

# NT

A pattern for life  
in God's House

**David:**  
Lover of God's house  
His relationship with Joab

Choosing a Bible  
translation

Loving one another

Luke's Christ

Issue 3 2014

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📘 Hayes Press

Communications to the editors:

@ [editors@neededtruth.info](mailto:editors@neededtruth.info)

✉ c/o Robert Fisher, 258 West Main Street, Whitburn, West Lothian, EH47 0QW Scotland

☎ +44 (0)1501 743811

Editorial production team: Robert Fisher, Peter Hickling, Geoff Hydon, Brian Johnston, Martin Jones

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# From the Editors' desk

If you are reading this magazine in print form for the first time you are perhaps bucking a global trend! Reader subscriptions to printed copies of magazines generally are in decline, although early forecasts that digital would completely replace hard copy have yet to transpire. Some statistics have in fact shown an emerging duality, with magazines being successfully distributed in both digital and hard copy formats. NT falls into this category. Readers evidently want the best of both worlds: a hard copy magazine for comfortable reading and a digital archive to search as needed. Editors of this magazine receive heartwarming assurances from readers around the world that the content is meeting their needs, and that is the important thing. This issue will hopefully pass that test too!

The Lord Jesus Christ on one occasion said *every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old.*<sup>1</sup> He presented statements that were new to some of His hearers, but they had the compelling support of consistency with God's past declarations. In this issue of NT you will find re-statements of truth long held and taught by the churches of God (e.g. David, Lover of God's House). However, perhaps it is new to you. If so, you will want to explore the deep digital resources of archived editions of NT, and other Hayes Press publications, which will provide helpful additional readings. Alongside these 'old' treasures are comments on new trends and current issues, articles like 'The Prosperity Gospel' or 'Where was God...?' The latter answers 21<sup>st</sup> century questions by those who have misunderstood God and His purposes.

Each of our articles can be read in minutes. Many will prompt much deeper thought by those desiring to be instructed concerning the kingdom. It is impossible to do more than present the kernel of the case in a magazine contribution. But you are warmly invited to contact us on any of our content, so that we may help direct you to fuller answers to your questions.

Reference (1) Mat. 13:52

Geoff





# On the scrap heap?

Gilbert Grierson, Knocknacloy, N.Ireland

“To the scrap heap!” That’s what I occasionally have to say when I open the kiln door and remove the pots that have just completed their ten-hour firing process. Taking out the jugs, bowls and mugs, one by one and examining them closely sometimes reveals that cracks have developed or a glaze has run or that the intense heat (1100 deg. C) has caused the pot to blister. So to the scrap heap outside the pottery door it goes! Thankfully, not many end up this way, for a lot of time and energy has been expended on moulding, decorating and firing each pot.

Paul, writing to the saints at Corinth reminds them that they, or at least their bodies, are *jars of clay*.<sup>1</sup> What was true for them is also true for us; our physical composition is made up of the *dust from the ground*<sup>2</sup> like Adam. Our bodies deteriorate with time, get old and weak, develop serious physical ailments, show evidence of unavoidable mental ageing and are prone to the effects of our inherited fallen, sinful nature. At death, our bodies return to dust!<sup>3</sup>

But, praise God, these bodies contain a ‘treasure’! And this treasure will never decay or perish. It is our spiritual life, given as a gift from God. And it’s His life, the life of our Lord Jesus. He lives in the believer!<sup>4</sup> That is the most amazing truth about the Christian life, and because of it we shall never, ever, end up on the ‘scrap heap’.

Jesus said, “*I give them eternal life, and they will never perish.*”<sup>5</sup>

Sadly, we do fail at times. Our love waxes and wanes – goes up and down like a temperature chart at the end of the hospital bed. If our salvation depended upon ourselves, we would soon be rejects. But we are reminded that *He who began a good work in us will bring it to completion in the day of Jesus Christ*.<sup>6</sup> He is the potter – the Master Potter – and we are the clay. He suffered the intense heat of His Calvary experience on our account, and He won’t fail to finish His work. Isaiah’s prophecy reminds us that *He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied*.<sup>7</sup>

One future day, He will see the results of His finished work; there won’t be any mistakes on His part, (though we ourselves could lose some of our rewards at the judgement seat of Christ when our lives of obedient service to Him as Lord are assessed).

So take courage! You and I are living in jars of clay. We may suffer many knocks and bruises, afflictions, even persecutions because of our faith, experience mental and



physical wear and tear, and maybe battle against chronic conditions day after day or even have a terminal illness.

But, Paul writes, ... *we do not lose heart. Though our outward nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.*<sup>8</sup>

Bible quotations from ESV unless otherwise stated

References: (1) 2 Cor. 4:7 (2) Gen. 2:7 (3) Gen. 3:19 (4) Rom. 8:11 (5) John 10:28 (6) Phil. 1:6 (7) Isa. 53:11 RV (8) 2 Cor. 4:16-18

David

## Lover of God's house

James Needham, Birmingham, England

By what measure would you assess the value of a man's life?

Perhaps by the recognition he achieves from others; by his achievements in the world, or the accumulation of wealth? What about by where he stands in relation to the dwelling place of God – does that feature in your assessment, for it is surely one of ways in which God values those who belong to Him? Certainly that was so with His Son, for at the beginning of His ministry when the Lord Jesus drove out the profiteers from the temple, the ancient words of David were brought forcefully to the minds of His disciples, *zeal for your house has consumed me*.<sup>1</sup>

### The house of God neglected

By the time David came to the throne of Israel, the house of God had suffered some 400 years of neglect. During Israel's wilderness journey, the tabernacle had been the heartbeat of their camp, the presence of God their protector and guide.<sup>2</sup> Even at the end of their exile, the ark of the covenant – the symbol of God's presence amongst them – had been at the vanguard as the people crossed the Jordan into the land of promise.<sup>3</sup> As they campaigned to subdue the land before them, the tabernacle was erected at Shiloh<sup>4</sup> where it remained throughout the years of the Judges.<sup>5</sup>

Once in the land, declension was swift. The warning signs were there even while Joshua lived, as those who had chosen for themselves an inheritance in Gilead established their own altar beside the Jordan. The unity of the collective testimony of the people of God was under threat, until Phinehas' powerful defence averted catastrophe.<sup>6</sup> For now, the altar of God remained the one place where He was to be served, but Phinehas' faithfulness served only to delay decline.

