

# THE BOOK OF BOOKS

An Introduction to the Literature of the English Bible

Bible Studies Conducted by Peter McIntyre in  
Clogher Valley Free Presbyterian Church

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## DEDICATION

To the Memory of William Tyndale, martyred in pursuit of his vision for the English speaking peoples to possess the Word of God.

"I perceived how that it was impossible to establish the lay people in any truth except the Scripture were plainly laid before their eyes in their mother tongue." (William Tyndale)

"The Lord gave the word: great was the company  
of those that published it."  
(Psalm 68:11)

## Foreword

By Dr Alan Cairns

The Bible studies in this book fall under the general heading of Introduction. I think that for many seminary students Introduction is the least exciting part of their Bible course. Compared with the actual exegesis of the inspired text, it often seems boring--partly because it involves dealing with the sceptical ideas of liberal (usually unbelieving) scholars. Thus, in lecturing I found this in many ways the most demanding part of the Bible course, just trying to keep restless (or sleepy!) students on board. That makes Rev. Peter McIntyre's accomplishment in holding the attention and interest of a local congregation (many of whom must have come to the meetings after long hours of arduous labour) over the long time it took to cover all the books of the Bible an admirable achievement. I congratulate him and trust the Lord will richly reward his efforts. There is much here to instruct and edify any careful reader and I commend it as a welcome attempt to engage God's people in coming to grips with the Bible as a whole instead of being content with ill-founded ideas formed from isolated scraps of texts--which are all too often divorced from their context.

If I were to read and profit from only those writers with whom I entirely agree, my book list would be very small. So while there is much in Mr. McIntyre's work with which I agree, there are areas--for example, views of eschatology and of the possibility of inspired or uninspired (here theorists differ) apostolic epistles to New Testament churches which have been lost--in which I would argue for other conclusions. These are questions on which we have had a friendly exchange of views. As a result, in some cases we have perhaps come to a closer mutual understanding; in others, we have each become surer of his position! Differences in matters that are not fundamental to the faith should not lessen mutual respect and cooperation between brethren equally committed to the furtherance of the gospel and to the equipping of God's people for that task--which is what this book aims to do.

I am always delighted to see ministers set about the task of leading their people into deeper study of God's infallible word. That is the real value of this book. It invites God's people to take their Bible seriously and to give their best efforts to study it.

There is no other book like the Bible. I can think of no better commendation of it than what appeared many years ago in a Canadian paper in an article entitled, "What the Bible Is":

"This Book contains the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers. Its doctrines are holy, its precepts are binding, its histories are true, and its decisions are immutable. Read it to be wise, believe it to be safe, and practise it to be holy. It contains light to direct you, food to support you, and comfort to cheer you. It is the traveller's map, the pilgrim's staff, the pilot's compass, the soldier's sword, and the Christian's charter. Here is paradise restored, heaven opened, and the gates of hell are disclosed. Christ is its grand subject, our good is its design, and the glory of God its end. It should fill the memory, rule the heart, and guide the feet. Read it slowly, frequently, prayerfully. It is a mine of wealth, a paradise of glory, and a river of pleasure. It is given in life, will be opened at the judgment, and be remembered forever. It involves the highest responsibility, will reward the greatest labour, and condemn all who trifle with its sacred contents."

Mr. McIntyre's work does not trifle with Scripture and if it leads believers to read and study the inspired Book it will repay all the effort, he put into producing it. I cheerfully commend it.

## Preface

This book is the product of many years of study and is one which I regard as a team effort on the part of Clogher Valley Free Presbyterian Church, where I minister. When I commenced these studies, producing notes for those who attend our weekly Bible Study and Prayer Meetings, two of our elders suggested that we should consider publishing the material for the benefit of the congregation. Out of that suggestion, the project has developed into the publication that you have in your hands.

I wish to thank the session and committee of Clogher Valley Free Presbyterian Church for supporting this publication, Mr Ian McClung who formatted the material, Mrs Rhonda McIlwrath for proof reading and editing the text and Mr Joe Costley for overseeing the printing of the material. Dr Alan Cairns provided me with a most helpful analysis. His generous encouragements and positive criticisms helped me rethink and make improvements, even though he and I did not agree on every detail. The Foreword he has prepared is a welcome endorsement of the work. I also thank my wife Elizabeth for all her love, patience and encouragement in the Christian ministry. Above all I place on record my thanks to Almighty God for saving me and calling me to serve in His kingdom as a minister of the Gospel, the greatest privilege for any mortal.

The aim of this publication is the same purpose for which I intended the studies to accomplish when presenting them initially to my congregation in Clogher Valley. They can be summarised as follows:

1: As an aid to God's people when reading and studying the Scriptures. My Principal in the Whitefield College and Theological Hall, Dr John Douglas, whom I was privileged to study under as my Exegesis, Hermeneutics and Hebrew Professor, has always emphasised that every Christian ought to be a Bible student. This volume is intended to assist Christians by supplying a little of the background and purpose of each book when studying the Scriptures.

2: Throughout this work I have emphasised the doctrine of Divine Inspiration and the inerrancy of Scripture as the living word of the living God.

3: I have sought throughout this book to show Christ, as the heart of Scripture, this being the Saviour's approach as He expounded the Old Testament to the disciples on the road to Emmaus.

4: As these studies were prepared as a pastor, the purpose was designed with the pastoral needs of God's people in mind. Therefore, throughout this volume there is application, which I naturally expanded upon when delivering the messages.

It is impossible when preparing a work of this nature to avoid difficult matters where I may have opinions which differ with some of my brethren in the ministry. It has never been my practice when working through a series of studies to avoid 'the thorny issues'. In so doing, however, I have been at pains to remain faithful to the inerrancy of Scripture and have not departed from views that are expressed within the ranks of reformed commentators. Yet even within these parameters, and where we do not depart from the fundamental points of theology there are areas where we may differ; we do so graciously.

This is a work with many limitations, considering myself to be the least of all God's servants. I appreciate the opportunity that God has given me in the preparation of this volume, and I pray that the material will be helpful in encouraging you, the reader, to make progress for God...that together we might grow in grace.

*May 2019*

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# Part 1

## The Compiling of the Bible

2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 3:16-17

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

Introduction is a branch of Bible study, where the various books of the Old and New Testaments are not only analysed but placed in their true historical and cultural context.

This first study introduces the Bible as one whole book. What is the Bible? What processes did the Bible undergo before it became the volume that we possess today? These are more than academic questions because they involve the authenticity of the Scriptures as God's Word:

“The Bible being to us what it is, it is of the highest importance that we should be satisfied of the authenticity of the title-deeds of our faith; that we should be able to accept them, not with a blind and unintelligent belief, but with a clear understanding of the manner in which the several books came into existence, and of the means by which they have been handed down to us.”

Sir Frederick Kenyon (Director and Chief Librarian of the British Museum, 1909-1930) “The Story of the Bible”.

### The Bible Defined

The word Bible stems from the Latin *Biblia* meaning “the books”.

While this is not inaccurate, it would be more precise to call the Bible by the singular, The Book (Psalm 40:7, Hebrews 10:7).

In 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 3:16-17, Paul identifies the Bible by two names; “the holy scriptures” and “all scripture”. While these words appear similar they are actually quite distinct in the Greek original. “The holy scriptures” is a translation of *hieros gramma* which literally means “sacred writings”. All scripture, on the other hand, is constructed very differently; *pas graphe*. Both Marvin Vincent “Word Studies in the New Testament” and W.E. Vine “Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words”, show that *graphe* is often used of the individual passages of a book as opposed to the entire volume. What is interesting, however, is that *gramma* is often employed as the word meaning “letter”; (Galatians 6:11). Therefore Paul may well have been stating that all the holy letters of the Bible were known by Timothy and that all the passages of the sacred writings were inspired. William Hendriksen “The New Testament Commentary”, however, suggests that the “sacred writings” were all the letters of the Old Testament whereas “all scripture” included the Old Testament plus the body of New Testament inspiration. What is notable here is that Paul was emphasising the importance of every letter, every passage as well as every book within the volume of Scripture.

The word Scripture itself is a most important term defining what the Bible is. It is derived from the Latin and means “the writings”. There are numerous examples from within the Bible which indicate that it was always emphasised as the book which God wrote (Hosea 8:12, Exodus 32:16, 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 17:37). Our Lord constantly rebuffed Satan with the words “It is written”. Also the Bible is referred to as being “The Word of God”. This marks it out as being a powerful book and quite distinct from the words which man records (Ephesians 6:17, Hebrews 4:12).

### **The Bible Preceded**

What would the world be like if we did not have a Bible? For the

Christian this is a solemn question, yet there was no Bible in any form until the time of Moses who was born in 1500 BC approximately. Therefore, for an astonishing two thousand five hundred years there were no sacred oracles. Did that mean the Lord's people had no revelation during that period? Evidently not, because throughout those years some of the godliest people in all history lived and worked; Abel, Seth, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. All of these people benefitted from visions and dreams where God revealed himself. In the absence of an inspired history there was an oral tradition where the details of their past were passed from generation to generation, until the days of Moses when this was formulated into the inspired record of Genesis.

### **The Bible Incribed**

God employed approximately forty authors in the writing of the scriptures. Together they laboured for more than one thousand five hundred years until their record was completed with the "Amen" of John's Apocalypse. These authors were diverse in education and experience yet their work has a unity which depicts Christ from beginning to end, "the Alpha and the Omega" (Revelation 1:8). We observe Christ in Abel's simple offering, in the various sacrifices of the Levitical economy, in beautiful character types, in the glorious messianic prophecies in the Psalms and Isaiah, in the facts of His life in the Gospel, in the high doctrine of Paul and in the foretelling of the second advent. He is the prime subject without whom there would be no Bible. This blessed theme of redemption by Christ highlights the divine nature of the Book:

"You see, then, it was sometimes the artless and sublime simplicity of John; sometimes the impassioned elliptical, rousing, and logical energy of Paul, sometimes the fervour and solemnity of Peter; it was Isaiah's magnificent and David's lyrical, poetry, it was the simple and majestic narratives of Moses, or the sententious and royal wisdom of Solomon - yes it was all this; it was Peter, it was Isaiah, it was Matthew, it was John, it was Moses; yet it was God." Dr L Gausson, "Theopneustia, The Plenary Inspiration of The Holy

Scriptures”.

The Scriptures were originally written on a variety of materials consistent with the learning of the age. We know for example that Moses would have inscribed his works on earthen clay, which was the material employed by the ancient Egyptians. Long before Christ, however, writing was inscribed onto papyrus scrolls. The papyrus was made from the leaf of a delicate plant grown in Egypt. Each scroll was no longer than forty feet, which would have corresponded to one Gospel. There have been discoveries of manuscripts, however, showing that the skill was developed whereby these papyrus leaves could be bound into a volume as opposed to a scroll. By the second century, vellum, which was leather material, had superseded the papyrus and the codex (the modern book form) had become the norm.

The original writings by the pen-men of scripture are known as the autographs. They do not exist today as they have passed away into the dust of time. By virtue of a process of copying the words of the autographs were passed on from generation to generation. What is particularly comforting is that no other ancient book, apart from the Bible, has the multitude of manuscripts corroborating its text. It was a book used, accepted, loved, studied and copied with the greatest care. It was a book written by God and preserved by Him.

### **The Bible Completed**

The completed Bible is divided into two major sections, The Old and The New Testaments. The word testament refers to a covenant which is an agreement. In order to redeem man, God entered into a covenant with Christ. The Bible is the unfolding of this covenant which secured redemption for fallen man. The Old Testament contains details of the Law which was the covenant God made with Israel. Israel, and indeed all humanity, has failed to keep this covenant which illustrates the necessity of a Covenant of Grace rather than of Works (Galatians 3:23-24).

A word key to our understanding of the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments is “canon”. The word means a rule or a line. It was a matter of great concern for the ancient Jew, and subsequently for the early Church, that they identified those writings which were written according to the special rule, divine inspiration. Ultimately we believe that the Jews and the Church were guided by the Holy Spirit to discern which writings were canonical (inspired) and which were non-canonical (not inspired). The product of their deliberations is the sixty-six books in our English Bible.

The Old Testament was completed four hundred years before Christ when Malachi wrote his prophecy. The Jews in an authoritative manner, closed the Old Testament canon about one hundred years before Christ's birth at a Council just south of modern Tel Aviv. They did not consider the Apocrypha to be inspired.

There is abundant historical evidence that most of the writings in the New Testament were written before 70AD (with the exception of Revelation and perhaps the Epistles of John), which corresponds with the generation of the apostles of our Lord. It was some time, however, before they were gathered together into one volume. From the writings of Clement, Bishop of Rome, we know that this process was beginning before the close of the first century. There is considerable evidence that in the second and third centuries all of the writings in the New Testament were collected and considered as inspired. Miraculously, these works were preserved despite the concentrated efforts of successive Roman emperors to kill Christians and burn their sacred books. By the fourth century Church leaders such as Jerome, Augustine and Athanasius were citing the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. There were, however, some disputed books; Hebrews, James, Peter's letters and one of John's epistles. It was at the Eighth Council of Carthage, North Africa, in 397 AD that a decision was formally taken ratifying the New Testament we possess today. There were three simple tests that were used to determine whether a book was inspired or not;

(1) The writing had to be written by an apostle or under the influence of an apostle; (2) The writing had to be consistent with the teaching of the apostles; (3) The writing had to be used by Christians from the first century.

### **The Bible Translated**

An introduction to the Bible would not be complete without a look at the history of translation. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew with the exception of a small number of passages which were penned in Aramaic. As a consequence of the conquests of Alexander the Great (died in 323BC), the world was given a unified language, Koine or Common Greek. Many Jews could no longer speak or read Hebrew. The time had come for the first Bible translation. Seventy-two scholars working in Alexandria, Egypt, produced a Greek version of the Old Testament known as the Septuagint. This was the translation our Lord quoted from and read and it was the version which the apostles quoted as they wrote the books of the New Testament. In the providence of God, the way was prepared for the New Testament age.

By the fourth century the same problem arose again, because by this stage Latin had superseded Greek as the language of the empire. While there were some Latin translations of the Old and New Testaments most were unreliable. It was a scholar called Jerome, commissioned by the Bishop of Rome, who undertook the mammoth task of translation. The product of Jerome's work was the Latin Vulgate. While this work became a blessing to many, it subsequently became a curse. As the Church plunged into the Dark Ages with the ascendancy of the Papacy, Jerome's Vulgate became the only version countenanced. As Latin gradually became an extinct language the people of Europe were plunged into darkness as they became a people without a Bible. To translate the Scriptures into the vernacular was deemed a crime punishable by death.

Nevertheless, in England, there was a desire to translate the Scriptures into the Anglo Saxon. Two of the most famous of these translators were The Venerable Bede (674-735) and King Alfred

(849-899). The first English translation of the Scriptures was completed by John Wycliffe in 1382. Using Jerome's Latin Vulgate as his manuscript he succeeded, amid much opposition, and earned himself the title "The Morning Star of the Reformation".

Into this era of Bible translation, came the invention of the printing press, pioneered by a German called Johann Gutenberg. The Bible was a major source of his business as he printed one hundred and eighty copies on paper. Throughout Europe printing presses sprang up; the age of ignorance was nearing an end.

Before the Bible could be translated into the language of the people, one more piece of jigsaw had to be completed; a printed edition of the Greek New Testament where all the manuscripts would be compiled into one volume. Two scholars worked on this task; Erasmus (1516) and Stephanus (1550).

With all the necessary tools now at their disposal, the Reformers considered it their life's work to give their people the Bible. Luther led the way with his German translation. Foremost among the English translators was William Tyndale who was martyred for his work. Throughout the sixteenth century the Bible passed through a number of translations. These were all based on the work of Tyndale; Matthew's Bible's (1537), Coverdale's Bible (1539), (also known as the Great or the Chained Bible) and the Geneva Bible (1557). The crowning achievement of this golden period of scholarship, however, was the King James Version.

## Part 2

### The Old Testament

2 Peter 1:16 - 21

“For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount. We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”

This study will focus upon the first and largest section of the Bible; The Old Testament.

#### The Origination of the Old Testament

The passage in question not only verifies the inspiration of the whole Bible, but focuses particularly upon prophecy of “old time”, the Old Testament. Therefore, the Hebrew Scriptures are a prophecy more sure and more glorious than the spectacle witnessed by Peter when Christ was transfigured. Rome has been guilty of misinterpreting the notable words of v20. They have misused the phrase “private interpretation”. The sacred writings were not the product of man's authorship; the writers were penmen who recorded what the impulse of the Holy Ghost dictated to them. Therefore they did not fully understand everything they

wrote. They actually studied their own writings with a view to comprehending what the Spirit had given to them.

### **The Composition of the Old Testament**

The canon of the Old Testament consists of the thirty-nine books which are found in the English Bible. The Ancient Jews, however, divided their Scriptures into three sub-sections; the Law; the Prophets, and the Writings. This division of the Old Testament is recognised by Christ who spoke of the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms (Luke 24:44). While he did not refer to the third section as the Writings, he did refer to it as the Psalms, most probably because this was the largest book. It is thought that The Writings may have been known by the designation Psalms. Therefore this reference does not merely show that our Lord assented to the three sections but that he recognised a volume containing the same Hebrew Scriptures that we recognise today. By virtue of this three-fold distinction the Hebrew Scriptures were not assembled in the order that we recognise today. The following is the order of the ancient Jewish Scriptures:

#### **The Law**

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy

#### **The Prophets**

The Former Prophets - Joshua, Judges, The Books of Samuel and the Books of Kings.

The Latter Prophets - Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, The Twelve - Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

#### **The Writings or The Hagiographa**

The Poetical Books - The Psalms, Proverbs, Job

The Megilloth - The Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther.

Historical Books - Daniel, Ezra and Nehemiah, The Books of Chronicles.

The following points should be considered in relation to the differences between the order in our English and that of the Hebrew Scriptures:

1. The records of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings are chiefly a testimony to the prophets who brought God's Word to the people throughout history.
2. The Minor Prophets are known by the designation "The Twelve" which in no way diminishes their authority.
3. Daniel is perceived as an historical book, although he too is a prophet.
4. Ezra and Nehemiah were one book.

The arrangement of the books is not inspired. In this study we follow the order in our English Bible but we must be aware that the old Jewish divisions can assist us in our understanding of the Old Testament.

### **The Preservation of the Old Testament**

The Old Testament was written in Hebrew, with the exception of Daniel 2:4-7, 28, Ezra 4:8-6, 18, 7:12-26, Jeremiah 10:11 and one word in Genesis 31:47, which were written in Aramaic. In the absence of modern equipment, the Hebrew Scriptures were preserved through the work of scribes. It is clear that the Jews took their duty seriously. Paul described the Jew as being entrusted with the "oracles of God." From the earliest days the scribes studiously copied God's Word. Tradition has it, however, that after the exile Ezra gathered all the copies of the Scripture that had been preserved. Subsequently the scribe became so much more important. In fact the act of copying belonged to the priest.

His spiritual duty to the people involved the preservation of the oracle.

The following procedures were adopted by the scribes, which highlights their deep reverence for the Word of God:

1. Clean animal skins were used to write on and bind the manuscripts.
2. Each column contained between forty-eight and sixty lines.
3. The ink was black, made from a special recipe.
4. Each word was pronounced as it was recorded.
5. The pen was wiped and the body was washed before “Jehovah” was recorded.
6. The work was reviewed within thirty days. If three pages required correction the entire manuscript was redone.
7. Letters, words and paragraphs were counted. If any letters touched each other the document was invalid.
8. The documents were stored in sacred places.
9. Old and worn documents were ceremonially buried. No manuscript containing God's Word could be destroyed.

We ought to have a high regard for these scribes who did such an invaluable service which we profit from immeasurably today:

“As Augustine said long ago, these Jewish scribes were the librarians of the Christian Church. In the providence of God they took care of the Hebrew Old Testament Scriptures until at length the time was ripe for Christians to make general use of them.” Edward F. Hills, “The King James Version Defended”.

The Hebrew text, upon which all versions of the English Bible is based, is known as the Masoretic (Traditional) Text. The Masoretes, (6<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries AD), were scribes who took extraordinary care in preserving the Hebrew text. In particular, they preserved the pronunciation of the words. The Hebrew Alphabet is a language without vowels so they introduced a system of vowels in the form

of points below and above the line. In the previous centuries the vowel sounds were memorised. In accordance with their reverence for God's Word these vowel points were placed above and below the line so as not to interfere with the divine revelation.

Christ makes reference to the Hebrew language in connection with the manner in which God preserves His Word (Matthew 5:18). He clearly attaches importance to the *jot*, the smallest Hebrew letter, and the *tittle*, the smallest stroke in the language (like the dot on the i).

### The Subversion of the Old Testament

One of the characteristics of the Protestant Reformation was the interest that the Reformers had in studying the Hebrew Text. Their attitude to the Bible is summed up in Chapter 1 Section 8 of the Westminster Confession of Faith; "The Old Testament in Hebrew...and the New Testament in Greek..., being immediately inspired by God, and by his singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentical..."

Soon after the Reformation period, however, Satan motivated scholars to question the authenticity of the Hebrew text. As a result The Old Testament was brought into what Edward Young called "The Dark Night of Criticism." Richard Simon (1685), a Roman Catholic priest, led the charge by asserting that Moses could not have written the Pentateuch in its present form. Subsequent writings in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries treated the Old Testament as a work of human origin. This so-called modern thought ultimately found expression in the theories named after German scholars known as the Graf-Kuenen-Wellhausen School. This school was the "antithesis to the historic Christian religion" (Edward Young, "An Introduction to the Old Testament"). It denied that the Jews were chosen by God, and that the patriarchs were historical figures. It dismembered the Bible by asserting that the Pentateuch was a patchwork of documents penned by unknown authors and by questioning the

authenticity of the Psalms of David and the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah. This poisonous school of thought found its way into many theological colleges and was responsible for the sharp descent into the liberalism which characterised Protestant denominations in the twentieth century. It was the secret acceptance of this theory by many Baptist pastors in England, in the late nineteenth century, that caused CH Spurgeon to leave the Baptist Union. This tragic incident broke Spurgeon's heart and hastened his early death.

### **The Verification of the Old Testament**

One of the greatest gifts of God to the Christian church in this modern age was Robert Dick Wilson, M.A. Ph.D, Princetown, who died in 1930. Called the "Incomparable Wilson" by David Ottis Fuller in "Which Bible", he made a prayerful decision to devote forty-five years of his life to the study of the Old Testament. He resolved, as a student in Heidelberg, Germany, to divide this period into three sets of fifteen years. In his own words he describes the plan:

"The first fifteen years I would devote to the study of all the languages necessary. For the second fifteen I was going to devote myself to the study of the text of the Old Testament; and reserved the last fifteen for the work of writing the results of my investigations, so as to give them to the world. And the Lord has enabled me to carry out this plan almost to the year."

He did this because many students travelled to Germany only to be infected by rationalistic arguments, which undermined the Word of God. He was determined not to accept the words of men but to examine the facts for himself so that he could be equipped for the defence of the truth of God's Word. This "genius of geniuses" ("Which Bible") during his numerous studies spent years researching 10,000 documents to prove that Dr Driver of Oxford was in error in his attempts to undermine the book of Daniel. As a genuine expert in his field who mastered 45 ancient languages and

dialects he testified:

“I can affirm that there is not a page of the Old Testament concerning which we need have any doubt. We can be absolutely certain that substantially we have the text of the Old Testament that Christ and the Apostles had, and which was in existence from the beginning.”

While the discoveries of Professor Wilson, are fascinating and useful, we need go no further than the Scriptures themselves to verify the Old Testament, the most reliable witness to its veracity being our Saviour. The Lord makes reference to the Law originating with Moses on 25-30 occasions. He is also said to spring from the lineage of Abraham and David. He also either quotes David or mentions his name on a dozen occasions. Therefore, to deny Moses, the patriarchs and David is to deny Christ. It is to claim that He was imperfect, that He was not God's Son, that He did not die an atoning death and that He neither rose again nor ascended. If we do not believe the Old Testament we cannot therefore, by logic, believe the New Testament (Luke 16:31, John 1:17). Therefore, we can appreciate why such liberal trends in scholarship led to an erosion of faithful gospel preaching in Protestant churches.

“The “Incomparable Wilson” would not have disagreed with this appeal to Christ as the final arbiter of truth. Rev Henry W. Coray quotes a testimony of one of Professor Wilson's students who recorded a stirring conclusion to a lecture on the complete trustworthiness of Scripture:

“Young men, there are many mysteries in this life I do not pretend to understand, many things hard to explain, But I can tell you this morning with the fullest assurance that, ‘Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so.’” David Ottis Fuller, “Which Bible”.

### **The Communication in the Old Testament**

What then is the substance and theme of Old Testament inspiration? Every aspect of the Hebrew Scriptures is a long finger

pointing forward to Christ (Luke 24:27).

1. The history is a record of the nation out of which the Messiah would be born.
2. The prophecies foretell a coming deliverer as they commence with the Proto Evangel (Genesis 3:15). They are especially clear in the Psalms and Isaiah. Many of these prophecies relate to a new day when the Gentiles would be gathered into the family of God.
3. The types of the Old Testament are valuable metaphors of the ministry of the Messiah. These types can be divided under three main headings:
  - a) The men whose lives illustrate the Messiah; Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, David and Daniel.
  - b) The anointed offices of prophet, priest and king, which represent the mediation of Christ on our behalf.
  - c) The various aspects of the ceremonial law which reveal the redemption of fallen man, through blood sacrifices and the intercession of the High Priest. This was the only source of relief available from the justice of God's Law.

## Part 3

### The Pentateuch: The Five Books of Moses

After turning the opening pages of Holy Writ, the first major section of the Old Testament we encounter is the Pentateuch. The five books of Moses rank alongside the Gospels as the two most important sub-sections of the Bible. The Gospels are foundational to the New Testament. The Acts of the Apostles and their Epistles flow out from the life of Christ. In a similar manner, the Pentateuch lays down the material upon which, not only the Old Testament but, the entire Bible is erected. For generations the books of Moses were the only Bible which God's people possessed. Indeed much of the Old Testament contains an exposition of the Pentateuch. Ancient Hebrew history can only be understood in the light of the law. A striking example of this is the great revival in the days of Josiah, which was inspired by a discovery of the ancient writings of Moses, which had been hidden and forgotten (2nd Chronicles 34:14-21). The ministry of the Jewish prophets reminded the people of the terms of the law applying its truth and its warning, often in days of spiritual darkness. The Pentateuch therefore, is fundamental to, and casts a shadow over, the Old Testament.

#### The Title

The Jews called the Pentateuch “The Torah”. The noun stems from the verb “yarah”, meaning to throw or shoot and generally carries the concept of direction. Therefore, the Torah carries words of direction and instruction. This is a most suitable definition of The Law of God. It is truly a lamp for our feet and a light for our path (Psalm 119:105).

The term Pentateuch is derived from two Greek words; “pente”

meaning five and “teuchos” meaning volume. The word literally means “The Five Volumes Book”. The word Pentateuch was coined by early Christian writers and has remained part of the Biblical vocabulary ever since. In reality, however, the word only describes the five books of the law, written by Moses, under inspiration of the Holy Ghost.

In the Old Testament the Pentateuch is known by the following titles:

The Law (Joshua 8:34, Ezra 10:3)

The Book of the Law (Joshua 1:8, 2nd Kings 22:8)

The Book of the Law of Moses (Joshua 23:6, Nehemiah 8:1)

The Book of Moses (Ezra 6:18, 2nd Chronicles 35:12)

The Law of the Lord (Ezra 7:10)

The Law of God (Nehemiah 10:28, 29)

The Book of the Law of God (Joshua 24:26, Nehemiah 8:18)

The Book of the Law of the Lord (2nd Chronicles 17:9)

The Book of the Law of the Lord their God (Nehemiah 9:3)

The Law of Moses the Servant of God (Daniel 9:11)

In the New Testament the Pentateuch is called:

The Book of the Law (Galatians 3:10)

The Book of Moses (Mark 12:26)

The Law (Matthew 12:5, Luke 16:16, John 7:19)

The Law of Moses (Luke 2:22, John 7:23)

The Law of the Lord (Luke 2:23, 24)

Throughout the Bible, therefore, the Pentateuch is said to be a direction, a rule and a power for instruction. It is a legislative

document laying down God's rules for Israel and his moral code for all men. While the Mosaic authorship is emphasised, the Law is God's, making the Holy Spirit the primary author.

### **The Authorship**

While Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy commence with a superscription that Moses was the human instrument, this is not true of Genesis and Exodus. There is no definitive statement crediting Moses with writing the entire Pentateuch. Nevertheless, there is compelling evidence from within the Bible, as a whole, that Moses was indeed the author.

#### **The Testimony of the Pentateuch**

In six different places Moses is referred to as writing the words at the behest of Jehovah; Exodus 17:14, 24:4-8, 34:27, Numbers 33:1-2, Deuteronomy 31:9 and 31:22. The reference in Numbers 33 is especially useful as it shows us that Moses recorded an itinerary of all the wanderings of the children of Israel. This would argue for his authorship of Exodus through to Deuteronomy. What then of Genesis? Genesis is viewed as a book which is preparatory to the rest of the Pentateuch. In Genesis the family out of which the Hebrew people would rise, is traced. The account leads into the story of Joseph and the subsequent emigration of Jacob's family from Canaan to Egypt. Exodus, therefore, opens with the word "Now" which connects the narrative with Genesis. In Exodus 1:2-5, the lists of Jacob's sons correspond to previous lists in Genesis, 35:23-26 and 46:8-27. Clearly the same author was at work. The argument in favour of Moses is decisive.

#### **The Testimony of the Prophets and the Writings**

Joshua is of particular importance as his authority derived directly from Moses. He acted according to the word which God had given Moses (11:15, 23, 14:2 and 21:2). He also referred to the law as being written by Moses (1:7-8, 8:31-34 and 22:9). References to Moses as the author of the Torah are found through Kings,

Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah (1 Kings 2:3, 2nd Chronicles 34:14, Ezra 3:2 and Nehemiah 8:1-8). While the prophets do not refer much to Moses, they do emphasise the Law, and in Israel, there was only one Law, the one which was penned by the great lawgiver. Therefore, wherever the law is mentioned, Moses is in view. Daniel and Malachi, however, do refer explicitly to Moses (Daniel 9:11-13, Malachi 4:4).

### The Testimony of the New Testament

While Christ had many quarrels with the Jewish religious leadership he was at one with them on the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. Frequently he cited the law as springing from Moses, (Matthew 19:8, Mark 1:44, Luke 5:14 and John 5:46, 47). The remainder of the New Testament is in perfect harmony with our Saviour's position (Acts 3:22, Romans 10:5, 1 Corinthians 9:9 and Revelation 15:3).

In summary, a denial of the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, is a denial of the Word of God itself. The evidence pointing to Moses is beyond all dispute.

## The Analysis

### Genesis

The Jews called this book after its first word, "B'reshith" meaning "In the Beginning". Genesis summarises the history of divine revelation from creation to the beginning of the sojourn in Egypt. Although it is a lengthy book by Biblical standards, it is a brief account, remembering that it covers a period of two thousand five hundred years.

### Exodus

This book was known after the opening words, "we'elloh shemoth" meaning "And these are the names". It was the translators of the Septuagint who gave the book a title which suited the central theme, "Exodus". This book narrates the deliverance from Egypt,

the giving of the Moral Law and Theocratic Legislation. Exodus 20 marks the first division in the Pentateuch as Moses moves out of simple narrative into legislation.

### Leviticus

Once again the Jews follow the opening words calling the book “way-yiqra” or “And he called.” The Jews also named it “The Law of the Priests” which prompted the translators of the Septuagint to entitle it “Levitikon”. It was Jerome who gave us the name “Leviticus”. It contains the law and procedures which governed Israel in both their religious and their civil life. These followed on from Exodus and were the laws given on Sinai.

### Numbers

The Jews called this book “benmidhbar” (“In the Wilderness”) or “wayedhabber” (“And he spake”). Both these phrases are found in the opening verse. Once again the translators of the Septuagint coined the title “Numbers” after the numbering and arrangement of the people which occurred in chapters 1-4. The children of Israel were now prepared to journey on from Sinai to the Promised Land. Numbers describes the journey to the tragedy at Kadesh Barnea and on to the plains of Moab, which they reached after forty years of wandering.

### Deuteronomy

This fifth Book of Moses was originally known as “These are the words” (elleh haddevarim or devarim). The Jews also called this book “mishneh hattorah” meaning the “the repetition of the law.” Therefore the translators of the Septuagint gave it the title “This Second Law”. This is the meaning of Deuteronomy, the second giving of the law. It contains the last words of Moses to Israel prior to his death and their conquest of Canaan. Rather than being a second law, it is a re-emphasis of the major pieces of legislation in the previous three books.

## Part 4

### Genesis: The Book of Beginnings

Key Text: Chapter 1:27

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.”

In this book, known by the Jews as “B’reshith” or “In the Beginning” the origin of certain facts fundamental to our understanding of the Bible, the Gospel and life on earth are uncovered. In this book we learn about the origin of the universe, the creation of man, the fall of man and the consequences which we still suffer from and the tracing of the line out of which the Messiah, our Redeemer would arise.

#### The Creation Week

Fundamental to Genesis 1 is the word *bara*, translated “create”. This word means to produce something new (Jeremiah 31:22). It signifies that a creative original force was at work throughout six days bringing the cosmos and our world into being. Genesis 1 leaves us in no doubt as to where this creative energy originates. On thirty-two occasions in this one chapter the word *Elohim* is used for God. This is a plural word and could potentially be understood as meaning gods. Yet the Jewish monotheistic religion never understood it in this fashion, to them *Elohim* was the Supreme Being who was over all. As Christians we can see the Holy Trinity indicated in Genesis 1. John Calvin, when expounding “Let us make man in our image” (v26-27) was clear that the Trinity was here revealed:

“Christians, therefore, properly contend from this testimony, that there exists a plurality of persons within the Godhead.”

Our God, therefore, is one God who subsists in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, all at work in the creation of the universe. This God acts and behaves in a certain way as He creates. He not only creates, but He also speaks, sees, calls, divides, makes, sets and blesses. On six occasions the words “and it was so” are employed as a response to His sovereign word.

He is a being who clearly formed the heavens and the earth for His own pleasure.

The number seven is vital in Genesis 1:1:

- a) Seven times He saw that His work was good.
- b) The week is made up of seven complete days.

Everything points to completion and perfection.

### **The Two-Fold Division**

The remainder of Genesis naturally falls into two halves.

#### **1. From the Creation to the Call of Abraham Chapters 1-11**

This first section is one of tragedy as it unveils the sin of Adam and the rebellion of man against his creator. It is sub-divided between the antediluvian world and the post-diluvian world. Throughout, Moses shows us why God needed to separate a people to himself out of whom would arise the Redeemer.

#### **2. From Abraham to the Settlement in Egypt Chapters 12-50**

The chosen race is identified in Abraham and is guided and protected from small and obscure beginnings. The Patriarchs; Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, provide a suitable outline of this section.

### **The Three Covenants**

### 1. The Covenant with Adam 2:16-17

This is a universal covenant made with the entire human race. Adam as our representative broke this covenant. We all therefore, sinned and fell with him.

### 2. The Covenant with Noah 9:8-17

This is also a universal covenant, which God keeps to this day.

### 3. The Covenant with Abraham 12:1-3

As God called out a people, he made promises to Abraham and to his children. These promises included the coming of Christ and the in-gathering of the Gentiles. This covenant is the first great revelation of the Covenant of Grace in Scripture. Paul taught that the Gentile church is very much part of the benefits of this covenant (Galatians 3:7-9).

## **The Ten Genealogies**

### 1. The Generations of the Heaven and the Earth 2:4

The origin of man and of sin and the formation of an ungodly society.

### 2. The Generations of Adam 5:1

The tracing of the godly line which included Enoch.

### 3. The Generations of Noah 6:9

The calling of Noah to build an Ark, the flood and the salvation of Noah's family.

### 4. The Generations of the Sons of Noah 10:1

The resettlement of the post-diluvian world. The continued rebellion against God at Babel is emphasised.

5. The Generations of Shem 11:10

The Semitic people now come into focus for the first time.

6. The Generations of Terah 11:27

The chosen race would arise out of his family.

7. The Generations of Ishmael 25:12

The origin of the Arab peoples out of whom the Islamic faith and its virulent opposition to the Jews and Christianity would arise.

8. The Generations of Isaac 25:19

The godly line would be divided in his twin boys.

9. The Generations of Esau 36:1

The eldest boy who lost his birth right

10. The Generations of Jacob 37:2

Unlike his fathers, all of Jacob's sons would inherit the birth right. Jacob himself would be known as Israel and so the nation was truly born.

### **The Messiah Revealed**

In the Proto-Evangel 3:15

In Abel's offering 4:4

In Enoch's translation 5:21-24

In Noah's ark 7:1

In Abraham's consecration 22:1-14

In Joseph's life 37-50

In Jacob's prophecy 49:8-12

## Part 5

### Exodus: The Book of Redemption

Key Text: Chapter 12:22-23

And ye shall take a bunch of hyssop, and dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and strike the lintel and the two side posts with the blood that is in the basin; and none of you shall go out at the door of his house until the morning. For the LORD will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the LORD will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you.

The Hebrew title of this book, “And these are the names”, is important in that it supplies the link with Genesis. From the opening lines it is clear that the same family, whose history is recorded in the previous book, are in view. It is thus apparent that Genesis is the introduction to Exodus. The history in the second book of the Pentateuch can only be understood in the light of what we have already been told. What is the importance of these Hebrew people? How did they come to be in Egypt? These are key questions which only Genesis answers. These people were in a covenant relationship with Jehovah on account of the promise made to their father, Abraham. In Genesis we learn several relevant facts in relation to this covenant:

- a) The seed of Abraham was given a defined territory that became known as Canaan (15:18).
- b) They would be strangers in a land which was not theirs for 400

years (15:13).

- c) They would not return to Canaan until the fourth generation when the iniquity of the Amorites was full (15:16).

The Amorites were a nation living in Canaan who were very wicked. God would allow these sinful peoples to populate Canaan until their sin was full and they were ripe for judgement. This provides us with a solemn insight into the character of God. He suffers long with the most wretched people and with nations, generation after generation, and then He intervenes in judgement. By the time Moses was born the iniquity of the Amorites was almost full and the time had come to bring the Hebrew people out of Egypt and into their promised inheritance. The story of their redemption from Egypt is one of the most thrilling historical narratives in the Scriptures. The word redemption is the optimum term. It signifies deliverance. It also sets the scene for the remainder of Old Testament history and lays a foundation for the gospel. Redemption was accomplished on the night when the first Passover Feast was instituted. The slaying of the lamb and pasting its blood on the door posts and lintels of the various homes secured deliverance from Egypt. Since then, throughout Jewish history, the Passover has remained a pivotal feast when redemption is remembered.

Christ was the ultimate Paschal Lamb introduced by John (John 1:29). He died during the Feast of the Passover, shedding his blood for the remission of our sin. He is known as “Christ our Passover” (1 Corinthians 5:7). The Communion Feast, celebrated by the Christian church was not only instituted at the final Passover but it is the continuation of the ancient feast under the terms of the New Covenant. In many respects while Genesis is the true beginning of the universe and of God's ancient people, Exodus is the unfolding of God's remarkable redemptive purpose. The Septuagint has given us the name Exodus which signifies deliverance and which parallels the concept of redemption. It is, indeed, the theme of redemption

which gives us an outline of the entire book.

## Outline

### **1: The Period before Redemption Chapters 1 - 10**

These chapters identify why the children of Israel need to be redeemed. They are subject to the most miserable slavery and degradation which even involved the infanticide of their firstborn sons. Egypt would forever be known as “the house of bondage” (20:2).

#### Chapter 1 The Plight

Their suffering is a type of the bondage to which the sinner is subject.

#### Chapter 2 The Plea

In their suffering they pray but little do they know that prayer will be answered in the form of a Hebrew, reared as an Egyptian prince, but who had escaped to the land of Midian.

#### Chapters 3 - 4 The Prophet

Moses is called and introduced to the people, as is his brother Aaron. They would recognise that here was an answer to prayer. This constitutes the first true revival in Scripture as the people bowed their heads in worship. In Moses, we observe a foreshadowing of Christ. He too is called to be our prophet and deliverer.

#### Chapters 5 - 10 The Plagues

The plagues are a dramatic backdrop to the one of the most intriguing contests in Scripture; Moses and his God versus Pharaoh and his magicians. This is one of the most sustained period of miracles in the word of God and we watch in horror and wonder as the greatest power on earth is humbled by the relentless

bombardment from God's artillery. God would clearly move heaven and earth in order to redeem His people.

## **2: The Plan In Redemption Chapters 11 - 14**

This section brings us to the details of redemption.

### Chapter 11 The Pathos

Pharaoh receives a final warning but he is unmoved because God has hardened his heart, giving us another solemn insight into the divine activity in the lives of the impenitent.

### Chapter 12 The Passover

The details of the Passover feast are given, all of which contain Gospel truth. This section ends with the death of the firstborn followed by the hasty departure from Egypt.

### Chapter 13 The Pillar

Subsequent to their removal from Egypt, God appears as the Pillar of Cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. This theophany not only guides and protects Israel in the wilderness but is a constant reminder and revelation of the glory of God. When the tabernacle is erected this cloud resides in the Holy of Holies (Numbers 9:15) and when Moses enters into the cloud to commune with God, the divine glory is reflected on his face (Exodus 34:34-35).

### Chapter 14 The Path

When the Pharaoh pursues the Hebrew people to the shores of the Red Sea, God performs the greatest miracle in all of Old Testament history in not only parting the great ocean, but destroying the Egyptians in a watery grave. Throughout history, their God is identified as the one who parted the sea (Joshua 2:10, 4:23, 24:6 and Psalm 106:9).

### **3: The Purpose after Redemption Chapters 15 - 40**

The remainder of Exodus is taken up with God guiding Israel through the wilderness to Sinai, the giving of the law and the pattern for the tabernacle. As with salvation in the New Testament age, God has a purpose which He perfects for His redeemed people.

#### **Chapters 15-18 The Provision**

In addition to leading His people, Jehovah also supplies all of their bodily needs at Marah, Elim and at Rephidim where water comes from the rock and where Amalek is defeated. Central to this section is the provision of manna, the small white heavenly loaf which is such a perfect picture of Christ. This section contains two of the Lord's Jehovah titles; "I am the Lord that healeth thee" (15:26) and "Jehovah Nissi "or the Lord is my Banner (17:15).

#### **Chapters 19 - 40 The Pronouncement**

The nation encamps at Mount Sinai and there God reveals His purpose for His redeemed people. He gives the law in its threefold division; moral, civil and ceremonial.

- a) The Moral Law Chapter 19; The Ten Commandments.
- b) The Civil Law Chapters 20-23; Regulations specific to Israel.
- c) The Ceremonial Law Chapters 24-31; The tabernacle and priesthood.
- d) The Forsaken Law Chapters 32-33

Moses returns from the mount to discover the people worshipping the golden calves. One of the themes of the wilderness wanderings is rebellion, most evident in this place. Moses intercedes for his people and Jehovah visits Moses with one of the Old Testament declarations of mercy and grace (33:19).

- e) The Renewed Law Chapter 34

#### f) The Obeyed Law Chapters 35-40

Yielding to the will of God, Israel bring their offerings out of which the tabernacle would be constructed. This tent of witness will be the place of worship for Israel for generations until the temple is erected under Solomon. In every respect, the tabernacle presents Christ from the door, to the brazen altar, to the laver, to the tent right into the innermost sanctuary where the Ark of the Covenant and the Mercy Seat reside.

## Part 6

### Leviticus: The Law of the Priests

Key Text: Chapter 20:7

“Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy: for I am the LORD your God.”

Originally the Jews knew Leviticus by the name, “And he called”, which corresponds to the opening words of the book. The Talmud, a collection of Jewish writings in the early Christian centuries identified this book as being “The Law of the Priests”. The name Leviticus was coined by Jerome in his Latin translation of the Bible, known as The Vulgate.

Leviticus principally deals with the worship of God within the tabernacle. As such, it logically follows Exodus in sequence. There, in the final chapters the people bring their offerings out of which the Tabernacle and its furniture would be constructed. After the completion of the Tabernacle on the first day of the first month (Exodus 40:17) the glory of God came down and filled the tent (Exodus 40:34-38). Then God called Moses to reveal to him the various procedures which would dominate the life of this place. God's words to Moses would continue through into the book of Numbers and would not be completed until the twentieth day of the second month (Numbers 10:11).

The significance of God spending a month relaying the actual contents of Leviticus should not be lost on the reader (compare 1:1 with Numbers 1:1):

“...God took only six days to create, but spent forty days with Moses in directing him to make the tabernacle-because the *work of grace* is more glorious than the *work of creation*. And so we find the law from Sinai occupying three days at

most, while these rules that exhibited the love and grace of God are spread over many weeks”. Andrew Bonar, “Leviticus”.

This view of God's grace, which Leviticus presents, introduces us to the glory of Christ in His sacrificial and intercessory work as our High Priest. For this reason He is the central character in Leviticus with the core theme being atonement. What is revealed in type in Leviticus is unfolded in the New Testament, especially in the Epistle to the Hebrews:

“...the Jews looked upon a veiled Saviour, whom they had never seen unveiled. We, under the New Testament, look upon an unveiled Saviour; and going back to the Old, we can see far better than the Jews could, the features and form of Jesus the Beloved, under that veil” (Robert Murray McCheyne in a letter to a friend as quoted by Andrew Bonar in his commentary on Leviticus).

Ultimately, Leviticus shows us that we are made righteous through the priestly work of Christ and that He is the ground by which we can access the presence of a holy God.

## **Outline**

### **1: Sacrifice Chapters 1-7**

As sacrifices are a central aspect of Leviticus a few remarks are necessary. God had established Israel as a theocracy, which He governed, dwelling among them. Yet this nation was sinful. Sacrifices were the method whereby Israel could access God. These sacrifices served two purposes; they were expiatory and devotional. Each sacrifice had to be clear of all impurity. When offering the beast, the offerer's hand was laid upon the head of the beast taking ownership over the sin that necessitated the death of that creature. Therefore the great themes of sin, sacrifice by blood, substitutionary atonement, confession and repentance are woven into the fabric of Leviticus.

#### **a) Daily Sacrifices**

- Chapter 1     The Burnt Offering    Faith in Christ
- Chapter 2     The Meat Offering    Following after Christ
- Chapter 3     The Peace Offering    Fellowship with Christ

b) Special Sacrifices

Chapter 4-5:13    The Sin Offering                      Forgiveness through Christ

Chapter 5:14-6    The Trespass Offering    Fee demanded by Christ

c) Laws of the Offerings     Chapter 6:8-7

**2: Priesthood Chapters 8-10**

Chapter 8     Aaron's Priesthood Consecrated

Chapter 9     Aaron's Priesthood Confirmed

Chapter 10    Aaron's Priesthood Challenged

**3: Uncleaness Chapters 11-22**

a) Ceremonial Uncleaness: Natural Sin

Chapter 11     Unclean Flesh

Chapter 12     Uncleaness after Childbirth

Chapters 13-14    Uncleaness in Leprosy

Chapter 15     Uncleaness in the Human Body

b) Atonement: Covering of Sin

Chapter 16     Day of Atonement

Chapter 17     Sacrificial Procedures

c) Moral Uncleaness: Intentional Sin

Chapter 18 Personal Relationships

Chapter 19 Social Conduct

d) Penalties: Punished Sin

Chapter 20 Moral Uncleaness Judged

e) Priestly Uncleaness: Leadership Sin

Chapter 21 Various Rules

f) Sacrificial Uncleaness: Careless Sin

Chapter 22:17-30 Procedures for Offerings

Chapter 22:31-33 Reminder of God's Holiness

**4: Special Seasons Chapters 23-25**

Chapter 23:1-4 The Sabbath

Chapter 23:5-8 The Feast of the Passover

Chapter 23:8-14 The Feast of First Fruits

Chapter 23:15-22 The Feast of Pentecost

Chapter 23:23-25 The Feast of Trumpets

Chapter 23:26-32 The Day of Atonement

Chapter 23:33-43 The Feast of Tabernacles

Chapter 24:1-9 The Priest on the Sabbath

Chapter 24:10-23 The Sin of Cursing God

Chapter 25:1-7 The Sabbatical Year

Chapter 25:8-56 The Jubilee

In all of these festivals, truths relating to rest, redemption, restoration and resurrection are unfolded revealing to us the glory of the Gospel.

## **5: Final Exhortation Chapter 26**

Various procedures for offering vows to the Lord as a result of the willing devotion of the offerer.

1: Persons 2: Animals 3: House 4: Land

5: Firstlings 6: Devoted things 7: Tithe

## Part 7

### Numbers: From Sinai to the Plains of Moab

Key Text: Chapter 14:22-23

“Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice; Surely they shall not see the land which I swore unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it:”

The Jews called the fourth book of Moses *bemidhbar* or “In the Wilderness”, which is taken from the opening verse. This is most appropriate because Numbers is the record of the wilderness wanderings. As such, it records the major events of a period totalling approximately thirty-eight years. The name “Numbers” is first found in the Septuagint where the Greek *arithmoi* is used. This acknowledges the fact that two censuses are recorded in this book; one at the commencement before the people left Sinai and the other at the plains of Moab as they prepared to enter the Promised Land. The key words, murmurings and wanderings, are vital to our understanding of this book. While murmurings first surfaced in Exodus they became more vicious in Numbers and led to the rebellion at Kadesh Barnea. The murmurings led to the wanderings. From the borders of the Promised Land, God sent the nation back into the wilderness for another thirty-seven years until the generation who left Egypt had perished. Numbers is the only book of Moses to use the word “wander”, with reference to the journeys of the Hebrews; 14:33, 32:13. On these two occasions the wanderings refer to judgement; judgement for the murmurings and

their catastrophic consequences. When Paul wrote to the Hebrews, (chapters 3 and 4) he drew strong application from the failings of a generation in the book of Numbers. There, he clearly indicated that the rest which the Israelites refused was a picture of Christ and we must not be deceived into departing from the living God by abandoning our hope in Him.

### **The Preparation For Leaving Sinai**

#### **Chapters 1 - 4 The Numbering of the People**

In this first census, 603,550 men of fighting age are recorded. Therefore the total strength of the nation must have been approximately 2.5 million people. This was a remarkable growth from the seventy persons who came to Egypt four hundred years earlier. We can understand why the numbers of Hebrews so alarmed the Egyptians. God was fulfilling His promise to Abraham that His people would be numerous. We should pause to appreciate the weight on Moses' shoulders as this huge camp city spread out before him reaching into the horizon.

#### **Chapters 3 - 4 The Roll and Arrangement of the Levites**

The priests could only serve when they were aged between thirty and fifty years of age. Therefore, a huge amount of time was involved in preparing the young men for their twenty years of service. Herein we see Christ who did not take up public ministry until he was thirty years old.

#### **Chapters 5 - 6 Cleansing the Congregation**

This includes the rules surrounding the vow of the Nazarite who was set aside for holy purposes. The two most famous Nazarites in Jewish history were Samson and John the Baptist.

#### **Chapters 7-9 The Last Events at Sinai**

This includes the offering of gifts, the consecration of the Levites and most significantly, the celebration of the Passover.

### Chapters 9:15-10:10 The Call to Leave Sinai

9:15-23 This informs us that the people could only journey when the cloud moved forward. This cloud transformed into fire at night and represented the presence of God. In our lives, this typifies the word of God from which we must constantly seek guidance in relation to the future.

10:1-10 When the cloud moved the people were alerted by the silver trumpets. While the trumpet is often synonymous with the watchman and warnings in the scripture; it is especially likened to the voice of the Lord in the book of Revelation; 1:10, 4:1. When we are in the will of God we will be so certain that it will be as if the voice of God is sounding as a trumpet in our hearts. When the Word of God and the inner voice of the Spirit in our souls correspond we know that, like Eleazar of Damascus, we are being led in the way (Genesis 24:27).

## **Journeying From Sinai To The Plains Of Moab**

### Chapter 11 Complaining for Lack of Flesh to Eat

God gives them what they desire in the form of quails. Many died as they were eating, however, teaching us that it is foolish to make requests of God with a bitter and angry spirit.

### Chapter 12 Moses Challenged

Aaron and Miriam are a poor example to the nation with their questioning of Moses' marriage. Miriam is struck down with leprosy for this sin, to be saved by her brother's meekness.

### Chapters 13-14 Kadesh Barnea

The events at Kadesh Barnea would consign the people to the wilderness for the lifetime of all those who left Egypt. It is a tragic scene of rebellion and judgement. The only bright spot in this dark incident is the faithfulness of Joshua and Caleb who stood with Moses against the vicious onslaught.

## Chapter 15 Various Offerings to be Presented in the Promised Land

## Chapter 16 The Rebellion of Korah

Supported by Dathan and Abiram, Korah leads a rebellion against the authority of Moses and Aaron. This provokes one of the most severe judgements to be recorded anywhere in the Old Testament, when the earth opens and swallows these rebels and their families. The children of Korah survived and became servants in the ancient temple in later generations, which is testimony to the grace of God (26:11, Psalm 42, 44-49, 84-85, 87-88).

## Chapter 17 Aaron's Priesthood Authenticated

The blossoming of Aaron's rod proves that he is the Lord's high priest. The rooting of a dead and dry stick reveals Christ, the root out of a dry ground, and teaches us that the Lord makes the weak and the despised fruitful servants.

## Chapters 18-19 Priestly Legislation

## Chapter 20 The Passing of a Generation

Miriam and Aaron die and Moses is told that he will not enter the Promised Land because he smote the rock in anger, even though he was provoked by the rebellions of the people.

## Chapter 21 The Fiery Serpents

God sent fiery serpents as a judgement because the people provoked Him by their complaints. The nation is saved by a brazen serpent, a wonderful picture of Christ, John 3:14-16.

## Chapters 22-24 Balaam and Balak

The heathen prophet who is compelled to bless Israel against the wishes of the King of Moab, (24:17) furnishes us with a view of Christ, all the more remarkable when we consider Balaam.

## Chapter 25 Idolatry, Immorality and Faithfulness

On the plains of Moab, Israel rebels against the Lord by worshipping Baalpeor and forming relationships with Moabite women. Twenty-four thousand die in the plague which God sends. Aaron's grandson, Phineas, stays the plague by killing a Jewish man and a Moabite woman.

## Chapter 26 The Second Census

Now that the old generation who left Egypt have died off, at the alarming rate of three hundred funerals a week, it is time for a new numbering. This new census calculating the fighting men, numbers just over six hundred thousand. Despite the difficulties of the wilderness, God ensured that there was a new generation strong and ready to fight for the Promised land.

## Chapter 27:1-11 The Daughters of Zelophehad

## Chapter 27:12-23 Joshua Appointed as Moses' Successor

Chapters 28-30 Offerings, Feasts and Vows

Chapter 31 The Defeat of the Midianites

Chapter 32 The Two and a Half Tribes

Reuben, Gad and Manasseh claim the territory east of the Jordan. They have to promise to fight alongside the other tribes as they conquer Canaan. This chapter has some key texts; v6, v18 and v23.

Chapter 33 A Summary of the Wilderness Journey

Chapter 34 The Borders of the Promised Land

Chapter 35 The Cities of Refuge; A Picture of Gospel Grace

Chapter 36 The Marriage of the Daughters of Zelophehad

## Part 8

### Deuteronomy: The Repetition of the Law

Key Text: Chapter 6:12-13

“Then beware lest thou forget the LORD, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name.”

