

# *new covenant* Voice

*Jesus said, 'Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost;'*

*Matthew 28:19*

**But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to GOD the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect and to JESUS the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel See that ye refuse not him that speaketh**

**HEBREWS 12:22-25**

**ISSUE NO. 13**

**SPRING 1989**

# CONVERTS OR CHILDREN

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## RACHEL'S CRY 'Give me children ...'

The following article, presented with minimal editing, is the substance of ministry given to elders and wives at Bracknell Fellowship on 16th July, 1988, and the editor considered it of importance to be reproduced for a wider readership.

Please turn with me to the book of Genesis. I want to read to you from the 30th chapter. *'And when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister; and said unto Jacob, Give me children or else I die. And Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel; and he said, Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb? And she said, Behold my maid Bilhah, go in unto her; and she shall bear upon my knees that I may also have children by her. And she gave him Bilhah her handmaid to wife; and Jacob went in unto her. And Bilhah conceived, and bare Jacob a son. And Rachel said, God hath judged me, and hath also heard my voice, and hath given me a son; therefore called she his name Dan'.*

Many years ago, somebody told me about a man who had preached in their church on that great cry of Rachel's, *'Give me children or else I die'*. I never heard the man preach, but from that moment (and that was many years ago) I decided that one of these days I was going to preach on it. I was greatly affected by it. I saw the difference between getting converts and bearing children, and it's about this that I want to talk to you this morning. Rachel spoke out of envy, the background of which is that both she and her older sister Leah were discovered, upon marriage, to be barren. Leah was given to Jacob first, but bore no children and it was a double tragedy when Rachel eventually came into the home and was found to be barren too - imagine the terrible disappointment! A tremendous jealousy developed between the two women. And a great rivalry. And hatred. This is exactly the word Leah used when she gave birth to her first child. God had heard that she was hated, she said, by Rachel perhaps, and possibly Jacob too. *'When the Lord saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb'*, we read, *'and Rachel was barren'*. And so it goes on. At last, children of the marriage were coming and the more the children came, the more terrible Rachel felt, for she herself had not borne Jacob one child.

## HAVE YOU ANY CHILDREN?

This morning, I want to ask each one of you: you man and you woman, how many children have you borne to your Lord Jesus Christ? I'm not enquiring how many converts you've made, or how many people attend your meetings. Answer quite honestly before God - how many children have you personally borne to Him? For a long time there has been a grief in my heart that we're influencing many people and getting converts

(perhaps to new covenant teaching, or whatever) and yet when I meet them I don't find any life in them, none at all. I believe that people are getting doctrinally correct ideas, and do you know, beloved, I think God doesn't care one little bit about the doctrines people believe, initially. People do not get saved by believing doctrines, by believing and accepting doctrines, people only become converts. The only thing that counts is whether or not they have the life of God throbbing in them. Brethren or sisters, this isn't said in any critical spirit, but out of deep concern. What I say is not only in my heart, but in the hearts of many others also.

*'Give me children or else I die'*, said Rachel, and I invite you to take up that cry as a prayer. Look round in your fellowships, congregations, groups, or whatever you call them, and see how many real children of God there are, and, mark you, not somebody else's children, yours. Leah had borne to her lord, and so had Bilhah, but not Rachel. Lots of people rejoice in somebody else's children, but can you rejoice in any of your own? May I ask of you each individually how many children you have personally borne to God? May I ask you too whether you think there's anything else worth living for? And if you do think so and you are living for those things, and being satisfied in them, God have mercy on your souls - that's how serious it is to my mind. Give me children - give me children. It might sound a bit incongruous to hear a man speaking in these terms and tones, taking up a woman's cry - but in this there is neither male or female. Rachel never asked Jacob to beget children. She knew he wanted them - he had often sought them of her. Bear that in mind and substitute Jesus for Jacob. I take it that Rachel's cry is natural to most women. I would think it very strange to meet a woman who wanted to marry and didn't want to have children. I wonder if the angels of heaven, if they were ever asked their opinion, would inquire why you and I should want to marry Jesus Christ in our hearts and not bear His children. I would think that most incongruous. I take up the cry of Paul in his great statement, *'I travail in birth'*. Unfortunately, to be strictly true, he had to say to the Galatians, *'I travail in birth again'*. Had he travailed and not brought forth? Had he? Or had he travailed and brought forth live children and they had lost the life they had? You may believe in the doctrine of the eternal security of the saints, or you may not, but I'm not now discussing doctrine, I just want to point you to the scripture, that's all. I ask a question, brother, sister: have you had life and lost it? I cannot answer that. I only know that when I go round fellowships, churches etc., I don't find a lot of life. I find a lot of noise. It seems that people believe if you stand up and bawl and shout, it's an evidence of the Holy Ghost working. I no more believe in noise as a sign of salvation than I believe in silence as a sign of salvation. I don't know what you do. When I was younger, I used to shout a lot more than I do now, so I'm not being critical, please do not misunderstand me, but there is noise and there is noise.