Before long, the tabernacle at Shiloh was forgotten by those who bowed to false gods;<sup>7</sup> moral depravity was associated with spiritual decline.<sup>8</sup> At Shiloh, in the house of the living God, the high priest of Israel sat at ease, assisted by sons who *did not know the LORD* and who used their office for personal gain.<sup>9</sup> It speaks volumes for the state into which the testimony of Israel had fallen that Eli should look upon the outpouring to God of a poor woman's heart and mistake it for drunkenness.<sup>10</sup> These were days in which *the word of the LORD was rare*,<sup>11</sup> for the people reaped the harvest of their neglect of God's things. When at last the ark of the covenant fell into enemy hands, 'Ichabod' was written large over the condition of God's people, for the glory had departed from Israel: God forsook His dwelling among men<sup>12</sup> and

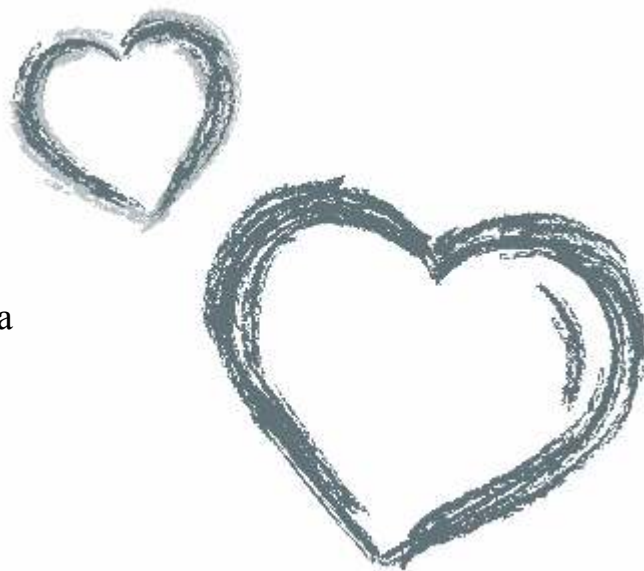
the problems were not corrected just by the recovery of the ark from enemy hands.

The reign of Saul saw nothing to reverse this decline. We read of no occasion when Saul visited Shiloh; no attempt to reunite the ark with the tabernacle. Though Saul made offerings to the Lord, he did so on his own terms and it cost him a royal legacy;<sup>13</sup> and though he sought guidance from the urim, he found no answer there,<sup>14</sup> for the Lord sought a man after His own heart, whose desire was towards the place where He dwelt.

### The house treasured once more

In David, He found such a man. Having been anointed king at Hebron, David's first action was to conquer Jerusalem and secure it from the enemies of God. Having done so, his thoughts turned at once to the ark which languished in the house of Abinadab. In the way he prized the dwelling-place of God, David gave echo to the deep desire of God to dwell amongst His called-out people. *LORD*, David declared, *I love the habitation of your house and the place where your glory dwells*,<sup>15</sup> and in answer to such love he would bring the ark out of its obscurity and place it in the newly-won city of the king. His was a love for God's house which changed the focus of a nation as he shared with them all that was in his heart: *"...let us bring again the ark of our God to us, for we did not seek it in the days of Saul."* *All the assembly agreed to do so, for the thing was right in the eyes of the people.*<sup>16</sup>

The excitement which surrounded David's attempt to bring the ark to Jerusalem came to a swift and tragic end. Amidst the music and song which celebrated the return of God's presence to the centre of national life, the cart which carried the ark rumbled along the road. As the oxen stumbled, Uzzah put forward his hand to steady the ark and, for touching that which was too sacred for him, Uzzah was struck down.<sup>17</sup> The attempt was abandoned, and the ark came to rest in house of Obed-edom. David's motivation had been right, but those who love the dwelling-place of God must be prepared to give





obedience to His ways. David learned his lesson. Three months later, when the ark was finally brought within the walls of Zion, *the children of the Levites bore the ark of God on their shoulders, by its poles, as Moses had commanded according to the word of the LORD.*<sup>18</sup> David's love for God's house was maturing, and finding proper expression in obedience to His commands.

Though the ark now rested in Jerusalem, the old tabernacle which had been God's dwelling in the wilderness still stood on the high place of Gibeon.<sup>19</sup> David's appreciation of the value of God's dwelling caused his heart to swell with a glorious ambition, that a house should be built for the Lord of heaven and earth, *exceedingly magnificent, of fame and glory throughout all lands.*<sup>20</sup> As a man who had shed blood in warfare, David was not permitted to see his ambition realized.<sup>21</sup> It may seem strange to us that God did not allow such a servant to fulfil his godly desire, but the house of God is a place of rest, and David's hands had been stained with the blood of those whom Saul had failed to overcome. David himself knew the peace associated with God's house. In Psalm 29, he pictured a tempest rolling in from the sea, bending the cedars and stripping the forests bare. As thunder growled and lightning flashed from above, still the peace of God's presence remained: *in His temple, everything says "Glory!"*<sup>22</sup> The building of the house was a work to be done after the victory, carried out by a man of rest.<sup>23</sup> David must have been disappointed to learn that he could not build that which was the desire of his heart,

but no bitter word crossed his lips – instead, he made preparation in gathering precious materials for the work, in drawing up plans by the hand of the Lord, and in charging his son to be faithful: *"Arise and work! The LORD be with you!"*<sup>24</sup>

Almost 3,000 years later, the house of God today does not take the form of a physical building. It is built of those who have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, been baptised and added together in local testimony to form a united people for God, serving Him in accordance with His revealed will.<sup>25</sup> For many, the house of God remains a neglected building, forgotten amongst the innovations men have devised to serve God in their own way. But to David it was everything. He would not seek his rest until God had found His<sup>26</sup> – the one thing that captivated him was to  *dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life,*<sup>27</sup> and by that godly ambition we assess the value of his life.

*"I have a treasure of my own,"* David said, *"and because of my devotion to the house of my God I give it."*<sup>28</sup> We live in days when the victory has been won, when we enjoy the rest achieved through the accomplished work of Calvary. It is a day in which God's house must be built, of living stones brought together according to the pattern of His will. May our lives, like David's, be valued according to our estimation of God's house, having no treasure to call our own, save this: *to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple.*<sup>27</sup>

References: (1) Ps. 69:9; John 2:17 (2) Num. 2:17; 9:17 (3) Josh. 3:3-4 (4) Josh. 18:1 (5) 1 Sam. 1:3 (6) Josh. 22:19, 29 (7) Judg. 18:30-31 (8) Judg. 19:18, 22 (9) 1 Sam. 2:12-17 (10) 1 Sam. 1:9-14 (11) 1 Sam. 3:1 (12) 1 Sam. 4:21-22; Ps. 78:58-61 (13) 1 Sam. 13:10-14 (14) 1 Sam. 28:6 (15) Ps. 26:8 (16) 1 Chron. 13:3-4 (17) 2 Sam. 6:5-7 (18) 1 Chron. 15:15 (19) 1 Chron. 16:39; 21:29 (20) 1 Chron. 22:5 (21) 1 Chron. 22:8 (22) Ps. 29:9 NASB (23) 1 Chron. 22:6-10 (24) 1 Chron. 22:14-16 (25) Acts 2:41-42; 1 Pet. 2:5; Heb. 3:6 (26) Ps. 132:43-45 (27) Ps. 27:4 (28) 1 Chron. 29:3

Quotations from the ESV unless stated otherwise

**In Psalm 29 David pictured a tempest rolling in from the sea, bending the cedars and stripping the forests bare. As thunder growled and lightning flashed from above, still the peace of God's presence remained: *in His temple, everything says "Glory!"* The building of the house was a work to be done after the victory, carried out by a man of rest.**



# Merciless maestro

Jonny Archibald, Glasgow, Scotland

One of the striking things about King David is the large number of deep challenges that he was able to overcome in all the experiences of his life.