The Jews called the fifth book of Moses *elleh haddevarim* or *devarim* following the opening sentence “These are the words”. They also knew it by the title *misneh hattorah*, the repetition of the law, or *sefer tochaboth*, the book of admonitions. All of these ancient names have much to offer because they reveal the truth in the final book of the Pentateuch. This book contains the words of Moses to the people before his death and prior to their entrance into the Promised Land. This book is also the repetition of the law. The Jews deduced this from 17:18 where the King is commanded to write out the copy of the law. The copy is the repetition, which is what Deuteronomy is. Unfortunately, Deuteronomy is a misnomer as it stems from the Latin *Deuteronomium*, which means The Second Law. Deuteronomy is not a second law but a repetition.

The Jews were much more accurate in their assessment. The Jews referred to Deuteronomy as a book of admonitions. German expositor and theologian Keil described Deuteronomy as “a hortatory description, explanation and enforcement of the most essential contents of the covenant revelation and covenant laws...”. The word hortatory means to exhort. Therefore, Moses in his final months spent much time exhorting the people to obey and follow the law which God had given. This fifth book is a series of sermons and addresses from a man who knew that his life and

ministry were at an end. Keil went onto describe Deuteronomy; "...with an emphatic prominence given to the spiritual principle of the law and its fulfilment, and with a further development of the ecclesiastical, judicial, political, and civil organisation, which was intended as a permanent foundation for the life and well-being of the people in the land of Canaan". Moses taught that the law should be kept in spirit as well as deed and that it applied to every area of life. For this reason, Deuteronomy throbs with practical spirit and vital principles which continue to be relevant for the Church in this twenty-first Century.

## Outline

### **1: Introduction Chapter 1:1-5**

The time and location are fixed. The people are ready to enter the Promised Land and Moses has words of preparation.

### **2: The First Address Chapter 1:6-4:43**

#### a) Historical Review 1:6-3

God's guidance and their rebellions are described. In 2:38 the way is being prepared for Joshua.

#### b) Exhortation to Obey 4:1-43

As a result of God's care over them they are commanded not to forget, to take heed and teach the word to their children, 4:9.

### **3: The Second Address Chapter 4:44-26:19**

#### a) Introduction 4:44-49

Once more the location is fixed for another assembly called by Moses.

## b) The Ten Commandments Expounded 5-11

The law is repeated and the people are reminded of the events at Sinai. This was vital as Moses was dealing with a new generation. Central to this section is the requirement that the people love the Lord and teach the word within their homes to the next generation, 6:4-13.

## c) Principal Laws Expounded 12-26

Chapter 12	One altar for sacrifice
Chapter 13	Idolatry forbidden
Chapter 14	Clean and unclean animals
Chapter 15	The Year of Release, v15
Chapter 16:1-17	The three feasts; Passover, Pentecost (weeks), Tabernacles
Chapter 16:18-17	The Judges and the King
Chapter 18	The Priests and the Prophets
Chapter 19	The Cities of Refuge
Chapter 20	Warfare
Chapter 21	Crimes worthy of death
Chapter 22	Social, Environmental and Morality Laws
Chapter 23	Citizenship
Chapter 24	Marriage and Divorce
Chapter 25	Corporal Punishment
Chapter 26	Thanksgiving at the Feast of First Fruits

## 4: The Covenant Renewed Chapter 27-30

This section is central as the word covenant appears as often in

Deuteronomy as it does in Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers taken all together. Moses has presented the teaching, now is the hour of decision, the moment of personal challenge. Would the people enter into the covenant that God made with them to obey his law and walk in his ways? Great stones are erected upon Mount Ebal upon which the Law is inscribed. Half of the tribes stand upon Mount Ebal to pronounce curses upon those who broke the law and half of the tribes stand upon Mount Gerizim to pronounce the blessings in keeping the law. 30:11-20 are a significant challenge to the nation from the great law giver of Israel.

## **5: The Last Words of Moses Chapter 31-34**

### **a) Moses' Final Instructions Chapter 31**

Joshua is publicly set aside and formally charged with the task of leadership.

### **b) Moses' Song Chapter 32**

Magnifies Jehovah, v1-4; mourns the rebellions of the people, v15-20; anticipation of great victory, v43.

### **c) Moses' Blessing Chapter 33**

The twelve tribes enumerated.

### **d) Moses' Death and Burial Chapter 34**

Moses death is one of the great mysteries in scripture, dying alone and buried by the Lord. Although one hundred and twenty years of age, he died as a physically strong individual. He is described as the greatest of the prophets who knew God face to face. Yet he is also simply described as "...the servant of the Lord."

## **6: Messianic Revelations**

a) Chapter 18:15-22

Confirmed in Acts 3:20-22 that the great prophet is indeed Christ. Every anointed prophet in ancient times prefigured the coming Messiah. He is The Word who presented the greatest revelation from God (Hebrews 1:1-3).

b) Chapter 21:22-23

Paul shows us that Christ was the one who hung upon the tree, being made a curse for us. (Galatians 3:13).

## Part 9

### Joshua: The Conquest of the Promised Land

Key Text: Chapter 24:15

“And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”

#### Theme

Joshua describes the conquest of Canaan after the journey through the wilderness. As such, it follows on logically from the Pentateuch. Indeed the books of Moses are incomplete without Joshua.

#### Authorship

While large parts of the book of Joshua consist of Joshua's words, it is highly unlikely that he himself was the author. John Calvin speculated that the author may have been Eleazar the high priest, because it was the function of Levites “to furnish posterity with a record of the goodness of God.” Calvin was also quick to judge that we are “unable to determine the author...the knowledge of which is not necessary...”. What according to him was important was that “the doctrine herein contained was dictated by the Holy Spirit for our use”. It is generally thought that Joshua was not the author because the events of Joshua 15:16-19 (compare with Judges 1) took place after the death of Joshua. Unlike the Pentateuch, Scripture nowhere affirms that Joshua actually wrote the book

which bears his name.

### **Affirmation**

The events of Joshua are confirmed in both the Old and New Testaments, affirming their authenticity (1 Kings 16:34, Psalm 68:12-14, 78:54-55, 114:4-5, Habakkuk 3:11, Acts 7:45, Hebrews 4:8, 11:30-31, James 2:25).

### **Joshua**

As one of the two spies who were faithful at Kadesh Barnea, and as the assistant of Moses, Joshua was the divinely appointed leader. John Calvin wrote, "...when God takes away those whom he has adorned with special gifts, he has others in readiness to supply their place, and that though he is pleased for a time to give excellent gifts to some, his mighty power is not tied down to them, but he is able...to raise up from the very stones persons qualified to perform illustrious deeds."

### **Christ**

Christ is manifested in this book through Joshua, whose name is the Hebrew version of Jesus, our Saviour (Hebrews 4:8). At the end of Joshua's life there was a sense that the conquest was not complete and that the hearts of the people were not right with God (24:23). He reminded them of the covenant with Abraham (Joshua 24:2-3) which ultimately was fulfilled in Christ. The failure of Israel throughout the Old Testament pointed to the great King, the Messiah in whom the promises would be fulfilled. The Psalms, especially show us that the Abrahamic covenant would be fulfilled in Him. (Psalm 72:17, Psalm 89:31-36).

### **Application**

The battles of Joshua have much to teach us about the life of sanctification. Our rest is in Christ, yet we must conquer the

world, the flesh and the devil.

## Outline

### **1: Preparation Before Conquest Chapters 1-5**

#### a) The Lord's Counsel Chapter 1:1-9

There is a strong similarity between this section and Psalm 1.

#### b) The Leader's Counsel Chapter 1:10-18

A reminder to Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh.

#### c) Rahab and God's Grace Chapter 2

A remarkable Old Testament picture of grace (Matt. 1:5).

#### d) Crossing Jordan Chapter 3-4

A picture of justification; as Israel followed the ark through Jordan into the Promised Land, we inherit the blessings of adoption and sanctification because of justification by faith in Christ alone, who died and rose again on our behalf.

#### e) Rededication at Gilgal Chapter 5

The circumcision of the men represents our consecration. Joshua's sees Christ on the eve of the first battle. This is his burning bush experience, coming after consecration.

### **2: Programme of Conquest Chapters 6-12**

#### a) Jericho's Walls Chapter 6

This is the first sign to the Canaanites that God would fight for His people in a remarkable sense.

#### b) Achan's Sin Chapter 7

The deceitfulness and greed of human nature is exposed by the God who sees all things.

c) Ai Conquered Chapter 8:1-29

d) Law Reaffirmed Chapter 8:30-35

The importance of the law is highlighted in a solemn gathering on the Mounts Ebal and Gerizim.

e) Gibeon's Deceit Chapter 9

f) The South Taken Chapter 10

One of the great miracles as the sun shines for twenty-four hours to allow Joshua to defeat Adoni-Bezek and his confederates.

g) The Northern Alliance Chapter 11

This is the greatest challenge to date, with an army that is likened to the sand upon the sea shore. The land which Israel occupied was densely populated with many peoples, but these people were cursed by God and land was given to Israel.

h) A Summary of Conquests Chapter 12

### **3: Partition after Conquest Chapters 13-21**

a) East of Jordan Chapter 13

b) Caleb's Faith Chapter 14

The faith of Caleb, Joshua's fellow spy, will ever remain inspirational. Are we prepared to pray for and wait for the blessings that we are promised in Christ for this life?

c) Judah's Inheritance Chapter 15

d) The Sons of Joseph Chapter 16-17

e) The Land Surveyed Chapter 18:1-10

f) The Seven Lots Chapter 18:11-19

g) The Cities of Refuge Chapter 19

h) The Levites' Cities Chapter 21

i) The Eastern Altar Chapter 22

The building of an altar by the two and a half tribes, almost causes a civil war for fear that it would incur the wrath of God. It was built, however, not for sacrifice but as a witness, a reminder of the one faith that all Israel shared.

#### **4: Challenge in Conquest Chapters 23-24**

a) Joshua's Final Message Chapter 23-24:28

Joshua, in old age, is clearly burdened concerning the spiritual condition of the nation, which prompts his great declaration of faith, 24:15.

b) Joshua's Death Chapter 24:29-33

His significance is revealed in the fact that all those who outlive him remain faithful to God. It is the new generation who never experienced Joshua, who would lead the people into apostasy.

## Part 10

### Judges: Revival in Days of Apostasy

Key Text: Chapter 21:25

“In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.”

#### Apostasy

Apostasy means to fall away from or depart from the truth. This book is the sad and tragic account of Israel's departure from the law of God in the years following the death of Joshua. As such, it is a most relevant book for us, as we too live in an age of departure from the truth of God.

#### The Holy Spirit

In days of general decline, God raises up deliverers or judges to lead the people politically, militarily and most importantly, spiritually. On seven occasions we are told that the Spirit of God came upon these individuals; Othniel (3:10), Gideon (6:34), Jephthah (11:29), and Samson (13:25, 14:6, 14:19, 15:14). In an age of general departure God can revive His people, but only through the dynamic of the Holy Ghost.

#### Rest

While we inevitably focus on failure throughout this book we must remember that for most of this period of history Israel enjoyed rest and peace.; Othniel - 40 years; Ehud - 80 years; Deborah - 40 years; Gideon - 40 years; Tola - 23 years; Jair - 22 years; Jephthah

- 6 years; Ibzan - 7 years; Elon - 10 years; Abdon - 8 years; Samson - 20 years. In days of decline God is able to bless with periods of peace and rest for the church which will bring benefits to the nation.

## Outline

### **1: The Seeds of Apostasy Chapters 1 - 3:4**

#### a) From Conquest to Capitulation Chapter 1

The people move from winning territory over their enemies to surrendering ground, verses. 19, 27,29,30,31, 32, 33.

#### b) Revival at Bochim Chapter 2:1-4

A message which brings the people to tears.

#### c) Spiritual Rebellion Chapter 2:6-23

Political appeasement gives way to spiritual apostasy.

#### d) The Sovereignty of God Chapter 3:1-4

God permits the failure of the people as a test.

### **2: The Saviours in Apostasy Chapters 3:5 - 16**

These deliverers, the judges, are saviours in that they rescue the people from their enemies. Tragically after the death of a judge the people return to their idolatry, indicating a shallowness in faith and conviction. It appears to be feature of life in these times that, as the years progress and as the people became more wicked, their religious leadership becomes increasingly shallow. Samson is the most glaring example of a strong man who could be incredibly weak. In Gideon's fascination with an ephod and Jephthah's rash vow, we are reminded of the weakness of great and good leaders.

a) Othniel Chapter 3:5-11

Coming from the family of Caleb, with a wife who has a true vision (1:13-15), it would appear that Othniel was a worthy successor of Joshua.

b) Ehud Chapter 3:12-30

c) Shamgar Chapter 3:31

d) Deborah Chapters 4-5

Deborah's Battle Chapter 4

Deborah's Song Chapter 5

e) Gideon Chapters 6-9

Preparation of the People Chapter 6:1-10

Gideon Called Chapter 6:11-22

Gideon Consecrated Chapter 6:12-32

Gideon's Fleece Chapter 6:33-40

Gideon's Army Chapter 7

Gideon's Critics Chapter 8:1-21

Gideon's Weakness Chapter 8:22-35

Gideon's Son Chapter 9

f) Tola Chapter 10:1-2

g) Jair Chapter 10:3-5

h) Jephthah Chapters 10:6-12:7

Jephthah's Background Chapter 10:6-18

Jephthah's Commissioning Chapter 11:1-11

Jephthah's Message Chapter 11:12-28

Jephthah's Vow Chapter 11:29-40

This is the most difficult passage in the Book of Judges and one which has often been debated. It is impossible to believe that Jephthah offered his daughter, however, as a human sacrifice. Such offerings were pagan and were never associated with the worship of the true God. It is more likely that she was offered to a solitary religious life where she would be excluded from ever being married.

Jephthah's Challenge Chapter 12:1-7

i) Ibzan Chapter 12:8-10

j) Elon Chapter 12:11-12

k) Abdon Chapter 12:13-15

l) Samson Chapters 13-16

Samson's Birth Chapter 13

Samson's Marriage Chapter 14

Samson's Conquests Chapter 15

Samson's Death Chapter 16

### **3: The Signs of Apostasy Chapters 17-21**

a) Idolatry in the Tribe of Dan Chapters 17-18

The story of Micah and his fascination with false worship, the thieving of his priest and his ephod would certainly indicate that the land generally has gone a long road in leaving God.

## b) Civil War with Benjamin Chapters 19-21

These chapters reveal a debauchery and depravity which is as intense as any found anywhere in the scriptures. The people are also vindictive, endeavouring to destroy the tribe of Benjamin where the wicked deed was done. There certainly is a sense of every man doing what he thinks right, just as in our day. Such a course is ruinous.

## Part 11

### Ruth: The Kinsman Redeemer

Key Text: Chapter 4:10

“Moreover Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place: ye are witnesses this day.”

#### Introductory Thoughts

Ruth is the first book in our English Old Testament which appears in a different place in the Hebrew Scriptures. There, it is included towards the close of the Old Testament among The Writings or Hagiographa. In our English Scripture it is placed in its historical context after Judges and before the books of Samuel.

The author of Ruth is anonymous. It certainly appears to have been written at the time when David was famous, perhaps even king, as his ancestry is referred to in Chapter 4.

This is the first of two Biblical books to be named after a woman, the second being Esther. Ruth is also one of four women who are named in the genealogy of Jesus Christ; the other three being Tamar, Rahab and Bathsheba. Her husband, Boaz, was actually the son of Rahab, whose family alone were spared the annihilation of Jericho.

#### The Purpose of the Book

**Historical** - The characters are factual, not fictional as some allege, because the purpose of the book is to trace the lineage of David. It relates the departure of a Jewish family from Bethlehem to Moab in a time of famine. This is certainly characteristic of the

Judges period in that everyone was doing as they pleased without regard for the law. The search for prosperity in Moab ends with tragedy as the sons of the family marry Moabitesses, which is forbidden. This spiritual disaster leads to grief as the men in the family unit die, one by one, leaving Naomi on her own with two Moabitess daughters-in-law. Without hesitation, she returns to Bethlehem, and Ruth the Moabitess out of devotion for her heartbroken mother-in-law, remains by her side. As a consequence of providence Ruth, in Bethlehem, meets Boaz a kinsman of Elimilech's. Under the Law of Moses, Boaz has an entitlement to redeem Elimilech's name by marrying a widow within in the family. This he does and so Ruth the Moabitess is integrated into Jewish society in the Bethlehem district becoming the grandmother of David and a part of the ancestry of the Messiah.

**Devotional** - Ruth carries serious warnings concerning the dangers of backsliding. Elimilech took his family into Moab, a heathen idolatrous society. As Elimilech and his family suffered so backsliding will bring us nothing but pain. He went in search of prosperity but instead Naomi returned to Bethlehem empty, with a desire to change her name from that which meant pleasant to "Mara" meaning bitter. Yet, as Naomi returned, God gave her and Ruth restoration with a family of grandchildren she thought she would never see. There is restoration through God's grace for the backslider.

There are also lessons relating to the moral excellences of loyalty and devotion. Leaving her home behind, Ruth gave her life to this elderly relative. God rewarded her commitment giving her more in return than she ever thought possible. Ruth 1:16-17 is paralleled in the New Testament by Romans 12:10-15; church life needs to be a true fellowship not merely a society which listens to sermons!

**Typical** - Ruth is a type of the Gentile peoples in this New Testament age. Without any natural right to the covenant promises she was brought into the Hebrew nation and given the privileges of citizenship. As with the Gentile church today, she was the wild olive tree which was grafted into the natural branches and

made to enjoy the “root and fatness of the olive tree” (Romans 11:17). As with Rahab, Naaman and the people of Nineveh, she represents the gathering of God's elect from across the peoples of the world.

Boaz, however, is one the purest Old Testament types of Jesus Christ. As a near kinsman to Elimilech, he had a right to marry the widow and raise up a family for the one who had died (Deuteronomy 25:5-10). The word translated kinsman in Ruth is the Hebrew *goel*, which means redeemer or ransom (Isaiah 51:10, Job 19:25). Herein, we observe the work of Christ. We were dead in sin but Christ became our kinsman in being made flesh for us (Hebrews 2:14-15). He contested with the law of God who staked a claim over us, as the nearer kinsman in Ruth 4 did. Yet He redeemed us from the curse of the law (Galatians 3:13). He redeemed the family in which so much death had occurred by marrying Ruth and thereby bringing new life. Christ our redeemer, makes the church His bride and new blessed life is the result (Ephesians 5:25-27).

## Outline

### 1: The Requirement for a Kinsman Redeemer chapter 1

- v1-2 Dearth in Bethlehem
- v3-5 Death in Moab
- v6-18 Desire for Bethlehem
- v19-22 Departure from Moab

### 2: The Revelation of the Kinsman Redeemer chapter 2

- v1 Presentation to the Reader
- v2-3 Providence in the Fields
- v4 Piety among the Workers
- v5-7 Particulars of Ruth
- v8-17 Protection for Ruth

v18-23 Purpose for Ruth

**3: The Request to the Kinsman Redeemer chapter 3**

v1-5 Consultation with Naomi

v6-11 Consideration for Boaz

v12-18 Condition from Boaz

**4: The Response from the Kinsman Redeemer chapter 4**

v1-8 Challenge from Boaz

v9-16 Comfort from Boaz

v17-22 Children from Boaz

## Part 12

### 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel: The Rise and Progress of the Monarchy

Key Text: 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 8:5

“And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.”

#### Authorship

These books were originally regarded as one book by the Jews. They were not divided into two until the Septuagint translation was published where they were known as the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Books of the Kingdoms. As Samuel's death is recorded in 1 Samuel 25:1 he is not considered the author. While the prophets did record events after their death they do so prophetically, not historically. As these books are written as history, we cannot view Samuel as the author and there is no biblical warrant for doing so. It is probable that he wrote that which occurred in his lifetime with Nathan and Gad completing the work, for which there is some biblical basis (1 Chronicles 29:29).

#### Major Characters

**Samuel;** The young boy called to serve in a dark place, as a response to his mother Hannah's prayers is one of the great Bible stories. Samuel is the last and perhaps the greatest of the Judges. He serves as the link between that era and the days of the monarchy. As a prophet, he led the nation into spiritual renewal and served as a spiritual mentor to both Saul and David.

**Saul;** The first King of Israel who while physically strong proved himself to be spiritually weak.

**David;** The man after God's own heart who succeeded Saul after many battles and trials through which he remained true to God.

### **Minor Characters**

**Eli;** The last of the priests who ruled, whose lack of discipline discredited his office, but who was also a man who knew God.

**Jonathan;** David's confidant and friend who died with Saul in battle.

**Abner;** Saul's captain who delivered the kingdom up to David.

**Joab;** Great soldier and leader, loyal to David but cunning and murderous who stopped at nothing to protect his power.

**Nathan and Gad;** Prophets who played pivotal roles; 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 7, 12, 24.

**Bathsheba;** A woman who capitulated in adultery but who, as a result of God's grace, became the mother of Solomon, David's successor.

### **Important Places**

**Shiloh;** The resting place of the tabernacle in the days of the Judges.

**Ramah;** Samuel's home; the location from where he judged Israel.

**Bethlehem;** David's home and place of great Messianic importance.

**Gath;** Goliath's home and a major Philistine city.

**Mount Gilboa;** The place where Saul died.

**Jerusalem;** Consolidated by David as the seat of power.

### **Themes**

**Leadership;** Leaders must be chosen and anointed by God yet they are responsible to God for their work and will be held accountable for failure. In the three great leaders in the books of Samuel we observe men with feet of clay. It is a reminder that great men always fail.

**The Ark;** This most important piece of religious furniture still represented the presence of God. It was taken when the glory departed (1 Samuel 4:21), it remained in Kirjath-jearim because of failure (7:1-2), there was judgement upon Uzzah for touching the ark (2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 6:7), the house of Obed Edom was blessed for housing the ark (6:12) and there was rejoicing when it was returned to the tabernacle (6:17-18).

**Friendship and Loyalty;** The friendship between David and Jonathan is the greatest example of fellowship in the Bible. Jonathan's self sacrifice and David's commitment to the promise he made long after the death of his friend has much to commend.

**Messianic;** Christ is chiefly revealed through the tracing of the line out of which he would spring, the house of David. The kingdom established by David is a prefiguring of the kingdom which Christ established, the church. David in his commendable

characteristics, particularly in his earlier years certainly, is a type of Christ (1 Samuel 13:14).

### **Outline**

Through a number of key verses we can trace the important moments of this period of history.

#### **1<sup>st</sup> Samuel: The Birth of the Monarchy**

Chapters 1-8 Samuel, The Last of the Judges

7:12; In a time of terrible apostasy God honours Samuel's ministry.

Chapters 9-10 Saul Chosen and Crowned

9:16; Saul while chosen by God, is selected to gratify the people. The theocracy has come to an end, rule by the prophets is over.

Chapters 11 - 15 Saul's Weakness and Rejection

15:22-23; Solemnly, the blessing of God is removed from Saul.

Chapters 16 -17 David; The Anointed of the Lord

16:12-13; An unlikely hero is chosen by God to succeed Saul.

Chapters 18 - 27 Saul's Hatred of David

18:8-12; The penny drops, Saul identifies his successor and threat. In his time as an outlaw David shows himself ever the statesman especially when Saul's life is in his hands (Chapters 24 and 26).

Chapters 28 - 31 The Last Days of Saul's Reign

31:4; The tragedy of King Saul is cemented on Mount Gilboa.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel: The Consolidation of the Monarchy**

Chapter 1 David's Lament for Saul and Jonathan

1:23; David takes no pleasure in the death of his enemy.

Chapters 2 - 4 David's Reign Over Judah

3:1; For seven years David's reign is confined to Judah as Saul's son reigns over Israel, these are years of civil war.

Chapter 5 The Reunification of the Nation under David

5:1-2; He is sought by all of Israel to be king.

Chapters 6 - 10 Spiritual Revival and Military Conquests

6:17-18; The return of the ark to Jerusalem marks a spiritual high point in his reign and reveals his priorities in his early reign.

Chapters 11 - 12 The Turning Point; The Bathsheba Affair

12:7; Nathan's accusation is to cast a shadow over his reign.

Chapters 13 - 20 Absalom's Conspiracy and Joab's Power

18:33; Lust, murder, intrigue and rebellion are the subject matter of these chapters, the consequences of adultery and murder, climaxing with David's deep sorrow for Absalom.

Chapter 21 Saul's Final Humiliation

21:6; Justice for an injustice perpetrated by Saul has to be satisfied.

## Chapter 22 A Psalm of Thanksgiving

22:1-4; David's gratitude to God for His mercies.

## Chapter 23 David's Final Words

23:5; Regrets his own sin but magnifies the faithfulness of God.

## Chapter 24 A Day of Judgement

24:14; His sin brings judgement but he asks for God's mercy.

## Part 13

### 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings: The Kingdom Divided

Key Text: 1<sup>st</sup> Kings 12:19

“So Israel rebelled against the house of David unto this day.”

#### Authorship

As with the books of Samuel, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings were also one book in the original Hebrew manuscripts. They were divided by the translators of the Septuagint and called the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Books of the Kings and are seen as a continuation of Samuel.

There is much internal evidence which suggests that the author drew from various sources in compiling his extensive history of the period. ; “the book of the acts of Solomon” (1 Kings 11:41), “the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah (1<sup>st</sup> Kings 14:29 and a further 14 occurrences), “the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel” (1<sup>st</sup> kings 14:19 and a further 17 occurrences). Regarding the use made of these sources, under God, Edward J Young wrote; “These sources, therefore, may be regarded as a part of a prophetic history issued in the form of annals. Under divine inspiration the author of Kings made his choice from these written documents.”

The tradition among the Jews was that Jeremiah was the author of the books of Kings. Certainly, the author was a contemporary of the great prophet as he obviously lived during the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians. It is striking that 2nd Kings 24:18-25:30 is virtually identical with Jeremiah 52. It is these books which furnish us with details of the prophetic ministries of Elijah and Elisha to the northern kingdom. God’s grace was manifested in raising up these mighty men to stir hearts and encourage the

faithful among a people mostly associated with their departure from God. Kings is the final book in the section of the Hebrew Bible known as the Former Prophets. The Jews regarded it as a book written from the perspective of one called to present God's truth.

### **Purpose**

To sketch the key events in the history of the Jewish people from the final days of David's reign to the beginning of the Babylonian exile. Fundamental to our understanding of this period is the rebellion of the ten northern tribes against the House of David under the leadership of Jeroboam 1<sup>st</sup> (1 Kings 12).

### **Key Places**

#### **Jerusalem**

The seat of the kings of Judah and spiritual home of the Hebrew people.

#### **Samaria**

Established by Omri as the seat of power for the kings of Israel.

#### **Dan and Bethel**

Golden calves were set up in these two places as idols to prevent the people travelling to Jerusalem to worship God. They represented a religion of convenience used to consolidate the new nation.

### **Key Characters**

#### **David**

His final act was to declare Solomon as king, against the actions of his son Adonijah, who had been crowned with the support of Zadok, the High Priest, and Joab, the Commander-in-Chief. Solomon's accession broke Joab's mischievous influence and hastened his death. Throughout the books, the kings of Judah are differentiated between those who walked in the ways of David and those who failed in this regard. In the dark days of spiritual decline, however, it was stressed that God would favour Judah for the sake of His servant David (1 Kings 11:36, 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 8:19).

## **Solomon**

With a name which is a variant of the Hebrew, *shalom* or peace, Solomon hastened in a long period of peace and prosperity. Renowned for his wisdom and riches, he led Israel to her brightest and best days. The erection of the temple and his prayer of dedication is one of the spiritual high water marks in the history of the Jewish people. While he is noted as the writer of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon, he sadly and tragically sowed the seeds of future apostasy with his marriage to heathen women for pragmatic political gain.

## **Rehoboam**

Solomon's son, who refused the advice of the older men who cautioned against heavy taxation. The result was the division of the kingdom.

## **Jeroboam**

A servant of Solomon's who had obvious talents as a leader and administrator. He used these talents to establish a new kingdom and a false religion. He is referred to as the man who made Israel to sin.

## **Asa**

A long and prosperous reign with many commendable characteristics.

## **Omri**

Samaria established as the administrative capital of Israel. He brought stability to an unstable and warring people.

## **Ahab**

His reign in the northern kingdom is important in that he led the nation to new depths of apostasy as a result of the influence of his heathen queen, Jezebel. He reared up a temple to Baal with a pagan altar in Samaria and provoked God more than all the kings which were before him (1 Kings 16:31-33). His life was characterised by idolatry and stained by the murder of Naboth. His death was clearly God's judgement.

## **Elijah**

1 Kings 17 - 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 2, charts the life of the greatest prophet of the period and one who ranks with Moses as one of the two foremost leaders in Old Testament history. He ministered in a dark time to the northern nation. Yet, his prophecy sparked a new awakening among the people as the spiritual battle at Mount Carmel illustrated.

## **Elisha**

2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 2 - 13 charts the career of Elisha as Elijah's successor. His ministry, along with that of Elijah, is one of three Biblical periods where miracles are the norm (along with Moses and Joshua, Christ and the Apostles). He led societies known as schools of the prophets who kept God's truth alive among the people. As he died, the king cried out "My Father, my Father the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof" (13:14) indicating the decisive role that the

prophet played in the life of the nation.

## **Jehoshaphat**

His reign over Judah is included within the historical scope of 1 Kings 15 - 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 8. The writer of Kings focuses upon his political contribution as opposed to his spiritual leadership. He compromised with the house of Ahab for pragmatic reasons (1 Kings 22, 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 3). This unholy alliance led to the marriage between Jehoshaphat's son and the daughter of Ahab which in turn had a detrimental effect upon the spiritual life of the southern kingdom (2 Kings 8:18).

## **Ahaz**

A king of Judah who behaved like the kings of Israel. Devil worship and human sacrifice were introduced to the people (2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 16:1-4).

## **Hoshea**

Under his reign over Israel, the Assyrians conquered the land and carried the people away captive (2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 17).

## **Hezekiah**

Much space is given to this godly Judean king in 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings (18-20). He led the people in a spiritual revival and his prayer spared the people the miseries that the Assyrians had meted out upon their northern neighbours.

## **Manasseh**

Ironically, the son of Hezekiah proved himself to be an ungodly wretch whose reign cemented the judgment that Judah herself would face (21)

## **Josiah**

This great-grandson of Hezekiah reversed the trend set by his grand-father Manasseh and father Amon. The record of his reign sets him above all the kings post-Solomon for piety and revival spirit (22-24).

## **Nebuchadnezzar**

2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 24 - 25 charts the progressive annexation of Judah by Babylon over the period of a decade. This took place during the reigns of Zedekiah, Jehoiakim and Jehoichin. And so, this once proud nation fell and became a mere province within the mighty Babylonian empire.

### **Outline**

1<sup>st</sup> Kings 1-2:11; The last days of David's reign.

1<sup>st</sup> Kings 2:12-11; The Reign of Solomon

1<sup>st</sup> Kings 12-14; Rehoboam and the division of the kingdom

1<sup>st</sup> Kings 15-16:15; Stability in Judah; Intrigue in Israel.

1<sup>st</sup> Kings 16:15 - 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 10; Omri's wicked house in Israel

2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 11-12; The Athaliah conspiracy in Judah

2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 13; Israel's war with Syria

2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 14-15:7; Days of prosperity in both kingdoms.

2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 15:8-17; The final years of the kingdom of Israel

2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 18-20 ; The reign of Hezekiah

2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 21; The wickedness under Manasseh and Amon

2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 22-23; 30; The good reign of Josiah

2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 23 -25; The final years of the kingdom of Judah.

## Part 14

### 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles: A People Preserved

Key Text: 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 7:14

“If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.”

#### Name

As with Samuel and Kings, Chronicles also forms one complete book in the Hebrew Scriptures. The original title of these books was *divere hayyamim* or “the words of the days”, which is translated “chronicles” in 1 Chronicles 27:24. The Septuagint interpreted this title using the Greek word *Paraleipomonea* meaning “things omitted or passed over”. Therefore we learn that the word Chronicles really has no relation to the long genealogy found in the first English book, but rather means historical records. As the Hebrew title infers, these books contained records that were passed over in other histories. It was not until Jerome’s Latin Vulgate that the word Chronicle began to be used for this section of the Bible. He called it “A Chronicle of the Entire Divine History”. Incidentally, this is the final book in the Hebrew Bible. It was placed in the section known as “The Writings” and in a subsection of historical books where it was included with Daniel, Ezra and Nehemiah. Therefore the Jews treated Chronicles differently from Samuel and Kings which were regarded as prophetic books. These distinctions are important to grasp if we are to appreciate the lessons from Chronicles.

## Authorship

The Jewish rabbis believed that Ezra wrote the chronicles. There is evidence within the books which indicates that the words were written in the period after the Babylonian exile, which is consistent with the times of Ezra. In 1<sup>st</sup> Chronicles 3:19-21 the sons and grandsons of Zerubbabel are mentioned. Zerubbabel was the first man to lead the Jews out of Babylon. Ezra arrived in Judea approximately eighty years later and would have been in a position to record the names of his sons. Also 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 36:22-23 records the decree which allowed for the resettlement of the Jews in Judea. Therefore these words had to be written in the years after the exile. It is true, however, that as this decree was made eighty years before Ezra's rise to prominence it could potentially have been written earlier than the great scribe. It is interesting to note, however, that there is strong similarity between Ezra 1:1-2 and the close of Chronicles. There is certainly strong circumstantial evidence at the very least, linking Ezra to Chronicles.

## Purpose

It is the historical setting in which these books were written which gives us the ultimate key to unlocking the purpose of Chronicles. Historians write with a purpose in view. No historian can write a complete history of a period or he becomes bogged down in meaningless facts and his work is a bore. The historian assembles the relevant facts which enable him to communicate the past to the present generation. Chronicles was written for the benefit of Jews who had come out of seventy years of exile in Babylon. The returning captives for the most part neither knew nor remembered this homeland. It was the land of their fathers, yet it was new to them. Therefore, the writer related the history of this land so that the people might know that they were God's unique people serving Him in the land that He had given. The writer even traced the

family histories of the Jewish people right back through Abraham, Shem, Noah, Seth and Adam. The pedigree of the Jew was good. The proof was conclusive. They were God's people. They had to know this because they had come through a period of great national uncertainty. As we have observed, the writer of this history traced the lineage of individual families to show them that their heritage could not be questioned. The returning exiles were rebuilding a nation and a way of life. In particular, they were re-establishing a theocratic kingdom, a nation governed by God. Therefore, the writer retold the history of Judah and the kings which sprang from David's lineage to show them the principles of true worship. Built into this history, is the warning against apostasy which had brought this once proud people to ruin. The writer of this history passes over the history of Israel during the days of the divided kingdom because they were not governed by the seed of David nor did they, as a nation, worship aright at any time. The focus is upon the kings of Judah and Jerusalem, the holy city.

### Themes

**Historical Study;** Chronicles is the study of history with a spiritual as opposed to an academic, end in view. The principle is therefore laid down that the present generation can be taught valuable spiritual lessons through an understanding of God's grace in the past. In particular, we should acquaint ourselves with Church history, especially the Reformation period and the great revivals with which God blessed his people. History teaches us that we have a heritage. Chronicles taught the Jews that they were part of a continuous line. Our beliefs and teachings are not new. They have been dearly held since apostolic times and the line of truth can be clearly identified.

**Messianic Line;** The underlying message in Chronicles is that God had not merely preserved the Jewish people for their sake. He had

done so for his own glory, that the line out of which Jesus Christ would be born, would be preserved. Therefore the first three chapters lead us from Adam, through the patriarchs to Judah, David and Zerubbabel, figures who were familiar to the Jews in captivity. The Messianic line had been preserved. Therefore Judah's family is delineated before the other sons of Jacob and David's family is given prominence. Matthew 1 completes this genealogy.

**Regulated Worship;** Public worship is neither governed by convention nor tradition. Worship in its entirety ought to be regulated by the Word of God. This was important for the returning exiles as they had a spiritual responsibility to rebuild the temple and reinstate the true worship of Jehovah. Therefore new detail is given regarding the removal of The Ark of the Covenant to Kirjath-jearim with the full text of David's song of thanksgiving (1<sup>st</sup> Chronicles 13, 15-16). More information is also forthcoming in relation to the plans which David made for the erection of the temple, the building of the same under Solomon and the dedication. The returning exiles faced challenges from the Samaritans, at this time, who practised a religion which was a form of Judaism mingled with paganism. Therefore, it was vital that returning Jews knew why they needed to keep their worship pure. Today we base our worship upon the Word of God. The singing of Psalms and hymns with priority given to the ministry of the word has been the practice of the Reformed church since the reformation period and is grounded in the scriptures. To tamper with the structure of our worship is to throw the church into uncertainty and is highly dangerous.

**Spiritual Reform;** In this history, emphasis is placed on the great reforming kings who recovered Judah from apostasy. Chronicles is a history of revival in Judah with details given which are not available in the books of Kings.

- a) Abijah - His preaching, his praying and praises are all set forth on the day that he defeated Jeroboam in battle (2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 13).
- b) Asa - The altar of God rebuilt (2<sup>st</sup> Chronicles 14-15)
- c) Jehoshaphat - He began well in the ways of David (2<sup>st</sup> Chronicles 17:4-6) but after his backsliding and compromise with Ahab he had to recommence the work of reform which had slipped back (2 Chronicles 19).
- d) Joash - Under the influence of Jehoiada the High Priest, Joash oversaw the repair of the temple, being only seven years of age when he began to reign (2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 24).
- e) Uzziah - A king who did much good while under the influence of Zechariah the prophet (2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 26).
- f) Hezekiah - After a long period of declension, Hezekiah led a sudden revival, the most thorough work of reform to date, when the Passover was revived (2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 29-31).
- g) Manasseh - While he was the most wicked king who presided over Judah, Chronicles relates his miraculous conversion (2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 33).
- h) Josiah - The last and the greatest of the reforming kings. The Passover, which was the climax of this revival was the greatest spiritual feast since the days of Samuel (2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 35:18). In his days, the Law

was recovered from the temple and it became apparent that judgement was coming to Judah for her sins, particularly those under Manasseh (2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 24). Jeremiah's lamentation when the godly King Josiah died in battle is therefore most significant (2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 35:25). God removed His servant paving the way for judgement.

**Apostasy;** Throughout all of these reforms and revivals an undercurrent of apostasy lingered in the nation. This was at times

evident in the people who refused to follow the faith of their king, therefore reforms could easily be overthrown. At other times, however, the weakness of men, who for a time served well, is apparent. Uzziah's usurping of the priest (2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 26:16-23), Jehoshaphat's compromises and Joash's u-turn are examples of these tendencies. No revival is perfect and every spiritual reform can within a few years be swept aside. All of this warns us to be vigilant and look out for the seeds of failure which exist in every denomination and local assembly of believers.

**Divine Providence;** God's oversight is in view throughout the Chronicles. The preservation of the seed royal under the stewardship of Jehoiada (2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 23) and the proclamation at the close of 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles are striking examples of this principle.

### Outline

1<sup>st</sup> Chronicles 1 - 9 ; The Genealogy of the Preserved People

1<sup>st</sup> Chronicles 10 - 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 9; The Monarchy under the United Kingdom

Chapters 10 - 28; The Reign of David

Chapters 1-9; The Reign of Solomon

2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 10-36; The History of Judah as a Kingdom

Chapters 10-12 Rehoboam

Chapters 13 Abijah

Chapters 14-16 Asa

Chapters 17-20 Jehoshaphat

Chapters 21 Joram

Chapters 22 Ahaziah and Athaliah

Chapters 23-24	Joash
Chapters 25	Amaziah
Chapters 26	Uzziah
Chapters 27	Jordan
Chapters 28	Ahaz
Chapters 29-32	Hezekiah
Chapters 33:1-20	Manasseh
Chapters 33:21-25	Amon
Chapters 34-35	Josiah
Chapters 36	Destruction and Captivity

## Part 15

### Ezra: The Returning Exiles

Key Text: Chapter 1:5

“Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all them whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem.”

#### Authorship

The Jews believed that Ezra was not only the author of Ezra but of Nehemiah, Chronicles and possibly Psalm 119. There is certainly strong internal evidence that Ezra penned the volume that bears his name. From 7:28 - 9 the words are written in the first person indicating that he was the author. Ezra himself is highly regarded as one of the most influential figures in Jewish history. He is credited with preserving the inspired volumes written before this period and of playing a huge role, under God, in establishing the Old Testament canon. The Jews regarded Ezra and Nehemiah as one volume. Ezra appears, in both books, as a godly spiritual leader in both books who played a pivotal role in spiritual revival.

#### Historical Setting

Ezra belongs to what is known as the post-exilic period. This is the first of three historical books telling the story of the Jewish people after their captivity in Babylon (the other two books are Nehemiah and Esther). The story of these years is also told by the post-exilic prophets who ministered during these years; Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.

## **Ezra the Man**

### **1: His Pedigree Chapter 7:1-5**

He was sent by God as a priestly leader and was a direct successor to Aaron.

### **2: His Preparation Chapter 7:6**

He was well versed in the scriptures being a “ready” or skilful scribe.

### **3: His Purpose Chapter 7:11-28**

To leave Babylon, where he appears to have had some influence and success, and return to the land of his fathers. He was given authority from Artaxerxes to not only be a spiritual, but, a civil leader also.

### **4: His Prayerfulness Chapter 8:21-23, Chapters 9 and 10**

Before leaving, he prayed with those who would accompany him. He was blessed with companions of the highest order (8:18). Arriving in Judea and discovering sin among God’s people, his intercessory prayer is one of the finest examples that we can discover anywhere in the scriptures. This prayer was the catalyst for revival.

## **Key Events and Outline**

### **1: The Decree of Cyrus Chapter 1**

A different political dynamic was at work after Jerusalem fell. The Babylonian Empire had fallen and now Cyrus the Persian was the great world leader. He saw himself as one mandated by God to permit the Jewish people to re-establish themselves in their homeland once again (1:1-4). Cyrus’ role in history had already been foretold by Isaiah (45:1-4). Jeremiah, too, had prophesied

that the Lord would cause his people to return to the land of their fathers (29:10). All of this emphasises the sovereignty of God in world affairs, teaching us never to despair.

## 2: The Return under Zerubbabel Chapter 2

Zerubbabel was God's appointed leader for the enormous task of rebuilding a nation. He belonged to the royal line and was an ancestor of the Messiah making him supremely suited to the task (Matthew 1:12). Only 42,360 Jews responded to the appeal. Millions chose to remain in Babylon where they had become well established and prosperous.

## 3: Rebuilding the Temple Chapters 3-6

Zerubbabel's ministry concerned the rebuilding of the temple. This was highly commendable. There was land to reclaim and buildings to erect but this man saw the re-establishment of spiritual worship in Jerusalem as the reason why they were given this opportunity. The altar was rebuilt first of all. At the heart of spiritual worship is the offering of sacrifices. For decades, no sacrifice had been presented. Now the people united to provide the funds to reinstate the altar and they were blessed by the offerings that were presented. Even the enemies of the Jews became afraid, recognising the symbolism of what was happening in Jerusalem once again. When the foundation of the temple was laid the reaction was mixed. Some of the people rejoiced but others wept because this temple would not be as glorious as Solomon's. The older people were responsible for discouraging the younger because they harked back to days which never would return. At this time, the enemies of the Jews hindered and frustrated the rebuilding of the temple. They appealed to Emperor Ahasuerus, who now presided, making accusations that the Jewish people had, in the past, been rebellious and difficult. As a result, the rebuilding of the temple ceased. Even when everything is arrayed against the people of God there is still work to be done but Zerubbabel, for ten years through discouragement, did nothing. It

was Zechariah and Haggai who reminded him, and the Jews, of their high calling and of the work to be done. The work resumed after an appeal was issued to Emperor Darius. Finally, twenty years after the construction began, the temple was completed. This caused joy and gratitude which climaxed in a memorable Passover celebration.

#### 4: The Return under Ezra Chapters 7-8

Zerubbabel's work and ministry was complete. It was time for God to prepare the heart of a new leader. God's man was found in Ezra who had remained with the Jews in captivity. He had a burden for the word of God, a desire to teach truth and a commission from Emperor Artaxerxes to return to Judea. In chapter 7:1-10 we are given a clear insight into the spiritual credentials of this man of God. Fifty-eight years after the completion of the temple, Ezra arrives with a group of Jews.

#### 5: The Problem of Intermarriage Chapters 9-10

On arriving, he was shocked to discover that the people had intermarried with the Gentiles in the region. His prayer for the people is one of the greatest examples of intercessory prayer to be found anywhere in Scripture. His prayer confessed the sins of the people and expressed a fear that God could turn His face from the Jews as He did in the past. His major concern, however was that the "holy seed" had been polluted (Chapter 9:2). The Jewish seed was holy because it would supply the line out of which the Messiah would spring. Satan's strategy throughout Old Testament time was bent on destroying the holy seed so that the Messiah's coming would be prevented. Ezra sensed this and so he prayed for divine intervention. His sights were clearly on Christ. His spirituality was infectious because many people prayed and wept with him. He is an example of one man who turned the spiritual tide of a nation. The men who took wives of the Gentiles were named, dealt with and persuaded to put away the women they had married against the law of God.

## Part 16

### Nehemiah: Rebuilding the Walls of Jerusalem

Key Text: Chapter 2:18

“Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work.”

#### Historical Setting

The history contained in Nehemiah continues the story of the resettlement of the children of Israel after their long years in captivity. The story contained in Nehemiah serves to remind us that every generation of God's people is called to build upon what a previous generation has established. The work is never completed yet progress can always be made. Without the leadership displayed by Zerubbabel and Ezra, Nehemiah would have had no work to do. On the other hand, Zerubbabel and Ezra, while they achieved much, were not suited to a large scale building project. They viewed the rubble which lay around Jerusalem, little knowing that God was preparing a man with the vision and the expertise for this very task.

#### Authorship

At face value, the author of Nehemiah appears to be the man whose name is the title. Throughout the book, Nehemiah's words are in the first person which certainly indicates that he himself was the author. It is also true that the work bears some resemblance to Ezra and is certainly a continuation. For example the phrase “hand of God” appears in Nehemiah (2:8,18) this also

being a favourite of Ezra.

## Nehemiah

Nehemiah emerges as a civil rather than a spiritual leader. At this stage the people had a spiritual leader, in Ezra, but Nehemiah's task involved more practical matters. Nevertheless, in civil matters he acted with a sense of spiritual convictions. This is particularly apparent in chapter thirteen. This remains essential in civil leaders today.

Nehemiah was a Jew of some influence in the royal court of Artaxerxes. He lived in the palace and was the king's cup-bearer, a position of great trust. He chose to leave career behind, however, to serve his people in Judea. He did so because his heart was moved at the report in chapter one of the walls of Jerusalem being in such disarray. Having been granted leave by the king to go and help his people, Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem approximately ninety years after the first wave of immigrants.

He found the people and city in a poor and lamentable state. Not only were the gates and walls in ruins, but there were houses not yet rebuilt (7:4). Nevertheless, he was successful in mobilising the population to recognise their responsibility and repair the Lord's inheritance. Throughout the building process, he was opposed by a local population which feared the emergence of a strong Jewish people. At first Sanballat and Tobiah mocked (2:19, 4:2-3) but as the work continued they grew more sinister (4:11). They even attempted to discredit Nehemiah and planted a spy to give him poor advice (chapter six). In the midst of this onslaught, Nehemiah was courageous and strong and the people drew from his resolve. They built and they guarded being ever ready for war until the work was complete.

It is reckoned that Nehemiah spent approximately twelve years in Jerusalem before he returned to the king (13:6). On hearing of compromise in Jerusalem, with the enemies of the people he returned once again and put matters right in relation to the temple, the Levites, the Sabbath and intermarriage with the

heathen.

## Ezra

Ezra's major contribution in the days of Nehemiah concerned the renewal of the covenant which saw the people swept into a new period of spiritual revival. On one solemn day the law was read and expounded by Ezra and his assistants. The sins of the people were confessed and prayer was offered. The princes, the Levites and the priests then signed their names to a covenant promising on behalf of the people that they would follow the terms of the law. What was truly significant was that the first to step forward and seal this covenant was Nehemiah (10:1) - a civil leader with true convictions.

While Nehemiah succeeded in rebuilding walls, Ezra's work involved building up the people spiritually. It is a bigger task to build up the church in spirit than it is to erect buildings. We need our buildings to be erected and maintained to the glory of God but there ever remains a need for the work of grace to be strengthened in our lives.

## Outline

### **1: Rebuilding the Walls** chapters 1 - 7

News about Jerusalem	Chapter 1:1-3
Prayer for Jerusalem	Chapter 1:4-11
Despatched to Jerusalem	Chapter 2:1-11
Survey of Jerusalem	Chapter 2:12-16
Purpose in Jerusalem	Chapter 2:17-20
Workers in Jerusalem	Chapter 3
Enemies in Jerusalem	Chapter 4
Discord in Jerusalem	Chapter 5
Completion of Jerusalem	Chapter 6

Census in Jerusalem

Chapter 7

**2: Renewing the Covenant chapters 8-12**

Ministry in Jerusalem

Chapter 8:1-13

Obedience in Jerusalem

Chapter 8:14-18

Prayer in Jerusalem

Chapter 9

Re-dedication in Jerusalem

Chapter 10

Roles in Jerusalem

Chapter 11

Priests in Jerusalem

Chapter 12:1-26

Dedication of Jerusalem

Chapter 12:27-47

**3: Nehemiah's Return chapter 13**

Cleansing of Jerusalem

Chapter 13:1-9

Levites in Jerusalem

Chapter 13:10-14

Sabbath in Jerusalem

Chapter 13:15-22

Intermarriage in Jerusalem

Chapter 13:23-31

When Nehemiah returned the second time, he discovered most of his good work had been undone because the people were slipping away from the faith of their fathers. He was learning the bitter lesson that every great work of God is quickly eroded by the sin of man. At this period of his life he has a special prayer, "Remember me" (13:14, 22, 31). In seasons of discouragement we must ever seek the Lord that He would remember us as we re-learn our need of His grace and the blessings that flow therefrom.

## Part 17

### Esther: For Such a Time as This

Key Texts: Chapter 4:14 & 6:1

“For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”

“On that night could not the king sleep, and he commanded to bring the book of records of the chronicles; and they were read before the king.”

“Trouble is brewing in Iraq. An edict from the king has given consent to the general massacre of a religious minority who are not trusted. These are troubling and uncertain times.”

We know only too well that the above bulletin could well have been lifted from the news print of any number of papers across the world over recent times. In fact, this is the news that sent shock waves through the world in the days of Queen Esther, when Haman devised a plot to exterminate the Jews. It is striking that similar issues have the eyes of the world firmly fixed upon these ancient lands in the 21st Century. Is this not proof that the heart of man, untouched by the gospel of grace, is still the same as it has always been?

#### Historical Background to Esther

Esther is positioned in its historical context, following on from Ezra and Nehemiah. This book too, tells the history of the Jewish people after the Babylonian exile. Where Ezra and Nehemiah chronicle the returning nation, Esther relates an important event in the lives of the Jews who chose to remain in the lands where their forefathers were captives.

By contrasting Esther with Nehemiah we discover that the events of this book occurred before Nehemiah's arrival in Jerusalem to rebuild the walls. Nehemiah served under a Persian emperor

called Artaxerxes (Nehemiah 2:1). The Emperor whom Esther married was Ahasuerus. Historians are agreed that this was another name for Emperor Xerxes. We know that Xerxes preceded Artaxerxes on the Persian throne. Therefore, when Nehemiah was a courtier, the events detailed in Esther would already have been history.

### **The Sovereignty of God in Esther**

In many respects, Esther is a book of mysteries. The author is anonymous although some claim Mordecai. Certainly, the author appears to have had excellent knowledge of the affairs within the king's court and customs within the great Persian empire. Some have treated the book with disdain, as not being an historical work but a fictional romance. This is not the way, however, to understand the mysteries of divine truth.

The greatest mystery of Esther, however, is the lack of God's name. Indeed, God is neither mentioned nor is prayer offered throughout this work. This gives Esther a singular place among the sacred writings that make up the Old and New Testaments.

How can a book which omits God be regarded as being inspired? The answer is found simply by appreciating who these Jewish people were in this land so far from Jerusalem. They had refused the call to return and rebuild in the land of their fathers. They chose to remain in a pagan society. Therefore they were influenced by the world in which they lived, and not for the good. These people were not the spiritual cream, yet they remained God's people and He was determined to care for them. Therefore the mysterious hand of providence is the theme of the book. God may not be mentioned by name but He is present in mighty deeds. These people may not have mentioned God's name but He still came to their help nonetheless:

“The book of Esther, then, serves the purpose of showing how Divine Providence overrules all things; even in a distant, far country, God's people are yet in His hands. But since they are in this distant, far country, and not in the land of promise, His name is not mentioned. By causing us to behold the workings of Providence, the book does, after all, turn our eyes to God, who determines the destinies of men and nations” (Edward J Young).

## Outline

### Chapter 1 Vashti's Removal

It was considered a poor example to women throughout the empire when Vashti refused to honour her royal husband, therefore she lost her crown.

### Chapter 2 Esther's Marriage

This chapter introduces us to Mordecai, whose great-grandfather had been carried captive to Babylon. He was a man of great strengths and proud of his Jewish ancestry. He was compassionate, taking in his orphaned cousin Hadassah (meaning "Myrtle") as his daughter. She would be given the Persian name Esther meaning "Star". He was educated, attaining a position in the palace. He was opportunistic using his influence at the court to have Esther brought before the king when it was known that he was searching for a new wife. He had foresight refusing to allow Esther to reveal her ethnic origin. He was loyal, exposing an assassination plot against the king, saving his master's life. No doubt, Mordecai sensed that the tide was turning against his people. This ultimately was the reason why he actively promoted Esther. His plan was most successful with Esther chosen to be queen.

### Chapter 3 Haman's Planned Genocide

Mordecai's fears were realised with the promotion of Haman in the royal court. As Mordecai refused to bow to this man, Haman influenced the king to appoint a day when the Jews throughout the empire would be massacred. Xerxes is presented as a cruel man which makes the events of the book all the more remarkable.

### Chapter 4 Mordecai's Appeal to Esther

Mordecai pleads with Esther to visit the king for she has been brought to this position for this time. She asks him and the Jews in Shushan to fast for her because to come before the king uninvited could mean certain death.

### Chapter 5 Esther's Acceptance

The signs are good, that all will be well for the Jews, when the king reaches out his sceptre to Esther. She invites him and Haman to a special banquet. Haman, however, goes home to erect a gallows for Mordecai whom he hates, little knowing that he is the queen's adopted father.

### Chapter 6 Mordecai Honoured

The first verse is the true turning point in the saga, with the king asking for the records of the kingdom to be read during a sleepless night. When hearing of Mordecai's loyalty, he decides to honour the Jew. It is evident that God has taken sleep from this powerful man's eyes. Haman is caused to lead Mordecai through the streets to great acclaim.

### Chapter 7 Haman Hanged

When Esther reveals her identity, the king has Haman hanged on the gallows he erected for Mordecai.

### Chapter 8 The Jews Protected

The Jews were given royal protection. The event caused many people throughout the empire to turn to the Jewish faith.

### Chapter 9 Purim

After the enemies of the Jews were destroyed, the Jews inaugurated the Feast of Purim as a memorial to the salvation they had enjoyed.

### Chapter 10 Mordecai's Promotion

The Jewish courtier was made second only to the king himself.

## Spiritual Lessons

- a) God will always protect His people.
- b) Like Esther, God positions His people in every age and place for a special purpose.
- c) Christ always extends His sceptre to us as we enter God's presence.
- d) Like Mordecai, Christ is the one whom the King delighteth to honour. Even His enemies will one day confess him to be Lord.
- e) God protects His people in the most unlikely places. Xerxes was not the kind of man one would wish his daughter to marry, yet God worked out His purpose.

## Part 18

# **Job: A Kaleidoscope of Suffering**

Key Text: Chapter 1:21

“And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.”