## **BARRENNESS - there must be a reason**

Where is the life that is begetting unto Jesus Christ? Beloved, Rachel did not bear children of noise. I am sure noise would have been no substitute for her natural barrenness. I would point out to you that the Lord could have terminated her barrenness as soon as she married if He had wanted to, but He didn't, and I think I know the reason why. Look at verse 1 of chapter 30. Rachel envied her sister, and I suggest to you (what cannot be proved) that before she married Jacob she was already jealous of her and hated her. Rachel would have known that Jacob loved her and wanted her and not Leah. She had been tricked - her father had deceived both her and Jacob. Long, long years of waiting had embittered her. Here then, beloved, is the reason why people often do not bear children unto God. Though it may not be the exact thing that had prevented Rachel from bearing, there's something in people that does prevent people from doing it. When God doesn't give children, there is a reason for it. There are those who can speak of children and rejoice in them, but they are somebody else's children. You can lovingly adopt them and mother them and father them, and be good to them and call them yours, but they are not. I believe also that there is envy in hearts. I believe that. I think I hear it. I know that there are causes for this but there is something abnormal and very wrong if a church is not growing. Many of you have heard it said - where there's life there is growth. There must be growth where there's life, there must be. Making meetings more lively, changing from pianos to guitars and having tambourines, for instance, won't do it, beloved. There's no reason why you shouldn't have guitars - don't misunderstand me. I speak out of love and concern for you all, beloved. Sometimes I've heard almost envious statements about people who seem to get hundreds of people into their meetings. Don't go for that. If you go the right way, the church will spring from nothing into something, and multiply and multiply and you won't be able to contain the numbers - having been through it, I know. There must be something radically wrong. Birth is normal, isn't it?

I look again at verse 2 '*Give me children or else I die*', she said. Rachel wasn't threatening to commit suicide. She meant that this longing for children, this 'MUST' bear children was so great she would die unless she DID bear. Has longing in you ever reached that pitch? Has it? Or have you got some way of explaining your barrenness, perhaps explaining it all away? Wherever arguments and explanations come into this, you're sure to pass into the psychological realm instead of remaining in spiritual realms. Does your heart say, 'I'm going to die if I don't bear children unto God'? Is this the intense longing of your heart? If not, you never will.

## **BARRENNESS - it must be recognized**

This strange succession of barrenness in the women was no accident. First Sarah, then Rebekah, then Leah then Rachel - four barren women. Are you surprised that when God wanted to usher in the new testament, He started by producing John Baptist through a formerly barren woman? Have you ever thought about the significance of it? Spiritual children will not be born to a childless church until a great sense of barrenness first grips it and hearts cry out 'O God, I'm unfruitful unto

Thee'. Some may think, 'I'm not unfruitful, I'm a great source of sermons', but sermons, beloved, are so often intellectual exercises composed from Bible knowledge and a command of language. Some among us are more gifted than others, but that makes no difference - sermons aren't children. I'm sure, as the Lord is looking down upon us all this morning, (and I identify myself with you all brethren. I am only an elder.) God wants to see the children. He loves us dearly, but we must never hide behind His love - who would ever doubt Jacob's love to his precious Rachel, who would ever doubt it? She knew he loved her. He served for her those long years and, for the love wherewith he loved her, it seemed but a few days, that's all. There was no doubt about Jacob's ability to beget children, none at all. She saw them - they laughed and played around him - but they were not hers. They were so many knives in her bosom. '*I shall die, Jacob, I shall die!*', she said. Would to God that her cries got hold in each one of you. Better to die, she thought, than live childless - my heart echoes her feelings. You'd all better die than remain barren. 'What?', you say, 'All these lovely brothers and sisters, some of us your children, and you are talking to us like this?' Yes, I'm talking to you like this. There's only one purpose for living - bearing children. It's easy to get people to come to hear popular doctrines - preach prosperity, and they will come in by thousands. It's natural for people to want lots of money and big cars, and to be happy and joyful, and sing, and dance, and shout - everybody wants that. But beloved, when you're back in your churches tomorrow, count the people who you know are alive, not people who are making some kind of profession, not even people who can say something in tongues or prophesy or do things like that. Start with yourself. Does somebody need to travail in birth over you again? I do this - I examine myself. I'm not asking you to do anything I don't do, beloved. Do you bring people into life? The other day I heard that a young man said of another young man in his church 'He's the first one I've ever seen come right clean through out of homosexuality, and drugs, and all that terrible mixed up way of life - the first one I've ever seen come right through to God and to life'. Praise God, but what a terrible thing to have said - the first one; can you even count one beloved? Can you?

Recognition and confession of barrenness is often the first step toward fruitfulness. Are you prepared to face up to it and say, 'Lord, not one have I begotten, not one, not one'.

