or hell. Is it possible that you are unwittingly heading for the fire? You may be content and happy, moving in a carefree manner through life, just like the people entering the tunnel, but disaster may be just ahead. You may not agree there is a fire. The testimony of another who lived without God is, "have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame," Lk.16.24. How close you are to eternal fire is known only to God. Again we read in Prov.27.1, "Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." Also, Jms.4.14, "For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." You need to be prepared for eternity and meeting God.

There is only one way in which this can be done and that is through the Person and work of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. "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. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved. He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." Jn.3.16-18. When the Lord Jesus was on the cross, He bore and exhausted the judgment of God against sin and that work is credited to all who trust Him and they shall never perish. On the cross of Calvary He cried, "It is finished." Isaiah the prophet wrote, "But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all," Isa.53.5,6. Peter records in his first epistle in 2.24, "Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree," and in 3.18, "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God."

If you realise you are travelling to the fire, listen to the advice of other preachers, "And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," Acts 16.31.





# ASSEMBLY TESTIMONY



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## ASSEMBLY TESTIMONY

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**Editor: B. Currie**

Correspondence relative to Editorial matters should be addressed to:

**The Editor**, 49 Glenburn Road, Dunmurry, N. Ireland, BT17 9AN.  
Telephone (028) 9062 1343.  
E-mail: AT@bcurrie.free-online.co.uk

**Secretary/Treasurer : William Neill**, 109 Lurgan Road,  
Banbridge, Northern Ireland, BT32 4NG.  
Telephone (028) 4062 4238.

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

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# BEHOLD YOUR KING

(Meditations in Matthew)

by Jim Flanigan (Belfast)

## 26. The King, the Village, and the City (Ch.21)

This chapter has the distinction of bringing to us the first mention of Bethany in our Bible. In the heart of the chapter, at v17, we read of the Saviour that “He went out of the city into Bethany; and He lodged there.” This is very significant. As A. C. Gaebelain remarks, “We are now reaching the beginning of the end.” The city has no room for Him. It has its temple and its priests, its ceremony and its ritual, and it neither needs nor wants Him. Bethany is different. It may be but a dusty street or two and a few simple homes, but here they will receive Him and love Him and make room for Him. In this chapter our Lord's movements and ministry lie between Bethany and Jerusalem, between the village and the city.

The early verses portray a fulfilment of a beautiful prophecy of Zechariah, “Jerusalem: Behold thy king cometh unto thee: He is just, and having salvation: Lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass,” *Zec.9.9*. The King now draws near to the city with His disciples, in literal fulfilment of the prophecy. It is often referred to as “the triumphal entry,” and such, in a sense, it was. The very acquisition of the ass with its colt was a miracle. The Lord had need of them, and they were granted. The tender grace of the Lord has been noted here in that there were two animals, a mother with her foal, and the Saviour would not have them separated. Although needing but one, He asked for “them”. If the pronoun is in italics twice in v2, yet in the two occurrences of it in v3 it is not italicised, and v7 confirms that the disciples “brought the ass, and the colt.” Note also our Lord's omniscience. He who knew just where that fish was, with the silver in its mouth, *Matt.17.27*, knew also that over yonder, in the nearby village, there was an ass tied, with its colt.

It was quite a remarkable scene on the Mount of Olives. They put their garments over the animals and strewed the way also with garments and with branches of trees. No costly rugs for this King, but garments and palm leaves to prepare His way. The King was in the midst of them as multitudes went before Him and multitudes followed after. “Hosanna!” they cried, “Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord.” It was *Ps.118*. “Hosanna” means, “Save now”. “Hosanna to the Son of David” was, at least for the moment, a public acknowledgment that He was both Saviour and King.

As the great procession approached Jerusalem the whole city was moved, asking, “Who is this?” The city of the great King did not recognise its King. Jerusalem had been troubled at His birth, when the question was, “Where is He that is born King?” *Matt.2.3*. Now, thirty-three years later, the question is not “Where” but “Who”. Note

the answer, "This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee." "Jesus"! It was a confession that there was greatness, but a greatness which perhaps they could not fully understand or explain. "Nazareth"! The town of ill repute where He lived for thirty years. "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" another had asked, Jn.1.46. "Galilee"! The province despised by these more sophisticated Judeans.

Jesus enters the precincts of the temple. It was still called "The temple of God," but men had demeaned it and desecrated its courts. There were money changers and merchants, bartering and bargaining, cheating and defrauding, shouting and arguing. They had made the sacred court a market place and a den of thieves. Now, for a second time, He purged the temple, the first cleansing being at the beginning of His ministry in Jn.2.13-17. What a scene it must have been as the King, with royal authority cast them out and overthrew their tables. Coins would spill all over the pavement, with animals and birds in confusion. Then judgment is blended with mercy, when, having cast out the merchants, He graciously healed the blind and the lame who came to Him. But the wonderful things that He did, and the accompanying "Hosannas" of the children, angered the chief priests and scribes. "Hearest Thou what these say?" they asked. "Yea", He replied, "Have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings Thou has perfected praise?" It was, of course, a quotation from the eighth Psalm. They must have known it. The sword of the Word pierced and silenced them. They had no answer. He left them, and went out of the city. This was symbolic. He crossed the Kidron Valley and went over the Mount of Olives into Bethany. How He must have appreciated the welcome and the hospitality of Bethany. He lodged there. That dusty village was now more to Him than all the pomp and splendour of great Jerusalem.

Next morning the Saviour returns from Bethany to the temple. On the way over the mount He was hungry. What grace! Though He was rich, He had become poor. He was King, proprietor of everything, but yet He is hungry. He observes a fig tree and looks for fruit. There was foliage, so there ought to have been fruit. The fig tree is not like other fruit trees. With the fig, fruit and foliage develop together, and if there are leaves then there should be fruit. "But", says Matthew, there were "leaves only." The Lord pronounced judgment upon it and presently it withered. Is this the only miracle of judgment recorded? There is a parable in the miracle. As J. N. Darby comments, "Israel in fact possessed all the outward forms of religion, and were zealous for the law and the ordinances, but they bore no fruit unto God." The withered fig tree was but a foreshadowing of the future judgment of the nation which professed so much but gave so little. The disciples marvelled at the miracle and were exhorted to have that faith which never doubted but ever received from God what was asked in His will. In the temple court the chief priests and elders question the Lord's authority to teach. "Who gave Thee this authority?" they ask. He puts a proposition to them. If they will tell Him whether the ministry of John Baptist was from heaven, or of men, then He will tell them about His authority for His ministry. They were in a difficulty, and they knew it. If they said, "From heaven," then He would ask, "Why did ye not then believe him?" If they said, "Of men," they feared the people, who held John to be a prophet. Weakly they replied, "We cannot tell." "Neither tell I you," He said. In their hypocrisy they could not tell. In His

judgment of their hypocrisy, He would not tell. But He would give them another parable.

A certain man had two sons. When he requested of them that they should work that day in the vineyard, the first bluntly said, "I will not," but afterward repented and went. The second replied promptly, "I go, sir," but went not. "Which of the two did the will of the father?" Jesus asked them. "The first," they answered correctly. It was just an illustration of the different ways in which John Baptist's hearers had responded to his ministry of righteousness. These proud and polished leaders of the nation professed righteousness but it was profession only. The publicans and harlots whom they despised, seemed by their lives to be denying obedience, but in repentance came and yielded. They entered the kingdom before the unrepentant, self-righteous priests and elders and scribes.

Then there was another parable. A householder; a vineyard; a winepress in anticipation of fruit; a watch-tower to guard against intruders; husbandmen to labour in the vineyard; and the owner went to a far country. When vintage time came servants were sent to receive the expected fruit. These were beaten and stoned, and another killed. More servants were sent and suffered similarly. Last of all he sent his son, thinking that they would reverence him, but they said, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance." They caught him, cast him out, and slew him. What would the lord of the vineyard do to those husbandmen? "He would miserably destroy those wicked men," they replied. The Saviour used the sword of the Word again, "Did ye never read?" he asked. How such a question would have angered them. They? Chief priests and elders? They who knew the Scriptures so well? "Did ye never read?" He quotes Ps.118 to them, the very Psalm from which the children had quoted when they had cried "Hosanna." Now from the Psalm He reminds them of the stone which the builders rejected, but which became eventually, the head of the corner. The stone of the Psalm was the Son of the parable. They would reject Him, but he would yet be exalted. They rightly perceived that the parables spake of them, and but for fear of the people they would have arrested Him there and then. In the chapter that follows He has yet another parable for them.

—to be continued (D.V.)

### ***HIS GREATNESS***

*A greater than wise Solomon is here,  
In all His majesty;  
By far than Abraham, God's friend more dear,  
From all eternity;  
Surpassing Jonah in His power to tell  
Thy mind, obediently;  
Greater than Jacob who gave them the well,  
For Christ gave all for me.*

Matthew J. Cordiner

# Assembly Testimony Bible Class

by J. Riddle (Cheshunt)

## ESTHER

### (11) THE MAN WHOM THE KING DELIGHTETH TO HONOUR, Part 1

#### Read Chapter 6

The words that stand at the head of these notes occur five times in this chapter. The passage signals the beginning of Mordecai's rise to honour, and the beginning of Haman's journey to the gallows. We are given a glimpse of Mordecai's coming glory as "the man whom the king delighteth to honour." It is a foretaste of the day when "Mordecai was next unto king Ashasuerus, and great among the Jews," 10.3. All of which reminds us that "we see Jesus ... crowned with glory and honour," and that His glory is soon to be fully displayed. But the beginning of Haman's downfall reminds us not only that Satan is already a defeated foe, but that ultimately he will be "cast out into the earth ... having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time," Rev.12.7-12. Haman's wife and friends were certainly convinced that he had "but a short time!" v13.

We will study the chapter under four paragraph headings as follows:

- (1) A man who had not been honoured, v1-3;
- (2) A man who wanted to be honoured, v4-9;
- (3) a man who was publicly honoured, v10-11;
- (4) a man who would never be honoured, v12-14.

#### 1) A MAN WHO HAD NOT BEEN HONoured, v1-3

"And the king said, What honour and dignity hath been done to Mordecai for this? Then said the king's servants that ministered unto him, *There is nothing done for him,*" v3.

Notice, first of all, the perfect timing in every detail of the story:

*a) It was the right night.* "On *that* night could not the king sleep." That is, the night before Esther's second banquet. If Ahasuerus had suffered a bout of insomnia on any other night, the story might have ended rather differently.

*b) It was the right book.* "He commanded to bring the book of records of the chronicles; and they were read before the king." He could have endeavoured to while away the time in some other way (how about the court musicians?), or asked for a completely different book. It appears from Ezra 6.1-2 that the royal palaces had extensive archives.

*c) It was the right entry.* "And it was found written, that Mordecai had told of Bigthana and Teresh ... who sought to lay hand on the king Ahasuerus." They could have read from other parts of "the book of records of the chronicles."

**d) It was the right question.** “What honour and dignity hath been done to Mordecai for this?” The king could have grunted approval, and let them read on!

Notice, secondly, that what had *not* happened was also perfectly timed. Just suppose Mordecai *had been* honoured at the time of the incident in question. Or suppose that he had clamoured for some kind of recognition or reward. Events could have turned out very differently. Now let's notice some important lessons:

**A) God's providence is perfect**

We have already noticed this in our studies. Let's quote J. Sidlow Baxter again: “God arranged non-miraculous events to achieve a predetermined outcome - which makes it all the more miraculous.”

Now listen to Peter preaching on the day of Pentecost: “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain,” Acts 2.23. Now it's Paul writing. “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. Aren't these New Testament examples of divine providence? Just think about your own life now - you should be able to supply a few examples of your own!

**B) God's Son must be honoured**

Ahasuerus had failed to honour the man who had delivered him from death. “There is nothing done for him.” We know that this was prearranged by God, but could we, even faintly, see ourselves in this picture? The Lord Jesus has delivered us from death at infinite cost, and are we failing to honour Him in our lives? Could it be said of us, “There is nothing done *for HIM?*” Listen to the New Testament again: “For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but *unto Him* which died for them, and rose again,” 2Cor.5.14-15. See also 1Cor.6.20; “For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God ...” Read Ecc.9.14-15. It is generally true in the world that “no man remembered that same poor Man.” But do *WE* leave Him out of our calculations?

**C) God's people must be humble**

We have already noticed that Mordecai never clamoured for recognition. Solomon observed that “The fear of the Lord is wisdom; and before honour is humility,” Prov.15.33. This was preeminently true of the Lord Jesus. He was “obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name,” Phil.2.8-9. Peter writes: “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,” 1Pet.5.5-6.

**2) A MAN WHO WANTED TO BE HONOURED, v4-9**

Haman was dazzled by his own success. Ahasuerus had “advanced him, and set his seat above all the princes that were with him,” ch.3.1, ch.5.11. Everything seemed set fair for him. He had enjoyed a private drink with the king, ch.3.15 and was to accompany the king to the queen's banquet. So, “Haman thought in his heart,

To whom would the king delight to do honour more than to myself?” v6. It was even better than getting permission to hang Mordecai! He didn't have time to make that request anyway! Not let's notice some lessons:

**A) He was obsessed with his own importance**

You'll notice that it was an attitude of heart: “Now Haman thought in his heart.” The previous reference to his heart reveals the same thing: having been invited to the banquet, “Then went Haman forth that day joyful and with a glad heart,” ch.5.9. So Haman entered the king's presence with a very proud heart. Notice that he observed court etiquette: he was in the “outward court,” v4 - as opposed to the “inner court” of ch.5.1; see ch.4.11. But outward ceremony masked inward pride, and inward hatred for Mordecai. It's very easy to ‘go through the motions,’ especially in assembly life. We like to be as orthodox as possible, and do exactly the right thing. Every ‘i’ is dotted, and every ‘t’ is crossed. But it can mask “anger ... malice,” Col.3.8, and other evils just waiting to be let loose.

How do we enter the King's presence? John the Baptist said, “he must increase, but I must decrease,” Jn.3.30. There was no decreasing with Haman. We can just imagine how Haman would have responded if Elisha had said to him, “What is to be done for thee? wouldst thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host?” He would have jumped at the opportunity! But just listen to the lovely answer from the “great woman” of Shunem: “I dwell among mine own people.” No wonder she was “a great woman!” 2Kgs.4.8-13. Paul had to remind the proud Christians at Corinth that any ability they possessed was entirely God-given: “What hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?” 2Cor.4.7. Whether it's our position, or gift, or whatever - none of us has any reason to “glory in His presence.”

**B) He was ambitious for the highest place**

Just like Diotrephes: “Who loveth to have the preeminence among them,” 3Jn.9., or like the Pharisees, “Ye love the uppermost seats in the synagogues,” Lk.11.43. The Lord Jesus taught that “Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister (servant *diakonos*); and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant (*doulos*),” Matt.20.26-27.

Haman sought recognition on a scale that put him almost on the level of the king himself. Just contrast this with the way Paul describes the status of the apostles in 1Cor.4.9, where the word “last” is a technical term describing prisoners bringing up the rear of a triumphal procession and destined for the arena. Haman's aspirations remind us that in the end-time, the “man of sin” will sit “in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God,” 2Thess.2.4. How different to the Lord Jesus Who came “not to be ministered unto (to be served), but to minister (to serve), and to give His life a ransom for many,” Matt.20.28.

**C) He was totally unworthy of promotion**

Mordecai had actually done something to benefit the king. But Haman, the king's favourite, had done nothing of merit. All he had achieved was confusion at Shushan, ch.3.15 and immense distress to Jewish citizens in the Persian Empire, ch.4.3. But then, it's often true that the greatest chaos is caused by people who seek position and prominence.

—to be continued (D.V.)



# The Kings of Judah and Israel

by Graeme Hutchinson (Belfast)

## Uzziah (Paper 12)

The reign of king Uzziah, Azariah in 2Kgs.15.1, was noted for its length (52 years upon the throne) and variety. As his father before, Uzziah began his reign with some power and godliness, only to succumb to the problems of pride towards the end. 2Chron.26 records the fact that the king was:

### *(a) Productive*

Similar to the help that Jehoida gave to king Joash, 2Chron.24.2, Uzziah was influenced by a man of God, Zechariah, 2Chron.26.5. From the moment he rose to prominence in Judah we can observe how he acted with regards to:

#### • *Restoration*

2Chron.26.2-3 reminds us that the king, when only sixteen years of age, restored Eloth to the nation. This place was once the possession of Judah when Solomon was ruler, 2Chron.8.17, however it had fallen into the hands of the enemy<sup>1</sup>. Upon entering the assembly we may find that certain values or truths have been lost through time, should we not endeavour to restore such things? Perhaps we should take our example from the Lord Himself: 'I restored that which I took not away,' (Ps.69.4).

#### • *Invasion*

2Chron.26.6-7 illustrates the king at war. With the help of God he was able to defeat the enemy and enlarge the nation. As soldiers, 2Tim.2.3, may we be as successful in our military campaigns. Contrast 2Chron.26.7, 'God helped him' with Ps.108.12, 'Vain is the help of man.' Relying on the help of man, whilst natural at times, is bound to fail. Remember the words of the Lord in Jn.15.5, 'without me ye can do nothing.'

#### • *Fortification*

2Chron.26.9 records that Uzziah had a desire to protect the nation against possible attacks. It was good to invade, but how necessary it was to defend against likely reprisals. The Apostle Paul had a similar desire in Acts 20.28-31. Timothy was exhorted in the second epistle to do likewise, 2Tim.3. We live in an age where the child of God is under tremendous pressure for the conflict still rages against the enemy but we need to 'withstand', Eph.6.13.

#### • *Production*

2Chron.26.10 outlines the interests that the king had in things horticultural! The end of the verse is particularly revealing; 'he loved husbandry' or 'he was a lover of the ground' (Newberry margin). 1Cor.3.9 reminds us that the assembly is likened to

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<sup>1</sup> Perhaps it was under the reign of Jehoram that Eloth (in the land of Edom) was recaptured by the Edomites (2 Chron. 21.8-10).

the ground. What a man Uzziah would have been in the assembly, a lover of the assembly, its truth, people and Head! Do we have similar attitudes towards the assembly? See 2Tim. 2.6.

***(b) Prosperous***

2Chron.26.5 informs us that, whilst not making material possessions his main desire in life, he still was prosperous. Moreover, the verse stresses that it was God who ‘made him to prosper.’ Scripture never criticises those that have riches, but it does caution against making it the motive for living, 1Tim.6.9, 17. In the spiritual sense, the believer is rich beyond measure but not all believers realise this. For instance, a recent convert will appreciate the blessings of salvation, but it is only when Ephesians is read that they realise the extent: ‘Blessed with all spiritual blessings ... in Christ,’ Eph.1.3. The same holds for 2Cor.8.9. In all probability we can make a strong correlation between point (a) and (b). The reason for his prosperity was due to his productivity. The more we explore the Word, the more we shall understand of the ‘treasures’, Col.2.3, and the riches that we have in Christ.

***(c) Proud***

2Chron.26.15 records a solemn statement: ‘marvellously helped till he was strong.’ As with many characters in Scripture, once Uzziah began to sense his own strength the problems started to appear. Verse 16 remarks that ‘his heart was lifted up to his destruction.’ Jer.17.9 stresses the precise nature of the heart, and it was this that was to be the downfall of Uzziah. No matter how good we become on the outside, we must always remember how bad we are on the inside! Contrast Jehoshaphat with Uzziah: the former had his heart ‘lifted up’ for good, 2Chron.17.6, the latter to destruction. We can further observe:

**• *His Desire***

Uzziah wanted a career break! Perhaps discontent with only being king, he went into the temple to perform the role of priest. We too may, at times, feel that our position within the assembly is unsatisfactory and not maximising our potential. However, ‘godliness with contentment is great gain,’ 1Tim.6.6. Let us accept the role that the Lord has given and seek to realise all that the Lord wants us to do within that role.

**• *His Determination***

For Uzziah, his desire to act as priest was not something that he merely harboured in his heart, he actually went into the temple to burn incense, 2Chron.26.16-17. However, Old Testament teaching had clearly separated the tribe of Judah as the royal line, Gen.49.10, and the tribe of Levi as the priestly line, Deut.33.10, Ex.28.1, Ex. 4.14. Whilst David was able to combine the role of king, 2Sam.2.4, and Prophet, Acts2.29,30, this was not to be the case with King and Priest. With the exception of Melchisedec (before the establishment of the nation) no king was to perform the role of priest. Why? Such a position was to belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, Zech.6.13. Uzziah then, not only desired something that he was not to have, he also upset a type of Christ.

***(d) Punished***

With Uzziah's transgression and subsequent anger, the Lord smote him with leprosy, 2 Chron.26.19. Such was the extent of the leprosy that it rose to the area of

his forehead, for all to see, and he eventually died of the disease, v21. ‘Cut off’ from the temple and the throne!

Whilst we may express sorrow at the way in which king Uzziah ended his reign, one that had commenced so promisingly, it is still possible to record some positive features from the narrative. Undoubtedly the principle of Rom.5.20 can be observed: ‘Where sin abounded grace did much more abound.’ Consider the following:

- 2Chron.27.2 records that when his son, Jotham, took control of the throne, he had obviously learnt the lesson that Kingship and the Priesthood must not overlap. May we similarly learn from the mistakes of others and so avoid the pitfalls that others have fallen into.
- When Uzziah died of his leprosy, the prophet at the time, Isaiah, was given a vision of the Lord upon His throne, Isa.6.1. In this vision, Isaiah was reminded that, relative to a Holy God, the entire nation was spiritually leprous, Isa.6.5. Living in an age where sin and iniquity are on every hand, may we live godly lives and so be enabled to stand faithful to Him.

Thus, Uzziah was another king who followed the usual pattern: starting well and finishing badly. May we implement his positive features, be productive in the things of God and enjoy the riches that are in Christ, and avoid the negative points by remaining humble within the assembly and avoiding any desire to take the prominent place. Such a position belongs solely to the Lord, Col.1.18.

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

## PROPHETIC PICTURES OF THE LORD

by J. E. Todd (England)

### 2. THE VINE

Sometimes the nation of Israel, God’s earthly people, is likened to a vineyard. God so likens His people in Isaiah’s parable of the vineyard, 5.1-7. A vineyard is brought into being at no little cost of labour. A fertile site must be chosen, v1. The site must be cleared and prepared and planted with choice vines. A watchtower must be built for storage and for the watchman. A winepress dug for the treading of the grapes, v2.

God had chosen the land of Israel to be the site of His spiritual vineyard. The descendants of Jacob (Israel) were His chosen vines, v7. God, at no little labour, had delivered the children of Israel from their Egyptian slavery and preserved them during their journey through the wilderness and finally planted them in the land which flowed with milk and honey. “Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt: Thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it,” Ps.80.8. But, “What could have been done more to My vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?” Isa.5.4. God had looked for the grapes of obedience, worship and love for Himself, also justice and righteousness to one another, v7. But the vineyard of Israel produced the wild grapes of idolatry and sin.

A fruitless vineyard is abandoned, “I will lay it waste,” v5-6. Thus God in judgment was to abandon Israel and Judah to their Assyrian and Babylonian enemies. Israel proved to be a false vine.

The nation of Israel had failed to produce a people for God, a people who would love Him and serve Him, and also love one another, So when the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came into the world, He announced, “I am the **true** vine”, Jn.15.1. He came to call out a people from every nation and form them into a fruitful people for God. “The great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works,” Tit.2.13-14.

As God the Father had planted Israel, the failed vine, so now He sends His own Son to be the true Vine. “Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts: look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine (Israel),” Ps.80.14. “My Father is the vinedresser,” Jn.15.1,R.S.V. “The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world,” 1 Jn.4.14.

But the coming of the Christ was to cause a division in Israel. “I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee (Moses), and will put My words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto My words which he shall speak in My name, I will require it of him,” Deut.18.18-19. “But who may abide the day of His coming? and who shall stand when He appeareth?” Mal.3.2. Those Jews who did not repent and receive Him at His coming were to be rejected. For as John the Baptist said, “And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire”, Matt.3.10. So the fruitless branches which did not respond to their Messiah were taken away, “Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He (the Father) taketh away,” Jn.15.2. Thus to suffer the prophesied fate of judgment for such people, “When the boughs thereof are withered, they shall be broken off: the women come, and set them on fire: for it is a people (Israel) of no understanding: therefore He that made them will not have mercy on them, and He that formed them will shew them no favour,” Isa.27.11. “If a man abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned”, Jn.15.6.

But those who abide in Christ will produce the fruit pleasing to the Father. “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except ye abide in Me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing,” Jn.15.4-5. As the life-saving sap flows from the vine into its branches and produces the grapes; so the Lord Jesus Christ, the true vine, gives the life-giving Holy Spirit to each believer to produce in his or her life the fruit that pleases God. “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance (self-control)”, Gal.5.22-23.

The Lord Jesus Christ, the true vine, in contrast to the Israel of old, the failed vine, has created a worldwide fruitful people for God, that is the church. For the Lord said of Israel, “The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof”, Matt.21.43. Of course, Israel will again bring forth fruit to God in that great and glorious day to come.

—to be continued (D.V.)

# Believers' Baptism

## A Defence of this important New Testament Ordinance

by J. D. McColl (Australia)

### Paper 3

#### Has the Ordinance of Baptism taken the place of the Rite of Circumcision?

The argument that baptism answers to circumcision and that, therefore, children are to be baptized tells against, not for, the practice. The child of an Israelite was circumcised, not to make him an Israelite, but because he was an Israelite by birth. The order was birth first, then circumcision; and so it is now. First, regeneration, or spiritual birth, then baptism. We read in Acts 16.3 that Timothy was circumcised long after baptism had come, and so strong were some in favour of it, the "apostles, elders and brethren," of the church in Jerusalem had to come together to consider the question of circumcision being forced upon converted Gentiles, as necessary to their salvation. If baptism had come in the place of circumcision, that would have been the time to say so, and finish the controversy. There is not a mention of baptism in the entire discussion that took place in Acts 15.1-29.

Circumcision is essentially a Jewish rite. It was enjoined upon Abraham and his lineal descendants, signifying a covenant relationship existing between the nation of Israel and God, Gen.17. The administering of the outward sign did not indicate a moral state corresponding with the privileges to which the Israelite was admitted as a member of the Chosen Race. Birth, not circumcision, brought them into those privileges. There is nothing in the N.T. exactly analogous to the language of Gen.17. The most important Scripture is this connection in Col.2.11-12: "In whom (i.e. Christ) also ye were circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, in putting off the body (of the sins) of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye rose with Him through your faith in the working of God who raised Him from the dead." None but a prejudiced theorist could see in these words any indication of a divine intention to associate circumcision with baptism in the manner in which they are connected in the minds of certain interpreters.