The terrible suffering inflicted upon Job makes him one of the most famous characters in the Bible with the proverb “the patience of Job” belonging to everyday speech. The theme of human suffering in a broken world is most relevant for every generation. In the case of Job a good man experienced severe loss and pain, yet God mysteriously was permitting it all for a great and marvellous purpose. We wrestle with the difficult providences of God today; therefore we need the message of Job to anchor our souls. Joseph Caryl, one of the greatest expositors on Job (he preached 424 sermons on Job over a twenty-four year period with his words being published in twelve volumes and 8,000 pages between 1664 and 1666) wrote; “The book teaches this general lesson: That the judgements of God are often times very secret but they are never unjust. That though the creature be not able to give a reason of them, yet there is infinite reason for them.”

## **The Historical Figure**

Liberal scholars have sought to deny that such a man as Job ever existed. They treat the book as an allegory, similar to ‘Pilgrim's Progress’, written to encourage human hearts in a painful world. In this book, however, the names of people are given together with the places where they came from; Job of Uz, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuite and Zophar the Naamathite. Also Elihu is mentioned as well as the Sabeans and the Chaldeans. While it is true that a large part of the book is written as Hebrew poetry, Chapters 1-2 and 42 are written in prose as recorded history. Most conclusive of all, Job is mentioned in scripture alongside some of the greatest figures in the Bible, Ezekiel 14:14, 20.

## **Who, Where and When**

The identity of the author of this book is unknown and there are few clues provided. While the human author is shrouded in mystery

we are convinced that this work was ultimately produced by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost working in man. Our Lord read from the Greek version of the Old Testament, known as the Septuagint which contained the book of Job as the Jews regarded this work as canonical. In addition, there are a number of New Testament quotations drawn from Job; Matthew 24:28 (Job 39:30), James 4:10 (Job 22:29), Romans 11:34-35 (Job 15:8). Also, James 5:11, certainly points to Job being divinely inspired.

The next question concerns where the events took place because that too is obscured by a deep mystery. The first assumption made by scholars has been that the Land of Uz was named after a person bearing that name. If that is the case, Uz would probably have been a son of Shem fixing Job in the same family that the Jewish people sprang from (Genesis 10:22-23). As the Chaldeans who dwelt in modern Iraq, were one of the marauding bands who attacked Job's property, we can safely deduce that Job was living in an area that was easily accessible to them. It is generally believed that Job lived somewhere between Israel, as we know it today, and the river Euphrates, fixing Uz in modern Jordan, Saudi Arabia or Southern Iraq. It is probable that Uz was a sizeable territory with Job being one of its most famous and influential characters.

The question of when the events take place is the most interesting of all. There are a variety of opinions, even among conservative scholars. For example some believe the book to have been written during the time of Solomon's reign, that being the golden age of Hebrew poetry. For me, however, the most convincing arguments point to Job being a contemporary of the patriarchs. Job had a very long life. After his sufferings, when he was already a mature man, he lived one hundred and forty years (Job 42:16). This would certainly fix him in that period when men lived long lives that were progressively becoming shorter (Terah lived two hundred and five years and Abraham his son lived to be one hundred and seventy-five). The most conclusive point of all, however, pertains to the manner by which Job worshipped God. There were no priests in this time. Men could offer sacrifices to God acting as priests for their family (Job 42:8-9). Therefore, Job lived in the patriarchal age pre-dating the institution of the Levitical order under Moses.

## **The Theology of Job**

This book is a manual showing us the theological depth that existed in the early years of time long before the Scriptures were composed.

- a) The existence of one God who is Almighty (5:9), Omniscient (11:11), Wise (24:1), Invisible (9:11), Creator of all things (4:17), Governor of His Creation (5:9-13), Gracious and Forgiving (5:17-27) and the Hearer of Prayer (33:26).
- b) The existence of angels (38:7).
- c) The existence of evil spirits. Twice in the book God and Satan are in dialogue. It is clear that Satan wishes to discredit God through the suffering of Job but God is ultimately in control having a greater plan.
- d) Man is a fallen creature struggling in a broken world (4:17-19, 14:1, 4, 15:14-16).
- e) The necessity of reconciliation with God (22:21-22).
- f) The necessity of repentance (22:23).
- g) That the redeemer will visit the earth and the dead will be raised (Job 19:25).

### **Science, Arts and Industry in the Days of Job**

Evolution would have us believe that ancient civilizations behaved as savages and that we live in a world that has been enlightened. This book reveals an ancient people with considerable educational attainments.

- a) Astronomy (9:7-9, 38:31-33)
- b) Cosmology (26:7)
- c) Geography (23:8-9)
- d) Meteorology; Northern Lights (37:21-22), Tornadoes (36:32-33), Dew (38:28), Clouds and Rain (38:37), The Sea (38:8-11), Hail, Ice and Snow (38:29, 37:10, 37:6, 38:22- 23).
- e) Mining (28:1-11)
- f) Precious Stones (28:18)
- g) Writing (19:23-24):
- h) Medicine (13:4)



## Part 19

### Psalms: Praise, Prayer, Poetry

Key Text: Psalm 150:1-2

“Praise ye the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary: praise him in the firmament of his power. Praise him for his mighty acts: praise him according to his excellent greatness.”

As we have observed, the Hebrew Old Testament was divided into three sections; Law, Prophets and Haggiographa (Writings). The first book in the third and final section is the Psalms. As this is the largest and the primary book in this section the Haggiographa or the Writings were often referred to as “The Psalms” (Luke 24:44). This certainly highlights the importance that the ancient Hebrew believer attached to this book and this fact has not been lost on the New Testament believer. Some of the passages within The Psalms are the most familiar in the entire Bible (Psalms 1, 23, 100) and many Christians have found comfort in this book alone in times of trouble and fear. The gospel witness in The Psalms is also clear. This is illustrated by the fact that prior to his conversion, Martin Luther was chiefly studying both Psalms and Romans, two books which changed his life and the face of Church History. C.H. Spurgeon called his commentary on this book, “The Treasury of David.” It is a treasury indeed and may God help us to mine its everlasting riches which out-value gold and diamonds.

#### Purpose

The primary purpose of the Psalms is designated by its title. The Hebrew title “Tehullim” means praises and the Greek “Psalmoi” means songs. This book certainly contains many songs of praise. These songs were sung by the people of God in their worship within the sanctuary (1st Chronicles 16:4). We limit the Psalms, however, if we limit it to public praise alone. It is clear that many of the psalms were unsuitable for praise alone and some are considered as being prayers. It is on this footing that many Christians have found personal comfort from this book:

“The Psalter, rather, is primarily a manual and guide and model for the devotional needs of the individual believer. It is a book of prayer and praise, to be meditated upon by the believer, that he may learn thereby to praise God and pray to him.” (Edward J. Young)

“An Anatomy of all the Parts of the Soul, for there is not an emotion of which any one can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror. Or rather, the Holy Spirit has here drawn to the life all the griefs, sorrows, fears, doubts, hopes, cares, perplexities, in short all the distracting emotions with which the minds of men are wont to be agitated.” (John Calvin)

### Inspiration

The internal evidence within scripture clearly points to the Psalms as an inspired volume. There are numerous New Testament references to this volume; in fact only the book of Isaiah has more New Testament quotations. Jesus cried out from the cross, quoting Psalm 22:1. The apostles used the Psalms to prove that Jesus Christ was the Messiah (Acts 2:24-36, Acts 13:32-38). It is also evident that in the New Testament the Psalms played an important role in worship (1 Corinthians 14:26, Ephesians 5:18-19 and Colossians 3:16).

There is testimony within the Old Testament itself showing that David, the most prolific psalmist, was a man endowed with the Holy Ghost who wrote with prophetic unction (1 Samuel 16:13, 2nd Samuel 23:2).

### Authorship

The following table indicates the variety of psalmists employed in the composition.

<u>Authors</u>	<u>Number of Psalms</u>
David	73
Asaph	12 (Psalms 50 and 73-83)
Sons of Korah	10 (Psalms 42, 44-49, 84, 87, 88)
Solomon	2(Psalms 72 and 127)
Heman the Ezrahite	1 (Psalm 88)
Ethan the Ezrahite	1 (Psalm 89)
Moses	1 (Psalm 90)
Orphan (Anonymous)	50

As the Psalms are linked with David more than any other author it is worth pausing to consider his contribution to this volume. Everything we learn from David in Scripture points him out as a man with the God-given talents for this work. Indeed we could add that his training and experience fitted him for the bequeathing of this, his heirloom, to generations of believers. What were his qualities which gifted him with the title “sweet Psalmist of Israel”? He was a skilful musician (1 Samuel 16:18, Amos 6:5), he was a true poet (2nd Samuel 1:19-27), he was a man of deep feeling (1 Samuel 18:1-4), he was a true worshipper of Jehovah (2nd Samuel 6) and he was a man of rich and varied experience as a shepherd, a warrior, a king, an administrator, a musician, a poet, a worshipper, a lover, a friend, a parent and a sinner.

### Composition

While there is some clarity in relation to the authors there is much uncertainty surrounding the assembling of the psalms into their present form. The Jews considered the Book of Psalms to be a volume of five books.

Book 1 Psalms 1-41 (Mainly written by David)

Book 2 Psalms 42-72 (Mainly written by David and the Sons of Korah)

Book 3 Psalms 73-89 (Mainly composed by Asaph)

Book 4 Psalms 90-106 (Mainly unknown authors)

Book 5 Psalms 107-150 (Mainly written by David)

What is striking, however, about this arrangement is that the psalms are not in chronological order. David's psalms appear early in the volume and also towards the end. The earliest psalm, penned by Moses, appears as number ninety. It is most likely that David began the arrangement of the psalms playing a key role in assembling the material so that the present form would have been recognisable in his day. By the time of King Hezekiah we know that the psalms of both David and Asaph were in use by the Lord's people (2nd Chronicles 29:30). Nevertheless some psalms were certainly composed after Hezekiah's time and even during the exile (Psalm 137). The 126th relates the return from captivity which would place it in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. After the exile,

there was certainly a renewed interest in the Psalms (Ezra 3:10-11, Nehemiah 12:24-27). This adds weight to the theory that the Psalms were finally assembled after the exile, possibly by Ezra, one of the most dominant figures in Hebrew history.

### **Titles**

We consider the titles of the Psalms, written in small print in the Authorised Version, to be inspired. The Hebrew manuscript does nothing to reduce their importance. These words prefacing the Psalms, supply us with useful information as to the authors and, at times, the circumstances when a particular psalm was written. This is true of the following Psalms of David; 3, 7, 18, 30, 34, 51, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, 60, 63 and 142.

The following is a list of rather obscure words used in the title of Psalms with their meaning:

Title and Meaning, if available

Mizmor (57 times) To pluck, with reference to an instrument

Shir (30 times, 12 in connection with Mizmor) A song

Maschil (13 times) A Meditative Psalm or a Skilful Psalm

Michtam (6 times) Either a Golden Psalm or an Atoning Psalm

Shiggayon (once in Psalm 7) Meaning uncertain

Tephillah (5 times) Prayer

Tehillah (once in Psalm 145) Praise

Lamnatseach or To The Chief Musician (55 times) Given to the director of music for use in the sanctuary for worship.

Neginoth (6 times in combination with Lamnatseach),

Stringed Instruments

Al Hasshemineh (twice in Psalms 6 and 12) On the octave

Gitteth (3 times) Word is connected with the wine, possibly a song for the grape harvest

Nechiloth (once in Psalm 5) Wind Instruments, it is thought this kind of music was associated with mourning

Al-tashcheth (4 times) Do not destroy.

Ayyeleth Hashachar (once in Psalm 22) Hind of the Morning, a hunted animal.

Shoshanim (twice in Psalms 45 and 69) Lilies or roses, associated with love

Shashan Eduth (twice in Psalms 60 and 80) A lily or rose is my testimony

Jonath elem rechokim (once in Psalm 56) A dove far away

Al muth habben (once in Psalm 9) Meaning unclear

Songs of Degrees or Ascents (Psalms 120 -134) Thought to be the songs of pilgrims going up to Jerusalem for worship.

Sela (Not a title but appears at the end of a section, 71 times in 39 Psalms). Some take it to mean a pause, others have claimed it means an increase in volume.

## Style

Psalms were written as poetry. Hebrew poetry differs from English poetry which is dependent upon rhyme and rhythm. Hebrew poems embraced a style that has become known as parallelism. In Hebrew parallelism, the words of one line always lead on to a parallel line which expresses a similar idea or, at times, a concept which is the exact opposite.

We will take Psalm One as our example. In the first verse there is an example of synonymous parallelism where the thought within the first line is contrasted:

“Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly,  
Nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the  
scornful”

In the sixth verse on the other hand the author employs antithetical parallelism where the thought within the first line is contrasted with the second:

“For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous:  
But the way of the ungodly shall perish”.

Parallelism is a study in its own right and can help us understand the book of Psalms. These few examples, however, help us appreciate that the psalms are indeed a form of poetry.

### Themes

Christ - The messianic psalms are among the most important passages in the Old Testament foretelling the coming reign of the Messiah. Among the most well known are Psalm 1 (His Perfection), Psalm 2 (His Dominion), Psalm 8 (His Humility) , Psalm 16 (His Resurrection), Psalm 22 (His Passion), Psalm 23 (His Compassion), Psalm 24 (His Royalty), Psalm 40 (His Obedience), Psalm 45 (His Marriage to the Church), Psalm 110 (His Priesthood), Psalm 118 (His Resurrection) and Psalm 128 (His Scourging). Christ himself related the messianic theme of the psalms (Luke 24:44-47).

Praise - There are many psalms of praise and thanksgiving throughout the volume, some of which we sing in God's house today; Psalms 40, 103, 121, 124. There are many others besides. The Jews called Psalm 118 the Great Hallel, singing it at the Passover Feast. These were probably words which our Lord and the disciples sang before leaving the upper room. The Songs of Degrees are very much the praises of the pilgrims making their approach to Jerusalem. The volume concludes like an orchestra reaching a mighty crescendo as God is praised over and over; Psalms 144-150.

Prayer - The Psalms are also a prayer book where the supplications of saints are recorded. At the beginning of the volume there are a set of five Psalms where David's prayer in adversity is recorded (3-7). Throughout the book we discover a sad, lonely and suffering people who found refuge in their God in days of trial. In tragedy we can read Psalm 46, when betrayed we can turn to Psalm 55, when anxious Psalm 37 will be of assistance and when bereaved, Psalm 39 will give us a godly view of life. The list is endless. There is a prayer for every difficult occasion in this book that we can incorporate into our own prayer lives.

Confession - When we sin, we discover a way back to God in the book of Psalms. The most notable example is the 51st, which we

would be all the poorer without. The Psalm written after David's terrible sin reveals a God who shows mercy to the penitent.

Gospel - The assurance and hope that the Christian has in Christ is revealed throughout the psalms. In the 32<sup>nd</sup> we observe a man whose sins are covered, in the 34<sup>th</sup> the poor man cries and the Lord hears him and in the 103<sup>rd</sup>, we are informed that our sins are cast away as far as the east is from the west.

The Gathering of the Nations to Christ - The psalms speak of a day, which has not yet dawned, when all nations of the earth will be gathered into the family of the redeemed; Psalms 86:9, 22:27, 2:8, 47:2-8, 72:7-11,17,19, 110:1. The day of revival and mass evangelism followed by conversions is not yet over, in fact it has not even begun. The church can approach the future with optimism.

The Scriptures - From the opening psalm where Christ, our greatest example, spends His time meditating upon Scripture, we are taught throughout this volume that God's word is precious. The two most obvious Psalms in this category are Psalm 19 and Psalm 119. In Psalm 19 God's general revelation in nature and his special revelation in Scripture are set forth by way of thanksgiving. Psalm 119, as well as being the longest chapter in the Bible, gives the highest honour to the Word of God, line by line. It has given us such remarkable words as:

“Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (v11)

“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (v105).

Judgement - The most difficult, and for some the most unpalatable, aspect of this volume are the Imprecatory Psalms. Throughout the psalms, the inspired writers cry out for justice and the overthrow of their enemies. From Psalm 2 where David foretells the Lord breaking the heathen with a rod of iron (v9) to the 139<sup>th</sup> where he declares that he hates those that hate the Lord, the volume is littered with expressions of vengeance. This is unpalatable for this pluralist ecumenical age where God's justice is

seldom mentioned. Nevertheless, it is a salutary reminder that justice is a godly principle. It is never vindictive to represent justice and righteousness. It is never wrong to demand that evildoers are punished. It is a Christian and godly virtue to pray that evil is punished, if not in this life, certainly in the life which is to come:

“But thou, O God, shalt bring them down into the pit of destruction: bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days; but I will trust in thee.” (Psalm 55:23).

## Part 20

### Proverbs: Heavenly Wisdom

Key Text: Chapter 1:7

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.”

The Hebrew title of Proverbs is in essence the 1st verse; “The proverbs of Solomon, the son of David, King of Israel.” Like the Book of Psalms, however, Proverbs is also a collection of writings which took centuries to complete. Solomon is most prominent as the primary writer of Proverbs but even he uses the words of other wise men to reinforce his argument. While Chapters 1-24 were compiled in Solomon's lifetime, we can discern distinct sections indicating that he was at work on this volume at different times or even various periods of his life.

The word “mashal”, translated “proverbs” in English conveys the idea of a brief pithy saying which expresses wisdom. These sayings found throughout this book contain some of the most famous statements in the Scriptures. We do well to consider the wise men of Israel carefully, because their words, inspired by the Holy Spirit, have much to teach us in the 21st century.

#### **1: Solomon's Advice to Young Men Chapter 1 - Chapter 9**

The opening section of Proverbs consists of an address aimed primarily at younger people. It was quite possibly written by Solomon for his son, Rehoboam, as the oft repeated phrase “my son” would indicate. It seems ironic that Solomon failed to live the life of his proverbs, particularly in respect of women. The lack of morality in the messenger, however, does not detract from the one who inspired him, The Spirit of God. Perhaps as he reflected upon his life in old age, Solomon became painfully aware of his earlier failures. These first nine chapters are a complete section commencing and ending with the fear of the Lord. (Key texts for each section are bracketed)

a) 1:1-7 (v4)            Introduction

- b) 1:8-19 (v10) Avoidance of Evil Companions
- c) 1:20-33 (v20) Poem about Wisdom's Voice
- d) 2 (v3) The Value of Seeking Wisdom
- e) 3 (v5,6) The Prosperity of Wisdom
- f) 4:1-9 (v3,4) Parental Teaching
- g) 4:10-27 (v10) Responsibility to Parental Teaching
- h) 5 (v3-5) Fatherly Counsel About Immorality
- i) 6:1-3 (v3) Valuing Friendship
- j) 6:4-11 (v6) Hard Work and Foresight
- k) 6:12-19 (v16) Things that God Hates
- l) 6:20-35 (v27-29) The Evil of Adultery
- m) 7 (v6-7) A Parable about Immorality
- n) 8 (v35-36) The Appeal from Wisdom
- o) 9 (v10) The Pinnacle of Wisdom

## **2: Solomon's Advice for the Nation Chapter 10 - Chapter 22:16**

This section of the book consists of a series of miscellaneous proverbs touching on practically every area of life. The only way to approach this section is by identifying the themes that run throughout.

### **Key Themes**

- a) The Responsibility of Children; 10:1, 13:1, 15:5, 17:2, 17:25, 19:26.
- b) Hard Work; 10:3-5, 16, 12:23-24,27-28, 13:4, 13:11, 19:24

- c) Use of the Tongue; 10:11-13, 18-22, 31-32, 11:9,13, 12:5-6, 12:17-22
- d) Care for the Poor; 11:24-26, 21:13, 22:16
- e) Honesty; 10:6-9, 11:1, 18-19, 14:5, 16:11, 20:10, 20:17, 20:21
- f) Pride and Humility; 11:2, 13:10, 16:18-19, 21:4, 21:24
- g) Blessings of the Righteous; 11:5-8, 13:20-21, 14:11, 16:7, 16:20, 22:11
- h) Receiving Advice; 11:14,12:1
- i) Judgement; 12:7
- j) Materialism; 13:7-8, 15:6, 15:16, 16:8, 22:1
- k) Gospel Warnings; 14:12, 14:27, 16:25, 22:3
- l) Backsliding; 14:14
- m) Anger; 14:17, 14:29, 15:1, 15:18, 16:32, 21:14
- n) National; 14:34, 16:10, 20:2, 20:8, 20:26, 21:31
- o) God's Sovereignty; 15:3, 15:11, 16:1-4, 16:13-15,16:33, 17:3, 19:21
- p) Divine Chastening; 15:10, 20:30
- q) Learning; 16:16, 16:22-23, 17:27, 19:20, 19:27, 20:5, 21:11
- r) Old Age; 16:31, 17:6, 20:29
- s) Forgiveness; 17:9, 19:11
- t) Contention; 17:14, 17:19, 20:3
- u) Friendship; 17:17-18, 18:24
- v) Family Life; 12:4, 13:24, 19:13-14, 19:18, 20:7, 21:9, 21:19, 22:6
- w) Fearing God; 19:23
- x) Alcohol; 20:1
- y) Soul Winning; 11:30

### **3: The Words of Solomon's Wise Men Chapter 22:17 - Chapter 24**

This section contains the words of the wise which most scholars believe are a collection Solomon made of the proverbs produced by the wise men of Israel. Under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost Solomon begins this section with the command “Bow down thine ear and hear the words of the wise...”.

22:17-21 (v17)	The Purpose of Wise Words
22:22-29 (v22,24,26,28)	The Four Imperatives
23:1-11 (v1)	Friendship and Feasting
23:12-35 (v15)	More Fatherly Instruction
24:1-12 (v1)	The Vanity of Wickedness
24:13-14 (v13)	The Sweetness of Good Instruct
24:15-22 (v21)	The Good Men and Evil Men
24:23-34 (v23)	Final Words from the Wise Men of Israel

### **4: Solomon's Wisdom Discovered Chapter 25 - Chapter 29**

This section was added to Proverbs in the days of King Hezekiah when hitherto unpublished sayings of Solomon were discovered.

25:1; Title for the Section

25:2-7 (v2); The King and his Subjects

25:8-28 (v8); Division Among the People

26 (v11) ; Marks of the Fool

27:1-4 (v1); Boasting

27:5-19 (v6); Friendship

27:20-27 (v23); Good Business Sense

28 - 29 (28:2, 29:26); The Marks of a Godly Society

### **5: The Words of Agur Chapter 30 (Key Text - 30:5)**

The words of this anonymous writer take the form of a poem in a passage which is full of wisdom and rich symbolism, where the great themes of Proverbs are restated. V. 11-31 contain the words of the “Numerical Proverbs” where much store is placed on the number four (v15, 18, 21, 24)

### **6: The Words of King Lemuel Chapter 31 (Key Text - 31:10)**

This second anonymous author produces an inspired acrostic poem about the virtuous woman. Every line between v.10-31 commences in the Hebrew Bible with a different letter of the Hebrew language producing a beautiful passage extolling the blessed virtues of womanhood, for which every man ought to be grateful.

## Part 21

### Ecclesiastes: The Preacher

Key Texts: Chapter 1:2, & 12:13

“Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.”

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.”

#### The Title

The Hebrew word translated ‘preacher’, which appears in the first verse, gives us our English word ecclesiastical, which refers to church matters. The word in the original Hebrew defines someone who addresses an assembly. Therefore the writer of this book is presenting an address, under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost.

#### The Author

The identity of the author has proved to be controversial even among conservative Protestant scholars. To the reader, Solomon appears to be the obvious candidate from the opening words where the preacher is “the son of David, king in Jerusalem.” Nevertheless we must admit that his name is never specifically stated, as is the case in both Proverbs and the Song of Solomon. Edward J. Young held that the book was written in the days of Malachi and that the writer personified wisdom as preaching to a corrupt society and the personification of wisdom was Solomon. He maintained that the characteristics of society mentioned in this book did not correlate with the days of Solomon.

It must be said, however, that this view denying Solomon's authorship is awkward and departs from the obvious statement in the first verse. Charles Bridges held that the theory which supposes that a later author penned the work under the pseudonym of Solomon was “utterly unworthy of inspiration.” This seems to me, to be the opinion which carries the greatest weight

as it draws its authority from the words of Scripture claiming a son of David, who was king, as the author.

### **The Date**

All of the internal evidence of Ecclesiastes appears to indicate that Solomon was in old age at the time of writing. He reflects upon his building projects which occupied some twenty-five years of his life (2:4-10), his immense wealth (2:8) and his immoral relationships (7:26-27). In addition his poignant picture of old age (12:1-7) would indicate that he was in more mature years reflecting upon the passage of his life. Bishop Reynold commented that in Ecclesiastes, Solomon “..seemeth to have written it in his old age, when he took a more serious view of his past life.” From this perspective, this rather unique book has much to teach us as we ponder the discoveries that Solomon made when contemplating the successes and failures of a lifetime.

### **The Philosophy**

Ecclesiastes is one of the most philosophical books in the Bible and for that reason it is considered one of the most difficult to grasp.

The view of life that is presented in this book appears, at face value, to advocate fatalism (a belief that nothing that happens can be avoided to the total abdication of human responsibility) and hedonism (love of pleasure); 2:24, 3:1, 12-13, 18-22, 5:18-19, 7:15-16, 9:11-12, 11:6.

These statements, however, cannot be measured in isolation from other aspects of Solomon's philosophy of life. The key word, vanity, is employed over and over to show that everything man accomplishes and achieves is empty. At his very best, man is a failure. Solomon discovered this in his long march through life. At the end of the first chapter, he concluded that even his great knowledge and wisdom only served to intensify his sorrow. This is perhaps the reason why he declared that much study is a weariness to the flesh as he neared his final conclusion, 12:12. Through the course of this book Solomon described laughter as madness, 2:2, and such was the emptiness he discovered in this world he described himself as hating life, 2:17. He saw sorrow as something

which was better than laughter and the house of mourning a better environment than the house of feasting, 7:2-3.

Taking these various aspects of Ecclesiastes together, Solomon appears to be advocating the idea that we must simply get on with life, enjoy ourselves while we have time but in the final analysis all is doomed to failure. The picture is grim and depressing.

What was his purpose in depicting life in this light?

1. To give us the worldly man's view of life.
2. To show us that life without God is empty and without hope.

Having eloquently depicted the abject failure of man to satisfy himself, Solomon's conclusion brings us to man's purpose for existence, which alone will create satisfaction:

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man” (12:13).

## Outline

### Chapter 1:1-11 The Preacher's Problem

Solomon begins his sermon with several striking observations. Using the passing of generations, the course of the sun, the flowing of the rivers and the passage of the winds as his introduction, he observes that man is never satisfied with seeing or hearing (v9). It is as if man is caught up in a river of time where his course has been decreed and there is nothing he can do to alter his miserable destiny (v10). Having observed life in this light Solomon has a problem. What is the purpose of our earthly sojourn?

### Chapter 1:12-18 The Preacher's Purpose

Solomon now unfolds his purpose; “...to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven” (1:13). He is intent on investigating the purpose of life; something which

philosophers have set themselves to do in the centuries that have since passed into eternity.

### Chapters 2-4 The Preacher's Path

Solomon now reflects upon his own life and his immense achievements. Yet, as he reviews his life's work, he not only hates his life but he hates his labour and what he has accomplished. In old age he has little satisfaction; all is vanity and vexation of spirit. He sees man caught in the river of time. Chapter 3:1-8 is one of the most memorable in the Authorised Version. Man is born for success and failure and the shadow of sorrow and tragedy appears to cast a shadow over his existence. Even Solomon's own life was marred by this kind of failure and hopelessness.

### Chapters 5-12 The Preacher's Presentation

The remainder of the book is an application to all men based on the outcome of Solomon's investigations. There are many memorable passages in this section:

- Respect for God's House 5:1
- The value of a Good Name 7:1
- Dead flies in the Ointment 10:1
- Casting Bread on the Waters 11:1
- Appeal to Youth 12:1

All of this would indicate that as Solomon's sermon continued, perspective was taking shape, despite all the darkness of life. Spiritual values are coming into focus as the only true source of happiness.

This culminates in the blessed summary of 12:13 which shows us that Ecclesiastes is indeed a book of inspired philosophy.

## Part 22

### The Song of Solomon: The Voice of My Beloved

Key Text: Chapter 8:5

“Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved? I raised thee up under the apple tree: there thy mother brought thee forth: there she brought thee forth that bare thee.”

#### Introduction

The Hebrew Bible names this book according to the words of v1; “The song of songs.” Essentially this means the best of songs. In 1 Kings 4:32 we are informed that Solomon wrote 1,005 songs, yet this song is the best, the Song of Songs.

The book is a beautiful example of Hebrew poetry. The flow and the use of language in the Authorised Version renders certain passages among the most eloquent in the English Language. For me personally, chapter two stands out, chiefly because it was often quoted by an aunt of mine upon her death bed. As she faced eternity, there is no doubt that she heard the voice of her beloved “Rise up my love, my fair one and come away.”

#### Authorship

It is certainly the emphatic claim of the Holy Spirit, who inspired this book, that Solomon is the author. There is some internal evidence which verifies this. The book was obviously written before the division of the kingdom. Places which belonged to what became the northern and southern kingdoms are referred to as if they belonged to the entire nation (Jerusalem, Carmel, Sharon and Lebanon). The reference to the horses drawing Pharaoh's chariots (1:9) is fascinating because Solomon introduced Egyptian horses to Israel (1 Kings 10:28). The author clearly had an extensive knowledge of plants and animals. One authority has listed twenty-one varieties of plants and fifteen species of animals within the six chapters that comprise this song. This would certainly correlate with Solomon's extensive knowledge and wisdom.

## **Jewish Reverence**

The ancient Hebrew people regarded this book as especially sacred. It was always read at the Feast of Passover. Due to the manner in which the book deals with the love between man and woman, the Jews forbade anyone to read the words until they were thirty years of age.

### **The Division of the Book**

- Chapter 1 The Bride longs for her Beloved v7
- Chapter 2 The Groom comes for his Beloved v8
- Chapter 3 The Bride separated from her Beloved v2
- Chapter 4 The Groom's desire for his Beloved v8
- Chapter 5 The Bride searches for her Beloved v6
- Chapter 6 The Groom calls for his Beloved v13
- Chapters 7 & 8 The Beauty of their Love 8:6-7

### **The Interpretation of the Book**

#### **1: Practical Interpretation**

As we believe that this book details a real-life romance which actually occurred, the essential lesson, on the surface lesson is, that the love which we enjoy within the sanctity of marriage is a precious holy gift bequeathed by our Creator.

“The Song, therefore, is didactic and moral in its purpose. It comes to us in this world of sin, where lust and passion are on every hand, where fierce temptations assail us and try to turn us aside from the God-given standard of marriage. And it reminds us, in particularly beautiful fashion, how pure and noble true love is.” (Edward J Young).

It also gives the lie to the Romish view that there is something defiling and corrupting about sexual relationships, even within marriage, making it necessary for priests and nuns to live celibate lives.

## 2: Spiritual Interpretation of the Book

All who have studied the Song of Songs have not been content with the literal interpretation alone. As a result there have been many differing and at times conflicting ideas as to the real meaning of this love song.

## 3: Hebrew Interpretation

The Rabbis traditionally regarded this book as being typical of the constant love of God for his people. Therefore the bridegroom is God and the bride becomes Israel. They saw the emancipation of God's people from Egyptian slavery, their wilderness wanderings and their eventual settlement in Canaan all within the compass of the book.

## 4: Christian Interpretation - The Marriage between Christ and His Church

This has been the dominant view of early Christian, Catholic and Protestant scholars since Origen first depicted the Song of Songs as being an allegory of the love between Christ and the church. This remains the dominant view, and is one, which most Christians take for granted as being correct.

Within this interpretation, there are, however, three differing standpoints. These standpoints relate to our view of the characters within the Song of Songs and who they represent. Who for example is the Bridegroom? Was he Solomon himself or is he the shepherd alluded to in 1:7? How many principle characters are there in the song? Are there two (Solomon and the Shulamite) or are there three (Solomon, the Shulamite and the Shepherd lover)? If the latter is the case, are there, therefore two men, competing for the affections of the young woman and who won the contest, the king or the shepherd? These are tantalising questions which add a sense of mystery and drama to the beauty of the Song.

### a) Solomon as a Type of Christ

This is the view which sees Solomon as an illustration of Christ's love for the church, His bride. Dr Brian Green in "Shepherd of the

Hills” criticises this approach, “In this book he boasts of sixty queens and eighty concubines without number (6:8). Eventually his harem would include many more. The question must be asked - how could such a sensualist be a type of Christ?”

#### b) Solomon as a Shepherd King

This is a variation of the first interpretation where Solomon is portrayed as one who woos the young woman unsuccessfully. Knowing her to be from a pastoral setting, however, he disguises himself as a shepherd winning her affections. The application is clear; Christ condescended to a low estate to win us as his bride. While the parallels are filled with beauty, the third figure in the story is erased as he becomes Solomon.

#### c) The Shepherd as a Type of Christ

This view is very satisfying. Solomon in his pursuit of beautiful women takes the young woman away from her shepherd lover. As such, Solomon rather than being Christ is reflective of the world in its effort to entice us away from the Lord. The young woman was heartbroken in her gilded, Jerusalem palace prison. She longed for her shepherd who came searching for her as he too was distraught. Eventually they are reunited and she returned with him to the hills and to her vineyard (8:12-14). It is Christ's constant and perpetual love which is therefore in view throughout the Song. Even when we are drawn by the world we retain our love for Him and He will come seeking for us.

If the last view is correct, the Song is a fitting sequel to Ecclesiastes. Solomon, in his naivety, thought that he could enjoy whatever woman he desired because he offered everything by way of riches and material comfort. In the case of this young woman, however, he could not give her what her shepherd could supply, true love. Therefore the king learned a lesson which he would never forget.

While Edward J. Young remained fairly sceptical of the typical applications, on the grounds that they turned the Song into a mere allegory or fable, he nevertheless could see the beauty of a God who gave the gift of love to humanity throughout these chapters:

“But the book does turn one's eyes to Christ. This is certainly shown by the history of interpretation in the Christian church. The book may be regarded as a tacit parable. The eye of faith as it beholds this picture of exalted human love - will be reminded of the one Love that is above and beyond all earthly and human affections - even the love of the Son of God for lost humanity” (Edward J. Young).

## Part 23

### Isaiah: The Prophet of Grace

Key Text: Chapter 40:1

“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.”

Isaiah commences a section known in our Bible as the Major Prophets. The Jews, however, called this section the Latter Prophets or the Writing Prophets. The latter title emphasised that their words were verbally inspired and perpetuated.

#### Who Was Isaiah?

He was a prophet raised up by God to teach the people of Judah divine truth. His ministry began sometime during the reign of King Uzziah and continued during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. There is a Jewish tradition that he continued to serve God in the reign of Manasseh during which time he was executed, but of this we cannot be certain. At any rate, his ministry was exceedingly long; the shortest estimate being forty-nine years with the longest being sixty-four years. This extensive period of service produced the longest volume penned by any of the prophets. Over a period which occupied between forty-nine and sixty-four years, sixty-six chapters are, in reality, quite a brief summary of this man's faithfulness to his God. He was a most influential figure in his day, having both the ear and the respect of kings.

#### What was the Purpose of Isaiah's Ministry?

The world was a rapidly changing place. A new superpower was emerging in the east, which posed a considerable threat to the Jewish people. In Isaiah's day, this power was taking shape in the form of the Assyrian empire while a hundred years later the Babylonian Empire would arise as a much stronger and more potent force. These were days of domestic unrest fuelled by international upheaval. The Assyrians were flexing their military muscle in a way that no other nation had ever done in the history of the world up until that point. Nations were occupied by the Assyrian armies

and annexed into the greater empire. During the reign of Ahaz, King of Judah, the northern kingdom of the Jews was eventually brought to an end (2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 17). This undoubtedly caused tremendous consternation in Judah and part of Isaiah's task was to teach the people of God how to react to this changing and worrying situation.

This new situation in the world was in reality the revival of the spirit of Babel, which was the spirit of Antichrist. Babel represented an effort to bring the peoples of the world into an ungodly alliance but God confounded their efforts. For thousands of years, this spirit lay dormant with no effort being made to unify the nations. In this period, the Jewish nation emerged from small beginnings; the family of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob survived much hostility, the sojourn in Egypt and the wilderness wanderings to become the envy of the world, under Solomon. In Isaiah's day, however, the glory of Israel had long since faded and the old spirit of Antichrist was bringing the nations together and the Jewish people were very much in his sights.

While Satan was utilising this situation to destroy the Jewish people, and, in particular the seed from which the Messiah would spring, God was in control, preparing the world and Israel for the coming of the Saviour. Christ would come not to preside over a Jewish state but to establish a spiritual kingdom of which Israel was only a faint shadow. Therefore with the decline of Israel, God was paving the way for a greater kingdom which would occupy the entire world.

Edward J. Young in his "Introduction To The Old Testament" wrote on this point: "Isaiah's ministry occurred at a crucial time in Judah's history. The Assyrian power was rising, and in the light of this fact two groups appeared within the nation. One would seek alliance with Egypt and the other with Assyria. Isaiah, however, forbade human alliances and urged the nation to trust in God. As a sign of deliverance, he proclaimed the birth of the Messiah and prophesied concerning the nature of His Kingdom."

The later chapters are full of remarkable teachings, which are applicable to the church of Christ. Therefore, Isaiah's book points the way to the emergence of the new Israel, the spiritual nation. Therefore, the gospel of grace dominates the later chapters particularly, and there are numerous references to the coming of Christ, His person and work. This is very much in keeping with the

meaning of Isaiah's name, "the LORD is salvation". On this account, Isaiah has on occasions been called "The fifth gospel".

### **Did Isaiah Write All Of This Prophecy?**

Liberal scholars have long contended that Isaiah only wrote fragments of the book which bears his name. Such remarks, however, are based on the premise that the Bible is the product of man and is not the word of God. We must approach the Bible exercising faith and in so doing we presume that the scriptures are inspired because the Bible itself bears witness to this fact. We do not need scholarly arguments to prove that Isaiah was indeed the penman (although these are useful in their place), we only require the authority of the Scriptures.

What is truly fascinating about Isaiah is that there are more quotations from his book in the New Testament than from the rest of the prophets put together. This, in itself, proves that Isaiah is the author. For example, if we deny this then the entire New Testament is a fabrication and the gospel is a myth. Such is the uniformity of the scriptures that we must believe everything or accept nothing.

Below is a list of New Testament passages which specifically quote from Isaiah, naming him as the author in so doing:

New Testament Passage	Passage Quoted
Matthew 3:3	40:3
Matthew 8:17	53:4
Matthew 12:18	42:1
Matthew 13:14	6:9-10
Matthew 15:7	29:13
Mark 1:2	40:3
Mark 7:6	29:13
Luke 3:4	40:3-5
Luke 4:18	61:1-2
John 1:23	40:3

John 12:38	53:1
John 12:39-41	6:9-10
Acts 8:28	53:7-8
Acts 8:30	53:7-8
Acts 8:32	53:7-8
Acts 28:25	6:9-10
Romans 9:27	10:22-23
Romans 9:29	1:9
Romans 10:16	53:1
Romans 10:20	65:1

### **Outline Of The Book Of Isaiah**

- Chapters 1 to 12 The Assyrian Threat
- Chapters 13 to 35 God Reigning over the Nations
- Chapters 36 to 39 King Hezekiah
- Chapters 40 to 66 Future Blessings for The Church

### **Themes**

- The Messiah - 7:14, 9:6, 11:1-2, 42:1-4, 53, 61:1-3,
- The Gospel - 55, 61:10, 62:1-4, 11-12, 63:7-9, 65:1-2,
- Comforting Promises - 40, 41:10, 43:1-2, 44:1-3, 45:1-4, 49:12-16
- The Bible in Miniature - Begins with sin (1:6), continues with history, points to Christ and concludes with the eternal state (65:17-25).

## Part 24

### Jeremiah: The Weeping Prophet

Key Text: Chapter 1:7-9

“But the LORD said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the LORD. Then the LORD put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth.”

Almost one hundred years after God called Isaiah to be His spokesman in Judah, He raised up Jeremiah to continue this good work. For approximately forty years, this man of God proclaimed the truth to Jerusalem but the people were unwilling to listen. He was well known to the kings, conversing with them, being summoned into their presence and at times being punished by them. If we were to measure Jeremiah by the standards of acceptability and popularity, we would conclude that his ministry was an unmitigated disaster. Yet according to the divine measure of faithfulness, Jeremiah is an historical Colossus. He warned, he prophesied and he witnessed the fall of a nation that had rejected God. His path was distressing and heart-rending. Therefore, he has become known as the weeping prophet (9:1).

#### Biography of Jeremiah

Jeremiah is unique among the prophets in that his book contains more biographical material than any other. We learn that he was from Anathoth, a town situated northwest of Jerusalem. He was from a priestly family. He was called as a prophet when only a young man (1:6), some think he was about twenty years of age, in the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign. Initially, Jeremiah lived in Anathoth, travelling to Jerusalem to proclaim God's Word where he encountered opposition. He even suffered rebuffs in his native town, among his own family (11:18-23, 12:6). Eventually he moved to Jerusalem. The death of Josiah, who did much good, was

particularly devastating (2nd Chronicles 35:25) although he does not specifically mention this in his prophecy.

Josiah was followed by his son, Jehoahaz, against whom Jeremiah prophesied (22:11-17), and who only survived for three months, being slain by the Egyptians.

His brother, Jehoiakim, was placed on the throne by the Egyptian emperor. Many of Jeremiah's prophecies occurred at this time, including his great address in the temple (7-9). In chapter thirty-six, God commands Jeremiah to gather his prophecies into a book, a clear indication that Jeremiah was the author and that God intended his addresses to be perpetuated in a written form. After the king shredded them with his knife, Jeremiah received a second copy from the Lord. At the end of Jehoiakim's reign, Nebuchadnezzar emerged as the strongest power in the region. He captured Jerusalem and carried the king to Babylon in chains. This was the occasion when Daniel was brought to Babylon (Daniel 1:1).

Nebuchadnezzar placed Jehoiakim's son, Jehoiachin, on the throne of Judah. He only lasted three months, being taken to Babylon as Jeremiah had predicted (22:24-30).

Another son of Jehoiakim's (2nd Chronicles 36:9-10), Zedekiah, was then placed on the throne by Nebuchadnezzar. Zedekiah attempted to break the yoke of Babylon by refusing to pay tribute (2nd Chronicles 36:13). Jeremiah advised against this, urging Zedekiah to be respectful towards the imperial power (27:12-22). Finally, Nebuchadnezzar moved against Jerusalem for one final siege. Jeremiah was arrested at this time and placed in a dungeon. This was in spite of Jeremiah's purchase of a field from his cousin Hanameel which was a sign that the Jews would one day recover their territory. Overall, however, Jeremiah was considered too truthful for the people of Jerusalem to stomach. Judgement was inevitable. Nevertheless, recognising his status as a man of God the king enquired for a word from the Lord, as these were desperate times (37:17). The King brought Jeremiah from the dungeon allowing him the freedom of the prison court. However, his enemies cast him into a slime pit, in an effort to silence him. He would have died, were it not for the endeavours of Ebedmelech, the Ethiopian (38:7-13). When Jerusalem finally fell, Zedekiah was blinded and brought to Babylon as another trophy for Nebuchadnezzar to exhibit.

Subsequently, Jeremiah was set free by Nebuzaradan, the Babylonian general (39:11-14). Certain Jews then murdered Gedaliah, the governor whom Babylon had set over affairs in Judah, and fled to Egypt, taking Jeremiah with them against his will (43:1-7). In the place where they settled, Jeremiah continued his ministry, with his addresses being recorded in Ch. 43-44.

### **Outline of Jeremiah's Prophecies**

- Chapters 1-25 Judgement against Judah
- Chapters 26-45 Jeremiah's personal life.
- Chapters 46-51 Judgement upon the Gentile nations.
- Chapters 52 Historical appendix (mirroring 2nd Kings 24-25)

### **Purpose of Jeremiah's Ministry**

Jeremiah's work was to denounce Judah as a people who were ripe for judgement on account of their sin. This was evident from the moment when he was called. The Lord told him his path would be difficult but that he would know divine protection as he engaged in his solemn ministry (1:7-10).

### **Hope in the Midst of Darkness**

It is in Jeremiah's writings that we see the grace of God in being married to the backslider. Continually the people who forsook the Lord are urged to return to one who is gracious and willing to forgive (3:14). In 29:10-12, he gives God's promise that after the period of suffering, Israel would return to their homeland once again. This promise was of particular comfort to Daniel as he lived his life in captivity.

### **The Messianic Nature of Jeremiah's Ministry**

Against a dark and foreboding backdrop, Jeremiah was given some of the most beautiful Old Testament prophecies of Christ. In, 23:5-6, he foretells the King who would arise as the righteous branch, the one known as *Jehovah Tsidkenu*, or the Lord our Righteousness. Christ as the branch of David, as the holy King and

the one who meets the need of our unrighteousness is set forth in these verses in all his glory. In 31:31-34 he sees a new day when God will write His law in the hearts of His people (regeneration) and will remember their sins no more. Paul verified writing to the Hebrews that this was indeed a gospel prophecy (Hebrews 8:8-12). 33:16 affords a most beautiful climax to these messianic prophecies when once again The Lord our Righteousness is identified.

### **Jeremiah as a Type of Christ**

As one who was both priest and prophet, Jeremiah is a type of Christ. His separation from his mother's womb, his ministry which experienced wholesale rejection, his suffering and persecution and his gracious words of comfort all represent the future ministry of Christ our Messiah. As with Christ, he came unto his own but his own received him not, yet still he offered hope to an undeserving people.

## Part 25

### Lamentations: A Cluster of Tragic Poems

Key Text: Chapter 3:22-23

“It is of the LORD’S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.”

Lamentations is a collection of five poems, in which the Babylonish destruction of Jerusalem is lamented. The intensity of sorrow and pain expressed in these laments makes this one of the most tragic, if not the most tragic book, in the bible. Quoting Lowth, Fausset describes the tone of language in these poems, “Every letter is written with a tear, every word the sound of a broken heart.” In reading this book, we ought to pause and think about the pathos, the pain, the agony that we might in some way enter into the pain of the author.

#### Title

The Hebrews called this book *Echah* or ‘How’. One can appreciate the import of these words in the light of the terrible devastation which had transpired. As we pass through our sorrows and chastenings we often lament with the question represented by the word ‘how’; ‘How and why has this tragedy happened? What is God’s purpose?’ The Septuagint ascribed the book “The Tears of Jeremiah” and Jerome followed on with the “The Lamentations of Jeremiah” when preparing the Latin Vulgate. The English title is therefore derived from the Latin.

#### Place in the Scriptures

The English Bible places Lamentations in its historical place following on from Jerusalem’s collapse in the days of Jeremiah. The Hebrew Scriptures, however, include this book in the Hagiographa or Writings in a subsection known as the Megilloth.

The Psalms and other poetical books are also in the Hagiographa. The Megilloth also contains The Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes and Esther.

### Authorship

Nowhere does Lamentations state that Jeremiah was the author. It has generally been assumed that the great prophet composed these five poems. The Jews from early times perpetuated this tradition. Both the Greek (Septuagint) and Latin (Vulgate) versions of Scripture emphasised Jeremiah's authorship within the title. The place which Lamentations has in the English Bible, following on from his prophecy, is based on the assumption that Jeremiah is the author. Is the assumption that Jeremiah wrote these poems credible and verifiable? While it is not verifiable, in that the evidence is inconclusive, it is certainly credible in that there is circumstantial evidence leading us to Jeremiah as the author.

1. The poems were written by one who witnessed the fall of Jerusalem.
2. The author had a tender heart of sympathy consistent with Jeremiah's reputation as the weeping prophet.
3. Jeremiah composed lamentations at the time of Josiah's death (2nd Chronicles 35:25). These were different lamentations but they certainly suggest that this style of poetry was typical of the prophet.
4. There are a number of phrases employed throughout Lamentations which bear striking similarity to Jeremiah's style in his prophecy. One example is the description of "the oppressed daughter of Zion" (1:15 and Jeremiah 8:21). Scholars have identified other peculiarities of Jeremiah's style in these poems.

This combination of circumstantial and forensic evidence leads us to the conclusion that it is not unreasonable to suggest that Jeremiah was, in fact, the author.

### Style

While Lamentations uses literary instruments such as parallelism and metaphor, it is especially unique for the technique known as

alliteration. Psalm 119 is an example of another portion of scripture where this technique is employed. In the case of Lamentations, it is no accident that the translators of the Authorised Version chose to divide the book into five chapters, four containing twenty-two verses and one containing sixty-six verses (a multiple of twenty-two).

In the case of the first poem, (chapter one) there are twenty-two lines and each line begins with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This pattern is followed in the second poem and the fourth poem. The third poem, however, which is central is the book, is made up of sixty-six lines. Each group of three lines begins with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The fifth poem is somewhat unique in that there is no alliteration whatsoever. Alliteration was probably employed from the point of view of order as an aid to memorising the poems.

## Outline

### The First Poem - Chapter One

Jeremiah begins by likening Jerusalem to a widow who has been plummeted into tragedy and grief (v1). He acknowledges, however, the sin of the nation which brought this disaster (v8) and the righteous dealings of God (v18). Jeremiah expresses his own grief of mind and soul. At times he appears as a type of the suffering Christ as the Almighty plunges his sword into his bones (v12-13). Jeremiah takes the sin of his people as if it were his sin as he prays and sighs. The picture of a man who cannot be consoled becomes more vivid as the poem reaches a climax (v20-22).

### The Second Poem - Chapter Two

While this poem also describes Jeremiah's pain (v11), the overwhelming theme is the judgement of God poured out upon his people. Jeremiah sees nothing but God's hand behind the atrocities perpetuated by Babylon. Therefore God had "cast down from heaven unto earth the beauty of Israel." He depicts God as a warrior army burning the city (v3), as an archer bending his bow and slaying (v4) and generally swallowing Israel up as an enemy (v5). He caused the temple and the altar to be removed (v6-7), he broke down the walls (v8) and sunk the gates into the ground (v9).

Jeremiah could see the hand of God in these tragic events because it correlated with his view of God as revealed in His word (v17). Jeremiah, however, in this poem pleads with his country to repent and turn from its sin. The words of v19 are especially instructive as he urges the nation to remember the plight of the young children who have been innocently caught up in this calamity.

### The Third Poem - Chapter Three

In v1-21 Jeremiah describes the devastating impact the fall of Jerusalem has had on his own spiritual life. He felt the rod of God (v1), all was darkness around him (v2) and his bones were broken (v4). The most difficult burden of all was that he felt shut out of heaven when in prayer (v8) and his soul was far removed from peace (v17).

V22-36 sees a change in tone as the prophet is able to see the mercy of God despite His terrible judgement. It is no accident that these verses lie at the heart of a tragic book. How often have we not quoted v22-23 in our own devotions? Jerusalem had fallen, many had died, hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, were in captivity. Yet, the nation was not exterminated. God was still gracious. These words are a challenge to us. Even the most tragic and horrendous situation imaginable is filled with the mercy and goodness of God. Jeremiah anticipated the forgiveness of God for his people and looked by faith to a better day. He learned to trust God in his despair.

Jeremiah proceeds with great hope, to urge his people to repent and turn to God (v40-41) before once again testifying to his own grief of mind and soul (v48-49). In the final section (v55-66) he certainly experiences great liberty in prayer as he knew that God heard him and saw him in his pains (v55-57). Therefore, having received a vision of God's mercy he enjoyed renewed blessing in intercession.

### The Fourth Poem - Chapter Four

This poem describes the national collapse with tragic poetry of the highest order: "How is the gold become dim! how is the most fine gold changed! the stones of the sanctuary are poured out in the top of every street. The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, how are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the

hands of the potter!” (v1-2). The gold was not merely the gold of the temple that had been desecrated and stolen. The gold of the sons of Zion had been relegated to earthen pitchers. The gold of the sanctuary was a symbol of the unfolding of a human tragedy.

Again, the image of the Nazarites, the holiest order among the Jews, being reduced to black coal depicts the impact the captivity had upon the people (v7-8).

Jeremiah, in his poem, explains the reason for the disaster. As well as speaking of God's fury he reflects upon the wicked spiritual leadership that caused innocent blood to be shed in Jerusalem (v13-16). He was under no illusions as to where the true problem rested. So it is today. Apostate Christendom has so much to answer for in relation to the spiritual decline of our nation.

#### The Fifth Poem Chapter Five

This lament takes the form of a prayer which Jeremiah offers to God on behalf of his nation. He begins by calling upon Jehovah to remember the situation in which they found themselves (v1). He confesses the sin of the people, acknowledging the true cause of the national upheaval. Verse 21 is especially poignant as the prophet prays, “turn thou unto us and we shall be turned.” We can and should model our prayers for our nation upon this remarkable supplication. As we turn to God, the church will be turned in revival and our nation will be turned in regeneration. Oh that God would look favourably upon us!

## Part 26

### Ezekiel: By the Rivers of Babylon

Key Texts: Chapter 18:4 & 18:20

“Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die.”

“The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.”

I have often felt the words of Psalm 137 relate strongly to Ezekiel's position and the days in which he lived. There, the captives describe themselves as sitting by the rivers of Babylon weeping, hanging their harps upon the willows because they could not sing the Lord's song in a strange land. In Ezekiel 1 we find this man among the captives, by the River Chebar, when God came with stupendous visions. The name Ezekiel means “God strengthens” which is most apt. The times in which he lived were most difficult but God strengthened him with a prophetic ministry to a captive nation.

#### Historical Context

Ezekiel testifies that he received his first prophecy in the thirtieth year. This date is somewhat obscure, with the scholars being unable to conclusively agree as to what it means. To some, it is thirty years after the law was discovered in the days of Josiah, to others Ezekiel was thirty at this time whereas some believe it has some reference to Babylonian chronology. What is clear, however, is that this thirtieth year was also the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity. Therefore five years previously, Jerusalem was captured and King Jehoiakim was taken to Babylon. Many captives were forcibly taken to Babylon at this time. Within three months, his son, Jehoiachin, rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, necessitating yet another Babylonian siege and conquest. As

Ezekiel makes mention of this Jewish king's captivity, it is very likely that he came to Babylon at this time also. Therefore Ezekiel was a captive in Babylon at the same time as Daniel. It is certain that he knew Daniel or at least was aware of his influence (14:14, 20, 28:3). Where Daniel held high office in the Babylonian kingdom using his godly influence to great effect Ezekiel, on the other hand, was called to minister to the ordinary Jewish people who suffered the ravages of displacement. As for Ezekiel, it appears that he was blessed with a comfortable life in Babylon enjoying his own home and being blessed with marriage (24:18), although this passage relates the painful episode of his wife's death. He was called to be a prophet in the fourth month of the fifth year of captivity. The latest date given in the book is the twenty-seventh year, meaning that his ministry lasted for twenty-two years and possibly longer.

### **The Purpose of His Ministry**

Ezekiel's purpose was to show Israel that this calamity had come to pass because of their sin, as the key text illustrates. Personal responsibility, is therefore a key element of the message. At the same time, hope is offered as he calls on the wayward children to repent, "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die" (33:11). He also prophesies of better days when the people will return to their land and enjoy one shepherd (34:23). As Edward J. Young wrote "Thus, the book reveals the faithfulness of God to His eternal purposes. The sinful nation must be destroyed, but yet God will not forsake His own."