Years ago, when I was quite a young man and not in the things I'm in today, I once said to a man, himself a preacher, that I knew there was something wrong in me, because with all the gifts I had, I had not led one soul to Christ. I regularly preached the gospel as I knew it then (I used to do a lot more singing in those days as well) but I didn't know one soul who had come into life. I hadn't got it myself, of course - that's why. I didn't really know that at the time though, I came to this realization later. I want to ask you men who are elders, and have an aptitude to teach or preach, do you know of anybody that you have directly brought into the eternal life of God? What use preachers if they can't do that? What use are elders if they can't do that? What use church members if they can't do that? Church member? Yes, I'm a member of the church too. Scripture doesn't say that Rachel was an evangelist, does it? All she had to do was conceive from her Jacob. That's all she had to do. It doesn't say she was an apostle, or a pastor, or a prophet - she wasn't one of these great gifted people, she was a normal woman.

## CHILDREN ... or death?

I want to ask you whether these instincts are in you beloved. Are they there? Is the longing there - that natural thing in the spirit, or are you fighting to keep your head above water? Are you disappointed because there is no sign of movement or life in you? What is it we're preaching? What is it? At times I get concerned over what I consider to be the forsaking of the original truth, once so well known and oft preached to us. Do you look at others, and say 'Well they seem to succeed'? Well so did Leah! So did Bilhah! It isn't that beloved! I'm not saying everybody here ought to have bigger congregations. The bigger the congregation without the vital life of Christ, the bigger the death, the bigger the deception. I tremble before God sometimes when I think of it. They say God inhabiteth the praises of Israel, so we all jump on the praise bandwagon, but praise won't give birth to people beloved. I feel like saying that in the New Testament it says God dwells in the hearts of his people, not just in the praises - just keep that clear. To know the difference between the old and the new is one of today's greatest needs. To be ignorant of it is devastating to spiritual reality. May God open our eyes. That you and I see a thousand - ten thousand - people, singing praises and capering about is not to be compared with one soul being begotten to Christ. That isn't to say that we shouldn't praise, that we shouldn't rejoice. I said this was a festive occasion. Let's do that. But, oh, it's so easy to catch things from other people. There's a man over here from another country and a million people are catching the singing, dancing craze from him. How dreadful that it should spread through churches! I'm not saying we ought to be miserable and straight-laced. I daresay that I shall shout and jump before we're through but that's not the point. The whole point is this: I've got to beget to God. It's not just for men, you women; men have to graduate to your position, sisters, and travail in birth. Don't hide behind your husband. It's a woman we're looking at - Rachel. Don't say, 'Well, I support him, I'm with him 100%. That's good, you ought to be, but you can do a lot better, and this is what the Lord wants us all to see, beloved. You are a person brought by someone into the life of Jesus Christ. I remind you that Christ Jesus said, *'I and the children that God hath given me'*. His Father gave Him children. Rachel wanted Jacob to give children to her, and that's how Jesus Christ lived on the earth. Every one born of God has this great all-inclusive life of God embracing both genders, male and female - in these things there is neither male or female.

It doesn't matter whether you're gifted in natural ways with words or not. I would still be that if I didn't have the Holy Ghost, and (I know it very well) words could be my winding sheet. Your very words, your very sermons, brethren, can bring you into the grave. They shouldn't do of course, they shouldn't do, but let one that's been preaching for many many decades speak to you: it's got to be children, or else you're dead and your church is dead - unless God has mercy on you because someone sitting in the congregation has more life and spiritual urgings than you have. And by that I do not mean that as soon as the choruses start, they're always up clapping and waving their arms about - I don't mean that. There's nothing to stop you doing that, of course, if you have got the life that warrants it. But so often these seem to be an expression of anything else but life. Sometimes I wish I could go round the churches and fellowships not preaching, but sitting in the congregation listening. I'd know then. Beloved, if you aren't bringing forth children it's death, and the sooner it's buried the better, in my estimation.

## BARRENNESS - the result of a wrong relationship to God.

Rachel was crying from envy. She looked at others - 'Oh, why can't I, why can't I?' God kept her womb closed tight, she was unable to bear. Hatred, envy, jealousy, being upset for the wrong reason - there's something behind it all - something mixed in with the natural. Oh beloved, what is that that is so mixed up in so many hearts? What are our motives? Where do our reasonings spring from - or our excuses?

Now look at this man's answer. Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel. Oh Lord, I hope in this instance Jacob isn't a type of You. I don't want You to be angry with me. But Jacob was angry - he was just a mere man of course, and he was angry with her. Listen to what he says to her, (and you will notice how I read this sentence) *'Am I God, am I in God's stead'*, and it reads on, *'Who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?'* I pause. *'Am I God?'* Think! Where do children come from? That's what I ask you. The reason for your barrenness lies in your relationship with God. The fault lies there, beloved, and it all stems from there, all of it.