The simple trust in God he displayed in defeating Goliath<sup>1</sup> was a hallmark of his life of service for God and the people of Israel. Towards the end of his life, David acknowledged his complete dependence on God throughout his experiences as he spoke to Bathsheba, “*As the LORD lives, who has redeemed my life from every distress...*”<sup>2</sup> We can trace the thread of this trust in God and the simple, sincere wish to honour God in all the twists and turns that lay in the path of life that David walked. David walked and ruled in faith despite murderous pursuits from the preceding King Saul, great family sorrows, mistakes and significant opposition from surrounding nations.

One of David’s key relationships was with Joab, the commander of the army under David for almost all of David’s time as king, which totalled 40 years.<sup>3</sup> However, in the very last part of David’s reign, Joab sided with Adonijah, one of David’s sons who sought to take his father’s position (unsuccessfully) as king owing to David’s declining health.

When we are looking at a Bible character it is very challenging to present a true picture of the person, as we must base our learning on a set number of events in the Bible record. Even people we know in our own lives can be difficult to summarise because there can be such a variety of elements to a person’s character that can all be displayed in varying degrees according to circumstances. Based on the Bible record, we could easily take the negative aspects of Joab’s actions and character in certain situations and paint him as a villain throughout. In actual fact, at times he shows positive aspects. Perhaps the best thing we can do is to seek to learn from Joab’s mistakes and take on board the positive steps Joab took in his service.

Joab was David’s nephew through his sister Zeruiah. Zeruiah had three sons: Abishai, Joab and Asahel. It is an interesting point to note that the commander of Saul’s army, preceding David’s rule, was Abner, who was Saul’s cousin. When David, later in life looked into replacing Joab as commander of the army, he was planning to replace him with another nephew, Amasa. It’s quite possible that Saul and David deliberately picked their army commanders on the basis that they were blood relations, in addition to their fighting and leadership capabilities. This would count in the respective king’s favour when it came to an extra degree of loyalty, but

could also count against them if that loyalty affected impartiality when the commander stepped out of line.

In addition to being a blood relation, Joab reacted first when David said: “*Whoever attacks the Jebusites first will be chief and captain.*”<sup>4</sup> Joab also appears to have had practical skills in directing the repair of Jerusalem after it was taken by David’s army.<sup>5</sup>

The first record we have of Joab in the Bible is through a family connection, rather than an incident in which he was personally involved; Joab’s brother Abishai offered to kill King Saul on David’s behalf when David and Abishai found him sleeping.<sup>6</sup> It is clear that Abishai, Joab’s brother would have killed Saul with no regret and, in fact, he attributed the opportunity to kill Saul as God’s provision. David, by contrast, even though he had been pursued extensively by Saul, who had every intention of killing David, would not succumb to Abishai’s suggestion, although that would understandably be very tempting in the circumstances. David had great reverence for Saul’s position as the Lord’s anointed king.

Whilst Abishai and Joab were quite separate people, answerable for their own actions, there is a theme of David lamenting the merciless approach of the sons of Zeruiah in the years that followed. Asahel, who was Abishai and Joab’s brother was killed by Abner, Saul’s army commander after fighting between Saul’s servants (Saul had died by this point) and David’s servants.<sup>7</sup> Later on, Joab, in turn, personally killed Abner. David lamented over Joab’s killing of Abner as follows:

“*...the sons of Zeruiah are too harsh for me. The LORD shall repay the evil-doer according to his wickedness*”.<sup>8</sup>

Later, when Shimei, a relation of Saul, cursed David in front of David’s men and Abishai, Joab’s brother, heard it, he offered to intervene by killing Shimei, David said: “*What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah?*”<sup>9</sup> David said exactly the same thing to Abishai when he appealed again to David for Shimei’s death when Shimei later came to apologise for his cursing.<sup>10</sup> The implication here is that the general response of the sons of Zeruiah to opposition was to resort to violence, whereas David, almost without exception, considered God’s purpose in each situation rather than rely on human reaction.

When Absalom, one of David’s sons, attempted to take away the throne from David he was pursued by Joab and his men who killed him against David’s specific



instructions to “Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom.”<sup>11</sup> Absalom had previously killed one of his own brothers and in order to arrange a meeting with a reluctant Joab, and thereby attract David’s attention, he had set fire to Joab’s barley field.<sup>12</sup> However, that seems insufficient grounds to take Absalom’s life, especially when David had issued instructions to deal gently with him.

It was after the death of Absalom that David said that he would make Amasa, another of his nephews, commander of the army in place of Joab.<sup>13</sup> Shortly afterwards Joab cruelly and publicly killed Amasa.<sup>14</sup>

We have dealt with some of the negative aspects of Joab’s character but there are some more positive aspects to be found:

- He showed faith in God in his leadership of Israel against the people of Ammon,<sup>15</sup>
- He reported fully to David on the progress of battle and he anticipated how David may react to some losses,<sup>16</sup> (although he was willing to assist David in arranging the death of Uriah the Hittite, a loyal<sup>17</sup> and mighty man<sup>18</sup>),
- He called David to battle in case he, Joab, conquered in David’s absence and the royal city of Ammon was then called after Joab, a situation he was keen to avoid,<sup>19</sup>
- He appeared to show some wisdom in giving counsel to David about how the extent of David’s mourning for Absalom could cause desertion by his people.<sup>20</sup>
- He was willing to listen to a reason when a ‘mother in Israel’ averted the death of many in a city by handing over a rebel who was taking refuge within its walls.<sup>21</sup>

As a mark of the knowledge David had of Joab’s way of dealing, he saw through a scheme of deception that Joab had set up to bring about a return to Israel for Absalom.<sup>22</sup>

David’s final words to Solomon included some specific words about Joab: “... you know also what Joab the son of Zeruiah did to me, and what he did to the two commanders of the armies of Israel, to Abner the son of Ner and Amasa the son of Jether, whom he killed. And he shed the blood of war in peacetime, and put the blood of war on his belt that was around his waist, and on his sandals that were on his feet. Therefore do according to your wisdom, and do not let his gray hair go down to the grave in peace.”<sup>23</sup>

It is clear that David observed Joab over the years showing little or no mercy, even to those to whom he was related by blood. In the many challenges that Joab’s actions often brought to David’s approach we can see how David’s faith and mercy shone by contrast. David’s song in 2 Samuel 22 contains the words: “*With the merciful you will show yourself merciful...*”. Such knowledge was won from experience of trusting the Lord of Hosts and, at least in part, learning from the unmerciful approach of a man like Joab.