### **The Peculiarities of Ezekiel's Ministry**

Ezekiel is characterised by unique and awe-inspiring visions. From his vision of God's glory in ch1, to the Valley of Dry Bones in ch37 and the amazing temple where God is always present, (40-48) he appears as a mystic. In this, he bears certain similarity to John who also saw mystical visions, which parallel Ezekiel's, as he too was a captive, on Patmos. Patrick Fairbairn comments that Ezekiel's ministry was definitely what was required by Israel at this terrible time in history:

"It was, in truth, precisely such a mind that was needed in the crisis, at which the affairs of the covenant-people had then

arrived, when, the external framework of the divine kingdom having fallen to pieces, the interest of God seemed ready to perish, and the very foundations of the faith were tottering at their base. No ordinary man, at such a time, was fitted anew to raise the standard of God's truth, and rally the prostrate forces of the kingdom. One was needed, who should be capable of living alike in the past and the future, and who could see, as with open eye, and grasp, as with giant's hand, the hidden realities of faith”

Ezekiel presented the glory of God to a backslidden people, he explained the reason for their present calamity, he foretold the total collapse of the state of Judah while at the same time he offered hope that a brighter and a better day was coming.

### **The Watchman**

Chapters 3:17 & 33:1-20; Ezekiel is the watchman of Israel charged with warning his people of the follies of their sin. As such, he represents preachers of all ages and the solemn obligations of their office.

### **The Departing Glory of God**

From chapter 9:3 to 11:23; Ezekiel relates the story of the departure of God's presence from Jerusalem. The glory of Jehovah departed slowly and progressively in response to the terrible sin of the nation. This progressive departure warned the people to repent of their sin and be restored to the God of their fathers. Spiritually ignorant people, however, are unable to read the signs of the times, and so Jerusalem collapsed. The Church needs to learn these lessons for the age in which we live, where souls are not being saved, where the prayer meeting is neglected, where a church haemorrhages her youth and becomes aged - are these not signs that the presence of God is no longer with us as once it was? We must be spiritually sensitive to the times in which we live, looking for the tokens of God's blessing, yes, but being equally moved by the tokens of divine displeasure.

### **Pictures of Revival**

Chapters 11:19 & 36:26 The Heart of Flesh

The stony heart is unresponsive to the will of God but when the Spirit of God moves, there is a softening and sensitivity to the Word of God.

#### Chapter 34 The Recovery of the Neglected Flock

The people of God have suffered because they have been spiritually neglected by shepherds who were self-serving and men pleasers. The flock is recovered, however, by Christ, represented as David (v24). He gathers His people and causes their land to be fruitful once again as He rains down “showers of blessing” (v26).

#### Chapter 37:1-14 The Valley of Dry Bones

A church which suffers the deadness of formalism and where all spiritual vibrancy is extinguished. How we need the wind of God to make these bones live!

### Understanding the Temple

Chapters 40-48; The most mysterious and difficult section of Ezekiel's remarkable prophecy is the temple which occupies the last 9 chapters. This vast edifice represents the presence of God coming to dwell with Israel once again. The picture is one of hope for a people reeling from the effects of God's judgement, being banished to a foreign land. As such, the vision of the temple offered the promise that God would return, and they would be revived again. These people, forsaken and desolate, who hung their harps upon the willows because they could not sing the Lord's song in a strange land, would have been heartened to hear the words with which Ezekiel concludes, which is the name of the city; “The LORD is there” or *Jehovah Shammah*.

It is evident, however, that there is so much more to Ezekiel's temple vision than the future of Israel in the Old Testament. While Israel did return and re-establish themselves in Jerusalem, rebuilding their temple and reconstituting its worship - they did not build *this* temple. I find the whole idea that this mighty temple represents a promise never gained, most unsatisfying.

I am personally convinced that the vision was partially fulfilled in Israel but is perfectly fulfilled in the church. One of the New Testament pictures of the Church is that of a temple (Ephesians 2:19-22, 2nd Corinthians 6:14-18, 1st Peter 2:5). There are beautiful gospel pictures in this vision, which a work of this nature does not permit me to examine in detail. One example is the

waters that spring from the altar in Ch.47, bursting as a mighty stream bringing life to the desert. Here is the Gospel issuing from the cross, being established by the merits of our Great High Priest, going to all the world and bringing life in a world of death. Yet this understanding has weaknesses. For example - Why would God include so much specific detail regarding this temple if only a spiritual meaning was in view?

I appreciate that some brethren consider this passage as a prophecy of the Millennial Temple erected in Jerusalem after the Second Coming of Christ. Benjamin Wills Newton in "Prospects of the Ten Kingdoms of the Roman Empire" cites Ezekiel's Temple as one of the proofs "that the seat of Christ's administrative government on Earth, will be established in Jerusalem, no less truly or visibly than God was established on Sinai". While this literal approach satisfies the precise nature of the vision it also has its difficulties, the most notable of which are the sacrifices which are offered. The very idea of sacrifices post Calvary undermines the thesis of Paul's epistle to the Hebrews. To be fair, however, in recognising this difficulty, some from this school of thought, deny that propitiatory sacrifices will be offered in the millennium.

For a fuller discussion of these futurist and historicist views on prophecy refer to the last chapter which examines Revelation.

Whatever our interpretation of this difficult vision, the closing words resonate with the church in every age filling our hearts with confidence and encouragement, as I discovered when reading A.A. Hodge on "God - His Nature and Relation to the Universe". Sitting in a railway carriage looking at the world around I was impressed by the all-pervading presence of God, *Jehovah Shammah* - one who is beyond us, above us, within us and around us:

"The Christian recognises every event as providential. Every hair of our head is numbered and not one sparrow falls to the ground except as our Father wills it. He works out all to will and to do of his good pleasure in all things. Hence every flower is a thought of God. The firmament reflects his immensity, and the order of the stars his limitless intelligence, and the myriad-fold beauty of the world unveils the secret chambers of his image-ry. The tempest is the letting loose of his strength, and the thunder utters his voice. To the Christian the universe is not merely a temple in which God is worshipped, but it is also the ever venerated countenance on which the affections of our Lord toward his children are visibly

expressed. Everywhere we see God and everywhere his ever-active benevolence toward us is articulated in smile and word and deed"

A.A. Hodge, "Evangelical Theology".

### **Outline**

- Chapters 1-7      The First Vision and the Call of the Prophet
- Chapters 8-24    The Sins of Israel bringing the Judgement of God
- Chapters 25-32    Judgement Upon the Gentile Nations
- Chapters 33-39    Revival Among God's People
- Chapters 40-48    The New Kingdom

## Part 27

### Daniel: God's Witness in a Hostile Society

Key Text: Chapter 4:35

“And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?”

The name Daniel means “God is my Judge”. There are three Bible characters who received this name. David's second son was called Daniel (1 Chronicles 3:1) as was a Levite in the days of Nehemiah (Nehemiah 10:6). By far the most prominent individual to bear this name, however, is the prophet whose inscription is found in this book.

#### Daniel's History

Christian and Jewish authorities alike are agreed that Daniel wrote his prophecy in Babylon in the 6th Century BC. He was among a group of captives who were brought from Jerusalem to Babylon after the defeat of King Jehoiakim. It appears that Daniel came from royal stock (1:3) and many believe he was born in Jerusalem. There were other young men from prominent families who found themselves in Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar was resolved to make use of the very best talent that existed among these slaves for the benefit of his government. Therefore, his advisers selected some young men who would be trained in the language and customs of the Chaldeans. This was probably a strategy which he employed to subjugate this slave nation who would be restless and possibly rebellious. By taking some of their number and transforming them into Chaldeans in language, dress and culture he was sending out a message that conformity to Babylon would be rewarded with prosperity. Daniel and his three friends Hannaniah (God has favoured), Mishael (who is what God is?) and Azariah (Jehovah has helped) were selected for this purpose. Immediately, their Jewish names were dispensed with and they were given Chaldean names which John Gill identifies as being associated with pagan deities;

Belteshazzar (Keeper of Bel's Treasures), Shadrach (Messenger of the Sun), Meshech (Of Shech) and Abednego (Servant of Nebo). In Daniel's account, these young men are known as "children". It is reckoned that this word is indicative of an age that lies somewhere between childhood and adulthood. In our language, we would describe these young men as youths, boys or lads, therefore they were almost certainly teenagers, more likely to be in early than late teens. This makes the historical account in the early chapters all the more remarkable. Babylon did everything that was humanly possible to eradicate Jewish culture from these young men but still they did not forget the God of their fathers and boldly represented His name in a hostile culture.

Daniel served as a close advisor to Nebuchadnezzar after which he appears to have fallen out of favour in the court of Babylon. He returned to brief prominence at the close of Belshazzar's tenure and was present on that fateful night when mighty Babylon fell. Darius, the Mede, made use of Daniel's extensive knowledge of Babylonian government, in the regulating of the empire of the Medes and Persians. It also appears that Daniel had considerable influence with Cyrus the Persian ruler and may even had some influence over him as he made the decree permitting the Hebrews to return to their homeland. Daniel, the boy slave had a most remarkable life and career, at the heart of the mighty powers of the age, yet remained true to his faith throughout.

### **Attacks Upon Daniel**

The Book of Daniel has been the subject of considerable attack by liberal scholars and theologians. Some have claimed the historic figure was not the author but that others compiled this work at a much later date. Others have questioned the validity of some of Daniel's historical records while some have claimed the prophecy of the wars between Syria and Egypt and of the times of Antiochus Epiphanes (Ch 11) is so historically accurate that it had to be written by an eye witness not a prophet. It is not necessary to consider the particulars of these objections. It is safe to conclude, that as Christ validated the authenticity of Daniel, his testimony is as sure as that of the Saviour (Matthew 24:15 Mark 13:14). Daniel himself testifies that he was the recipient of divine revelation; 7:1, 8:1, 9:2, 10:1, 12:5-8. In 12:4 he is commanded to preserve the book in which his words are found. Therefore, the internal

evidence of the scriptures points to this book as an integral part of the Old Testament canon.

### **Daniel's Place in the Hebrew Bible**

The Jews placed Daniel at the close of the Hebrew Bible preceding the historical books of Ezra, Nehemiah and Chronicles. Unlike those who compiled the sections of the English Bible the Hebrews did not consider Daniel to be truly a prophet. They believed Daniel was a statesman who at times received prophetic visions. He was not one who had received the training and qualifications which belonged to a true prophet. In this instance, we must state that the English Bible, is more accurate than the Hebrew Scriptures because Daniel was certainly one of the great Jewish prophets, as testified by Ezekiel (Ezekiel 14:14, 20).

### **Purpose of Daniel's Prophecy**

Throughout his life and through his visions, Daniel showed an ungodly society that the God of Israel was superior to the gods of the Gentile nations. He demonstrated that although the Gentile empires appeared to be in the ascendancy on occasions, they would crumble and fall, while the God of Israel would continue to establish His kingdom on earth. In fact, the God of Israel would use the rise and fall of these great empires to further His cause among men. The power of a sovereign God is the primary lesson from Daniel's prophecy.

### **Outline**

#### **Section 1 Historical**

##### **Chapter 1**

By refusing to eat the King's food, Daniel and his friends are blessed by God and gain favour.

##### **Chapter 2**

Daniel, after prayer, interprets the dream of Nebuchadnezzar's image, which demonstrates the sovereignty of God among the kingdoms of men, and the supremacy of God's Kingdom in the world.

##### **Chapter 3**

Shadrach, Meshech and Abednego are delivered from the fiery furnace, to which they were committed, after refusing to bow to Nebuchadnezzar's image.

#### Chapter 4

Nebuchadnezzar is stricken with insanity, which Daniel prophesied through an interpretation of a dream.

#### Chapter 5

Daniel interprets the writing on the wall and Babylon falls to the Medes and Persians.

#### Chapter 6

Daniel is trapped by the jealous princes who passed a law forbidding prayer to any deity save the king. For breaking the law, Daniel is thrown into the den of lions from which he is saved.

## Section 2 Prophetical

#### Chapter 7

The vision of the four beasts is an enlargement of four kingdoms within Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Ch 2. The fourth kingdom, however, in this vision is a terrible beast with ten horns. Three of these horns, which are kings, succumb to a little more powerful horn which arises to make war with God's people. To some this little horn is the Papacy, to others he is a political leader who will arise at the end of time. Ultimately, the powers of Antichrist will be overcome by the one whom Daniel describes as the Ancient of Days, the judge of all the earth.

#### Chapter 8

The battle between the ram and the goat represents the fall of the Medes and Persians to the Greek empire, under Alexander the Great. The little horn on the goat represents Antiochus Epiphanes who persecuted the Jewish people.

#### Chapter 9

Daniel discerns the meaning of Jeremiah's prophecy regarding the seventy years in exile. He sets himself to pray for the return of the Jewish people to their homeland. God reveals to Daniel a figurative period of seventy weeks during which the temple would be rebuilt and the Messiah would come to His people.

#### Chapter 10

Daniel receives an angelic visitor who has come to reveal the future to the man described as “greatly beloved”.

#### Chapter 11

The wars between the kings of Egypt and Syria are described in a way which is verified by the histories of the period. The rise of Antiochus Epiphanes is also charted. These events would take place three to four hundred years after Daniel.

#### Chapter 12

Daniel transports us to the end of time, to the resurrection, everlasting rewards for the wicked and glory for the righteous. Daniel completes his vision with a reference being made to a period of 1,290 days (3 ½ years) which is the same as the times, time and half a time (12:7, 7:25). This represents a period of persecution yet those who would endure this period and keep the faith would be blessed. Daniel, himself, is the supreme example of faith remaining pure under fire, and as such, inspires persecuted Christians in every age.

## Part 28

### Hosea: Plain Words for a Backsliding People

Key Text: Chapter 4:6

“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.”

#### The Twelve

Hosea commences a new section in the English Bible, which is commonly known as The Minor Prophets. This section is distinctive, in that apart from the Pentateuch, this is the only part of the English Bible which follows the same pattern as the Hebrew Scriptures. The arrangement and order of these twelve books is very ancient. These writings were a sub-section of a part of the Hebrew Bible known as the Latter Prophets or the Writing Prophets. This section included the lengthy writings of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel which were followed by the inspired works of these twelve men. Both Jewish and early Christian writers gave this section a very concise title, “The Twelve”. There is some evidence from the early church that these prophets were regarded as being one book because we find references to “The Book of the Twelve Prophets”. While they have come to be regarded as The Minor or The Lesser Prophets this term has respect only to the length of their writings, not the spiritual contribution that they made. These men were major figures for God in their generation. They stood in the gap and boldly resisted the apostasy and compromise of their peoples. They were mighty men of God.

The order of these twelve prophets is not easily understood. Hosea stands first, probably because he occupies the most space. Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi are last because they are latest of all the prophets. Between Hosea and Haggai the prophets are roughly arranged according to their chronology, although this is by no means exact.

These twelve men span a considerable period of Jewish history. Joel, the earliest of their number ministered after the reign of

Jehu. As such, he was a successor of Elisha and Elijah. He was probably trained in one of the schools of the prophets established by Elijah. The earliest of the minor prophets (Joel, Amos, Hosea, Jonah) were ministering before Isaiah's call. Hosea's ministry certainly overlapped the ministry of Isaiah. The final prophets witnessed the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple and played a crucial role in assisting Ezra and Nehemiah during the resettlement of the land.

### **The Man whose name means Saviour**

The name Hosea is a variant of Joshua and Jesus, all of which mean Saviour. He was a true mediator who prefigures the greatest prophet who would come with words from God. His ministry was chiefly to the northern kingdom, the ten tribes who separated themselves from the House of David in the days of Rehoboam and Jeroboam 1st. One of the features of Hosea's prophecy is the use of the tribe Ephraim as being synonymous with the entire northern kingdom. On thirty-seven occasions he calls Israel by the name Ephraim. This would indicate that in his day, Ephraim was the most numerous and most influential tribe in the nation. Therefore Jacob's promise concerning Joseph, that his branches would run over the wall, was certainly being fulfilled.

Hosea's dates are set forth by association with the reigns of certain kings both of Israel and of Judah. It has been reckoned, after totalling the years of these kings that Hosea must have ministered God's Word for a period approaching, if not exceeding, sixty-five years. Although he ministered in the north, the names of certain southern kings are associated with him as Judah was the true home of Biblical worship and the seat of the house of David from which the Messiah would come. I believe there is an indication here that the ministry of Hosea was known and respected in the kingdom of Judah.

### **Days of Deepening Apostasy**

Hosea began preaching during the reign of Jeroboam 2<sup>nd</sup>, the grandson of Jehu, who was chosen by God to execute judgement upon the house of Ahab. Jeroboam 2<sup>nd</sup> was a most successful monarch who strengthened and prospered Israel. Nevertheless, his

reign was marred by sin and a following of the idolatrous ways of Israel's first monarch, Jeroboam the son of Nebat (2nd Kings 14:23-29). In Dan and Bethel, there were golden calves to whom the people paid homage. They imitated the true biblical worship having priests and sacrifices. Yet all of this was not acceptable because they had turned the glory of the Lord God Jehovah into a four-footed beast. Therefore, throughout his prophecy, Hosea condemns the falsehood of apostate religion; 4:5-6, 8, 9, 5:1, 6, 6:6,9, 8:14, 9:7-8, 10:5.

Apostate religion will always be the author of sin and wickedness. It seemed that in the days of Hosea every commandment of God was broken. He writes of deceit (4:1, 7:1), adultery (4:11, 5:3-4), murder (5:2, 6:8), robbery (7:1), and perversions of justice (10:4). It seemed that the ills of a nation were concentrated upon the false priests, their prophets and the religion that they promoted. The king and his court set the example (7:5), the priests engaged in the sins of the nation (4:8-9), adultery became an act of religion (4:14), the priests sought to intercept and murder those who travelled south to Jerusalem to worship (5:1, 6:9), places sacred to God were violated and every good memory erased (4:15). There was total ignorance and a rejection of true knowledge (4:6). It seemed the situation was beyond repair (7:1).

### **A Marriage with a Message**

Intriguingly, Hosea's prophecy begins with an account of a marriage, that while commanded by God, is at variance with our understanding of Biblical principles. Hosea is told to marry Gomer, a woman who is ungodly and known for a promiscuous lifestyle. It is clear from 1:2, however, that Hosea's marriage to this woman is intended to be a picture lesson to the nation, of their apostasy. As Gomer was married to Hosea, a faithful husband, so Israel was married to God. As Gomer committed adultery and broke Hosea's heart, so the Jews had pursued false religion and committed spiritual adultery.

There are some writers who believe that this marriage was a parable and not an actual real-life situation. This case is set forth because of the paradox, why would God ask his servant to marry an ungodly woman? This analysis, however, poses even more questions. Gomer is identified with her father being mentioned, Diblaim. This indicates that she was an actual woman. If the

marriage is an allegory, can we then be sure that Hosea himself, is an actual person? On the balance of evidence, I would suggest that the marriage did take place according to God's commandment. God's ways are mysterious. He often leads his people through strange and difficult paths to fulfil a great purpose. Such was Hosea's lot in life.

Hosea and Gomer had three children, and their names represented a clear message to an apostate people:

Jezreel     Judgement is coming to the royal house of Jehu.

Lo-ruhamah     God will not have mercy upon Israel.

Lo-ammi     Israel is not God's people.

Despite Gomer's adultery and her infatuation with other lovers, Hosea continued to love his wife, offering her a home. This is the occasion of a beautiful message to Israel from God where He offered mercy and grace (2:14-23).

Gomer persists on this destructive path which eventually leads her to poverty and the slave market. Her way, indeed, is hedged with thorns and she discovers in the cruellest manner possible that Hosea is the one who is good and kind to her (2:6-8). The third chapter finds Gomer in the slave market, being auctioned off to pay for the debts she has incurred and as a means of escape from the poverty in which she finds herself. Hosea, however, goes seeking for his adulterous wife, finding her in the slave market, and purchasing her for himself. It is an exceptional act of forgiveness. Chapter 3:2, is in many respects, John 3:16 in the Old Testament where God purchased us out of the slave market of sin by sending His Son to the cross.

### **Hosea's Plain Word Pictures**

Hosea employs a plain straightforward style in teaching the people the truth of God. He is the master of the metaphor and he employs this technique with devastating effect:

Metaphors for God - Husband (2:15-16), Shepherd (4:16), Moth (5:12), Young Lion (5:14), A Father (11:1), Lion and Leopard (13:7), Bear Bereft of Her Cubs (13:8), Healer (14:4).

Metaphors for Israel - Prostitute (1:2), Slave (3), Backsliding Heifer (4:16), Suffering Sicknes (5:13), A Morning Cloud (6:4), Adulterers

(7:4), Drunkards (7:5), Cake Half Baked (7:8), A Silly Dove (7:11), Sowing the Wind and Reaping the Whirlwind (8:7), Wild Grapes (9:10), A Bird Flying Away (9:11), A Dried Up Root (9:16), An Empty Vine (10:1), A Heifer that is Trained (10:11), Fallow Ground (10:12), A Child (11:1), A Lily (14:5), An Olive Tree (14:6).

### **Repentance and Forgiveness**

Amid the darkness of apostasy and impending judgement, Hosea produces beautiful promises that Israel will repent and God will be gracious. These passages supply wonderful words of encouragement for the church in this New Testament age (6:1-3, 10:12, 14:4). They certainly remind us that while a backsliding people will suffer the consequences of their sin, God is gracious and will restore such a one to blessing and favour.

### **Outline**

**God's Marital Relationship with His People Chapters 1-3**

Through the picture of Hosea's difficult marriage, the unfaithfulness of the people and the mercy of God are vividly demonstrated.

**The Decline and Fall of a Nation Chapters 4-14**

Hosea has been called the prophet of the decline and fall of the northern kingdom. The defeat by Assyria and the subjugation of the people is related.

## Part 29

### Joel: The Rending of Hearts

Key Text: Chapter 2:13

“And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.”

#### Joel's Time and Place

Hebrew scholars identify Joel's name as meaning, “The Lord is God”. The combination of the letters “Jo” (abbreviation for Jehovah) and “el” which always signifies God, would certainly warrant that conclusion. Therefore, this man with his very name proclaimed an important message, that there only is one God, Jehovah, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Jehovah, He is God.

In 1:1 two vital facts are presented, authenticating this man's ministry. The “Word of the Lord” came to him. He did not present his own ideas because his ministry was a revelation of divine truth. The second important fact that the introduction presents is that Joel was “the son of Pethuel”. Therefore Joel is a literal figure whose lineage is identified.

It is believed that Joel is the earliest of the minor prophets. As he served God before the major prophets also, this makes him the earliest of the written prophets in the prophetic section of the English Bible. While the book does not state the king who reigned at the time of writing the general thought is that he served in the days of King Joash (2nd Chronicles 22:10-2nd Chronicles 24).

Certainly the tone of the book would indicate that Joel ministered to the southern kingdom, known as Judah, as opposed to Israel, the northern kingdom. He writes about the priests and the House of God (1:9), the trumpet blowing in Zion (2:1), Judah and Jerusalem (3:1).

Joel's ministry in Judah pre-dated Amos' prophecy which took place in the days of Uzziah of Judah and Jeroboam 2nd of Israel. In Amos

1:2 the language of Joel is employed, “The Lord will roar from Zion (Joel 3:16). Also, Amos' closing promise employs poetic language that is strikingly similar to that of Joel (compare Amos 9:13 with Joel 3:18).

The question, remains, how much earlier was Joel's ministry to that of Amos? The clue is found in the omission of the king's name from the autograph. At the beginning of Joash's reign the throne was usurped by the wicked and murderous Queen Athaliah. At this time, the people looked to the priests especially Jehoiada, the high priest. When Joash finally received his crown, at seven years of age, Jehoiada played a key role in the leadership of the nation. He was in effect “The king-maker”. Therefore Joel directs words from the Lord to the priests urging them to provide spiritual direction to the nation (1:9, 13, 2:17).

Joel's ministry belongs to a time long before the Babylonian and Assyrian threat to Judah's, and Israel's, independence. Joel rather makes mention of enemies who were problematic in an earlier time, which is broadly consistent with the days of Joash. The Phoenicians, Egyptians and Edomites are referred to by this prophet (3:4, 19). This is verified at least in part in 2nd Kings 8:20-22 and 2nd Chronicles 21:16-17.

### **Historical Backdrop**

Joel was called by God to present a message against a background of economic despair. In 1:4 he informs us that that the land had been infested with insects (palmerworm, locusts, cankerworm and caterpillar) which stripped vines, the fig, apple and pomegranate trees as well as decimating the wheat and barley harvests (1:7-12).

What were these insects that caused such devastation? In 1915 a plague of locusts invaded Palestine and Syria. These insects were observed to develop in four stages. The swarm of locusts descended in a cloud so thick that the sun was darkened. The females laid eggs that were thought to number 65,000 per square metre. Six weeks later, when the eggs hatched, the young locusts crawled like large ants devouring all vegetation. When their wings developed, they continued walking and devouring as they went. It was only when they moulted once more that they became the adult locusts that had descended upon the land in the first instance. At every stage of development, they laid waste to all

organic growth including the very bark of the trees. All of this is consistent with what Joel described. The fourfold development of the locust is almost certainly what Joel has in mind in 1:4.

### **Interpreting The Calamity**

As God's messenger it was Joel's duty to explain this calamity that had afflicted the nation. In 2:25 this infestation of locusts is described by God as "my great army which I sent among you." Therefore Joel was pointing out that this disaster was not a mere natural phenomenon, the hand of God could be delineated in the unfolding of events. In several places, he describes the sun being darkened as the day of God's judgement descended (2:2, 31, 3:15), which depicts the first feature of the arrival of the locusts. We are loathe to attribute national disasters to the hand of God lest we are seen to be unpatriotic and judgemental. However, if we believe in a sovereign God, we are obliged to see His handiwork in all circumstances. At the very least, we must declare that when our land, or our church, is beset by difficulties that God is leading us this way to teach us serious lessons. While society refuses to acknowledge God's providences, let us not fall into the same humanistic trap of unbelief.

### **The Call for Repentance**

As the land had suffered nationally, Joel's prophecy calls for national repentance. In 1:13-14 he urges the priests to call a fast day and bring the people together for a solemn assembly. He calls upon them to open their eyes and observe the devastation and turn to God, because He alone can remedy the situation (1:13-20).

In 2:12-27 Joel takes up this theme once again. He calls upon the people to turn unto the Lord with all their hearts with fasting, weeping and mourning, rending their hearts and not their garments (2:12-13). The phrase 'rending the heart' would clearly show that formal religion was not what God required. He desired true repentance, true faith and true prayer. This phrase is deeply relevant for the evangelical church today. We emphasise purity of worship but the format is worthless if we do not draw near to God with our hearts.

The call to the priests to pray on behalf of the nation is indicative that sin had caused this plague to descend on their crops, “Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them, wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God?”.

### **The Promise of Encouragement**

The promise most often quoted from Joel is found in 2:25, “And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten.” This certainly applies to the physical destruction that had occurred as a consequence of the infestation. This recovery, however, is directly attributed to the power of prayer. It is also linked to the mercy and forgiveness of God (2:13-14). The primary matter that needed addressed was the failed relationship with God. The descent of the locusts, on a wind from the north, was emblematic of the sins of formalism and dead religion that had beset the devotional spirit of the nation. God, at times, chastens his people for their spiritual coldness. He causes material problems to afflict us in order that we might turn unto the Lord. He provides inducements in order that we might be turned to prayer. With the restoration of fellowship with God, the physical barrenness was then addressed. Whatever our problems, we must first of all develop a true and genuine walk with God, trusting in Him to meet our other various needs.

### **The Glory of the New Testament Church**

In his prophecy, Joel predicts the spiritual fervour and enlargement of the New Testament, even though he, in all probability, did not appreciate what he was writing. He writes of the Spirit being poured out upon all flesh with all those who called upon God's name being converted (2:28-32). This passage is explained by Peter in his remarkable sermon on the day of Pentecost when he quotes Joel's words being fulfilled at that time (Acts 2:14-21). This interpretation, inspired by the Holy Ghost, teaches us that many of the images in the prophets have a non-literal spiritual interpretation. The sun being darkened and the moon becoming as blood are symbols of spiritual events of enormous moment. The events of the Day of Pentecost transformed the history of the world as the New Testament church emerged.

This provides the necessary basis for understanding the third chapter. While this part of Joel's message has some application to Judah in his times, as the mentions of the various enemies illustrates, much of it is a follow on from the final part of chapter two, which relates to the New Testament church. He writes of all nations being gathered together in the Valley of Jehoshaphat, also called the Valley of Decision (3:2, 14-16). Peace would descend as the weapons of war are smelted down and remade as agricultural tools. Judah's captivity would be reversed, the Lord would dwell in Jerusalem and the people would enjoy peace and prosperity (3:1, 10, 17-21). If the second chapter closes by predicting the New Testament Church, why argue that this third chapter represents anything different? The New Testament church emerged in Jerusalem with a message that would be extended to every nation. The Jews today are a spiritually captive people on account of their spiritual blindness to Jesus as their Messiah. One day, however, they will be restored and emancipated from this darkness, joining with the multitudes of Gentiles who have already confessed Christ. This will usher in a new day of blessing for the world of men when peace shall reign on earth, the blessed peace of the Gospel. Therefore, while this third chapter relates to the New Testament church, part of it is yet to be fulfilled.

There is a message of hope here, which must be transmitted from one generation to the next: "Tell ye your children...and let their children tell their children, and their children another generation" (1:3).

## Part 30

### Amos: The Herdman of Tekoa

Key Text: Chapter 4:12

“Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.”

#### Amos' Biography

The name Amos, according to the rabbinical scholar, John Gill, means “burdened”. A most suitable name for one called to present God's truth to a sinful people, his was a great burden to carry. Amos was taken from the farm to be a messenger of truth. 1:1 informs us that he served among the “herdmen”. The Hebrew word signifies that he was a shepherd or more literally a “sheep-raiser”. According to 7:14 Amos was also a “gatherer of sycamore fruit”. The Hebrew word in this place would indicate that Amos was a dresser of sycamore trees. He was a tree surgeon or husbandman who cared for the tree in such a way as to maximise their potential for fruit. This would indicate that rather than being one who owned his own land, Amos was a labourer who sold his skills for hire. At times, he tended to the flocks but could employ his husbandry skills in the pruning season. 1:1 and especially 7:15 would indicate that Amos was taken from his labouring position to be a prophet of God. While he was working on the land, the call of God came and like the disciples of a future generation, he had to leave his occupation behind for a higher calling. Indeed 7:14 indicates that Amos was a somewhat surprising choice to be a prophet. When challenged by Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, the man of God replied, “I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son...”. It seems that there was no-one more surprised by the call of God than Amos himself because he was only a herdman and a gatherer of sycamore fruit. The key point, however, was “And the Lord took me” and “the Lord said unto me, Go, prophecy unto my people Israel” (7:15). Despite his humble background, God had called His servant and he therefore represented the truth of God. Amos is a reminder that we should never prejudge whom the Lord calls into service. All that is required is a willing mind and ready

heart. Often He calls the most surprising individuals and equips them for great work that no flesh should glory in His presence.

Amos was a resident of Judah, the southern kingdom in Israel. Tekoa, his home district, was situated close to Bethlehem. His ministry, however, was to the northern kingdom. He served during the reign of Uzziah, King of Judah and Jeroboam second king of Israel. He was therefore contemporary with Hosea and also with Isaiah.

His prophecy is the record of his sermons which were delivered some two years before the earthquake (1:1). It appears that having delivered these writings he was prompted by the Holy Ghost to record them in a written form after the earthquake occurred. We know little of this earthquake, except that it must have been devastating in a most extraordinary sense. At a much later time, however, Zechariah makes mention of this event:

“And ye shall flee to the valley of the mountains; for the valley of the mountains shall reach unto Azal: yea, ye shall flee, like as ye fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah: and the LORD my God shall come, and all the saints with thee” (14:5).

Obviously the magnitude of the disaster lived on in the consciousness. Doubtless, this natural disaster was regarded as a judgement from heaven, therefore Amos was prompted to record his writings. The interaction between Amos and Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, in 7:10, would indicate that he was a public figure who challenged false worship in a demonstrative fashion. Indeed his words appear to have shaken the entire nation and he was considered a threat to the establishment (7:10). The tradition among the Jews is that Amos' boldness hastened his death. It is claimed that he was pierced through the temples at the behest of Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, and buried in his home town of Tekoa.

### **Characteristics of Amos' Preaching**

Amos did not preach as a cultured theologian. There was something of the farmer in him that persisted throughout his times of ministry. He described God as the one who “formed the mountains and created the wind” (4:13), as the one who made “the seven stars and Orion, and turneth the shadow of death into

the morning and maketh the day dark with night, and calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth” (5:8). These are passages of poetic beauty written by one who had spent much time alone with the grandeur of nature. When Amos emphasised the importance of walking in agreement with God, he used metaphors of nature. He talked about the lion being joined to the prey and the bird falling into the snare, teaching that God's people must be joined with the Lord (3:3-5). Often had he witnessed the bird being caught and had heard the mighty lion roar as he cared for his flock. The stately trees (2:9), the laden cart (2:13), the sifting of corn (9:9) were all images with which Amos was familiar and they found a place in his homely, yet powerful, sermons.

Amos' particular burden, however, was to relay a message of judgement. The most potent rural metaphor he employed when revealing the wrath of God was the “basket of summer fruit” (8:1). The summer of opportunity was over, winter was approaching and with it God was saying “The end is come upon my people of Israel; I will not again pass by them any more” (8:1-3). Amos teaches every preacher to not only expound the truth faithfully, but simply, drawing from personal experiences.

### **The Religious Condition of Israel**

Remarkably the northern kingdom maintained all the outward trappings of traditional Hebrew worship. They had rules about leaven (4:5), they had an altar on which blood was sprinkled (3:14), they had Nazarites and prophets (2:12), and they had priests (7:10). Yet, all of this was of no value because they had transformed Jehovah into a calf to prevent the people travelling to Jerusalem for worship. It is clear that the people of Israel, despite their descent into paganism, recognised the authority of the Law of Moses. Amos used this to good effect holding the nation to account for its disobedience. He chastened them for their treatment of the poor (5:11), for their dishonesty in business (8:5), and for profaning God's name (2:7). He goes further, however, and employs pictures from Deuteronomy to enforce the message that judgement was on the horizon (Compare 5:11 with Deuteronomy 28:30, 39). Amos was a preacher familiar with the Scriptures and engaged them, as his text, as he applied truth.

### **Outline**

Chapters 1:1-2:3; Prophecies against the nations; Damascus,  
Philistines,

Phoenecia, Edom, Ammon and Moab.

Chapter 2:4-5; Prophecy against Judah

Chapter 2:6-16; Prophecy against Israel.

Chapters 3-4; God's quarrel with Israel

Chapter 5; God's lament over Israel.

Chapter 6; Woe upon Judah

Chapters 7-9:10; Five Visions of coming Judgement

(1) 7:1-3 Plague of Locusts

(2) 7:4-6 Destroying fire

(3) 7:7-17 The Plumbline

(4) 8:1-14 The Basket of Summer Fruit

(5) 9:1-10 The Destruction of the Sanctuary

Chapter 9:11-15 The Millennium

This climactic passage employs the most thrilling language to describe the reign of Messiah. The tabernacle of David is raised up, the land is blessed by harvests so abundant that the reaping and the sowing need to be done simultaneously; “the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that that soweth seed”. Rev David Park, my friend and colleague, writes; “The harvest lasts until the vintage, and the vintage continues to the seedtime. There is one continuous produce, one perpetual round of toil and success” (in a chapter written for the book “Israel and Nations” published by Sovereign Grace Advent Testimony).

Those who espouse the amillennial perspective consider that this passage has been completely fulfilled with the emergence of the New Testament basing their opinion to a large degree upon James' citation at the Council of Jerusalem. Louis Berkhof used James' remarks in Acts 15:16-18 as one of his proofs asserting that the Church is the inheritor “of the spiritual fulfilment of the promises given to Israel” (“Systematic Theology”). Premillennial advocates on the other hand argue that James only quotes a portion of Amos 9 and while there is a principle here, in relation to the conversion

of the Gentiles, the words will find their literal and ultimate fulfilment in the period following the return of Christ to the earth, and to the nation of Israel specifically. Those who subscribe to postmillennial thinking, however, see this passage fulfilled in the great time of international blessedness that will befall the world before the return of Christ. David Brown, in his book “Christ’s Second Coming” for example, sees a literal fulfilment in these promises as the gospel persuades mankind to better use his God-given resources for the benefit of all:

“The universal righteousness of that happy period will prevent despotism in government, anarchy in the people, as well as the devastations of war, by which the earth is left uncultivated, or its produce is destroyed...The love universally felt and practiced in that period, will lead those who have abundance to distribute cheerfully and freely to the necessities of those who may be in need.”

For a fuller explanation of the distinctions in these views of the future please to refer to the last chapter which examines Revelation.

## Part 31

### Obadiah: The Kingdom Belongs to the Lord

Key Text: Verse 21

“And saviours shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the LORD’S.”

Obadiah is one of the lesser known and neglected books of the Bible. Nevertheless there is a message in Obadiah, which fits in neatly with the tone of Old Testament inspiration, and which anticipates the New Testament Church.

#### Who was Obadiah?

The first question to be asked when examining a piece of literature concerns the identity of the author. This question is relatively straightforward when dealing with the prophets whose writings contain some autobiographical material and other information which helps us to establish a date for their writings. It is more complex where Obadiah is concerned because the information within the book is sparse so there are few clues as to his identity.

#### The Arguments

The name Obadiah, translated “servant of God”, occurs in several places in scripture with all the individuals being worthy contenders as the author of this inspired prophecy. One Obadiah was a courtier of King Ahab who acted illegally, at great risk to himself, by protecting the Lord’s prophets in times of persecution (1 Kings 18:3-4). A later Obadiah served in the kingdom of Judah and was appointed by King Jehoshaphat to teach the people God’s word in days of revival. An individual by the name of Obadiah oversaw the work of the temple as Josiah restored the house of God for worship, in what were also days of revival (2nd Chronicles 34:12). After the Babylonian captivity, one by the same name travelled with Ezra out of Babylon to help resettle Judah once again (Ezra 8:9). This certainly indicates that Obadiah was a most common name among the Jews and to try to connect any with the authorship of this book would be a virtually fruitless exercise. It is safe to conclude, for reasons that will shortly be outlined, that our Obadiah lived, preached and wrote in Judah in the years before

the fall of Jerusalem. He was possibly a contemporary of Jeremiah, which would place him in the same time frame as the man who helped restore the temple. If God called Amos the herdsman why could he not also call Obadiah the site foreman, to be a prophet? Our attempts to discover who Obadiah was, however, are tempered by commentator Albert Barnes' perceptive remarks:

“Fruitless guesses at what God has hidden! God has willed that his name alone and this brief prophecy should be known in the world. Here, he is known only as Obadiah, ‘worshipper of God”.

### The Edomites

Obadiah's prophecy foretells the judgement of God, which would befall the Edomites. These are the children of Esau (Genesis 25:30). It would appear from the records in Genesis that they became a powerful people much earlier than the children of Jacob (Genesis 32:3, and ch.36). The Biblical view of Edom, however, must always be influenced by the prophecy made to Esau by Isaac on the day that he lost the blessing reserved for the first born:

“And Isaac his father answered and said unto him, Behold, thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above; And by thy sword shalt thou live, and shalt serve thy brother; and it shall come to pass when thou shalt have the dominion, that thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck.”  
Gen 27:39-40.

Edom was promised power and prosperity but also much difficulty. They were not the children of the covenant and it seemed that throughout their existence they despised the blessing that Jacob had received. In this, they were a people who resembled the character of Esau, their father, who despised his brother. For this, they were a people earmarked for judgement. When the children of Israel attempted to pass through Edom as they journeyed to Canaan they were prevented from so doing (Numbers 20:14-21). As God prophesied through Balaam shortly afterwards, the supremacy of Israel over the Edomites was stressed (Numbers 24:17-19). Under the reigns of Saul (1 Samuel 14:47) and David (2nd Samuel 8:14) Edom was placed firmly under the control of Israel, a position cemented by Solomon (1 Kings 9:26). In the days of Jehoram, the Edomites revolted and established themselves once again as an independent nation with a king to rule over them (2nd Kings

8:20-22). Clearly, this is the position Edom were in during the days of Obadiah, the prophet, as he describes a people with their own power and authority.

### **The Purpose of Obadiah's Prophecy**

Obadiah foresees the destruction of Jerusalem. He speaks of distress and calamity for Judah and Jerusalem (v12-13) and the tone of the language indicates that an enemy has subjugated the nation. The sin of the Edomites was the manner in which they revelled in the destruction of Jacob, their brother (v10). It seems that they looted Jerusalem and helped to murder the inhabitants of the city who attempted to escape (v13-14).

From the opening words of his prophecy, Obadiah writes of a word from the Lord God indicating that Edom will suffer for its crimes against Jacob. He writes about the proud people being brought down (v2) and the nation which exalted herself like the soaring eagle and the heavenly stars being brought down to earth (v3). The evidence is clear, the Edomites are deserving such a visitation because God has discovered all of their secret sins against his people (v6).

### **Obadiah and Jeremiah**

There is a strong correlation between the prophecy of Jeremiah, respecting the Edomites, in 49:7-22, and the words of Obadiah. This is especially apparent when comparing Obadiah 1:1-4 and Jeremiah 49:14-16. John Calvin certainly believed that Obadiah wrote first but he also stressed “the sameness and the differences” between the two accounts. Calvin wrote about Obadiah exposing the blindness of the Edomites while Jeremiah further emphasised the prophecies of the former prophet as he announced the certainty of impending judgement. Whether Jeremiah was aware of Obadiah’s prophecy or not, we cannot say. This we can affirm, however - the Holy Spirit using, strikingly similar language reinforced the message of God’s wrath. In a similar vein the Holy Spirit warns this wicked and rebellious world of the coming of the Son of God to execute vengeance on those who know not, and obey not, the gospel of Christ.

### **Obadiah and New Testament Times**

One of the features of the prophets is the manner in which they foretold of Christ and the dawn of a better, brighter age. In v15, Obadiah foresees a judgement day in which all the world will be involved. It is as if the judgement upon Edom is an example of what will occur at the end of time as all nations experience the wrath of God. This time is styled the “Day of the Lord”.

From v17-18 the Jewish people are pictured as repossessing their homeland and enforcing total domination on the Edomites. The fact that there is no nation known as Edom today, while the Jewish people continue to be a recognised force in the Middle East would indicate that Obadiah's prophecy has been fulfilled.

At the close of the book, however, Obadiah transports us beautifully to the emergence of the New Testament Church. He describes “saviours” coming up on Mount Zion. The Hebrew word translated Saviour, in this instance, is closely related to the name Joshua and its Greek variant, Jesus. The very translation Saviour brings us to Christ in the Old Testament. Why then did Obadiah write of saviours? In the Old Testament there were many saviours, many christs. Every prophet, priest and king occupied an anointed office and the Christ or the Hebrew Messiah means Anointed One. All of these saviours, however, prefigured the greatest Prophet, Priest and King who would come to reign and establish a new kingdom, a spiritual kingdom which would live within the hearts of men.

The Jewish nation as the expression of God's kingdom on earth would pass away to be superseded by a new kingdom that would encompass every nation under the sun. This is the kingdom which is the Lord's, the glory of which would be finally unveiled by John as he penned the Apocalypse. All earthly kingdoms will fade but Christ will continue to build His church.

## Part 32

### Jonah: Salvation is of the Lord

Key Text: Chapter 2:9

“But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD.”

Jonah is without a doubt the most famous of the minor prophets on account of his adventure in the belly of the great fish which subsequently spat him out upon dry ground. This has been a favourite Bible story which has been retold time and again to children throughout the history of Christendom. On the other hand, Jonah's unlikely adventures has brought about the scorn of the liberal and the unbeliever in their quest to dispel all that smells of the miraculous as belonging to the realm of legend and fable. While we, of course, will argue for the historicity of Jonah we do not wish to associate this man only with his sojourn in the belly of the fish. Rather than simply being the reluctant prophet, his common persona, Jonah was given one of the most amazing missions in all of Old Testament history, a mission which foreshadowed the enlargement of God's kingdom in New Testament times. There is certainly more to this ancient prophet than meets the eye.

#### Jonah's Association with the Longsuffering God

Jonah receives one mention in the Scriptures apart from the little book that bears his name, 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 14:25-27.

“He restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain, according to the word of the LORD God of Israel, which he spake by the hand of his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, which was of Gathhepher. For the LORD saw the affliction of Israel, that it was very bitter: for there was not any shut up, nor any left, nor any helper for Israel. And the LORD said not that he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven: but he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash.”

This passage informs us that Jonah ministered in the northern kingdom during the reign of Jeroboam 2nd, making him a contemporary, most notably, of Hosea. These were dark days of apostasy with the monarch pursuing the policies of Jeroboam 1st “who made Israel to sin.” In these days, however, when it seemed that Israel was ripe for judgement, God looked down with mercy and he gave a promise, through Jonah, that Israel's borders would be protected. This promise arose because God was unwilling to blot out Israel from under heaven. God honoured the promise he gave through Jonah and so Israel was saved. Therefore, Jonah was a man associated with a God who was merciful and patient towards a backsliding and rebellious people. His ministry, in this respect, is an encouraging reminder that God can enable ungodly rulers to do good things for their nations, in response to the prayers of Christians. This incident in the ministry of Jonah throws an important searchlight onto our understanding of the book.

The call by God, to Jonah, that he preach to Nineveh was not random. Here was a man prepared for such a mission because God had given him, more than any other prophet of his era, an understanding of the divine longsuffering, where evil and wickedness abound. To reach a wicked society we must appreciate the depth and extent of a forgiving and gracious God. Jonah had such a preparation.

### **Jonah as a Type of Jesus Christ**

“The fundamental purpose of the book of Jonah is to show that Jonah being cast into the depths of Sheol and yet brought up alive is an illustration of the death of the Messiah for sins not his own and of the Messiah's resurrection” (Edward J. Young)

A casual reading of the Old Testament would render it highly improbable this man who attempted to flee from God could ever be warranted the title, a type of Christ. Yet this noble position is granted to Jonah by none other than Christ himself who compares his own death and resurrection to Jonah's sojourn in the belly of the great fish (Matthew 12:40).

Jonah is an ancient witness to Christ because he was an anointed servant of Jehovah, just as our Lord himself was. Jonah found himself in the belly of the great fish because of the sins of Nineveh which were hastening the wrath of God. This was the essence of God's call to him, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be

overthrown” (Jonah 3:4). Likewise Christ himself was sent to this world where he died because of the sins of the nations, not just because of Israel. Jonah was brought out of the belly of the fish in order that he might visit Nineveh and save the Assyrians from destruction. Christ was delivered from the state of death in order that the gospel might go forth into all the world.

On this account, it was certainly in the plan of God that Jonah should flee and be consigned for three days to the belly of the great fish. This is so encouraging. Our failures are permitted by God and used by God as he manifests His wonderful works of grace.

### **Lessons for Ancient Israel from Jonah**

Jonah was called for a great work, yet he disobeyed and had to pass through a fearful affliction in order that he might obey. Likewise Israel, as Jehovah's covenant people, were living in a state of rebellion. They would suffer terribly in order that God might raise up a remnant who would return and be faithful to Himself.

Jonah was despatched to Nineveh and, under his ministry, there was a remarkable turning to God. Yet the Jewish people who had many prophets were turning away from the Word with which they were familiar. How sad it is even today; those who are most familiar with the gospel have the greatest tendency to despise its precious truth.

### **Jonah and the Universal Nature of God's Kingdom**

“He was sent to a Gentile city. He was sent to the most renowned city of heathendom then on the face of the earth. He alone of all God's prophets had such a commission assigned him. His was a most extraordinary call” (Hugh Martin).

We can only understand Jonah's reluctance to visit Nineveh in the light of the Old Testament revelation which was almost exclusively directed towards the Jews. There was no history of any prophet declaring a message from Jehovah to the Gentiles. It was a mission more daring or more adventurous than an evangelistic campaign in an Islamic nation today.

This poses the question, 'Why did God send Jonah?' Throughout the Old Testament there was a growing sense that God had a purpose,

not just for the Jew, but for the Gentile also. This commenced in Genesis 9:27 where the children of Japheth were singled out for a particular blessing. When the law was given, the Hebrews were instructed to be gracious towards the Gentile (Leviticus 19:34). Ruth's conversion and place within the royal family cemented this view that there was a future plan for the Gentiles. This concept found its fullest expression in the Psalms (principally Psalm 2) where it is prophesied that God's kingdom would be extended beyond Israel into all parts of the world. Therefore Jonah's call, and the subsequent conversion of the people of Nineveh, was a foretaste of a future day when the apostles would be commanded to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every person.

Ironically God used Jonah in spite of himself. Not only did Jonah initially attempt to run away from God but when the people were converted Jonah was angry because he refused to accept God's plan. He was a cog in the wheel of Jehovah's mighty scheme of redemption but ultimately the work was not Jonah's because salvation is of the Lord.

### **Jonah's Prayer in the Belly of the Great Fish**

The content of Jonah's prayer in chapter two is as remarkable as the place where he supplicated. Not only do we hear the confessions of a saint of God but we are given an insight into the deeply spiritual and devotional nature of these Old Testament saints. Constantly throughout the prayer he quotes from the Psalms, relying upon the word of God for his encouragement; Psalm 42:7 (v3), 18:6 (v4, 7), 69:2 (v5), 50:14, 116:17 (v9). For this reason, the prayer of Jonah is frequently called a psalm. On a practical note, this prayer teaches us that, when we come to God in deep trouble we ought to practice the art of articulating the words of scripture. If we cannot frame our own words, there is a prayer in scripture, inspired by the Holy Ghost, which will be of help.

## Part 33

### Micah: Who is Like God?

Key Text: Chapter 7:18-19

“Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger forever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.”

#### The Prophet's Name

To the Jew, the Hebrew language was more than a mere language. It was the living oracle which God employed to reveal His wisdom to men. There was a spirituality in the language, which we in our modern mindset cannot begin to appreciate. Names of places and especially of men, were powerfully significant. A study of the names of the men of God in Scripture reveal so much about their testimony and the God who called them. This is certainly so of Micah the Morasthite. He is styled as “the Morasthite” to differentiate him from a notable predecessor who bore the same name. In 2nd Chronicles 18 we read of Micaiah (the full and proper name of the shortened version, Micah) whom Ahab imprisoned because he only related evil words and not good. The truth was Micaiah was only interested in truth, however unpalatable. He was a man who stood alone in a hostile court before two kings and boldly pronounced God's word and was incarcerated for so doing. Therefore, the very name Micah is a reminder of a faithful witness in a dark day. The name becomes increasingly significant as we consider the Hebrew meaning, “Who is like God?” Micah along with the other prophets testified to a singular God, one who ruled and governed alone, one who would not tolerate sin, who honoured His promises. When it seemed that so many were seeking after new religions and other gods, Micah stood out from the crowd to defend the God who was unique, the one and only true God. This was his calling.

## His Time and Place

Micah was principally a citizen of Judah, the southern kingdom among the Jews. Therefore the reigns of the kings are set forth whom he served under; “Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah”. Micah’s words, however, were directed to both nations. Therefore he addresses his messages to the twin capitals, “Samaria and Jerusalem.” Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah, who was a resident in Jerusalem, although his ministry was somewhat shorter than the one called the Evangelical Prophet.

## Judgements and Promises

These two facets of God’s nature are particularly apparent in the preaching of Micah. The book is divided into three discourses. Each one begins with sin and judgement and concludes with promise. As the book progresses the promises become more wonderful with the conclusion providing a lovely climax

1. Chapters 1-2
2. Chapters 3-5
3. Chapter 6-7

Each section begins with the words “hear ye”, emphasising that these were sermons later recorded for reading. The first judgement is directed towards the whole world (1:2) and this section ends with the prophecy of the “breaker” who shall deliver His people and deal with the enemy (2:13). The second judgement is directed towards the leaders of the people (3:1) and concludes with the promise that God will exercise judgement and fury upon the heathen (5:15). The final judgement is directed to all Israel (6:1) and concludes with the promise that God will forgive his people their sin and cast those sins into the depths of the sea (7:18-19). This promise is the greatest of all and contains the name Micah in the form of the question “Who is a God like unto thee?” This is particularly important theologically. Our God is a God of mercy. All that He does in relation to the world, to His church and to us as individuals will always be tinged with mercy. When Moses asked God for a revelation of glory this was the very message received as he was sheltered in the cleft of the rock (Exodus 33:19). Although Micah’s message was one of judgement,

which is necessary, God was ever reminding Israel that there will still be mercy and the covenant promises would not be forgotten.

### **The Sins of the People**

Micah's prophecy majored on sins which related to materialism and a general lack of proper justice in the land of which the following are examples:

- a) Oppression (3:2-3)
- b) Violence by the Rich (2:2, 6:12)
- c) Bribery and Corruption (3:11, 7:3)
- d) Taking Innocent Life (7:2)
- e) Expelling Women and Children from their Homes (2:9)

Appreciating all of this corruption and vice makes the advice of 6:8 all the more relevant. These are words which identify the very meaning of genuine Christianity in this New Testament age.

### **Autobiographical Sketches**

There are cameos in this book which tell us a little about the life and ministry of this man, Micah.

Chapter 3:5-12 - Here is a man standing alone with a solemn message which contradicts the false preaching of prophets who are more interested in wealth and position than truth. What set Micah apart? "...I am full of power by the spirit of the LORD..."

Chapter 7:5-10 - It would appear that Micah had learned by bitter experience not even to rely upon those in his own family. Rather than trusting people his eyes were in another direction, "...I will look unto the LORD...". This adds a certain colour to the description of the woman who was his enemy, who rose up against him. While she would suffer and be ashamed Micah knew that Jehovah would be a light unto him. Who was this enemy? The scene is unclear but it is apparent it was a friend, one from his own house; his wife?

It must be said, however, that many commentators do not see a biographical sketch in this passage. Matthew Poole, for example, described Micah as personating Israel, urging the people to trust in

the Lord while at the same time promising the certain judgement that would befall her enemies.

### **Messianic Promises**

Micah contains two notable messianic promises which anticipate the New Testament age.

Chapter 4:1-5 - This is a passage which has strong similarities with Isaiah 2:2-4. The picture of all nations flocking to the Lord's House for worship, laying down their weapons, as the earth is brought to a hitherto unrealised period of peace, is beautiful beyond all thoughts.

Are we living in this period now? I think not, judging by the state of the world. Will this period be a literal millennial reign of Christ, in Jerusalem, when all nations will flock to Israel for wisdom? I find this difficult because this tends to the view that the Jew will be a special element within Christ's church and that the temple will be restored in Jerusalem. The view I take from this passage is that the temple is the Church, according to general New Testament interpretation. The temple today is growing and developing. But, before the end of the world a new period of blessing will visit the church as Christianity makes its greatest impact upon the world. This will be a period of revival which will usher in a halcyon time for the world. For a fuller explanation of the distinctions in these views of the future, please to refer to the last chapter which examines Revelation

Chapter 5:2 - This is the prophecy which the advisers of Herod brought to the king's attention as he was wondering where the new king could possibly be born (Matthew 2:5-6). It not only identifies where Jesus Christ would be born but who He would be and always was; "ruler in Israel...whose goings forth have been of everlasting."

## Part 34

### Nahum: A Stronghold in the Day of Trouble

Key Text: Chapter 1:7

“The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him.”

#### Nahum; The Man and his Times

Nahum is simply defined as being the Elkoshite, 1:1. There has been considerable discussion as to where the place of his birth was situated. There is a strong tradition that his home village was sited in Galilee. This is borne out by the fact that the town of Capernaum, in the Galilee region, means “The Village of Nahum”. Others will argue that he was from a place in Judah, as his prophecy had more of an interest for the southern kingdom than for the north, Galilee being situated in the north.

While it is not possible to fix his ancestral home with any certainty, we can confidently pinpoint the period in which he served the Lord. In 3:8 he refers to a city called “No” which was conquered.