"...The circumcision of Christ". This is not the Jewish rite to which our Lord was subjected as 'born under law' for that being only an ordinance in the flesh (body). This is something which meant death, for the next verse speaks of 'burial', and refers to us being cut off at the cross, "being crucified with Christ" ... We are not sealed with any outward mark, but with the Holy Spirit of Promise within. "Putting off the body of flesh". The word 'putting off' means 'stripping off and casting away,' being divested of a piece of filthy clothing. Our standing in Adam was terminated in the death of Christ, but the flesh as a principle of sin remains in the believer and must ever be judged. In the death of Christ we part with all our ruined condition attached to us linked with Adam - the Head of a ruined race.

“Buried with Him in baptism.” Our baptism as believers did not remove our ruined state, but it shows forth in figure, what we as believers, as men in Adam, have already passed through, and we count our emergence from the baptismal waters as a figure, too, of our being raised with Christ. Baptism did not effect participation of being “buried” and “raised” with Christ, but our faith in the power of God did. A symbol of the essence of our spiritual experience.

“Uncircumcision of our flesh,” v13. The literal uncircumcision of these Colossian Gentiles was but a symbol of the fact that they were subject to their old state in Adam, until God in grace had brought them into living union with a risen Christ.

Circumcision as a rite is entirely Jewish; baptism as an ordinance is entirely Christian. The former was carried out on those who were already Jews; the latter is administered to those who are already Christian. As administered to others (i.e. to unbelievers, whether young or old) baptism is a mere farce, devoid of meaning, and in many cases at least, a successful device of the devil deluding people into the belief that salvation is secured by an empty ceremonial.

### **The important place given to Baptism in the great Commission, Matt.28.16-20**

“All authority is given unto Me.” Rejected and slain by man, He was raised by the glory of the Father, enthroned in the place of highest honour and made “both Lord and Christ”. He was invested with absolute authority in every sphere. He used that authority in amazing grace for the spiritual enrichment of all nations, gathering His disciples around Him and giving them their marching orders.

“Make disciples of all the nations.” His sovereign grace went beyond the confines of Israel, reaching out to the remotest bounds of Gentile lands. The Gospel preacher tells to all mankind the grand news that there is salvation from Hell for all who will repent and accept the Saviour of sinners. But the terms of His sovereign Master’s commission means more than this, it is, “Make disciples”; bringing believers to the feet of Christ to own Him as Lord and to obey His will no matter what the cost. The faithful servant must have nothing less than this before him, for anything else will not fulfil the terms of his commission.

“Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” The place of first importance was given to baptism in the commission, and the N.T. servant acted on those instructions, so that, in the N.T. it is not supposed that any believer would not be baptized. In this act of obedience in baptism the believer demonstrated, in a public manner, a severance of every moral tie that bound them to the world life, the sin life and the self life, making a solemn surrender of themselves to the complete authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. In this they openly declared their allegiance to Christ, and their willingness to “observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” In the great commission there is equal emphasis placed upon the servant to “teach them to observe all things...,” and this includes all that the Lord afterwards commanded in the progress of divine revelation until the Word of God was filled up. Paul reminds the Corinthian believers, “If anyone think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord” 1Cor.14.36-37.

Let us note with interest the recurrence of the word “ALL” in the great commission.

“All authority” — The Power All.

“Make disciples of all nations” — The Parish All.

“Teaching them to observe all things” — The Precepts All.

“Lo, I am with you always” — The Promise All.

The Lord Jesus had commanded His servants to baptize believers in the name (singular) of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost and these early Christians regarded it as a duty and privilege to conform to His will, considering it an immense honour, and a grave responsibility, to the name of the Triune Godhead called over them. Baptism by immersion was the Lord’s will and way. Is there a true believer who would suggest by his or her neglect that they are wiser than the Lord?

It is well that we constantly remind ourselves of the meaning and implications of our baptism. Are we living as baptised believers should live? Are we living daily in the spiritual power of association with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection?

As J. G. Deck expressed it so admirably-

“Into Thy death baptised  
We own with Thee we died,  
With Thee, our Life, are risen,  
And shall be glorified.  
From sin, the world, and Satan-  
As ransomed by Thy blood-  
We here would walk as strangers  
Alive with Thee to God.”

*(Concluded)*

## ***Christian Conduct in a Modern World***

by Walter A. Boyd (South Africa)

### **Paper 4**

#### **No.2 — THE CONSECRATED LIFE (Continued)**

##### **(c) The Believer and Fellow — Christians, Romans 12.9-13**

As indicated earlier Rom.12 is all about Christian relationships in various dimensions. By being in the family of God by regeneration, it is expected that instruction be given to guide us in our relationship with the Lord, 12.1, with the world, 12.2, and with the Church, 12.3-8. There has been a change of relationships from our unsaved days, which has brought a change of responsibilities. The apostle has dealt with the truth of the Body of Christ and the variety of gifts within the body, ch.12.3-8. He now returns his attention in ch.12.9-13, to the important matter of relations between fellow-Christians and their attitude to one another within the circle

of Christian fellowship. Paul introduces us to the subject from v9 onwards, by stringing together a number of imperatives in rapid succession one after the other. This is not just a general list of Christian qualities that are expected of us as believers. These are the essential principles of Christian living that will enable the members with gifts to function smoothly, for the glory of the Lord and the good of the body.

*The Practice of Love* is the predominant theme of v9,10. It is interesting that in the other main passage on gifts in the assembly,

1Cor.12, Paul follows it immediately with a discourse on the need for and the principles of love. Now, after highlighting the gifts in v6-8, he elaborates on the principles of love by which those gifts operate efficiently and effectively. He does the same in Eph.4; he lists the gifts in v11 and then stresses the need for love in v15, “but speaking the truth in love.” One thing that is of paramount importance is the practice of love. Love is the basis of fellowship between the members of the body and the means by which they operate in harmony. It is love that lifts our fellowship together on the work of God beyond the camaraderie of earthly associations, it adds dignity to our relationships in the Lord and in the assembly.

Paul not only gives the requirement for love but also explains the characteristics of the love he expects us to practise. Love and *sincerity* ought to be happy companions. The word “dissimulation” is really hypocrisy. There must be no play-acting in the practice of our love. If it is at all insincere, it loses its character and ceases to be love. Our love for one another ought to be patterned on the Lord’s love for us, His is sincere, real and sacrificial. If we strive for this there will be no insincerity but there will be genuine love for each other.

The next characteristic he expects us to manifest with love is *purity*, v9. In the practice of our love we must abhor that which is evil and cleave to that which is good. True love is pure love and love for goodness. Love that is patterned on our Lord’s love, is a love that hates evil. Love of evil things is not true love, it is nothing more than selfish lust. The word “abhor” used here speaks of a very strong revulsion against evil, a real loathing of anything that is wrong. Why does it follow the command for love? — Because love is often portrayed as blind sentiment with no discernment. Love, which is patterned on the Lord’s love, will not only turn away from evil but will also accept and cling to that which is good. What a challenge this is to our thinking! Love being practised in the fear of God governs our associations in such a way that we turn from evil and cling to good. If we each resolved in our heart, that by the power of God, we are going to implement this principle in life, there would be a dramatic change in personal and assembly testimony.

In v10, Paul adds emphasis to his theme of love, by introducing the word “*philadelphia*” to his instructions. Hitherto, he has spoken of love by using the general term “*agape*”, but when direct reference is made to relationships one with another, he intensifies his theme by using that word which appears only six times in our New Testament. It is not a general word for love, but highlights love with *family affection*. In the practice of our love one to another, we are to develop family affection. The exercise of love in v9 does not necessarily involve human emotions;



but “brotherly love” in v10, is human affection for those within the family circle, the family of God. “Kindly affectioned” is the natural love of kindred-members of our family. We are to love brothers and sisters in the Lord as we would love brothers and sisters in the flesh, with a love that is warm, tender and affectionate. Such love will be characterised by loyalty, respect and a sense of responsibility for one another. Love and *esteem*, v10, “in honour preferring one another” will manifest that respect, which nowadays is often a scarce commodity. This is what Paul speaks of in Phil.2.3, “esteeming others better than ourselves.” This is true humility, only a humble person can truly honour others by giving them preference. True humility is the result of true love, (*philadelphia*) one for another. The natural tendency is to despise those whom we do not like, or whom we see as a threat to our ambitions: we esteem ourselves better than they. This is sinful pride and is a reversal of God’s intention. True love is always unselfish and considerate of others.

In v11, the apostle moves from the practice of love to a new theme, *Purpose in Service*. The word “business” in the AV is misleading; Paul is not speaking of the business life of the Christian, although this can be included. The whole of the verse deals with the matter of serving the Lord; it should be marked by *concentration of purpose*, “in diligence not slothful,” (RV). It means the whole being is fully alert and concentrated on the task of serving the Lord. It is serving the Lord with wholeheartedness, doing with all our might what our hands find to do. Our service should exhibit *enthusiasm of spirit*, “fervent in spirit.” In our spirits, we ought to be energised fully by the Holy Spirit. It has in view being maintained in peak spiritual condition by the Holy Spirit and thus ready for any task in service of the Lord. Serving the Lord ought to be with *willingness of heart*, as bond servants “serving the Lord.” Our service for the Lord amongst the saints must be characterised by diligence and enthusiasm and must be the exercise of love. When we serve each other in the assembly, we are serving the Lord.

In v12 the apostle continues to deal with the collective responsibility of the Christian and adds three more characteristics of a spiritual believer. The first of these characteristics is *joyfulness* or “rejoicing in hope.” We cannot be aglow for God, serving the Lord with the features of v11, without being full of joy. Our rejoicing will be in the sphere of our hope. Here Paul is taking up a theme expounded in ch.8.24,25; “For we are saved by (to) hope; but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.” In Christ, we await the realisation of a substantial hope, glory with Him. When we are rejoicing in all that this entails, service for the Lord will not be irksome. Rejoicing in this hope is a joy that is independent of our circumstances, we know that our future is secured and assured.

The second characteristic is *steadfastness*, “patient in tribulation.” Rejoicing in “the hope” will enable us to accept patiently whatever tribulation we may have to endure while here and until we enter fully into that hope. There is no doubt that we can use this as a diagnostic instrument to ascertain our spiritual condition. Being impatient in tribulation may be a symptom of one who has lost his grasp on the hope of ch.8.

The third characteristic is *prayerfulness*, “continuing instant in prayer.” In the context of the assembly, those who serve together and suffer together will rejoice together and engage in preserving prayer for one another. The expression “continuing instant” is elsewhere translated as “continuing steadfastly,” Acts 2.42, or “attending continually,” Rom. 13.6. With this hope firmly set before us and being patient in tribulation is closely linked to continual prayerfulness. Are we not all rebuked by this simple imperative? How often our prayer life becomes sporadic, enfeebled by the pressures of the modern world with its rush, and quickened pace. Such a view of the Christian life emerges from these exhortations and encourages us to strive for this standard.

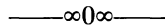
Verse 13 brings to our mind the practical outcome in a life lived to the standard God expects. These principles should be manifested in *Practical Fellowship*. This is a necessary part of the responsibility of Christians one to another. The welfare provisions made by many countries for its citizens have obscured this. True love will be expressed in a multitude of different ways, at the heart of which will be practical fellowship in material things. Two features of this fellowship ought to be prominent: *generosity and hospitality*. Love will take into account those who are in need and will seek to provide loving help as in the assembly at Jerusalem in the early days of the present dispensation.

“Distributing” means to enter into fellowship with other believers. This is more than mere giving, it means sharing the experience of the need, and results in mutual good. As I give to help another in need, I enter their privations in some measure and am edified thereby. It is the fellowship of the giver and the receiver; the fellowship of sharing what God has entrusted to me is more important than giving to alleviate a need. *Hospitality* is the practice of an open door towards the saints in a manner similar to distributing, which is having an open hand toward the needy. The need for hospitality is always present and those who accept their responsibility in this great service will find adequate reward to their eternal account. Both distribution and hospitality ought to be characterised by generosity, the Lord loveth a cheerful giver,” 2Cor. 9.7, this is not so much doing these things with a smile, but rather doing them with a full and willing heart  
—to be continued (D.V.)

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### SOME GLEANINGS

There is no work of grace in the heart where there are no acts of grace in the life.



If you are afraid that perhaps the love of money is getting a hold on your soul, start giving some of it away and see how you feel! If you feel glad (cheerful) then you are still safe, but if it almost breaks your heart then it is time to get down on your knees and pray to be freed from this sin of covetousness! It is going to ruin you unless you are delivered from it!

# The Role of Sisters in the Assembly

by J. Grant (Scotland)

## No. 3 — TEACHING

It may be thought strange that the subject of teaching should be introduced in papers dealing with the role of sisters in assembly life. Clearly it is taught that a sister will not speak in the gatherings of the assembly, 1Cor.14.34, so the teaching to which we refer is not that of publicly addressing the gatherings of the saints. In what way, then, does a sister teach? Although not in the gatherings of the saints, sisters have an important teaching role outwith these gatherings, to educate others who are in the fellowship of the assembly.

Titus addresses the sisters when he writes; “That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, obedient to their own husbands, that the Word of God be not blasphemed,” Tit.2.4-5. In the sphere of the home, therefore, there is a vital responsibility to be undertaken by sisters of more mature years. In the climate of society today this is more necessary than ever when the fabric of family life is under attack from the Adversary. Assemblies are underpinned by strong family life, and when the world around us is discarding this and replacing it with immoral relationships, it is of extreme importance that believers hold fast to the teaching of Scripture on this matter.

Teaching on this subject by brethren from the platform must be given, but there are issues, which cannot be aired in the gatherings of the saints, many of which only a sister can tackle. This is where the teaching role of the older sisters comes in. Titus is not envisaging the setting up of “motherhood teaching meetings” in the assembly or “practical housekeeping courses” addressed by sisters. Rather he is teaching that in the home the older sisters, probably mostly on a “one to one” basis, will instruct the young wives in how a godly wife will act. Instruction will be given in all that is involved in loving husbands, loving children, managing the home and displaying kindness in a discrete manner. Older sisters will observe younger sisters with godly care, and will draw alongside with help when they see it is necessary. Younger sisters will not regard this as interference in their life, but will be happy to accept guidance from those who have experience in these matters.

It is important to note that the reason for the need of such instruction is “that the Word of God be not blasphemed”. There may be a wayward younger sister, out of ignorance or even out of rebellion against the Word of God, who is bringing the testimony into disrepute. A home which is not properly kept, a family which is not cared for or gossip which is not edifying can all cause damage to the testimony of

the local assembly. The world is watching critically and is eager to exploit any weakness, which they see in the home lives of believers. In such a situation the sister will be the subject of gossip and criticism in the locality, and the Word of God will also be spoken against. The sister in question will claim that the gospel has changed her but the world looking on will state that the change cannot be seen.

Particular problems are faced by wives and mothers who are saved and who have unbelieving husbands. When salvation comes, home life changes and the new Christian will be unsure how to deal with some of the issues. What does she do when her husband expects her to accompany her to the places where they previously spent time together? How does she act to enable her to attend the assembly gatherings? When issues arise regarding the bringing up of the children, what does she do? These and many other issues must be faced, and a sister who is willing to help will prove invaluable.

But the work of sisters in relation to the work of the assembly goes beyond that. Into Ephesus came a man from Alexandria, Apollos by name. He was “an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures,” Acts 18.24, and engaged with fervour in the work of the Lord. There were, however, important spiritual matters in which he had to be instructed, and Aquila and Priscilla, a husband and wife who had come to Ephesus with Paul, took an interest in him, and “expounded unto him the way of the Lord more perfectly,” Acts 18.26. We cannot escape noticing that it was “they”, both Aquila and Priscilla, who took him and expounded the way to him. It must be repeated that Priscilla would not do this in the gatherings of the assembly, nor would she take a leading part in the teaching of saints publicly. Clearly, however, she was able to converse with spiritual intelligence on the things of the Lord and help Apollos come to a greater understanding of divine truth. That he took the lessons to heart is obvious, as the brethren gave him a letter of commendation as he left Ephesus to journey into Achaia.

Because sisters do not teach publicly we may fall into the trap of thinking that it is of little importance whether they study the Scriptures. Such an attitude fails to appreciate that growth in Christian life is only possible as we know the Word of God, and therefore it is just as vital that our sisters read and study it as our brethren. How encouraging it is when in conversation sisters show that they have an intelligent grasp of the Book. The writer well remembers a godly, aged sister who sat through the weekly Bible Reading in silence. Walking home in her company she would converse with the young men and show that she was better acquainted with the passage which had been under discussion than many of the brethren who took part during Bible Reading. With a little smile she would sometimes say “I could not tell you in the meeting, but I can mention now...”.

The influence, which such well-taught sisters can wield in the assembly, is great. When dealing with domestic matters younger sisters will be given advice which is Scriptural. Indeed guidance given at any time will be soundly based. The writer also remembers that when first attending a Gospel Hall, ignorant of assembly truth, it was another sister, the godly wife of a godly husband, who, as we sat one evening after others had gone home, first spoke to him of the significance of the breaking of

bread. This godly couple opened their home to an insignificant and unpromising teenager, and “expounded ... the way of God more perfectly”.

Let our sisters never think that their role in the work of the assembly is simply a passive one. There is much to which they can turn their hands, and an intelligent appreciation of truth is vital if the work has to be done in a way which pleases Him. In all this work discretion is vital, and a lack of desire to be prominent is consistent with godliness. Godly sisters have much teaching to do and the saints will benefit from devotion to the Lord expressed in this practical way.

—*to be continued (D.V.)*

## **MY CONVERSION AND CALL (64)**

*by Nitish Patel (London)*

I was born in 1963 in East Africa where my grandparents had emigrated from India to find work. We lived in Kenya in a small town in the country. Though living in Africa, the Indians kept their religion and culture and I was brought up in a devout Hindu home where my sister and I were taught to be good and pray to various idols. We were never allowed to eat meat for that was supposed to be a great sin.

Due to turmoil in East Africa we had to leave and settled in London in 1968. It was here that I first went to school. We would have to say the Lord’s prayer every day and sing hymns in assembly such as “Jesus bids us shine with a pure, clear light”. I never heard the name “Jesus” before and asked my mother concerning Him. She made up a story and told me that He was a shepherd who lived long ago and looked after sheep. The Romans used to come and kill them for food. He was so angry with people eating meat, that he tried to stop them but they crucified Him! I thank God that I was not left in such darkness concerning the Saviour for long.

Things changed when in 1972 our two cousins came to live with us from Africa. The house was crowded and we made a lot of noise. My father who owned a grocery store was getting a headache! He told his customers he did not know what to do with us! One customer was a sister in fellowship at Clifton Hall, which was at the end of our road. She suggested we were sent to Sunday school. We were promptly ordered to attend by my father!

I did not want to go but remember my cousin telling me “What would God think of you?” I feared God enough to go to this strange building.

To my surprise, I enjoyed Sunday school and heard stories from the Bible for the first time. The one thing I remember most is that we had to memorize Rom.6.23 for the following week to earn points. I enjoyed it so much I never missed a Sunday.

Hinduism with all its confusion soon left my mind for it never made any sense to

me but the story of the Saviour made much more sense. The story of the love of God that sent His Son to die at Calvary for sinners was constantly taught as well as our responsibility to repent and receive Him into our hearts as our Saviour.

It was a number of years later, that the Spirit of God began to bring me under conviction and for a number of months I could not get out of my mind that I needed to be saved. At that time I was fearful of what others would think of me and said to myself that when I was older I would become a Christian but the conviction grew greater.

The Lord was to remind me in a strange way. At the end of 1973, I was sick and off school for a week but felt well enough to return one Thursday. However, while in class, I suddenly felt very ill and thought I was going to pass out. In my fear, I knew that the Lord was speaking to me and I prayed that “I will become a Christian, I will put it off no longer”. I immediately felt better and was thankful to God.

Soon after, one night in 1974, I felt I could go on no longer as I was. I prayed “Lord Jesus, forgive me of my sin and come into my heart to be my Saviour.” That moment a great burden seemed to lift from my heart and I knew that I was saved.

As the days passed, changes took place that can only be attributed to the work of God. I began to detest the pop music I used to listen to though no one told me it was wrong. Any bad language that I had picked up from friends at school had stopped. As the days went by, my life was completely changed. I had been born again!

As the years passed I witnessed to my friends at school though I was often mocked. I began to have a burden for my family who were not saved. I enjoyed the young people’s Bible class and never missed a meeting.

Sadly, due to the Charismatic movement most of the Sunday school teachers left for the denominations where this false teaching was practised, but not before they had tried to get us to join them. I never felt at home anywhere else except Clifton Hall where I had enjoyed the best years of my life.

For a while I became cold of heart and was full of questions that no one seemed to answer such as “how can God punish Hindus who never had the chance to hear the gospel?” The false teaching of Evolution at school also confused me.

I kept on reading the Word of God and praying for help. It was the words of a hymn greatly helped me to keep loyal to the Lord Jesus and kept me attending the assembly — *“Trust and obey for there is no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey.”*

The Lord restored me to the joy of salvation and I was baptised on the 2nd of October 1983, and received into fellowship. Immediately I began to witness as I did before. I started to study the Scriptures seriously and found that all the answers to my questions were in God’s Word. I began to go to the park to give out tracts and also outside our Gospel Hall which lies on a main road.

At this time, I was at the City University in London, doing a degree in computer engineering but the Lord had other plans. Things did not work out and I dropped out. I sought to look for a job as an engineer but the Lord closed the door. I decided

to find a job locally so that I could come home early and go tracting. I immediately found a job as a computer operator with a local firm that was involved in oil exploration.

During the three years while I was working and tracting, I had the joy of leading several souls to Christ. The Lord kept burdening my heart to go full time into His harvest field looking only to Him to meet my needs. I had a special burden for my own people in their darkness and I took up lessons in the Gujarati language in preparation to go into the work. Though it was my mother tongue, I had lost fluency in it having spent most of my life in this country. I told the brethren of my convictions and sought advice. They were happy to commend me to the grace of God. I left my job in November 1987 and was commended by my assembly for the Lord's work amongst the Hindu people.

I had a lot of opposition from family and relatives initially. Some told me that I was a disgrace and would be begging on the streets. However, they knew little of our wonderful God who has promised to meet every need. It was a great surprise to them when He did.

I made my first visit to India in 1989 to see the Lord's work there. It was there that I met my wife, Ellen, who has been a true help to me in the work. I was told that I have found a virtuous woman whose price was above Rupees!

We had both been praying about each other without the other knowing. When we found out, we recognised the hand of God behind it all and we were married a few months later on the 6th of May 1991. It has since been a privilege to visit India several times to help in the work there.

In the early days I laboured amongst the small Gujarati population in my area but the Lord opened a great door of opportunity when I was asked by the assembly in Wembley to come over to them. The Gospel Hall lies on a road, which is the main shopping area for Asians in the South East of England. Thousands come from miles around to do their shopping and we are able to preach the gospel to them.

The Hindu people are very open to the gospel and many invite us into their homes to tell them more of the Saviour. We have had the joy of seeing one Hindu man, Raja, saved who is now in fellowship. He is the first fruits of the work there and we labour on waiting to see the rest of the harvest.

The prayers of the saints will be valued as we continue to serve our beloved Lord Jesus.

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Nearly four centuries ago, a poor monk bowed down with a sense of sin, might have been seen painfully climbing upon his knees the twenty-eight steps of the Sancta Scala at Rome. Many a time the words of the "Absolvo te" (*I forgive thee*) had been pronounced in his ears, but coming only from the lips of a fellow-sinner, they brought no ease to his conscience.

Suddenly, a sentence from God's Word, "**The just shall live by faith,**" Rom.1.17, flashed upon his mind, and Martin Luther rose from his knees a justified and forgiven man.

# Good Tidings from Heaven

## DO YOU REALLY WANT PEACE?

The world presently has a great need and that is peace. Whether we consider matters internationally, locally or personally, peace is paramount. Many are said to be under stress from business and family life and find it impossible to be at rest and have a few moments peace. To have a mind in turmoil and never to be able to relax in a congenial atmosphere must be an awful way to live. However, all those problems will end when life ends — OR WILL THEY? Those who think death will bring relief often open a forbidden door and commit suicide. But what then? Many will say, "that is the end. There will be no more problems. After all we just die like the animals."

To know what happens after death we have only one infallible source and that is the Bible, the inspired Word of God. This is what we read in Rev.14.11, "the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night ..." Dear reader, you could leave the turmoil of this life and open the door to the unending, relentless, eternal judgment of God! The state of those who die unrepentant is given in Lk.16 and we read the words of a lost soul, v24, "I am tormented in this flame." Some, who should know better, teach there is no hell, no place of torment. Such teaching is contrary to the Holy Scriptures and we say, "yea, let God be true, but every man a liar," Rom.3.4

There is only one source for eternal peace. Mic.5.5 "this man shall be the peace ..." Peace is to be found in a man. It is not in a religion, creeds, ordinances, good works, a clean life or anything that man can do for himself. We are "without strength," Rom.5.6 and cannot please God or bring ourselves nearer to Him. Salvation is all from Him, Eph.2.8,9. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." How is this procured? In Col.1.20 we read that God made peace through the work of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. "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." Please note there is no reconciliation for those that may be "under the earth" — that is in hell. God gave His Son to the death of the cross at Calvary, outside Jerusalem and there He bore the fulness of God's judgment in order that God could save, forgive or reconcile sinners to Himself. Thus we read of the Lord Jesus, "Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree," 1Pet.2.24. All that is required to give you peace has been done. It is not a matter of you making peace with God, He has made the peace and you must accept the conditions laid down.

How is that done? Listen to the invitation of the Saviour, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," Matt.11.28. In this Man you can have eternal peace and that will give peace even in time. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee," Isa.26.3. Dear friend, take this great gift of peace with God and enjoy it forever. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ," Rom.5.1





# ASSEMBLY TESTIMONY

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## ASSEMBLY TESTIMONY

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**Editor: B. Currie**

Correspondence relative to Editorial matters should be addressed to:

**The Editor**, 49 Glenburn Road, Dunmurry, N. Ireland, BT17 9AN.  
Telephone (028) 9062 1343.  
E-mail: AT@bcurrie.free-online.co.uk

**Secretary/Treasurer : William Neill**, 109 Lurgan Road,  
Banbridge, Northern Ireland, BT32 4NG.  
Telephone (028) 4062 4238.

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

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# BEHOLD YOUR KING

(Meditations in Matthew)

by Jim Flanigan (Belfast)

## 27. Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians (Ch.22)

After the parable of the early verses, this chapter is composed of questions from Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians, with final questions to them from the Lord Himself. These questions and answers form the four parts of the chapter following the parable. The parable is similar, if not the same, with different emphases, as the parable of Lk.14.16-24.

A certain king had made preparation for the wedding of his son. There had been a prior invitation and arrangement with a number of guests and when the feast was ready servants were sent out to bid those who had been invited to come. An abrupt statement says, "they would not come." The response of the king is to send other servants to them to explain the preparation which had been made for the dinner. Oxen and fatlings had been killed and everything was ready. "Come unto the marriage" is the appeal of the second invitation. Some made light of it all, and went their usual ways. Others took the servants, abused them and slew them. The king was understandably angry. He sent his forces, destroyed the murderers, and burned their city. Once again the servants are sent out, this time to gather in from the highways as many as they could find, both good and bad, to furnish the wedding with guests.