References: (1) 1 Sam. 17:45 (2) 1 Kin. 1:29 (3) 2 Sam. 5:4-5 (4) 1 Chron. 11:6 (5) 1 Chron. 11:8 (6) 1 Sam. 26:6-9 (7) 2 Sam. 2 (8) 2 Sam. 3:39 (9) 2 Sam. 16:10 (10) 2 Sam. 19:22 (11) 2 Sam. 18:5 (12) 2 Sam. 14:30 (13) 2 Sam. 19:13 (14) 2 Sam. 20:10 (15) 2 Sam. 10:12 (16) 2 Sam. 11:18-20 (17) 2 Sam. 11:9 (18) 1 Chron. 11:41 (19) 2 Sam. 12:27-28 (20) 2 Sam. 18:5-7 (21) 2 Sam. 20:15-22 (22) 2 Sam. 14:19 (23) 1 Kin. 2:5-6

Bible quotations from NKJV



**It’s quite possible that Saul and David deliberately picked their army commanders on the basis that they were blood relations, in addition to their fighting and leadership capabilities.**

# One-anothering

## Love one another

Tony Jones, Aberkenfig, Wales

Do you ever scratch your head when hearing a quotation and think ‘is that scripture or just some wisdom of the world’? ‘Love covers a multitude of sins’ is often cited with perhaps many not knowing that they are in fact the words of God, even if slightly misquoted.

Peter knew the forgiving love of his Lord rescuing him from his bitter experience.<sup>1</sup> He’d also been instructed that he was not to enumerate how often his brother offended him.<sup>2</sup> Love is the key.

Three times the Lord investigated the depth of Peter’s love for Him.<sup>3</sup> In chapters 13 and 15 of John, though, Jesus says four times that we should love one another. Don’t we, too, find that our love for the Lord comes more readily than that for our brothers and sisters? Peter was paying close attention that Passover night, knowing that there was something special taking place, so his writings are based on his own appreciation that no doubt came afterwards.

Peter encourages the readers of his first letter to *love each other deeply because love covers over a multitude of sins*.<sup>4</sup> His next words give us some advice as to how to effect this love for each other: *Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others*.<sup>5</sup> The Lord underlines by His own actions the blessing to be found in spending time together, often in houses over a meal, and gives us the sublime example of humility and service in the washing of his disciples’ feet. Peter’s words are from experience of being with the Lord, and an insight worth consideration as we deal with this recurring difficulty of loving each other.



John, the loved disciple, also took to heart those specific words of the Lord on that Passover celebration evening, referring to them no less than five times in his epistles. In 1 John 3:7-12 he uses three approaches with supporting arguments as to why we should love each other:

1) *Let us love one another for love comes from God*.<sup>6</sup> This appeal is made on the grounds that the God whom we serve is love and exudes love. We are His children, as John has previously asserted, so we should pray for release from our selfishness to live out our Father’s character. We need to take a deep interest in each other and let that work out into a caring love. Let us!

2) *Since God so loved us, we ought to love one another*.<sup>7</sup> This time John lays a duty on us: it’s meaningful because of Calvary. To fulfil our responsibility more effectively, pray for deeper insight into that atoning sacrifice. This helps us to not be critical of others as we become more aware of our own significant failings. We ought!

3) *No-one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us*.<sup>8</sup> John suggests that, as we embrace this command, there will be an outworking of God’s love which otherwise does not happen. He makes the point that people cannot see God Himself, so linking this to the Lord’s own comment – “*By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another*,”<sup>9</sup> we see why it is vital. Our prayer based on this can be that our love for each other speaks volumes of Christ, and attracts others to Him. If we!

The Lord set the bar high saying, “*As I have loved you, so you must love one another*.”<sup>10</sup> On that centre cross His love covered over the multitude of our sins (in the even more wonderful sense of atoning for them fully). Of course we love Him, so let’s love one another more as well.

References: (1) John 18:17,25,27; 21:15-17 (2) Mat. 18:21-22 (3) John 21:17 (4) 1 Pet. 4:8 (5) 1 Pet. 4:9-10 (6) 1 John 3:7 (7) 1 John 3:11 (8) 1 John 3:12 (9) John 13:35 (10) John 13:34

Bible quotations from NIV

**... love each other deeply because love covers over a multitude of sins.**  
(1 Pet. 4:8)



# Where was God when ...?

Peter Hickling, Cromer, England

... a mudslide killed over 100 people? ... a tsunami killed thousands? ... six million Jews were murdered? ... 800,000 Tutsis were killed in around 100 days in Rwanda?

Sceptics will argue 'If there is a God, either he had the power to do something about them, and did nothing, therefore he doesn't care about human beings; or he didn't have the power, which negates the very idea of God'. There are two broad categories here:

## Natural disasters

The recent mudslide near Seattle and the tsunamis in the Indian Ocean have cost many lives – should God be blamed for inaction? Physical events can be studied scientifically and often predicted. Could God stop them? On the basis of Scripture, the answer must be 'Yes'. In the Old Testament God parted the waters of the Red Sea and stopped the flow of the Jordan; in the New Testament Jesus walked on the sea and raised the dead. However, these were isolated incidents in which God reached in from outside Nature for His own purposes; if in every case He were to act to overcome the laws of physics we would be living in an unpredictable universe, since what would benefit one person would not necessarily benefit another. In most cases God expects us to 'keep calm and carry on'. He provides Christians with the help of the Holy Spirit within them, and even those who have never bothered much about God in the past may call on Him in a time of desperate need – perhaps leading to a faith that was never there before. We ought to remember that this is not about earthly life alone; those who die in disasters have an eternal life to face, and their attitude to God and his Christ in this life determines that destiny. God does care, to the extent that he sent His Son to die to bring people to himself.

## Rampant evil

The month of April 2014 was the 20th anniversary of the genocide in Rwanda, when some 800,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutu people were slaughtered in 100 days by members of the Hutu tribe, armed for the most part with nothing more advanced than clubs and machetes. They were organised by members of the armed forces, and even given 'hit lists' of people to kill. The government radio station urged Hutus to kill Tutsis, telling them to 'weed out the cockroaches'. This could happen because in a tribally divided country the Hutus were in the minority, although they were in power. The hard-liners wanted to kill all Tutsi to retain that power, and incited Hutus to kill neighbours with whom they had long lived peacefully.

Older readers will remember Hitler's 'final solution of the Jewish problem'. The Jews were an identifiable race,



many better-off than average (and many musically and intellectually gifted), and thus Hitler was able to stir up envy and hatred against them. It ended up with the deaths of six million Jews, who had first been taken from their homes to concentration camps, then systematically slaughtered. Most will have seen photographs of the emaciated bodies of those killed or brought to the verge of death.