Authorities are agreed that this was the capital of Upper Egypt which was famous for its wealth and military power. This city was known by two names. One was No-Ammon which had reference to the idol of the god Ammon which was worshipped there. The other more famous name for this Egyptian city was Thebes. In 3:10, however, Nahum records the desolation of No-Ammon which took place at the hands of the Assyrians in 664-63 BC. This suggests that Nahum's prophecy occurs after this historical incident. Nahum's prophecy, focuses upon the city of Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian empire. From the outset, his writing is described as “The Burden of Nineveh” (1:1). He prophesies the eventual destruction, of what was, in his day, the greatest city ever built. In the second chapter Nahum anticipates, under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, the details of Nineveh's conquest. In 2:6 he refers to the gates of the rivers are opened up, bringing about the dissolution of the palace. Apparently, there was a strong belief, among the people of Nineveh, that when the river Tigris turned against the

city, Nineveh would be destroyed. When armies, led by the city of Babylon besieged Nineveh, they did so after a time of heavy and persistent rain that caused considerable flooding. The foundations of the wall were eroded making it possible for the enemy to breach the defences. As a result, the king of Nineveh made a massive funeral pyre, not only for himself but, for his eunuchs and concubines, burning down his entire palace before the enemy reached him. This occurred in 612 BC. Therefore, Nahum's place in history is fixed between the fall of No-Ammon in Egypt and the collapse of Nineveh, by the Tigris, in modern day Iraq.

Nahum ministered during the last fifty years of the kingdom of Judah. He was certainly a contemporary of Jeremiah and may have witnessed the spiritual revival, which took place during the good reign of King Josiah.

### **The Core Purpose of Nahum's Prophecy**

Judah was a small kingdom, which was encircled by the menace that had come from Nineveh. A century earlier, the Assyrians had conquered and brought an end to the northern kingdom of Israel. Nahum described the fall of No-Ammon at the hands of Nineveh, in Egypt. Therefore to the north, to the south, to the east and to the west the soldiers of Nineveh ruled supreme. Yet Judah was protected. There was a very good reason why Jerusalem was spared the treatment that other great cities had experienced at the hands of the Assyrians. Before Nahum's day, the armies of Sennacherib, the Assyrian emperor, besieged Jerusalem, but were defeated by the angel of death in the still of the night. This event was so engrained into the consciousness of the greatest military power on earth that they passed by Judah and left this kingdom alone. Nevertheless, as Nineveh became stronger there was much fear within Judah. They had some reason to fear. Nineveh was infamous for her cruelty towards whatever people she subjugated. Nineveh was a rich city, with wealth that had been plundered from whatever nation she had annexed.

In 1:7 Nahum comforts Judah with the wonderful words, "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him." Nineveh was a powerful fortress. The inner city was surrounded by a wall which was eight miles in circumference. It was one hundred feet high and was so wide that chariots could race three abreast on top of it. This wall had twelve hundred

towers and fourteen gates. Beyond this wall, was the outer city surrounded by yet another longer, outer wall. Beyond the outer wall was what we might call extensive suburbs. It took Jonah three days to travel through Nineveh preaching the message God had given him. Nahum, however, taught Judah, that Jehovah was a stronghold greater than Nineveh. Martin Luther took great encouragement from this text when he wrote, “We must relate and apply it not merely to that trial of Judah but to absolutely every day of our trials and adversities, so that we may learn to flee for refuge in any trial at all to this sweetness of the Lord as if to a holy anchorage”.

### **The Wider Purpose of Nahum's Prophecy**

Nineveh was once one of the most ancient of all the cities in the world. Genesis 10:10-14 tells about the rise of the first world empire under Nimrod. He built several cities. The most famous and most enduring were Babel (Babylon) and Nineveh. Nineveh was the first to rise to prominence to be followed by Babylon. Nimrod was a mighty hunter in that he was a tyrant, a despot. His name means rebel. Babel was the centre of the first false religion in world history indicating that Nimrod was a hunter of souls. A rebel against God in the greatest sense of the word. This character persisted in Nineveh because, twice, Nahum describes this city as imagining or plotting against Jehovah (1:9, 11). This was a city that had elevated herself as God. Therefore the God of Israel was going to bring this city down, showing that He was the only true God and none can stand against Him. In this regard, Nineveh is a fitting illustration of all the kingdoms in the world today with their bustling cities and their vast populations.

There is a spirit in this world which is as the spirit of ancient Nineveh. There is rebellion against God manifesting itself through false religion and atheism. This rebellion is a manifestation of the depravity endemic in human nature. Therefore, a society which is rebellious is cruel and corrupt. Nahum, in the third chapter, identifies the cruelties of Nineveh. In Romans 3, Paul catalogues the sins of the Roman world, in which he resided. We observe the same character traits in our society today.

Yet God has suffered long with Nineveh. Nahum identifies this attribute of God in 1:3. Indeed a century earlier, Jonah visited Nineveh and the great city was brought to repentance. Tragically,

later generations had forgotten this remarkable work of grace. So it is in the great nations of the world today. The message of the Gospel has been preached, many of these kingdoms have experienced revival, but sadly future generations have forgotten or have turned away from the message of grace through Christ. Nahum's message was that the longsuffering of God will eventually wear out and come to an end. Therefore from the beginning of his prophecy, Nahum writes about the vengeance of God. Judgement day was on the horizon for Nineveh. So it is for this world of sin in which we live. The presidents, prime ministers and monarchs of this world take no account of their Creator, but He takes notice of them. Governments do not regulate their policies in the light of the Day of Judgement. But still there is a God who will hold them to account for all their actions.

This wider vision of Nahum is exceedingly solemn as we consider it with God's dealings with all sinful and wicked humanity in view. It ought to draw us into the prayer offered by Habakkuk who cried out that God would "in wrath remember mercy" (3:2).

## Part 35

### Habakkuk: Revive Thy Work O Lord

Key Text: Chapter 3:2

“O LORD, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid: O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy.”

While we know very little about Habakkuk as an individual, a clear biblical understanding leads us to the conclusion that he ministered in Judah a little before the fall of Jerusalem and the captivity in Babylon. Habakkuk follows on, chronologically and logically, from Nahum. Nahum lived in days when Nineveh was great, yet he prophesied that Judah would be kept safe from the Assyrian armies and that eventually Nineveh would fall. After the fall of the Assyrian empire, the Chaldeans rose to supremacy with Babylon as their imperial capital. It is clear that by the time God called Habakkuk, Nineveh was no longer a threat and the Chaldeans were the major threat to peace, stability and independence. From Habakkuk's writings we learn that Judah is demising as a nation, that the Chaldeans are growing ever stronger and that the day is fast approaching when Jerusalem will be taken (1:6). While Habakkuk probably witnessed the spiritual revival during the days of King Josiah, he also saw times of declension and departure. A study of the reigns of Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah will provide the Bible student with the historical background which influenced the writings of this man of God. Amidst the growing apostasy, the inevitability of military defeat, and the end of a civilisation drawing near Habakkuk laments, “...O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy” (3:2).

There is so much more to Habakkuk than the prophesying of a man moved by the Spirit of God. That in itself is remarkable enough. When God inspired these holy men, He used their feelings and their fears. Therefore, human experience was intertwined with the miracle of inspiration. In a dark and uncertain world, God chose to record the prayers and the questions of one of his servants who

was struggling to comprehend the meaning of the events which were unfolding around him. For this reason Dr Martyn Lloyd Jones chose to conduct a series of studies in Habakkuk after the close of World War Two. These sermons were later called “From Fear to Faith.” The vital truths contained in Habakkuk remain relevant to our lives today. We are confronted by imponderable situations that cause us to doubt and fear. We must walk the puzzling journey with Habakkuk, seeking answers that we might be brought to the light of faith and understanding. What then was Habakkuk's journey?

#### 1: The Puzzle of the Unanswered Prayer 1:1-4

Habakkuk, at the beginning of his prophecy is trapped in a place of despair, as he pleads for his nation, yet no positive response is forthcoming. Therefore he cries out in some anguish, “O Lord, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear” (v2).

#### 2: The Pathos of the Unexpected Response 1:5-11

The Chaldean aggressor is raised up by God for a specific task. They would be instruments of judgement marching throughout the length and breadth of the land (v6).

#### 3: The Power of the Unequaled God 1:12-17

Upon understanding God's terrible purpose for the future of his people Habakkuk bursts into praise, magnifying the name of Jehovah. He sees the silver lining in the dark cloud of chastening. The situation remains in the control of God and the future of Israel is secure (v12). Nevertheless, in the midst of his praises he remains puzzled. Why would a just God allow a wretched people, the Chaldeans, to be instruments of judgement upon the Lord's people, many of whom had not turned aside to idols? (v13).

#### 4: The Position of the Unworldly Prophet 2:1-4

Habakkuk now retires from the world of clamour and questioning. He ascends a watch tower, far above the city streets, away from the rumour and gossip, and he begins to reflect in silence. When we are puzzled and distressed, we must learn to take a step away and get alone with God and our thoughts, and look for a different perspective. In his watchtower he finds that different perspective

when the Lord says, “the just shall live by his faith”. These are words quoted on three occasions in The New Testament (Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11 and Hebrews 10:38) because they contain the kernel of the gospel. These were the words which converted Martin Luther and spawned the Protestant Reformation, the greatest revival of Christianity since Pentecost. It is Luther’s remarks on the impact that these words had upon him, which opens up our understanding as to how they helped Habakkuk in the midst of his distress of soul:

“Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that ‘the just shall live by his faith’. Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise.” Ronald Bainton, “Here I Stand”.

Habakkuk was taught by God not to be dismayed nor discouraged. He was to trust God even though his ways were beyond comprehension. He was to live by faith. I believe that in 2:3 there is an indication of the gospel age that was approaching. A vision was dawning but was not realised. It was for an appointed time. Yet it would come and would not tarry. This vision was fulfilled when the gospel of salvation, through faith alone, would be extended to every nation under the heavens after the Day of Pentecost. What a privilege is ours, to be living in these very days!

## 5: The Punishment by the Unrivalled Judge 2:5-20

At the close of chapter one Habakkuk questioned and queried God for allowing the wicked Chaldeans to run roughshod over the Lord’s inheritance. The Lord reassured the prophet, however, that Babylon herself, would be a recipient of the righteous judgement of God. He did this through a series of woes; “Woe to him that increaseth that which is not his!” (v6), “Woe to him that coveted an evil covetousness” (v9), “Woe to him that buildeth a town with blood” (v12), “Woe to him that giveth his neighbour drink”(v15), “Woe unto him that saith unto the wood, Awake” (v19). This justice was applicable to all, both Jews and Babylonians. None would escape. In the midst of these woes, however, there is the gracious promise that God’s cause will be extended through the earth in more ways than the prophet could ever have anticipated (v14).

## 6: The Prayer of the Undeserving Servant 3:1-19

This section sees Habakkuk on his knees before God. The questions have been dissipated by the vision of God's glory and purpose. He is entirely submissive to God's will in the world of men, and for his people Israel. He realised that, even in war and disaster, God would fulfil his great purpose (v3). From this place of humility, he produces one of the greatest prayers for revival in the Scripture. He could remember the revival under Josiah and had witnessed the declension of later years. There would not be another revival among the Jews for at least one hundred years. Nevertheless, this man of God prayed that in days of wrath, the Lord would have mercy and revive His work. How we need the humble prayer of Habakkuk today! Whether we see revival in our day or not, let us pray that it might take place.

Habakkuk's prayer, and indeed, his prophecy, concludes with a beautiful expression of confidence, trust and contentment. The contrast with the questioning spirit with which he commenced could not be more marked. He now accepts that if it is the will of God for his people, and ultimately himself, to be brought into penury he would "rejoice in the Lord...and joy in the God of...salvation." An important lesson is taught here. The source of Christian happiness is in not our circumstances but in the God revealed to us through the Scriptures in the person of Jesus Christ. "Whatever my lot thou hast taught me to know, It is well, it is well with my soul."

## Part 36

### Zephaniah: The God Who Sings

Key Text: Chapter 3:17

“The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.”

#### His Time and Place

Zephaniah is unique among the minor prophets in that he produces more detail of his ancestry than any of the others. Most scholars are of the opinion that Hizkiah, his great great grandfather was in fact Hezekiah, the king of Judah. While this is by no means certain, it is a possible solution to the problem posed by a genealogy going back four generations. It is certainly suggestive that he was claiming credibility and authority through an important ancestry. According to v1 Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of Josiah, King of Judah. 2nd Chronicles 34 informs us of the spiritual stages which Josiah passed through in his leadership of Judah:

1. He ascended the throne at eight years of age. In the first eight years, little good was achieved for the Lord in the land.
2. When he was sixteen he began to seek God and this was the time when the idols were removed from the kingdom.
3. In the eighteenth year of his reign, the Law was discovered in the temple, the contents of which stimulated a spiritual awakening among the people.

It would appear that Zephaniah ministered in the early years of Josiah's reign before the great revival. He does not refer to the revival, he surely would have done if he had witnessed its glorious effects. In fact, the very opposite appears to be the case. Ch1v4-6

would indicate that idolatry was rife in the land. It was this very thing which was hastening the judgement of God upon the nation.

Therefore Zephaniah called upon the people to:

“Seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgement: seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD’s anger” (2:3).

Hebrew scholars identify the name Zephaniah as meaning either “the Lord’s Watchtower” or “His hidden one”. Both have relevance as we analyse his significant contribution. Zephaniah was certainly occupying a spiritual watchtower overlooking the people, warning of spiritual dangers. He also encouraged the people to seek the hiding place, the refuge, as the judgement of God drew nigh. It has been suggested, that as Zephaniah ministered prior to Josiah’s reforms, his message may well have been influential in bringing the king and the people to their knees in the great revival.

### **Zephaniah's Place in the Scriptures**

The Minor Prophets, or The Twelve as the Jews designated them, are divided into two sub-sections. The first nine prophesied before the fall of Babylon and are therefore pre-exilic. The final three (Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi) contain messages to the remnant who returned after the exile and are therefore post-exilic. Zephaniah is the last of the minor prophets in the pre-exilic section.

### **Outline of Zephaniah**

#### **1: The Impending Day of Judgement 1-2:3**

This section which is exceedingly solemn, is written with poetic language and is directed towards the people of Judah. It concludes with an exhortation to repent.

#### **2: The Scope of God’s Judgement 2:4-3:8**

The prophets of Israel had a universalism in that they taught that all nations would be summoned before God and there they will face their judgement. Zephaniah focuses primarily upon the Philistines (west), the Moabites (east), the Ethiopians (south) and the Ninevites (northeast). Not only Judah, but all the nations round

about, would meet with God and He would deal with them according to their sins. He was claiming that God was the supreme arbiter in the affairs of men. So it is today. God's judgement comes in various forms. From economic deprivation to defeat in war He has his own method of meting out His wrath. Writing after World War 2 historian Herbert Butterfield said, "There is a judgement embedded in the fabric of history". Ultimately, judgement will fall upon the kingdoms of the world, for all their unrighteous deeds when Christ comes and establishes His Great White Throne.

### 3: The Restoration of Israel 3:9-20

In his work on The Minor Prophets James Montgomery Boice entitles this final section of Zephaniah, "New Day Dawning". After the oppressive language of judgement, the tone is suddenly transformed into a scene bright with joy and happiness. As God turns to His people (v8) they in turn call upon His name to serve Him with one consent. The dispersed of Israel flock from beyond the rivers of Ethiopia abandoning their sin to enjoy sweet and happy rest.

The chapter concludes with two songs. The daughter of Zion is exhorted, "Sing...be glad and rejoice with the heart" (v14). Then God Himself is depicted as singing, rejoicing over His redeemed, restored and repentant people, "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing" (v17).

The remarkable conclusion of Zephaniah's prophecy is a reminder that grace is triumphant, and that God is merciful. Ultimately this is the great and glorious hope of the gospel, the only hope for Israel and the sole means whereby this world can be rescued from a rendezvous with the wrath of God.

## Part 37

### Haggai: Consider Your Ways

Key Text: Chapter 1:13

“Then spake Haggai the LORD’S messenger in the LORD’S message unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith the LORD.”

#### Haggai’s Place in History

Haggai is the first of the prophets to serve God during the post-exilic period. This was the time of restoration. Under the leadership of Zerubbabel approximately 50,000 Jews responded to the decree issued by Cyrus, Emperor of Persia, permitting the captive nation to return and re-establish themselves in Judea once again. This was a dramatically different period for the Hebrew people than at any other time in their history. No prophet had previously served in times such as those for which Haggai was raised up. The glory days of Israel and her monarchy had slipped away through the sands of time. The temple, erected by Solomon, had been razed to rubble and no other building would recapture that former splendour. Jerusalem, the Holy City, would be rebuilt, but it would never again be the city that once it was. The millions who populated the twin kingdoms of Israel and Judah had been carried as slaves by the Assyrians and the Babylonians. Instead, a mere 50,000 people responded to the call to return and rebuild a once proud nation out of the ashes and rubble of desolation. It was to this people that Haggai was called to minister the Word of God. The story of the ministry of Haggai and Zechariah together with their blessed effects are related in Ezra Chapters 5 and 6.

#### The People Whom Haggai Pastored

The 50,000 people whom Haggai served are simply called the “remnant” (1:12). They were but a small portion of the millions who chose to remain in Babylon. The new generation of Jews, who now regarded their adopted nations as their true home, chose not to follow the call to rebuild the Jerusalem and resettle the land of

their fathers. They had homes, businesses and ties in Babylon. Therefore they decided to allow a small remnant to do the important work while they lived a life of comparative ease. In time, the remnant would be increased by other groups who followed the route across the desert to Jerusalem. Therefore Haggai had a more encouraging congregation than those whom the prophets preached to before the exile. They witnessed a people slipping through spiritual decline into apostasy and on towards judgement. While the pre-exilic prophets had some encouragements, for the most part, they were confronted by hardness and opposition. Haggai's flock were a tender-hearted spiritual group. They were the cream of Israel. They had taken leave of their homes and their lifestyle in order that they might follow God's call. They were therefore a teachable people. A pleasure for any preacher.

### **The Challenge Facing Haggai's Flock**

Sixteen years earlier, this people arrived in Judah full of hope and ambition. By all accounts they quickly got to work, under the leadership of Zerubbabel, the man appointed as governor by Cyrus, along with Joshua their high priest. By the second year, the foundation of their temple had been laid, an occasion of spiritual excitement. As a result of a campaign by those in the land who opposed the resettlement of the Jews, however, the people became downhearted and building work ceased. Historians inform us that in the sixteen years between arrival of the Jews and the calling of Haggai, Cyrus, the Persian emperor who favoured the Hebrew people, died. After this, the campaign against the Jews reached the ears of successive emperors including Darius and Ahasuerus (Xerxes).

It would seem that the people who came to Judah with such enthusiasm had, in the intervening years, conveniently forgotten about the need to rebuild the Lord's House. They erected their own houses and were living comfortably off the land. Therefore Haggai was called to a good and godly remnant who, as a result of discouragement, had lost a sense of priority. This same problem has afflicted Christians in every age. We lose our determination and zeal. We become focused on careers, homes and all the other trappings of a materialistic society. We no longer have the interest in the Lord's work that once we had. This is not apostasy but a

lukewarmness that overtakes the body of the church. To such a people Haggai was called. Is his prophecy not relevant for a discouraged remnant seeking to serve God in the midst of a humanistic materialistic society?

### **The Stinging Nature of Haggai's Message**

While these were a good people at heart, they still needed the word of rebuke. The preacher who does not see the need to chasten the flock at times, is not following the promptings of the Spirit. They had to consider their ways because of two problems:

1. They were living in their ceiled or covered houses, while the house of God was neglected (1:4).
2. All of their business had not been rewarded with success (1:6-11). These verses remind us that materialism never satisfies. Serving God is fulfilling but following the god of money only creates an emptiness and a longing for more.

### **The Result of Haggai's First Sermon**

The name Haggai means festival. He was probably born on a Jewish feast day and his godly father marked the occasion in his son's name. As it is highly unlikely that Haggai was sixteen or younger when he preached this sermon, this man was born in Babylon. He was among those who returned with optimism and he was among the remnant who suffered discouragement. The people said it was not the right time to rebuild. Therefore they waited. Then one of their number boldly presented the need to carry on the rebuilding work. He preached as God's messenger (1:13). The word did not merely stir one or two people. It fired the hearts of the whole community in Jerusalem. This was revival. A Holy Ghost anointed preacher declaring God's Word. The first to move were the leaders (1:14). How necessary it is for the church to be led by godly ministers and elders giving the flock an example to follow. Zerubbabel and Joshua admitted their error and so led the people into completing what they had begun sixteen years earlier. Within one month of Haggai's ministry commencing, God was moving in a new way among His people.

## **The Encouragement to Persevere**

As in every work among the Lord's people there are those, even in the ranks of the remnant, who will discourage every effort. Those older people who remembered the glory of Solomon's temple were disheartened because the new temple would be nothing like the old. In response to this discouragement God, through Haggai, had some helpful words one month after the people had initially resolved to rebuild:

- a) Be strong because the Lord is with you (2:4).
- b) The Holy Spirit is with you (2:5).
- c) All nations will be shaken but Israel would remain (2:6-7).
- d) The desire of all nations would come. This heralds the first coming of the Messiah to the world (2:7).
- e) The glory of this house would be greater than Solomon's because Christ would walk in its precincts (2:7, 9).
- f) The cost of the building materials would be provided (2:8).

On a human level, the new temple would not be as splendid as Solomon's construction. This new generation was doing a new work for a new age. Their work would be blessed in ways that they never could have anticipated. Therefore the work they were doing for God should not be despised. We should never despise what we do for God, or what others do for the Lord, in this 21st Century. We are not living in Reformation times, we are not enjoying the revivals of the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries. We are not in receipt of the stirring that characterised the 1960's. We can only build up the kingdom of God for today and tomorrow, and the little that we do will be blessed by God according to the laws of the harvest.

## **Continued Encouragement**

Like Barnabas, Haggai was indeed the son of consolation. In the ninth month he once again brought a message aimed at helping the people carry on the good work which they started. It would appear that this was the occasion when the first stone was laid upon the foundation (2:15). He explained that the reason why they were poor in this land was because of their attitude towards the house

of the Lord (2:17). From this day their lives would be revolutionised because God would not withhold His blessing (2:19).

### **A Final Word for Zerubbabel**

Zerubbabel, as a son of David, represented the royal and the messianic line in Judah (Matthew 1:12). As the leader in these fearful and difficult times he needed much by way of strengthening. He was assured that the people for whom he was responsible would be protected and kept intact. He was given the assurance that he was indeed the chosen leader and was as God's signet (2:23). As the signet ring was employed as a means of authority, so Zerubbabel had the authority of God in his leadership. He was therefore a type of Christ, the Word of God Incarnate.

## Part 38

### Zechariah: By God's Spirit Alone

Key Text: Chapter 4:6

“Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.”

#### The Author

Zechariah's lineage is defined in the opening lines as “the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo...”. Unlike Zechariah, Iddo is an uncommon Hebrew name. It would appear from Nehemiah 12:4, 16, that a man called Iddo departed from Babylon with Zerubbabel and he had a son whose name was Zechariah. Ezra constantly refers to Zechariah as the “son of Iddo”. Perhaps Berechiah, the father of Zechariah, died while young and the prophet was raised by his grandfather. It may also be the case that Zechariah is associated with his grandfather because Iddo was a well known and well respected man in his generation. Nehemiah's genealogy of the earlier immigrants who returned from Babylon indicates that Iddo was a priest. Therefore Zechariah as well as being a prophet also belonged to the holy order of Levi.

Zechariah therefore was among the first wave of Jews to return to rebuild their once proud and industrious nation. He was in all likelihood, among the youngest to make the journey, no doubt influenced by Iddo, who could possibly remember the old temple erected by King Solomon. After sixteen years, the people had made little progress. Their plans had been frustrated and all that they possessed were the foundations of the new temple. Suddenly, however, the people were inspired to return to the noble work of rebuilding by the pointed message of Haggai. Haggai began preaching in the sixth month of Darius' second year. Two months later Zechariah was prompted by the Holy Spirit and he stepped in to assist and encourage Haggai in this great work of ministry. Therefore, like Haggai, Zechariah's purpose was to encourage a people who were discouraged, in order that they might complete the work which they had begun.

Some question the logic of Zechariah's ministry because verses 1-7 appear to indicate that the people's heart was not quite right and they needed to turn unto the Lord. This does not appear to fit into the picture we have of revival in the early months of Haggai's ministry. It is quite easy, however, to reconcile Haggai with Zechariah's rather stern challenge. Every work that man does is imperfect. Even when there is revival among God's people some are resistant to the work of the Holy Spirit. Not everyone was engaging in the work and those who were labouring were not doing so with a perfect heart. Therefore they needed the challenge from Zechariah; "Turn ye now from your evil ways...". We all require such a word from heaven!

### **The Nine Visions**

Zechariah's ministry is dominated by nine visions which he saw in the night. These are sometimes styled the visions of the night, 1:8.

#### **1: The Man Among the Myrtle Trees Chapter 1:8-17**

Zechariah sees a company of horses, led by a man riding a red horse, who is standing among the myrtle trees. It is apparent that the man is the Angel of the Lord and He speaks with the prophet. The theme of His discourse is one of encouragement that God will enable the work of rebuilding the nation to succeed. The Angel of the Lord is Christ and He is leading the heavenly cavalry into battle, accomplishing victory for His people.

#### **2: The Craftsman and their Horns Chapter 1:18-21**

The horn in the Bible is a symbol of strength. The new horns would defeat the horns of the Gentiles who persecuted and threatened Israel.

#### **3: The Measuring Line Chapter 2**

This is a word of hope, that God has measured the Holy Land and His people would receive their inheritance.

#### **4: Joshua the Priest Chapter 3**

This was a personal word to the High Priest, one of the leaders of the Jewish remnant. He was under attack from Satan and God was

comforting him with the assurance that he was God's chosen vessel and that his ministry would be protected. These words have much to teach us about assurance and justification. We all need the word that Joshua received.

#### 5: The Lampstand Chapter 4

The Lampstand represents Israel in the Old Testament and the Church in the New Testament. As the lampstand required oil, so we depend upon the Holy Ghost. Although the temple which the people were building was small in comparison to Solomon's construction, they were not to despise the work. The little that we do is great if the Spirit of God is blessing. It is His power, not our might, which is the basic requirement of success. This is a lesson we must learn over and over.

#### 6: The Flying Roll Chapter 5:1-4

This scroll was vast, measuring, it is reckoned, thirty feet by fifteen feet. It carries a solemn message of judgement upon those who refuse God's standards.

#### 7: The Ephah Chapter 5:5-11

The ephah is the smallest dry measure. In this vision the ephah is taken from Judah to the land of Shinar or Babylon. God judged Israel by removing his people to Babylon. There may also be the thought here that the spirit of Babylon had been imbibed in the remnant and that needed to be removed and left in the land of their captivity.

#### 8: The Four Chariots Chapter 6:1-8

Four Chariots come from between two brass mountains and go into all the world. The picture is of the victorious power of Christ. He will subdue the world of men with the power of the Gospel.

#### 9: The Crowning of the High Priest Chapter 6:9-15

This section is intriguing in that it shows the coronation of Joshua, the high priest. It was unusual for a priest to be crowned, anointed

yes, but not crowned. Yet, here we view a priest sitting upon a throne governing according to peace. This is a remarkable Old Testament view of Christ, who sits at God's right hand as King of Kings while at the same time He makes intercession for us. Here we see the Throne of Grace.

### **The Question of Fasting**

In the fourth year of Darius, two years after Zechariah's first vision, some Jews approached the prophet desiring to fast in order that the destruction of Jerusalem might be remembered. This would have been an introduction of a holy day which was not laid down in the law. God reminds the people that they fasted and prayed before the fall of Jerusalem but He did not answer because their hearts were not right in His sight. The lesson being taught is that religious exercises without practical religion, is vain and empty. (7:8-14)

### **The Ingathering of the Gentiles**

Chapter 8, quite remarkably, foretells the gathering of the Gentiles into the economy of God's grace. The picture of ten men from ten different nationalities laying hold on the Jew saying, "We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you....", has not yet been fully realised.

### **The Coming of the Messiah**

At the centre of Chapters 9-10 is the prophecy that the king would come riding upon an ass's colt. The picture is one of the dominion of Jehovah's kingdom, accomplished by this peaceful and gracious King.

### **The Good Shepherd**

In Chapter 11 another messianic prediction presents our Lord as the Good Shepherd in contrast to the foolish shepherds which had blighted Israel. While the foolish shepherds did not care for their flock the good shepherd fed His flock with his two rods called

Beauty and Bands. Sadly, historically God turned away from Israel because of their following after the false shepherd.

### **The Death of Messiah**

In 12:10 we view the Jew turning to Christ, looking upon the one whom they pierced and mourning for him as one mourneth for an only son. In 13:1 a fountain is opened for sin and uncleanness. This is that fountain which Cowper described as “drawn from Immanuel’s veins.” 13:6 presents Christ as a prophet with wounds in his hands inflicted by his friends. The smiting of the shepherd and the scattering of the sheep was referred to by Christ himself as being fulfilled in himself (Matthew 26:31, Mark 14:27).

### **The Second Coming and the Eternal State**

The fourteenth chapter grants a glorious and graphic view of Christ’s return as the Mount of Olives is divided asunder. Peace and prosperity is ushered in as the Lord reigns with peace throughout all the earth. There is also terrible judgement as the ungodly nations are dealt with in what for them will be the terrible day of the Lord.

## Part 39

### Malachi: The Final Promises of the Old Testament

Key Text: Chapter 3:1

“Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts.”

#### Malachi's Name and Era

The name Malachi means “my messenger”, which certainly appears to be appropriate for one who was relaying the Word of God to the Jewish nation. As a prophet, however, Malachi would write about the messenger who would arise in the future. In 3:1 he speaks of “my messenger” (literally Malachi) preparing the way for the Lord who would “suddenly come to his temple.” In 4:5 this messenger is identified as being “Elijah the prophet”. In many respects, this is a re-echoing of Isaiah 40:3 where the voice crying in the wilderness declares “Prepare ye the way of the Lord.” In the case of Isaiah's prophecy, the New Testament identifies the voice crying in the wilderness as being John the Baptist (Matthew 3:3). In Matthew 17:12-13 Christ identified John the Baptist, His forerunner, as being Elijah because the spirit of the great Old Testament prophet rested upon him. Therefore Malachi, at the close of the Old Testament canon, presented this word of promise that Elijah would come, the messenger from God, who would prepare the way for the Messiah. The Jews to this day await the return of Elijah, after which the Messiah will arrive. As they celebrate Passover, every Jewish family will set a place and a goblet for Elijah, even sending the children outside to see if he is coming because they have been taught that Elijah will come first and then the Messiah. Elijah has come, inasmuch as his power rested on John the Baptist, and the Messiah has arrived, yet the Jews, as yet in their blindness, fail to recognise this. After Malachi, the voice of the prophet was not heard for four hundred years. Four hundred years of silence. That silence was only broken when that voice was heard crying in the wilderness. The one whose Malachi's very name anticipated was

born to preach and to introduce the Lamb of God to lost and dying humanity.

Malachi belongs to the post-exilic era. There are certain clues in the book which assist us greatly in pinpointing the time when he ministered:

1. The temple was rebuilt (1:13, 3:1, 10). This places him after Haggai and Zechariah.
2. The Jews were under a governor (1:8). This sets him in the days of Nehemiah, the last Jewish governor of Judah.
3. The sins which Malachi challenged were the same sins which Nehemiah had to deal with; formal religion, mixed marriages and the neglect of tithing. This would place him either during or just before Nehemiah's second residence in Judah. Therefore Malachi's ministry corresponds to Nehemiah 13. Using this data it would seem that Malachi ministered about one hundred years after Haggai and Zechariah. He supported and encouraged Nehemiah as the prophets who preceded him assisted Zerubbabel.

Malachi is very much a transitional book. His ministry finalises the Word of God to Old Testament Israel. It also, however, anticipates the New Testament, John the Baptist, the arrival of Christ the Messiah and the dawn of the gospel age (1:11). The formality and sinfulness which he identified in the Jewish religion of his day would intensify over the next four hundred years, so much so that by the days of our Lord, Judaism would appear only as that which was apostate and corrupt. The times were becoming ripe for a new beginning.

### **A People Who Question God's Word**

The people to whom Malachi ministered were argumentative and arrogant in that they refused to accept the rebukes that were presented to them. Seven times the word "how" is used as they challenge the Word of God.

1:2 They question the love of God.

1:6 The priests question the condemnation that they had shown contempt for God by offering imperfect animals for sacrifice.

- 1:7 The priests refuse to accept that they had placed defiled food on the altar.
- 2:17 The people ask how they had wearied God.
- 3:7 When challenged to return unto the Lord they ask “How?”
- 3:8 When accused of robbing God and not paying their tithes they refused to accept that this is the case.
- 3:13 The people question when God rebukes them for their stout words against Him.

This gives us a clear spiritual portrait of the people to whom Malachi ministered. They were not broken and contrite when the Lord's word was given to them. They were proud and questioning and show a serious lack of humility. They behaved as if all was well yet it was apparent this was not the case.

### **The Sins of the People**

#### **Chapters 1:6-2:9 Poor Spiritual Leadership**

The best of the flock and herds were not being presented to God. The people were led badly and had poor examples to follow. To a large degree, this explained the low spiritual level of the people.

#### **Chapter 2:10-17 Mixed Marriage, Adultery and Divorce**

There were some among the people who had married Gentile women (v11). Others had committed adultery dealing “treacherously” with their wives (v14, 15). The marriage covenant was not respected and divorce was common, therefore God described Himself as the one who “hated putting away”.

#### **Chapter 3:6-12 The Sin of Robbing God**

The people had not been paying their tithes. The promise, however, that would accompany correction of this sin is one of the greatest in the Old Testament, a blessing that there will not be room to receive.

## **The God Who does not Change**

Chapter 3:6 is another great Old Testament text that is found in Malachi. The people had sinned against God. This was a reminder that God does not change. They had set aside God's principles but they had no right to do so because God does not change. At the same time the people, who had sinned by attempting to change the laws of the unchangeable God, were in receipt of God's mercy because He would never break His covenant with Abraham. How humbling this is. We too break God's law yet He continues to be faithful to His promises.

## **The Coming Messiah**

Malachi presents three particularly precious promises in relation to the coming of the Messiah. What is striking is that these can be interpreted both in the light of His first and second coming.

Chapter 3:2-3 He would be like the refiner and purifier of silver. The refiner would look into the molten silver, removing all impurities until he could see his own reflection in the shimmering liquid. Christ came to purify, to remove sin. He continues to do this work in our lives through His Holy Spirit. One day He will finally see His own reflection in us, when we see Him face to face.

Chapter 3:16-17 Christ will gather together His people as His own precious jewels. The characteristics of His people are most instructive. They fear God, they think about Him and they discuss the Lord with one another. God even writes up a Book of Remembrance to record His people and their love for Him. This was a word of encouragement for those who were faithful in Malachi's day. It is a word for God's faithful people in every age.

Chapter 4:2 When Christ comes He does so as "The Sun of Righteousness" and He has "healing in his wings." He is the light of the world and He has the essence of spiritual life within Himself. Four hundred years later, the light would begin to shine in Bethlehem's manger. He remains the only source of light and life in a dark and evil world.

## Part 40

### The Literature of the New Testament

John 16:13 “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.”

John 14:26 “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.”

We now come to the threshold of the New Testament scriptures. From the first promise of a Saviour (Genesis 3:15) through all of the types and prophecies of the Old Testament a new era was depicted. The fullness of the time, spoken of by Paul (Galatians 4:4), was about to dawn. Yet this bright new day dawned after the most intense period of spiritual darkness in the history of Israel. For four hundred years there were no prophets, the period of inspiration had ceased. Judaism slumped into an apostasy characterised by formal religion. Demon possessions were commonplace across Judea and Galilee, indicating that God had removed some of his restraints from Satan, on account of the sins of His people. The people, however, who walked in darkness were about to see a great and a wonderful light, a sunbeam of hope which, in time, would shine in every corner of the world.

#### The Purpose of the New Testament

The word “testament” used in the Greek Scriptures usually means “covenant”. Therefore the Bible consists of two sections, the old and the new covenants. The old covenant was made with Moses, as the mediator, for Israel, when it became a kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:6). The new covenant, however, was made with Christ (Hebrews 8:6, 9:15, 12:24). This new covenant was made with Christ on behalf of God’s elect people from every nation on earth. The New Testament is the story of Christ’s ministry, His sacrifice and resurrection, the establishment of the church and the

proclamation of the gospel among the Gentile peoples. The church would be described by Paul as “one new man” (Ephesians 2:15) because it incorporated Jew and Gentile in one body. The climax of this New Testament period will be the gathering of all peoples around the throne of God (Revelation 5:9).

### **The Preparation for the New Testament**

Although God had been silent for four hundred years, in that He had not added to the voice of Old Testament inspiration, He was not inactive. Through those centuries He providentially paved the path for the New Testament church.

Four hundred years before Christ, Philip of Macedon conquered Greece. His son Alexander was the master of an empire that extended to the border of India. While Alexander’s empire was not permanent, in that it was divided into four identities after his death, he left behind a lasting legacy. The Greek language and Greek culture had become a common denominator in all the lands which Alexander conquered. The Greek language particularly, as a truly international language, provided the world with a suitable vehicle by which the New Testament could be disseminated.

One hundred years before Christ’s birth, the Roman empire had been consolidated as the dominant power throughout all of the Mediterranean. The Romans brought their world to a state of lasting and enduring peace. Roman law provided a legislative framework which provided all the provinces with order. The Romans developed an extensive and successful communication network enabling travel and commerce throughout the empire. Being pragmatists at heart, the Romans recognised the dominance of Greek language and culture in the east of their empire and did nothing to change it. All of these factors created a world that was ripe for the establishment of a truly international spiritual body, the Christian church.

### **The Power in the New Testament**

There are, as we know, twenty-seven books in the New Testament. How did the Church arrive at a place where it recognised that these books were genuine revelations from God? This is a question of authority. How do we know that that these twenty-seven books

carry the power of God's approval? The answer really lies in the words of Christ in the upper room. Our Lord promised that the Holy Spirit would inspire and prompt the apostles (John 16:13, John 14:26). Therefore the church was obliged to collect and preserve the writings of these apostles who were gifted with the spirit of inspiration. All of the New Testament books are therefore apostolic. Paul was the apostle who was not a disciple, born out of due season (1 Corinthians 15:8). While Luke and Mark were not apostles, their writings were apostolic in that they were written under the influence of Peter and Paul.

It is truly significant that the list of twenty-seven books was not officially recognised at a church council meeting or anything of the sort. The churches slowly accepted the writings of the apostles as they became available and preserved them for posterity; "If we ask how long it was before a complete list of twenty-seven books was recognised by most of the churches, the answer is: perhaps a little over one hundred years. But if we ask how soon it was before the canonical books were recognised by their recipients as authoritative, the answer is immediately" (Brian Edwards in "Why 27?"). Various early church leaders such as Clement of Rome (96AD), Ignatius of Antioch (115AD), Polycarp of Smyrna (115AD) and Justin Martyr of Rome (165 AD) claimed authority for their doctrines and practices from the writings of books included within the same New Testament that we use today.

The Church, however, saw the New Testament only within the context of the Old Testament canon. The apostles added to the body of inspiration which God had already given. The Hebrew Scriptures were "the oracles of God" (Romans 3:2) and the prophets and apostles were inspired by the same Spirit (1 Peter 1:10-12).

While we do not possess the autographs, that is, the original writings, of the apostles today, there is considerable proof that we possess the books which God has preserved. No other ancient book has so many ancient manuscripts as the Greek New Testament. For the most part, these manuscripts corroborate each other, with the differences in readings being minor. The God who inspired His word has preserved His word also. Therefore we know that we possess the genuine Holy Ghost inspired New Testament.

## **The Partitioning of the New Testament**

We can partition the New Testament into three major sections:  
Historical; Matthew to Acts -The historic basis of Christianity  
Epistles; Romans to Jude - Christian doctrines and practices.  
Prophetic; Revelation - God's purposes throughout history.

## **The Polluting of the New Testament**

All that God accomplishes the devil will pollute and counterfeit. Therefore it should be no surprise to us that the credibility of the New Testament has come under sustained and growing assault.

### **1. The Validity of the Greek Text**

The Traditional Text, which encompasses 80-90% of the Greek manuscripts, was used without question since the Scriptures were translated into English by Tyndale. In more recent times other manuscripts have been employed by Bible translators which have more variant readings, hence the necessity for footnotes in these versions. These footnotes question the authority of Scripture because they employ manuscripts which were rejected by the early church and were therefore disused. This is the strongest argument for remaining faithful to the Traditional Text, which underlies the Authorised Version.

### **2. The Validity of 27 Books**

Within two centuries of Christ's death, numerous books were circulating which claimed apostolic authority. Many of these documents spawned from a cult known as Gnosticism which strived after secret, even mystical knowledge. One of their books was the Gospel of Judas which, when it was discovered in 2006, National Geographic Magazine claimed could provoke a crisis in faith. Christians have nothing to fear. A book, obviously rejected by the early church and which lay hidden for 1800 years cannot claim to be apostolic. This book and others like it belong to literature known as the "pseudepigrapha" or false writing. Paul, in his lifetime, warned the churches against fraudulent documents which claimed apostolic sanction (2nd Thessalonians 2:2).

In 1945, a body of documents was discovered in Egypt that have become known as the Nag Hammadi Library (after the village where they were uncovered). These contain pieces of literature with such eye-catching titles as “The Gospel of Truth”, The Gospel of Thomas”, The Gospel of Philip” and “The Gospel of Mary”. Dan Brown in “The Da Vinci Code” made use of these writings in his blasphemous attempt to undermine the purity of Christ and the credibility of the New Testament. The most wicked outcome of this library has been the suggestion that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene. While Mary is elevated above her New Testament status in this library of works, it does not specifically state that they were married. What is important from our perspective, however, is that that these works are clear forgeries in that they are dated at least 100 years after the apostles, while it is freely accepted that the twenty-seven books of the New Testament canon originated in the first century.

In many respects the New Testament has been, and will be, under attack from the enemy of truth. We must be vigilant and hold onto high and lofty views of Holy Scripture as that which is inspired and preserved by God for the edification of His Church.

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God...” (2nd Timothy 3:16).

## Part 41

### Versions and Manuscripts

Throughout my life I have consistently used the Authorised Version of Scripture. This was due initially to the prevailing practice within the Free Presbyterian Church, which is, and always has been my spiritual home. It is true that those of us who read the King James Version love the eloquence and majesty of its language, which has contributed to it becoming the most influential single book in the history of our language. There are those, however, who despise our sole use of the Authorised Version in our devotions and public ministry. We are thought of as a people who cling to old and archaic traditions with no desire to move forward into the future. This criticism is simply unfounded and untrue. Within the Free Presbyterian Church, and throughout the English-speaking world, many Christians use the King James Version out of conviction that this is the most accurate version of God's Word in existence today. I do not read the Authorised Version simply because my denomination uses this translation exclusively, nor do I use it because I love the style of language. My use of the King James version is based upon a settled conviction that this translation protects the purity of God's Word, where other translations, quite simply, do not. Faithfulness to the original manuscripts must be the prime consideration in our choice of translation. The Psalmist wrote "the commandment of the LORD is pure" (Psalm 19:8), teaching us that in the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts, God's Word is without error, infallible. If this is so, then it is vital that a translation of Scripture remains as close as possible to the original text, therefore preserving, as far as possible, the purity of the word.

We believe that the Authorised Version is superior in this regard because of the family of Greek manuscripts that the New Testament is based upon. There are no manuscripts which contain the entire New Testament. Rather, there are fragments of whole books or part books. These manuscripts, however, when collated together have been classified by scholars as falling into one of two families, the Traditional Text and the Alexandrian Text

The Traditional Text is superior because it is the family of manuscripts which were used by the early church. We know this because these manuscripts are relatively new in comparison to the Alexandrian Text. Some claim that the Traditional Text is weak because the manuscripts on which this is based are centuries away from the original documents (the autographs). In reality, their time in history is a strength because it proves that the older documents became unreadable through usage, necessitating the need for more copies. The sheer number of manuscripts which belong to the Traditional Text bears this out. Of the 5,338 Greek manuscripts in existence some 80% - 90% of them are from this family. For 1500 years, until the invention of printing, these works were passed down through the generations by handwritten copies. If the Traditional Text is indeed the text used by the church then it is the text which God has miraculously preserved. God who inspires his word for the good of the church will also preserve that word for the church to use. The church can never at any time be without the Word of God.

### **Traditional Text**

Originated in Syria  
(early centre of Christianity)

Thousands of manuscripts  
which support each other

The Greek Text compiled by  
Erasmus, the Renaissance  
Scholar

The Received Text, compiled  
by Robert Stephens in 1550.

Luther's German Bible,  
Tyndale's Translation, Geneva  
Bible, Authorised Version,  
NKJV

### **Alexandrian Text**

Alexandria was the home of  
an early heresy called  
Gnosticism

Very small group of  
manuscripts (about 5 in total)

The Wescott- Hort Text

The Revised Version, NIV, ESV  
and the New NIV

The manuscripts which underlie the Alexandrian Text are very old but their age and amazingly good condition reveal an obvious truth, they were rejected by the church and therefore were disused. The two major manuscripts in this family were not discovered and critically examined until the 19th Century. Codex B (Vaticanus) was discovered in the library of the Vatican while Aleph (Sinaiticus) was found in a monastery on Mount Sinai. When Tregelles went to Rome to study Vaticanus he was not allowed ink and paper and he was watched over by two prelates who would take the volume away if he spent too long with a certain passage. Another scholar called Tischendorf went later to the Vatican and received similar treatment at the hands of Rome. Yet those who support the Alexandrian Text would claim these manuscripts are older and by implication are more reliable than the Traditional Text. Would God allow His word to be hidden for centuries in the library of Rome, the great corrupter of the truth? Do we accept the manuscripts used by the church or do we accept those that were hidden from the church? Which family of manuscripts answers to the doctrine of divine preservation?

The Traditional Text is highly credible because when its manuscripts are studied they are found to be consistent with one another in the vast majority of readings. The two major manuscripts that constitute the Alexandrian Text, however, (B and Aleph) contradict each other, not hundreds but, thousands of times. For example, in the Gospels alone, they read differently on 3,000 occasions. This presented a problem for scholars who attempted to compile a Greek text from these manuscripts. The two 19th Century scholars who attempted this very thing were Wescott and Hort. Dr Alfred Martin, an American scholar, in 1951 described the work of these two English scholars; "The Wescott-Hort method is essentially rationalistic, for it exalts the judgment of the individual critic. They were influenced either consciously or unconsciously by the liberal tendencies of their time. Both...seem to have been theistic evolutionists." In other words these men decided what should be the Word of God and what shouldn't. John Burgon who extensively rebutted the Wescott-Hort method in the 19th Century wrote, "The Holy Scriptures are not an arena for the exercise or display of the ingenuity of critics." If the Bible is God's inspired word then He will have preserved manuscripts which agree with each other and which enable scholars to produce reliable translations. The Traditional Text and the Authorised Version certainly correspond to these guidelines.

As a consequence, the modern versions use footnotes which explain the variant readings in older manuscripts. Two whole passages are inserted into the NIV New Testament with the heading “The most reliable early manuscripts and other ancient witnesses do not have Mark 16:9-20 / John 7:53-8:11”. This instantly produces doubt and uncertainty as to what is the Word of God and what is not. G.W. And D.E. Anderson have catalogued 650 variant readings where the original Greek has been changed, a passage has been bracketed or verses and words have been left out completely. The words of Revelation 22:18-19 must be taken seriously in studying this subject. For those who are attracted to the New King James Version, attention must also be drawn to its use of footnotes which authenticates Codex B and Codex Aleph. This certainly indicates, that for all its claims, the New King James is not the reliable alternative that it pretends to be.

We can assert with confidence that in the Authorised Version, we have a translation which is based upon accurate manuscripts and which contains the pure stream of God’s inspired truth.

## Part 42

### The Four Gospels

Luke 1:1-4

“Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed.”

John 1:14

“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.”

The New Testament is launched by four books which are fundamental to our understanding of the New Testament and central to the message contained in the entire Bible. Without the life of Christ, the Messiah spoken of and prefigured throughout the Old Testament, the Scriptures would have no credibility.

“These Gospels which, as to size, are mere pamphlets, are the most precious writings in all the world. But for what we are told in them there would have been no preceding Old Testament and no following Acts, Epistles, and Revelation. They are the heart of Divine revelation, because they are the record of the manifestation of God on earth, in the person of His Son, for the purpose of redemption” (Graham Scroggie, “A Guide to the Gospels”).

#### The Term ‘Gospel’

The English word “gospel” is derived from the Anglo-Saxon *god-spel* which means good story or even God’s story. In the New Testament “gospel” is a translation of the Greek *euaggelizon* (meaning to

preach the good news) and *euaggelion* (meaning good message). The word gospel or good tidings appears in this sense in Matthew (4:23, 9:35 24:14, 26:13), Mark (1:1,14,15, 8:35) and Luke (1:19, 2:10, 4:18, 4:43, 7:22, 8:1, 9:6, 16:16). In the case of Luke's gospel, there are several instances when the verb translated "preach" essentially means to preach the Gospel. There can be no true preaching without the proclamation of this message of good news, the best news the world could ever receive.

### **Geography and Political Administration**

In the days of our Lord, the land which we today call Israel, was divided into a number of administrative districts. It is a mistake to think of all the places where Christ travelled as being one nation:

1: Galilee - This belonged to a region, which together with Perea, was governed by Herod Antipas. Our Lord was raised in Nazareth and he spent considerable time in Capernaum, by the Sea of Galilee. Capernaum is often referred to as being his home city. A significant number of the disciples hailed from this district. Perea is a district not mentioned in the Bible, but alluded to. It was a relatively infertile region that lay to the west of the Jordan and the Dead Sea. It is sometimes referred to as the land beyond the Jordan (Matthew 4:25, 19:1, Mark 10:1, John 1:28, 10:40).

2: Samaria - Samaria was a region situated to the east of the Jordan and was sandwiched between Galilee, to the north, and Judea to the south. During the captivity, this region was settled by Gentiles who brought their own pagan religions with them. The Jews who were left behind by the Assyrians assimilated the pagan beliefs of their neighbours into their own faith. Hence the Samaritan religion was formed which eventually led to them erecting their own temple on Mount Gerizim. The Jews had an intense hatred for those who practised this rival and apostate religion. This was so intense that they refused to journey through Samaria when travelling from Judea to Galilee even though this was the direct route. This makes the Lord's association with the Samaritans in John 4 all the more remarkable and beautiful.

3: Judea - Judea was initially a province within the Persian empire but eventually it was annexed by the Romans who for administration purposes considered it part of the province of Syria. This region was under the direct control of a Roman governor.

## **Jewish Religious and Political Life**

1: The Sanhedrin -This was the main ruling body among the Jews, based in Judea. It consisted of seventy members with the high priest acting as President. The Romans granted this body considerable autonomy.

2: The Synagogue - Synagogue worship owed its origin to the captivity when Jews assembled in small groups as they were robbed of temple worship. During these gatherings the scriptures were read and expounded (Luke 4:16-21).

3: The Pharisees - The name Pharisee means separated. They were a sect who considered themselves to be the orthodox Jews of their time. They were the guardians of the written law. They were steeped in formalism and hypocrisy, however, which Christ often exposed.

4: The Sadducees - They were liberals in theology denying the existence of spirits and the resurrection. They were very much the ruling party with priests mostly belonging to this group. They rejected the traditions imposed by the Pharisees and had less influence and support among the common people.

## **Identity and Purpose of the Authors**

It has been recognised from time immemorial that each author of the four gospels had a different purpose in mind as he related the holy narrative. From the end of the second century, for example, they were likened to the four faces of the cherubim in Ezekiel's vision. Matthew was represented by the lion as he presented Christ as the King of the Jews. Mark's account was illustrated by the ox, the beast of service, because he viewed Christ as the busy worker. Luke's narrative is illustrated by the face of a man because he was especially interested in the humanity of the Lord, the Son of Man. John, however, is represented by the eagle, the soaring king of the heavens, because he was at pains to show that Jesus Christ was the Son of God.

Each gospel author has a different readership in mind. Matthew aimed his story at the Jews. It is apparent that his concern was to encourage Jewish Christians and to win Jewish converts. All authorities are agreed that Mark's Gospel was directed at the Roman Christians. Luke, as the only Gentile author, had the Greek people very much in mind as he penned his holy account. John, however, had the whole world in mind, both Jews and Gentiles as he wrote his account of the Son of God.

### **The Synoptic Gospels**

The Gospels are arranged in two groups. Matthew, Mark and Luke belong together. They are known as the Synoptic Gospels. Synoptic means "viewed together". They largely follow the same line of thought in their presentation of Christ's life. John's material is arranged differently and he introduces a number of details that are omitted by the other three. For example, Mark's Gospel contains 661 verses, Matthew contains 500 of Mark's verses and Luke has 320 verses which are common to Mark. Only 50-55 verses in Mark are not found in Matthew or Luke. This has led some scholars to claim that Mark was written first and was used by the other two evangelists as source material. This, however, does not account for the material found in Matthew and Luke which are not found in Mark. There are actually 250 verses which are common to Matthew and Luke which are not found in Mark. While God may well have used one of the Gospels as a help for the other authors, we must be careful not to undermine the miracle of inspiration. The Gospels are not histories written and devised by man. God brought the details to the memory of the authors but at the same time he used their individual talents, as writers, in their preparation of the material.

There is no doubt that the Synoptics follow a similar line of thought. They present Christ in His humanity, born of a woman. They focus upon His Galilean ministry, which receives little mention in John's account. They present Christ as the public figure in his miracles and teaching. John considers more of Christ's private discourses with individuals and he limits the miracles to seven (eight if Christ's own resurrection is included).

### **Reading the Narrative**

Graham Scroggie in “A Guide to the Gospels” compiled an extensive harmony in order to relay the narrative of Christ’s life, drawn from all 4 Gospels. The following are the major points.

- 1: Annunciations and Incarnation followed by thirty years of preparation
- 2: Introduction by John, first disciples, first miracle.
- 3: Early Judean ministry, first cleansing of the temple.
- 4: Samaritan ministry, woman of Sychar.
- 5: The Galilean ministry (22 months approx.).
- 6: Later Judean ministry, Feast of Tabernacles.
- 7: The Perean ministry, period of teaching and preparation.
- 8: The Week of Christ’s Passion:
  - Sunday - Triumphant Entry,
  - Monday - Second Cleansing of the Temple,
  - Tuesday - Conflict with his enemies,
  - Wednesday - Silence,
  - Thursday - The Upper Room,
  - Friday - The Cross,
- 9: The Forty Days, from the Resurrection to the Ascension.

## Part 43

### Matthew: The Voice of the King

Key Verse: Chapter 2:2

“Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.”

#### The Author and His Peculiarities

It has long been beyond all doubt that Matthew, the disciple of Christ, was the author of this Gospel, even though there is no claim in the narrative that this was the case. Early Christian writers who had connections with the first generation of believers were quite clear on this matter and their testimony is credible. Therefore the title, attributing the work to Matthew is no mistake.

Matthew was the tax collector of Capernaum, whom Jesus called out of his office to be a disciple. While he is one of the less well-known apostles his contribution to the Christian church is immense. As a servant of Rome, he would have attained a reasonable standard of education. As well as being fluent in Aramaic, the language of Judea, he would have been a Greek speaker, the international language of commerce and literature. As a tax collector, who probably was fairly senior as he was located in an office, Matthew would have been an accurate record keeper and note-taker. This gave him valuable literary gifts which prepared him for the authoring of the first of the New Testament books. It is highly likely that Matthew was constantly making brief records of Jesus' sermons and miracles, keeping a diary or journal which he later made use of in the writing of the first New Testament book.

Matthew was a Jew, albeit treacherous, in the eyes of his fellow countrymen. His Hebrew name was Levi but Christ gave him a new name, Matthew. While Mark and Luke use his Hebrew name when relating the story of his call, Matthew never once refers to himself as Levi. This is an indication that he left his past behind preferring to magnify the grace of God which was symbolised by the name Christ gave to him.