Rachel was looking to Jacob for the child - the children - so much wanted, instead of looking to God. Looking at Jacob's powers, she didn't see that God was wanting to do something wonderful for her and that for this reason she had been born barren. It had been the same with Sarah - she was born barren because God was going to do something wonderful through her, as you well know. Rebekah was the same - she was born barren because God was going to do something wonderful for her and bring forth a Jacob, who would become Israel. Don't you see? You have a thousand gathered round your feet! It was between Rachel and God. He had kept her barren, and then the hatred ... and then the jealousy ... and then the envy ... Oh the bitterness! Christians have gone wrong. Men and women who have had the life of God have become bitter and jealous and angry and all kinds of things of that nature. God show us all what it is! 'My own inability' - thank God for it, man, woman - it should drive us to a place where we cry out like Rachel, 'Give ME, ME, children'. That's what it's all about. Am I God? All you people that sit in churches having one man ministering to you - don't blame him if there are no children being born. It isn't only or altogether the fault of the minister, or of the ministry; much of it is your fault. There has to be ministry, or a church is not a church; there has to be, preaching brethren, but I'll ask you, precious brother: 'How many times have you preached in the last 52 weeks and seen results in lives? How many? 52 out of 52?' *'Am I in God's stead?'* The man who once said he travailed in birth said on another occasion, *'as though God did beseech you by us, WE pray you in God's stead'*. Is that true of you, have you got that intensity, or is it just a verse you believe? This is a charter for preaching isn't it? We are ambassadors, we say. Read through those verses carefully, and see if by those standards you really are an ambassador. Don't just presume that because it's in the Bible, it is true of you - it was true of those of whom it was said, but do not presume beyond that. It is not automatically true of everyone who preaches. One of the great hindrances to truth among Bible-believing people is: 'It's written in the Bible and I believe it'. Of course we ought to believe it - even the devil believes what's written in the Bible, every verse of it. It is only true of you if it's being proven true of you.

When we realize that our Jacob wants children and have to answer Him, "Lord, I have none I can't even fulfil my 'womanhood'", we take the place of Rachel.

It is God who withholds children from people, and if that is so with anyone it is because there is something wrong in their relationship with Him. Therein lies the tragedy. Beloved, if we don't face the fact that in this respect we are dead, being unproductive, we are twice dead.

## **GOD WANTS EVERYONE TO BE A MOTHER**

How can this be put right? Not the way Rachel chose. Listen to her. Instead of facing the state of her own heart, she said *'Here is my maid Bilhah. She will bear upon my knees. I'll have children by her.'* No you won't, oh no you won't. No-one bears God's children by proxy. You must understand that, beloved. Isn't Jesus your husband too? Though somebody in your group may bring forth to God, and you may be thankful, they are not your children, are they? Not even though they may have been brought forth upon your knees, (if I may adapt the term). Oh no; hiding behind the spiritual success of another person is remarkably like an adaptation of Adam's behaviour. But isn't it wonderful - somebody born again? Yes! But does anybody say, 'born again from you', my precious child? Don't you understand? God wants everyone to be a mother. 'I'm not gifted', you say? You don't have to be gifted to bear children. It's a natural process, it's law working in you if you are born again. I want to emphasize this. It's there, the ability is there, why have you neglected it? God may do a thousand other things, 'I hear and I discuss, I listen, I help politely'. So you should, but here's the important thing, 'Give me children ... I must ... I must'. Listen to what Rachel said, *'I will have children by her'*. Look in the margin, and you will find the word *'builded'*. 'I will be builded' if somebody else has children! Do you think that? The church will be built, but you won't. When you say 'I will be builded', and you are builded, it will not be by some Bilhah, but by your blessed Lord. Not that we do not rejoice if we hear of people responding to the Lord in some way or other, we do (that is if they truly responded to the Lord, it is counted good if you can even get their foot on the way these days, I think). But to bring forth somebody unto the Lord, so that from that moment they are wholly the Lord's child, is the Lord's desire for Himself and you.

## **HE CAME BECAUSE FATHER WANTED CHILDREN**

Do you believe you can bring forth children of God? Do you or don't you? Don't start asking questions, trying to find another tree with bigger leaves. Oh beloved, people often put a halter round their neck that way. Say to Him, 'Lord, I can. I believe I can Lord. I must, I know I must'. Let that kind of determined thinking grip you. You may say, 'Well I'm doing a job in the church - I'm secretary, I'm leader of this and I'm ...' Yes, good for you, but where are you and the people you serve going to be in that day? I have hope for you my brothers, my sisters ... 'I'll do this, I'll do that', you say ... yes, yes, that's right, you will, I'm sure you will, and if one member is blessed, we are all blessed - we are a body. You can't fail to have some input and impact. But beloved, you are a Rachel - your appointment is to bring forth children. You can be a member

of the singing group, an open air worker, an elder, a deacon, a tract distributor, the man at the door - any one of a dozen people, but unless you are bringing forth children, somewhere there's something wrong.