How can it happen? How could it happen that the people of countries that produced Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Luther, Einstein and Schweitzer should acquiesce in the barbarities of a demagogue like Hitler? What makes people suddenly murder hundreds of thousands of the neighbours they had previously lived peacefully with? A reporter who saw hundreds of people murdered in churches where they had taken refuge, sometimes with the connivance of the priest, wrote after twenty years of reporting, 'My personal sense now is that there are no real political solutions to human wickedness. Ironically, as time has progressed, thinking hard and long about those churches, I have come to believe that the only consolation is spiritual'.<sup>1</sup>

He was right. Whether people are highly civilised and 'cultured' or live simple and 'primitive' lives human nature is the same – *Scripture imprisoned everything under sin*.<sup>2</sup> What would you have God do about it? Prevent every sinful action? All of them, or just some serious ones? Since God hates all sin He would have to prevent every wrong; to do that would make us all automata. Instead, God gives us every incentive to do right, by bringing to those who will trust in His Son a new birth in Him. If we fail He offers the prospect of forgiveness. The truth is that God is always here, but He doesn't usually prevent events, either human or natural ones, but offers strength to survive through them. After all, He has been there Himself: Christ suffered, both at the hands of men and as the sin-bearer, and overcame it all.

References: (1) The Spectator, 5th April 2014, p.21  
(2) Gal. 3:22 ESV

## Methods of Bible study

# Choosing a Bible translation for study

Karl Smith, Kirkintilloch, Scotland

The Bible was not given to us originally in English. The Old Testament, mainly for the people of Israel, was given in their Hebrew language. Some sections in Ezra and Daniel use Aramaic, the dialect the Lord Jesus Himself probably spoke. By the Lord's time, Greek was understood across most of the Mediterranean world, the Romans having taken over the Eastern part of their Empire from the Greeks. God therefore chose this language for the written revelation in the New Testament.

There is then no single 'inspired' English translation of the Scriptures. It is important, however, to choose a version of the Bible that represents the inspired original faithfully. A lot of the study tools you may want to use are based on the Authorised (or King James) Version of 1611, so you may find this beautiful version helpful to use. An update called the New King James Version keeps the old vocabulary where it has not dropped out of use, but uses the grammar of contemporary English to make it easier to follow. Since 1611, more copies of the original manuscripts have come to light and more recent versions take these into account. I personally like to use a version that aims to put the same English word for the same Greek word throughout, except where this makes the meaning unclear or the context dictates otherwise. The Revised Version aimed to do this and so do its successors, such as the English Standard Version or the New American Standard Bible. This way you can have a fair idea of which Greek word stands behind the English word you are reading. The important thing, however, is that you use a version you can understand.

Some study tools exist to help those of us (including myself) who have not mastered the original languages. An analytical concordance (such as Young's) groups the English words according to the word in the original that they are translating. A lexicon is a special concordance that lists Greek and Hebrew words in alphabetical order instead of English ones. Many computer programmes exist that make all this much easier. You can click on a word in a verse and see straightaway which Greek word it translates and another click will give you all the places that this Greek word occurs! This helps in making connections between verses that we might otherwise miss. For instance, the golden cover of the ark of the covenant with the carved cherubim is translated 'mercy seat' in Hebrews 9:5, adopting the language of the Old Testament. The Greek word for mercy seat is *hilasterion*. In Romans 3, the word is translated 'propitiation', which means making peace with God, usually by a sacrifice: *Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith* (vv.24-25).

Propitiation for the sins of the individual by Christ's death in our place is the subject of Romans 3. When we realise this same word is the New Testament name for the Old Testament mercy seat, where blood was sprinkled annually for the sins of the people, it brings out an interesting linking thought. For a nation of people with sin in their hearts, to approach God would only have brought the judgement of a righteous God, but the shedding and sprinkling of blood in this inner sanctuary is also a 'propitiation' that cleansed everything and allowed them to come near. This was part of the purpose of Christ's sacrifice – to propitiate God so that a New Testament people can enter His presence together and bring sacrifices of praise.

Access to Hebrew and Greek scholarship also helps to recognise subtle distinctions between ideas that a single English word might hide. For example, the Lord's question, "Do you love me?" in John 21:15-17 appears to be the same each of the three times in our English translation. Two different words for 'love' appear in the original, however. The first two times, the Lord Jesus asks, "Do you *agape* me?" (often found as an all-consuming unselfish love of the whole will). Peter replies, "Yes Lord; you know that I *phileo* you," (usually an affectionate love based on cherishing someone). The third time, the Lord uses Peter's word in the question. Perhaps this suggests that the Lord accepts our *phileo*, but wants our *agape* love.

Obviously it is a real advantage to learn these languages or to use the short cuts outlined above. Please, however, don't be put off studying the Bible if this is not for you. In whatever language, the Lord's requirements of us and the depths of His love become more real to us the more we study the words God uses to convey them to us.





# The Prosperity Gospel

Frederick Ntido, Lagos, Nigeria

## What does ‘the prosperity gospel’ mean?

The prosperity gospel is sometimes referred to as the ‘prosperity theology’, ‘health and wealth gospel’ or ‘the gospel of success’. It teaches that it is the right of all Christians to be healthy and wealthy. This right is presented as based on a covenant relationship which God enters into with all believers at the point of salvation. God is considered bound by His covenant obligations to ensure the health and wealth of all His children. As such, God and the Holy Spirit are considered to be at the disposal of believers to bring about prosperity through positive confession and other ‘spiritual’ activities such as giving of tithes and offerings to churches and ministries.

There are Bible passages which the exponents of the prosperity gospel repeat: ... *the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, ... that you through His poverty might become rich.*<sup>1</sup> *I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.*<sup>2</sup> *But He was wounded for our transgressions, ... by His stripes we are healed.*<sup>3</sup>

The prosperity gospel is not a recent phenomenon, although it has over time increased in the number of adherents. The message of prosperity preachers centres largely on the hearers contributing financially to their ministries or churches in order to unlock the door to unparalleled wealth and blessings. The yardstick for this is usually Malachi 3:10: “*Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, ... and try Me now in this,*” says the LORD of hosts, “*If I will not ... pour out for you such blessing ...*” Many of the prominent prosperity preachers are stupendously rich due to the hundreds of thousands and sometimes millions of individuals donating to their churches and causes. They frequently present themselves as proof of the authenticity and efficacy of their message. However, what does the Bible actually teach?

## The Bible teaching about wealth and health in the Old Testament

Adam and Eve enjoyed unequalled health and wealth prior to the entry of sin. The Lord gave Adam dominion over all living things and he was created to live forever.<sup>4</sup> However, with the entrance of sin the dynamics of creation changed: man would die, both physically and spiritually, and he was to labour before he would meet his basic needs.<sup>5</sup> There was now no automatic right to health and wealth.

In the Old Testament, the Lord reminded the Israelites not to forget that He gave them the power to get wealth.<sup>6</sup> Although He gave specific instructions, compliance with which would usher in material and physical blessings for the individuals, yet there were still poor and unhealthy persons amongst the Israelites and continuing support for these was enjoined.<sup>7</sup> The Old Testament is replete with

references to the all-sufficiency of the Almighty God and warnings on the danger of a life devoted to the pursuit of wealth.<sup>8</sup> The wise man Solomon observed this.