It should be no surprise that Matthew showed more interest in money than any of the other evangelists. Mark for example refers to three coins only; the mite, the farthing and the penny which were the smallest pieces of currency. Luke talks about the mite and the farthing and also pounds. Matthew, however, writes about the talent (worth sixty times the value of a pound) and refers to gold and silver. Indeed Matthew emphasises pieces of currency which were of greater value. He shows greater precision as one who was expert at handling money in his former career. In Matthew 22:19 he uses the word “tribute” whereas Mark uses the term penny (12:15). It is Matthew alone who records the miracle of the coin found in the mouth of the fish. Matthew also is the only evangelist to refer to debt (18:27-32), to account taking (word reckon 18:24) and to the exchangers (25:27).

### **Matthew’s Place in the New Testament**

Matthew is almost certainly, by common consensus, not the first of the Gospels to be completed. That accolade is generally given to Mark. If that was the case why did the church place Matthew first in the annals of the New Testament? The answer lies in the strong Jewish nature of Matthew’s account. Of all the Gospels, it is this narrative which is most strongly linked to the Old Testament. While Malachi helps to detach the reader from the Old Testament, with the coming of the messenger prophesied, so Matthew draws the reader into the New Testament narrative from a strongly Jewish perspective.

Writing to a largely Hebrew readership, Matthew was concerned that he should in the first place prove that Jesus Christ was the Messiah. He did so by tracing the family tree of Joseph, the head of the home, into which Jesus was born. This genealogy shows plainly that Jesus was in the line of the kings and was not only the son of Abraham but also the son of David. In this, the only Gospel to begin with a genealogy, Matthew is instantly declaring that Jesus Christ is the rightful King of the Jews. As a mathematician, however, Matthew was also fascinated by the numbers which made this family up. The family lineage of Jesus could be traced through three sets of fourteen generations. With fourteen being a multiple of seven, the complete number, Christ was presented as one who alone can complete Israel and indeed humanity.

As one writing to win over the Hebrew people we would expect numerous Old Testament references in Matthew's record. We are not disappointed. Graham Scroggie listed fifty-six direct Old Testament citations and a further seventy-six occasions referring to a passage or incident is referred to. Matthew, therefore, is revealed as a man who is deeply familiar with the ancient manuscripts. From the commencement of the New Testament, therefore, we begin to realise that God's word is being added to. The New is erected upon the foundation laid in the Old.

### **The Arrangement of Christ's Parables**

Matthew took great care when recording the parables of our Lord. In all he records forty parables in total. What is evident about these parables is that they are drawn from virtually every aspect of life; domestic, marriage, agricultural, commercial and professional. Christ, in preaching and teaching, brought the truth to the hearts of men and women in ways that everyone could understand and appreciate. He was never aloof, he showed empathy with the experiences of the people while, at the same time, He taught them that they had one common need, which could only be realised through the power of the gospel

In the Sermon on the Mount, which Matthew alone records in its totality, there are eight parables, which illustrate Christ's teaching. From the mountain top, the King presents His rules for those who are the subjects of His kingdom. Yet we must follow its precepts spiritually, allowing the Holy Ghost to imprint the truth upon our consciences. There are precepts laid down and characteristics enforced, in this sermon, which we must pray that the Holy Ghost would develop and mature in our lives.

“Hear the Sermon on the Mount, and do it, not from a mere teacher, but from the Saviour who died; not from a dead prophet, but ever anew from the living Lord” (Gresham Machen, “The New Testament”).

Chapter thirteen contains a collection of eight lessons which are the Parables of the Kingdom of Heaven. The parable of the sower introduces this discourse and it is apparent that our Lord is speaking of the church and the power of the Word of God through its ministry. The church is the Kingdom of God on earth today.

Matthew also includes, in his account, seven parables of judgement which are exceedingly solemn, The Unmerciful Servant (18:23-35), Labourers in the Vineyard (20:1-16), The Wicked Husbandmen (21:33-41), The Guest without the Wedding Garment (22:10-14), The Faithful and Unfaithful Servants (24:45-51), The Wise and Foolish Virgins (25:1-13) and The Talents (25:14-30).

The eleven parables which are found alone in Matthew's Gospel are; The Wheat and the Tares (13:3-23), The Hidden Treasure (13:44), The Pearl of Great Price (13:45-46), The Dragnet (13:47-50), The Householder (13:51-52), The Unmerciful Servant (18:23-35), The Labourers in the Vineyard (20:1-16), The Two Sons (21:28-32), The Marriage of the King's Son, (22:1-14), The Ten Virgins (25:1-13), The Talents (25:14-30).

### **The Presentation of Christ's Miracles**

It is clear that our Lord performed many more miracles than those described by the apostles. Matthew, in common with the other evangelists, made a selection under the promptings of the Holy Ghost to illustrate the variety of our Lord's astonishing works. Matthew recorded twenty miracles of which only three are unique to his record; Healing of the Two Blind Men (9:27-31), Deliverance of the Dumb Demoniac (9:32-33) and the Finding of the Coin in the Fish's Mouth (17:24-27). The miracles recorded by Matthew can be classified as follows:

Christ's Power over Human Sickness - 8 (e.g. Peter's Mother-in-Law). Christ's Power over Natural Laws - 7 (e.g. Raising of Jairus' Daughter) Christ's Power over Evil Spirits - 5 (e.g. Deliverance of Legion).

### **A Gospel for Everyone**

Although Matthew's Gospel was directed to the Jews, there is clear teaching in his narrative that there is hope through Christ for the Gentiles also. As he compiled the list of Joseph's ancestors he included three women by name. Two were Gentiles (Rahab and Ruth) and the other, Tamar, committed a terrible moral sin. A fourth woman is alluded to, Bathsheba. She too was guilty of a moral lapse. The breadth of the Gospel's power therefore is depicted from the outset. Matthew alone tells about the wise men

from the east (2:1), he writes about people coming from the east and from the west (8:11-12), he records the healing of the Centurion's servant (8:5-13) and we hear Christ's praise, through his pen, for the faith of the Canaanite woman (15:21-28). In the parable of the Great Feast there is a clear picture of the church inviting the whole world to embrace the Saviour (22:9-10). Matthew concludes his summary of Christ's earthly ministry with the Great Commission where the apostles were sent into the whole world. This is truly a gospel of hope.

### **Outline**

Chapters 1-4:11; The Preparation for Christ's Ministry

Chapters 4:12-15:21; The Great Galilean Ministry

Chapters 15:22 - 20; The Retirement Ministry (taking Christ to Tyre and Perea, before returning to Capernaum. He prepared His disciples for His suffering and death at this time.

Chapters 21-27; The Passion Week

Chapter 28; Resurrection and Ascension

## Part 44

### Mark: The Work of the Servant

Key Text: Chapter 10:45

“For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

#### Mark’s Place as the Author Assured

As with Matthew, there is nowhere within this, the briefest of the gospel records, which confirms that Mark indeed was the author. However, as with Matthew, there has been no dispute over the authorship since the earliest days of the Christian church. An important witness is Papias of Hierapolis. Born between 50AD and 60AD he may have known apostles (some believe the John whom he served was the apostle John) and he almost certainly was acquainted with first generation Christians. Writing about the Gospel in question he recorded this fact, “Mark, on the one hand being an interpreter of Peter, wrote accurately as many things as he remembered, yet not in order, the things which were either said or done by the Lord.” It was the unity between Peter and Mark that convinced the Church from the very beginning that this work had apostolic sanction and was therefore the inspired Word of God.

#### Meet the Author

Of all the Gospel writers, Mark is the most surprising and therefore the most interesting choice.

The facts about Mark which are beyond question are:

1. Mark was his surname, his Christian name being John.
2. Mark’s mother was, it would appear, a woman of means who may have supported Jesus in his earthly ministry. If this is so then Mark could have been introduced to the Lord and His disciples through the faithfulness of his mother (Acts 12:12).
3. His mother was Barnabas’s sister (Colossians 4:10).

4. He accompanied Barnabas and Paul on the first missionary journey. He probably accompanied them as a servant caring for their practical needs, freeing the preachers to study and evangelise. Unfortunately he abandoned the enterprise, which left a rather sour taste in Paul's mouth, and eventually led to the breaking up of the first missionary partnership in history (Acts 15:37-39).

5. At a much later stage in the narrative of the early church, Mark reappears as a companion of Peter (1 Peter 5:13).

When Paul was imprisoned in Rome and writing to Philemon and the Colossians, Mark was with him (Philemon v24, Colossians 4:10). This indicates that the two men had now been reconciled, although Barnabas disappears completely from the narrative of the New Testament.

Mark therefore is presented as one who was always around the leaders of Christendom. He was a man with flaws but he overcame them to be a faithful servant. He is an encouragement for believers discouraged by their own weaknesses.

“Who, then, was Mark? Not a great leader but rather a follower, not a master-builder but a helper, not flawless but one who fought against and overcame his weakness, not a stay-at-home but a great traveller, not pre-eminently a man of quiet contemplation but a man of action, one who delighted to picture Christ in action for the salvation of sinners for the glory of God” (William Hendriksen)

### **The People for Whom Mark Wrote**

Mark wrote an account of Christ's life in Greek for the benefit of the Roman Christians, with whom he was so familiar. This account was principally the presentation of Peter's preaching to the Romans in a written form, and so preserved for antiquity.

Mark explains Aramaic phrases, giving their meaning to a Roman readership, to whom these words were foreign (boanerges, 3:17, talitha cumi, 5:41, corban, 7:11, ephphatha, 7:34, Abba, 14:36). Furthermore, Mark at times explains Jewish customs for the benefit of his readership, such as the preparation being the day before the Sabbath (15:42). Mark's Gospel is unique in that he had the habit of converting Greek words into Latin, the indigenous

language of the Romans; although it must be said that Greek and Latin co-existed, each in its own particular sphere, within the Roman empire. Therefore the widow's two mites were a "farthing" which was a Roman coin, the quadran (12:42). Of particular interest is the hall where Jesus was led to, Praetorium, this was the Roman governor's official residence (15:16).

In addition to these fascinating details, Mark takes time to name the sons of Simon of Cyrene, Alexander and Rufus (Mark 15:21). Why? Because they were well known to the Christians at Rome (Romans 16:13).

### **The Title**

As with the other books in our English Bible the title is one given by the translators and is perfectly agreeable with our understanding of the authorship of this Gospel. Mark, however, penned his own unique Holy Ghost inspired heading; "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." How do we understand the word "beginning" as it is employed here? It could mean that Mark was simply beginning his story of Christ's ministry. Alternatively he may be stating that the ministry of Christ marks the true beginning of the New Testament Church. One is a limited narrow view while the other looks at the word from a broader New Testament perspective. The fact that Mark commences his Gospel with the introduction of the Lord by John the Baptist would indicate that it is the beginning of His New Testament ministry which is in view here. We normally consider John to be the Gospel which emphasises the deity of Christ. While that is true, we must remember that all the writers had a clear appreciation as to the identity of Jesus Christ. Mark is crystal clear from the outset as he describes Jesus Christ as "the Son of God."

### **The Missionary Gospel**

Mark presents Christ as the busy worker, as the missionary evangelising and labouring for the masses. His favourite word is translated "immediately" or "straightway". Christ was the one who had so many demands pressing upon His time throughout those brief years of public service. The first chapter perfectly illustrates

this truth. He commenced his ministry by calling the four fishermen walking by the seashore looking for them (v16-20). Going to the synagogue in Capernaum on the Sabbath, He caused quite a stir by His exorcism of the unclean spirit which possessed a man who interrupted proceedings (v21-28). Afterwards, He entered the home of Simon Peter where He healed his mother-in-law (v29-30). By sunset the house was beset by multitudes who brought the sick and those possessed by devils and the Lord worked to help everyone (v32-34). In the morning, He was up before dawn for prayer (v35). Simon and the others informed Jesus that many were seeking Him. He told them He had other towns to reach into and so He travelled throughout Galilee ministering to the people (v36-39). Therefore the scene is set for the great Galilean ministry which occupies so much space in Mark's Gospel because it took up the majority of Christ's public service.

Mark was also the missionary gospel in that he related those aspects of Christ's life which the apostles concentrated on in their evangelistic preaching. While the virgin birth of our Lord is a vital doctrine the Apostles in their ministry did not initially proclaim that truth. They preached the life of Christ, His notable miracles, His death and resurrection. This was especially evident when Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:22-36). The miracles were the indisputable evidence that Jesus was the Son of God. These were the signs that He was who He claimed to be. Therefore it was vital that these public performances of power should be emphasised primarily. Other truths such as the virgin birth were taught later as men and women grasped the truth of the Christ's public service, His death and resurrection. Therefore Mark was presenting an account of Peter's preaching and evangelism. Teaching the facts of Christ's life are central to the gospel. This Gospel therefore has an evangelistic goal from the outset.

## Outline

Chapter 1:1-13; Christ's Introduction

Chapters 1:14-Ch10; Christ's Three Years of Public Ministry

Galilean Ministry; 1:14-7:23

Christ's Ministry beyond Galilee; 7:24-10

Chapters 11-15; The Week of Christ's Passion

Chapters 16; The Resurrection and Great Commission

## Part 45

### Luke: The Beloved Physician

Key Text: Colossians 4:14 “Luke, the beloved physician,”

This study will focus upon Luke’s biography, some of which we glean from Biblical history and some of which we learn from the uninspired accounts of early Christian history. It is important that we take time to think about this prominent figure in the annals of the early church. He is important by virtue of the histories which he recorded, “The Gospel According to Luke” and the “Acts of the Apostles”, yet he is mentioned by name only three times; Colossians 4:14 and 2nd Timothy 4:11, Philemon 1:24.

#### Piecing Together the Biblical Facts

These three references grant us a fair starting point in our journey of discovery. In Colossians 4:14 Paul describes Luke as “the beloved physician.” As Colossians was one of Paul’s prison epistles, Luke was therefore one of Paul’s faithful companions in adversity. He was evidently a medical doctor and was therefore a man of advanced education. He was clearly associated with his profession in the mind of Paul. Therefore Paul saw this man using his medical skills and probably benefitted from Luke’s care and attention. His professional qualifications were all the more useful as he treated people with the love and compassion that only a Christian could display. Therefore, to Paul, he was the beloved physician.

The passage in 2nd Timothy 4:11, written some time later during Paul’s final imprisonment prior to his execution, informs us that Luke continued to be the companion of Paul. As Paul neared the time when he would receive the crown of life, he was comforted by Luke’s companionship. Others, such as Demas, had forsaken Paul. Some were busy evangelising in other places, such as Timothy. Luke, however, stood alone with the apostle which was all the more appreciated in this season of terrible trial. Luke is therefore regarded as one who was educated, professional,

compassionate and totally loyal. We would all long for this kind of friend and companion. The reference in Philemon is revealing in that his Latin name is given, Loukas or Lucas. This informs us that Luke was certainly Greek and therefore a Gentile.

### **The Author of Acts**

It is apparent that the one who authored “The Acts of the Apostles”, also penned “The Gospel According to Luke”. The two books are similar in that they address an unidentifiable yet prominent individual by the name of Theophilus. The true starting point in proving that Luke wrote the third Gospel is the Book of the Acts. The evidence there that Luke was the author and by inference also the author of the Gospel is beyond all dispute.

The author of Acts was a man who travelled extensively with Paul. The “we” passages of the Book of Acts describe the events which the author himself witnessed during the ministry of the Missionary Apostle:

Acts 16:10 - 40

The author joined Paul on his second missionary journey at Troas and remained with him until Paul was forced to leave Philippi on account of persecution.

Acts 20:5-21:18

The author re-joined Paul on his third missionary journey at Philippi and travelled with him all the way to Jerusalem.

Acts 27-28

The author was evidently a man of great loyalty because he voluntarily travelled with Paul, the prisoner, to Rome and remained by his side through storm and great danger until the party reaches the imperial capital.

In common with the evangelists, Luke’s name is never mentioned in either his gospel narrative or the Acts of the Apostles. This is surprising because he was evidently one to whom the apostle Paul was indebted on account of his personal service. It is impossible to think of anyone else who possibly could have travelled so extensively with Paul and was so acquainted with the early Christians as to write a comprehensive account of the life of Christ and of the events which transpired in the early church. Luke’s

fingerprints are all over the Acts and by inference the Gospel which bears His name.

## **The Author of the Third Gospel**

There is ample evidence, however, apart the Book of Acts, linking Luke with the third gospel. There was apparently a practise which developed among early Christians, ascribing titles to the Gospels. We know that as early as 125AD title “The Gospel According to Luke” was current among believers. This is significant because this was the prevailing view among those who lived in the same generation as Luke. This is as convincing evidence as we can possibly discover, linking Luke with his Gospel. There are other early Christian works which confirm that this was established as fact, early in the history of the church:

Anti-Marcionite Prologue (160-180AD) - Luke was a bachelor from Antioch, who remained with Paul until his death. He lived until the age of 84 when he died at Boeotia in Greece, “full of the Holy Spirit”.

Irenaeus (182-188AD) - He is significant in that he was a pupil of Polycarp, who would have known some of the apostles and possibly Luke. He said that Luke in his Gospel recorded what Paul preached concerning Christ’s life.

Eusebius (4th Century) - Luke was familiar with most of the apostles.

Jerome (400AD) - Greek was Luke’s native language.

## **What Can We Learn from Luke?**

### **1. Utilising Our God Given Talents**

Luke was obviously a highly educated individual. His writings are some of the finest examples of Greek literature to be found in the New Testament. He was a man of learning and study. If he had not graduated as a doctor he would never have been able to minister to Paul in his hour of affliction. If he had not been as educated as he was he would have been incapable of compiling such a thorough account of New Testament history. God has given all of his people talents. We must develop those abilities to the full if they are to be useful for God.

## 2. Our Talents are Useful For God's Glory

Luke left behind the lucrative surgery for a life of hardship following the call of God. Let us listen to the voice of God and use what he has given us for Christ and His glory.

## Part 46

### Luke: The Tenderness of the Man Christ Jesus

Key Text: Chapter 19:41

“And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it,”

#### Luke’s Prologue

The opening four verses of Luke’s Gospel contain one sentence, which is essentially Luke’s introduction to his account of Christ’s life. This sentence is recognised by scholars as being the work of an educated writer well versed in the Greek language. It informs us that Luke was much more than a medical doctor. He was also an author and an accomplished historian.

#### Luke’s Methodology

In v3 he writes about “having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first”. The words “perfect understanding” refer to “accurate investigations” or a “close following of the facts”. Afterwards he writes about writing in order. This refers to an orderly setting forth of the facts.

Luke was not an eyewitness of the life of Christ. From the outset, Luke records that he received testimonies from those who knew Christ face to face throughout his earthly ministry. This sets him apart from Matthew, Mark and John who lived in Galilee and Judea at the same time when Jesus taught and performed his many miracles. Luke, however, set himself the task of touring the area we today call Israel, talking to those who saw and heard Jesus. He compiled his notes and subsequently authored the Gospel which bears his name. Church historians believe there is evidence which points to Luke being present in Judea and Galilee for two years from 58 AD, during which period he conducted his research.

## **Luke's Credibility**

From the beginning of the Gospel which bears his name, Luke presents himself as a credible and accurate historian. It was important that he presented the facts of Christ's life in a convincing manner. He fixed the time of Christ's birth, according to the calendar of the times (2:1-3) and stated when John the Baptist began his ministry in a Roman and Jewish time frame (3:1-3). He went to great pains to present the story of Christ as authentic.

## **Luke's Purpose**

1. Immediate Purpose - To present a friend, by the name of Theophilus ("Loved by God"), with the narrative of Christ's life. If Theophilus was a Christian, Luke was seeking to strengthen his faith. If Theophilus was not a Christian, Luke was endeavouring to win him over to Christianity.

2. Intermediate Purpose - It is clear that Luke's writing was aimed at a much wider readership. All that he intended for Theophilus, he intended for all who read his account. Indeed the name Theophilus, "Loved by God", reminds us of our standing with the Lord as we learn the facts of His life, death and resurrection.

3. Debated Purpose - There are other ideas as to the reason for Luke's narrative, which while not substantiated are interesting to Bible students and church historians.

One theory is that Theophilus was a rich benefactor who was sympathetic to Christianity and that Luke dedicated his work to this man in order that it might receive widespread circulation. He may have used his work as a defence of the Christian church in the Greek speaking world. Some argue that Paul was in prison when Luke conducted his research and that the narrative was a defence of Paul and his beliefs.

4. Ultimate Purpose - That all nations might know of Christ. As the only Gentile author in the Bible this was Luke's consuming vision. The parable of The Good Samaritan (10:25-37) and The Cleansing of the Ten Lepers (17:11-19) highlights this truth as does 2:32, 3:6, 4:25-27, 9:51-56 and 24:47.

## **Luke's Presentation**

As a physician, greatly loved by Paul especially, Luke was a man with a spirit of deep compassion. While this attitude was probably already part of his nature prior to embracing Christ, the Gospel gave him not only a Christian interest in the lives of others but in the tender compassion of Jesus Christ. Two parables, “The Good Samaritan” and “The Prodigal Son”, emphasise this feature of Luke’s character. Both are among the most famous parables related by Christ and are unique to Luke. In The Good Samaritan the importance of kindness and grace are stressed. It is a practical outworking of “The Sermon on the Mount” where we are taught such virtues as turning the other cheek, going the second mile, praying for our enemies and forgiving because our Father in heaven has forgiven us. Gresham Machen’s words have special relevance where Luke’s interest in this parable is concerned: “As a physician Luke was interested in the relief of suffering; as a philanthropist he had sympathy for poverty and all kinds of distress.” In The Prodigal Son the principle of unconditional love is illustrated.

In both parables, the glory and beauty of the gospel is presented. Spiritually, we can understand Christ as The Good Samaritan, despised and rejected, yet willing to rescue the wounded and weary. He is on a rescue mission to save the untouchables in society. He loves those who are treated with contempt by the world at large. In The Prodigal Son we can spiritually understand God as the Father who welcomes the sinner into His family and restores the backslider to his favour. There is a warmth and vibrancy in these beautiful stories which are timeless in their application.

It is Luke, alone, who depicts Christ weeping over Jerusalem (19:41-44), challenging us in relation to our sympathy for a perishing world.

### **Luke’s Originality**

Luke writes in the vein of The Synoptics, telling the story of Jesus from the perspective of His humanity and relating a narrative that takes the reader from the baptism of Jesus through His Galilean ministry to the final days in Jerusalem, culminating with His death, resurrection and ascension. He does, however, weave considerable material into the narrative which is unique to him. Much of this unique material is characteristic of Luke’s approach to the life of Jesus. The following are a sample:

### 1. The Nativity of Christ

Luke has a greater interest in the story of Christ's birth than any of the evangelists. This was due to his desire to write a complete history. As a good biographer he began by looking at the ancestry of the subject, in his case Jesus Christ. The story of John's conception, the conception of Jesus, the relationship between Mary and Elizabeth and the presentation of the baby in the temple are all vital ingredients of the story of our Lord. I believe, however, that we observe Luke's interest in the conception of our Lord from the perspective of a medical doctor. Why would he not be intrigued? No other baby was ever conceived as this child. The question asked by Mary (1:34) is still asked today by the sceptics. The response by Gabriel is the best explanation of the miracle of the incarnation to be found in the New Testament (1:35).

### 2. Miracles

The Raising of the Son of the Widow of Nain (7:11-17), The Crippled Woman (13:10-17), The Man Afflicted with Dropsy (14:1-6) and The Ten Lepers (17:11-19).

### 3. Poetry

Mary's Magnificat (1:46-56) and Zechariah's Benedictus (1:67-80), are beautiful in their language.

### 4. Women

Luke emphasises the roles of women in the life of our Lord. While His mother is not blessed above women she is certainly highly favoured among women (1:28). The close of the nativity record reveals a mother who watches her growing boy with love and discernment pondering all within her heart (2:51). It is Luke who introduces us to the saintly Elisabeth whose son was filled with the Holy Ghost from his birth (1:39-45). The godly Anna who waited long for the Messiah is only identified by Luke (2:36-38). He tells us the history of Mary Magdalene and reveals the names of other ministering women (8:1-3). He relates the parable of the widow who persevered despite the fact that the judge who heard her case was known for his lack of justice (18:1-8).

### 5. Narratives

There are two incidents in Christ's life which Luke relates. One concerns the conversion of Zacchaeus (19:1-10). This fits neatly in with Luke's desire to portray Jesus as the compassionate one who

embraced all men, even the chief of publicans. The second narrative which Luke tells beautifully is the experience on the road to Emmaus. The heartbroken disciples, the stranger drawing alongside, the stirring exposition of Christ in the Old Testament, the invitation to remain at their house and the sudden revelation of the resurrected Messiah will forever provide comfort and inspiration for God's people everywhere (24:13-35).

### **Lessons from Luke**

While the outline of Luke's ministry is essentially similar to Matthew and Mark in that it follows a similar narrative, the lessons from the book for us today are significant. William Hendriksen summarised these lessons:

1. A book of doctrine showing us what to believe. He emphasised the true humanity and deity of Christ and expounds the way of salvation (18:13).
2. A book of ethics telling us how to live. The leper who returns teaches us gratitude and the Good Samaritan points the way to compassion.
3. A book of comfort teaching us why to rejoice. Luke's Gospel begins with song (Mary's Magnificat) and concludes with great praise (24:52-53). Christ is at the heart of this joy.
4. A book of prophecy informing us what to expect. Prophecy was fulfilled when Jesus came (22:37) and Luke reveals immediate future prophecy in that Jerusalem will be besieged and destroyed (19:43-44). The credibility of the Word of God was especially emphasised to the disciples on the road to Emmaus.

## Part 47

### John: The Gospel of the Son of God

Key Texts: Chapter 20:31

“But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.”

#### The Author

There is evidence from Church history that John was the author of the fourth gospel. The clearest is the testimony of Irenaeus who wrote in the second half of the second century. His witness is important because he was a student of Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, and Polycarp himself was a student of the apostle John.

There is no need, however, to rely on uninspired history to find John’s fingerprints on this account of Christ’s life. There is strong internal evidence linking the Gospel to him. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all name John, presenting him as a member of the inner group of disciples which included his brother James and Simon Peter. These three, alone, saw the raising of Jairus’ daughter, the transfiguration of Christ and were present by His side in Gethsemane. Throughout the fourth Gospel, however, John is never mentioned by name, neither is James his brother. Yet Simon Peter receives some attention, as does his brother Andrew. Their introductions to Jesus are narrated in chapter one while John’s and James’ are not. In the accounts of Matthew, Mark and Luke, however, the calling of James and John are strongly linked with that of Peter and Andrew. In fact Luke informs us that Peter was a partner with James and John in their fishing enterprise (5:10). While John does not record the call by the seashore he tells us of Andrew and another anonymous individual who had been followers of John the Baptist who in turn became followers of Jesus. On the same day, Peter became a follower as a result of Andrew’s witness. The question arises, “Who was the anonymous disciple?” A closer examination of the gospel reveals that he appears in other places. At the last supper, he reclines upon Jesus’ breast as one who was

loved (John 13:25). As this disciple is inevitably one of the inner circle, owing to his closeness with the Lord he has to be either James or John, because Peter is mentioned by name at this time. In 18:15-16 one styled “another disciple” used his influence to have Peter admitted to the palace of the high priest. If the anonymous disciple of this Gospel is indeed John, this is consistent as both he and Peter enjoyed close acquaintance with the master. It also reveals that John came from a wealthy family which granted him a certain influence in high places. At the foot of the cross, he is seen standing with the women, the only disciple it seems who ventured so close to the scene of Christ’s passion (19:26). Again described as “the disciple...who he (Jesus) loved...”, he is charged with caring for Mary. This disciple is again featured with Peter, on the morning of the resurrection, outrunning his friend to the empty tomb and believing for the first time that the great miracle had transpired (20:1-10). After the resurrection, John and James are again unnamed but for the first time they are said to be in the presence of the Lord as the “sons of Zebedee” (21:2). While the others receive their names on this occasion, they are known only by their father. At the close of the gospel he again appears as “the disciple whom Jesus loved...which also leaned on his breast at the last supper” (21:20). Peter was particularly interested in the future ministry of this particular disciple again revealing they had a close affinity.

Piecing together this vital information, we learn that the anonymous disciple was close to Peter, that he was a member of the Lord’s inner circle and that neither John nor James are mentioned by name in the account when both feature in the other gospel records. It seems inevitable therefore that the anonymous disciple must be John who continued to labour with Peter after the resurrection as the account in Acts 3 records. It would seem that he omitted to mention his own name and his brother’s out of a sense of humility, a practise that was common in Greek literature. The fact that he made himself anonymous helps us signpost the way to John as the author of this gospel. As, will be apparent, John’s Gospel was the last of the narratives to be written, which rules out James owing to his martyrdom when Christianity was in infancy.

## The Narrative

John's Gospel stands alone and apart from the other three, known as The Synoptics because they view Christ's life from a similar position. To understand John's narrative one must be acquainted with Matthew, Mark and Luke. John assumes that his readership is well acquainted with many of the facts of the life of Jesus. He does not repeat what is already well known. He fills in some of the gaps in Christ's life which the other writers omitted. In fact, while we need The Synoptics to appreciate John, we also need John to complete the life of our Lord.

John informs us that Jesus ministered in Judea before commencing his Great Galilean Ministry which the others emphasise so clearly (2:13-3:36). During this time, the temple was cleansed, informing us that there were two cleansings of the temples. It is also by understanding John's Gospel that we know Christ's ministry lasted for three years; Passover One (2:13), Passover Two implied (5:1), Passover Three (6:4), Passover Four ((13:1).

## The Theme

John's purpose is not simply to tell a story. He has an ambition to relate those aspects of Christ's life which best illustrate the central truth - that He was in fact the Son of God. Matthew wrote about the King, Mark, the Servant and Luke, the compassionate Saviour and they all related the story from the aspect of Jesus' humanity. John, however, draws out the central truth which the others implied but do not state with the same clarity, that Jesus is the second person of the Trinity, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father.

This is evident from The Prologue (1:1-18). John begins his account in eternity showing us Christ as The Logos, translated The Word. As our words reveal our thinking so Christ, as the eternal Word, reveals the mind and will of God. Christ, as The Word, existed through eternity as God and engaged actively in the creation of the universe. Yet in time He was "made flesh and dwelt among us". In v14 John emphasises his own experience, "we beheld his glory". The author therefore was an eye witness which he would stress perhaps more emphatically in his first epistle (1 John 1:1).

John weaves the facts of Christ's life around this central truth, that Jesus is, and always was, the Son of God. He only records

seven miracles; Changing the Water into Wine (2:1-11), The Healing of the Nobleman's Son (4:46-54), The Healing of the Impotent Man (5:1-8), The Feeding of the Five Thousand (6:1-14), Jesus Walking upon the Water (6:15-21), The Healing of the Blind Man (9:1-7), The Raising of Lazarus (11). Seven, being the perfect number, shows us the completeness of the power of Christ over sickness, over nature and over death. There is an eighth miracle, the resurrection. The eighth marks a new week and so His resurrection denotes a glorious new beginning for world. It is John who defines the reason for Christ's miracles and this he does when recording the first - "to manifest forth his glory" (2:11). The miracles were the signs declaring His divinity. John also shows us that Jesus used His miracles to teach truth. The feeding of the five thousand led Him into a long discourse about the Bread of Life. The opening of the blind man's eyes prompted Him to expound the parable of the shepherd and the sheep.

John's Gospel is also characterised by the seven "I Ams" of Jesus Christ. By recording these wonderful statements, John was identifying who Jesus was; The Bread of Life (6:35), The Light of the World (8:12), The Door of the Sheep (10:7), The Good Shepherd (10:11), The Resurrection and the Life (11:25), The Way, the Truth and the Life (14:6), The True Vine (15:1). The phrase "I Am" is used, however, in other ways also. To the woman at the well he revealed himself as "I Am" to indicate that he was indeed the Messiah. In John 8:58 he emphatically stated "Before Abraham was I am". This was one of His greatest revelations as He stressed his own eternity and His co-equality with the Father and so enraged the Jews who realised the significance. In 10:30 He employed the phrase to teach His oneness with the Father. In 14:3 He told the disciples that He already was in heaven before He died stressing His eternity and giving them hope, "that where I am there ye may be also". The phrase "I am" links Him with the ancient and holy name Jehovah which means "I am that I Am" - the unchanging God.

### **The Intimacy of Christ's Discourses**

It is evident that this account was written by one who had a close acquaintance with our Lord, from the nature of the conversations and discourses which are recorded. There is an intimacy about Jesus which lifts John's record far above a normal historical account. Nicodemus (Ch 3), the woman of Samaria (Ch 4) and the

woman taken in adultery (Ch 8) are examples of personal accounts which John alone records. In addition, however, John records many of Christ's personal interactions with His disciples, particularly the Upper Room discourse (Ch 14-16) followed by the High Priestly prayer of Ch 17.

### **The Purpose of John's Gospel**

While Matthew wrote for Jews, Mark for the Romans and Luke for the Greeks, John was writing for the world. The phrase "world" is a feature of John's writings. It is especially featured in the most famous gospel text in Scripture (3:16). This text reveals the purpose of John's Gospel, to win people from across the world, whether Jew or Greek, for Jesus Christ. In 20:30 and 21:25 John informs us that the Lord did many other works which are not recorded by him. He selected the facts, however, with one aim, one purpose:

"But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name" (20:31).

### **Outline**

Prologue 1:1-18

His early ministry in Galilee 1:19-2:12 (His hour was not yet come - 2:4)

His early Judean Ministry 2:11-2:36

His Samaritan Ministry 4:1-42

His second Galilean Ministry 4:43-54

His second Judean Ministry 5:1-47

His Great Galilean Ministry 6:1-71

His third Judean Ministry 7-10 (His hour was not yet come 7:30, 8:20)

His return to Bethany 11:1-57

His final arrival in Jerusalem 12:1-50 (His hour is come 12:23).

The Upper Room 13-17 (His hour is Come 13:1, 17:1)

Gethsemane and Golgotha 18-19

The Resurrected Saviour 20-21

## Part 48

### Acts: God's Blueprint for the Christian Church

Key Text: Chapter 1:8

“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

#### The Title

The English title for this book, “The Acts of the Apostles”, although very ancient, is not inspired. While this name is in many respects quite appropriate, it is an imperfect representation of the content of Luke's volume. Throughout the narrative, the apostles come and go from the stage of history. Peter is prominent in the first half but by the end we have no clues as to where he continued ministering. John appears at the beginning but then vanishes entirely. The ministry of Paul is dominant in the second half of the narrative but we are left at the end on a “cliffhanger” with the apostle in prison. Most of the apostles hardly get a mention, if at all, in this book. The thread that runs through this book is not the ministry of the apostles but the power of the Holy Ghost. We observe the movements of the Spirit of God as He prompts and energises His servants in the establishment of the New Testament Church.

#### The Importance of Acts

Luke, inspired by the Holy Ghost, made an invaluable contribution to the Christian Church, in writing this account for two reasons:

1. This is a foundational book in relation to understanding the historical and cultural background of the early church. We gain a better understanding of the epistles through the knowledge, provided by Luke, of the churches to which they were written. Our knowledge of Paul's testimony and ministry is a vital component of the history of the early church, which is found alone in Acts, although Paul alludes to it in his letters. In particular, the details regarding the change of emphasis in the ministry of the church and

how the gospel eventually went to the Gentiles first on account of the Jewish rejection of Christ, is most illuminating (13:46-48). In many ways, this helps us appreciate the extended metaphor of the olive tree and the wild olive tree of Romans 11 and shows us why the church is primarily a Gentile movement today.

2. Acts is also a book of instruction in that it lays down certain principles which are true of the church in all ages. The characteristics and methods of the early church are the examples to which the church today ought to aspire.

## **The Principles of the New Testament Church**

### **1. The Holy Ghost - The Power of the Church**

**Revival** - In Acts 2, the Holy Ghost was given according to Christ's teaching in Acts 1:8. Acts 2 is a watershed in the history of the church. For the first time, the Holy Ghost was made freely available to all Christians. Prior to this, the Spirit moved in certain people, at certain times, but was not present in all of God's people all of the time. Acts 2 is also a revival and as such is a pattern for every revival in the history of the church. It is a demonstration of the awesome power of the Holy Ghost when God's people are energised with "the power from on high".

**Regeneration** - In 2:37 the multitude were "pricked in their heart" on hearing Peter's analysis of their sin in crucifying the Son of God. The conviction and transformation which occurred on that day, and which took place wherever the apostles preached, teaches that true conversion is a work of the Holy Ghost.

**Guidance** - Throughout the Acts of the Apostles, the church relied heavily on spiritual guidance in the decisions they made as they served God. The first missionaries were chosen as the church was prompted by the Spirit (13:1-3) and Paul was evidently directed into Europe by the progressive guidance of the Holy Ghost (16:6-10). Many other passages illustrate Holy Ghost guidance (8:29, 39, 10:19, 11:12, 11:28, 21:11)

**Infilling** - It was regarded as a vital qualification for serving God that the believer experienced the fullness of the Spirit (6:3, 5, 7:55, 9:17, 11:24).

### **2. Prayer - The Communion of the Church**

From the first prayer meeting in the Upper Room, (Acts 1:13-14) the church was conscious of its need of prayer. When the first signs of persecution emerged (4:23-31) and when Peter was later cast into prison and facing certain death (12:5) the people of God took their burden to God. It was a primary and key characteristic of the early Christians, evidenced in Saul of Tarsus after he was converted (9:11).

### 3. Preaching - The Proclamation of the Church

Wherever the apostles travelled, they preached the message of the gospel. There are many sermons recorded in the book beginning with Peter's message on the Day of Pentecost (2:14-36). The sermons of Philip, Stephen, and especially Paul, are given as examples of apostolic preaching. In content, these sermons quoted from the Hebrew Scriptures, testified to Christ's perfect life, his atoning death and his remarkable resurrection. These facts are set forth repeatedly, teaching us that true New Testament preaching must proclaim Christ. The ministry of the apostles was unequivocal and uncompromising. Jesus is the only way of salvation (4:12).

### 4. Baptism - The Testimony of the Church

The sacrament of baptism was practised by the early church, most notably on the Day of Pentecost when three thousand bore witness to the work of the Spirit upon their hearts. The Ethiopian eunuch (8:36), Saul (9:18), Cornelius (10:48) and the Philippian jailer (16:33) are examples of believers who bore witness to Christ in this manner.

### 5. Witnessing - The Evangelism of the Church

Apart from public ministry, there is evidence that individual Christians were constantly speaking of Christ and spreading the gospel in their daily lives. After the first persecution, the believers went everywhere preaching the gospel, or talking about Christ (8:4). The words "scattered abroad" refers to the scattering of seed. God regarded His people as being seeds which He scatters in order that fruit might be produced in the form of precious souls.

### 6. Persecution - The Opposition to the Church

The Acts of the Apostles is the record of Satan's work in opposing the Kingdom of Christ. The martyrdom of Stephen (7:54-60) and James (12:2) are recorded as well as the imprisonments of the apostle Paul, which is where the book concludes.

## 7. Missions - The Outreach of the Church

Christ's programme for the church extended beyond Jerusalem and Judea to Samaria and into all corners of the world (1:8). Philip was the first missionary who carried the gospel to the Samaritans (8:5). Peter, who later joined Philip, was the first missionary to reach out to the Gentiles in the form of Cornelius and his house (10). It was early missionaries who carried the gospel to Antioch in Syria (11:19-21). This church as well as being the home congregation of Paul, Barnabas and Silas, was the first truly missionary minded congregation in the history of the Church. It was they who made the decision to appoint Paul and Barnabas to the work of missions thus marking the beginning of a new era of evangelism. Paul's zeal in spreading the gospel, the places he travelled to and his faithfulness continue to be the greatest inspiration to the missionaries of today.

## 8. Church Planting - The Organisation of the Church

The early missionaries were keen to evangelise and to plant churches. Paul established churches across Asia Minor and Europe. He not only established these congregations but he continued to teach them through his many epistles. In planting churches, Paul always ordained elders in order the churches might be organised and led effectively (14:23, 20:17).

## 9. Division - The Challenge of the Church

It has always been the case, that divisions threaten the peace and well-being of the Church. In this book, the church is taught that resolutions can be found if the problem is considered in a spiritual manner. Within the early church there was a cultural division between the Greek-speaking Jews known as Grecians and the Aramaic-speaking Jews. When it was perceived that the Grecian widows were being disadvantaged apostles called on the congregation to elect seven godly men to oversee the work (ch.6). When Jewish believers attempted to compel the new Gentile

converts to follow the ancient Hebrew customs, Paul and Barnabas appealed to the council of apostles and elders at Jerusalem (ch.15). Therefore by establishing proper leadership and by following the decisions made, the church was spared schism in its early stages of development.

## 10. Unity - The Fellowship of the Church

Unity was prized from the inception of the New Testament Church. The first prayer meeting was characterised by men and women who were of one accord (1:14). The first believers sold their possessions surrendering their property to the apostles so that poor brothers and sisters could be cared for (2:44-45). Wherever the apostles travelled throughout the world they found a kindred and friendly spirit among the people of God, characteristics that we should prize today in the church.

### Outline

- Chapter 1:1 - 8:3    The beginnings and development of the Church In Jerusalem.
- Chapter 8:4-12:25    The spreading of the gospel to Samaria and among the Gentile peoples and the conversion of Saul of Tarsus.
- Chapter 13:1-28:31    The missionary journeys of the Apostle Paul

## Part 49

### Romans: The Gospel

Key Text: Chapter 1:16-17

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.”

#### The Roman Church

As the inspired history of the New Testament is incomplete, there are many details concerning the narrative of church expansion and missions of which we know nothing. For a congregation to be established in the greatest and most powerful city on earth, it is amazing that God chose to hide the facts regarding its planting and progress from our eyes. From the tone of Paul's letter to the Romans, we can gather he was particularly keen to visit this congregation (1:10-11). It would seem that the letter is one of self-introduction where the apostle reveals his intentions, to visit, while at the same time expressing his credentials (1:1-5). Indeed, it would appear that he used this letter to stake out his doctrine and theology so that the Romans were assured that he believed in the same gospel.

From the letter we can deduce some facts regarding the Roman Church:

1. They were a spiritually mature body of people. Paul was therefore able to unfold the mysteries of grace in a manner that stands apart in the New Testament.
2. Therefore it would follow that this congregation had been established for some time. It may well be that some of those Roman Jews converted on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:10), returned to their home city to establish a congregation. If this was the case then it is possible that the Roman Church was fifty years old, at least, by the time Paul wrote his epistle.

3. The Roman Christians were well known for their grace and love for the Lord. Not only did Paul refer to their faith being well known across the world, but he knew that he himself would receive blessings as a consequence of meeting these brethren and sisters in Christ.

4. Paul wrote this letter while at Corinth during his third missionary journey. The narrative of the fifteenth chapter would indicate that he was preparing a gift to bring to Jerusalem and sent Phebe of Corinth to Rome with the letter. Scholars date this letter therefore in year 57 or 58 AD.

### Outline

Chapter 1:1-17 The Roman Church and the gospel  
Paul begins by confirming his apostleship (1:5), commending the testimony of the Roman Church (1:8) and expressing the purpose of his letter, to expound the gospel of Christ (1:16).

Chapter 1:18 - 3:20 The World needs the gospel  
Declaring the wickedness of the Jew and the Gentile, Paul declares the whole world guilty before God (Romans 3:19).

Chapter 3:21 - 6:11 Justification by faith; The heart of the gospel  
Paul defines justification as a free act of God's grace, based solely on the merits of Christ (3:24-31). Using Abraham as his illustration of justification by faith alone, (ch.4) he speaks of this truth providing the believer with peace, joy, patience, experience and hope (6:1-5).

Chapter 6:12 - 7:25 Sanctification; Living out the gospel  
In 5:5 Paul alludes to the ministry of the Spirit. Beginning at 6:12, however, the apostle demonstrates, that one who is justified walks is not a slave to sin because he resists the dominion of sin over his mortal body. This is the work of sanctification which follows the act of justification.

Chapter 8:1 - 39 Assurance; The hope of the gospel  
This chapter is the crown jewels of the Epistle to the Romans. The one who is justified and who enjoys the Spirit's work within the heart, is not condemned (8:1), is sure of eternal glorification

(8:30) and is confident that nothing can separate him from the love of God.

Chapter 9:1 - 11:36 God's plan for Israel; The Jew and the gospel  
This section brings us back to Paul's opening remarks where he emphasised that the gospel was preached "to the Jew first". He expresses his spiritual burden for the Jew (9:1-5), he explains that they will be returned to the fold of God using the analogy of the olive tree (11:15-26) and he expounds that God is the author of human history as he orchestrates the development of the church for his own glory.

Chapter 12:1 - 15:7 Christian behaviour; The practicalities of the gospel

This section is dominated by the opening section which calls upon the justified people to be fully surrendered to God, "our reasonable service" (12:1). There are useful subsections dealing with the attitude of the church towards civil government (13:1-21) and towards issues which cause division among Christians (14:1 - 15:7).

Chapter 15:8 - 33 Paul; The apostle and the gospel

Paul, conscious that the Roman Christians have never met with him, explains his authority to preach and to write as an apostle (15:15 - 19). This section is also biographical as Paul outlines his plans for the future, to visit Rome and then journey onward to Spain (15:24).

Chapter 16:1 - 27 Salutations and Benediction

This section is dominated by a long list of people in the Roman Church with whom Paul is familiar. We also understand from this section that Phebe, of Corinth, was the letter carrier, and that Aquilla and Priscilla accompanied her on the journey to the Imperial Capital. The closing benediction (16:25-27) is of special encouragement to all who labour in Christian witness:

"Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith: To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever Amen."

## Part 50

### 1st Corinthians: Teaching for an Immature Church

Key Text: Chapter 1:30

“But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:”

#### The Geography and History of Corinth

Corinth developed as a prosperous city on account of its convenient location in the north of the Peloponnesian peninsula, in southern Greece. Ships would have docked at the port of Lechaum, two miles north of Corinth, their wares would have been transported to the port of Cenchreae, seven miles east of Corinth, and the cargo would have been taken across the Aegean or the eastern Mediterranean. This brought much trade to Corinth, creating wealth and bringing immigrants.

In the year 140 BC, however, the Romans decimated the ancient city on account of its revolts against the imperial power. One hundred years later in 44BC Julius Caesar rebuilt Corinth, together with its ports, and established the city as a Roman colony. The city quickly prospered, owing to its advantageous position as a hub of international trade. It drew a diverse range of people from Europe, Africa and Asia who contributed to the life of the colony. As a Roman city, the official language was Latin and the colony was governed by a structure that was similar to Rome itself. Julius Ceasar's brainchild was a huge success. It is no wonder that the official name of the colony was “The Corinthian Colony is Julian Praise”.

#### Paul's Relationship with Corinth

As a pioneer missionary, Paul worked to a careful strategy as he evangelised. Focusing on the major centres of population he sought to establish churches knowing that their location would be advantageous for spreading the gospel still further. We could say with certainty that God permitted the re-establishment of the Corinthian Colony, so that one hundred years later, it would be

sufficiently established to enable the gospel to be spread throughout the world as a result of the human traffic that passed through.

Paul arrived in Corinth during his third missionary journey remaining in the city for eighteen months (Acts 18:1-17). When he departed across the Aegean to the Ephesus (probably in 52AD) he left an assembly of believers, established by the grace of God.

### **Storm clouds**

Paul returned to Ephesus in the course of his third missionary journey, where he ministered for three years. During this period he received word that the Corinthian believers were living in an immoral fashion. Therefore he wrote an initial letter addressing this problem (1 Corinthians 5:9-11). This letter has been lost to antiquity and therefore not preserved by the providence of God to be included within the New Testament Scriptures (Part 51, 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians, examines the difficulties around additional letters of correspondence from the apostles).

Paul was to discover that the problems at Corinth were much greater than even he feared. He would learn of these problems from three sources:

1. The household of Chloe who communicated with him (1:11).
2. A letter which the Corinthian church addressed to Paul seeking his counsel on serious matters (7:1).
3. Paul met a delegation which was sent from the Corinthian church; Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus (16:17).

Gathering this information, Paul learned of the issues which needed addressed in the church which he had established just two or three years previously.

### **Paul's method**

In his article entitled “Problems of a Gentile Church” Dr J Gresham Machen commented that “First Corinthians alone presents the practical problems of an early church in the fullness of their puzzling variety.” Therefore 1st Corinthians has an historical importance in addition to the doctrinal. Dr Machen refined the

problems facing the Corinthian Christians in a pagan society with one question, “How ought Christian faith to work out in practice?” He commented that while the Scriptures cannot supply us with the detailed solutions for every problem (“the details of life are of endless variety”), the method for solving every problem is set forth in 1st Corinthians:

“Here is the remarkable thing about 1st Corinthians - every matter that is discussed in it is tested by the fire of evangelical truth. Hence the permanent value of the Epistle. How to apply the lofty principles of the gospel to the routine of daily life is the fundamental problem of Christian conduct.”

Therefore 1:30 is a suitable key text because it teaches that Christ who is “made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” is the solution for every difficulty that arises.

#### Problem 1 - A Party Spirit 1:10-4:21

The Corinthians, being accustomed to Greek culture and learning, adopted the view that by listening to eloquent preaching and growing in learning their devotional life would be enhanced. Therefore they debated over which preachers were best suited for their needs. Some followed Apollos, others Peter, a few were loyal to Paul while there were those who simply said they were of Christ (1:12). It is from this section that we discover Paul was not noted as a great orator and his very appearance was off-putting (2:1-4). In the course of these chapters, Paul shows them that the preaching of the cross is foolishness to the world (1:18), that God takes up people that are weak (1:26-29), that preachers are labourers together with God (3:5-9) and all Christians are part of a building with Christ being the foundation. He continually brings them to see Christ as the focus of unity as he seeks to heal the divisions.

#### Problem 2 - Immorality 5:1-12; 6:15-20

Throughout the Greek and Roman world, the Corinthians were infamous for their wicked lifestyles, so much so that the Greeks described someone who lived fast and loose by coining the phrase, “to live a Corinthian life.” Some professing Christians did not

entirely abandon their lives of sin and there was one tragic case of an individual living in a manner which would have disgraced even the Corinthians. For the sake of Christ, who died for sin, this transgressing brother would have to be disciplined or the entire church would become polluted. Some of the believers in Corinth had been saved out of deep sin (6:9-11). Those who were living in open sin were probably a minority, but they had the potential to seriously damage the work of God.

### Problem 3 - Lawsuits 6:1-11

Believers were not to bring their grievances against one another to the civil courts. Rather, they were to trust the judgements of God's people in relation to their difficulties as their practices were contrary to the gospel. Rather than going to the kingdom of this world they were to submit themselves to God's Kingdom.

### Problem 4 - Marriage Problems 7:1-40

Paul addresses those who are married and those who are unmarried. He urges faithfulness to the marriage union, even in cases where only one is a believer, but at the same time he observes that, under the particular circumstances then facing the church, those who are unmarried have more time and opportunity to serve God, which was his own position (7:8).

### Problem 5 - Food Offered to Idols 8:1-13 (10-1-31)

Corinth had a number of pagan temples and altars celebrating both Greek and Egyptian deities. As a consequence, meat was freely sold that was taken from animals offered in pagan rituals. A question had arisen in Corinth as to whether it was proper to eat this meat. Paul taught that the act of eating meat offered to idols was in itself harmless. The harm was generated when such meat was eaten in a manner which offended those who thought differently. Christ is brought into the solution once again with beautiful words which should instruct us as we wrestle with differences among us, "But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ." (8:12).

#### Problem 6 - Maintaining the Gospel Ministry 9:1-27

Paul taught that the church ought to support those who were ministering to their spiritual needs (9:8-14). He assured the Christians that he was not ministering for material gain but spiritual profit. Rather than being served he ministered as a servant for the glory of Christ (9:15-27).

#### Problem 7 - Worship 11:1-14:40

It is evident that public worship was seriously flawed. Paul gives instructions regarding the head-covering, the Lord's Supper and public prayer. He does not, as some allege provide teaching regarding the supposed gift of tongues as is practised in Pentecostal / Charismatic churches. Rather he was laying down procedures for a church, made up of various nationalities, whereby public prayer was adopted in an orderly fashion (the word "tongue" being the Greek equivalent of "language").

#### Problem 8 - The Resurrection 15:1-58

It is likely that false views of this doctrine were the occasion of one of the greatest apostolic expositions of the final and great hope of the Church.

#### Problem 9 - Giving to the Saints 16:1-23

Paul stated his intention of gathering an offering in Corinth which would be presented to the Christians at Jerusalem (16:1-3). In so doing, he was stressing the great unity of the international church while at the same time he was dealing with opposition that may have arisen to such an offering.

## Part 51

### 2nd Corinthians: Paul Speaks for Himself

Key Text: Chapter 4:1-2

“Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.”

#### A Tale of Two Letters

The contrast, in terms of content, between Paul's first Epistle and his second Epistle to the Corinthian church could not be sharper. While the first letter is pre-eminently practical in its outlook, the second letter is mainly theological and doctrinal with some practical application. This book contains some of the most wonderful mysteries of the New Testament scriptures. It is evident that the Corinthian church, to which Paul was so attached, and in whom he had invested so much time, had reached a degree of maturity in the intervening time, enabling Paul to unfold deeper truths. They could now stomach the strong meat of the Word.

#### The 4th Epistle to the Corinthians

Although this book contains Paul's second Epistle to the Corinthian church, there are indications that this was his fourth letter which he despatched to them. Only two of these letters were inspired by God for the purposes of the New Testament Scriptures. When Paul initially heard of the immoral behaviour among the Corinthian Christians he wrote an initial letter, which met with little success (1Corinthians 5:9). Afterwards he wrote the letter which is the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians in the New Testament. By this time, the facts were well established and there were other matters to address besides sexual immorality. Paul indicated in 1st Corinthians 16:10 that he was sending Timothy to presumably deal with the matters outlined in the letter. Acts 19:22 indicates that

Erastus was also despatched from Ephesus to Corinth, as a helper and companion for Timothy. The indications are, however, that neither Paul's letter nor Timothy's ministry solved the rather sensitive, and it seems intractable issues, that afflicted the church. According to 1:1 Timothy had returned to Paul and was now at his side by the time the second epistle was written. 2:1 indicates that sometime between the writing of the two inspired letters Paul made the trip across the Aegean from Ephesus to Corinth to address the difficulties in Corinth face to face. It would appear that Paul suffered a rather severe rebuff on the part of the church which caused him to withdraw and write his third Epistle, called by scholars "His Sorrowful Letter" (2:4). While the letter described in chapter two may appear, at a casual glance to be, 1st Corinthians, it appears that it follows immediately after a visit which must have been painful, necessitating such a tearful letter. The chronology argues for a third letter at this stage.

It appears, that this difficult and tortuous set of circumstances caused the Corinthians to reflect on their circumstances in a deeper fashion. The individual who had committed the sin, described in 1st Corinthians 5:1, had indeed been disciplined and had repented of his immorality. In 2:7 Paul is pleading with the church to reinstate the offender, typically making his case on the grounds of Christ's mercy and forgiveness towards us all. When Paul heard the news, that God was working anew amongst his people he travelled north from Ephesus to the city of Troas (2:12-13). While he ministered in Troas he was waiting for Titus. In 7:5-6, 13 we discover Paul in Macedonia where he actually does meet with Titus. Indeed 1:16 informs us that Paul was travelling by land through Macedonia intending to travel all the way to Corinth. It was Titus who confirmed the news that the Corinthians had repented of their backsliding. This would indicate that it was Titus's ministry which contributed to the reversal in Corinth. He was probably the one who delivered the so called "Sorrowful Letter" and pastored this flock with whom Satan had caused such havoc. Therefore writing from Macedonia Paul writes this fourth letter, called in our Scriptures, the second epistle to the Corinthians. This is a rather more joyful letter than any of the apostle's previous correspondence.