The parable is, of course, dispensational. For centuries there had been a promise to Israel of a kingdom of the heavens, with all the blessing and joy which that would bring. At the appointed time Messiah came. He extended the invitation to them, a privileged and chosen nation, but they rejected Him and His ministry of grace. There would have been a feast of good things for them if they had come, but they would not. Notice that now, when other servants are sent forth with the renewed invitation, there is mention of sacrifice and death. When the work of redemption had been accomplished God again appealed to the nation by the preaching of the apostles in the early chapters of the Book of Acts. This was longsuffering indeed, that such mercy should be extended to those who had rejected and crucified their Messiah, God's Son. Once again the invitation was spurned. They not only made light of it but murdered Stephen in Acts 7 and James in Acts 12, and there were other martyrs too, Acts 22.4; 26.10. This was not now just a simple refusal to come, it was a climax. God would deal judicially with those who had so rejected all that He had prepared for them, and eventually, as in the parable, He literally destroyed their city. The Saviour had predicted it and had wept over Jerusalem. The long siege of the city in AD70, and the awful events that took place during the siege, ended with its ultimate burning and destruction.

The invitation, however, must go forth again, this time to the highways, to the

good and the bad, to whosoever would come. All things were ready. The house must be filled. If the Jew will not come then the Gentile must be invited. The Gospel of the grace of God will call them in and the wedding will be furnished with guests indeed.

In considering what now follows it must be remembered that this is a kingdom parable. The Church is not in view but the kingdom of the heavens, viewed here as a sphere of profession where not all is real. As is often said, there are both professors and possessors in the kingdom. The king observes a man not wearing the provided wedding garment. Just as the prodigal was dressed in "the best robe," Lk.15.22, so these guests from the highways were provided with garments that they should be suitably attired for the king and wedding. There was one who had apparently refused to wear the garment of the king's providing. So it is in the kingdom. There are those who robe themselves in their own morality, culture, respectability, and even religion. This is not acceptable dress. Only Christ will suitably cover a man for God's presence. As Paul writes, "found in Him, not having mine own righteousness ... but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God," Rom.3.9. The intruder is confronted by the king, and, speechless, is cast out.

A most strange and unusual coalition of Pharisees and Herodians now comes to question the Lord. They had little in common, these Pharisees and Herodians, but they were allied now to oppose the Saviour. They asked about paying tribute to Caesar. Was it right, or not? Their approach and address to Him was hypocritical in the extreme. They eulogised His person, His teaching, His integrity, and His impartiality. All that they said of Him was true, but they did not mean a word of it, it was feigned. If they had really meant what they said of Him they would have believed Him and received Him. It was a subtle question. Had He given a negative answer they would so quickly have reported Him to the Roman authorities with a charge of conspiracy against Caesar. Had He given an affirmative, approving of paying tribute to the Roman Emperor, this would hardly have been in keeping with His Messianic claims. He calls them hypocrites. He knows their hearts and their intentions and says, "Shew me the tribute money." Did they not realise it, that He was making them handle the coin? Did they quibble about paying tribute to Caesar? They were not averse to handling Caesar's money! The image on the coin was that of the Emperor and they admitted it. "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things which are God's," He said. They marvelled, and left Him.

The Sadducees then came, men who denied the truth of resurrection. They had a question about a most grotesque and unlikely situation of a woman who had been married during her lifetime to seven brothers. They were, of course, basing their hypothesis on Deut.25.5. If there was a resurrection (were they sniping at the Pharisees?) whose wife would this woman be in the supposed after life? The Lord disposes of them very quickly. They erred on two counts. They were ignorant both of the Scriptures and the power of God. In resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God, and, He who said, "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," was not the God of dead fathers and patriarchs; He was the God of the living.

The Pharisees then took courage to come to Him again, having observed how He had silenced their bitter rivals, the Sadducees. They send one of their lawyers with an old question, about which there had been many councils and debates. "Which was the greatest commandment?" The Saviour reduced the law to two commandments. Love to the Lord God with the whole being was the first and great commandment. But there was another, like unto this, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." The whole law hung on these two commandments, "Love the Lord thy God." "Love thy neighbour."

Now, while they are all gathered together, Jesus will ask them a question; perhaps two! What do you think of Messiah? he asks them, "Whose Son is He? They answered immediately and correctly, "The Son of David." Now His second question to them, "How then doth David in spirit call Him Lord?" he quotes from the Messianic Psalm 110. "The Lord said unto my Lord." David calls his Son, "My Lord"! Can they explain? How can Messiah be David's Son and David's Lord? The simplest believer in the Lord Jesus has no difficulty, but for the Pharisees, and for every Jew, and for all those who deny the Deity of Christ, there is a problem. They could not answer. Every true believer however, knows that Jesus is both the Root and the Offspring of David, Rev.22.16. David might well have used the words of John Baptist, and said, "He that cometh after me is preferred before me; for He was before me," Jn.1.15. When once it is believed and confessed that Jesus of Nazareth is Jehovah of Eternity, and that He is the promised Messiah, then there is no problem with our Lord's question. For those who will not acknowledge that He is indeed a divine Person, then the question is unanswerable.

In the chapter which follows our Lord will expose and condemn, ruthlessly and in detail, the hypocrisy of these religious leaders. — *to be continued (D.V.)*

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## Assembly Testimony Bible Class

by J. Riddle (Cheshunt)

### ESTHER

#### **(12) THE MAN WHOM THE KING DELIGHTETH TO HONOUR, Part 2**

#### **Read Chapter 6 again**

In part 1 of this study, we suggested that this chapter can be divided as follows:

- (1) A man who had not been honoured, v1-3;
- (2) A man who wanted to be honoured, 44-9;
- (3) A man who was publicly honoured, v10-11;
- (4) A man who would never be honoured, v12-14.

We have already pondered the first two sections of the chapter, which brings us to:

### 3) A MAN WHO WAS PUBLICLY HONOURED, v10-11

Imagine the chagrin of Haman. “Make haste, and take the apparel and the horse, as thou hast said, and do even so to Mordecai *the Jew*, that sitteth at the king's gate: let nothing fail of all that thou hast spoken,” v10. The very position he sought and expected, was given to the man he had attempted to destroy. Assuming Lucifer to be the dark master of the king of Babylon, and speaking through him, we read: “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,” Isa.14.13-14. But the position, and more, sought by “Lucifer, son of the morning” belongs to Christ.

Ahasuerus was evidently reminded of Mordecai's nationality from the official records. But why didn't he immediately identify Mordecai with the people whose destruction he had recently authorised? The best answer is, simply, that he didn't know who Haman was describing in 3.8-9. Haman carefully avoided mentioning the Jews by name, and Ahasuerus made no attempt to verify the charge brought against them. He just accepted Haman's word for it!

The words, “the man whom the king delighteth to honour,” cannot fail to remind us of the Lord Jesus. Every word is weighty!

#### A) *he is “the MAN Whom the King delighteth to honour”*

You can build on this yourself. Start with Heb.10.12, “But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God.” Go on from there. Oh, and don't forget it is “*THE* Man Whom the King delighteth to honour.”

#### B) *He is “the Man Whom the KING delighteth to honour”*

There could be no greater degree of honour. Mordecai received honour from the highest authority on earth. The Lord Jesus received honour from the highest Authority in heaven: “For He received *from God the Father honour* and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the *excellent glory*,” 2Pet.1.17. The honour and glory bestowed upon Christ is *unique*. It is shared by none.

#### C) *He is “the Man whom the King DELIGHTETH to honour”*

It was no grudging recognition. The scene on the mount of transfiguration was a picture of “the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” That is, of course, His second coming. The world will hear God say, “This is My *beloved* Son: hear *HIM*.”

#### D) *He is “the Man Whom the King delighteth to HONOUR”*

He was honoured by wearing the “royal apparel ... which the king useth to wear, and the horse that the king rideth upon, and the crown royal which is set upon his head,” v8. (The competent authorities tell us that this means, literally, that the crown was worn by the horse! Well, the crown certainly isn't mentioned in v9 and v11). Mordecai was invested with royal honours, but that is nothing when compared to the honour bestowed upon Christ. “Jesus said, now is the Son of man glorified, and God

is glorified in Him. If God be glorified in Him, *God shall also glorify Him in Himself, and shall straightway glorify Him,*" Jn.13.31-32.

Mordecai was honoured publicly. He was honoured in the very place where a gallows had been erected for him, and the details are most significant. Firstly, that the word "gallows" is literally, 'tree'. Secondly, that the punishment intended for Mordecai was some form of crucifixion, since hanging, in the usual meaning of the word, does not seem to have been employed by the Persians. Need we say any more? Christ will be proclaimed as "the Man Whom the King delighteth to honour" in the very world which nailed Him to "the tree". God has said, "Sit Thou at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool," Ps.110.1. Mordecai was brought "on horseback through the street of the city." The Lord Jesus will emerge from heaven seated on a "white horse". See Rev. 19.11.

John C. Whitcomb has it nicely: 'Fourteen centuries earlier, Joseph, another Israelite, was thus honoured when the Pharaoh "had him ride in his second chariot; and they proclaimed before him, Bow the knee! Gen.41.43. Some day the entire universe will bow down before God's unique Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, cf Ps.2.4-12; Phil.2.10-11.'

#### **4) A MAN WHO WOULD NEVER BE HONOURED. v12-14**

Just try to imagine the turmoil in Haman's mind. R. Sinker (Ellicott's Commentary) puts it like this" 'It would be a grim and curious study to analyse Haman's feelings at this juncture. Various thoughts were mingled there. Self-reproach, perhaps, that he had so thoughtlessly been the cause of the present display, bitter hatred of his rival now multiplied a thousandfold, and the evident knowledge that the game was played out, and that he was ruined. The more subtle the brain, the more truly must he have known this.' Of course, Haman had not been in any way disgraced by leading Mordecai through the city: *but it was a terrible blow to his pride*. A humble man can cope far more easily with the blows of life than a proud man!

Once again, we encounter the words, "And Haman told ..." But what a difference now! It was boastful pride in 5.11: it's bitter disappointment in 6.13. His wife's words in v14 could well have been the last he ever heard her say. We certainly mustn't underestimate this lady. She certainly influenced her husband in 5.14, and correctly assessed the situation in 6.13. But was Zeresh speaking "off the cuff," or was she giving Haman the benefit of careful observation? Had she noticed that somehow or the other, the Jew comes out on top? For example, Joseph with Pharaoh, and Daniel with Nebuchadnezzar. Or had she learnt that, "he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of His eye?" Zech.2.8. One thing is clear: the omens had changed, and so had the attitude of Haman's family and friends.

The Lord Jesus taught that "Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased," Lk.14.11. Remember too that "pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall," Prov.16.18. There could hardly be a better example than Haman.

—to be continued (D.V.)

# The Kings of Judah and Israel

by Graeme Hutchinson (Belfast)

## Hezekiah No. 1 (Paper 13)

Ever since the Kingdom had been divided in the days of Rehoboam, a total of eleven kings had ruled over the Southern nation of Judah before Hezekiah took control. The record of his life is given in a total of four chapters in 2Chron.29-32, and from these we can observe:

### (a) *His Stability*

In order to appreciate the contribution that Hezekiah made to the nation of Judah, it is important to consider the background and conditions from which he emerged. His great-grandfather (Uzziah) was a man of pride and he ended his sojourn on earth as a leper, 2Chron.26.21. His grandfather (Jotham) was a man of strength, one who 'prepared his ways before the Lord his God,' 2Chron.27.6, and yet the impact on the people was minimal, 2Chron.27.2; 2Kgs.15.35. His father (Ahaz) was a man of idolatry, one who was exceedingly wicked and corrupt, 2Chron.28.1-4; 22-25. How necessary it was then for the new king to introduce a degree of control and stability back into the nation, Hezekiah was such a king! Although both Uzziah and Jotham 'did that which was right in the sight of the Lord,' 2Chron.26.4; 27.2, notice that their model was the previous king, their own father. For Hezekiah, his model was far superior, king David, 2Chron.29.2.

In tracing the factors that must have influenced Hezekiah in the early years, we can identify three important directions from whence he looked:

#### • *Backwards: The History of Judah*

The fact that Hezekiah used king David as the 'measuring stick' for success is interesting<sup>1</sup>. David was a spiritual king, one who had a heart for God, Acts 13.22, and His Word, Ps.18.30. Not surprising therefore, every good king of the Southern nation was compared to David, whereas the same could not be said for men such as Ahaz<sup>2</sup> 2Chron.28.1. Josiah was another king of Judah who sought to reproduce the character of David during his reign, 2Chron.34.1.

As believers we should follow the example of others who have gone before. Whilst the Lord is the supreme example, 1Pet.2.21, the Apostle Paul could exhort others at Corinth to follow him, for in doing that, they would be following Christ, 1Cor.11.1. Looking back need not be interpreted as 'living in the past', rather it is with the desire to learn from others.

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<sup>1</sup> Notice how often David is mentioned in the latter part of the chapter - 29.25, 26, 27, 30.

<sup>2</sup> Ahaz is compared to the kings of Israel. They seem to be synonymous with evil and wicked hearts and every king of Israel is compared, not with David, but with Jeroboam. John Heading likens David and Jeroboam to the influence of Christ and Satan respectively (Understanding 1 & 2 Chronicles: The House of God and Its Service, 1980, p.335).



### • *Outwards: The Captivity of Israel*

2Kgs.18.10-11 reminds us that it was in the sixth year of Hezekiah's reign that the Northern Kingdom of Israel was taken into captivity by Assyria. The reason, as verse 12 of the above passage indicates, was due to their own disobedience towards the Lord. This, together with the implications of his own father's idolatrous heart, must have had a profound impact upon Hezekiah.

For us, as we live in the 'last days,' 2Tim.3.1, it is not difficult for us to observe how the hearts of men have turned away from God. However, even when we notice the lack of spiritual vigour in other believers, it should not bring criticism, rather it should impress upon all our hearts the need for faithfulness to God.

### • *Upwards: The Prophecy of Isaiah*

The prophet Isaiah had served under the kings of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and now Hezekiah, Isa.1.1. Accordingly he must have been both old and experienced and thus in an ideal position to impart pearls of wisdom to Hezekiah. The close relationship that both men enjoyed can be observed from passages such as Isa.37 and 2Chron.32. Nevertheless, the most significant contribution that the prophet would have made to the king was to reveal the Lord and His desires for the nation.

Within the local assembly there will be men of great age and knowledge. Whether they be elders or not, it should be both our joy and responsibility to learn from such men, for they have something we do not have - experience! Moreover, godly men reveal the character and will of the Lord in this present age.

Therefore, when Hezekiah was installed as king of Judah he brought a great deal of stability to the throne. This should be our desire within the assembly, and remember, the process in achieving this is the same as that for Hezekiah: model ourselves on the spiritual *legacy* of the past; separate ourselves from the *lawlessness* of the present age; identify ourselves with godly believers who reveal the *Lord*.

### (b) *His Spirituality*

For Hezekiah, the single most important place in his life was that of the sanctuary. 2Chron.29 outlines the various ways in which he demonstrated his spiritual interest in the one place where God dwelled. His whole heart was given to the work, v10 - see also 2Chron.31.21. Consider the following:

### • *Caring for the Temple*

2Chron.29.3 remarks that in the first year of Hezekiah's reign - no delay shown<sup>3</sup> - he 'opened the doors' of the temple and then sought to repair it. Not only was the House to be accessible to the people, but it had to be attractive. It was because of the actions of his idolatrous forefathers, v6-7 - particularly his own father Ahaz, 2Chron.28.24 - that Hezekiah found it necessary to make such repairs.

We must remember that the assembly is the place where the Lord has chosen to place His name, Matt.18.20. Thus, as the world embarks on the so-called 'spring-cleaning', surely the assembly should always be engaged in 'sin-cleaning'! This is

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<sup>3</sup> Notice how the king had the tendency of rising early when it came to the work of the Lord! (2 Chron. 29.20).

where each believer endeavours to walk before the Lord and so maintain holy character, consistent with the One who dwells therein. In addition, the assembly must be accessible to the people of God; the place where priestly work can be conducted, 1Pet.2.5, and it must be attractive; the place where the truth is exercised and the Lord is glorified, 1Tim.3.15.

• *Charging the Priests/Levites*

Tenderly, 'My sons', 2Chron.29.11, Hezekiah encouraged the Priests and Levites to sanctify themselves unto the work of the temple. It was only fitting that a clean temple should have clean servants, thus they had to be set apart. In the present age all believers are priests and all should be engaged in offering the sacrifices of praise, Heb.13.15, irrespective of gender or gift.

• *Conducting the Worship*

With the temple cleansed, 2Chron.29.17, and the Priests/Levites sanctified, 2Chron.29.15, the way was open for the offerings to commence. Notice what they gave: the sin-offering, v21; the burnt-offering, v27; the thank/peace-offering, v31,35, and the drink-offering, v35.

Whilst there is much that could be said about these sacrifices, in terms of their order, objective and outcome, it is important to stress that all, in their own way, spoke of Christ. Surely this is what true worship is. Not thanking God for what He has done for us, rather presenting to Him the only One who fills His heart with joy and affection - the Lord Himself.

From this passage there is much to learn regarding our approach in worship. First, it was collective, all the congregation worshipped, v28. A strong assembly is one where all have a desire to express their gratitude for Christ. Second, it was joyful, 'they sang praises with gladness', v30a, 36. No sad or mournful expressions here! Third, it was spontaneous, 'when the burnt offering began, the song of the Lord began also', v27, 31. Fourth, it was reverent, 'they bowed their heads' to worship, v30b. Fifth, it was in fellowship, Levites assisted the Priests in their work, v34. Sixth, it was orderly, Hezekiah ensured that the offerings took place in an organised fashion, v25, 27, 31. How could it be any other way when our God is an order Himself, 1Cor.14.33. Seventh, it was in humility, Hezekiah and all the people acknowledged that it was God who 'had prepared the people', v36.

Thus, the spiritual nature of Hezekiah can be observed by means of his attitude to the dwelling place of God and the service that took place therein. Surely this is how we should measure a believer's spirituality, and not by how eloquent he may appear. In the next paper we shall consider Hezekiah's steadfastness and strength.

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

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I am not in fellowship because I break bread. I break bread because I am in fellowship.

*J. Douglas*

\* \* \*

The truth — like He Who gave it, will always be spoken against.

*Donald Ross*

# PROPHETIC PICTURES OF THE LORD

by J. E. Todd (England)

## 3. THE SHEPHERD

In the Old Testament God is portrayed as the Shepherd of Israel. The Psalmist declares, "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock," Ps.80.1.

### THE FALSE SHEPHERDS

God, out of His shepherd's care for Israel condemned the false shepherds. They were the kings, the priests and the false prophets who led the nation away from God and into idolatry and sin, then ultimately to judgment. Thus saith the Lord GOD unto the shepherds. Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks?" (see Ezek.34.10). But God will provide a true shepherd for His people, a descendant of David, "And I will set up one Shepherd over them, and He shall feed them, even my servant David; He shall feed them, and He shall be their shepherd", v23.

### THE DIVINE SHEPHERD

Where can this true shepherd be found? God answers that God alone can be the true Shepherd of His flock. "The voice of Him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD make straight in the desert a highway for our God ... Say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God! Behold the Lord God will come with strong hand ... He shall feed His flock like a shepherd", Is.40.3; 9-11. This voice was the voice of John the Baptist, Matt.3.1-3. The One whom John was to introduce to Israel was, as Isaiah prophesied, 'the LORD', 'our God', 'Your God', 'the Lord GOD'. This Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ, was to be God manifest in the flesh.

### THE GOOD SHEPHERD

When the Lord Jesus Christ referred to Himself as 'the good Shepherd,' Jn.10.11,14, He also stated His deity, "I and My Father are one", v30. The goodness of the good Shepherd extended to laying down His life for the sheep. As a price paid is the value of what is purchased, so the value of the sheep to the shepherd (that is the value of the believer to Christ) is the value of that perfect life laid down. "Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish," Matt.18.14, such is the value of the believer. "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand," Jn.10.27-28.

### THE GREAT SHEPHERD

'Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ,' Heb.13.20-21. The greatness of the divine Shepherd rests upon a threefold foundation. First, He has conquered death,

the great enemy of the sheep, 'brought again from the dead.' Second, He, the Shepherd, has established an eternal agreement with His sheep, 'the blood of the everlasting covenant.' Third, He is the Shepherd who provides all the spiritual needs of His sheep, 'make you perfect in every good work ... through Jesus Christ.'

### THE CHIEF SHEPHERD

'When the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye (the elders) shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away,' 1Pet.5.4. The elders are the shepherds of the local assembly, 'their flock' (see v1-5). "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers (bishops), to feed (shepherd) the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood," Acts 20.28. The elders are responsible to the chief Shepherd, the Head of the church, to feed the sheep on His teaching. Thus to fulfil the chief Shepherd's purpose, 'Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, 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.5.25-27.

Therefore the sheep of the good Shepherd's flock can say, "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want," Ps.23.1.  
—to be continued (D.V.)

## ABRAHAM IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

by David McAllister (Zambia)

### Paper 1 — INTRODUCTION

A consideration of the life of Abraham has long been of delight and benefit to the Lord's people. Many a saint has been blessed by a study of his life *practically*, such as his example to us of faith in God's promises, which is so beautifully set forth in Heb.11. At other times our hearts have been thrilled by the contemplation of Abraham *typically*, for example in his offering up Isaac, picturing God the Father offering up His Son on Calvary, or in sending the servant to find a bride for his son, picturing God the Father seeking a bride for His Son. We have also enjoyed considering Abraham's importance *prophetically*, the Abrahamic Covenant being highly significant for the whole of prophetic study. Many a writer and speaker has set forth these things clearly, and it is not the exercise of the present writer to go over such ground again. Rather it is his desire to consider lessons that we learn from Abraham *doctrinally*.

Abraham is one of the most often mentioned Old Testament characters in the New Testament. He is mentioned by name no less than 70 times, with Moses (79 times) being the only Old Testament character named more often in the New Testament.

Often when Abraham is mentioned in the New Testament, he is used to expound and illustrate truths that are of importance to us today. In these papers, it is our hope to look together at some of these truths.

We will consider the following:

- (1) Abraham and the Greatest Privilege (John 8.31-47).
- (2) Abraham and the Greatest Person (John 8.48-59).
- (3) Abraham and the Greatest Principle (Romans 4.1-5:1).
- (4) Abraham and the Greatest Proof (James 2.14-26).
- (5) Abraham and the Greatest Promise (Hebrews 6.9-20).
- (6) Abraham and the Greatest Priesthood (Hebrews 7.1-28).
- (7) Abraham and the Greatest Partition (Luke 16.19-3).
- (8) Abraham and the Greatest Power (Matthew 22.23-33).
- (9) Abraham and the Greatest Place (Hebrews 11.8-16).

### **(1) ABRAHAM AND THE GREATEST PRIVILEGE (Jn.8.31-47)**

— *“If the Son therefore shall make you free ye shall be free indeed.” (Jn.8.36)*

In this passage, Abraham is mentioned by name six times (v33,37,39,39,39,40). The Lord Jesus Christ clearly impresses upon us that it is possible to be a descendant of Abraham physically, but to be a slave of sin and a child of Satan, and that only the Son of God can give freedom from sin and Satan.

We will look together at five lessons that we learn from this passage:

1. The Message of the Saviour;
2. The Mistakes of the Sinners;
3. The Methods of Satan;
4. The Meaning of the Seed;
5. The Marks of the Saints.

#### **1. The Message of the Saviour**

In v30, we read “many believed on Him.” However, not all of them were truly saved, as v31,32 show. The “disciples indeed”, v31, and those “free”, v32, would show evidence of the reality of their faith by continuing in His word, v31. Evidently some believed the facts of which the Lord was speaking, but did not trust Him as Saviour. It is not enough to believe with the mind; one must believe with the heart, Rom.10.10. This realisation would lead us to not get carried away by numbers of people professing, but what should really rejoice our hearts is to see those who have professed continuing in the truth, 3Jn.4.

The Lord Jesus Christ then goes on to explain the message of true freedom:—

In v34, he says that to commit sin (the word “committeth” is a present participle, indicating a continual practising of sin) is to be the slave (“doulos” — a bondservant) of sin. Those whose lives are characterised by the practice of sin are simply giving evidence of the fact that they are slaves to sin. How contrary this is to the popular view today: the worldings think that they are “free” to do as they like, and that they are exercising “liberty”, when, in reality, all the time they are exhibiting the opposite — their slavery to sin.

In v35, we see the fundamental difference between a servant and a son. Here we have a general principle: a servant has no guarantee of his position. He has no security in the house; no assurance of remaining there. Not so for the son — he is guaranteed an abiding place in the house. In the context of Abraham in this passage, it is highly likely that the Lord is here alluding to the case of Abraham's two sons,

Isaac and Ishmael, Gen.21.8-21. Ishmael was the “son of the bondwoman,” and was cast out; whereas Isaac’s position in the household was secure. The teaching is clear — not only is a sinner enslaved to sin; he does not have any security. The privileges of sonship are not his.

But v36 gives us a deeper insight: although v35 is indeed true of a son in general, it goes beyond a general principle: “the Son” of v35 is not just any son, but, as v36 shows, it is “*the Son*”, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. What a wonderful truth is here brought before us:- The Lord Jesus Christ’s position in the house is secure - He is not just “a son” but “*the Son*” - the eternal, only-begotten Son of God. Therefore anyone whom He makes free is sure of a position in the house, in identification with Him. What a wonderful statement of the believer’s eternal security! What a privilege! It is no wonder that the Lord describes someone who has been freed by “the truth”, v32 and by “the Son”, v36 as “free indeed”!

## 2. The Mistakes of the Sinners

Those who were in conversation with the Lord Jesus knew nothing of this great privilege; nor did they want to. They were badly mistaken, in several ways. They were:

(a) wrong in their *appreciation* of their history:

i) they thought that they were not slaves, when in fact they were.

In their minds, they believed that being descended from Abraham meant that they had never been, nor could they be, in bondage, v33. This is amazing, in view of their past servitude (e.g. in Egypt and Babylon) and their present servitude to Rome. However, an even more serious error was their failure to grasp that they were slaves to sin, which the Lord Jesus brought before them in v34.

ii) they thought that they were sons, when in fact they were not.

They were of the opinion that their national history meant that God was their Father, v41. Whether we take the statement “We be not born of fornication” as literal, or as a statement that their background was not one of idolatry, both are true — their relationship to Abraham was an honourable one. However, this physical relationship did not automatically make them sons of God; v42 shows that they were not children of God.