## Does God promise wealth and health in the New Testament?

The New Testament gives clear guidance about health and wealth. The Lord declared: “*In the world you will have tribulation.*”<sup>9</sup> Christians have no guarantee of material and physical ease.<sup>10</sup> They are called to a life of self-denial, knowing that they are strangers and pilgrims in this world.<sup>11</sup> Whilst some believers may be entrusted with material wealth, it is never for self-indulgence, but for the benefit of others who are less privileged.<sup>12</sup> There are repeated injunctions to keep ourselves free from the love of money, to learn contentment and to pursue godliness. The transience of our present troubles (whether physical or material) is contrasted with the eternal weight of glory being worked out for us.<sup>13</sup>

## The sovereignty of God

God is sovereign, but the prosperity gospel advocates He cannot do as He pleases.<sup>14</sup> He is depicted as a benevolent benefactor at the service of believers who can get Him to act by saying the right words in ‘faith’. This ‘gospel’ is a grave error as it enthrones ‘the deity of the believer’ who is conferred with similar authority as the Almighty. In the early days of Christianity there appeared to have been elements of this error, as some deemed godliness a means to financial gain and others encouraged the pursuit of material prosperity to the detriment of their spiritual lives. It is to such that the injunction about the love of money being a root of all evil refers.<sup>15</sup>

## Dependence on God

Scripture admonishes us to work with all our might and to put our trust in God who gives us all things richly to enjoy. We are exhorted to be content with food and clothing and, where blessed with wealth, to employ it in the furtherance of God’s kingdom. We are to store up our treasures in heaven and to know we cannot serve both God and money. Importantly, the Lord Jesus instructs us to guard against every form of greed. Greed, is the cornerstone of the prosperity gospel.<sup>16</sup>

References: (1) 2 Cor. 8:9 (2) 3 John 1:2 (3) Isa. 53:5 (4) Gen. 1:28-30 (5) Gen. 3:17-19 (6) Deut. 8:18; Prov. 10:22; Ecc. 6:2 (7) Deut. 28:1-68; 15:7 (8) Ps. 24:1-2; 50:10-12; Prov. 28:22; 27:24 (9) John 16:33 (10) Mat. 8:20; 16:24 (11) 1 Pet. 2:11; Heb. 13:16 (12) 2 Cor. 9:8; 1 Tim. 6:17-19; Mark 14:7; Heb. 13:6 (13) Heb. 13:5; 2 Cor. 4:17 (14) Dan. 4:32; Isa. 45:11 (15) 1 Tim. 6:10; 2 Pet. 2:1-19 (16) Luke 12:15; Mat. 6:19,24; Ecc. 9:10; Col. 3:23; 1 Tim. 6:8,17

Bible quotations from NKJV

# Christ in the Gospels

## Luke's Christ

Mario Magallanes, Tagum, Philippines

The Gospel of Luke is the third of the synoptic Gospels which describe the early life of Jesus, our Saviour. Luke was a medical doctor, historian and writer of the New Testament. He was a faithful companion of the apostle Paul. Starting at Troas, he joined Paul in his ministry journeys, as recorded in the book of Acts.



Luke's Gospel was written to the Gentiles generally – to people everywhere. He wrote to a man named Theophilus. The name Theophilus means 'one who loves God'. He was probably a Gentile, a high ranking official, because when Luke writes, he salutes him with the title 'most excellent'. Theophilus had apparently shown interest in learning more about the facts, and had wanted to know the certainty of the things he had been instructed in. Luke had confidence to write the Gospel, having understanding of all things from the beginning.

The Gospel by Luke contains detail about the annunciation to Zacharias; John the Baptist's birth and his preparing the way for the coming Messiah; the announcement of the Messiah's birth; the divine conception and human birth of Jesus; the baptism of Jesus; the recording of His genealogy; His special testing time; His first ministry in Galilee; His preaching; casting out of demons; healing the sick; cleansing the diseased; appointment of His disciples; teaching with parables; rebuke of the storm; healing a woman with a blood haemorrhage; raising up a dead girl; sending Jesus' disciples to preach the good news; the feeding of five thousand people; instructing people how to follow Him; teaching concerning prayer and the kingdom of God; reaching out to Zacchaeus; and then at the end, the presentation of Himself for redemption; entering into Jerusalem triumphantly; cleansing the temple; instituting the breaking of the bread ordinance; His death, resurrection and finally His ascension.

Luke gives accurate detail of the humanity of Jesus. He presents Him as a normal and perfect man, come to reveal God among men in His saving grace to fallen mankind. The writer presents the Lord's complete genealogy from His parents back to Adam. Featuring Jesus as the Son of Man (a title Jesus used often of Himself, e.g. in 9:22), Luke portrays Jesus as a person who has a good relationship with all. He especially emphasizes His compassionate feeling to the poor, the sick and the suffering, as well as the desperate and sinful ones. He is presented as caring for everyone with the same unfeigned love, regardless of their nationality. In Him, there is no such discrimination.

Luke portrays to us that Jesus is a person who is God and man combined, conceived of the divine Holy Spirit and born of a human mother. It's wonderful; the Lord has a human mother, but no human father! When the angel of the Lord appeared to Mary and told her that she had found favour with God, he said: "... *behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS*".<sup>1</sup> In Hebrew, the word 'Jesus' is 'Joshua' which means 'Jehovah the saviour' or 'the salvation of Jehovah'.

If John's Gospel emphasizes the Son of God aspect; Luke places the emphasis on the Son of Man aspect. What is the difference? John emphasizes the divine side; while Luke emphasizes the human side. Jesus, in His human life on earth, expressed divine attributes through human virtues. The Lord Jesus, now seated at the right hand of God in heaven, retains His dual nature.

Since the Lord Jesus is both God and man, He is able to save lost sinners, lifting them out from their sins. Luke portrays Jesus as the Son of Man who had come to seek and to save the lost.<sup>2</sup> Zacchaeus was one of those lost sinners. The Book of Isaiah says, *We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*<sup>3</sup> *All have sinned,*<sup>4</sup> and our sin separates us from God. God is most holy; He cannot condone sin; it requires punishment. Jesus paid the death penalty for everyone who will believe on Him.

Jesus is portrayed as the great physician. He healed a woman with *a flow of blood.*<sup>5</sup> Luke's diagnosis of her was of an incurable case, but nothing is impossible with God.<sup>6</sup> Jesus, the Son of Man stands by our side all the time, when we put our faith and trust in Him.

Luke tells us that the Son of Man will one day come in the clouds with power and great glory. Everyone who has accepted Him as personal saviour will by then be with Him forever.

Bible quotations from NKJV

References: (1) Luke 1:30-31 (2) Luke 19:10 (3) Isa. 53:6 (4) Rom. 3:23 (5) Luke 8:43-48 (6) Luke 1:37



# Learning from Him

An interview with Geralde Mag-usara, Davao, Philippines

## ***Tell us a little about your background and current circumstances***

I was raised in a God-fearing family. I thank God for that good start. But sadly, I was spiritually astray in different denominations I'd been attending before. This was because I was like the horse's tail: wherever my father headed, I went too. I wasn't then following what the Bible says, but was afraid of my dad's punishment if I didn't follow him. Then I became a backslider and a prodigal son. But in 2004, God used two of his full-time workers (Brian Johnston and Brian Tugwell) and helped me find the truth. Since then, I began to study the Bible seriously and I was amazed for the first time that salvation is eternal, through faith,<sup>1</sup> and I was convinced that there's only one place where God dwells on earth and where He wants us to worship Him – His house.<sup>2</sup> Having newly found these precious truths, I was added to the Church of God in Tagum in 2005. While still a teenager and student, I became involved in spreading the Good News including that about the house of God in places where God was working.