## **The Difficulties of Uninspired Apostolic Writings**

The weight of reformed scholarship is supportive of the hypothesis I have advanced, that there were additional letters which Paul, and presumably other apostles, may have written, which were not preserved and therefore not considered inspired.

John Calvin wrote of the letter alluded to in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 5:9:

“The epistle of which he speaks is not at this day extant. Nor is there any doubt that many others are lost. It is enough, however, that those have been preserved to us which the Lord foresaw would suffice”

Calvin therefore, lays claim to the doctrine of Divine Preservation as being proof of inspiration. Some may wonder at the possibility of lost writings being found and the impact that may have upon our faith. But even if such writings were recovered, we would have to conclude that as they were not preserved for the benefit of the church in all ages they were not therefore inspired.

Matthew Poole admitted that the balance of evidence pointed to lost apostolic writings, though he inserted a caveat indicating that there were problems with this position; yet in his caveat he obviously believed that the position could be consistent with the divine inspiration of Scripture.

“It should seem that Paul had written so in some former epistle which he had directed to this church, which is lost; for we must think that Paul wrote more epistles to the several churches than those left us upon record in holy writ (yet so as not to undermine the perfection of the Holy Scriptures).”

Charles Hodge enters fully into this subject, dealing initially with the objection that this epistle referred to 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 5:9 was a reference to the current epistle. He considers this improbable, because of the natural force of the words. Bearing in mind that Charles Hodge was a brilliant Greek scholar, his summary of what was intended is most helpful:

“‘I wrote to you in the epistle,’ naturally means here as in 2 Cor. 1, 8, the epistle which you have already received, and not the one which he was then writing...”

What is gravely troubling about Hodge’s view, however, is that he admits the possibility that inspired writings could be lost. He writes about the “natural indisposition in Christians to admit that any of the inspired writings are lost” and goes on to emphasise

that “the church has all the inspired writings which God designed for her edification.” He maintains that it is natural to assume that the “apostles wrote many short letters, not intended as pastoral epistles designed for the church in all ages, but simply to answer some question, or to give some direction relative to the peculiar circumstances of some individual or congregation.” With the latter I can readily agree but to describe the lost writings as inspired, for me, is a stretch too far, and does raise questions about the infallibility of the living Word of God.

Why then does Hodge approach the matter in this manner? It is most likely because the early church would have always regarded all writings from the apostles as inspired. If, as many suggest, Paul did pen four Corinthian epistles the church would not have differentiated between the personal notes and the inspired instruction; although based on their reaction to some of Paul’s advice it would appear their regard for his authority was, at times, somewhat lacking. This being said, we must return to Calvin’s point about “preservation” proving inspiration.

Matthew Henry, while not committing himself to a particular position clearly leans on the side of those who speak of a lost epistle, on similar grounds to Calvin:

“Some think this was an epistle written to them before, which is lost. Yet we have lost nothing by it, the Christian revelation being entire in those books of Scripture which have come down to us, which are all that were intended by God for the general use of Christians, or he could and would in his providence have preserved more of the writings of inspired men.”

Certainly the “inspired men”, the apostles of Christ, always wrote and preached with unique authority but were all their words and writings inspired, God-breathed, with a view to being part of the canon of Holy Scripture? The balance of Biblical evidence and the weight of scholarly investigation would appear to be on the side of other writings which were not preserved and therefore not inspired for the benefit of the church in all ages.

The arguments against this lost epistle theory in relation to Corinth, and the general difficulties concerning uninspired apostolic writings, however, should not be ignored. While it appears logical to assume the apostles wrote many letters, in addition to those which are within the canon, it is argued that a degree of speculation is involved. Those who caution against

additional writings also claim that if such a lost writing were to be found it would create uncertainty about the canon. That being so, they claim that the idea of lost apostolic literature, therefore, undermines the credibility of the canon. The English 19th Century Methodist commentator Adam Clarke drew from sources to insist that 1 Cor.5:9 did not in fact refer to a previous letter but to the contents of the letter that we regard as 1st Corinthians:

“The words may be translated, ‘I Had written to you in This Epistle’...Dr. Whitby produces several proofs of this, and contends that the conclusion drawn by some, viz. that it refers to some epistle that is lost, is not legitimately drawn from any premises which either this text or antiquity affords.”

It is also argued that by claiming 2nd Corinthians is the 4th letter of correspondence between Paul and Corinth, further speculation regarding the source of 2nd Corinthians is encouraged by way of a question - Are the contents of 4th Epistle a combination of the two lost letters? This latter claim would be totally unwarranted and if countenanced would be damaging to the doctrine of inspiration, I admit. The reader can make an independent informed opinion as to the possibility of the uninspired apostolic letters of correspondence.

### **Biographical Notes**

From chapters 10-13 the great apostle really does speak for himself. We obtain an intriguing insight into his vision, his desire and his plans together with some intimate details about his life. Paul was still concerned about the attitude that the Corinthians had entertained as regards his ministry when many preferred Apollos on account of his greater skills as a public speaker. There he makes reference to his bodily appearance being “weak and contemptible” in contrast to his powerful weighty letters (10:10). Therefore, Paul concludes his 2nd Epistle with a testimony to his ministry as an apostle:

His Power - Spiritual in his battle for souls of people (10:3-5).

His Vision - To reach the unreached as the Corinthians were (10:13-16).

His Love for Corinth - Jealous to keep them pure for Christ (11:2).

His Suffering - His sacrifices for Christ and the Church (11:23-33).

His Thorn - The manner in which the Lord granted Paul grace and empowered him through physical weakness is most encouraging (12:10).

His Plans - To visit Corinth for the third time (12:14-15, 13:1-2, 10).

His Exhortation - Typical apostolic benediction (13:11-14).

## Theology

2nd Corinthians is pre-eminently a book of profound and mysterious theology which has a bearing upon the daily lives of God's people whether we live in the first or the twenty-first century.

### Earthly Suffering as a Preparation for Heaven

We have already observed Paul's description of his many persecutions and the satanic attack upon him in the closing chapters. He also enumerates his suffering for Christ in other places throughout this book (1:8-10, 4:7-12, 6:4-10). In 4:17-18 he actually states, however, that our sufferings in this world work out a greater weight of glory in the world to come. Also, in 5:1-4 he testifies, that the more he suffers, the more he anticipates the glory of the hereafter when he would receive his eternal home. What encouragements for suffering believers! At the beginning of the epistle Paul actually states that God allows us to suffer so that we might be able to comfort others who pass through similar experiences (1:3-4). How noble are the providences of God!

### The New Covenant

As one who was a minister of the new covenant Paul, in chapter three produces some of the most profound expositions of the New as opposed to the Old Covenant that we can find anywhere in the New Testament. The glory of the Old Testament is best illustrated by the veil which covered Moses' face. The glory was hidden and obscured. It could not be seen in fullness. Now, in this New Testament age, the veil is removed. The Holy Spirit enables us to see the glory of God in the face, not of Moses, but of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

### The Gospel Ministry

In 4:1-7 he explains why some will reject the ministry of the gospel, the god of this world has blinded their minds. Yet, still,

the true church has a treasure in earthen vessels and through the preaching of Christ the light of the glory of God shines from the face of Jesus Christ. The fault lies not with the message, or the messenger, but with the blindness of the human heart.

In 2:14-17 he teaches that the gospel will always have an effect whether in life or death. One receives life through his acceptance of Christ while another is condemned through rejection. Therefore, the apostle described his ministry as a constant triumph because the gospel he preached was never ineffectual.

In 5:11-21 he described his ministry as one of peace and reconciliation where he sought to reconcile men and women with God through Jesus Christ. He emphasised the death and sacrifice of Christ in proclaiming this message. He likened himself to an ambassador, representing His kingdom, in a foreign land. The Church certainly ministers as an ambassador for God yet we must be compelled by the same godly fear that motivated Paul.

### **Offering for Jerusalem**

Chapters eight and nine are taken up with a rather lengthy exhortation regarding the offering that Paul was gathering for the Christians at Jerusalem. His argument was based on the giving of Christ who gave up the riches of glory, being made poor in order that we might be rich. Therefore, he was teaching these people to stand into Christ's love in their generosity towards the needy in Judea. This passage contains the famous words about the cheerful giver whom God loves with the assurance that divine blessing will come to those who give of their substance.

## Part 52

### Galatians: Justified by Faith

Key Text: Chapter 3:11

“But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith.”

#### The Theme

It is a most striking fact that the central theme of Paul's Epistle to the Galatians is a carbon copy of the theme of his Epistle to the Romans. These were the two key New Testament books, whose teaching inspired the Protestant Reformation. As Martin Luther studied for his Theology lectures in Wittenberg, he was led by the Spirit of God through the Psalms and onto Galatians and Romans. The teaching, not only transformed his life, but, was the catalyst for transforming the spiritual, social and political landscape of Europe. Of the three books he studied in his darkened monastic cell, Luther considered Galatians to be the most ground breaking; “The epistle to the Galatians is my epistle. To it I am as it were in wedlock. It is my Katherine.” Paul's great theme when writing to the Galatians was “Justification by faith alone” in its theological and practical aspect. This book therefore has much to teach the church in relation to justification by faith alone as the key theme of the gospel.

#### The Galatians

In his work “Ireland and the Celtic Church” George T. Stokes shows that the Galatians were a Celtic people and therefore related to the peoples of Ireland, Scotland, Wales and parts of England. About the year 278 B.C., a large body of Celts moved east, out of France, eventually penetrating Asia Minor. They established a kingdom in what we today would call central Turkey. This kingdom was comprised of three tribes which were known as Galli and sometimes Galatae. Hence their kingdom became known as Galatia. This kingdom finally lost its independence in 25 BC when the Romans established Galatia as a substantial province within Asia Minor. Paul visited Galatia during all three of his missionary

journeys establishing congregations in Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. During these years we must assume that further churches were planted throughout the region. When Paul wrote this letter he was addressing, not one congregation, but a number of assemblies across a wide ranging and important region.

### **Fighting for the Future of the Gospel**

After Paul and Barnabas returned from their first missionary journey, their home church of Antioch was challenged by men from Judea who taught that the Gentile converts should be circumcised according to the law of Moses (Acts 15:1-2). After much debate, Paul and Barnabas decided to travel to Jerusalem to have this issue settled once and for all. Paul's position was upheld by the Church Council (Acts 15) and the doctrines of those who advocated a Jewish way of life were discredited. The Judaisers remained determined to continue causing havoc within the church. They were helped greatly by Peter who withdrew from fellowship with Gentile brethren when the Jewish legalists appeared. Paul was grieved by this conduct, sensing that Peter's pragmatism was fanning the flames of false doctrine (2:11). In the following years, these legalists made inroads throughout Galatia to the extent that the Galatians were beginning to question the core element of the gospel, justification by faith alone. Gravely concerned by this turn of events, Paul addresses a people who were "bewitched" (3:1), "removed to another Gospel" (1:6) and hindered in the faith after having run so well (5:7). Paul was aware that a departure from the gospel of grace to a system of works would ruin the work that had begun. It also seems that this departure occurred a short time after the churches of Galatia had been established. How quickly things can change for the worse in the life of a congregation, or in this case a group of local assemblies! Therefore, Paul wrote this short epistle knowing that the stakes could not have been higher.

The theme of Galatians may be identical to Romans, yet the occasion is very different. To the Romans, Paul wrote to a people who believed as he believed. He wrote to show them that the gospel he preached was the same as the gospel which they proclaimed. To the Galatians, however, Paul was defending the gospel against error and attack. Perhaps this was why Luther described this epistle as his favourite book, living as he did in a world dominated by a system of works, not unlike the one which

Paul was intent on overthrowing. As we serve God against a religious backdrop which often values works more than grace we need to be constantly grounded by this remarkable book lest we also become entangled again with the yoke of bondage (5:1).

## Outline

### Chapters 1 and 2 - The Gospel Preached

Paul opens up this epistle in a devastating manner; “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have received let him be accursed (1:8). He proceeds to describe the gospel as a message which he received “by revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:12). After describing his own ministry to the Galatians, Paul concludes this section with a testimony to the grace of God, a testimony which every believer can take possession of: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me” (2:20).

### Chapters 3 and 4 - The Gospel Proved

In this section, Paul deals with the relationship between law and grace as he unfolds the distinctions between the Old and the New Covenant. At the outset, however, he brings the Galatians to the heart of the gospel, justification by faith, from the life of Abraham (3:6-11). To prove the gospel, justification by faith must be verified from Scripture. What better method when dealing with the Judaisers, than taking the people to Father Abraham? After all he was justified by faith. Not content to rest with Abraham, Paul expounds the cross, portraying Jesus Christ as the one who accomplished redemption by being made a curse for us in hanging from the tree (3:13-14). He proceeds to show that the law was a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ (3:24-25). We are now the sons of God having received the Spirit of adoption. This is a blessed place of peace and freedom which negates all legalistic tendencies (4:4-7).

### Chapters 5 and 6 - The Gospel Promoted

Paul's teaching to the Galatians is beautifully positioned between the Legalists on the one hand and the Libertines on the other. The one group imposed the straight jacket of the Mosaic Law while the other group threw off, in totality, the principles of the Moral Code. A middle way was essential. The gospel is that middle path. If the gospel is to be promoted, the church needs to live a spiritual life in a wicked world, showing forth the holiness and purity of Christ. Therefore, Paul urged the Galatians to walk in, and produce the fruit of, the Spirit (5:16-26). This section concludes with suitable advice regarding forgiveness and restoration, sowing in the flesh and in the spirit and not being weary in well doing, all being evidence of their justification (6:1-10).

### **Galatians for the 21st Century**

Paul's Epistle to the Galatians is ever relevant, because the dangers of legalism, on the one hand, and antinomianism on the other, are constant threats to the gospel of grace. Legalism is the concept that eternal life can be earned by good works and a religious habit. Tragically many who attend Christian churches are being fed a diet of, 'do your best and live a decent life', thinking that this will mean acceptance with God. This is the "other gospel" which Paul warned of and many have been deceived by its message. However, many who loudly proclaim their love of grace pervert grace by practising antinomianism, which is the theory that because they are not under law but under grace believers have no obligation to keep God's law. Like the rest of the New Testament, the message of Galatians does not countenance this perversion of grace. We cannot preach a message of grace and love without reference to godly living, which is grace worked out in the life. James certainly emphasised that "faith without works is dead" (James 2:20). The fruit of the Spirit, which Paul exhorted, is this very thing, the evidence in the life and conduct that the professing Christian has a testimony and is no hypocrite. There are those in evangelical circles today who criticise godly principles as being legalism. Legalism is a false message of salvation by works, it is antinomianism which argues for the abandonment of godly principles after conversion. We have seen this at work in churches through the increasing desecration of the Lord's Day by Christians (when the Scriptures teach that Sabbath must be honoured Exodus 20:8), the ordination of women to ministry (when the bible expressly states that the male is to be in oversight, I Timothy 3:1),

in the removal of head coverings by ladies in worship (when Paul taught Corinth plainly that this was necessary, 1 Corinthians 1:1-16), in the increasing use of alcoholic beverages by believers (when Proverbs, for example, warns of its great danger, Proverbs 23:32) and in many other innovations that have no biblical merit. Yes, we resist another Gospel but we likewise resist the liberal trends which are sweeping away many churches today. It is this balance, which remains the relevance of this epistle for the 21st Century.

## Part 53

### Ephesians: The Church in a Pagan Society

Key Text: Chapter 1:3

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:”

#### Background

In writing to the Ephesians from his imprisonment in Rome (4:1) Paul was addressing the New Testament congregation that was closest to his heart. Of all the places he visited, Ephesus enjoyed his ministry for the longest; some three years (Acts 20:31). The farewell scene when he last saw the elders of Ephesus is among the most moving passages in Scripture (Acts 20:36-38). It seems appropriate that this congregation planted and pastored by Paul, should receive this most profound analysis of the church's role in a pagan and hostile society.

#### Relevance

William Hendriksen's comments clearly capture the relevance of the Ephesians letter, for this twenty-first century, with the encroachments of militant atheism and rampant secularism with their determined and, it seems, successful efforts to limit the freedoms of Bible Christians.

“Timeliness... Loathsome wickedness marked the world of Paul's day (2:2). Efforts to improve this condition were largely unsuccessful...efforts are being put forth to...improve man's environment...slum clearance, better housing, development of parks and playgrounds, higher minimum wage scale, job retraining, rehabilitation of educational drop-outs and psychiatric aid...At the present time...Some call for better laws. Others emphasise the need of more rigid law enforcement...The merit in all this must not be under-estimated. But neither should it be over-estimated. The danger is the misapprehension of man's basic need. That need is nothing less than the removal of the load of guilt by which he,

being by nature a child of wrath is oppressed. What he needs is something more than job rehabilitation. He needs reconciliation to God. Ephesians proclaims that for all true believers this great blessing has been provided by means of the vicarious, atoning death of God's own son (2:13)."

This book shows us the true nature of the church and its mission to a fallen world. We cannot deny that the church has social and political responsibilities. We would be inconsistent if we taught love on the one hand and on the other did nothing to help the needy. The church must challenge the moral evils of the day and insist that government is accountable to God's Word. These are not at the heart of the church's mission, however. Our reason for being is the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, because this truth alone can transform mankind.

## Themes

### The Grace of God

One the key words of Ephesians is "riches". Paul refers to "the riches of his grace" (1:7), "the riches of... glory" (1:18), "exceeding riches of his grace" (2:7), "unsearchable riches of Christ" (3:8) and "the riches of his glory" (3:16). As a consequence of the grace of God, the Christian has treasures in the bank of heaven which can neither be stolen nor devalued.

1:3-14 - The Christian has received all spiritual blessings (v3). All 3 persons of the Godhead have contributed to these blessings because we are chosen by the Father (v4), redeemed by the blood of the Son (v7) and sealed by the Holy Spirit (v13-14).

2:1-10 - This favourite passage describes the Christian before and after salvation. The link verse which emphasises the reason for the difference, the transformation is 2:4 and the words "But God." Where would we have been but for God? Lost in this world, ruined and depraved, but for God. In hell, forever, but for God.

### The Church of Christ

1:22-23 - The church is the body of Christ, with the Son of God as the head. The universality of the church, the union of the church and the submission of the church are all in focus in this metaphor.

2:19-22 - The church is a temple, with the apostles as the foundation and Christ as the chief corner stone. The Church must reflect New Testament doctrine and practice. It is the Christians themselves, denoted as saints and fellow citizens, who are the building. This building continues to grow.

4:1-6 - The unity of the church, which exists in Christ, provides the basis for real practical fellowship. We endeavour to keep or maintain the unity of the Spirit because we exist in one body, possessing one hope through the one Spirit worshipping the one Father. As we possess the one faith and the one baptism let us strive to maintain bonds with one another. To behave otherwise is to commit sin.

4:7-14 - Christ, the Head, has given gifts for the church. These gifts are the “work of the ministry”. At the heart of the church's purpose is the work of the apostles, prophets (apostolic teachers) evangelists, pastors and teachers who all preach the word. Their purpose is to perfect the saints and edify the body of Christ in order that the saints are not tossed about with every wind of doctrine. This grants us a powerful insight into the nature of the New Testament church; a place where Christians grow and mature under the influences of exposition and application of divine truth.

5:25-33 - Using the metaphor of marriage, Paul shows us that the Church is the bride of Christ. We are nourished and cherished by him and one day He will present us faultless to His Father.

### The Mystery of the Gentiles

3:1-12 - In the New Testament, a mystery is a revealed secret. The mystery, Paul is concerned with here, is the gathering of the Gentiles into the family of God. This was alluded to in the prophecies of the Old Testament, “that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs...”. Paul was made the minister to the Gentiles being entrusted with declaring unto them “the unsearchable riches of Christ.”

2:11-18 - Paul employs the picture of the “middle wall of partition”, which barred Gentiles from the Court of Israel within the temple, to demonstrate that the Ephesians were “strangers and foreigners”. They are reconciled to God by the blood of Christ's cross. It is the banner of the cross, however, which unites the Gentile with the Jew. Therefore, old enmities are destroyed

and peace is generated within the Christian Church which is called “one new man.” The church alone can transform a world of hatred, the Gospel is the only solution for sin, which is man’s fundamental problem.

### The Law of God

4:20-5:16 - Paul now provides practical teaching as to how those who have put off the old man and have put on Christ, should live in the world. This involves using the law of God as a model as it teaches us how to live. He deals with lying, anger, stealing and moral sins. To do otherwise is to grieve the Holy Ghost. By living in this manner, the church preaches the gospel to a dying world through a holy example.

### The Infilling of the Spirit

5:17-6:9 - This long passage situated in the practical aspect of the epistle exhorts all Christians “to be filled with the Spirit” and explains how that influences domestic and business relationships.

### Prayer

This epistle contains two of Paul’s prayers, which teach us so much about genuine intercession.

1:16-23 - This is particularly a prayer for spiritual wisdom and understanding. Of all the things that the Church needs understanding of, however, the knowledge of Christ and the gospel is paramount; “that ye may know what is the hope of his calling”. This prayer teaches that the same power which raised Christ from the dead is operative in the hearts of all believers.

3:14-21 - One of the great model prayers of Scripture. From praying for spiritual strength to asking for “all the fullness of God” Paul is emboldened by the confidence that God can do “exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or even think.”

6:18-20 - Having prayed for the Ephesians, Paul requests prayer for himself that he might with boldness make known the mystery of the gospel.

### Spiritual Warfare

6:10-20 - This notable passage is a salutary reminder that the Church will always be a militant force in the world, being called upon to rebuke evil, to separate from false doctrine, to combat persecution from without and heresy from within. Using the illustration of the Roman soldier's military attire Paul depicted the "Christian in Complete Armour" (William Gurnall) standing fast in power of the Lord.

## Part 54

### Philippians: A Thank You Letter Written with Love

Key Text: Chapter 4:19

“But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

#### Background

Unlike Romans, 1st Corinthians, Galatians and Ephesians, which are theological in nature, Philippians is by nature an intensely personal letter written from the heart of the great apostle. It has therefore been compared to 2nd Corinthians but it must be said that Philippians is the most personal of all Paul's letters, with Philemon, perhaps, being the exception.

It is evident from our reading of this epistle that Paul has a close bond with the church at Philippi, as he did with the Ephesians. While we rely upon the Acts account to reveal his affinity with Ephesus, the pastoral and personal ties with Philippi are revealed in the epistle itself.

#### A Launchpad for a European Adventure

Philippi will forever have a special place in the heart of European Christians. When God directed Paul to sail across the Aegean Sea into Macedonia, the first European missionaries ministered in Philippi. This was an ideal place to begin missionary endeavours in a new continent. It was not only the capital of Macedonia, but it was also a Roman colony, and as such was affluent and governed after the model of Rome itself. We are given considerable details concerning the formation of the church at Philippi. As Paul is writing, he is conscious of those whose conversions played such a pivotal role; Lydia, the young girl with the spirit of divination and the jailer. His relationship with this church was forged in the fire of persecution, on an unforgettable night, when God intervened with an earthquake, resulting in the formation of a congregation which was always dear to the heart of the missionary.

## **Evidence of a Close Relationship**

Paul's address to the Philippians (1:1) is important in that he distinguishes the dichotomy of offices within a New Testament church. While writing to "all the saints" he makes mention of "the bishops (overseers) and deacons". It is evident, therefore, that Paul writes to a mature congregation who enjoyed the oversight of only two offices, recognised in the New Testament.

Moving on from the opening address, there is much that reveals the pastoral and personal bond that existed between Paul and this church (1:3-8):

1. He was grateful for every memory of these people.
2. When praying for this church it was always with happiness.
3. He was grateful for their fellowship and for the work which God would finish in their lives.
4. He had these people in his heart and he longed after them all.

## **Paul the Prisoner**

It is evident throughout this epistle that this is another of Paul's communications written when he was a prisoner in Rome. He is very concerned that the Philippian Christians may be overly distressed regarding his incarceration. He acknowledges that the same grace which was sustaining him was likewise sustaining these Christians. It seems that they were suffering with the founder of their church and so were given the same grace from the Lord. This is further evidence of a mutual spirit of love which flowed between these two parties (1:7).

He not only comforts them with the grace that he had received, but he shows them that his trials were being used to further the gospel; so much so that in Caesar's palace there were those who embraced Christ (1:12-13). It seems that Paul's testimony had encouraged many to be bold in their proclamation of the gospel and so the church was growing (1:15-18).

He assured them that he was not afraid of death. The timeless words written by a prisoner of Christ reveal his determination to

be faithful to the last in sure and certain hope of eternal life - "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (1:21).

### A Letter of Appreciation

The Church at Philippi had been in the habit of raising gifts for Paul. From 4:10-20 Paul finally broaches the core reason for writing, gratitude. Verses 15-16 indicate that after he departed from Philippi, the church had given him a gift when he was in Thessalonica and again, they helped him when he departed from Macedonia. On other occasions, Paul refused material help although he was not opposed to this practice in principle. In 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 9:14-18 he described himself as not having used this power to take benefit from the church. Again 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 11:7-11 intimates that while Paul took "wages" from other congregations he never accepted such gifts from the Corinthians choosing to humble himself. The man of God probably reckoned that in some instances there would be those standing ready to condemn him for working for his own profit, therefore he refused the gift. There is ample evidence that Paul made every effort to support himself during his travels. On arriving at Corinth, he found residence with Aquila and Priscilla, presumably because their tent-making business required skilled extra workers. Likewise, in Thessalonica, Paul laboured with his hands (1<sup>st</sup> Thess. 2:9, 2<sup>nd</sup> Thess. 3:7-9) so that he would not be "chargeable". Gresham Machen in his "Introduction to the New Testament" deduces that on the balance of evidence it was unusual for Paul to accept a gift from the people of God. Yet he made an exception in the case of Philippi on more than one occasion. It seems that this is evidence of the strong bond of love and trust which existed between these people and their spiritual father.

The epistle expresses gratitude for a gift which Paul received while imprisoned. It seems that for a long time the opportunity to deliver a gift had not been presented (4:10). Paul is encouraged, that, although some 800 miles from Philippi, these people had made the effort to assist him. His method of expressing appreciation is fascinating. He assures them that this gift in no way affected his spiritual or his psychological state. He would always be content regardless of his material circumstances because of Christ's strengthening (4:10-13). The gift, however, represented for Paul spiritual fruit which encouraged him greatly (4:17).

Therefore he described the present in spiritual terms, “an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable well pleasing to God.” He had faith that God in turn would supply the needs of these Philippian Christians “according to his riches in glory” (4:19). Although the gift was material it was given for a spiritual reason and accepted in a spiritual manner and therefore the gratitude had a distinctly spiritual flavour.

### **Epaphroditus, the Gift Carrier**

The person whom the Philippian church despatched on what was a mammoth journey, was Epaphroditus. Word had filtered back, however, that this servant had grown quite seriously ill either on the journey or after arriving in Rome. This had distressed the Philippian church and had caused Epaphroditus much sorrow on hearing of the sadness of his brothers and sisters. Indeed he almost died which would have been a tragedy for all concerned. Mercifully he recovered, and was able to return bearing the letter that we are now studying. Paul commended him to the Philippians as one who was willing to lay down his life for the cause of Christ (2:25-30).

### **Wise Words**

Philippi seems like a model church with little offered by way of criticism. No church, however, is perfect and Paul has some words of caution for these people. It is possible that as well as conveying the gift Epaphroditus was seeking Paul's counsel in relation to these matters:

1:27-30 - He counselled them to remember their citizenship in heaven as they served God in a pagan and hostile city.

2:1-11 - He urged upon them a spirit of humility towards each another, perhaps, because a spirit of pride leading to division was souring fellowship. To combat this, he showed them Christ in all of his humility and glory.

3:1-22 - He warned them to beware of Judaisers whose legalism polluted the gospel of grace. He reminded them that, as a Pharisee, he was well acquainted with the Hebrew code and its incompatibility with the gospel. He testified to the effect of the

gospel in his life; giving him a thirst for the knowledge of Jesus Christ, making him willing to lose all things for Him.

4:1-3 - A personal appeal to Euodias and Syntyche that they set aside their differences and “be of the same mind in the Lord.”

4:4-9 - Words we all need; when we learn to lay every burden at the feet of Christ we will “rejoice in the Lord always”.

## Part 55

### Colossians: Christ's Pre-eminence

Key Text: Chapter 2:10

“And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power”

#### The Geography of Colosse

Colosse was situated in the Roman province of Asia Minor, in an area known as the Lycus Valley, and was approximately one hundred miles east of Ephesus, the major population centre of the region. Colosse, as a town, was associated with Laodicea and Hierapolis, both of which were probably much larger. It is apparent that all three towns had churches signifying the impact of the gospel in this valley (4:13). The Lycus Valley was important as travellers journeying from the Middle East towards Ephesus would have passed through it. Therefore, while there is no record of Paul evangelising in this area, he would have been familiar, at least, with the territory. This was probably part of the district Paul was forbidden to evangelise as the Holy Ghost led him towards Europe (Acts 16:6).

#### The Church in Colosse

It is certain that Paul did not found the Colossian Church, making reference to those within the fellowship who had not seen him “in the flesh” (2:1). This, however, does not mean that Paul did not have a role in the formation of the work. During Paul’s extensive ministry in Ephesus many people from throughout Asia Minor heard him preach and debate (19:8-10). This inevitably included people from Lycus Valley. It is apparent that while Paul had an indirect influence, the immediate founder of the churches in this region was Epaphras. The people learned the gospel from this man (1:7). He was a native of Colosse who was faithful to the souls of his compatriots (4:12). 4:13 emphasises his association with the churches in the Lycus Valley inferring that he was a hard and enthusiastic worker in the gospel of Christ.

## **Rome, Onesimus and Philemon**

This is another of Paul's 'Prison Epistles'. While at Rome, he receives Ephaphras as a visitor, who supplies the apostle with an up to date account of the Colossian church (1:7-8). Those entrusted with bearing the letter to Colosse were Tychicus and Onesimus (4:7-9). Onesimus was the runaway slave belonging to Philemon, who is the subject of the epistle bearing the master's name. With Epaphras, Tychicus and Onesimus all being mentioned in Philemon, the inference is drawn that both letters were sent at the one time.

### **A Church under Threat**

While the Colossians had many encouraging features (1:3-8) there was a growing threat to their doctrinal orthodoxy. False teachers had infiltrated the church and were propagating a falsehood which included elements of Judaism and pagan mysticism. 2:16 is indicative of Judaism whereas 2:18, 23 denotes a pagan asceticism, denying oneself the comforts of life for a spiritual end. It is clear that this teaching was "the tradition of men" (2:8) being packaged in an attractive manner (2:4). These falsehoods were impacting the simplicity of faith in Christ and Paul was intent on sounding a note of warning. Regarding these dangers Paul emphatically warned the Christians to "Touch not, taste not, handle not" (2:21). It would seem that the one charged with pastoral care of the work was Archippus (4:17). The tone of Paul's encouragement would indicate that he was discouraged on account of the inroads that were being made by the false teachers. Therefore the closing word was addressed to him, "Take heed..."

### **Christ's Sufficiency**

In countering this threat, Paul presented these people with the pre-eminence of Christ. These people required no further teachings or practices. Christ was all they required. Anything else would detract from their dependency upon Him. For this reason, the Christology of Colossians makes this a most vital New Testament book. Let us not think, however, that because the error faced by Colosse is unknown to us, that the Christology of the epistle is irrelevant. The relevance of the person of Christ and His all sufficiency needs to be learned by us and indeed relearned in this 21st Century:

Sufficient in His Redemption (1:12-13)

Sufficient in His Deity (1:15)

Sufficient in His Glory (1:16-17)

Sufficient in His Headship (1:18)

Sufficient in His Humanity (1:19, 2:3, 9)

Sufficient in His Reconciliation (1:20)

Sufficient in His Assurance (3:1-4)

The evangelical church in the 21st Century is under threat from those who insist that that the ministry of the word is insufficient. Some believe that an emphasis upon preaching will not keep our young people, nor will it attract the visitor. There must be something else, something extra, to make the church more relevant. Some look to social welfare strategies such as food banks. Others have introduced more lively music and song into the church. None of these innovations are in themselves wrong, if a balance is maintained. The church should be caring and worship is important. However, where the motivation is driven by the thought that the ministry of the Word must be supplemented, Christ is being replaced by something inferior, of our own making. Christ can only be manifest through the ministry of the Word. That must continue to be our focus, whatever other fellowships introduce, because He alone is sufficient.

### **Practical Observations**

In common with Paul's approach elsewhere, the final part of the letter is taken up with practical instruction which is drawn from the theology expounded at the beginning. Therefore, chapter three commences with a straightforward challenge to seek the things which are above, because Christ, our life, is in heaven and He is coming again. Seeking the things which are above means reflecting outwardly the transformation that has already taken place in the putting off of the old man and the putting on of the new man (3:5-17). It also necessarily involves prayer and a proper use of the tongue (4:2-3).

## Part 56

### 1st Thessalonians: Words of Comfort

Key Text: Chapters 4:18

“Wherefore comfort one another with these words”

The key point of interest in both 1st and 2nd Thessalonians is that Paul wrote these letters within a few months of the founding of the church. We gain important insights into Paul's love and concern for new converts. If he had not been forced to leave the city so early this is the kind of message which he would certainly have been preaching. Paul's pastoral concern and his method of building up new converts is to the fore in both these epistles.

#### The Founding of the Church

Thessalonica, known today as Salonika (Greece's second largest city), was, in the early New Testament period, the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia. It was a free city meaning that it had considerable autonomy and power. For this reason, Thessalonica was a prosperous and influential metropolis.

The story of the beginnings of God's work in this city is told in Acts 17:1-10. After leaving Philippi, as the result of persecution, Paul probably took the Egnatian Way (a famous military road which linked the Bosphorus, at what is now known as Istanbul, with the Adriatic), which after one hundred miles, led him to Thessalonica. His ministry in the city was incredibly brief yet very powerful, through the demonstration of the Holy Ghost. He ministered in the synagogue for three weeks (v2). The converts were so numerous that the city was in uproar, which necessitated the removal of Paul, Silas and Timothy to Berea. After being forced to leave Berea, (because of the persecution by the Thessalonians) Silas and Timothy remained to nurture the fledgling work (3:2). After evangelising in Athens, Paul travelled onto Corinth where his companions caught up with him eventually (Acts 18:5). It was during Paul's time at Athens that he wrote his two letters to the Thessalonians, only a few months apart. They are filled with

pastoral concern, care and instruction designed to comfort the hearts of those who were comparatively young in the faith.

### **Past Reminders Chapters 1-3**

In the opening chapter, Paul reminds these people of the dramatic work of grace that was accomplished among them. The mighty power of the gospel (1:5) caused many to turn from their idols to serve the living God (1:9). Perhaps the comparatively fruitless ministry at Athens had taught Paul the true secret of success in evangelism, the power of the Holy Ghost. This was what made the difference at Thessalonica.

He reminds them of their persecution which began as soon as the work of God started (1:6, 2:2, 14-15). These people were unmoved, it seems, receiving the word with joy despite their afflictions (1:6) because they believed the message to be the Word of God and not of mere men (2:13).

The opening chapter is one of intense joy and gratitude (1:2) because Paul has learned of the continued progress of the gospel in this community. He had been alarmed because he had been forced to abandon these people, when perhaps, he felt they needed him most. Timothy's report, however, filled him with great gladness and he was not a little comforted (3:6-7). This church was already getting organised for missionary endeavour and the word of God was sounding out from them into all Macedonia (1:8). No doubt, the intense persecution was fanning the fire and spreading the news of Christianity around the region from the capital city.

Paul reflects upon his own care and concern for the flock in Thessalonica in this opening section. He compares himself to a nurse caring for little children (2:7) and to a father exhorting his sons and daughters (2:11). He prayed for this flock "night and day" that he might have opportunity to minister to them face to face once more. Nevertheless, he had faith that God would allow their steps to converge (3:11). He prayed that this church might be filled with love for one another and that they might be established further in holiness (3:12-13).

### **Present Instructions Chapters 4:1-12, 5:12-28**

These two sections, one of which forms Paul's concluding remarks contains brief exhortations in the matter of practical Christianity

which we do well to take to heart. He deals with such topics as sexual immorality (4:3-5), honesty in business (4:6, 12), work ethic (4:11), love to the brethren and to the world (4:9, 5:14-15) respect for the spiritual oversight (5:12-13) and avoidance of the very appearance of evil (5:22).

The exhortation to avoid quenching the Spirit by our failures in these areas is especially solemn and thought provoking (5:19).

### **Future Prophecies Chapter 4:13-5:11**

The leading feature of Paul's letters to the Thessalonians is their focus upon prophecy and the return of Jesus Christ. Each chapter of 1st Thessalonians concludes with a mention being made of the return of the Lord. This is certainly the Christian's hope and motivation: our Saviour's literal and visible return to the world of men.

Paul introduces this theme to comfort the people of God, who in common with ourselves, were labouring under the shadow of death (4:13). Twice he uses the word comfort in applying the benefits of Christ's return for our lives in the here and now.

This passage gives us important details about the second coming of our Lord. The trumpet will sound and there will be a shout indicating that the world will be aware of Christ's return (4:16). He will come as a thief, surprising the world, but the church will not be surprised, being in a state of readiness (5:1-4). This defeats the theory of the secret rapture, sincerely held by those who have adopted the dispensational approach to Scripture. When our Lord does return, the dead in Christ will be resurrected and then the believers who are alive will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. Death will be defeated and sorrow will be no more. We will be forever with the Lord (4:16-18).

As well as providing comfort, Paul taught that, the second coming of Christ is our great challenge and incentive to live holy and godly lives in a cruel and ungodly society. He assured the Thessalonians that their hearts would be established "unblameable in holiness...at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (3:13). He warned the church not to be sleeping in spiritual lethargy but to be awake and vigilant putting on the "breastplate of faith and love" (5:6-8) because we shall live together with Christ (5:10).

## Part 57

### 2nd Thessalonians: Preserved from Evil in a Day of Apostasy

Key Text: Chapter 3:3

“But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil.”

1st and 2nd Thessalonians are closely related because, it seems, that apart from their being addressed to the one congregation, they were written within a few months of each other. We find the letters proceeding from Paul, Silvanus and Timotheus (1:2) in both epistles, while the postscript informs us that both were written from Athens. Therefore in 2nd Thessalonians we discover some of the same commendations that the congregation had already received in the first letter.

1st Thessalonians 1:2 - “We give thanks to God always for you...”

2nd Thessalonians 1:3 - “We are bound to thank God always for you”

1st Thessalonians 1:3 - “...your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope...”

2nd Thessalonians 1:3 - “...your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of everyone of you all toward each other aboundeth.”

The themes of gratitude, of faith and of love characterise the introductions to both epistles.

#### Paul's Relationship with the Thessalonians

This book and indeed the 1st Epistle, offers us windows into Paul's personal dealings with these people. For example, in 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 3:10-13 he prayed night and day that they might be faithful until the day of Christ's return. Significantly, although we are promised that God will keep us, we must pray that the church will be consistent to the end.

In both epistles, Paul refers to his time spent working with his hands, presumably in tent-making, and shows he was not a burden to the Thessalonians while he was with them (1st Thess.2:9, 2nd Thess.3:8-13). In the latter passage, he uses his own example as a lesson to the Thessalonians to be industrious, providing for their families. It appears from the tone of this passage that there were some who did not work, perhaps waiting for the return of Christ while neglecting material concerns. Paul, certainly did not behave like this, nor did he expect others to do so.

### **The Second Coming of our Lord and Saviour**

The dominant theme in 2nd Thessalonians is the second coming of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. While this message was fairly important in the first epistle, it has assumed a much more important place in the second epistle. It would seem that the second letter was necessitated because the Thessalonians misunderstood Paul's teaching on this issue. 2:2 indicates that the people were gravely troubled because they believed that the second coming of Christ was at hand or very close. This was more than a misunderstanding, they had been exposed to false teachers who had deceived them by twisting Paul's original teaching on the subject in the first letter (2:3).

It is probably these false teachers that Paul had in mind in 3:6, 14-17. The apostolic guidance is clear, a brother who walketh disorderly is to be admonished and if he refuses to repent is to be deprived of fellowship. The principle of separating those who walk disorderly, from professing Christians, is set forth by Paul in order that the purity of the church be maintained.

The thought of separation from error links neatly with the core purpose of this teaching about our Saviour's second advent. Paul (in 3:3) foresaw a great falling away or apostasy from the faith. Paul speaks of the apostasy, which is a sign of the second coming of Christ. Although the Lord's return was still a long way off, Paul's words had important application for the Thessalonians because this spirit of apostasy has sadly been a feature of the attack of the evil one throughout the history of the church. As apostasy would creep in upon the church, Paul promised the Thessalonians that they would be established and kept from the evil. In the second chapter (where Paul deals with the great falling away from the truth) he assures the Thessalonians that they would not succumb to

this departure because they were “chosen to salvation”. This sovereign choice, however, does not diminish human responsibility because those who are chosen must believe the truth. Therefore, as the evil day approached the people of God were encouraged to “stand fast and hold the traditions” which they had been taught. These promises and exhortations relate to the church throughout all ages. The church will continue despite the heresies and schisms which have torn her asunder. Christ promises to keep her from evil and to enable His people to be faithful in holding the historic apostolic faith.

The Thessalonians represent the church throughout the ages in miniature. They suffered severe persecution from without and deception from within but as the Lord's coming approached they were assured of God's protection. So it is for the church throughout the ages.

The theme of Christ's second advent is unfolded through this epistle as follows:

#### Chapter 1:4-12 The Great Judgement Day - The Justice for the Church

The church is encouraged to continue to suffer persecution with patience because Christ will come and exercise vengeance with flaming fire on those that obey not and know not the gospel of Christ. In this world, there is either no justice or flawed justice; injustice abounds everywhere. This is especially true of the relationship between civil powers and the church. Yet, there is a day approaching when the servants of God will be vindicated and the judge of all men will impose divine standards upon a corrupt world. It is quite apparent, in this place, that this judgement will be executed as soon as our Saviour appears. There is no interval. This, I would suggest, is the Great White Throne judgement that John sees in Revelation 20.

#### Chapter 2:3-12 The Great Apostasy - The Departure by the Church

Prior to the return of Christ, the Church will depart from the faith. The church is here styled as the “temple of God” and will host the man of sin who will be revealed. Therefore the man of sin, or the Anti-Christ, is not a political leader but a religious person who dominates the professing church which has fallen away. This man

of sin would be worshipped as God. He will not appear, however, until the hindrances to his rise are swept away (v7 - let means hinder). This points with clarity to the Papacy. The Roman Catholic church is the Christian church existing in an apostate fashion. There is only one man within Christendom who takes the place of Christ and receives the adoration which is reserved for Him alone. This is the Pope. Historically, the Bishop of Rome only degenerated into the modern Papacy after the Roman empire crumbled. In the days of Paul, the empire kept the church humble but with the collapse of the empire, the Papacy exploited the power vacuum and rose to become the spiritual and political leader of Europe, and the mystery of iniquity was revealed:

“There is no other head of the Church but the Lord Jesus Christ: nor can the Pope of Rome, in any sense be head thereof; but is that Antichrist, that man of sin and son of perdition, that exalteth himself in the Church against Christ, and all that is called God.”  
Westminster Confession of Faith Ch.25 Part 6.

The argument I have advanced above belongs to the historicist school of prophetic thought. Brethren who espouse the futurist scheme see this quite differently. While accepting that the Papacy is the spirit of antichrist which has arisen within the Church, they perceive that a future political leader will arise, defying God as no other before him. Benjamin Wills Newton wrote of the “restraining agency”, established by God, being removed as the power of this spirit of lawlessness is unleashed on the world in the days before the Lord’s return. In his work “The Antichrist Future”, Benjamin Wills Newton quotes from Bishop Horsley, which captures the Futurist position; “That son of perdition who shall neither be a Protestant nor a Papist; neither Christian, Jew, nor heathen: who shall worship neither God, angel nor saint: who will neither supplicate the invisible Majesty of heaven, nor fall down before an idol. He will magnify himself against everything that is called God...will claim divine honours to himself exclusively and consecrate an image of himself.”

These distinctions are further discussed in the final chapter on Revelation.

## Part 58

### 1st Timothy - Apostolic Advice for a Young Pastor

Key Text: Chapter 3:15

But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

#### The Pastorals

The Epistles to Timothy and to Titus constitute a section in the New Testament, which is known as “The Pastorals”. They are so called because Paul was providing instruction to brethren who were called to pastor the church of Christ.

#### Content

William Hendriksen, Bible expositor, presented six reasons why we ought to study the Pastorals. The first three, are especially relevant and can be summarised as follows:

1. Church Administration; Public worship, the qualities and duties of pastors, elders and deacons, dealing with the needy, the widows, young men and young women.
2. Sound Doctrine; The truth of Scripture must be taught and applied to the consciences of the people of God.
3. Consecrated Living; The person who upholds sound doctrine will have a lifestyle that is consistent with his testimony.

#### Author

While Paul is the author, he did not write these letters during the history recorded in Acts; “All attempts to fit these Epistles into the period of the first three missionary journeys and the first Roman imprisonment have resulted in failure. They must clearly be assigned to a later period in the life of the apostle” (Gresham Machen). Therefore, we deduce that Paul was released from his imprisonment in Acts 28 and enjoyed a further season of usefulness

before his re-arrest and martyrdom. This is consistent with the testimony of Church history, written after the death of the apostles. Clement of Rome, for example, writing in 95AD described Paul as travelling unto the “bounds of the west” (presumably Spain), which he did not do in the span covered by Acts.

### **The Pastors**

Paul was now in the last stages of his ministry. The churches he had founded or helped to establish were now mature. He was no longer acquainted with the key figures in these churches, which had grown considerably. He was aware that men like Timothy and Titus would face immeasurable challenges as those called to lead second generation Christianity. In writing these letters he was giving them the tools to fulfil their ministry. Every denomination which passes beyond the first generation phase of enthusiasm and growth needs to carefully consider the drift of Paul's teaching to these second generation leaders.

### **Historical Background**

Paul in his travelling, post imprisonment, had arrived in Ephesus, and had subsequently travelled across the sea to Macedonia. He left Timothy behind to care for the needs of Ephesus (1:3).

Paul was well acquainted with Timothy, as he had for many years been travelling with him. He first met him as a young man, who had an excellent testimony, in Derbe and Lystra, during the second missionary journey (Acts 16:1-2). Timothy not only agreed to join with Paul but he consented to the rite of circumcision, for the sake of the gospel. It was at this stage that he was ordained by the elders or the presbytery (1st Timothy 4:14). As we have already noted, from our studies in the Thessalonians, Timothy received his initial experience of leadership in Thessalonica when it was prudent for Paul to move away to Athens. Timothy was certainly at Paul's side during his ministry in Corinth and Ephesus. It was when Paul was at Ephesus that Timothy was sent into Macedonia to assist the churches there (Acts 19:21-22).

These facts indicate that Timothy was trustworthy and dependable. He had a heart for the work of God was able to

absorb responsibility. Paul had a particular attachment to Timothy describing him as “my own son in the faith” (1st Timothy 1:2).

## Outline

### Chapter 1 False Teachers in the Church of God

Timothy's first duty in Ephesus was to withstand those who taught other doctrines than that which the apostle had delivered (v3). To veer away from sound doctrine is to make shipwreck of the faith (v19). This emphasises the importance of doctrinal teaching within the church, as doctrine is the bedrock upon which the church stands. Paul in this section, by way of testimony, teaches the doctrine of God's grace, the heart of the gospel.

### Chapter 2 Biblical Worship in the Church of God

Worship must be regulated by Scripture. In our worship we pray for all men and especially for those who are in authority. Worship is to be led by men, not by women, who are never to have a place of authority over the man in the church of God (v12).

### Chapter 3 Godly Leaders in the Church of God

It is clear from the letter to Titus that bishop meaning overseer, is a term used interchangeably with elder (Titus 1:5-7). All who are in office and who aspire to office within the church do well to examine their hearts in the light of these qualifications.

### Chapter 4 Clear Teaching for the Church of God

In this chapter, Paul returns to the false teachers and divisive ideas that were current in his generation (v1-4). Timothy is taught to “teach” the people with regard to these errors (v11) and to attend to reading, exhortation and doctrine (v13).

### Chapter 5 Pastoral Care for the Church of God

Paul now turns his attention to the needs of widows and the attitude that needs to be cultivated within the church towards the oversight. In the former area, all are valuable within the church

and need to be cared for as such. In the latter area, a church needs to be orderly and this involves the necessary respect for the elders as they do their work.

## Chapter 6 Apostolic Charge for the Church of God

The final chapter mainly consists of a charge for Timothy and is an appeal from the heart of the man of God. The pastor needs to flee from pride, from false doctrine, from the love of men, from a worldly spirit and he is to pursue “righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness” (v3-11). Throughout this letter, we get a clear sense that Timothy’s calling was not an easy one. Owing to the prevalence of false teaching he was instructed to “war a good warfare” (1:18) and “fight the good fight of faith” (6:12). No pastor is therefore to expect a life of ease. As long as there is a devil and sin there will be battles where we are called to stand firm for the truth. Timothy’s authority was questioned on account of his age. Paul’s response was straightforward; “Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (4:12). As a man called by God and given the evident gifts for ministry (4:14) Timothy was equipped for the task. Nevertheless, he had to “stir up the gift of God” and “take heed” unto himself”. This is what we all should do in order that God’s will might be perfected in our lives.

## Part 59

### 2nd Timothy: An Old Warrior's Farewell

Key Text: Chapter 1:13

“Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.”

#### Background to the Letter

Any study of 2nd Timothy is deeply influenced by the sad circumstances which necessitated its occasion. Unlike the 1st Epistle to Timothy and the Epistle to Titus, Paul was not a free man. He was once again a prisoner and on this occasion he was facing certain execution. In the final chapter, he expresses his faith and confidence viewing death as an offering and a departure (4:6). His expectation that a “crown of righteousness” was awaiting him must certainly be an inspiration to persecuted Christians facing martyrdom in every age.

From the perspective of New Testament history, 2nd Timothy has a peculiar interest because it is the final word, inspired by God, written by the hand of Paul. This man, whose influence upon the church was immeasurable, has final words of advice for Timothy, his son in the faith. The dying words of truly great people are of special interest. Only the last words of our Lord are of more value than the dying words of Paul, the Missionary Apostle.

#### The Purpose of the Letter

##### 1. A Simple Practical Purpose

Paul wanted Timothy to come and visit him in Rome before he died; “Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me” (2nd Timothy 4:9). The picture of an aged, suffering man of God pleading for his dearest friend to come to his side is both beautiful and tragic at the same time. It certainly brings out the humanity in Paul.

The epistle has some indications that Timothy was at Ephesus when he received the letter. 1:15 has reference to apostasy in Asia, with

Ephesus being the leading city in that area. The reference to Tychicus being sent to Ephesus, perhaps to relieve Timothy, allowing him to travel to Rome, is also suggestive (4:12). When Timothy was travelling, he was instructed to bring the cloak which was left behind at Troas (Troas was convenient to Ephesus, 4:13). This was important as winter was coming and Paul would feel the cold in the harsh environment of a Roman prison (4:21). Timothy was also instructed to bring the books and the parchments. It is evident that these were copies of God's Word which the man of God wished to meditate upon before his eventual martyrdom. In death, he was looking after every aspect of his constitution (emotional - Timothy's companionship; physical - the cloak in winter; spiritual - the books and the parchments).

There was also a request that Timothy bring along Mark "for he is profitable to me for the ministry". This indicates that Paul had been reconciled to John Mark despite rejecting him for service at the beginning of the second missionary journey. This detail is characteristic of 2nd Timothy. We receive information about people on which the New Testament is elsewhere silent. The information about Luke's loyalty to Paul and Demas' desertion are highly suggestive as well as being historically fascinating. At the close of his ministry, and life, Paul had both his encouragements and discouragements.

## 2. A Profound Spiritual Purpose

In common with other pastorals, Paul was concerned in this letter, with equipping the second generation of leadership for the work that lay ahead. Therefore, early in the letter, he exhorted Timothy to "Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me..." (1:13).

A - Defining the Sound Words (3:15-17): The sound words are the oracle of God, breathed or inspired by the Holy Ghost. Timothy had been well versed in the scriptures as he was instructed by his mother Eunice and grandmother Lois (1:5). God's Word is without error and contradiction. It is our only rule of faith and practice.

B - Departing from the Sound Words (1:15, 2:16-18, 3:1-9, 4:3-4): Paul foresaw a day of departure from the faith. This has been a tragic characteristic of the church in every age and is a matter about which we must be vigilant.

C - Discerning the Sound Words (1:6-7, 2:15, 3:14): These references present a progression of thought. To be able to discern what the Scriptures teach, we need a sound mind which is the gift of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, this gift must be stirred up through prayer and meditation upon the Scriptures. Having stirred up the gift, the servant of God must study the Bible, “rightly dividing the Word of God.” He presents an accurate interpretation as he is guided by the Holy Ghost. He does not wrench the scriptures out of context and present his own petty ideas. He focuses upon the Word itself. Finally, we must be consistent by continuing in the truth that we learn.

D - Declaring the Sound Words (2:1-7, 14, 24-26, 4:1-7): While this epistle climaxes with Paul's great charge exhorting Timothy to preach the Word, let us not forget the progression. Having a sound definition of what the Word is, being aware of the departure from the truth that is ongoing, having spent time studying and nurturing his soul through the Scriptures, Timothy is then able to proclaim the Word. This proclaiming of the Word is certainly alluded to in the second chapter. Timothy was instructed to teach other men who could themselves teach. The training of a new generation of preachers is a necessary aspect of New Testament ministry. He was taught to gently teach and reason out the truth showing the error of false doctrine. Nevertheless, the power and majesty of the fourth chapter is a fitting climax and has been often used at ordinations. It does, however, contain warnings about difficult days and hard times when there would be a turning from the truth. This harks back to the second chapter where Timothy is exhorted to be like the soldier enduring hardness and the farmer waiting for the harvest. Through days of persecution and spiritual famine, the preacher must stick to his task and “Preach the Word”.

These then are Paul's dying words to the Christian church. Don't strive to be popular, don't be swayed by the prevailing winds of opinion. Follow the old paths - be faithful to the Word of God; the only form of sound words.

## Part 60

### Titus: Pastoring the Church in Crete

Key Text: Chapter 3:8

“This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men.”

#### The Character of Titus

A close examination of the New Testament text, however, leads us to an assessment of the character of Titus. In 1:4 Paul describes this man as his “own son after the common faith”, indicating that Titus was converted under his ministry.

Titus' first historical appearance is found in Galatians 2:1-4, where he accompanies Paul and Barnabas to the church Council, meeting at Jerusalem. This was an important gathering because the Church would decide how the Gentiles would be regarded. Paul and Barnabas were fresh from their first missionary journey and were bringing reports of Gentile churches springing up in Galatia. Galatians informs us that Titus was a Gentile, making him the first genuine Gentile preacher in the New Testament era of the church. His mention in Galatians by name indicates that he hailed from that region and his name would be recognised. He was therefore among the “others” who accompanied Paul and Barnabas in Acts 15:2. As Galatians emphasises that Titus had not been circumcised, it appears that he was one of a group of new converts who had come to testify to the church leaders in Jerusalem.

The epistle, however, where Titus' name appears most frequently is 2nd Corinthians (on 9 occasions). It is the contribution that Titus made in Corinth that establishes his credentials as a pastor of extraordinary wisdom and ability. When Paul first heard of the problems in Corinth, he sent an initial letter (1st Cor. 5:9), which met with little success, after which he sent what we call the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians. Timothy was despatched with this

letter but even he could not resolve the difficulties which had engulfed this church. 2nd Cor. 2:1 indicates that Paul himself then visited Corinth, to be rebuffed, after which he sent a third letter known as his Sorrowful Epistle (2nd Cor. 2:4). 2nd Corinthians 7:5-9 informs us that Paul was greatly comforted when meeting with Titus because he received the news that the Corinthian problem had been solved. Where Paul and Timothy failed, Titus succeeded.