We can pity these people in their blindness. Yet how common it is, even today, to meet sinners who think that physical relationship automatically confers spiritual blessing, and who are blind to the reality of their slavery to sin.

(b) wrong in their *apprehension* of truth:

Several times the Lord Jesus speaks of their failure to apprehend divine truth. In v46, He points out that His sinlessness was proof that what He was saying was the truth. Yet they did not believe it, v46. They could not hear it, v43, and His word had no place in them, v37. Why not? Because they were not of God, v47. Indeed, so serious was their state that they deliberately rejected what they knew to be true, v45. Any person should always believe the truth, but, perversely, their very reason for rejecting what He said was precisely because it *was* the truth that He was speaking.

It is still so today. The natural man still does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, 1Cor.2.14. Indeed, he deliberately rejects truth, because he knows it to be

truth, and he willingly believes lies. The popularity of the theory of evolution is a clear example of this: men want to believe the lie, against the evidence for creation, because they do not want to face the implications of the truth of an all-powerful Creator.

(c) wrong in their *attitude* to the Lord:

- they did not love Him, a Man who came from God, v42;
- they wanted to kill Him, a Man who spoke the truth of God, v37,40;

A true believer loves the Lord Jesus Christ; someone, however religious, who does not love Him, is certainly not saved. “What think ye of Christ is the test ...”.

(d) wrong in their *actions*:

Their deeds were what they had observed from their father, the devil, v38, and took character from him, v44.

### 3. The Methods of Satan

Verse 44 of this chapter also affords us an account of Satan's methods, right “from the beginning” of the human race, in bringing mankind into bondage, and keeping them in it:-

(a) he is *lustful*: “the lusts of your father ye will do”:

- we see this in him tempting Eve to eat the fruit that God had forbidden.

(b) he is *lethal*: “he was a murderer from the beginning”:

- we see this in him enticing Eve to take action when he knew full well it meant that they would “surely die”.

(c) he is *lying*: “he is a liar, and the father of it”:

- we see this in him telling lies to Eve about the consequences of her disobeying God.

His methods were certainly working well for those people with whom the Lord was in dialogue: they did the devil's lusts, desired the murder of the Lord Jesus, and believed Satan's lies. His methods are the same today — resulting in unbridled lust, a hatred for the Lord (if He were here today, the world would treat Him no better now than they did then), and believing all Satan's lies.

### 4. The Meaning of the Seed

In this passage, we see that “Abraham's Seed” can be taken in different senses:

(a) *Physically*: In v33, the people said “We be Abraham's seed.” This was true physically, and the Lord agreed with them: “I know that ye are Abraham's seed,” v37.

(b) *Spiritually*: In v39, the Lord Jesus points out that they are not children of Abraham spiritually: “If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham.”

This distinction is important *practically*: it is not enough to be physically Abraham's seed; the important thing is to be his child spiritually. It is also important *prophetically*: some would try to tell us that the term “seed of Abraham” always refers to his spiritual children, not his physical children, and thus that Israel has no future. In this passage we have a clear case of the term being used physically — these people were not Abraham's seed spiritually, yet the Lord calls them “Abraham's seed.” Thus when we study in Scripture the promises to the seed of

Abraham, we need to be very careful to distinguish those promises which are to his physical seed and those to his spiritual seed. The wonderful thing is that it is through the Lord Jesus Christ that these promises will be made good to all the seed, both to that which is of the law, and that which is of faith, Gal.3.16; Rom.4.16.

### 5. The Marks of the Saints

How blessed it is to see that, in this passage in which we see so much of the work of Satan and his followers, the Lord also gives us the marks of true disciples:-

- (a) **Abiding** in the Lord's word: "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed," v31:
- (b) **Affection** for the Lord Jesus Christ: "If God were your Father, ye would love me," v42:
- (c) **Accepting** God's words: "He that is of God heareth God's words," v47:

True believers have a love for the Lord, a desire to hear and receive the Word of God, and they continue in it.

In conclusion, we learn that the greatest privilege that someone can have is to be a child of God. It is possible to be a physical child of Abraham, yet to be a child of Satan, and a slave of sin. The vital thing is to be a spiritual child of Abraham, a child of God, and "free indeed".

But what about this blessed One, described in this passage as "the Son", Who makes us "free indeed"? In the next paper, Lord Willing, we will see how Abraham is used to teach us doctrine about Him, the greatest Person.

—to be continued (D.V.)

## *Christian Conduct in a Modern World*

by Walter A. Boyd (South Africa)

### Paper 5

#### No.2 — THE CONSECRATED LIFE (Continued)

#### (d) The Believer and Society (Romans 12.14-21)

In Rom.12.9-13 we saw the responsibilities that each of us faces, primarily in relation to our fellow believers. The circle of Christian fellowship is a real thing and places demands upon us that have to be faced honestly with love and conviction and not just from a sense of duty. Our circle of responsibility now widens out and takes into account the unsaved and even our enemies. The apostle shows that there are others who have to be considered. There is the community in which we live, the townsfolk, our neighbours. In these verses we are given a Christian Citizen's charter which has six very important points. We should not miss the weighty responsibility of each verse by being misled by its brevity, here are divine commands succinctly put, which if obeyed, will produce Christian living that will be a testimony for God



and His glory. Some of these commands are positive in nature, things we must do. Others are negative in nature, things we must refrain from doing. Very often, what a person does not do tells us more about their character than what they do.

**1. Spiritual Living, v14.** “Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not.”

It is the Christian’s privilege, indeed duty, to return good for evil. The enemies of the truth of God are always the enemies of the people of God and in one way or another will manifest their animosity against God in how they treat Christians. It is true that in our generation in the Western world, we have not had to suffer much by way of persecution for our faith. Sadly, in other parts of the world some of our dear fellow believers are suffering intensely for their faith in Christ. It is a sad fact of life that where there is no persecution from the world, it is not unknown to find persecution of Christians by fellow Christians. Considering the great truths of the body of Christ, this is incongruous, but it is nonetheless a fact to be faced. From whatever source persecution comes, it must be faced with fortitude. Persecution can be endured and blessing can be returned, but only by those who have experienced the truth of consecration as described in the earlier part of the chapter. Persecution, when handled correctly, should produce those characteristics that make for Christ-likeness. Instead of retaliating with curses we should retaliate with blessing. There is no more effective way to disarm one who is bent on inflicting harm upon his fellow believers than to treat him with love and grace. In this verse we have an echo of the Lord’s words in Matt.5.44, “*But I say unto you, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you.*”

**2. Sympathetic Living, v15.** “Rejoice with them that do rejoice and weep with them that weep.”

Here is the true test of living for others and not for self. Not only are we to share in the temporal needs of the saints as in v13, but also to share in their spiritual experiences. We are to share each other’s joy. The cause for rejoicing is not stated by Paul, but whatever the cause for another believer’s rejoicing, we are not to be envious or jealous but willing in our heart to rejoice with them. It has often been pointed out that it may be more demanding to rejoice with others than to sorrow with them. But whenever we find another believing sorrowing, we should be prepared to enter that experience with them in sincerity and with love. This is much more than the clinical empathy of a counsellor’s couch, it is real heart-felt sorrow by those with true fellow-feeling. Experiences of joy and sorrow should have the effect of binding the people of God together in real friendship.

**3. Humble Living, v16.** “*Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.*” True humility will be manifested in these two negative and two positive exhortations. V14,15 are requirements that should be met, as occasion demands, but v16 ought to be the rule of daily life. Harmony instead of haughtiness in our relations with each other is a real test of spirituality. A Christian should be easy to get along with and should have a harmonious disposition that radiates warmth and approachability. This does not mean sacrificing the truth or seeing eye to eye with

everybody but it does not mean that even when we differ, it should be in an agreeable spirit. This harmonious living will be the outcome of being lowly minded. There will be no pride in a spiritual believer. Humility instead of conceit should be manifested in our attitude towards others. This is what the Lord did as the friend of publicans and sinners, He “condescended to men of low estate.” Genuine humility will enable us to associate with the lowly in a true spirit of friendship. This is not to advocate spending time in the company of the unsaved for the sake of friendship. Rather, it is that attitude of heart that enables us to bring the Gospel to the outcast in society and the down and out.

**4. Honourable Living, v17.** *“Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.”* Another constant attitude of life is being honourable in all things. This takes in every sphere of life to which we have been called, including home life, work life, assembly life, school life or wherever. The believer may not be outwardly persecuted but he may receive evil treatment at the hands of the ungodly. When that happens we should not pay back in kind. In the office, that evil deed is not to be repaid and in the business that underhand deal is not to be repaid. As well as how we handle evil treatment, we are called upon by Paul to show absolute integrity in all our dealings with men. We are to “provide things honest” or literally, “take thought for what is honourable in the sight of all men.” The Christian must be beyond reproach. We must learn to live above the temptation to take short cuts in our affairs. The truly consecrated believer should be prepared to pay the price for this type of high principle in living.

**5. Peaceable Living, v18.** *“If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.”* In v16a, the matter of harmony between believers is addressed, but here in v18 undoubtedly the matter in view is harmony with the unsaved community. Living peaceably should be our ambition and aim. It may not always be possible to avoid conflict with the unsaved as they live by different standards, however the cause of the conflict must never be with the child of God. Living peaceably is not only to be our ambition but it is also to be given our best efforts. *“If at all possible, as much as lieth in you,”* has in mind searching diligently for every opportunity to live peaceably. So, even when we find the unsaved in conflict with us, we are to try our best to live peaceably with them. We should never be the ones to disturb peace and provoke a quarrel. If the situation demands that we must put our faithfulness to Christ first, we must do this and face the consequences. If hostility ensues it must not be perpetuated by the Christian. Peace ought to be pursued and practised by the Christian.

**6. Christ-like Living, v19-21.** There can be no better description of these three verses than that they are a manifestation of Christ in the believer’s life. This parallels what Peter writes in 1Pet.2.23 concerning the Lord Jesus when He was under provocation, *“Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously.”* This is what the Christian must do. In v19, **vengeance is prohibited**, *“Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, vengeance is mine; I will repay saith the Lord.”* When Paul addresses the Christians as *“dearly beloved,”* he is not only putting into practice what he has been bringing before them

in the earlier part of the chapter but is also reminding them that there is no question of taking revenge among those who are dearly beloved of each other. In personal matters the Christian must not take it upon Himself to administer punishment or attempt to vindicate himself when another has wronged him. Instead of avenging himself he is to *“give place to wrath.”* In the Greek text, the definite article before the wrath would indicate a specific wrath in this case, i.e. the wrath of God. We are to stand back and let God deal with the situation, for, if punishment is required He alone has the right to administer it, *“vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord.”* To take the matter into our own hands is to enter God’s domain and we shall eventually be the losers. It is better to do what the Perfect Man did and leave the matter with God because His judgment will be just right. In v20, *mercy is enjoined, “Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.”* In situations of hostility, the only retaliation allowed, is to show kindness. What exactly the Lord means when He says to *“heap coals of fire on his head,”* is difficult to ascertain and has been the subject of various suggestions. It probably means that showing kindness to those who have shown us nothing but hostility will have the effect of smiting their consciences and producing a burning shame. In v21, *evil is overcome, “be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.”* Retaliation will result in defeat for the Christian. The best way to deal with an enemy is to turn him into a friend by showing him kindness. Victory is found by overcoming evil with good and returning kindness for hatred. In the Sermon on the Mount the Lord Jesus said, *“do good to them that hate you: pray for them that despitefully use you,”* Matt.5.44. —to be continued (D.V.)

## The Role of Sisters in the Assembly

by J. Grant (Scotland)

### No. 4 — THE SERVICE OF CARE

We hear much in the media today about the role of “carers”. This term has only come to our attention in the last few years, but the work involved should not be strange to believers. The service of care and Christian compassion is one in which believers have been engaged for generations as they have followed the example of the Master who had compassion on the needy.

Paul was concerned that widows in assembly fellowship should not be neglected, so he gave us instructions regarding those who will be supported by the assembly. In doing so he left us a beautiful description of the work of a godly sister. The elderly widow will be “Well reported of for good works;” if married she will have “brought up children;” she will “have lodged strangers;” “washed the saints’ feet;” “relieved the afflicted;” diligently followed every good work;” 1Tim.5.10.

The general heading over the list is that she will be “Well reported of for good works.” All who knew her, both Christians and unbelievers, testified to the good works in which she engaged. When she saw need she was quick to help. This is a vital part of Christian testimony and sisters must be aware of the value to the testimony of this service. Married sisters will have opportunity to go about this work, perhaps with more freedom than unmarried sisters who have full time employment. However, such employment can also be used to carry out “good works” amongst those with whom they come into contact. Our society today expects governments and other agencies to help the needy, but there are many souls with difficulties and problems who feel alone and long for company and a little help on the way. Homes into which illness and suffering have come need that special attention which a believer is able to give, as the compassion which the Master showed to others, and which we have known ourselves, is shown to them. It is a joy to meet sisters who make this service their “employment” and who, without being forward, are known for their good works.

The second feature concerns the family of married women. She will have brought up her children well. She accepted the joys, the worries and the responsibilities of motherhood. How often is this seen today as a “second rate role” for those women who do not wish to have “full time employment”? Such an attitude completely ignores the fact that bringing up children is “full time employment.” Complaints that a mother, giving all her time to bringing up children is being unfair to her husband by expecting him to “keep” her, strikes at the very basis of marriage. Her husband vowed to do this in the marriage vows. It is true that circumstances such as an illness or unemployment may necessitate a mother having full-time employment. It may even be possible for a mother of older children to have part-time employment and still fulfil her role. It is disturbing, however, to see mothers give over their children daily to grandparents or child-minders so that they can “go out to work,” when it is clear that a little less love of materialism would enable them to live within the income of their husband. Bringing up children for God, that they may in later years be of value in His service, is of inestimable value.

The father is the head of the house, but a mother is the focal point of the family. She can be a “mother in Israel” to her family. From her the children receive their early education in the things of God. She shares their joys and their difficulties. She is there when she is needed, a shoulder to cry on, a hand to hold, a friend to trust and a sharer of laughter. She has earned the commendation of King Lemuel “Her children arise up, and call her blessed,” Prov.31.28.

The third and fourth feature which should be noted is that this sister has “lodged strangers” and “washed the saints' feet.” She has been hospitable to strangers and has been a servant to the saints. The need to show hospitality in the days when Paul wrote this letter is easy to understand. Those who travelled were far fewer in number than those who do so today, but against that there was no network of suitable lodging places which could be booked in advance. Consequently the ordinary traveller would seek accommodation after his arrival in a town or city. A godly sister would gladly open her home to saints who were passing through. This would entail extra work and the disruption of her daily routine. It would involve her in

expense which perhaps could not all be recovered. How appreciated this would be by weary believers who reached her home to be welcomed by warm hospitality. This service, however, was not only for strangers from afar. Even local people who did not know her found, in times of need, that the home was open.

The local believers also enjoyed the blessings of her service. She is said to have “washed the saints' feet”. Any service which she could carry out for them was done uncomplainingly, no matter how menial the task may have appeared. If there was work to be done she was willing to sacrifice her time, energy and money to serve others. In addition to all this she “relieved the afflicted.” The suffering and the needy found respite when she was there. Her keen watchful attention on all that was taking place would ensure that she did not miss need when it was around her, and she made it her business to act that those with whom she came into contact would remember her work with gratitude.

Here we have a sister who is well known in the area for the kindly, self-sacrificing service of care which she carries out. She tackles this, not on the basis that she will see what she can do to help any in need if she happens to hear of it. This is not a haphazard business in which she is engaged. No! She treats this as a service for the Lord in which she engaged with perception and determination. She looks out for need. No one accuses her of interfering. She is too spiritual in how she acts to even leave such a feeling behind her. This sister honours the Master.

We often hear it said that the influence of the assemblies is declining. For this there are a number of causes, but is one of them not highlighted here? The “working mother” has no time for this role. Many sisters who do not work outside of their home have become accustomed to the thinking of today, that this role is no longer necessary. What a need there is around us that we are not meeting. It is the view of the writer that this is one of the most neglected areas of Christian service today, and no one should underestimate its value to the assembly.

A beautiful example of such a spiritual sister is Dorcas, Acts 9.36-41. It is recorded of her that she was “full of good works and almsdeeds which she did.” Dorcas gave her life over entirely to this service. She was “full of” this work, indicating that there was little time in her days for anything else. Her good works extended to helping the poor and the needy. She was busy with her needles, sewing to make garments for others. Where there was need she identified it and met it. She was held in such respect by the believers that when she died two men were sent to Peter, who was residing at Joppa, to ask him to come. The grieving saints showed him the garments which Dorcas made “while she was with them”. Here was a sister who was considered by the saints to be vital to the testimony. How could they go on without her? What great joy there must have been when she was restored to them. The work could go on.

In this cold indifferent world may we all, brothers and sisters, show that compassion to others which reveals the love of Christ. May our sisters be encouraged that they have an opportunity in this service to carry out work which can touch the hearts of men and women. In doing so they display the care which the Master showed to those who were in need.

*—to be continued (D.V.)*

## MY CONVERSION AND CALL (65)

*by William Skates (Wisconsin, U.S.A.)*

Edenderry Village near Belfast, where I was brought up, comprised a linen weaving factory, a small grocery store and a Gospel Hall, along with almost 100 terrace houses. With no through traffic the village had a rural character and it is a special place in the world which will always be dear to me. Father and mother were both saved and in the assembly from their teenage years, so the home in which I was raised was marked by a godly atmosphere and the assembly was central to family activities. Morning meeting, Sunday school and gospel meeting were standard on Lord's Day and between meetings we were permitted to go for a walk through the fields or along the bank of the river Lagan on which the village was built.

Eternal things were impressed upon our minds from earliest days and our need for salvation was brought before us with sincerity and weight, both at home and in the meetings we attended. Consequently, I cannot remember a time when I did not want to be saved, to a greater or lesser degree. The imminent rapture of the church was a truth from Scripture that troubled me, but thoughts such as these did not stay long and life continued. Although not saved, my brother, sister and I would often sing ourselves to sleep with hymns and choruses or we might have been found after "lights out" reading a Sunday school prize book under the bed clothes using a flashlight. Preachers would regularly come to our house for supper after gospel meetings and mother's shortbread and pavlova cake would be accompanied with discussion of the Scriptures and hymn singing. "We're marching to Zion," was my favourite, although I was not saved.

The reality of death was learned when my two grandmothers were called home in 1968, I was then just 8 years old. However, it was not until the first day of October 1973 when my sister Elizabeth got saved that I became stirred in my soul and longed to be saved also. On Lord's Day October 7, 1973 the late Mr. Eddie Fairfield came to Edenderry at the start of a week of ministry meetings. That first Sunday night was a solemn gospel meeting. Weight and power characterized our late, esteemed brother's message. I went home convicted and sobered. "Righteous judgment from God should be my portion," was my honest confession of heart. Getting alone upstairs, it came to me like this: "William you are a sinner who deserves to be in hell," but then I thought of Christ, "He came to save sinners," then very simply I understood, "He was punished for me so I don't have to be punished — I'm saved!" I did not tell anyone for a week but when my friend Graham Maze professed the following Lord's Day, I had to tell it too. There was much joy that night in Edenderry.

Soon we were baptised and came into the assembly. School and college years came and passed by. When my wife Ethna and I were married in 1984, we made our home in Bangor and were in fellowship in the Ebenezer Assembly. As the years were passing, invariably Lord's Day evenings would find me going with older brethren to the various halls around the Province to preach the gospel. My father, and others, often took me with them and gave encouragement when appropriate.

During the summer of 1988 we visited Vancouver, British Columbia, in western Canada for a holiday. I took the opportunity to go and talk with some property valuers/appraisers in the city (the profession I was in). Although we were not determined to emigrate, our minds were open and a job offer was necessary for such a move. The last interview was with an expatriate Englishman. Being early for the interview, I sat down beside a fountain

to commit issue to the Lord. Opening my eyes I watched the water cascading down and with freshness Ps.1:3 flooded into my mind. "And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water ... and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." Reinforced with this assurance from the Word, I sat the interview. After some time, with this verse before me, I inquired about work and to my surprise Mr. Nilsen offered me a job if I could get through immigration.

Returning to Northern Ireland we submitted an application to the Canadian authorities and in due course the way opened up. We found at each stage of the process an increasing willingness to go to Canada, but at this time my father's health was deteriorating. He had heart surgery six years previously and now the old problem was flaring up. The waiting list was a year long and we could see he would not last another year. How could I leave for Canada with father in such a state and mother in the middle of renovating their house? Before the Lord one December night, grace was given to resolve to do what seemed to us to be His will, to go, and leave the consequences with Him. Amazingly, next day the visas arrived, although they were not expected until February. Father also had his operation early January, and made a good recovery, being spared to us for five and a half more years.

Selling our home proved to be a slow process in a difficult market. However, with suitable encouragement from the Scriptures, we were assured again of the leading hand of God upon us. We arrived in Vancouver with our two year old son in May 1989. We came into fellowship in the Woodland Drive assembly and I started work with the man who offered the job. In the fall of that year, Mr. Tom Bentley was in the city and one day at lunch, he asked me if I had any aspirations for the Lord's work. I replied that I saw my work to be a help in the assemblies in Vancouver and to gain the confidence of my brethren. However, a seed was planted. In the fall of 1991, Mr. Arthur Ward (Wisconsin) visited the city. Again, at lunch we talked about an exercise I had for some gospel meetings in Vancouver, when he said "you know, you should think of Wisconsin." Impossible to emigrate again, I thought, and tried to dismiss it from my mind, but another seed was planted.

Wesley Barr and I had a couple of series in the gospel in 1992 and 1993, and although we were encouraged, openings for such work were few and far between in Vancouver. Meanwhile, correspondence with Art Ward told of blessing, opportunity and a great shortage of workers in the American Mid West. My interest in Wisconsin began to deepen to an exercise to try to help. Just at this time (March '93) a letter from Mr. Tom Bentley set out in clear language his belief it was "time to get at it while you are young!" Little did he know the tremendous impact that had on my exercise of heart. The major obstacle before us was "impossible" immigration procedures to the States. But God is able.

A few days later I saw a newspaper advertisement for an immigration program to the States, so I made inquiry and applied. It was an abbreviated process for immigrants from certain countries, N. Ireland included. The documents indicated that if we had not heard anything from them by the end of June, we were not selected. June came and went. Nothing! Burden of heart and confusion of face was mine. So once more I left it with God in prayer. Before turning out the light that night I read Ps.143. Here was the burden of my heart reflected in the word. Verse 8 fairly stood out, "cause me to hear Thy loving kindness in the morning." Friday July 9, came and went, nothing! Early next week a letter arrived from Art Ward, post marked July 9! "A great need still exists in Wisconsin, where are the workers?" But what about immigration? It wasn't until October that the big white envelope arrived confirming we had been selected and we should get our papers in order. I visited Wisconsin early 1994 and after that spoke to the brethren in Woodland about our exercise. In due course our visas came through and we were commended by the Woodland assembly, with endorsement from the Fairview assembly. The Lord has since been pleased to confirm the work in these parts with His blessing. Brethren, pray for us.

# Good Tidings from Heaven

## A DECISION YOU MUST MAKE

Decisions must be made every day. Some are quite trivial as we decide what to choose from a menu, what colour of garment to wear; others are more important as we make a decision in our employment which we hope will benefit our employer; others are even more important as we decide on a career, a partner for life, a place to live etc. In the course of a life there must be many thousands of decisions made.

The most important is that faced by Pilate. He was the Roman governor before whom stood the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, manifested in flesh. This is what he said, "What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ?" Matt.27.22.

Various pressures were brought to bear upon him. These were both religious and political or social. In v20 we read "the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus." There was a constant chant, "Let Him be crucified," v22,23. Many religious leaders will deny what is written in this paper in particular and in this magazine generally, but that does not change the truth. You will answer to God alone and for yourself. Then there was the social pressure. Jn.19.12, "the Jews cried out, saying, if thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend." Popularity has damned many souls. The world and its deafening din have caused many a person to forget God and reject salvation. Are you prepared to turn your back on the crowd, leave aside popularity, prestige, the transient glory of this world and trust the Man who died in shame upon the cross in order to purchase your salvation?

In the midst of it all he sought to evade the issue by putting the onus on the people to decide. We read, "Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ? For he knew that for envy they had delivered Him." It was not ignorance on his part, it was desire to avoid making a decision. Dear reader, you may be in the same position, but you cannot avoid deciding either for or against Christ. Nor can you avoid meeting Him. You will either do this by faith while in this world, or you will meet Him literally in the next world when He will assign you to your portion in eternal fire. Pilate planned and schemed all on a natural level without any consideration of God or eternity. Will your theories do for eternity? Are you sure you are ready to meet God? Acts 4.12, "Neither is there salvation in any other: For there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

What was the result? Very simply and directly it was crucifixion for Christ and damnation for Pilate. Your decision, now that you have read this paper, is, will you accept Jesus Christ as your Saviour or will you reject Him? Will you choose Heaven or hell for eternity? The decision is yours personally. You will face God alone. Then you will have no one to blame, you will have no props. You will be accountable for your own personal decision.

"Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God," 2 Cor.5.20.





GRACE TRUTH

# ASSEMBLY TESTIMONY



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## ASSEMBLY TESTIMONY

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**Editor: B. Currie**

Correspondence relative to Editorial matters should be addressed to:

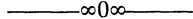
**The Editor**, 49 Glenburn Road, Dunmurry, N. Ireland, BT17 9AN.

Telephone (028) 9062 1343.

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

**Secretary/Treasurer : William Neill**, 109 Lurgan Road,  
Banbridge, Northern Ireland, BT32 4NG.  
Telephone (028) 4062 4238.

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



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# **BEHOLD YOUR KING**

(Meditations in Matthew)

by Jim Flanigan (Belfast)

## **28. Scribes, Pharisees, Hypocrites (Ch.23)**

This chapter is in three parts. In v1-12 the King speaks to the multitude and to His disciples, warning them of the hypocrisy of the ecclesiastical leaders. In v13-33 He addresses these leaders directly, pronouncing eight “Woes” upon them. The remaining verses (34-39) are a sad lament over the nation, and over the city, as the King foresees the ultimate desolation, which will be developed in the next chapter.

These scribes and Pharisees had placed themselves in the seat of Moses the legislator. Their precepts were right but their practice was wrong. What they taught and demanded of the people was quite proper, but they themselves were motivated in their practices by pride and hypocrisy. They loved to be seen of men. The phylacteries were two strips of leather, to each of which was attached a small box containing quotations from the law. One of these strips was wound around the head, with the box resting on the forehead. The other was bound around the arm. So was indicated that what a man thought, and what he did, was all in observation of the law of Moses. The Pharisees, however, wore phylacteries which were broader than those of other men, and likewise the borders of their garments were enlarged also. It was all to attract attention. At the feasts, in the synagogues, and in the markets, socially, religiously, and commercially, they vied for the attention of men. They loved titles, Rabbi, Father, Master. They loved honours, offices, and distinctive garb, and they were ignorant of that rule of the kingdom, that he who would be great must be servant, and he who would be truly exalted must humble himself. The King Himself was the great Exemplar of this basic principle of His Kingdom. It should be noted that Pharisiasm does not belong to one dispensation only. The leaven of the Pharisees has permeated ritualistic Christendom and the believer must ever beware of it. Seven times in the verses which follow the King says, “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites,” and once, in v16, He says, “Woe unto you, ye blind guides.”