However, God's Enemy tried to stop my service for Him. When Linnie and I had a relationship while we were both in college, the Devil tempted us and that resulted in excommunication from the Church of God. That was a very painful thing to experience in our lives. But God is so gracious. He corrected our mistake and we learned so much from it. As in the case of Peter, God used me again for His service. Now we have a lovely son, John Herald (3 years old), and we long for him to become a man of God.

## ***In Acts 13:2, Scripture gives us a window into how God's call became apparent to Saul and Barnabas; how was it in your case?***

I believe the Lord began to speak to me, calling me for His service during my college years. In all my spare time

(usually every weekend and holidays), I became excited to do the Lord's work, and not to rest and have fun in the vacation with my friends (as college students usually do). In fact, I became more zealous to study the lesson from my heavenly Teacher in preparation for the next Bible-sharing message than in studying any college lesson from my teacher there. When I became aware that many denominations do not follow the biblical pattern in serving the Master, and that there is also a need for more servants to care for God's people in the Churches of God here, my heart responded to His call as echoed from Isaiah 6:8, "Whom shall I send?" which is parallel to Romans 10:14-15, *How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, unless they are sent?* These verses had a great impact on my life.

## ***What were the biggest challenges to faith in stepping out?***

Handling conflict among God's people. Before I only solved my own problems, but now I need to solve problems that were not mine. However, I thank God who gives me strength<sup>3</sup> to cope with it. Another challenge is not always being able to discern contacts who are genuinely truth-seekers. My typical initial ministry here in any new place is in the 'open air' through showing the 'Jesus' film to a crowd of people. During follow-up, I still find myself spending time chasing those who are not interested. I am still slow to learn who are genuinely seeking.

## ***What has been the biggest adjustment so far?***

Time management. When I was still single, the work for the Lord took most of my time. My parents would only see me in our house if I was unwell. But when well, I went elsewhere evangelizing. I never heard



of my parents protesting about my work. But when I got married, and I did the same as before, my wife protested! Yes, I was guilty that I left almost no time to spend with my family. I realized that the Apostle Paul, in his own perception, was right that it is good for a man to remain unmarried so that his time will only be focused on the things of the Lord.<sup>4</sup> However, someone brilliantly advised me to give time for my family – it's the Lord's work – not mine. Even our Lord allowed His disciples to take rest.<sup>5</sup> From then on, I realized the essence of managing my time: time for ministerial work and time for my family. My wife and I made adjustments.

## ***What are the 'desires of your heart' before the Lord?***

I desire that each of the Churches of God in the Philippines may become mature and active in witnessing to others. May the Lord open the eyes and hearts of the people we are witnessing to, that they may grasp the things which are precious to Him and treat them like treasures.<sup>7</sup>

## ***How can we best pray for you in your service for the Master?***

Please pray that I manage my time well for the Lord's work, with time for my family also. May the Lord give me more wisdom, knowledge, guidance, grace and perseverance in doing His things for His glory. May God help me carry out fully the ministry He has given to me.<sup>8</sup>

References: (1) John 10:27-29 (2) Deut. 12:13-14; Ex. 25:8,9 (3) Phil 4:13 (4) 1 Cor. 7:32 (5) Mark 14:32 (6) Ps. 37:4 (7) Mat.13:44 (8) 2 Tim 4:5

## Early heresies

# Marcionism

Andy Seddon, Swindon, England

Marcionism was a set of beliefs that took its name from a man named Marcion, a native of Asia Minor who lived in Rome in approximately AD 140. Marcion dismissed the authority of the Old Testament Scriptures because he saw in them a wrathful Hebrew God who was vastly inferior to the gracious, loving Father-God revealed by Jesus Christ. Rooted in gnostic and docetic thought (see previous articles in the series) Marcion also believed that the OT God who created the world must have been flawed because the material world was naturally wicked.

He believed that the teachings of the apostles had been distorted by their own Jewish beliefs; except for Paul, whom he argued was the only one who grasped the distinction between these two different deities.

Marcion devised his own 'canon' of Scripture which contained two parts. The first, 'The Gospel' consisted of his own distortion of Luke's gospel. The second, 'The Apostle' included Paul's first ten letters to the churches which were also 'purified' to fit his philosophy. Unsurprisingly none of the Old Testament books found their way into his canon.

Marcionism gained a significant following and its beliefs continued in the west for centuries after him. In fact, the essence of this heresy is alive and well today to differing degrees.

### Modern day Marcionism

The discomfort that many people have with the Old Testament continues to display itself today. There are, of course, some difficult passages to stomach for the modern, secular reader. For example, there are passages which include acts of violence commanded by God, plagues, retribution on the unrighteous and capital punishment for behaviours which are considered by many to be perfectly acceptable today. Some of the Old Testament can be tough to understand, or to interpret, and many have difficulty with applying it to modern life due to the ancient cultural setting. Of course, the same might often be said for much of the New Testament too, including the teachings of Jesus Himself.

To summarise the difficulty that many have, Philip Yancey writes:<sup>1</sup> '[The OT] doesn't always make sense, and what sense it does make offends modern ears.' The well-known militant atheist, Richard Dawkins takes it much further when he scathingly writes:<sup>2</sup> 'The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction.' Many of these objections are exacerbated by taking passages out of context, failing to understand the complete purposes of God under the old and new

covenants, or simply assuming that modern liberal beliefs hold moral superiority over the eternal will of God.

Marcionism, and other heresies in early Christianity, at least had a positive outcome of prompting the church fathers to carefully define the faith and the canon of scripture. This didn't mean adding or changing things, but rather officially confirming and stating what was already accepted. Our response is equally important today. Jude encourages us to *contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints*.<sup>3</sup>

### One God: two Testaments

The apostle Paul, whom Marcion supposedly endorsed, declares to Timothy, *There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*.<sup>4</sup> This agrees with Jesus Himself who states in prayer: "*And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent*".<sup>5</sup> There is no doubt that, to Jesus, this 'only true God' was the God of the Old Testament. These were the Scriptures that He read and believed, and His conviction about the uniqueness of this God is displayed when He cites Deuteronomy to Satan: "*You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve*."<sup>6</sup>

The notion of only one God and only one way of salvation through Christ alone is not popular in a multi-religious world where exclusivity seems arrogant towards other faiths. However, it is impossible to believe contradicting things, and we therefore must hold fast to what we know from God's Word and Jesus Himself. There is *one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all*.<sup>7</sup>