A man of Titus's tact and experience was again required for the churches in the island of Crete. The people of Crete were infamous for their dishonesty throughout the Roman empire. Sadly, some of these national characteristics had infected the Christians on the island. Quoting from a Crete author source Paul even describes these people as “liars”, being like “evil beasts” and possessing “slow bellies” (1:12). It appears that after Paul's release from his first Roman imprisonment, he visited Crete. Recognising the “things that are wanting” he left Titus behind “to set in order” (1:5). It seems that after the Corinthian experience, Titus was Paul's first choice when difficult situations arose within the church. He was a man with ready gifts for such work.

It remains the case today, that the work of God needs men of wisdom and tact who can win people over and pour cold water on flames of discontentment. Such a work is never easy but sadly will always be necessary. The ministry of Titus teaches us that there have always been problems and challenges within the church but that God will grant the leadership with wisdom in the solving of these crises.

### **The Theme**

This pastoral epistle contains Paul's advice to Titus as he pastored the flock alone. The key phrase in the letter is “good works”. The challenge Titus faced was how to promote good works among a people who had little national concept of how to live in an honest fashion.

#### **A - An Example of Good Works**

“In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity” (2:7)

The preacher must live out what he teaches.

### B - The Source of Good Works

“Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of 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” (2:14)

Only Christ supplies the power which enables us to live godly lives in an evil world.

### C - The Diligence in Producing Good Works

“This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works” (3:8).

As Christians we must take care that our lives reflect a good testimony for our Saviour.

### D - The Fruitfulness Arising from Good Works

“And let ours also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful” (3:14).

Good works are essentially the fruit of the Spirit being produced in the lives of God's people.

## Outline

1. Promoting Good Works Within The Church
  - 1: 1-4 Preaching;
  - 1: 5-9 Ordination;
  - 1: 10-16 Separation
2. Promoting Good Works Within The Family
  - 2:1-3 Exemplary Older People;
  - 2:4-8 Wise Younger People
  - 2:9-15 Obedient Servants

3. Promoting Good Works Within Society

3:1-8 Honest Citizens

3:9-11 Shunning Evil Companions

3:12-15 Final Encouragements

## Part 61

### Philemon: A Story of Grace and Forgiveness

Key Text: Verses 11-13

“Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me: Whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels: Whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel:”

#### A Deeply Personal Letter

While the epistles to Timothy and Titus were addressed to individuals, they were written from the perspective of an aged leader who was preparing the second generation for the future of the church. By contrast Philemon is a truly individual and personal letter; the only personal letter of Paul's which was blessed by Holy Ghost inspiration and divine preservation. In this book, we are given an insight into the personal character and testimony of New Testament Christians. We are introduced to Philemon, a wealthy member of society, to Onesimus, his thieving runaway slave and, to a lesser degree, to Apphia and to Archippus. As those who have been called to work and to witness in this secular humanistic twenty-first century, we can learn from those called to serve God in a first century dominated by pagan Rome.

#### The Colossian Connection

Philemon was a member of the Colossian church. In Colossians 4:9, Onesimus was charged with delivering the letter to the church and one to Philemon. Other characters who receive a dual mention in both epistles are Archippus (Colossians 4:17, Philemon v2) and Epaphras (Colossians 1:7, 4:12, Philemon v23), Aristarchus (Colossians 4:10, Philemon v24), Luke and Demas (Colossians 4:14, Philemon v24).

## **The Narrative**

In this most intimate of letters, there is interwoven a beautiful and sublime story of rebellion, repentance and recovery. The subject of the letter, Onesimus, had absconded from his master's home with stolen goods. His subsequent travels took him to Rome with all the pleasures and vice that a large city has to offer. It was at this time, directed only by God's amazing providence that Onesimus came into contact with the apostle Paul. During Paul's first imprisonment he had considerable freedom to teach and to interact with many people (Acts 28:16-31). It was at this time he met with, and won, Onesimus for Christ. In v10 Onesimus is described by Paul as "my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds". The transformation in this young man's life was remarkable. He remained with Paul to minister to him, so much so, that Paul described him as "profitable" (v11). Paul was sorely tempted to retain Onesimus in Rome to "minister unto him in the bonds of the gospel (v13) but he knew the young man had unfinished business in Colosse.

With the arrival of Epaphras from Colosse, Paul knew that an opportunity, given by God, had arisen whereby Onesimus could be returned to the household of Philemon. Therefore, Onesimus accompanied Tychicus on the long journey carrying the precious letter of endorsement from Paul. In this letter, Paul acknowledged the past unprofitability of Onesimus, a matter now rectified by the grace of God; he was now "profitable" (v11). He was encouraged to receive Onesimus as he would have received Paul himself, with the apostle even promising to underwrite any debts that the slave had incurred (v17-19).

## **The Character of Philemon**

The man to whom this epistle is addressed is worthy of some attention. Although Paul had never visited Colosse he had a relationship with Philemon. In v19 he employs the intriguing statement "I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides." Philemon owed Paul his life. The only construction that can be placed upon this phrase is that Philemon came to know Christ through the direct ministry of the apostle. This was indeed a powerful argument employed by Paul in persuading him to accept Onesimus back into his household.

Philemon was not only a man of wealth within Colossian society but he was a leader within the church. In v1 he is described by Paul as “a fellow labourer” and in v2 we discover that the assembly of saints meets in his house. Apphia and Archippus are mentioned in connection with Philemon. Apphia is described as “dearly beloved” by Paul indicating he has had a prior acquaintance. She seems to have been Philemon’s wife. Archippus too, seems to be a member of Philemon’s house, and may well have been his son. Significantly this man held a position within the Colossian church, being exhorted to, “Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it” (Colossians 4:17). This ministry is not specified but I believe it is fair to deduce that he was the teaching elder, greatly discouraged by inroads which false teachers had made into the work. The burden of ministry had fallen upon him after the departure of Epaphras to Rome (as outlined in the notes on Colossians). Philemon and his family therefore were mainstays within the Colossian witness.

Philemon was renowned for his graciousness towards the people of God. He communicated his faith by showing forth the tokens of Christ’s love to his people in a practical fashion (v6). The “bowels” or the spirits of the saints had been refreshed and edified by Philemon’s generosity and hospitality. Paul knew enough of this man to know that he would be forgiving towards the runaway slave (v21). He also requested that he prepare him a place to stay in readiness for the occasion when Paul himself would visit (v22).

## **Practical Lessons**

### **Forgiveness and Grace**

In the Roman empire the rights of slaves were non-existent. The Master could abuse and even kill his slaves with impunity. They were his private property to do with as he wished. Therefore, according to law, Philemon could have tortured or even killed Onesimus. This was his right. Paul, however, pleaded with Philemon on the grounds of grace. He introduced Christian compassion and appealed to his friend to show forth the love of God to his once wayward slave. At times we must set aside our rights and exercise grace, even to those who have wronged us.

### **Repentance and Restitution**

Becoming a Christian did not eradicate Onesimus's responsibilities to his master. By law he remained a slave and he had to return to Philemon. Restitution had to be made for the wrongs that he had perpetrated in his unconverted state. Even after God has forgiven us, we must show tokens of repentance by putting to rights the wrongs that we have done towards man.

### Christianity in a Pagan Society

Paul was not a social reformer nor was he the leader of political revolution. He never once attempted to change Roman society by outward means. Rather he accepted the political and economic realities of the Roman Empire. This meant accepting slavery even though he himself may have disapproved of it. He did teach Christian slaves, however, to honour their masters and he taught Christian masters to treat their slaves with grace. Therefore, he brought the love of God into a dehumanising situation proving that grace can conquer the most wicked of practices. Is this not proof that the church must be true to its mission of gospel preaching because the gospel alone can change our society?

## Part 62

### Hebrews: The Supremacy of Christ

Key Text: Chapter 1:1-4

“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.”

#### Was Paul the Author?

It seems that from the earliest times there were considerable doubts as to the identity of the author of Hebrews. There is evidence of this in the Greek text, as this is the only epistle without the name of an author as a heading. The reason why the Pauline authorship received universal acceptance in the fourth century, and thereafter, was because to deny this would have been to refuse this epistle a place in the New Testament. The test of inspiration was apostolic authorship. It would, however, have been inconsistent to deny Hebrews a place in the New Testament because there is sufficient evidence that it was read and considered to be inspired, stretching back to the first century. Gresham Machen in his “Introduction to the New Testament” wrote that, “though the book was not written by Paul, it was written, if not by one of the other apostles, at least by an ‘apostolic man’ like Mark or Luke. Scarcely any book of the New Testament bears clearer marks of true apostolicity.” Dr Machen questions, or at least gives credence to the idea that Paul did not write Hebrews. Was he correct to do so?

I prefer the argument of John Owen, the Puritan Divine, in arguing that Paul wrote Hebrews for the following reasons:

1. Testimony of Peter - 2 Peter 3:15-16. As Peter primarily wrote to the believing Jews, he intimated that Paul had also wrote to the same readership.
2. Writer was in bonds - compare 10:34 with Acts 26:29, Eph. 6:20, Phil 1:7, Col.4:18, 2 Tim 2:9. This was a phrase commonly used by Paul to describe his imprisonment.
3. Timothy was with the writer - compare 13:23 with Phil. 1:1.
4. Writer was in Italy as Paul was during his imprisonment -13:24.
5. Paul's signature phrase - compare 13:25 with 2nd Thess.3:17-18.

This begs, the question, however, why did Paul not reveal himself, in this epistle, as was his custom? Hebrews is different from all the other New Testament letters. It is written, not in the style of an epistle, but as a formal treatise. While it is true that the target readership was Jewish Christians, he nevertheless intended a general readership, not fixed to one locality. It is quite plausible that Paul did not prefix his own name because he was hated among the Jews and he felt that to remain anonymous would give his arguments greater success.

### **The Readership**

While the readership was the Jewish people, generally, there are indicators that Paul had a section of Jewish Christians from a particular community in mind. These people had passed through a severe persecution (10:32-34) with some of their leaders suffering martyrdom (13:7). These people were renowned for their generosity to other believers (6:10). There were, however, defects; many still required to be fed with milk like babies (5:11-14), Christian meetings were neglected (10:25) and there was danger that some who professed Christ should become apostate (6:4-8, 10:26-31, 12:25).

### **The Theme**

Apostasy was a very real problem for the Jewish section of the early church. This involved a renunciation of Christianity and a return to Judaism. Paul, in this epistle, taught that Christ is supreme, the fulfilment of the Old Testament, and that all the rites and ceremonies have been fulfilled in Him.

## Key Words

**Better** (1:4, 7:19, 7:22, 8:6, 9:23, 10:34, 11:16, 11:35, 11:40). All that these Jewish Christians enjoyed under the new covenant was better than what they possessed under the old.

**Great** (2:3, 4:14, 9:11, 10:32, 10:35, 12:1, 13): The readership was now in possession of a great salvation, promising a great reward through the ministry of their great high priest. Although they experienced great afflictions they would be comforted by the great shepherd of the sheep.

**Profession** (4:14, 10:23): Twice Paul exhorts these people to hold fast their profession. God's genuine people are those who persevere and continue, turning away from the evils of apostasy. If these people had something "better and "great" they had every reason to "hold fast".

## Outline of the Epistle

### Section 1 Doctrinal

- Chapter 1 - 2 Christ; Greater than the angels.
- Chapter 3 Christ; Greater than Moses
- Chapter 4 - 8 Christ's Priesthood; Greater than Aaron's
- Chapter 9 - 10:18 The New Covenant; Greater than the Old.

### Section 2 Practical

- Chapter 10:19 - 39 Encouragement to Hold Fast to the Faith
- Chapter 11 The Heroes of Faith
- Chapter 12 - 13:17 Living by Faith
- Chapter 13:18-25 Closing Requests and Benediction

## Part 63

### James: Faith without Works is Dead

Key Text: Chapter 2:18

“Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.”

#### The General Epistle

Like Hebrews, James is classified as a general epistle, along with the epistles by Peter, John (his 1st letter) and Jude. They were so called because they were not addressed to particular congregations. These six epistles are largely grouped in the one place in the New Testament in recognition of their commonality. James, in common with Hebrews, is directed to the Jewish Christians; “to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad” (1:1).

#### The Author

The author of James has been the subject of some controversy in the Christian church. The debate over Hebrews has been the identity of the anonymous writer, whereas the debate over James concerns the identity of the man who placed his name at the head of the letter.

The debate in reality hinges upon how many men by the name of James had positions of authority in the New Testament church. There are those who argue there were three men by the name of James, the first who is denoted the brother of John, the second who is the son of Alphaeus and the third who was called James the Just by Eusebius, the church historian. It is widely believed that James the Just was a half-brother of Jesus Christ and that he was the acknowledged leader of the Church in Jerusalem as Acts 15 demonstrates. The standard view of the church throughout history was that James the Just was the author of the epistle, which bears his name.

There are others, however, who argue that there were only two leaders by the name of James; the brother of John and the son of Alphaeus. This view sees the disciple and James the Just as being one individual. As with the “three James approach” this opinion sees the Moderator of the Jerusalem Council as being the writer of this letter.

Where does the truth lie? It is difficult to see anyone other than an apostle writing this letter. It was a rule of the early church and indeed by Christ himself that the inspired writings had to be apostolic (John 14:26). We can easily rule James, the brother of John out of the equation, because he was martyred fairly early in the church's development (Acts 12:1). This leaves us with James the son of Alphaeus (Matthew 10:3). Mary, the mother of Jesus, had a son called James who was recognised as the brother of Joses (Mark 6:3). It is evident that he was one of those who watched the crucifixion with Mary (Mark 15:40), in the context of which he is referred to as “James the Less” or Little James (or as an Ulster Scot would say 'wee Jimmy'). Being the brother of Jesus and being an apostle who remained in Jerusalem, it was logical for this man to assume a position of leadership within the church in Judea. This explains his authority in Acts 15 and the subsequent epistle which bears his name.

### **When was the Epistle Written?**

Eusebius indicates that James the Just was martyred in AD 62. He was thrown from the temple roof and was then beaten to death by a club. That being the case, it necessarily follows that James' letter pre-dates AD 62. The early Christians recognised James as being the first of the inspired apostolic writings. After the martyrdom of Stephen many Jewish believers fled. In his opening lines James addresses this writing to the Jews who were scattered abroad, which is consistent with Acts 8:1. This being the case, it follows that James the Just rose to a position of leadership before the death of the brother of John, with whom he shared his name.

### **Methodology and Style**

There is much in this letter which illustrates that it was addressed to Jewish Christians. He refers to key figures in the Old Testament to reinforce his teachings; Abraham, Isaac, Rahab, Job and Elijah.

He also refers to the “early and latter rain” (5:7), consistent with the climate of Israel.

This letter may well have been based on a sermon or sermons, which James preached. If this is the case, we are given an insight into first century pastoral preaching.

He was certainly a man who was familiar with the teachings of Christ, as he referred to the Sermon on the Mount (compare 2:13 with Matthew 5:7; also compare 2:10 with Matthew 5:19-20).

Throughout the epistle, James makes demands of the people. It is reckoned that there are some fifty-four imperatives in this letter of which the following are examples; 1:22, 2:8, 4:7-8.

James' epistle is enriched by varied and vivid illustrations taken from everyday life. The double minded man is compared “to the waves of the sea” (1:6-8), the one who hears without applying the Word to one who looks in the mirror and forgets the image of himself (1:23), the tongue to a fire (3:6) and those who wait for the Christ's return to the farmer waiting on the harvest (5:7).

### **The Central Theme and its Controversial Nature**

At the heart of James' letter is justification and its application to the lives of Christians. He appears to contradict Paul who stated that justification is by faith alone (Romans 5:1). James speaks of being justified by works (James 2:24). Martin Luther had doubts about the epistle (along with 2nd Peter, Jude and Revelation!) regarding it as “an epistle of straw” although he did admit that James had “many good sayings”. Even William Tyndale placed James at the end of his New Testament, which was perhaps a note of slight displeasure, although he did not remove the epistle from the canon.

The truth lies in James' perspective. He was teaching that a Christian's justification is revealed by the life that he lives. He was concerned with justification before men. People will see our faith only by the manner in which it is lived out in the world (2:18). Paul was going down a different track, teaching that a man can be justified before God only by faith alone. Paul was examining justification and personal assurance whereas James was focusing upon justification as a personal testimony. Both are important yet both are alike. Paul was at pains to teach that justification by

faith alone did not eradicate the need for works which fulfilled the Law of God (Romans 6:1).

## Outline

### Chapter 1 The Testing of Faith

1:2-3 “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.”

### Chapter 2 The Testimony of Faith

2:26 “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”

### Chapters 3 and 4 The Temperance in Faith

4:4 “Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.”

### Chapter 5 The Triumph of Faith

5:16 “Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”

## Part 64

### 1st Peter: A Chosen Generation

Key Text: Chapter 2:9

“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:”

#### The Author and His Place of Writing

The immediate thought that strikes us when turning to this place in the New Testament, is that once again we are introduced to Peter. He is like an old friend, with whom we were once familiar, who re-enters our lives after a long period of absence. He is frequently referred to throughout the gospels as the undisputed leader among the disciples, as he gives voice to their opinions and fears. From the depths of denial, he rose to the most extraordinary heights of evangelism, leading the revival on the Day of Pentecost. After winning the first Gentile convert, Cornelius, Peter was imprisoned and sentenced to death, only to be delivered through the intercessions of God's people. Subsequent to the conversion of Saul, however, Peter fades away from inspired history, only to re-appear with this letter that was written by his hand.

It is difficult to argue that Peter was not the author of this epistle. Prefixing his name at the head he attests his own authority as “an apostle of Jesus Christ”. He describes himself as “a witness of the sufferings of Christ” (5:1) and is a companion of Silas (or Silvanus) and Mark (both well known to the early Church, 5:12-13). The themes of 1st Peter, are wholly consistent with the record of Peter's sermons in the Acts of the Apostles.

Peter describes himself as residing at Babylon when he penned this letter (5:13). The Greek text literally reads “she who is at Babylon saluteth you”, which the AV has translated, by way of interpretation, “church”. As Babylon was in the first century, a fairly obscure place, it is highly unlikely that Peter was referring to the literal geographical location. This being the case, Babylon is a codeword. Peter's epistle is preoccupied with the Christian

approach to suffering. As he was writing to people living in uncertain times it was appropriate that he should, at times, write in code, because his letter could fall into the wrong hands. Babylon in Scripture is synonymous with evil and was a metaphor for Rome in Revelation. We might then ask, “What great and evil city which was renowned for persecuting Christians might Peter wish to describe by way of code, as if to conceal his whereabouts, for his own safety?” It is wholly consistent to argue that Peter was at Rome. The female, whose greeting is described as coming from Rome, is unlikely to be an individual as Peter is writing in code. Throughout the New Testament, the church is described as a female, being the bride of the Lamb.

This approach, which is taken by early Christian writers as well as a large body of commentators, gives no ground whatsoever to Rome's view that Peter was an established leader within the Roman congregation. If Peter was the Bishop of Rome, why for example did Paul not mention Peter when writing to Rome or when writing from Rome. There is no basis in Scripture or in history that Peter founded the Roman church and spent a prolonged time leading the flock. Philip Schaff, church historian, takes the view that Peter's residence at Rome represented a brief period, probably after the martyrdom of Paul. It is significant that Clement of Rome, writing before the 1st Century had expired, spoke of Peter's martyrdom taking place in Rome itself. As Peter himself was martyred, it is believed, in 64 AD or shortly afterwards, this letter was written sometime in the early to mid 60's. Christ himself said that Peter would be crucified (John 21:18-19) and the time we have fixed for the authorship of this letter marked the first period of Roman persecutions under Nero.

Peter's first epistle was well known by the early church. Clement of Rome (1st Century), Polycarp of Antioch (2nd Century) and Irenaeus (late 2nd Century) all make reference to this epistle showing that the church was familiar with Peter's words. These details help us corroborate the authenticity of the epistle as an inspired piece of writing given and preserved for the benefit of the church in all ages.

### **The People and the Purpose of Writing**

Peter addresses his letter to Christians who are scattered throughout Asia Minor, modern Turkey (1:1). Interestingly, he calls

them strangers. Some have conjectured this to mean the Jewish Christians who, by virtue of their historic dispersion from Judea, had become strangers in Gentile lands. Others have simply defined this as referring to the persecuted Christians in the Roman empire, who were strangers to this world. While Peter wrote primarily to Jewish believers as the apostle to the circumcision, his words had and have relevance for every group of Christians both then and now.

The key theme of 1st Peter relates to suffering. He primarily wrote to encourage Christians in uncertain and difficult times. He told them it was honourable to suffer for the Lord (2:19-20), he encouraged them not to be afraid (3:14) and above all, he told them to rejoice because they were sharing in the suffering of Christ himself (4:13). Alongside the theme of suffering is the concept of hope. In 4:13 he told them that beyond the days of persecution the glory of Christ would be revealed and in 4:19 he exhorted them to commit their souls unto the faithful Creator. As Martin Luther wrote:

“Let goods and kindred go,  
This mortal life also,  
the body they may kill,  
God's truth abideth still,  
his kingdom is forever.”

### **The Theology of 1st Peter**

This epistle has been described as the most theological of all the epistles because of the concise manner in which Peter deals with the wide range of Christian doctrine. Unlike Paul, who focuses on individual doctrines, Peter gives us a broader view of the theology of the early Church:

The triune God and His salvation (1:1-4).

Christ: His suffering (2:24, 3:18); His sinlessness (1:19); His atonement (1:19); His resurrection (1:3); His eternal glory (3:21-22).

The Holy Spirit: His union with Christ (1:11), His guiding of the preachers (1:12); His sanctification of God's people (1:2).

The Church: 2:9-10 is one of the great New Testament definitions. 5:1-4 outlines the duties of the elder to the Church as a flock which is under the jurisdiction of the great shepherd of the flock.

Eschatology: God will call his suffering church to eternal glory (4:13, 5:10) but the ungodly will suffer punishment (4:17,18).

The Will of God: For Christians to do good in a corrupt society (2:15) and to accept that even persecution is subject to God's will (4:1-2, 19, 5:6).

Comfort: That God cares for his people in adversity (5:7-8).

### Outline

Chapter 1 The Preservation of the Suffering Christian

“Kept by the power of God” (1:5)

Chapter 2 The Purpose for the Suffering Christian

“For even hereunto were ye called” (2:21)

Chapter 3 The Partner for the Suffering Christian

“The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous” (3:12)

Chapter 4 The Peace of the Suffering Christian

“Rejoice...ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings” (4:13)

Chapter 5 The Prospect for the Suffering Christian

“Ye shall receive a crown of glory” (5:4)

## Part 65

### 2nd Peter: Remember, Remember

Key Text: Chapter 3:1

“This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance:”

The 2nd Epistle of Peter has been one of the New Testament books which has been inflicted with sustained attack over the centuries. Even the great John Calvin, while not denying the inspiration of 2nd Peter, cast doubts upon the Petrine Authorship; “It seems to me more probable that this Epistle was composed by another.” This in itself poses a difficulty because if Peter did not write this book, who did? Furthermore, as Peter’s name is placed at the head of the epistle then it is a fraud and unworthy of the New Testament canon. This is why 3:1 is so vital because the author was writing to the same group of people whom he had previously addressed. We are, then, looking for a writer, who has written one inspired epistle and he is following it up. Why not Peter as his name is at the head of the letter?

There is other internal evidence pointing to this epistle being a genuine production from Peter’s pen as the following examples show:

1. In 1:14 the author relates that the Lord Jesus showed him how he will die. This is entirely consistent with the Lord’s words to Peter in John 21:18-19.
2. In 1:16-18 he relates his memory of the Mount of Transfiguration, which does not contradict the gospel account.
3. Peter was writing to a people who were familiar with Paul’s teaching, 3:15. This indicates that Peter was writing to the Jewish Christians in Asia Minor, as he did in his previous letter.

Weighing the evidence carefully, it is difficult to conceive of any one writing this letter apart from Peter. John Brown, in his

introduction to this book, quotes from Bloomfield's Introductory note on this very point:

“If not written by St. Peter, it would indeed be a most daring fabrication; and, yet if a fabrication, it would be one of the most artfully contrived on record; for there is not a single particular that betrays imposture; though it has been a subject of examination for above seventeen centuries.”

### **Parting Counsels**

This title, given by John Brown, in his commentary on the first chapter of this epistle, is most appropriate for the entire book. As 2nd Timothy contained Paul's last words for the church, so 2nd Peter is the last will and testament of one of the foremost apostles. Peter was especially concerned that the church would not forget the truths it had been taught after his departure. In 1:12-13 he testified to his faithfulness in continually making the church aware of the truths of the gospel. As death approached, however, it was his desire that God's people would continue to remember the things that they had been taught, 1:14 -15.

Remembrance, therefore is an important theme of 2nd Peter, to which he returns in 3:1. This is the duty of the preacher; to stir up the minds and affections of the people, by keeping certain truths ever in their remembrance. It is when the church forgets key truths that backsliding, decay and apostasy creeps into the flock of God.

### **Outline**

1:1-2 - Salutation

Peter makes no reference to the specific people, whom he addresses. With the information that a previous letter had preceded this account (3:1) we must deduce that the people are the same groups that he previously addressed. His description of the Lord's people reminds us that this epistle is, however, directed to the church in every age; “to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.”

1:3 - 3:13 - Exhortations

A: Remembering the Belief of Christianity (1:3-4): With few but yet glorious words, the Apostle, teaches what “precious faith” is and the victory it brings to the believer's life.

B: Remembering the Behaviour of Christianity (1:5-15): This section begins with a summary of sanctification and the progressive adding of various graces to faith. Faith grows and develops and those who don't grow are blind, barren and unfruitful.

C: Remembering the Basis of Christianity (1:16-21): Peter now defends the authority of the Scriptures, not given by private interpretation or authorship but by “holy men of God...as they were moved by the Holy Ghost”.

D: Remembering the Battle for Christianity (2:1-3:7): At the heart of Peter's second epistle is a warning against false teachers and the importance of being true to the principles of the gospel.

1. The Characteristics of the False Teachers (2:1-3): The primary threat comes from within the church, something which Church history verifies.

2. The Condemnation upon the False Teachers (2:4-17): If God did not spare the fallen angels, and Sodom; he will certainly not spare those who follow Balaam's path. Their own corruption condemns them and like clouds without water they have nothing to offer.

3. The Contradiction in the False Teachers (2:18-22): Here are a people claiming to be Christian and yet like a dog returning to its vomit, they return to their former wickedness. The words of v19 have special relevance for our decadent society - promising liberty but serving corruption which creates bondage. The liberals want to be free to choose sodomy, abortion, euthanasia and a thousand other vices. This is not true freedom however, because it condemns man to the judgement of God. Therein lies the fallacy of the argument.

4. The Challenge through the False Teachers (3:1-7): Peter challenges the church to remember the words of Christ and to be prepared for the false teachers who will arise within the church. We must be on our guard and constantly alert.

E: Remembering the Bounty for Christianity (3:8-13): Having described the judgement upon the false teachers, Peter proceeds to encourage the Christian by describing the great hope for which

we live; “new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.”

### 3:14 - 18 - Conclusion

With the address “Wherefore beloved” (v14) Peter produces a fitting conclusion which aptly captures the contents of his entire message.

Using the words “diligent” (v14) and “steadfast” (v17) he urges the people to continue in the faith. He warns about the false teachers who distort the scriptures (v16) and encourages growth in grace (v18).

## Part 66

### 1st John: Walking in the Light

Key Text: Chapter 1:7

“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”

#### The Author

While John's name does not appear at the head of any of his epistles, there is abundant historical evidence to suggest the translators were not mistaken to call this “The First Epistle General of John”. Polycarp, who is believed to have been a disciple of John, wrote a letter to the church at Philippi around 125 AD, and he quoted from this letter. Papias, an early Bishop of Hierapolis near Laodicea (early first century), used quotations from John's epistles where he attributed the words to the beloved disciple. In the succeeding centuries there are other references to John's authorship of these letters. The historical evidence is clear; the early Christians had no doubt as to the identity of the author.

What is more significant, however, is the evidence from within 1st John itself which points to John's handiwork. For example, in 5:13, the purpose of the author is set forth. This is virtually identical with John's purpose in writing his Gospel, John 20:31. Both books refer to the joy of the believer being complete (1:4, John 16:24), to the blind darkness of sin (2:11, John 12:35) and to the new commandment (3:23, John 13:34). The clearest evidence of all, however, is drawn from the description of Christ at the commencement of both books; “the Word”. This title for the Son of God is unique to John's writings. With reference to Christ being the Word, the author describes himself as having witnessed Him with his eyes and handled Him with his hands (1:1). Certainly, the fingerprints of John are on this important New Testament document.

## The Readership

In his first epistle, John gives little indication as to the identity of those whom he was addressing. It is interesting though that he addresses his readership using varying descriptions; “little children” (2:1), “fathers” (2:13) and “young men” (2:13). At face value, this indicates that John was familiar with his readership using these affectionate, even intimate titles. It also indicates that John was writing to people of all ages within the church. This epistle is relevant for all believers in every age whether young or old, mature or immature. There is no-one for whom the content of this letter is not relevant.

It is widely believed that John spent a proportion of his later years in Ephesus. It is therefore reckoned that this first letter was either written to the Ephesian church or to the churches in Asia Minor, the region in which Ephesus was the leading city. This certainly ties in with the opening chapters of Revelation and the letters to the seven churches of Asia.

## The Background

Error was creeping in among the people of God, causing John the greatest of concern. There were many antichrists, people who once had belonged to the church but had gone away from and departed from the fellowship of believers (2:18-19). Obviously, the character of antichrist is such that rises up from within the New Testament church. These antichrists, John refers to, had set themselves up as false teachers having imbibed the spirit of Satan.

These false teachers refused to accept the incarnation (4:2-3), they denied Jesus Christ to be the Messiah (2:22) and the Son of God (2:23, 4:15).

As well as being doctrinally unsound, the false teachers had a faulty concept of morality. They taught sinless perfection (1:8). It seems however, that equally worrying was their concept of sin. They wanted to claim fellowship with God while continuing to walk in darkness. Therefore, they had flawed ideas of sin if they claimed to have no sin.

Their moral flaws led to a harsh and unforgiving spirit among the people of God. John in a straightforward manner, denounced those

who refused to love their brothers and sisters as being “children of the devil” (3:10).

Simon Kistemaker in his commentary on 1st John described John's purpose in a twofold sense, “he exposes the lie and proclaims the truth.” This is the duty of every faithful man of God.

### Themes

**Assurance:** The purposes of John's Gospel and his first epistle are intertwined. The word “know” features prominently throughout, appearing some 27 times (2:3, 2:20, 3:2, 3:19, 4:13). To possess Christ is to possess eternal life (5:12).

**Love:** God gives us His love (3:1), which is manifested through the sacrifice of His Son (3:16). We must then show forth this love to the world especially through our relationships with other Christians (4:11). John makes this characteristic a test of genuine faith (4:20).

**The World:** In John's epistle the world refers to the spirit of godlessness that is endemic among men and women. In this sense we are not to love the world in all its aspects (2:15-17). The Christian is separated and appears very different from the wicked world by virtue of the new birth (5:19).

**Sin:** John deals with the perennial problem from which we all suffer (1:8). He teaches us what sin is and how it originated (3:4,8). He also encourages us in that a Christian cannot sin habitually without remorse or a desire to repent (3:9, 5:16).

### Theology

**The Person of Jesus Christ:** Incarnation 3:3, Atonement 1:7, Intercession 2:1, Propitiation 2:2.

**The Holy Spirit:** John emphasises the indwelling of the Holy Ghost as the author of assurance, 2:20, 3:24.

## Outline

Chapter 1 Confession; The Basis of Walking in the Light

v9 “If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”

Chapter 2 Compassion; The Behaviour when Walking in the Light

v10 “He that loveth his brother abideth in the light...”

Chapter 3 Consequence; The Blessing when Walking in the Light

v1 “Behold what manner of love the father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God...”

Chapter 4 Commitment; The Beauty in Walking in the Light

v7 “Beloved let us love one another: for love is of God; and everyone that loveth is born of God and knoweth God”

Chapter 5 Conquest; The Bounty through Walking In the Light

v4 “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”

## Part 67

### 2nd and 3rd John: Personal Letters

Both 2nd and 3rd John are distinguished in that they appear to be personal letters; although there may be a doubt in the case of the second epistle. Another more prominent characteristic of these, the briefest of letters, is the manner in which John describes himself, “the elder”. Peter too, in 1st Peter 5:1, called himself an elder. It seems that as the New Testament church was passing beyond the first phase of its development, and as the apostles passed away, the role of the elder in teaching and governing the flock of God rose in prominence. Hence the importance and scriptural basis of the title Presbyterian (or rule by elders) to describe the organisation of the New Testament church.

#### 2nd John: To the Elect Lady and her Children

Key Text: Chapter 1:8

“Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.”

#### The Recipients

There is some debate as to the identity of the people to whom John was writing. There are basically two alternatives, both of which have merit:

1. John was writing to a Christian lady, a widow, with whom he was familiar. The lady had been favoured with household salvation because her children walked in the truth.
2. The Christian Lady was an allegory, a code, in days of persecution for the Church of Christ. Through the New Testament Epistles, the Church is consistently described using the feminine gender, as the bride of Christ Himself. Peter also used this method of writing in code to describe a Christian Church calling her “she at Babylon” (1 Peter 5:13 in the original Greek).

#### Purpose

The purpose behind the epistle may well shed a little light in determining the identity of the recipients.

It seems that John was indeed addressing a church, presenting faithful warnings against the false teachers, which he also addressed in his first epistle. In v7 the major point on which these heretics erred was their view of Christ, denying his incarnation. John had rather uncompromising words for these people, telling the believers neither to welcome them nor bid them God speed, lest they become entangled in falsehood. John therefore, in the briefest of epistles, identifies apostasy as being a departure from the Biblical position on the person and work of Jesus Christ. The true church is called to separate where such a falling away exists (v9-12). While John uses the word house, we must remember that the early church met in private houses. The whole tone of the message appears to be directed to a local assembly.

### **Positive Message**

This beautiful little book has positive message with the Church today:

Truth Focused; v2, 4

Christ Centred; v3, 9

Separatist Principles; v10-11

Loving Fellowship; v5

Personal Examination; v8

### **3rd John: To the Wellbeloved Gaius**

Key Text: Chapter 1:11

“Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God.”

Again, denoting himself by the term elder, John on this occasion addresses himself to a man whom he describes as a close friend, “wellbeloved”. While the letter was certainly written to an

individual, John's remarks were relevant for the congregation in which Gaius played a leading role.

#### Gaius' Acknowledgement v1-2

John's opening description of his friendship with Gaius is a little summary of Christian fellowship. We can only have fellowship with those whom we love in the truth. Christ's love is based upon truth. Church fellowship is erected upon the basis of the truth around which we gather. Therefore those who refuse the truth are to be avoided, in terms of fellowship.

His greeting also displayed an active concern for every area of Gaius' life. While the prosperity of his soul was paramount, John also wished his friend physical health and material prosperity. This is true pastoral concern; considering every avenue of life and showing due care and attention.

#### Gaius' Acclamation v3-4

John heard from travelling brethren (probably missionaries) that Gaius maintained the truth in doctrine and lifestyle. Evidently this man was converted under the ministry of the apostle being described as one of John's children. John was not merely concerned with professions of faith, he desired progress in holy living because that is the evidence of a genuine work of God's Spirit.

#### Gaius' Acceptance v5-8

When the missionaries and evangelists arrived in Gaius' city to encourage and shepherd the fledgling congregation, this man received them graciously. By showing hospitality, the people of God were sharing in their ministry. This is an encouragement to us to give support to gospel work knowing that by so doing we have a real part in the activity and a share of the blessing.

#### Gaius' Associations v9-13

This final section gets to the heart of John's intention. It seems that the church in this locality was troubled by a rather arrogant and dominant personality by the name of Diotrephes. John had already written to the church but Diotrephes rejected the authority of John. He refused to exercise hospitality towards

believers and those who did exercise hospitality towards the travelling missionaries were thrown out of the congregation. Diotrephes' real problem was that he wanted control and authority, he loved the pre-eminence. He not bear the thought of competition. It may be that Gaius had been ejected from the local assembly because he was a man of hospitality. Whether this was the case or not, we cannot be certain, but John was certainly writing to encourage his dear friend. John made clear that he would deal with Diotrephes when he arrived in this city.

John uses the sins of Diotrephes to teach Gaius, and us with him, to always follow the good because that is the evidence of the new birth in our lives.

John bears witness to the testimony of Demetrius, which stands in contrast to the life of Diotrephes: “Demetrius hath good report of all men, and of the truth itself” (v12).

## Part 68

### Jude: Serving God in a Day of Apostasy

Key Text: Chapter 1:3

“Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.”

The Epistle of Jude bears similarity to 2nd Peter and to the Epistles of John, in that he majors upon the threat that apostasy poses to the church of Christ. The word apostasy stems from the Greek *apostasia*, which signifies to defect or to rebel. It was used by the apostle Paul in 2nd Thessalonians 2:3 as he also foretold of a coming day when there would be a “falling away”. It seems as the days of the apostles drew to a close the emphasis upon departure from the faith became all the more pertinent and increasingly urgent. Jude’s little letter, has been sometimes called ‘The Acts of the Apostates’ due to his treatment of this important subject. While that title has merit, it exaggerates the theme because Jude’s first priority was for the church and how they might serve God in a day of departure from the faith. In this day, when the major Protestant denominations have departed from the reformed faith, Jude’s epistle is most relevant. We must take his words to heart and “earnestly contend for the faith”.

In a technical sense, however, the New Testament work that Jude is closest too is Peter because of the similarities in language and phraseology as they unfold a common theme. Peter speaks of “false prophets...among the people” who were guilty of denying “the Lord” (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 2:1). Jude refers to “certain men crept in unawares” who sinned by “denying the only Lord God...” (v4). Both writers make reference to the fallen angels and to Sodom (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 2:4-11 and Jude 6-9). They both make use of the metaphors of clouds without rain and outer darkness (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 2:17 and Jude 12-13). Both also remind the readers of the teachings of the apostles and foretell the arrival of scoffers (3:2-3 and Jude 17-18).

This has led some to accuse either Peter or Jude of copying the other while others have claimed that both made use of a separate document from which they based their writing. Such reasoning only serves to undermine the authenticity of the scripture. In God's sovereignty, it is conceivable that either Peter or Jude was aware of the work of the other. Yet under the guiding of the inspiring Spirit they took similar themes and applied them to the particular needs of their respective readerships.

Jude's little epistle, well known from early times, was recognised as belonging to the canon by the clear testimony of the church and has been preserved for our learning.

## Outline

### v1-2 - The Salutation

Jude designates himself as the “servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James”. In common with John he refuses to use the title ‘Apostle’ preferring the humble title which distinguishes all of God's children regardless of rank; a simple servant. There only was one James whom Jude could have as a sibling. This was obviously a famous James well known among Christians. This was the James who wrote the epistle that bears his name, who was a leader within the Jerusalem church and who was the son of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Therefore Jude, too was a half-brother of the man Christ Jesus. Undoubtedly the family relationship that James and Jude had with Jesus gave them a certain standing among Christians, as we can appreciate. We also know that there was a disciple among the disciples known as Jude (Luke 6:16) who was a brother of James. On the balance of the available evidence, we claim this Jude to be both an apostle and a half-brother of the man Jesus.

Having described himself, Jude now denotes the characteristics of the Christians whom he addresses; sanctified, preserved and called. While we do not know who these people were, we take the salutation to heart as a fitting description of our place in the world.

### v3 - The Proposition

Jude's purpose was rather straightforward. The common salvation, which was the key truth of the gospel, was to be represented and

defended by the church. The word contend has a sporting connotation. It highlights vigour and competitiveness. The Church is in a struggle to defend the truth against a great onslaught.

#### v4-16 - The Explanation

Jude now explains what this challenge is, why the church must contend. The emphasis now is upon the features of apostasy.

1. Definition of Apostasy (v4): The apostate has crept into the church and denies the doctrine of Christ. This is consistent with John's definition.
2. Origination of Apostasy (v6-9): He traces the origins of apostasy down through the centuries to Satan himself.
3. Condemnation of Apostasy (v10-15): Apostasy will experience the "blackness of darkness forever".
4. Characterisation of Apostasy (v16): The pride of the apostate as he elevates his own vain thinking is clear.

#### v17-23 - The Presentation

Jude now teaches the church how it can contend for the faith. His introduction to this subject reminds the Christians of the teaching of the apostles before listing seven simple lessons:

Building	v20
Praying	v20
Keeping	v21
Looking	v21
Loving	v22
Saving	v23
Hating	v23

#### v24-25 - The Benediction

Jude's benediction is one of the finest to be found in the New Testament. His letter is dedicated to the God who will keep His true church from falling. This was encouraging for a people who would be alarmed by the severity of the apostle's tone. God preserves his church and will transport us one day into His presence with great joy.

He ascribes all glory to Christ described “as God our Saviour”. He both attacks apostasy and instructs the church by the fulsome description of the deity of our Saviour, the Son of God.

## Part 69

# Revelation: The Triumph of Christ Through His Church

Key Text: Chapter 19:16

“And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS”

With Revelation we approach the most mysterious book of Scripture, while at the same time it includes scenes which are of much encouragement to the people of God. As we wrestle with the seven seals and seven trumpets, we revel in the city bathed in eternal light where the tears will be wiped from every eye.

The word Revelation stems from the Greek *apokalupsis*, which means ‘unveiling’. This is a book where mysteries are unveiled. The future is certainly unveiled (1:1), as is Christ (1:13-16) and the throne of God (4:1). Christ, however, is the central one who is revealed. He is “the first and the last” (1:17) and He is the central figure in the throne, being the freshly slain lamb (5:6) who lives forevermore. Therefore, this book is the “Revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:1).

### Interpreting Revelation

There are a number of methods that have been employed in interpreting the Book of Revelation. These methods apply to interpreting all of the prophetic books. These can be best described as falling into two camps:

Futurist - The Futurist makes every attempt to interpret the events depicted by the imagery in John’s visions as actual and real. He sees these visions as representing events that will take place in the future. The futurist, while understanding that the spirit of Antichrist exists in every age and within the church, is convinced that the final Antichrist will arise, as a political ruler, to challenge God in an unprecedented fashion.

Historicist - The Historicist believes that Revelation describes the whole history of the New Testament Church until the time of Christ's return, by the use of metaphors. Some of this history is yet future, but many of the visions reveal events that have already been fulfilled. Most historicists hold that the system of the papacy is the Antichrist as prophesied in Scripture. Others believe that the Antichrist is the ungodly spirit that so imbibes the governments of this evil world.

Out of these two methods of interpretation, three main views of Revelation have arisen within the Church. As Revelation 20 is the only portion of Scripture to describe the millennium as a specific time frame, although the Millennial blessings are elsewhere described, the various views of Revelation have been characterised as being shaped around one's interpretation of this chapter.

### **Pre-millennialism**

This concept of thought belongs to the Futurist school. The pre-millennialist believes in a literal thousand years when Christ will reign physically on earth. This period will be preceded by seven years when the Antichrist will reign, the half of which will be The Great Tribulation. This period will be followed by a general rebellion against the reign of Christ when Satan will be loosed. Christ's reign of one thousand years will be centred on Jerusalem with the Jews playing a key role in the economy of God.

Pre-Millennialists are divided into camps:

(a) Pre-Tribulation - this school has been largely influenced by the writings of J.N. Derby and the Scofield Bible and is dispensational in character. Some dispensationalists believe that the history of the world is divided into seven dispensations, where God tests man "in respect to obedience to some specific revelation." (Alan Cairns, Dictionary of Theological Terms). All who have been converted during the dispensation of grace and who are alive, will be raptured away secretly rather than suffer the wrath of God during the tribulation period. With regard to the return of Christ this view raises an immediate problem as it proposes a two-stage coming of the Saviour, one invisible and the other visible. The invisible coming is one of which the world is not aware, but this goes against the emphatic teaching of the Scripture with regard to the personal return of Jesus Christ to the world; that all people will be

conscious of His arrival. More fundamentally than this, however, are the huge problems that dispensationalism poses to the gospel. Man becomes a creature who can be forgiven on the basis of his passing God's tests; "holding out the possibility of salvation by works of obedience" (Alan Cairns, Dictionary of Theological Terms). Additional to this the cross becomes an 'afterthought', God's final 'last ditch' effort to win man after all the previous tests had been a failure. Is Christ not the "lamb slain from the foundation of the world?" (Revelation 13:8).

(b) Post-Tribulation - Non-dispensational pre-millennialists hold that Christ will return after the period known as the Great Tribulation.

The advantages of pre-millennialism are that the strictly literal, where possible, approach to the interpretation of prophecy accords the Scripture with a high degree of respect. All serious-minded Bible students must always adopt a literal approach to Scripture and the desire not to be guilty of distorting the Bible with interpretations contrived by man is certainly to be commended. One must be mindful that the words "where possible" will produce inevitable discussion about those areas which may perhaps be literal or may not. Pre-millennialism also understands the importance of the Jews within the economy of God. One can certainly appreciate the manner in which God has preserved the natural family of Abraham through the centuries, in giving them nationhood subsequent to the horrors of the Holocaust, with the aid of this school of prophetic interpretation.

Likewise, pre-millennialism has disadvantages. The prophecies in the Old Testament, especially in Ezekiel and Zechariah, which are heralded as belonging to the millennium, speak of the offering of sacrifices. This instantly raises questions, in the light of the Epistle to the Hebrews and the removal of the Levitical sacrifices post-Calvary. It must be clarified, however, that not all pre-millennialists accept that there will be sacrifices in the millennium for this very reason; but this has been a thorny issue. Some who belong to the historicist school have also objected to a lack of clarity with respect to the millennium: Will an exalted Christ preside over a fallen world?; Will glorified saints and unbelievers share this planet for one thousand years?; If Christ returns with "flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God...", where will the unbelievers who live during the millennium stem from? This is not the place to consider the responses to these

questions but they do highlight the debates that pre-millennialism has sparked in its insistence that there will be a literal period of one thousand years when Christ will personally reign on the earth before the Eternal State commences.

### **A-Millennialism**

This concept arises from the historicist school of thought. The a-millennialist believes that the one thousand years merely describes the period of the New Testament Church, seeing the visions as containing a purely non-literal spiritual meaning.

The chief advantage of a-millennialism is that the Church's place as the "Israel of God" is strongly emphasised. The Abrahamic covenant included not merely the physical children of Abraham but "all families of the earth" (Genesis 12:3). This certainly ties in with Paul's statement that all "they which are of faith...are the children of Abraham (Galatians 3:6).

In my judgement, the major flaw in the a-millennial hypothesis is that the Jews are largely ignored with respect to their future as a specified people within the economy of God. When one considers the weight of Biblical references to the literal children of Abraham and the many promises about their future it is difficult to believe that, in this New Testament age, they are simply like all the other peoples of the earth. Can God forget the covenant that He made with Abraham which not only is the basis for the Old Testament but which forms a foundation for the New Testament revelation of the Messiah? The a-millennial position is also weakened by the belief that Satan is now bound and cast into the bottomless pit (Revelation 20:2-3). Even though a-millennialists teach that this binding pertains only to Satan's ability to deceive the nations as he did in the Old Testament age, it seems difficult to imagine that such a powerful image would be employed for this age when Satan, it seems, is exercising his powers of wickedness in ways that are unparalleled since the Protestant Reformation.

### **Post-Millennialism**

The post-millennialist believes that the millennium is a period when the church will enjoy a golden age of revival throughout the whole world, prior to our Lord's return. This revival will be sparked

off by a return of the Jewish peoples to Christ, an event that will produce repentance throughout the whole world. As with the pre-millennial hypothesis, there will be a period of rebellion and apostasy at the close of the 1,000 years, when Satan will be released from his prison, after which Christ will come to defend His church and establish His throne of judgement (Revelation 20:7-15).

The prime advantage of post-millennialism over against a-millennialism is the place that it accords the Jewish people in the economy of God. At the heart of this hypothesis is a literal interpretation of Romans 11 and the parable of the wild olive tree being grafted into the cultivated olive tree. The Gentiles, being the wild olive tree, are brought in to enjoy the covenant benefits of God, while the Jews, the natural branches are broken off. Paul, however, writes of the natural branches being grafted in, after which he makes this telling statement, "And so all Israel shall be saved" (Romans 11:26). In this chapter which deals with God's future purpose for His ancient people Paul argues that if the casting away of the Jews brought blessings to the world the receiving of them would be a resurrection for humanity; "life from the dead" (Romans 11:15). Post-millennialism is primarily an 'Eschatology of Revival' because of its positive outlook as regards the spiritual progress of the church in the world.

This position has certain weaknesses also, in common with the other interpretations. Those of the other camps have objected to the mismatch between the positive view presented by post-millennialism and the many Scriptures which indicate that there will be a growing apostasy and departure from the faith as times advance towards the second coming of Jesus Christ; "...in the last days perilous times shall come" (2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 3:1). Post-millennialism has also tended towards political action on the part of the church, sometimes with unforeseen consequences. The theology of the Cromwellian army and subsequent establishment of the Commonwealth was based on the premise that the millennium was dawning and a government must be established to enforce God's kingdom upon the people of England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. Indeed it is most significant that Cromwell, despite being criticised for his intolerance, was the first English ruler in one thousand years to grant the Jews religious freedom. Later in the same century the Scottish Covenanters waged their war against Charles 2<sup>nd</sup> and James 2<sup>nd</sup> from a broadly similar outlook. There

were other factors that motivated these political and military actions of the seventeenth century but it would be wrong to claim that the eschatology of the dissenting church, especially in those days, was irrelevant. Today the rise of the modern Reconstructionist movement, which holds that all the laws binding on Israel in the Old Testament, are applicable to every nation in the world today, is predicated upon post-millennial theology. Reconstructionism urges Christians to take up the mandate of Christ in public life, through political action, because the godly will exercise dominion in the earth. Reconstructionism is absolutely wrong in its assertion that the civil laws applicable to Israel in the Old Testament are binding upon the nations in this New Testament age. It is also dangerous to suggest that the church can accomplish, by civil action, what only the power of the Holy Ghost can achieve. God's kingdom extends in grace through the Spirit conquering hearts and minds. Christ triumphs, not through political progress but through the power given to His church at Pentecost. We must be mindful that efforts at enforcing God's kingdom by political means or even by physical force have always ended in failure.

### **A Personal Perspective**

It is my personal conviction that Christ presides now over the kingdom, which is His Church, a body which incorporates Jew and Gentile "as one new man" (Ephesians 2:15). This kingdom is a growing and developing entity which will be ushered into a golden age of revival before the Second Coming. This is how I understand scriptures like Psalm 2 where Christ receives the heathen for His inheritance, Daniel 2 where the stone cut without hands, consumes the statue, and the binding of Satan in Revelation 20. This is the kingdom of God advancing and filling the whole earth. Under the shadow of eternity Richard Cameron, the Lion of the Covenant, expressed this hope in no uncertain terms:

"The Church of Christ is to be so exalted that its members shall be made to ride upon the high places of the earth...the church shall yet be high and more glorious, as appears from the book of Revelation, and the church shall have more power than ever she had before".

Ian Murray, "The Puritan Hope".

It is apparent that all three views have their positive and negative aspects and are therefore the subjects of legitimate debate. In church history they have all been held by great and godly men, the writings of whom, teach us much on this vital and fascinating subject. It is important, when studying Revelation, to be aware of the distinctions which will influence an interpretation of the book. When reading helpful literature, remember that the author will present his own individual view which may necessitate reading another author of a different persuasion to receive some form of balance. Through prayer and careful meditation, the student can then form a personal view.

It is important that every view is held in love, showing grace and tolerance to those of opposing opinions. Perhaps when we reach glory, we all will discover that we all have erred in some form, which owing to our finite humanity will be the likely outcome!

At the heart of every legitimate interpretation of the Book of Revelation within the Church, however, is the centrality of Jesus Christ and His final triumph through His church. I consider that every believer while not subscribing to William Hendriksen's a-millennialist views is thrilled with the title of his work on the Apocalypse; "More Than Conquerors".

### **Outline of Revelation**

Introduction	Chapter 1
The Epistles	Chapters 2-3
The Throne	Chapter 4
The Seven Seals	Chapters 5-7
The Seven Trumpets	Chapters 8-10
The Two Witnesses	Chapter 11
The War with Anti-Christ	Chapters 12-19
The Millennium	Chapter 20
The Eternal State	Chapter 21-22

## The Symbols of Revelation

It is evident that Revelation is a book of mysterious and intriguing symbols all of which point to Christ and His pre-eminence in the world:

1. The Throne of God - the seat of divine government with Christ at the heart (ch4).
2. The 24 elders - The Church, who cast their crowns before Christ (ch4).
3. The Beasts - The creation of God which exists to glorify Christ (ch4).
4. The Lamb - Christ, the lamb slain but who is now all powerful with His seven horns (ch5)
5. The Book with 7 seals - God's decrees can only be unfolded by Christ, He alone is worthy (Ch5-6)
6. The Two Witnesses - The witnesses for Christ (ch11)
7. The Great Dragon - Satan and his opposition to Christ (ch 12).
8. The Woman - The Jewish Church giving birth to Christ (ch12).
9. The Man-child - Christ, the great hope for the world (ch12).
10. The Beast - The Political Power of Anti-Christ (ch13).
11. The Second Beast - The Spiritual Power of Antichrist (ch13).
12. The Great Whore - The Apostate Church and her counterfeiting of Christ (ch17).
13. Babylon - The corruption of the Apostate Church in her war with Christ (ch18).
14. The Marriage Supper - The Church, in perfection, united, with her Bridegroom (ch19).
15. The Millennium - The binding of Satan, the triumph of the Church, the final apostasy and final judgement.

16. The New Jerusalem - The Eternal State when the Lamb, alone, will be the light (ch21-22).

### **Numbers in Revelation**

7 Churches and 7 Candlesticks, 24 Elders, 7 Seals, 7 Trumpets, 7 Vials, 144,000 Sealed People, 7 Heads and 10 Horns, 1,000 Years.

All of these numbers are symbols of completeness already revealed in Scripture; 7 days, 10 Commandments, 12 Tribes and 12 Disciples. All of the numbers of Revelation are either these complete numbers or multiples of them. In some instances, the actual numbers are obviously literal (as in the seven churches) whereas in other instances they are not, as in the 144,000. It is appropriate to take the images and numbers literally, where possible, which of course produces the debate over the most controversial number; the one thousand years of Chapter 20. No-one can escape the inevitable conclusion from these complete numbers that God's plan for this world, the universe and the church will not be thwarted. He will perfect and accomplish that which He has designed. Ultimately the chorus of heaven will resound with the great song of victory; "Alleluia, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth" (Revelation 19:6).

### **The Promise of Christ's Coming**

Throughout Revelation, our hearts are encouraged by the prospect of Christ's return: 1:7, 6:12-17, 16:15, 19:11-16, 20:11-15, 22:7, 12, 20. For the wicked world, the return of Christ is the herald of judgement. This will be the final execution of justice as the 'Judge of all the Earth' establishes His grand assize. All the injustices of this corrupt earth will be corrected as the dead, small and great, are summonsed before God. For the Church, however, the prospect of Christ's return and the ushering in of the Eternal State is the removal of the curse. We struggle with the consequences of man's fall in this broken world. To dwell in a place where the curse is removed, where death is non-existent and where peace reigns is beyond our wildest imaginations. Yet such will be our eternal reality. Therefore, the final prayer of scripture is one that ought to be echoed in every believing heart:

"Even so, come, Lord Jesus"

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