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!” The woes begin in v13. These men were the spiritual leaders of the nation but by their example and influence they actually hindered the people. Scribes who were so familiar with the letter of the law should have known its deeper spiritual and moral import, but they had turned their backs upon it and upon the light. Those who followed them were led astray, so that both the leaders and the led were being barred from the kingdom.

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!” They preyed upon defenceless widows, with mercenary motives, seeking gifts in money or in kind, and looking for applause from these vulnerable women. They visited such houses, pretending to be what they were not, making long prayers in pretended evidence of

their spirituality and knowledge. We must beware of this. It was obnoxious behaviour and would receive greater judgment.

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!” They would compass sea and land to make one proselyte. For what reason? Judaism was torn with sects, schisms, and schools, each Rabbi having his own following of disciples. The Rabbis were both jealous and zealous, ever seeking converts to their own particular party. The motive was utterly selfish, the building up of their sect. They would stop at nothing to make a convert, and, having made one, they would indoctrinate the proselyte and make him worse than themselves.

“Woe unto you, ye blind guides.” They were both fools and blind, these leaders. The Lord speaks of the gold of the temple and the gifts upon the altar. These hypocrites preferred the gold and the gift rather than the temple and the altar. They were guilty. They either could not, or would not, get their priorities right. The temple and the altar were symbols of heaven and the throne of God, they were greater than the gold and the gifts associated with them.

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!” Again their priorities were wrong. They scrupulously attended to the paying of tithes even on the smallest of garden herbs, as mint, and anise, and cummin, but they neglected the weightier matters of judgment, mercy, and faith. They strained out gnats from their wine and water, filtering out the unclean, and yet they would feast themselves on unclean camel meat. It was cant and hypocrisy indeed.

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!” Externally they had a self-righteousness which covered the inner corruption of their minds and hearts. It was like cleansing the outside of cups and plates while ignoring the defilement inside. The hearts of these Pharisees were full of extortion and intemperance, while outwardly they gave the appearance of being godly. Once again the King charges them with blindness.

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!” They were like whited sepulchres. Outwardly such tombs appeared attractive, even beautiful, but within they were full of dead men's bones, unclean and corrupt. It was even so with the Pharisees, outwardly appearing righteous to men, but full of hypocrisy and iniquity within.

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!” Here is the concluding woe. They adorned and garnished the tombs of prophets and righteous men who had been killed by the fathers. “If we had been in the days of our fathers we would not have been partakers with them,” they said. But in saying this they were adamant that they were indeed the children of those who had killed the prophets. They were a generation of vipers. How could they escape damnation?

In spite of all these indictments, God would even yet send them prophets and wise men and scribes, but what their fathers did, they would do also. They would kill and crucify, scourge and persecute, and so they did, in their own generation, beginning with Stephen in the early days of the Acts of the Apostles. They would be as guilty as the murderers of Abel and Zacharias and God would hold them responsible for the blood of His martyrs.

This chapter closes with the well-known sad lament. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem ... How oft would I ... but ye would not." For three years the Saviour had presented Himself and had pleaded with them, "Come unto Me," but they would not come. He would have gathered them, protected them, sheltered them, as a hen covers her chickens with her wings. They knew the figure well, it was used often in the Psalms, and in the Book of Ruth. They were as vulnerable as chickens and in great danger and the fox would get them, but He had to say, "Ye would not." Their house would now be left unto them desolate.

One day it will be different. A remnant nation will greet the King when He comes in power and in great glory. They will say in that day, "Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord." What a contrast is this "blessed" to the "woes" of their earlier verses. The King will come. He will then gather His people and become their shield and defender and they will confess Him "wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities." But this will be a remnant people. So many of the apostate nation will have received another who will come in his own name. They will be branded with his mark and will worship his image while others patiently await the appearing of the true King and Messiah. —to be continued (D.V.)

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## Assembly Testimony Bible Class

by J. Riddle (Cheshunt)

### ESTHER

#### (13) EXIT HAMAN

##### Read Chapter 7

Haman's friends and family had predicted his downfall, 6.14, and now their worst fears were fulfilled. The Agagite had "begun to fall" in ch.6: his "fall" is completed in ch.7. We have already noticed the prophetic implications of the story. After his expulsion from heaven, Rev.12.7, Satan will vent his anger particularly on the Jewish nation: "And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child," v13. He has, however, "but a short time," v12, and will be consigned to the abyss, Rev.20.1-3, for a thousand years, before his ultimate consignment to the lake of fire, where he will be "tormented day and night for ever and ever."

Whilst there can be no question about the prophetic significance of events described in the book of Esther, we have also emphasised its practical lessons during our studies. We will do so again in this chapter.

#### 1) THE CORDIALITY OF AHASUERUS, v1-2

There certainly seems to be a strong feeling of goodwill in the king's request: "What is thy petition, queen Esther? and it shall be granted thee: and what is thy

request? and it shall be performed, even to the half of the kingdom.” We have already speculated about this. The smile on his face would have probably vanished if Esther *had* asked for half of his kingdom! Even so, there can be no doubt that Ahasurus was prepared to be generous to his queen. Perhaps his conscience reminded him that he had neglected her for thirty days, 4.11! Bearing in mind his tendency to sudden change, it seems more likely that he was in a particularly good mood at the time! One thing is certain: *we* come to a generous King. He is not subject to fluctuating moods. Someone has written:

Thou art coming to a King:  
Large petitions with thee bring.

He is “able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think,” Eph.3.20. The Lord Jesus taught, “If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you,” Jn.15.7. See also 16.23-24, John certainly seems to refer to this in his First Epistle: “Whatever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things which are pleasing in His sight ... and this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask any thing according to His will, He heareth us: and if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him,” 1Jn.3.22 and 5.14-15. You will notice, of course, that these words do not constitute a blank cheque. There are some very important conditions. Firstly, we must “keep His commandments, and do those things which are pleasing in His sight.” This means that we are not likely to make selfish requests. After all, that would hardly be “pleasing in His sight.” Secondly, everything is subject “to His Will.” We cannot expect Him to answer our requests if they are unscriptural, or if it would be harmful to us in some way. But this in no way detracts from His ability, generosity, and desire to bless us abundantly. We can “come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need,” Heb.4.16.

Perhaps we ought to say that our prayers should reflect the measure of our faith. For example, our faith might not be strong enough to ask for vast numbers to be saved in the area, but surely we can pray with complete faith that God will save souls in the district and enlarge the assembly whilst God “giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not,” we must “ask in faith, nothing wavering,” Jms.1.5-8.

## **2) THE CONCERN OF ESTHER, v3-4**

Esther takes the place of an intercessor, not merely for herself, but for her people. “If I have found favour in thy sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request: for we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish.”

It is worth noticing that Esther first brought pleasure to the king. He was invited to a “banquet of wine.” See Ps.104.15, “Wine that maketh glad the heart of man.” Ps.104.15. (But do remember Rom.14.21). Her intercession was set against the joy that she brought to Abasuerus. We have already noted the lesson.

Notice, that Esther was so different to Haman who carefully observed court etiquette, 6.4, but it only masked his pride and hatred for the Jews. Esther humbly petitioned the king, with no thought for her personal advancement.

### A) *She petitioned the king with a sense of acceptance*

Esther had not encountered hostility on the part of Ahasuerus. She was conscious of royal favour. The golden sceptre had been extended to her on the previous day, and the king repeated his desire to accede to her request. The fact that we pray in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ is not a meaningless formula. It is the ground of our acceptance in the presence of God.

### B) *She petitioned the king without personal ambition*

Ahasuerus had made a magnificent offer — “to the half of the kingdom” — but Esther was not concerned with increase in her personal wealth, or personal enhancement in any way. She was not an opportunist. By human standards, she missed a golden opportunity. An offer like that only comes once in a lifetime! But she identified with her own people; notice her words: “My people ... *we* are sold, I and my people ... But if *we* had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen.” (This was, presumably, the first time the king knew that he had married a Jewess! See 2.10 and 2.20. Now she really had got to ‘nail her colours to the mast’).

Doesn't this remind you of Moses?: “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 pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt,” Heb.11.24-26. Doesn't this also remind, again, of the “great woman” of Shunem? (We mentioned her in a previous study). “What is to be done for thee? Wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host?” Not at all! She had no desire for high society. Listen to her magnificent reply: “I dwell among mine own people,” 2Kg.4.8-13.

What about *our* ambitions? The welfare of God's people was more important to Esther than personal prestige. If we are genuinely concerned for one another, and really love one another, then we will take every opportunity to promote one another's welfare in every way. It is a case of “the members” having “the same care one for another,” 1Cor.12.25. Sadly, to quote the hymn, ‘Room for pleasure’ and ‘Room for business,’ displaces room for the Lord's people, and more serious even than that, ‘But for Christ, the crucified, Not a place where He can enter in the heart for which He died.’ Talking about ambition, how about Solomon? “And God said, Ask what I shall give thee?” What an offer! What a reply! Read 1Kg.3. How about Elisha? “Ask what I shall do for thee ...” What an offer! What a reply! Read 2Kg.2.

Still talking about ambition, listen to this: “Wherefore we labour (RV: ‘we make it our aim’ with the margin ‘Gk. are *ambitious*’), that whether present or absent, we may be accepted (‘wellpleasing’) to Him,” 2Cor.5.9. This must be the greatest, and most worthy, ambition of all!

### C) *She petitioned the king with a sense of alarm*

You can hear the urgency in her voice: “For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish.” Esther was actually quoting the King's letter, see 3.13. This was no casual request. The lives of God's people were at stake. Need we say more? You can hear the urgency in the prayers of Epaphras; “always labouring fervently for you in prayers,” Col.4.12. Read through the Psalms, and

notice how often the words “cry” and “cried” occur. So many of the Psalms were written in times of dire danger.

Now, a couple of technicalities. (i) The words, “we are *sold*,” refer to 3.9, where Haman said, “I will pay ten thousand talents of silver to the hands of those that have charge of the business, to bring it into the king’s treasuries.” This refers, not to those who had the ‘business’ of annihilating the Jews, but to those in charge of Persian business affairs. Haman offered to pay this vast sum of money to the royal treasury. (ii) The words, “if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my tongue, *although the enemy could not countervail* (‘*compensate*’, JND) *the king’s damage*,” are not so easy to understand! It seems to mean that if the Jews had been sold as slaves, Esther would have remained silent about their misery (perhaps because they would have at least been alive), even though the king himself would have been deprived of the revenue he would have otherwise received from them as subjects of his kingdom.

### 3) THE CHARACTER OF THE ENEMY, v5-6

We must notice the description of Haman. “The *adversary* and *enemy* is this *wicked* Haman.” We must never forget the identity of our opponent. Whilst he cannot rob us of eternal life, he will certainly endeavour to destroy our testimony, and ruin our service.

i) “*Adversary*.” This recalls 1Pet.5.8, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your *adversary* the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” The word rendered “adversary” here is interesting: it means an opponent in a lawsuit, and could refer to the fact that Peter’s first readers were faced with two alternatives: either to bow in emperor worship, or to refuse to do so, with the inevitable consequences. The word may therefore have the sense of “the accuser of our brethren,” see Rev.12.10. One thing is very clear: Satan is our opponent, whatever tactics he employs.

ii) “*Enemy*.” This recalls Matt.13.39, “*The enemy* that sowed them is the devil.” The world conveys the idea of hate and hostility. So don’t expect an easy passage.

iii) “*Wicked*.” This recalls 1Jn.3.11-12, “For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. Not as Cain, who was of that *wicked* one.” The word means ‘bad in effect, malignant.’ (W. E. Vine). The *active* form of evil.

### 4) THE CONDEMNATION OF HAMAN, v7-8

The man who had “begun to fall” in ch.6, is now plunging downwards. The grim forebodings of Zeresh must have rung in his ears as he went to the banquet. These forebodings became terror in v6: ‘Then Haman was *terrified* before the king and the queen,’ JND. First the king’s anger, v7, then the king put the worst possible interpretation on Haman’s posture at the queen’s couch, and finally, he is deprived of light itself. His face is covered: never again did he see the face of the king, v8. His doom was sealed.

The man who endeavoured to destroy the Jews had to lead ‘a Jew in triumphal procession through the streets of the city, and now he has to plead with a Jewess for his very life!’ (John C. Whitcomb). This can only remind us of the ascendancy of the Jew under the reign of Messiah. “And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with their face toward



the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet,” Isa.49.23. “The sons of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee; and all they that despised thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet,” Isa.60.14.

### 5) THE COUNSEL OF HARBONAH, v9-10

We have met Harbonah before: see 1.10. An additional charge is laid by him against Haman: “Behold also the gallows fifty cubits (seventy-five feet) high, which Haman had made for Mordecai, *who had spoken for the king.*” As if the existing charges were not enough, Haman was also guilty of plotting the death of a benefactor of the king.

We cannot escape the biblical significance of the words, “So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai.” Here is an appropriate commentary: “Oh let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end ... He made a pit, and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made. His mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own pate,” Ps.7.9-16. Compare Esther 9.25: “that his wicked device, which he devised against the Jews, should return upon his own head.” See also Ps. 9.15-16 and Prov.11.5-6. The final comment comes from the New Testament: “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap,” Gal.6.7.

If the “king’s wrath” was “pacified” with the execution of Haman, then divine wrath against Satan will be finally satisfied when he is consigned to the lake of fire.

—to be continued (D.V.)

## The Kings of Judah and Israel

by Graeme Hutchinson (Belfast)

### Hezekiah No.2 (Paper 14)

With the temple cleansed, the priests consecrated and the worship completed, 2Chron.29, Hezekiah further demonstrates his ability to progress in the things of God. 2Chron.30-32 record:

#### (c) *His Steadfastness*

Unlike many of the kings that preceded Hezekiah, his pure motives and spiritual strength enabled him to keep going! In 2Chron.30-31 this is demonstrated by the following points:

#### • *He displayed Enthusiasm*

2Chron.30 commences with Hezekiah’s desire to keep the Passover. Moreover, he sought to do so in a spirit of unity for the Northern Kingdom was also invited<sup>1</sup>, v1. Returning to the Word, ‘as it was written,’ v5, Hezekiah was able to enjoy a memorable Passover and the feast of unleavened bread, v13. This was all achieved

<sup>1</sup> Although the invasion of the Assyrian army had already taken place, some Israelites must have avoided captivity, 30.6. The holding of the Passover on the second month, v2, instead of the first month, Ex.12.1-2, was due to Hezekiah’s problems of having sufficient priests, 29.34, and also because more time would be given to the people to congregate at Jerusalem, v3.

despite considerable opposition from the Israelites, v10, for only 'some', v11, took up Hezekiah's kind offer<sup>2</sup>. Thus, two features characterised the king at this stage: warm-hearted, he invited the Northern remnant and whole-hearted, he put his all into the occasion, 31.21.

Although the Passover was the way in which the Israelites remembered their redemption from Egypt, and the unleavened bread spoke of their new way of life, the New Testament approach is different. Nevertheless, it is only when we return to the Bible, as Hezekiah did, that we learn of the way in which we should conduct our remembrance. It should be a simple gathering, only for the 'breaking of bread', Act.2.42, and yet solemn, 'the Lord's Supper', 1Cor.11.20. It too must be in a spirit of unity, 1Cor.10.17, and only then with united and dedicated hearts, shall we truly 'remember' the Lord.

#### • *He gave Encouragement*

2Chron.30.22 records that 'Hezekiah spoke encouraging words unto all the Levites' (Scofield Translation). Notice some of the things that characterised the Levites:

- (i) *holy* (2Chron.29.34b; 30.15; 30.22b)
- (ii) *helpful* (2Chron.20.34a)
- (iii) *happy* (2Chron.30.21)
- (iv) *hard-working* (2Chron.30.22)

especially as they 'taught the good knowledge of the Lord'. In response to such, the king was not jealous or silent, rather he 'encouraged' them. In addition, he was not selective, it was to 'all the Levites'. The same exercise was repeated in 2Chron.32.6 to the captains of war.

Within any assembly there will be those who labour for the good of others and who do so out of willing hearts. May our attitude be that of encouragement.

#### • *He ruled Effectively*

2Chron.31 records how Hezekiah dealt with the important subject of supporting the priests and Levites, v4. As they had no portion of land, Num.18.20-21, the responsibility was upon the nation to provide that which was necessary. Taking the lead himself, v3, Hezekiah was able to oversee the supporting of the servants of the Lord. From the passage we observe that the giving was:

- (i) *scriptural* - 'as it is written in the law of the Lord', v3.
- (ii) *spontaneous* - 'as soon as ... the children of Israel brought,' v5.
- (iii) *sincere* - 'tithes of holy things which were consecrated unto the Lord,' v6.
- (iv) *satisfying* - 'we have had enough to eat and have plenty left,' v10.

Within the confines of the NT assembly, our giving must follow a similar pattern. It should be based on the Word of God - 2 Cor. 8 and 9<sup>3</sup>. It should be in a cheerful manner, 9.7; once needs/problems are identified, 8.2; when we have first dedicated it to the Lord, 8.5, and then we can be sure that it will have the desired effect, 'being enriched in everything to all bountifulness', 9.11.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Chron.31.1 records the impact on those who came from Israel for the Passover, they rejected the false idols.

<sup>3</sup> The great example of giving is to be found in heaven. 'Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift,' 2Cor.9.15. 'For we know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich,' 2Cor.8.9.

#### **(d) His Strength**

2Chron.32 illustrates that it was not long until Hezekiah was tested on the strength and reality of his revival. Sennacherib, king of Assyria, confronted Hezekiah at Jerusalem, 32.1. At an earlier stage, Hezekiah had expressed his unwillingness to serve the king of Assyria, 2Kg.18.7, and had endeavoured, unsuccessfully, to avoid confrontation by offering silver and gold, 2Kg.18.13-16. How different was the attitude of Hezekiah's father, Ahaz, towards the enemy, 2Kg.16.7; 2Chron.28.16.

In 2Chron.32.3-20 we can observe the:

##### **• Actions of Hezekiah**

2Chron.32.5 summarises the way in which Hezekiah prepared for battle, 'he strengthened himself.' In more detail:

- (i) the *walls* were repaired, v5.
- (ii) the *weapons* were assembled, v5b.
- (iii) the *warriors* were encouraged, v6.

The emphasis on the 'walls' ensured that the enemy would find it difficult to penetrate the city. The 'weapons' were balanced between those designed to inflict injury on the enemy - 'darts' - and those designed to protect - 'shields'. For those 'warriors' called to engage in battle, they were encouraged when Hezekiah spoke of the Lord and how His strength was greater than that of the enemy, '... for there are more with us than with him,' 2Chron.32.7.

In the present age the believer is also engaged in battle, Eph.6.11; 2Tim.2.3-4, and it is important that our attitude should replicate that of Hezekiah's army. In terms of the 'walls' we should, as the Apostle Paul sought to do for the assembly at Ephesus, strengthen and fortify ourselves from attack, Act.20.28-29. This is only achieved when we meditate on the Word of God, 'which is able to build you up' Act.20.32. Then, concerning the 'weapons', as we showed in our study of Amaziah, we too have a weapon of penetration, Heb.4.12, and protection, Eph.6.16. Finally, as 'warriors', the Apostle John speaks in a similar way to that of Hezekiah: 'greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world,' 1Jn.4.4.

##### **• Attitude of the Enemy**

2Chron.32.9-19 records the way in which the enemy began their assault on the city/nation. Initially we observe that the king of Assyria sent his servants, v9, and they conveyed the message on his behalf, v10. The message threatened the faith of the people of Judah, v10b; the king, v12, and the God of Israel, v17. Then, with a move of great subtlety, the Assyrians spoke to the inhabitants of Jerusalem in their own language, v18, in order to trouble them.

As Christians we can be assured that the enemy will attack when the first signs of spiritual progress emerge. Whilst our faith will be attacked, the ultimate desire of Satan is to mar our testimony and so bring the Lord's name into disrepute. How should we respond?

##### **• Answer to the Problem**

Hezekiah responded in the only way open to him - prayer, v20. The verse also indicates that Isaiah (the prophet) joined in prayer which was in earnest. Isa.37.14, recording the same incident, illustrates a further feature of the prayer, they 'spread

it before the Lord.’ Not knowing what to do, both men just presented the situation to the Lord and left it there, acknowledging their own inability to take effective action and the Lord’s sovereign power. Thus, the victory recorded in 2Chron.32.21-22 comes as no surprise, especially as Hezekiah had earlier expressed the Lord’s superior might, v7-8.

Eph.6.10-17 may mention the complete armour of God, however, it must be combined with earnest and fervent prayer, v18. In our next paper we shall consider Hezekiah’s sickness, supplication, signs and stature.

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

## PROPHETIC PICTURES OF THE LORD

by J. E. Todd (England)

### 4. THE CORNERSTONE

God spoke through the prophet Isaiah to the southern kingdom of Judah. “Wherefore hear the word of the LORD, ye scornful men, that rule this people which is in Jerusalem. Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us; for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves,” Is.28.14-15. The majority of the people had turned their backs on God in order to embrace idolatry. They refused God their faith, their obedience, their praise and their worship. Isaiah’s task was to tell them that God’s judgment (‘His strange work’ v21, contrary to His wishes) would come upon Judah in the shape of the Assyrian and Babylonian armies. However, they were not repentant but arrogant, “We are alright, we have an agreement with death and the grave!” “No”, says God, “you are taking refuge in a shelter of lies and falsehood.” Their refuge was to be swept away, ‘Hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and waters shall overflow the hiding place,’ v17.

Israel had failed God. But God was to make a new start, creating a new people who would worship Him. ‘Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation; he that believeth shall not make haste,’ Is.28.16. This new work of God would be built upon a tested, precious and sure cornerstone. This speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ. Tested in His earthly life and found sinless. Precious in God’s sight because He is His beloved Son. Sure because He perfectly executed His Father’s plan of salvation. This new work would be based on justice and righteousness, v17, not lies and falsehood, v15.

The Old Testament speaks again of this cornerstone. ‘The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. This is the LORD’S doing; it is marvellous in our eyes,’ Ps.118.22-23. Here we are told that the One who is to become the cornerstone will be rejected, this means the cross; but God’s purpose will not be frustrated, this means the risen Christ will build up a true people for God. The Lord Himself points this out in the parable of the wicked husbandmen,

Matt.21.33-45. Note v42, 'Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the Scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner; this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?'

The One who is the Cornerstone is rejected, but finally it is those who reject Him who will be rejected by God. 'And He shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken,' Is.8.14-15. Again the Lord Himself pointed this out. "And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder," Matt.21.44. Peter also quotes Isaiah in this respect, 'And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them that stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed,' 1Pet.2.8.

So in summing up His parable of the wicked husbandmen, Matt.21.33-46, the Lord is telling the chief priests and Pharisees that He knows that they will reject Him and then the kingdom of God will cease to be theirs, but that He Himself will be the cornerstone of a new nation. "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof," v43. That new nation is the Church, the company of the redeemed, both Jews and Gentiles.

This is further explained in Eph.2.18-22. 'For though Him (Christ) we both (Jews and Gentiles) have access by one Spirit unto the Father ... And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for habitation of God through the Spirit'. The new temple would not be built of stones but of saints. Founded upon the teaching of the apostles and prophets, as found in the Holy Scripture. But the Lord Jesus Christ and His redeeming work is the cornerstone of this new spiritual temple. Now God dwells not in a tabernacle of cloth or a temple of stone but in the midst of His gathered people.

The picture of the cornerstone is carried a step farther in 1Pet.2.4-10. 'To whom (Christ) coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious. Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ,' v4-5. Here the believers not only make up the spiritual temple of God, but they are also the spiritual priesthood who offer up the spiritual sacrifices that God so desires. The spiritual sacrifices are described in Heb.13.15-16. 'By Him (Christ) therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name. But to do good and to communicate (share) forget not; for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.'

We, by God's grace, as believers, are now built on the chosen and precious Cornerstone. Living eternally to enjoy the privileges and fulfil the responsibilities that are ours. 'But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light: which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy,' 1Pet.2.9-10.

—to be continued (D.V.)

# ABRAHAM IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

by David McAllister (Zambia)

## (2) ABRAHAM AND THE GREATEST PERSON, Jn.8.48-59

— *“Before Abraham was, I am.” Jn.8.58*

Abraham was very highly honoured by the Jews, and rightly so. He was the father of the nation, and they held him in the highest esteem; indeed, they boasted in him. What a contrast to how they regarded the Lord Jesus Christ. Well could He say, “Ye do dishonour me,” v49. They called Him “a Samaritan” and said that He had “a devil,” v48. They had not been able to answer the points which the Lord made to them in the previous verses, so they resorted to personal attacks. This is still the case today: if people do not like the truth that is being told to them, but they have no answer to it, they begin to attack the character of the one who is bringing the truth to them!

In this passage, in which Abraham's name is mentioned 5 times, v52,53,56,57,58, the Lord Jesus Christ, while in no way speaking disparagingly of Abraham, clearly points out to these people, that, great as Abraham was, He, the Lord Jesus Christ, is greater. We find a threefold comparison of Abraham and the Lord Jesus Christ, each proving that the Lord Jesus Christ is greater:

1. The Passing of Abraham's life: *“Abraham is dead,”* v52:
2. The Pleasure of Abraham's life: *“Abraham rejoiced to see my day,”* v56:
3. The Period of Abraham's life: *“Before Abraham was, I am,”* v58:

These three comparisons deal with three different time periods, going in reverse historical order. The first deals with the period after Abraham died, the second with what occupied Abraham during his life, and the third goes back before Abraham was born. In all three, as we will see, the conclusion is the same: the Lord Jesus Christ is greater than Abraham.

### 1. The Passing of Abraham's life, v51-55

The Lord Jesus did not need to tell His listeners that Abraham was dead: they stated it themselves, v52,53, in response to the Lord's claim, v51, that someone who keeps His saying shall never see death. What provoked their irate response: “Whom makest thou thyself?” It was that, by His statement in v51, the Lord was claiming to have power over death. If the Lord had said in v51, “I am alive,” they would have shown no annoyance at that. It was perfectly true that He was alive at that time, but that in itself would not have made Him greater than Abraham. When the Lord Jesus spoke, there were plenty of people who were alive, but who were certainly not greater than Abraham. No, his statement went further. By stating “If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death,” the Lord was saying, not only that He was alive, but that He had (or, rather, has) the power of life and death. Not only so, but that the issue as to whether a person will live or die depends on one's obedience to His words. No-one else could claim that.