### One God: one nature

It can be easy to fall into a Marcionist error of distinguishing an 'angry OT God' from a 'loving NT God'. In reality, God is God, in all of His rich divine attributes, whether they sit comfortably or uncomfortably with us. We cannot just make God what our human nature wants Him to be, or He would actually be no more significant than an idol made by human hands. Moses is given a rich revelation of God's all-encompassing character in the following declaration:

*"The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and fourth generation."*<sup>8</sup>



We read of righteous anger and judgement in the New Testament, just as we read about God's grace and kindness throughout the Old Testament. In fact, it is in the person of Christ Himself that *all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell*.<sup>9</sup>

### The integrity of both testaments

Paul states that, *All scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness*.<sup>10</sup> He also reminds the Romans, *Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction*.<sup>11</sup>

Marcion was committing a serious error by excluding, adding and editing scriptural texts to support his preferred version of theological truth; can we be in danger of doing the very same today, no matter how subtly it may happen? Marcion's canon of Scripture does trigger the question which many sceptics ask today: what books do actually belong in the Bible and why? There isn't space to explore this question in depth in this article, but it is worth touching on briefly.

Regarding the Old Testament, the Christian apologist Amy Orr-Ewing summarizes:<sup>12</sup> 'The evidence points towards an established Hebrew canon before 150 BC' partly because the content we are familiar with was referred to by the Jewish historian Josephus who was born in AD 37. It illustrates that the books contained in the canon were already widely accepted as authoritative and inspired.

We can have the same confidence in the New Testament canon, as FF Bruce writes:<sup>13</sup> 'When at last a Church Council – the Synod of Hippo in AD 393 – listed the twenty seven books of the New Testament, it did not confer upon them any authority which they did not already possess, but simply recorded their previously established canonicity.'

### The importance of the Old Testament

When controversial beliefs are contested, like the teaching on homosexual practise, it is often argued that 'Jesus never said that', or 'Jesus changed all that'. This may be true in the context of dispensational arrangements, but it is not true of absolute moral law, because God's character does not change. Jesus made it very clear:

*"Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfil them"*.<sup>14</sup>

He taught the Jews that the Scriptures they read were the Scriptures that *"bear witness about me."*<sup>15</sup> After His resurrection when Jesus met with the couple on the road to Emmaus it says: *Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself*.<sup>16</sup>

The Old Testament prepares its readers for the necessity of the incarnation, death, resurrection and future reign of the



Christ. This is the scarlet thread which unites 66 diverse books into one miraculous story of God's fierce holiness and gracious love combined. Any heresy ultimately steers us away from the wonderful truth that, *Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures*.<sup>17</sup>

References: (1) Philip Yancey, 'The Bible Jesus Read' 2002 (2) Richard Dawkins, 'The God Delusion' 2006 (3) Jude 3 (4) 1 Tim. 2:5 (5) John 17:3 (6) Mat. 4:10, citing Deut. 6:13 (7) Eph. 4:5-6 (8) Ex. 34:6 (9) Col. 1:19 (10) 2 Tim. 3:16 (11) Rom. 15:4 (12) Amy Orr-Ewing, 'Why Trust the Bible' 2005 (13) F.F. Bruce, 'The Books and Parchments: How we got our English Bible' 1984 (14) Mat. 5:17-19 (15) John 5:39 (16) Luke 24:27 (17) 1 Cor. 15:3-4

Bible quotations from ESV

Editors expect that the articles in this series will challenge readers to explore in more depth the matters briefly introduced here. Correspondence with readers is invited where further information is held on the views propounded in the articles.

## Mission

# What a relief!

Colin Jarvis, Swindon, England

I had no sense of what it would feel like to be in Nigeria. “You should be careful about food, water, walking free, insect bites, toilets, traffic.” “Take a mosquito net, wet wipes, a cheap camera; don’t forget your jabs; stick close, dress down ... but do enjoy it!”



At 53 I would be truly out of my comfort zone for the first time. It would turn out to be eye-opening, life-changing, heart-warming! It was only for 3 weeks but I sobbed into my wife’s arms on return. I knew something of the idea of providing relief in developing countries. Now I had witnessed and appreciated some of the need; my senses had captured elements of the tough life. My heart and mind had begun to grasp the desperate need of those we met which was battling with their determination. It shone out of the faces and lives of so many people, young and old. Their love for God and their trust in Jesus Christ was evident.

Back in the UK, the Fellowship of Churches of God had a Relief Committee (FRC) in place. It mainly responded to need – to meet the effects of natural disasters, to enable young people to grow and learn, and to support personal and communal initiatives that required funding. Regular giving from churches and individuals had enabled this essential work. I had seen the effects of flooding but also the evident drive of individuals with an idea. Shaped plans mixed with Christian giving could offer hope that was sustainable. It seemed that I turned full circle and sat down in the FRC circle!

Our full-time ministers were invariably the eyes and ears for the FRC. They opened the window for the committee to see the need in **Burma**, **India**, the **Philippines**, and other African countries including **Ghana** and **Malawi** as well as **Nigeria**.

In a few years this changed significantly when an English lecturer, a doctor and a secondary school teacher offered their abilities for a year. Karl, Joy & Norma (UK3), later joined by Bryan (+1), were God-sent! FRC was overjoyed! Our response to tornados, floods and poor harvests remained sharp, our core values were unchanged but we had resolved to develop our proactive work. Malawi was the chosen location in this instance; 5 churches barely 10 years old – there are 8 now. Tony Nemi and Mark Imoukhuede, full-time Nigerian ministers were willing to help. There was a real sense, by all involved, that this was another example of Paul’s encouraging words in action, when he said, *We’re God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

Could we create a template for activity, weaving together resources, skills, requirements, local knowledge & micro-technology? From a distance of 9 years, it is clear that the UK3 (+1), together with short-term volunteers,

- gave time
- determined the needs
- helped to meet them
- lived the life
- shared love
- reached out with both hands.

In one hand they gave support, financed through the Fellowship Relief funds. In the other, they offered Christ as a lifetime friend. Together those hands, and many others, prayed over the project.

This evolving work had set the trend, opened the door, shown what could be done, and we were learning how it can be maintained. The message spread, and God continued to touch a variety of willing hearts. World-wide provisions include medical care for rural communities, adult education, travel support, care for orphans, school uniform & educational fees and improved crop development.

With every ground-breaking initiative, the pick sometimes hits rocks. Hard times are learning opportunities. The originator, our loving Father, may hand us different tools or direct us to alternative fields of work. We must always be prepared to learn, adapt and involve others.

I know that many subscribers to NT appreciate that our confidence is in *a new and living way* that Jesus Christ has opened up for us, giving us a strong hope. The Hebrews writer continues, *let us consider how we may spur each other on towards love and good works.* I have the privilege to send letters and emails of thanks to financial and prayer supporters of FRC; from churches of all sizes to those who send personal, precious gifts. Once again can I say thank you from those who benefit in such a variety of ways.

References: (1) Eph. 2:10 (2) Heb. 10:24 NIV