You can go around the world preaching (and I do a lot of that), but unless the children are being born, there's nothing of any worth in it. Should MY work of building-up be done by someone else? Never, Lord, never. In Rachel's days, marriage laws were not the same as they are today: the high morality of the New Testament was not known. God usually takes people where they stand and brings them on, and teaches them - and that's why simple people who do not know so very much get blessed above those who do. You say, 'I can't understand it'. You would do if you knew God. If you only know ethics, morality, and philosophy, you won't. There's something in the heart of God, beloved. Do you know why Jesus came down to this earth? You say, 'Yes, He came to save us', or offer one or another answer similar to it. He came because Father wanted children - that was why He came. Has it never dawned on you that all the other things were to this end? He came because Father wanted children. That is why He told His disciples before they all left the upper room that He was going to the cross so that the world might know that He loved the Father. He loved us, but to Him that was quite a secondary matter, and secondary things are taking the place of first things these days. There are good things to shout about, and preach about, but the real key to salvation is the ache in the heart of God for children. Why doesn't every man and woman fall on their knees and say, 'Lord, give me children. I'll let everything go for this - everything - if I can only bring forth children'. Of course, you could be honourable, moral and upright in your job - you should be - and bear that kind of witness, but whether or not you are bringing forth children to God is the main thing. Oh beloved, God has wonderful ways of doing things!

I do not know how eventually these two sisters sorted out their problem, or solved the enmity and hatred of their jealous hearts. I do know what Leah counted to be her dowry, for after she had borne children, again she said, *'God hath endued me with a good dowry'*; she believed she would buy her husband's affection with the children she had borne him. I think that could have its counterpart in modern civilization too, I think it could. Leah bore him six sons, and then she bore him a daughter, and then at that point God remembered Rachel. Leah wasn't right either - bargaining for love with children. The older I get the more I see how I am dependent on the mercy and grace of God. These are the themes for my thanksgiving rather than, 'Praise You, praise You, praise You, Jesus', it's the mercy and grace of God that holds me. Where churches are going over the top in praise and noise, I know they're chasing their own tails. Do not cut out praise sessions in your meetings, but let them be the praises of those that have borne children when a season of travail is ended - joy that a man child is born into the world.

## **BARRENNESS - a reproach from God**

If I could never sing again Lord, enable me to whisper a message from Thee. Are these exercises wrong? No, the roots are wrong, the seed's wrong, the foundation's wrong. Now I know that if this tape comes into the hands of some people, I may be condemned by as many; but not by all, I think. Beloved, it all lies here: *'God remembered Rachel, God hearkened to her*

and opened her womb. And she conceived, and bare a son'. It was pure joy to her soul. Listen to what she said: 'God has taken away my reproach'. Childless heart, there's reproach upon you which won't go away by saying, 'I'm not under condemnation'. I tell you that I went through reproach from God. And the reproach? Childlessness. I could not bear to stand before you or Him in that day unless God had granted me to bring forth children. Barrenness is a reproach on the ministry. Reproach Sunday by Sunday? I don't know, I just don't want it to be. I read my Bible, and if I understand it, as I try to, I hear the cries from the deeps of God and of man. I hope I do. I have so much more to learn. But reproach! Do you feel it? That was exactly what Elisabeth felt and said when she knew she had conceived, 'God has taken away my reproach'! What? A married woman and no children? It was counted as disgraceful. This isn't said to hurt or blame anybody who hasn't borne children but who really wants to do so and to please her husband in the natural. I'm simply taking up the natural instincts and powers to illustrate the spiritual instincts and power of those married to Christ. Childbearing should be prolific in churches married to Christ. Shall there be no children for Him? May God do something wonderful, beloved. May you see the miracle. If you are barren, if there's an agony in your soul - if you'd rather die than live childless, God will have to perform the miracle in you, and He will. If God has not done it, and you are barren, don't hide behind it, search your heart. Don't get under terrible condemnation, but be honest and face the Lord; cry unto Him, 'Give me children Lord - give ME children'.

## BUT I WANT CHILDREN

Let it be the theme of your prayers, let it grip you, let it obsess you if necessary. They said of Paul, the prisoner, that he was obsessed. He answered, 'I am not mad, most noble

*Festus. Would to God you were like me, except for these chains*'. Spiritual possession will cause the Christ-filled heart to throb for children. Before ever he knew he was an apostle or discussed with anybody whether he had the gift of evangelism or whatever, right from the start, when God gave him life, Paul was bringing people to Christ. He didn't wait until somebody put their hands on him with the words, 'You're called to be this, you're called to be the other'. Oh God, we've got lost in all the peripherals. We're so keen on church order, we are abounding with structural ideas, but where are the children? There are times when we've got to look at other things of course (they're all in the Bible) but God forbid that Bible words should sidetrack you. May He keep and foster this great primeval urge in your heart. It should be there; it is natural. 'Give me children, give me children, give me children'. It doesn't lie just in getting people to respond to appeals, there's something more than that, beloved, something much, much more.