In one sense, the response of His hearers was based on a misunderstanding. When

they replied “Abraham is dead,” they were of course meaning dead physically, and they took it that the Lord was speaking of physical death, whereas He was not saying that a believer never dies physically, but rather that he would not see eternal death. Yet in another sense, they understood the implication of His statement only too clearly: He was claiming to be greater than Abraham, as their words in v53 show. A man who could promise that anyone obeying Him would not see death, must certainly be greater than a man who is in the grave. And so it is: Abraham, great as he was, died, but the Lord Jesus Christ has the power to give eternal life to all who obey Him.

The listeners thought such a statement preposterous. They thought that He was honouring Himself; boasting of something that He was not, v53. But the Lord makes it plain that this was not so: it was God who was honouring Him—the God whom they claimed as theirs, v54. V55 makes clear the huge gulf between the Lord Jesus and His hearers. When He says “ye have not known Him; but I know Him,” he uses two different words for “know”. In referring to Himself: “I know Him,” He uses the word meaning intuitive knowledge: He is God, and did not need to get to know God by experience. But in referring to them: “ye have not known Him,” He uses the word meaning to get to know by experience. They had not even got to know God experientially; he already knew Him intuitively.

## **2. The Pleasure of Abraham's life, v56,57**

Now the Lord goes further back in time, to when Abraham was still alive, and He states: “Abraham rejoiced to see My day; and he saw it, and was glad,” v56. This shows that, during his life, Abraham was occupied with Christ, and obtained pleasure, gladness, and delight, in such thoughts. This shows that the Lord Jesus Christ is greater than Abraham.

We ought to ask ourselves: what is “My day” that the Lord Jesus refers to? It is generally taken to be the Lord's life on earth, to which Abraham looked forward. We do indeed see glimpses of this in Abraham's experience. For example, it is doubtless true that when Abraham said, Gen.22.8, “God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering,” he was looking forward to Calvary, and God's provision of Himself as the sacrifice. Surely Abraham's looking forward to the Lord's time on earth is included in the term “My day.” However, the present writer is inclined to believe that, in the context of this passage, the phrase “My day” includes much more than the Lord's time on earth. In this passage, and in particular in the verses that follow these ones, the emphasis is on the eternal existence of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus “My day” could well be a reference to the whole span of the Lord Jesus' existence, which encompasses eternity, and is not limited to the 33 years that He spent on earth.

Thus, when the Lord says “Abraham rejoiced to see My day,” as well as referring to Abraham looking forward to the Lord's time on earth, the He could also have been referring to the fact that, when Abraham was alive, He, the Lord Jesus, was already in existence. That was certainly how the listeners understood His statement: they took it to mean that the Lord Jesus was there in Abraham's time, and saw Abraham, v57. And, as the Scripture makes clear, not only did Abraham see His “day”: he actually saw *Him*, if we believe that it was the Lord Jesus Christ Himself Who appeared to Abraham and conversed with him in Gen.18. Among the things

that the Lord told him then was the promise of the birth of Isaac. What joy this conversation must have brought to Abraham! Such was the effect of his encounter with the Lord, that the following morning Abraham returned to the same spot where they had parted the previous day, Gen.19.27.

Furthermore, could "My day" not also look away into the future? In Heb.11.10, we read that Abraham "looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." Surely this also indicates that Abraham had an appreciation of Christ's glory in association with the Millennial city. He saw it, and was glad. The greatest pleasure of Abraham's life was his contemplation with the Lord Jesus Christ. This shows that the Lord Jesus Christ is greater than Abraham. The Jews had no understanding of this. They saw it simply in terms of the fact that the Lord was far too young to have been alive at the same time as Abraham, v57. They had no idea of His greatness.

### **3. The Period of Abraham's life, v58,59**

The Jews were shocked by the Lord's claims, but there was more to come. Now the Lord goes back even further, to before Abraham's birth. The listeners thought it ridiculous for Him to claim to have been there when Abraham was there, but the Lord announces: "Before Abraham was, I am, v58. He does not say, "Before Abraham was, I was." That would not in itself have made Him greater than Abraham. Enoch, for example, could have said, "Before Abraham was, I was." Only God could say, "Before Abraham was, I am." This statement is not according to the rules of grammar. Conventional rules of sentence construction are insufficient to express His greatness. The Lord here is making an unequivocal statement of His eternity and of His deity. Here is the voice of Jehovah Himself, the One who could say to Moses, Ex.3.14: " I AM THAT I AM ... say ... I AM hath sent me."

Those listening to the Lord were not believers, but they did know their Bibles, including Ex.3. They knew exactly the implications of His statement, and they were incensed. If He had said "Before Abraham was, I was," that would have been bad enough as far as they were concerned, but possibly they would have been content for the meantime to label Him as a Samaritan and demon-possessed, as they had done in v48, and to await a suitable opportunity to put Him to death. Now they could wait no longer: he was claiming to be God. This was the height of blasphemy, and they took up stones to stone Him to death, v59. These unbelievers had no doubt about the Lord's claims to deity, eternity and equality with God. Sad that it is that so many people today, who claim to be believers, are unclear about these fundamental truths.

In conclusion, the Lord Jesus Christ is the greatest Person. Whether we look at the eternal ages before Abraham was born, the time of Abraham's life, the years since Abraham has died, the future, or the unending ages still to come, the conclusion is the same: the Lord Jesus Christ is greater than Abraham. Not only is He greater than Abraham; He is God.

In this passage, the Lord Jesus told His hearers that a person who keeps His saying will not see death, v51. How can this be? How can a mortal, sinful man escape eternal death? In the next paper, if God permit, we will consider together how Abraham is used to illustrate the greatest principle: justification by faith.

*—to be continued (D.V.)*



# *Christian Conduct in a Modern World*

by Walter A. Boyd (South Africa)

## Paper 6

### No.3 — THE CHRISTIAN CITIZEN

#### (a) The Christian - An Earthly Citizen (Romans 13.1-7)

Rom.13 is an important development on the teaching of ch.12 in the matter of Christian conduct in the world. In view of what Paul wrote at the end of ch.12 about not retaliating but rather to overcome evil with good; one would be inclined to ask if all evil is to go unpunished? Can people do what they like and get away with it? The answer from ch.13 is a very definite, no. In society generally, there must be the rule of law and order. God has decreed the exercise of authority for the punishment of evil and for the protection of what is good. This is a God ordained arrangement for the good of society generally. In view of the existence of God's arrangements for the governance of society, the Christian can safely continue the virtue of overcoming evil with good as already taught in 12.19-21. At the same time he must be a model citizen and strive to uphold the arrangements God has placed for law and order. As well as having a responsibility towards those who do evil, he has a responsibility towards those placed in society for good - the authorities in the land. The Christian has a duty to render respect to the rulers of the country and live in obedience to their laws.

The chapter divides itself into three sections:

The Christian - an earthly citizen, v1-7;

The Christian - a fellow citizen, v8-10;

The Christian - a heavenly citizen, v11-14;

#### **The Christian - An Earthly Citizen**

##### **1. Submission to the State, v1,2.**

This passage is of the utmost importance in that it clearly defines what should be the attitude of a Christian towards the state. It is very relevant to our day and our place in a society, sections of which are only too ready to display rebellion against authority at any opportunity. We should be grateful for the inclusions of these verses and for the guidance that they give. The first sentence strikes the keynote for the section and its emphasis must be caught if we are to understand the contextual setting for all that follows. First in the sentence and thus in the mind of the Apostle is "*every soul.*" These instructions are not for some; they are inclusive of all. No exceptions are given. Having established the scope of his statement, he then introduces the subject - submissiveness to the state.

A) *The duty* of every citizen, saved and unsaved alike, is to submit to the ruling authorities. The freedom that we have received in Christ carries with it the responsibility to submit to the authorities that rule the land. There are no qualifications mentioned, so this is a very embracing command which takes in every aspect of life that is governed by the state, providing that conscience towards God is not involved. Acts 5:29 balances this by clearly teaching that "*we ought to obey God rather than man.*" There ought to be unqualified submission to the state as is manifested by the tone in which Paul writes. At that time of writing a tyrant ruled the Roman Empire. Nero

violently opposed the Christian faith and was later responsible for brutally persecuting the Christians. Had opposition to the State been an option for the Christians in those circumstances, Paul would not have written as he did. The Scriptures have in mind here the institution rather than the people who administer it. The duty of the Christian is clear- *“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers.”*

**B) The reason** for this duty is in the latter part of v1, *“For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.* When Noah and his family came out of the Ark, God established the principle of human government. Human government is a Divine institution and thus it is said to be “ordained of God.” First and foremost, the consecrated life must be lived in obedience to God, so it follows that a consecrated life will be in subjection to the powers ordained by God. Whatever the form of government and however the laws are applied and enforced, the Christian must be prepared to live in subjection to them provided that submission to God is not at stake in so doing. In Tit.3.1, Paul has a similar thought in mind; *“Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work.”* Peter has the same principle in mind when he says, *“submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well,”* 1Pet.2.13,14. In Rom.13 the requirement to submit is further strengthened in v2 by stating that *“whosoever resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves judgment.”* (RV). Rebellion against the state and breaking its laws is not the way a Christian is expected to behave, even if those laws are enforced by an unjust and wicked regime. This is not to say that God approves of the state of oppression and cruelty nor does He approve unjust and unfair legislation. The penalty for resisting God's ordinance as expressed in the rule of the state is to incur the judgment of the state for the infringement of its laws. Any breach of the law brings its own penalty.

## **2. The Nature of Submission, v3,4**

These two verses indicate the normal responsibilities and activities of the state and at the same time describe the nature of our submission to the state. This should express itself in the practice of good and the avoidance of evil.

**A) The Practice of Good.** *“For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil, wilt thou then not be afraid of the power?”* The child of God need have no fear of the state if he obeys its laws. Civil rule is constituted in order to operate against that which is evil, not against good. The Christian should be marked by good works and obedience to the laws of the land that have been enacted for the well being of society. One of the features of a just society is that good is rewarded *“... do that which is good and thou shalt have praise of the same.”*

**B) The Avoidance of Evil.** *For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid, for he beareth not the sword in vain.”* The one responsible for the administration of the civil order is described here as “the minister of God.” He has been ordained of God and placed by God within society for the good of the community. The work he does is a service to society for which he has been divinely ordained. The nature of submission to civil authorities therefore involves avoiding all that is evil and detrimental to society. Those who practise evil have every reason to fear the authority of the state since every infringement of the law brings its own penalty and defiance of the civil authority will be justly dealt with in punishment. This authority to punish evil is delegated by God to the state.

**3. The Motive behind submission v5.** *“Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.”* The necessity for submission to the state

is now established, “*we must needs be subject.*” In this verse we are told that it is also necessary to be subject for the right reason. The unsaved submits to avoid the wrath of the state but the believer submits for the additional reason of his conscience. He wishes to maintain a good conscience before God by doing the will of God in submitting to divinely ordained authority.

**4. The Illustration of Submission v6.** “*For this cause pay ye tribute also.*” The apostle now takes a specific example in order to illustrate the kind of responsibility that is involved in submission on the one hand and in administration on the other. The believer must fulfil his duties to the state in paying taxes imposed by the state. This is what is required of a citizen. What the state does with the taxes collected is no concern of the Christian, the rulers are responsible for this and answerable to God. Taxes are collected from Christians as well as from the unsaved. The believer is not justified in withholding taxes if the Government uses funds raised by taxation to promote an ungodly lifestyle or to advance the cause of something evil. In respect to the State discharging its fiscal stewardship, “righteousness exalteth a nation but sin is a reproach to any people.” Modern society has become so accustomed to the propagation and nurture of evil for some sections of society by government, that we hardly notice much of what is going on around us. Free needles are provided for drug abusers; social security benefits are biased towards those living sinfully; free legal aid is given to persistent offenders of the worst sort in criminal trials. There is a finely balanced debate that raises the plight of those who have fallen prey to sin and ignores the principles of righteousness. We are not advocating the opposite extreme of ignoring the plight of the underprivileged. The balance is seen clearly in the Lord’s handling of the woman at the well in Jn.4. He clearly wanted to meet her spiritual needs as a priority and that resulted in an improvement of her lifestyle by repentance bringing unto her a monogamous life. If a nation’s Government acts righteously in the enactment of legislation and the handling of revenue collected from its citizens, the nation will prosper. If on the other hand, it passes legislation that is contrary to biblical principles or uses the revenue from taxes in the promotion of sinful living, that will soon become a reproach to the people. Can we not see this clearly in the nation of Britain today?

**5. The Practice of Submission v7.** As a final word on the matter, Paul describes how submission should be practised in two ways. Paying tribute and custom, and rendering fear and honour. “*Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom ...*” That which is due to the authorities of the land should be paid and every other obligation to the state should be met. There appears to be a slight distinction in the words used. “*Tribute*” has in view the payment of taxes imposed on a person or property. “*Custom*” has to do with the payment of duty on goods and merchandise. Of primary importance is the need to be scrupulous in ensuring that we meet our responsibilities honestly in the matter of payment of taxes. There should be no desire to ‘cook the books’ at the end of the year to gain benefit in the tax return. Certainly, expert advice can be sought to avoid paying taxes that are unnecessary, this is a different matter to evading payment of taxes. “*Fear to whom fear ...*” shows that submission includes the intangible as well as the tangible. Fear or respect will be shown towards those ordained by God for the governance of the state. Honour should be shown to all that hold high office and have the responsibility or rule in the society. The modern world does not know much of this respect and honour. The popular press has ensured that almost every person of standing in the nation has been exposed to ridicule and has become an object for national fun and humour. Irrespective of what we think of persons in the high office, we should not be guilty of the common habit of criticising every form of authority. Alongside humble submission there will be absolute honesty and humble recognition of authority. —to be continued (D.V.)

# The Role of Sisters in the Assembly

by J. Grant (Scotland)

## No. 5 — IN THE ASSEMBLY GATHERINGS

Due to the silence which sisters maintain in the gatherings of the assembly it is possible for the part which they play to be regarded as insignificant. They may be looked on as silent bystanders who have no contribution to make. Because of this some sisters may be discouraged and fail to prepare for the gathering (This fault is just as prevalent with brothers). Such an attitude betrays a lack of understanding of the nature of the silence of the sisters. How then does she contribute to the gathering of the local assembly?

### **She acknowledges the Lordship of Christ.**

The privilege of showing that she acknowledges the Lordship of Christ is given to a sister in a manner which is not given to a man. She displays two signs of this in her long hair and in the covering that she places on her head when the assembly is gathered together. Paul's teaching regarding this, is given in 1Cor.11.

The divine order in creation is that the man is the head of the woman, Christ is the Head of the man, and the Head of Christ is God. The physical head of the woman is a symbol of her creatorial head, who is, as we have noted, the man. When the assembly gathers together the woman covers her head as a sign that man is not prominent and will be hidden as the Lord is present. He is thus acknowledged as the head of the man. He is acknowledged as Lord. If she refuses to do this, Paul states that a sister uncovered in the gatherings of the assembly is as shameful as a sister who has had her hair cut short or shaved completely, 1Cor.11.3-16. To all who gather, therefore, and to any unbelievers who are looking on, the sisters display in a very clear and positive way that Jesus Christ is Lord, and that in the gathering of the assembly, He alone has to be seen.

### **She educates angels.**

It is not only men and women who are looking on when the sisters cover their heads. Angels are interested on-lookers as believers work for the Lord. Paul understood that there was angelic interest in his service as he was "made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men," 1Cor.4.9. But angels also observe the godly behaviour of sisters in the assembly who appreciate that one of the reasons why they cover their head is "because of the angels," 1Cor.11.10. These angels know of a time when some of their own number rebelled against the divine order of creation. The words of the king of Babylon expressing the ambition of his master, the devil, are "I will be like the Most High," Isa.14.14. Thus he, the Adversary, sought to overthrow the divine order of creation and together with the angels who followed him in this venture of pride and folly, he was judged.

Today sisters have an opportunity of showing to the angelic throng who observe the gathering of the saints that they do observe this creatorial order gladly and acknowledge the lordship of Christ. They will not rebel, but have joy in accepting the privilege of having a place in the order of which the Lord has a part. To be part of this in any way is an honour and dignity far above our ability to apprehend fully. Let sisters therefore take

note that as they place the covering on their head and take their place amongst the gathered saints, angels look on and see the power of the work of the Cross in their glad acknowledgement of the order against which Lucifer, son of the morning, Isa.14.12, rebelled.

### **She adds fragrance to the worship.**

The worship of sisters is also very helpful to the assembly. Any thought that their silence results in no contribution is a very poor appreciation of worship. We must remember that Mary of Bethany heard what the disciples heard, indeed over the years she probably heard less than the disciples heard, but she understood much more. On that memorable evening she filled the house with the fragrance of her worship as she anointed the Lord with pure oil of nard. The height of worship which she reached was far above any thoughts in the minds of the disciples. Despite the accusation of waste made by Judas she heard the words of the Lord Jesus confirming that she had been right in her spiritual discernment. She had understood that shortly He would be buried. The Twelve had not appreciated this, but this woman alone was in touch with the mind of heaven, and so she worships. "Against the day of my burying hath she kept this" are the words of the Saviour, confirmation that she had made no mistake.

How many assembly gatherings have been lifted by the worship of godly sisters whose appreciation of the Lord is on a high plane? No thinking believer would ever claim that the only public worship of brothers is heard in heaven. The tender graciousness of a woman's heart and the finer feelings of a sister's spiritual affections have often been the means of "filling the house" with the sweet odour of worship.

### **She prays intelligently.**

Prayer also is made by sisters. In the assembly prayer meeting, and in the home, many a sister has been able to pray for that which escapes the notice of brothers. The writer has observed that godly sisters have a keen spiritual sense to see beneath the surface to the root of the matter. They can perceive what often brothers do not see and are quick to understand the difficulties and the problem of others. This enables them to pray intelligently, What we stated regarding worship is equally true of prayer. Silent prayers are as effective as public prayers.

In Scripture we find women who rose far higher than others in their dealings with God. Who would deny in reading Jud.13 that the mother of Samson had an appreciation of God which was greater than that of her husband? see v23. The account of the sorrow and then joy of Hannah shows her to have spiritual desires which went beyond the appreciation of Elkanah, 1Sam.1. Although Naomi obeyed her husband in leaving Bethlehem-judah, did her subsequent behaviour not show that she had spiritual desires larger than Elimelech's? The Shunammite, 2 Kings 4, displayed a care for others, and in her sorrow, spiritual discernment, which her husband did not share. The women who followed the Lord from Galilee stood afar off beholding the cross, Lk.23, when others had fled.

Let our sisters joy in the unique service in which they can engage, and let them never consider that the role given to them is second rate. The God who has saved us never asks us to engage in the second rate. To do with our heart what He has given us to do is pleasing to Him and will bring its reward in the day of review. The assembly is blessed indeed when it can number amongst those in fellowship, sisters whose godly demeanour, Christ-like disposition and spiritual perception make them invaluable to the testimony. Like Mary, Rom.16.6), they bestow much labour on behalf of the saints, and like the beloved Persis, they labour much in the Lord, Rom.16.12. May we hold them in honour and be thankful for their contribution to the work of the Lord.

—(Concluded)

## MY CONVERSION AND CALL (66)

*by John S. Wright (Trinidad, West Indies)*

Both my parents were saved in their early teens, my father during meetings held in February 1926 in Bethany Hall, Lochore, Fife, by Mr. David Roberts, an Evangelist from Liverpool. He had been using the "From eternity to eternity" chart. My mother first heard the gospel in 'kitchen' meetings that were held in Glenraig, Fife, around the same time by Mr. Sandy Munro, who was a coal miner and lived in the village. Later they both obeyed the Lord in baptism and were subsequently added to the assembly that met in Bethany Hall, Lochore.

I was brought up in that village and was taken to all the assembly meetings in Bethany Hall, I was sent to the Sunday School as a child, then as a teenager joined the Bible class, and attended gospel tent meetings during the summer months in the County of Fife, which was the normal way of life. Leaving school at fifteen years of age in 1951, I commenced a five-year apprenticeship as a house painter and decorator. This involved attending 'day release' classes during the first two years and 'night school' during the five years of my apprenticeship. A wee bit of taste of the world that I had been sheltered from was enjoyed during these first two years during the time day release class finished and night class commenced at the Lauder Technical College in Dunfermline, Fife.

Having been working for one year, my first holiday apart from my parents was at the Fife Assemblies Bible Class Camp held in a school in Bankfoot, Perthshire in July 1952. One morning, the room leader stated that two of the lads had trusted the Lord Jesus as their Saviour the previous night after the gospel meeting. I listened carefully to know whom he was talking about; each of the lads mentioned had his bed on either side of me! They were now saved I was not. Both presently are elders in their respective assemblies in Fife and Ayrshire, Scotland.

As July 1953 approached, I decided to go again to the camp, this time a school in Stanley, Perthshire was being used. Mr. Alex Scouter who was on furlough from India was one of the speakers, and a verse that he repeated nightly was "Choose you this day whom ye will serve ... but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord," Jos.24.15. I knew my parents and my sister who is seven years younger than me were saved, but I was not! Troubled by a remark that was made to me by a young woman after a gospel meeting, I left the school but returned again under deep conviction, and approached a Lochore friend and said, "I want to be saved." Talk to Mr. Scouter was his advice. By the bedside of Mr. Scouter as he read and explained Rom.10.9 to another lad and myself, I received the Lord Jesus Christ as my Saviour ... that was on Friday 24th July 1953. Returning to the room where we slept, I confessed to the leaders, who said with tears coursing down their faces, "John we have prayed for you for years." One of those men now resides in Auchlochan House in Lanarkshire; the other is at home with the Lord. I wrote to my parents who were on holiday in England the next day ... there was rejoicing in that Christian Hotel when the postcard arrived giving them the good news. Later I was baptised on the 15th November 1953 and received into the assembly fellowship at Bethany Hall the following Lord's day.

As a young believer I got involved in the Sunday school, also in children's meetings and open-air work both locally and in the surrounding villages where there was no assembly testimony. Brethren from the smaller assemblies in Fife started to invite other young men and myself from the assembly along to preach at their gospel meetings and later on to give teaching to the saints at their ministry meetings also.

I met Margaret at camp in 1954 and we started courting. Margaret was saved during meetings that Mr. James Hughes an Evangelist from Northern Ireland had at the opening

of the new Ashgrove Gospel Hall in Methilhill, Fife on the 11th August 1952. She was baptised on the 29th March 1953 and afterwards received into assembly fellowship at the Ashgrove Gospel Hall.

During our courtship, a circular letter from Mr. William D. Bell who was serving the Lord as a missionary in Trinidad, West Indies was read to the Lochore assembly one Lord's day during January 1956. In that letter he told of meetings he had been having in Chaguanas, a town in central Trinidad. A remark caught my attention, "There is great need all around ...O that God will raise up a young couple who will devote themselves to the Lord's service among those R.C. and Hindu people." Requesting the letter from the assembly correspondent, I showed to Margaret that same evening. We both had been asking the Lord to direct our footsteps, and were both conscious of guidance towards missionary service. Now the Lord was indicating a definite place. About two years later, Mr. Bell visited the Lochore assembly, where after the report meeting I asked him if anyone had at any time ever mentioned to him anything about what he had written in 1956. "No one," he replied! I mentioned that we were exercised before the Lord in that regard. Taking the elders of the assembly into confidence, they were requested to pray with us about this important matter. This they agreed to do.

In the intervening eleven and a half years there were many that encouraged us in our exercise, but its also true to say there were many discouragements and disappointments along the way. Finally, with the commendation of the Lochore assembly and five other assemblies in the County of Fife also giving supporting commendations, we left Scotland by train on the 9th June 1967 on the first stage of our journey which took us to Bournemouth on the south coast of England. From there to Southampton on the 13th June where we boarded the "Southern Cross" with our two infants of 15 months and 3 months. At 2.00 p.m. on that beautiful afternoon, as friends waved to their friends and as the skirl o' bagpipes and drums resounded, the ropes holding that ocean liner to the quay where loosed, and the tug boats pulled her out into The Solent. Port of Spain, Trinidad was to be the first port of call that the "Southern Cross" would make on its round the world voyage.

After an 8-day sail, Trinidad's Northern Range of mountains was sighted on the 21st June 1967. Waiting on the quay side to welcome us were Mr. and Mrs. William D. Bell, Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Ussher, Mr. and Mrs. Leonard King who were local commended assembly workers and Mr. and Mrs. Hedley McLachan. Mr. Hedley McLachan was the eldest son of the first assembly missionaries to reside in Trinidad, having arrived with his parents in 1910.

The Trinidad Government granted a three-year visa initially, "to preach and teach the Christian gospel." After seven years in the Country, we were granted Residential Status. Preaching and Teaching the Word has been done to a greater or lesser extent using halls and homes, tents and open-air meetings, and on occasions day schools, in both these islands of Trinidad and Tobago, and also in a few of the other West Indian islands over the intervening years.

Looking back over these 33 years, and having enjoyed the fellowship of fellow-missionaries and local evangelists, also the saints in the different assemblies, we can only say, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us," 1Sam.7.12. It has pleased God to save some and to see some of them added to the local assemblies. But at times there has been much grief when assembly discipline has been needed. However, some who have been put away, having repented have been restored not only to the Lord, but also to the local assembly. Still there are others, for one reason or other have left the assembly and fellowship with other believers.

It was the late Dan Crawford who once wrote, "hats off to the past, coats off to the future." The door is still open in these islands of the blue Caribbean Sea for the preaching of the gospel, and the ministry of the Word of God, but who will heed the call of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, "Whom shall I send ..." Is.6.8, and "Go ye therefore ..." Matt.28.19. Will you?

# Good Tidings from Heaven

## WHAT ABOUT YOUR SOUL

Mk.8.36,37, "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

Ezk. 18.20, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die."

Have you ever stopped to wonder  
What this life is all about?  
Why you're here and where you're going  
When your lease of time runs out?  
Maybe you've been far too busy,  
Trying hard to reach your goal;  
Would you let me ask you, kindly,  
Have you thought about your soul?

You may reach the highest portals,  
And your dreams may all come true;  
Wealth and fame may be your portion,  
And success may shine on you.  
All your friends may sing your praises,  
Not a care on you may roll:  
What about the great tomorrow -  
Have you thought about your soul?

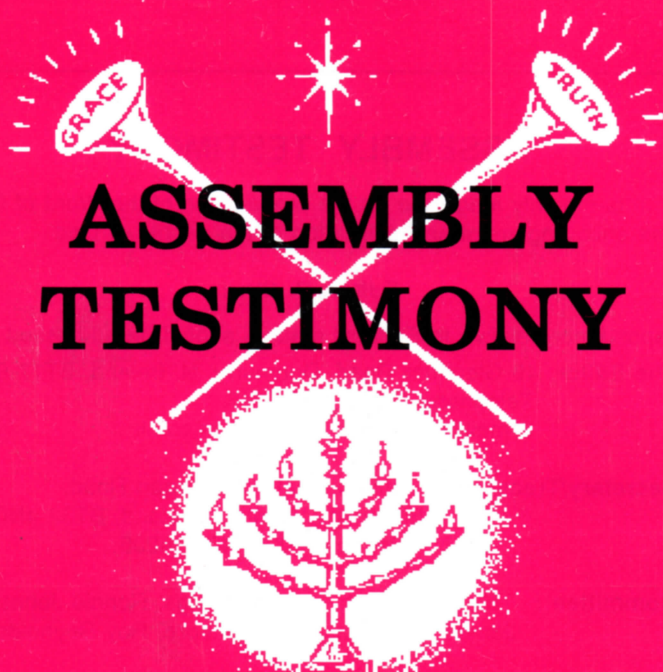
Don't forget your days are numbered,  
Though you may be riding high;  
But, like all of us poor mortals,  
Someday you'll just up and die.  
Your success and fame and glory  
Won't be worth the bell they toll;  
Let me ask you just one question,  
Have you thought about your soul?

If you've never thought it over,  
Spend a little time today;  
There is nothing more important  
That will ever come your way  
Than the joys of sins forgiven,  
And to know you've been made whole.  
In the Name of Christ, the Saviour,  
Have you thought about your soul?

Lev.17.11, "It is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul."

Is.55.3, "Incline your ear, and come unto Me: hear, and your soul shall live."





# 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.

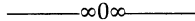
**Editor: B. Currie**

Correspondence relative to Editorial matters should be addressed to:

**The Editor**, 49 Glenburn Road, Dunmurry, N. Ireland, BT17 9AN.  
Telephone (028) 9062 1343.  
E-mail: AT@bcurrie.free-online.co.uk

**Secretary/Treasurer : William Neill**, 109 Lurgan Road,  
Banbridge, Northern Ireland, BT32 4NG.  
Telephone (028) 4062 4238.

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



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# **BEHOLD YOUR KING**

(Meditations in Matthew)

by Jim Flanigan (Belfast)

## **29. The Olivet Discourse (Ch.24)**

As the preceding chapter was very practical, so the chapter now before us is prophetic, and this great discourse on the Mount of Olives extends throughout ch.24 and into ch.25. The little company is sitting on the mount, looking over the Kidron Valley to the golden city shining in the sun. The sight is beautiful and it is not surprising that the disciples had remarked upon the buildings of the temple. The Lord predicts destruction. The great stones which they see shall one day be thrown down, with not one left upon another. This prompts a three-fold question to Him. They want to know when these things shall be, what shall be the sign of His coming, and of the end of the age. They speak, of course, of the end, or the consummation, of the Jewish age. To import the present age and the Church into this chapter is to invite confusion. These disciples are a Jewish remnant. They enquire with Jewish minds and our Lord answers accordingly in a discourse which will be of inestimable interest and value to a believing Jewish remnant of a later day, after the Rapture of the Church.

The first question, which concerns the destruction of Jerusalem, is not pursued here but is dealt with in the parallel passage in Lk.21. The Saviour now projects their thoughts to that future day when a remnant, just like them, will bear testimony in the midst of great difficulties and persecution. There will be false Christs in that day, appealing to sensitive souls longing for a Messiah for their deliverance. How easy it will be for some to be deceived. There will be wars and rumours of wars, with nations and kingdoms rising against each other. War will inevitably bring famine. When men are fighting they are not sowing and reaping. Famine will result in pestilences and death, and accompanying earthquakes will add to the terrible trouble. All these are but the beginning of sorrows, the birth-pangs of the nation. Note the correspondence of this part of the discourse with Rev.6.

In those fearful days of tribulation the godly will suffer much. For their faith they will be betrayed, afflicted, hated and martyred. False prophets will arise to confuse and deceive the people, so making the testimony of the remnant the more difficult. Iniquity will abound in the moral decadence of a corrupt and lawless society. Sadly, the love of many will wax cold. Many, however, will endure to the end and will be saved out of it all. This is not the salvation of the soul. It is the physical, bodily salvation of those who have lived through all the trials until the end of the tribulation period. Before that period ends the gospel of the kingdom will have been preached in all the world by that faithful remnant which will be divinely preserved for that

purpose, Rev.7.3-8. It is important to remember that there is but one gospel for every age. It is the good news of salvation through faith in Christ alone. There are though, different emphases on the message, in accordance with the particular context. The "gospel of the grace of God" is a fitting emphasis for the message of this present age, when by that grace the good news of salvation is being heralded to poor Gentiles everywhere. The "gospel of the kingdom" will, in that coming day, emphasise the fact that the King is coming, glad tidings indeed for those in suffering, and an incentive to believe the message in preparation for His appearing. In other circumstances Paul will speak of 'my gospel' and of the "gospel of God," and the "gospel of the glory," and in the Book of the Revelation we read of "the everlasting gospel," but the gospel is always Christ, with whatever emphasis and in whatever age.

In the midst of that seventieth week of Daniel's vision, as recorded in Dan.9, during which these things will take place, the "abomination of desolation" will stand in Israel's Holy Place. This would appear to be the idolatrous image of the beast of Rev.13. It is a usurping of the very place of God, by one who sets himself up as God, demanding worship as though he is God, 2Thes.2.4. Believers are now exhorted to flee from Jerusalem and Judea, the epicentre of all this trouble. Flight will be urgent. They must not linger, not even to collect or recover treasured earthly possessions. How hard it will be for those women carrying infants, whether in the arms or in the womb. Winter conditions or ceremonial regulations may increase the hardship and they should therefore pray for guidance and safe travel. They must close their ears to all and every rumour that Messiah has come. When He comes there will be no mistaking His coming. As lightning shining from one end of earth to the other, so will be the brightness of His coming and in that day unbelieving Israel will be as the carcase over which the eagles hover. The eagles are those enemy nations which will be the agencies of God's judgment. They will encompass the land, enemies of each other and of Israel, in preparation for the final battle of Armageddon. Sun, moon, and stars, and the powers of the heavens will then be shaken. Whether these are literal convulsions of the heavenly bodies, or, as some think, the death throes of governmental authorities, supreme and subordinate, they are evidences that the Son of Man is about to be manifested in great glory. His angels will come at His bidding, and they will gather His elect to safety from every part of earth.

The nation of Israel is variously presented in Scripture under the symbolism of three trees, the Olive, the Vine, and the Fig tree. Israel as the Vine is Israel as God desired her to be in the past, but she failed, and did not give Him the joy that He desired. Israel as the Olive tree is Israel as God intends her yet to be, producing, at the head of the nations in millennial days, oil for warmth and light, refreshment and health. Israel as the Fig tree is Israel under judgment, set aside judicially in this present age. But the Saviour points out that the Fig tree will blossom again. Men should watch for the putting forth of the tender foliage and fruit, and while it is in principle that no prophecy refers directly to this present age, nevertheless it may be possible to see the foreshadowing of this national revival even now. It is the budding of new life for that nation, and this is so very evident in these momentous days.

“This generation shall not pass,” our Lord says, “until all these things be fulfilled.” The statement is difficult and there are varying interpretations. Some think that the word “generation” should be understood as meaning that race, that nation, that family, that seed which sprang from Abraham. They will abide and remain until all is fulfilled. Others think rather that the Lord is indicating that that generation which sees the beginnings of these awful happenings will also see the culmination, that it will not be a long protracted period but will all take place in the lifetime of one generation. The other thought is that no reader, or listener, need wonder at the prophecy of these fearful events, for in AD70, at the siege and destruction of Jerusalem, all were partially fulfilled. This was not at all the complete fulfilment, but nevertheless, all that is predicted here was experienced by the people of AD70, the generation which was then alive when our Lord was ministering.

Now neither men nor angels know the date when the Son of Man will come. As men in the days of Noah were taken unawares in their complacency, so will it be when the King comes. Two men in the field, two women at the mill, will suddenly be separated, one taken in judgment, the other left for millennial blessing. This is not the Rapture. It is unwise even to use the verses so in application, as many do in gospel preaching, for such misuse of these texts has sown the seeds of misinterpretation in the minds of many. Men must watch diligently in that day. The coming of the Son of Man will be unexpected and many will be caught unprepared. Faithful and wise servants will therefore watch as they serve. Some, apostate Jews, evil and false shepherds of Judaism, will abandon hopes of His coming, and turn to things material, carnal, and sensual, to their everlasting ruin. The lord of the faithful servant will reward him. In the context that reward will be a place of responsibility and rule in the kingdom. The unfaithful servants will have their portion with those that are lost, amid eternal weeping and gnashing of teeth.

This discourse, another “Sermon on the Mount” continues into ch.25, a chapter of parables of particular relevance to that remnant of a day yet future, after the Rapture of the Church. Neither the Church nor the Church era is envisaged in this discourse.

—to be continued (D.V.)

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### WISDOM'S COUNSEL

*Give ear unto my counsel  
And harken children all,  
To each of you doth Wisdom  
In loving accents call,  
Seek earnestly the Saviour  
Of sinners in thy youth,  
For all who early seek Him  
Shall find Him of a truth*

The late James H. Wilkinson (Tyrone)

# Assembly Testimony Bible Class

by J. Riddle (Cheshunt)

## ESTHER

### (14) THE JEWS HAVE “A GOOD DAY”

#### Read Chapter 8

The contents of this chapter are summed up in Esther's plea before Ahasuerus “to *put away the mischief of Haman the Agagite*, and his device that he had devised against the Jews ... let it be written to *reverse the letters* devised by Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote to destroy the Jews which are in all the king's provinces,” v3 and v5. Haman was dead, but his plans remained in place, and the Jews were still in dire peril. They still “sat in the region and shadow of death,” Matt.4.16, and lived in “fear of death,” Heb.2.15.

We have already noticed that Haman is an apt picture of the devil. Esther's description is applicable to both: “The *adversary* and *enemy* is the *wicked* Haman,” 8.6. We have also noticed that the very gallows erected for Mordecai, became the instrument of Haman's own death. Those gallows proclaimed the triumph of Mordecai rather than his humiliation. All of which reminds us that the Lord Jesus came “that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.” But the passage continues: “and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage,” Heb.2.14-15.

Satan, like Haman, is a defeated enemy. The Lord Jesus triumphed over him at Calvary. It is now a question of delivering those over whom he had “the power of death.” John tells us that “for this cause the Son of God was manifested that He might destroy (loosen: undo) the works of the devil,” 1Jn.3.3. The Lord Jesus has not only defeated the enemy: He is able to completely reverse the effects of the enemy's power. That is certainly good news: even better than the news which brought to the Jews “joy and gladness, a feast and a good day,” 8.17.

This chapter illustrates the fact that whilst men and women are delivered from Satan's power by divine decree, God's people are actively involved in intercession before His throne, and in proclamation of the good news. Let's now work through the chapter, looking — as always — for its relevance to ourselves. After all, “whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope,” Rom.15.4.

#### 1) ASCENDANCY OVER THE ENEMY, v1-2

“On that day did the king Ahasuerus give the house of Haman the Jews' enemy unto Esther the queen. And Mordecai came before the king: for Esther had told what he was unto her. And the king took off his ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai. And Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman?”

In our studies, we have taken Esther as a picture of God's people, and Mordecai as a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is important to stress that this is an

application. If we pressed Mordecai as a 'type' of Christ, we could find ourselves in some difficulty. What would we then make of the words, "And Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman?" Bearing this in mind, notice:

**A) Esther received authority over the house of Haman**

She is given "the house of Haman." The enemy is in the position of defeat. The New Testament does not minimise for one moment the strength of our spiritual opposition. "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against the powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world," Eph.6.12. On the other hand we are told, "Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them (the spirits which are "not of God"); because greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world," 1Jn.4.4. Whilst we are acutely conscious of Satan's "devices", 2Cor.2.11, and sometimes fail in the battle, the fact remains that we do have immense superiority. Esther had all the power and authority of the throne of Persia: we have infinitely greater resources than even that.

**B) Esther revealed her relationship with Mordecai**

"And Mordecai came before the king; for Esther had told what he was unto her." These are quite delightful words. Do we tell the King what Christ is to us? When we enter the presence of the King, we speak about Christ more than about ourselves.

**C) Esther resigned her authority in favour of Mordecai**

"And Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman." She did not act herself: she deferred to her cousin. After all, he was the man with the king's ring. The Lord Jesus said, "All power (authority) is given unto Me." Esther gave first place to Mordecai, and we must give first place to Christ.

**2) APPEAL FOR HELP, v3-6**

Whilst Esther had been given a position of superiority over the house of Haman, this did not mean that the results of his rise to power had been automatically cancelled. The Jews were still under sentence of death on "the thirteenth day of the twelfth month." How could that awful disaster be averted? Well, one thing is certain: it could not be averted without intercession. Notice:

**A) The depth of Esther's concern**

"And Esther spake yet again before the King, and fell down at his feet, and besought him with tears to put away the mischief of Haman." In past studies, we have referred to the tears of Nehemiah and Paul. How much are we really concerned about the spiritual welfare of men and women? Whilst Esther delayed her previous request (see ch.5), on this occasion she comes straight to the point. Again, it was on Mordecai's insistence that she made the first approach. So far as we can judge, she now uses her own initiative.

The depth and reality of Esther's feelings become even clearer in v6. It's not now, "his device that he had devised against *the Jews*," but "how can I endure to see the evil that shall come unto *my* people? or how can I endure to see the destruction of *my kindred*?" She identifies herself with the very people under threat, and displays her love for them.

**B) The assurance of Esther's acceptance**

"Then the king held out the golden sceptre toward Esther." We have seen the "golden sceptre" before. It signified "favour in his sight," 5.2. Our acceptance is in

Christ Himself. The strength of Esther's acceptance lay in the strength of the sceptre. It was the emblem of absolute power. Our acceptance is vested in the "King of Kings."

### C) *The ground of Esther's appeal*

"If it please the king, and if I have found favour in his sight, and the thing seem right before the king, and if I be pleasing in his eyes." These four conditions fall into two categories. First of all, the *proposal* must be acceptable to him: secondly, the *proposer* must be acceptable to him. Read 1Jn.5.14 in connection with the first, and 1Jn.3.22 in connection with the second. (We encountered both verses in our last study).

### 3) *AUTHORITY FOR THE WORK, v7-10*

It's "in the king's name," and "with the king's ring," and by "the king's scribes." Mordecai acted as the king's executive: "He wrote in the king Ahasuerus' name, and sealed it with the king's ring, and sent letters by post on horseback, and riders upon mules, camels, and young dromedaries," v10. The messengers carried good news on the highest possible authority. Let's recall Matt.28 again: "And Jesus came and spake unto them saying, *All power (authority) is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore.*" The Saviour prayed, "As Thou hast sent Me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world." Jn.17.18. the Lord Jesus has absolute authority to Him, and the good news of deliverance bears that very authority.

### 4) *ATTACKING THE OPPOSITION, v11-13*

The letters were quite specific. It wasn't a case of an all-out attack on everybody, but "to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish, all the power of the people and province *that would assault them,*" v11. See also v13, "And that the Jews should be ready against that day to avenge themselves *on their enemies.*" So the battle was to be taken to the enemy. It wasn't a case of defence, but of attack. The Lord Jesus did exactly that: "Who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed by the devil," Act.10.38. He stormed the strongholds of the enemy. Every street tracted, every home visited, every conversation with unsaved people about the gospel, is an excursion into enemy territory. The enemies of the Jews had been given a date on which to strike: now the Jews themselves were to strike on the very same date. The enemy waits to strike us: we are to take the strike initiative ourselves. Needless to say, "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds," 2Cor.10.4

You will have noticed that v11 was not quoted in full above. So what about the balance of the quotation — "and to cause to perish, all the power of the people and province that would assault them, *both little ones and women, and to take the spoil of them for a prey?*" First of all, we need to remember that we are not talking about *Christian* conduct. Esther does not belong to our own era which is governed by the teaching of the Lord Jesus, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you," Matt.5.44. The Lord Jesus exemplified this perfectly. Secondly, it has been pointed out that the difficult words are really a quotation of Haman's original decree, 3,13, and therefore mean that the Jews were to destroy those who would assault them and their families, and who would rob them of their possessions. This certainly seems to be confirmed by 9.10 and 9.16.



But which ever way we take v11, the spiritual application is clear. We must be quite ruthless in spiritual warfare. Since it is the powers of darkness that keep men in “the region and shadow of death,” we must use our spiritual weapons to the full.

#### 5) ACCELERATING THE GOOD NEWS, v14

No hanging about here! “So the posts that rode upon mules and camels went out, *being hastened and pressed on* by the king's commandment.” (It was just the same previously. See 3.15. But then it was bad news). Rather like 1Sam.21.8, “The king's business required haste.” There was an urgency about the matter. Paul puts it like this: But this I say, brethren *the* (notice this) time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing (over using) it,” 1Cor.7.29-31. Paul is dealing here with earthly ties in view of the imminence of Christ's return; hence “*the* time is short” — not just ‘time is short.’ We are to pursue His interests.

J. C. Whitcomb puts it nicely: ‘It has often been observed that this provides a remarkably cogent illustration of missionary work today. God's death sentence hangs over a sinful humanity, but He has also commanded us to hasten the message of salvation to every land (cf. Prov.28.11). Only by a knowledge of, and a response to, the second decree of saving grace through the Lord Jesus Christ can the terrible effects of the first decree of universal condemnation for sin be averted.’

Why were the Persian postmen to ride at such speed? After all, the king's scribes were called “in the third month, that is, the month Sivan (June),” v9, but the actual date on which the Jews were to avenge themselves was not until “the twelfth month, which is the month Adar (March),” v12. The answer is two-fold. First of all, we need to remember that the Persian Empire was immense, and secondly, that the Jews needed plenty of time in which to plan their attack.

#### 6) ANTICIPATION OF VICTORY, V15-17

Let's just notice two things in the final paragraph of this chapter: (A) The exaltation of Mordecai, and (B) The expectation of victory.

##### A) Mordecai was exalted

“And Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and white, and with a great crown of gold, and with a garment of fine linen and purple.” The city of Shushan had been “perplexed” when Haman was in the ascendancy: now the city “rejoiced and was glad.” The reason for the joy of the Jews is obvious: their man had been exalted!

##### B) Victory was expected

“And in every province, and in every city, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a good day.”

But what do you make of the closing words: “And many of the people of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews fell upon them?” Conviction or convenience? Mere profession or reality? The same questions could be asked today, couldn't they?

—to be continued (D.V.)

# The Kings of Judah and Israel

by Graeme Hutchinson (Belfast)

## Hezekiah No.3 (Paper 15)

As we move towards the end of Hezekiah's reign over the nation of Judah, it is unfortunate that the discussion must include a combination of positive and negative points. For instance, 2Chron.32.24-33 and the parallel passages in 2Kgs.20 and Isa.38 and 39 records:

### *(e) His Sickness*

Isa.38.6 and 2Kgs.20.6 would suggest that the fatal illness of Hezekiah occurred when he was besieged by the Assyrian army. This was either when Sennacherib led the opposing force<sup>1</sup>, or when one of his successors, Esarhaddon, 2Kgs.19.37, was in control. Nevertheless, despite the problem in precisely identifying the enemy, the fact was that Hezekiah faced an enormous task: defeating the Assyrians in the face of certain death. Although we shall shortly observe the response of the king, we are still left with the following question to address: Why is the king struck with a fatal illness at such a crucial time?

The short, and perhaps obvious answer to the above question is that God's will was such that Hezekiah should be taken in death. The same reasoning could be applied to the circumstances of Mary and Martha, Jn.11, and Jairus, Lk.8. From such experiences, what can we learn about God's will?

### • *Always Perfect*

In the case of Hezekiah, the will of God was such that he should die, 2Kgs.20.1. Although he was later given an extension of fifteen years, v6, the fact was that these additional years were to mar his testimony as king. 2Chron.32.25 records his pride during these fifteen years and 2 Kgs.20.13 records his folly at listening to the enemy. Obviously had Hezekiah died, such events would never have occurred. How true are the words of Ps.18.30: 'As for God, His way is perfect.' The words of Joseph to his brethren in Gen.50.26 are always appropriate in such occasions: '... ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good.' May we learn from such an experience, and always accept what the Lord desires for us.

### • *Occasionally Painful*

Just like many other characters in Scripture, the life of Hezekiah illustrates that God's will is not always easy to accept. To the king, it seemed illogical that he should be cut down in the prime of life, 'I am deprived of the residue of my years'<sup>2</sup>, Isa.38.10. Many things happen in our lives which are hard to accept and understand

<sup>1</sup> If we take Isa. 38.6 and 2 Kings 20.6 to refer to the threat posed by Sennacherib, there is an obvious chronological problem to overcome. 2 Kings 19 records his defeat and death, and yet in 2 Kings 20 his threat was still imminent. Perhaps the opening words of 2 Kings 20 gives us a clue: "In those days". In other words, perhaps the events recorded in this chapter are concurrent with those reported in the previous one.

<sup>2</sup>If Hezekiah died when he was 54, 2Chron.29.1, he must have been only 39 when he was struck with this illness.

and yet in some senses this is to be expected: ‘... Neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord,’ Isa.55.8. Phil.4.7 gives soothing ministry in this respect: ‘And the peace of God which is better than<sup>3</sup> understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.’ In other words, to rest in the knowledge that God’s purposes for us are always for our good, is actually ‘better than’ understanding the path itself.

#### ***(f) His Supplication***

The response of Hezekiah to the startling revelation of his imminent death was the same as when he faced Sennacherib in warfare, he prayed, 2Kgs.20.2. Although he does not explicitly ask for the sentence to be lifted, there is little doubt from his remarks that this is what he desired.

2Kgs.20.4-6 record the way in which the Lord reacted to the request of Hezekiah, in that fifteen years were added to the life of the king. However, of importance, the Lord makes mention of two things that moved Him: Hezekiah’s prayer and tears, v5: ‘I have heard thy prayer; I have seen thy tears.’

Whilst we may respond to problems and difficulties in our life with prayer, how many of us combine this with genuine tears? The Psalmist certainly did, Ps.39.12; so too did Job, Job16.20; Jeremiah, Lam.2.11, and the Lord Himself, Heb.5.7. Unquestionably, when we pray with tears we are expressing the innermost desires of our heart. Maybe we are not earnest enough in our prayer life? Perhaps, when we follow the example of the aforementioned and pray with tears, the Lord will be moved to answer our requests. Remember that the Lord has promised to remember our very tears: ‘...Put thou my tears into thy bottle: Are they not in thy book?’ Ps.56.8.

#### ***(g) His Sign***

Once Hezekiah had recovered from the illness, 2Kgs.20.7, he asked for confirmation that the words spoken by the prophet Isaiah were a reality, v8. Such an approach appeared to be common amongst the Israelites, Jud.6.17, 36-40; 1Cor.1.22. These ‘signs’ were actual miracles that were used to confirm the promises of God, and so strengthen those for whom the sign was given. Therefore, when Hezekiah asked for the sun’s shadow to be reversed, he was seeking confirmation of the additional fifteen years.

In our day, the believer has a different resource to turn to when it comes to looking for confirmation (and guidance), not in signs/miracles, rather in the Scriptures. It would be very strange if the book, which is our lamp, Ps.119.105, could not ‘shed light’ into every area of our service. The Bible assures us that: ‘For all the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him Amen,’ 2Cor.1.20. In taking a Scriptural and faithful approach to our Christian life, we can be assured of divine guidance and, when necessary, confirmation.

#### ***(h) His Stature***

The fame of Hezekiah began to spread across neighbouring nations. In this there was to emerge a point of sadness. 2Kgs.20.12-18 record how the king of Babylon was able, surreptitiously, to evaluate all that belonged to the nation. Moreover, Hezekiah stated that the ‘precious things’; ‘the precious ointment’; ‘the armour’ and

<sup>3</sup>Authorised version of Phil.4.7 states that the peace of God ‘passeth” all understanding. The word for “passeth” - *huperecho* - is rendered as ‘better than’ in Phil.2.3.

'the treasures' were HIS! Obviously he had failed to remember that they were all given to him by God, 2Chron.32.29. However, not wishing to overly criticise the king, at least he repented of his pride, 2Chron.32.26, and expressed gratitude that the nation would have peace in his days, 2 Kgs.20.19.

Such was the standing that Hezekiah had in the nation, he was finally buried in the 'chiefest of the sepulchres' and all Jerusalem gave him honour, 2Chron.32.33. His contribution to the welfare of Judah established a high standard for others to follow. In order to highlight the extent of his contribution, consider the following:

- 'The revival under Hezekiah was a great one and also the first real one in the history of the monarchy. It had far-reaching effects on the northern Kingdom as well as in Judah. It had also brought about a measure of restored unity and showed God's hand with them in the matter of the attempted Assyrian invasion' (Revival: A Study in Biblical Patterns, D B Long, 1993, p.78). In recalling the reign of Hezekiah we remember one who, amongst other things, cared for the temple, 2Chron.29.3; communed with God, 2Chron.32.20; 2Kgs.20.2; considered others, 2Chron.30.22; 32.6, and cleared-away the idolatrous gods, 2Chron.33.3.
- 2Kgs.20.20 and 2Chron.32.30 suggests that one of the more memorable achievements of Hezekiah was the building of the tunnel from the Gihon spring to the Pool of Siloam. Not only was this tunnel 1,777 feet in length; not only was it brought underneath the walls of Jerusalem, but it was dug (through solid rock) by workmen digging from each end and meeting in the middle. A modern day channel tunnel!

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

## PROPHETIC PICTURES OF THE LORD

by J. E. Todd (England)

### 5. THE DOOR

The door, in the symbolism of Scripture, has a threefold meaning. First, quite obviously, as a means of entrance. Second, as the means of entry into the salvation graciously provided by God. Third, the door is singular, there is only one God-given way to obtain the God-given salvation.

All this is first shown in the ark of Noah's day. The door was the means of entry into the ark, "The door of the ark shalt thou set in the side thereof", Gen.6.16. The ark was the means of salvation from the judgment of that day, "With thee I will establish my covenant; and thou shalt come into the ark," v18. Inside the door alone was salvation to be found, 'And the LORD shut him in,' 7.16.

At the time of the Passover in Egypt no salvation from the judgment of the last plague could be found outside the door with its posts and lintel marked with the blood of the lamb. "And ye shall take a bunch of hyssop, and dip it in the blood that is in the bason, and strike the lintel and the two side posts with the blood that is in the bason; and none of you shall go out the door of his house until morning," Ex.12.22.

All this is restated in the building of the tabernacle, but expanded. "The curtain for the door of the court," Num.3.26. The only entrance into the courtyard of the tabernacle was a curtain, all of which can only speak of the coming of the Messiah, the Saviour.

First, it was multi-coloured. "And for the gate of the court shall be an hanging of twenty cubits, of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen, wrought with needlework," Ex.27.16.

The blue speaks of Christ's deity, the Lord from heaven.

The fine white linen speaks of Christ's purity, His sinless life.