I was in a meeting, not so long ago, which ended in grave silence. It descended on everyone and everything. My wife was there, and immediately we knew - we'd been in or under this before. The silence came; I think it must have continued for twenty minutes. No-one moved or murmured. Not a chorus, or a prayer - not a breath it seemed. Next morning, silence again - the hush of God. We were all too moved to shout, sing, praise, pray - we couldn't. God was working, changing lives. This is what it must be, beloved: God working. It isn't in the praising but in the begetting that children are born. Oh, praise has a part, it has a place, but I want children. Did you ever read that psalm which says that they will still bring forth fruit unto old age. It has nothing to do with physical fitness or period of life - it's to do with a heart that won't be silent unto God, but aches and longs, prepared to let everything else go for children.

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# SO WE CAME TO ROME

## BERNARD HULL

The last nine chapters of the book of Acts cover a period of about six years in the life of the apostle Paul. The concluding two verses of the book add a further two years, during which Paul lived in his own hired house and ministered the word of God unhindered. This last phrase of v31, '*no man forbidding him*', can be translated 'unhindered', 'unrestrained', or 'not bound'. It is a fitting end for this historical record of the main points of interest in the first thirty years of the church's development.

The book begins in Jerusalem, the home of bigoted Judaism, with all its narrow, nationalistic outlooks, and concludes in Rome, the gospel being ministered freely there at the heart of the world by Paul, possibly its greatest and most able ambassador. How far the word of the universal kingdom of God had travelled from the narrow confines of its beginning. It had broken the bonds and constrictions put upon it by its early emissaries, God had seen to that. It is a word meant for 'all flesh', from the 'least to the greatest' and God moved to make sure it reached that far.

## WHERE GOD WOULD BRING US

We all have our 'Romes' to which God would bring us - those places of personal fulfilment of the ministry and calling the Lord has laid upon us. It should not be spiritualised so as to mean God getting us safe to heaven! Rather, it is some place of service in the will of the Lord, a state of unhindered testimony and ministry. Sometimes it is a geographical location. As far as God's will for us is concerned, it is the heart of things, being in the centre of His will in a particular place.

There is a section of Psalm 107 which captures something of this truth. It concerns those who are sailors, doing business by sea. They travel across the deeps and navigate the oceans through storm and wave which at times threaten to overwhelm them utterly. All seems to conspire to thwart the successful completion of their business. Their souls melt, they are at their wits' end and, crying to the Lord, are heard of Him. He makes

the storm a calm, all becomes quiet and *'SO He bringeth them to their desired haven'*. Note the use of this word 'so'. It refers to the things through which He brought them, to His faithful overcoming of every obstacle and bringing them safely through to where they would be, and He wanted them to be. SO, He did it. That is, *'this is the way He accomplished it, through all these things He brought them'*. Then comes the exhortation *'Oh that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men'*.

## PAUL HAD HIS ROME

Luke records in Acts 28:14, *'and SO we went toward Rome'*. Verse sixteen in some translations reads, *'And SO we came to Rome'*. That seems to be the culmination of something that first surfaced on the page of scripture in the mouth of Paul, six years earlier, in chapter nineteen.

Paul was in Ephesus at the time, on what is called his third missionary journey. God moved mightily there and His word prevailed in hearts, against wicked spiritual powers. At this point of great success, Paul gave voice to a distinct purpose which was rising in his spirit. He felt he was to pass through Macedonia and Achaia, then make his way to Jerusalem, and then, *'After I have been there, I must also see Rome'*, chapter 19:21. It does not say that God told him so, rather, it would seem that there was an inward, intuitive longing rising in him, in accord with his missionary passion. He knew that from Rome roads radiated throughout all the empire. It was the hub of the then world, the seat of world government. He knew that the word of the heavenly Lord must be brought to the throne of the greatest earthly lord. It was spiritual law and he felt he had God's leading in the matter.

There is a sense of urgency in this first mention of going to Rome, as though he sensed that ahead, maybe some long time later, he would go there. However, there were things to be attended to first. He passed through some trials in Ephesus and, listening to the counsel of his brethren, quietly withdrew from the place of confrontation. This decision was totally in keeping with his sense of God's leading. He travelled around Macedonia *'giving much exhortation'*, doubtless discharging a burden growing within him, to share all he could on what he sensed would be his last visit. So, on to Greece where he stayed three months, from which place he made a quiet exit to avoid being killed by Jewish enemies. Back into Asia then, to areas in which he ministered. During this time Eutychus was raised from the dead. We sense the purposeful onward step. On to Mitylene and Miletus, and, desiring not to be delayed in Ephesus, he sent for the elders of the Ephesian church to come to him, and delivered to them a parting message full of pathos, power and prophetic import. During this message, he gave insight into his own soul, *'I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there ...'*

Paul was locked in to the will of God, inwardly bound to go forward to Rome, via Jerusalem. In the latter city there were responsibilities to be discharged. The large gift for the relief of the saints at Jerusalem, which the Gentile churches had been amassing, needed to be delivered. Doubtless, Paul hoped that this gift would deepen links of trust between the churches which had come from Gentile backgrounds and the mother-church of Jerusalem where all had begun. His own heart was filled with compassion for his *'kindred after the flesh'*. He longed to be

a faithful witness among them. Most certainly, one of the great sorrows of his life lay in the fact that those he loved the most understood him least and in the end rejected him.

## MOVING AGAINST THE TIDE

As Paul travelled on towards Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit spoke in various churches, no doubt through various mediums; prophecy, private counsel and warning. The substance of the message was always the same though - *'that bonds and afflictions awaited him'* (Acts 20:23). However, he was not moved from his purpose. He did not shrink from going forward. After some further time, he arrived at the port of Tyre in Syria with his companions. During their seven day stay there, they sought out and found the Lord's people, only to find that, there too, the prophetic messages concerning Paul were that difficulties awaited him if he continued in his purpose to go up to Jerusalem. Not only so, it seems that through the prophetic word given in Tyre, he was counselled not to go up to Jerusalem (21:4). It is obvious that this did not coincide with, nor corroborate the inward witness of God's Spirit in his own heart, for he ignored this well meaning counsel and pressed on.

A short voyage brought the party to Ptolemais and then across country to Caesarea. It was in this city that the illustrious evangelist, Philip, lived with his daughters. Probably a man of Paul's own age and, of course, one of the seven men chosen out almost thirty years earlier along with Stephen. No doubt Paul and Philip had much to discuss in their time together. Back in those early days when Stephen was stoned, they were on utterly opposite sides of the fence from each other. What precious fellowship they must have had as they considered all that God had wrought since those early days.

During the days spent in Caesarea, Agabus, a well known prophet in the churches, happened among them. It was only to be expected that a further corroborative, confirming, and an even clearer, word as to what awaited Paul should come through from him. He took Paul's girdle and bound himself with it, acting out the prophecy of what was to happen if Paul went on with his intended purpose. It was all so clear, so graphic, and all those about him began to plead with Paul not to go on up to Jerusalem, but rather to avoid this harm and trouble. Luke and all his companions pleaded with him too, but finally yielded to the will of the Lord in the matter when Paul would not be persuaded out of his purpose. He knew he must go there. He declared he was ready not only to be bound there but to die also, so strong was his conviction that he must go this way. He had to move forward, though the loving pleading of his dearest companions was breaking his heart. SO, they went on their way.

## COOL RECEPTION

After some further days, they arrived in Jerusalem and lodged in the house of an old disciple from Cyprus, whose name was Mnason. From the record, it seems that some of the brethren received Paul gladly, but that he met with a rather cool reception from James and the elders. Paul delivered the bountiful gift of the Gentile churches and gave account of what God had wrought, which brought forth glad response from those leaders who heard it. However, swiftly, the subject was switched to what was taking place in Jerusalem, namely that thousands of Jews were believing in the Lord Jesus and at the same time remaining zealous for the ritual aspects of the law. Paul's arrival

in Jerusalem at this time complicated things, for false reports were circulating. Exaggerated, over-developed accounts of what he taught were being discussed among the Jewish believers, causing confusion. The plea of the leadership was that Paul would prove that he was still agreeable to the old ritual by going through certain rites connected with cleansing.

At this point, it is hard to discover whether Paul went too far in his great love of his brethren after the flesh by compromising his position. He so longed that there should be unity among all saints, that these divisions should cease. He himself was personally untroubled by these old rituals. He knew all had passed away and were fulfilled in the spirit of their meaning in Christ. Well, only in the age to come will we know whether Paul's act was wise or unwise, but the fact of the matter is that it did not affect the overall fulfilment of the purpose of God in His servant's life, which was to bring him to his 'Rome'. There is great consolation here. God is greater than our falterings along the way!

We follow Paul into the temple and watch as the days pass, until they are 'almost ended' (21:27). It seemed as though everything would be all right. But it was not to be - soon there was an uproar. False accusations and rumours full of lies incited the mob. Paul was beaten and the intention of the people was to kill him. Yet God, overwatching all, rescued him by the hand of the chief captain and soldiers from the Roman garrison. It was a tense moment, to say the least! It seemed that God's purpose in His servant lay in serious jeopardy. Confusion and uncertainty pervaded every heart and tempers were running hot. Those of whom Paul said, 'I could wish myself accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen after the flesh' (Rom. 9:3), were crying out 'Away with him' (Acts 21:36). How reminiscent are these words of those cried by a mob who sought to do away with Jesus in the same place, almost thirty years earlier! Indeed, the servant was being conformed to his Lord.