The scarlet speaks of Christ's blood, His atoning sacrifice.

The purple speaks of a royal robe, Christ's royalty, the King of kings.

This hanging door was the only entrance to the tabernacle of the presence of God. Jesus said, "No man cometh unto the Father, but by Me," Jn.14.6. But it was a very wide door. It was twenty cubits wide, making up two-fifths of the length of that side of the tabernacle courtyard. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters" Isa.55.1. "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink", Jn.7.37. The door to the presence of God is wide enough to receive everyone and anyone. For those who wanted to enter, the door presented no impossible barrier, it was a curtain. "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out", Jn.6.37.

But what did this door to the courtyard of the tabernacle provide entrance to? To the altar whereon the sin offering was made and the laver wherein the priests washed themselves. Thus those who enter by the Lord Jesus Christ receive the forgiveness of their sins by His atoning sacrifice and the cleansing of regeneration by the living Christ Who comes to dwell within by the Holy Spirit. 'The kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost,' Tit.3.4-5.

A curtain of the same colours was provided as the door of the tabernacle of the congregation itself, 'The hanging for the door of the tabernacle of the congregation,' Num.3.25. This provided entrance into the holy place, wherein God was worshipped daily by the priests. Further on, a curtain of the same colours led into the Holy of Holies, the sanctuary, into which the High Priest ventured once a year into the very presence of God on the Day of Atonement. 'Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which He hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh; and having an High Priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for He is faithful that promised),' Heb.10.19-23.

A door often has a doorkeeper. "He that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth," Jn.10.2-3. That porter (door-keeper) was John the Baptist. "Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness unto the truth," Jn.5.33. John the Baptist introduced the Lord Jesus Christ to Israel. "Behold the lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world," Jn.1.29.

Thus introduced, the Lord Jesus Christ could announce, "I am the door: by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved," Jn.10.9. —to be continued (D.V.)

# ABRAHAM IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

by David McAllister (Zambia)

## (3) ABRAHAM AND THE GREATEST PRINCIPLE, Rom.4.1-5.1

*“Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.” Rom.4.3*

Job (a man who very possibly lived in the days of Abraham) asked the question: “How should man be just with God?” Job 9.2. In the chapter under consideration in this paper, Paul uses Abraham in order to answer that question. Eleven times in this chapter, he uses the word variously translated “counted”, or “reckoned”, or “imputed” — a word meaning “put to one’s account.” How can a person be just before God? In Rom.3, Paul has shown that no-one is just. What then is the means of justification? On what principle can a person have righteousness “put to his account?”

In 4.1, Paul introduces Abraham as an example: “What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found?” He then goes on to examine four possibilities; four possible bases on which someone might argue that a person can be reckoned righteous before God:-

1. v2-8: Works
2. v9-12: Ritual
3. 13-16: Law
4. 17-25: Faith

In each of the four cases, Paul uses Abraham to prove the point.

### **1. Was Abraham Justified by Works? No!, v2-8**

In this opening section of the chapter, Paul looks at both Abraham, v2-5, and David, v6-8. He has already stated, 3.21 that “the law” (Genesis to Deuteronomy) and “the prophets” (the rest of the Old Testament) bear testimony to the principle of the righteousness of God. In Abraham, we have a witness from the law, and in David, we have a witness from the prophets.

In v3, Paul quotes from Gen.15.4-6. God promises an heir to Abraham. What was Abraham’s response? Two possibilities are considered:

#### **(a) to do works.**

Paul considered such a case in v4: someone who does work receives a reward — his wages. The person is paid because he has worked for them. He is owed payment; it is his right. The employer who is paying him is not showing any grace to him — he is simply paying a debt that he owes to the worker. Thus, if anyone could be justified by works, God would owe him salvation, as a debt. Grace would not be involved at all.

#### **(b) to believe God.**

The person considered in v5 does not try to work. He sees himself as he truly is: “ungodly”, and therefore incapable of justifying himself, and he believes on the One

who is capable of justifying him. For such a one, his faith is reckoned for righteousness.

Now, into which of the above two categories did Abraham fit? There is no doubt. He was not justified by works: as v2 shows, if he had been justified by works, then he would have grounds for glorying before God. But he did not have grounds for glorying. V3 re-states the Scripture that “Abraham believed God,” and thus righteousness was counted unto him.

The example of David, v6-8, is consistent with the experience of Abraham. The fact that David stated the blessedness of the man to whom the Lord did not impute sin, v8 showed that this was precisely what he deserved — his wages. But by stating that God was not imputing sin to him, David was also implying that God was imputing righteousness to him — a gift.

## **2. Was Abraham Justified by Ritual? No!, v9-12**

Many people tried to argue that for a Gentile to be justified, he had to be circumcised. Indeed, this was the controversy that led to the gathering at Jerusalem in Act.15. In v 9 of Rom.4, Paul asks if the blessedness of being reckoned righteous is only for those who have been circumcised, or if it is also for those who have not been circumcised.

The answer is clear, v10: Abraham was justified when he was still uncircumcised. Again, the record in Genesis makes this plain. The record that Abraham was counted righteous is in Gen.15.4-6, and the record of him being circumcised is in ch.17.24-26. A comparison of Gen.16.16 and 17.1 shows that at least 13 years passed between Abraham being justified and being circumcised. The fact that Abraham was justified long before he was circumcised proves that one does not have to be circumcised — or go through any other ritual — to be righteous before God.

Moreover, in v 11, Paul explains what circumcision was. It was a “sign” and a “seal” of the righteousness that Abraham had already had before he was circumcised. A sign and a seal of a transaction give evidence of the transaction. They attest to it and ratify it. But they do not bring it about, or add anything to it. Rather, they are tokens testifying to the reality of it. So it was when Abraham was circumcised. His circumcision testified to the reality of his right standing before God, but it did not bring about his justification or add anything to it.

The latter part of v11, and v12, show that it is so for all believers. Abraham is the father of all believers, in the sense that all believers (whether they have been circumcised or not) are made righteous on the same principle as he was — faith.

## **3. Was Abraham Justified by Law? No!, v13-15**

In v13 Paul states that the promise to Abraham that he should be the “heir of the world” (the universal nature of the promise doubtless must mean that Paul is here referring to the promise in Gen.12.3, that in Abraham all peoples of the earth would be blessed) was not on the basis of Law, but on the basis of the righteousness of faith. He gives us two reasons why this is so:

(a) v14. The promise was given on the basis of faith. If inheritance depended on

keeping the Law, this would mean a change of the basis on which the person is made righteous. Thus it would nullify the promise: it would be of “no effect,” and faith would be empty: “void”. Justification by Law-keeping would nullify the promise based on faith.

(b) v15. The Law brings about wrath, not justification. The Law shows up sin for what it is: transgression is, by definition, the breaking of a known law. The Law therefore makes people transgressors, and bring God's wrath upon them. The Law leaves a person worse off, not better.

Paul amplifies the argument against justification on the basis of Law-keeping in Gal.3, again using Abraham as the example. In particular, he gives several reasons why the Law cannot make a person righteous before God:

- the Law brings a curse, v10:
- the Scripture explicitly states that righteousness is by faith, v11:
- the Law came later than the promise, and could not disannul it, v17:
- the Law was temporary, v19:
- the Law revealed sin, v19:
- the Law cannot give life, v21:
- the Law was preparatory to the coming of Christ, v24,25.

Thus, coming back to Rom. 4, Paul concludes, in v16, that anyone can be justified by faith, through grace, whether or not he was under the Law.

#### **4. Was Abraham Justified by Faith? Yes!, v17-25**

In each of the previous sections, Paul has already indicated that Abraham was justified by faith, v3,5,11,13,16. Now he explains in detail, and gives us some aspects of Abraham's faith:

##### **(a) the Circumstances:**

Humanly speaking, the circumstances were not conducive to the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham — Abraham was about 100 years old, v19. As far as having children was concerned, he might as well have been dead. As Heb.11.12 puts it, he was “as good as dead.” Also, his wife Sarah's womb was “dead”, v19. She was well past the age for bearing children, and she was barren.

But two characteristics of God, given in v17, totally changed the picture:

(i) “*who quickeneth the dead.*” The fact that Abraham and his wife were as good as dead, as far as having children was concerned, was no problem to God. A God who can make the dead live again could give children to Abraham and Sarah.

(ii) “*and calleth those things which be not as though they were.*” At that point Abraham did not have even one child, but God told him that his offspring would be numerous. The fact that God said that he would have many descendants made it absolutely certain that he would; it was as good as if it had already happened.

##### **(b) the Confidence:**

How did Abraham respond to God's promise? On the one hand, there were circumstances which, naturally, made fulfilment impossible, but, on the other hand,



there was a God who could raise the dead, and when He promised something it was sure to take place. We read of Abraham, in v18, that he “against hope believed in hope,” that is, he believed God's word, contrary to all human expectations. V17 states simply: “he believed.” His confidence in God is described:

(i) *negatively*: “being not weak in faith,” v19, and “He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief,” v20. The word “staggered” here is the same as that translated “waver” in Jms.1.6. His confidence in God did not waver; rather it was strengthened.

(ii) *positively*: “was strong in faith, giving glory to God,” v20.

**(c) the Conviction:**

Abraham was “fully persuaded,” v21, that God was able to perform what He had promised. There was no doubt in his mind. He was sure in his conviction.

**(d) the Consequence:**

In v22, the word “therefore” indicates the consequence of his faith and confidence in God: “It was imputed to him for righteousness.” Because of his faith, righteousness was reckoned to his account. This verse repeats the quote from v3 — Abraham was reckoned righteousness, on the basis of faith.

**(e) the Commentary:**

Now, v23-25, Paul brings the message home to us. In v23,24, he states that all this was not only written for Abraham's sake, but for our benefit too. Abraham pictures us in several ways. His was a hopeless situation — he was as good as dead, with no human hope of any change for the better. Likewise for us. Our “offences”, v25, left us without any hope of ever being just before God. No human effort — works, or rituals, or law-keeping — could do anything for us.

What was the only hope for Abraham? A God who could raise the dead. And that is our only hope too. He is referred to in v24 as “Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead.” Abraham was to believe in a God who could raise the dead. So must sinners today, in order to be saved. But there is a difference. Abraham had to believe in a God who could raise the dead, but he had not yet seen it happen. We have to believe in a God who has already raised the dead - our Lord Jesus Christ. Abraham believed that God would give life to the dead, in the future. We believe that He already has, in the past. Thus here we see the fundamental importance of the resurrection of Christ in the Gospel message. If someone does not believe in Christ's resurrection, he cannot be saved. Without the resurrection there is no Gospel message. As v25 puts it, he was “delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification.”

Abraham heard God's promise, believed it, and was reckoned righteous. It is so today too. God has promised blessing, and those who believe will be reckoned righteous.

**(f) the Conclusion:**

What a glorious conclusion to all this is given in 5:1: “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” How relevant to

this very day is the Word of God! So many people think that justification is of works (such as giving to charity or showing neighbourliness), or of rituals (such as baptism or “confirmation”), or of law-keeping (such as being a good citizen and “not harming anyone”). But the message of Scripture is still true — we are made righteous with God on the principle of justification by faith.

But someone may say: “What about works? Does not James speak of justification by works? And does he not use the very same person, Abraham, to prove his point?” In the next paper, God willing, we will consider how James uses Abraham to explain the relationship between faith and works.

—to be continued (D.V.)

# *Christian Conduct in a Modern World*

by Walter A. Boyd (South Africa)

## Paper 7

### No.3 — THE CHRISTIAN CITIZEN (Continued)

#### (b) The Christian - A Fellow-Citizen (Romans 13.8-10)

In our consideration of the first seven verses of ch.13, we noted our responsibilities to the State as earthly citizens. Another sphere in our responsibilities as a citizen is toward our fellow-citizens. From v8 we are moving into a new sphere from that of duties to the State to that of duties to other citizens in that State. In v8-10, our responsibilities take the form of:

- 1. Our Liabilities to be met, v8a.**
- 2. Our Love to be displayed, v8b.**
- 3. The Law to be fulfilled, v9-10.**

In ch.13.1-7, I am called upon as an earthly citizen to submit to the State and now in v8-10, as a fellow-citizen I am called upon to love others. It is clear from these verses that when love is displayed in a Christian's life, the result will be that his liabilities will be met fully and that his love for his neighbour will be of the same quality as love for himself. That being the case, the Christian will not harm his neighbour in any way, but will be a fulfilment of the Law, to the glory of His God.

*Our liabilities are to be met* - “Owe no man anything,” v8a. The apostle keeps in mind the earlier theme of rendering what is due, v7, and widens it out from State taxes to encompass every possible form of debt. It includes financial debts but extends to moral obligations of whatever sort. The only outstanding debt against a Christian's name should be that of love for his fellow-citizens, it can never be fully paid up. We are under a permanent obligation, as strongly as under a debt, to love others. Some have suggested that this prevents a Christian entering a loan agreement or mortgage with a bank. That is not the thought here, it is rather the idea of not

leaving a commitment of whatever sort, unpaid. There should be no delay in paying legally incurred and properly regulated debts according to the terms of the loan agreement. Few believers will fall into arrears with their financial commitments, but it is searching to ask if we are up to date with payments to our fellow-citizens in the currency of love.

*Our love is to be displayed* - ...“but to love one another,” v8b.

While it is expected of believers that they pay their debts promptly, here is a debt that will always be outstanding — love for one another. In the expression “one another,” Paul is not restricting love to among the saints only; it is in the context of “no man” and must therefore be given the widest possible meaning — all men. The practical implications are weighty; do I demonstrate a sincere love for all men whoever they are — not just for those I like? This demand for an all-embracing love shows the apostle Paul as the keen student of human nature that he was. He is aware of the possibility that we might not feel our responsibility to love those outside our normal sphere of relationships. Is it not true that we do not feel the same demand for our love towards the unsaved as for the saved? A great need in the present day is to build bridges with the unsaved. Modern life with its pressures and comforts has led to people becoming insular and lives becoming more private than ever. We leave home in the morning to drive to work in the car without any contact with our neighbours. We conduct our business for the day and return home in the evening, park the car in the garage and a full day has passed without any contact with our neighbours. A whole week could pass with nothing more than a friendly wave as we pass them in the street. In earlier days before the widespread ownership of motor vehicles, Christians had more social contact with their neighbours and community as they went about the chores of normal daily life.

One of the sad results of insular living in our modern world is a decreasing love for the lost. Our lack of daily contact with unsaved people has resulted in a lessening interest in their plight and a waning love for their soul. This is a sad reality that cannot be hidden and is manifested clearly in symptoms too commonly seen amongst us.

- Believers who seldom, if ever, bring an unsaved friend to the gospel meeting.
- Brothers and sisters who seldom attend the assembly prayer meeting prior to the gospel meeting.
- Residents in the street who do not know that their neighbours are believers.
- Workers who do not know that a colleague is a Christian.

This is by no means an exhaustive list, but it may help to direct our thinking and create a desire to establish meaningful contact with the community around us. Is it not time to awaken from the slumber of comfort and ease? The devil has made great progress in his pernicious activity and evil, and sadly, for the most part he finds little or no competition in our gospel activity. The gospel of Christ is still the power of God unto salvation to every one that believes — but it must be propagated. The Word of God is still the Good Seed — but it needs to be sown. We cannot hope to produce a harvest by placing an advert for a gospel meeting in the local paper or by dropping an invitation card through a letter box, and doing nothing more. It is not enough to open the doors of the gospel hall and then wait for the people to come in

of their own accord. We will be long in waiting and slow in harvesting. Genuine love for lost souls will produce a desire and initiate an effort to get the gospel to them.

***The Law will be fulfilled*** - “Love is the fulfilling of the Law,” v10.

***The Content of the Law*** as stated in v9 is not an exhaustive list of its requirements. The apostle is establishing our responsibility to our fellow-citizens by quoting the last five of the Ten Commandments. He specifically enumerates those commandments that regulate my dealings with others. The first five commandments of the Ten, have already been covered in the apostle's ministry in ch.12 — our dealings with God.

***The Obligations of the Law*** are embraced in the other five commandments not specifically stated here, but included under the general over-riding requirement. “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” As thyself — what a measure! This eliminates any selfishness, either hidden or manifest. To love in such a manner and measure will prevent any hypocrisy or half heartedness. How do we measure up to the standard?

***The Fulfilment of the Law*** is very practical, it “worketh no ill to his neighbour.” There is a double-sided thrust; as far as my fellow-citizens are concerned I will not harm them in any way — “worketh no ill.” As far as the Law is concerned, by so treating my neighbour I have given the Law the full measure of its demand and by this my responsibility towards God and man are both met. I can never fully or completely pay the debt I owe others but by the presence of love and the absence of harm, I can meet the full demands of the Law in this matter.

—to be continued (D.V.)

## MY CONVERSION AND CALL (67)

*by Clark Logan (Botswana)*

### SAVED AND CALLED WHEN YOUNG

The memory of the night I was saved as a little boy remains fresh and vivid even now, some forty years later. For some time before I had been greatly concerned about my soul, knowing I was not ready for Heaven and knowing that, if the Lord returned, my parents would be taken and I would be left behind. I feared being lost forever. Such thoughts were very real and troubled me, making me long for salvation and peace.

Our family had not long moved to Dundonald, a developing suburb of Belfast, and one Friday evening my father took me along to Dundonald Gospel Hall where Mr. Sammy Thompson and Mr. Reggie Jordan were conducting special meetings. That night I decided I must have the matter settled and on the way out of the meeting, I told Mr. Thompson that I wanted to be saved. I recall us going back into the small wooden hall where he prayed with me, mentioning the death of the Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross. When he had finished praying he asked me did I know

that Christ had died on the cross for sinners? I replied that I had learnt this in Sunday School. Then he asked me did I understand that He had died for me? I had never before thought of it in such a personal way but that night, in simplicity, I grasped the wonderful truth : “I am a guilty sinner, but Jesus died for me.” So began for me a new life in Christ on the 11th March, 1960.

On returning home, I ran ahead to tell my mother when she came to the door. There was great rejoicing in our home and my own heart was full to overflowing. On the Monday morning, first thing, I marched up to my schoolteacher and she was the next to be told but I recall only a look of incredulity on her part. I suppose she must have been totally perplexed and yet it was so real to me and worth telling others about.

From the time I was saved I wanted to serve the Lord as a missionary doctor. I still cannot tell how I came to have such aspirations. There was no one medical in our family; I do not recall being strongly influenced by reading about Livingstone or anyone like him; I do not remember my parents ever suggesting such a course to me. Still, this boyish ambition stayed with me and in the following years the desire deepened and matured and became a settled conviction. I eagerly read missionary biographies and attended missionary report meetings. Easter conference time in Belfast was always special and I was often stirred when others told of the triumph of the Gospel in Africa and elsewhere.

This conviction as to the way ahead was so firmly in my mind that, when at school I had to choose between Arts and Sciences at the age of thirteen, I remember praying earnestly about it before selecting the Sciences. This was the necessary preparation for medical studies but my problem was that by inclination and ability I was much more suited to the Arts subjects. And yet God made His will clear . I mention this just to make the point that I believe God is just as interested in the decisions that may perplex a schoolboy, as He is in the choices facing those who are older. He is the God of the young Samuels as much as the God of the adult Pauls. He still calls the young today and often it is early in life that the most telling and important decisions are made.

Our family association with the believers at Dundonald deepened and I was baptised and received into fellowship at the age of fourteen. A few months later a dear brother invited me to accompany him to a Gospel meeting and give my testimony. It was the first of many subsequent occasions and, looking back, I marvel at his patience. There were others too who took an interest in me and my missionary training was beginning in earnest. I think that there is no better place for missionary training than the local assembly. There was tract distribution, open-air preaching, children’s meetings and Sunday School classes in which young men could help. There were often missionary report meetings too so that we were encouraged to think of God in a wider context. The assembly at Dundonald became my Bible school and I began to appreciate in increasing measure the simplicity, liberty and beauty of God’s pattern for the local church.

My years at university were very happy ones and I enjoyed the hard work. There were about twenty Christians in my medical year and we would often sit until late at night, discussing differences of opinion. We rarely argued but there were the

inevitable topics which would surface; christening of infants, church government, the ministry of women, the sign gifts. The things I had learnt were challenged and tested but they were not found wanting. For most of those six years I lived at home or near Belfast and this meant I could continue to attend the assembly meetings in Dundonald as before and I had a stable spiritual home. Some of the students in our year found Christ and went on to prove the reality of conversion. A number of us spent the summer of 1974 overseas and I had my first taste of Africa. I wanted to return but had no particular country in mind.

By this time I was able to share my missionary interest with a young nurse, Hazel Mc Knight. It was at a missionary class that we met and soon after we started to keep company, I learned that Hazel had been saved as a young girl of twelve in Bloomfield Gospel Hall. It was also Mr. Sammy Thompson who was instrumental in pointing her to Christ. A year later, she had a definite sense of God's call when, at the Windsor Missionary Conference, Mr. Tom Bentley spoke on Romans 12:1.

A little prayer leaflet was used of God to focus my attention on assembly missionary work in Botswana. I was interested to learn that the work was new, having begun in 1969, and there was only one Scottish couple there. I began to write to Jim and Irene Legge in Botswana and this link developed into frequent correspondence over four years. In 1979 we met them when they visited Ireland on furlough and our interest deepened and became more specific. As husband and wife Hazel and I visited Botswana in 1980 and saw for ourselves the great spiritual need all around. We both knew that God was calling us to that barren desert land and so we began to prepare.

We made our exercise known to the elders in Dundonald and we were greatly encouraged by the way they answered us. They told us that they were not surprised at the development of our exercise for they had long anticipated it and they were wholeheartedly behind us. I completed postgraduate training in Obstetrics and Gynaecology and Tropical Medicine and resigned from the National Health Service in 1981. On the 4th February, 1982, we left Belfast for Botswana with the commendation of the Dundonald Assembly. Our parents and the believers of Bloomfield Assembly too were most supportive as we took this step and Jim and Irene had assured us of a warm welcome to the field.

Why have we come to Botswana? God saved and called us both young in life and He sent us here. What have we come to do? We have come to make known the glorious Gospel of Christ and teach the Word of God. Our only desire is that souls will be saved and gathered to the Lord's name in loving and faithful testimony. To this work we devote our time and energy and we pray that in it our Lord will be truly glorified.

We heard Him call,  
    'Come, follow' - that was all,  
Our gold grew dim,  
    Our hearts went after Him;  
    We rose and followed - that was all,  
Who would not follow  
    If they heard Him call?

# Selected Poems

by Roy Marshall (Falkirk)

## HIS CALL

*I heard His call.*

*It pierced the dark as in the clay I lay;*

*It penetrated deep with promises of day;*

*It entered my poor, sinful heart, and opened up the way  
That led to Him.*

*I heard his call.*

*Not from the throne of heav'nly glory bright;*

*Nor yet from scenes of Hermon's snowy height;*

*But from the Cross, upraised in Calvary's night.  
It led to Him.*

*I heard His call.*

*It seemed to draw me out to be with Him;*

*Not linked with pomp, or earthly pow'r or fame,*

*But - Best of all - to gather round His Name  
And be with Him.*

*I'll hear His call.*

*The noise of earth will not its accent drown;*

*Its heav'nly note shall chase away death's frown,*

*And suff'ring saints shall rise to don the crown  
And be with Him.*

—∞()∞—

## LOVE'S RESPONSE

*Lord, Thou hast been before*

*To Bethany; and more*

*And more my heart's been won*

*As at Thy feet I've sat; yet none*

*Has ever giv'n Thy heart its pleasure:*

*Never yielded up its treasure.*

*Blessings great we have received:*

*Comfort to the home bereaved:*

*Teaching such as ne'er was known,*

*Love and care to us thou'st shown,*

*Yet - and yet - it all must end*

*as on to Salem Thou must wend*

*Thy way, to meet and conquer death,*

*And show Thy grace 'til Thy last breath.*

*But now has come at last the day*

*When I must all thy care repay.*

*I cannot wait one moment more*

*To give what from my heart must pour*

*In overflowing love to Thee,*

*In answer to Thy love to me.*

*Broken the fragile box,*

*E'en though the traitor mocks;*

*Laden with nard her locks,*

*Wiping His feet.*

*Earning the Saviour's praise*

*(Him now - the poor always!)*

*Broadcast in future days:*

*Example sweet.*

# Good Tidings from Heaven

## THE END

How stark those words appear, like a great barrier beyond which you cannot go — you have read the final chapter of the story, you have seen the last act of the play, you have heard the last notes of the symphony and there is nothing to follow. Some even speak of the end of the world as if some great cataclysmic day will suddenly arrive and a holocaust on an unprecedented scale will mean a total annihilation of the human race and the world will explode in fragments. The Scriptures teach nothing of this, but they emphatically alert us to the fact that everything in this world is transient and passing and life itself is but “a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away,” Jms.4.14. While I am living, I am dying and life will undoubtedly end.

Dear reader, have you made preparations for that solemn day that will surely arrive, when life on earth will end? For the vast majority that moment comes suddenly, unwelcome, unplanned and unexpected. For others it comes slowly and though they labour to cling on to life, eventually the struggle is over, the brittle thread of life is snapped and life ends. Friends, be not deceived, life will end in spite of advances in medicine, in spite of miracle cures and in spite of break-throughs in the treatment of certain diseases.

“Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble,” Job.14.1.

“In Adam all die,” 1Cor.15.22.

“When a few years are come, then I shall go the way whence I shall not return,” Job.16.22.

“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.

But why be so pensive, you may ask, if death is the sad legacy bequeathed to all humanity without exception? For this very reason that there is a hereafter - “It is appointed unto men, once to die, **but after this the judgment,**” Heb.9.27. Death will not mean the end of me, for my soul cannot die and conscious existence continues in eternity. Then I will pass into a realm where the end will never come - ceaseless, changeless ages and if not saved, for me it will be the death that never dies, the fire that never shall be quenched, the torment that never will be abated, the pain that never will be alleviated, the thirst that never will be slaked.

In consideration of these inevitable realities, let me tell you of One who said, “The things concerning Me have an end,” Lk.22.37. He was not susceptible to disease, death and decay for He was sinless but of His own volition He was prepared to lay down His life that sinners might live eternally. On the mount of transfiguration, Moses and Elias met with Him and together they “spake of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem,” Lk.9.31. He would be in complete control and would do all that His Father demanded for our salvation. Upon that Cross He bore the full penalty of sin and paid the awesome debt our sins had augmented, that we, through personal faith in Him, might have hope for eternity and know assuredly that when we leave the body, we will be “at home with the Lord,” 1Cor.5.8.

Thank God, the agonies of Christ came to an end, the work that is fully sufficient to save a world from Hell, was accomplished and nothing remains for you, but to trust Him, believe His Word and accept that what He did on your behalf, is enough for eternity.

Dear reader, I beg of you to ponder these matters seriously and wisely and while you may, trust Him who said upon the Cross, “It is finished,” Jn.19.30.