## **PAUL WAS MASTER BECAUSE HE WAS MASTERED**

Paul was master in the midst of turmoil because he was mastered by the Lord Jesus, who is Master of everything. He gained the attention of the people, silence replaced uproar, and he, standing on the stairs leading into the fort of Antonio, spoke graciously and lovingly to the multitude, declaring the way God had brought him. The same God for whom the mob was zealous. He shows how Jesus was the same God whom they worshipped. Skillfully, Paul led the audience on, seeking to prove that, though he may have more light from God than they, yet God would be unto them just the same as to himself. They listened intrigued, maybe even partially persuaded, until he mentioned one word - that this God had told him to deliver the message to Gentiles. Then pandemonium broke loose again. Their Jewish pride was offended. The Roman captain was unable to understand what all the fuss was about and hastily withdrew Paul to a place of safety, and, finding that he was a Roman citizen, arranged that he be not ill-treated. The next day, a meeting was convened to allow the Jewish leaders to examine Paul.

It was not far into the meeting the next day when Paul found himself in trouble. Perhaps during the previous night he had hoped that he might gain a fair hearing. Perhaps his mind was already prepared for the worst. When he saw that there was nothing to be gained from discussion, he spoke of the

resurrection from the dead, knowing full well that this catalyst would act to divide the Pharisee and Sadducee parties present. Yet again the captain of the guard had to rescue Paul, only this time the two parties sought to pull him to pieces. Paul must have been in a sorry state physically, not to mention the mental exhaustion and great sadness of heart he must have been feeling as he saw all his efforts come to nothing. The realisation that he was not to be heeded by those he loved the most must have depressed his soul so deeply. Sadness filled him and a sense of failure stole over him like a dark mist as he spent the night in the dismal cell. A man maligned, misunderstood and misused. It seemed that he was destined to drink the cup of failure, and that those interior longings to go forward and bear testimony, yes, even in Rome, were wishful thinking.

## **SADNESS AND DEPRESSION?**

Some will say that it is incorrect to assess Paul's mental and spiritual states as being sad and dejected at this point. Depression, even for a moment should not be the lot of any saint, let alone an apostle. But why, if he did not need uplifting and encouragement, did Jesus appear to him that very night? Such comforting words would be irrelevant. The Lord's opening words to his servant were to take courage: 'Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome' (Acts 23:11). Here was Jesus the Lord and Lover of His servant, speaking right to the heart of His servant's troubled thoughts. 'You have testified of me in Jerusalem', 'You have not failed. Though they did not receive the word, yet you have faithfully discharged your calling. Take courage about this, for you must go forward yet more, even to Rome, and fulfil your ministry there. I am pleased with you and shall carry you on all the way, to the fulfilment of your ministry'. This is something of the meaning of the kind words of Jesus to Paul. It says that 'The Lord stood by him'. It was not a prophetic word, or an impression in the mind, or something rising from his inward man. Rather, into the dark, sad night of Paul's experience at this point, the Lord Himself came, STOOD BY HIM, and spoke words of unspeakable comfort.

Those words were to fortify Paul through the next two and a half years or so. He was to pass through further experiences, some unpleasant in the extreme. The Lord spoke to him not only to alleviate current feelings, but to encourage him in future extremities. Now Paul knew that the inward sense he had had for around three years was indeed the will of the Lord. His sensitive mind and spirit had rightly discerned God's will. Yet, at that very time, a plot to thwart the purpose of the Lord was being hatched. More than forty men had bound themselves with an oath to kill Paul before they ate any more food! It was a subtle plan involving serious and dedicated people, but God, watching over all, used Paul's nephew, who, learning of the plan, warned Paul in time. Paul was escorted by Roman soldiers to safety under the protection of Felix, the governor to Caesarea. God protected His own, by a young lad, by influencing favourably the mind of the heathen captain. He watched over His purposes in His child.

## **DETERMINED OPPOSITION AND UNWITTING FRIENDS**

It is of vital importance in gaining spiritual instruction from these events that we note just how determined the satanically inspired opposition was. Ananias and the Jewish

elders were consumed with jealousy, and sought to prosecute their purpose with incredible zeal. They employed an orator to accuse Paul before Felix at the scheduled hearing. Paul had to possess his soul in patience during the five days of waiting, comforted no doubt by the Lord's word that he must be a witness at Rome, yet wondering how all would fall out. It is true to say that the enemy of souls does not easily give up his purpose of preventing the will of God being worked out in His own. Yet, in the world there are not only those things that are utterly opposed, there are also those in a genuine quandary, seeking to discover what is really going on. The Roman captain was in this category. Unwitting friends in strange places assist the fulfilment of God's purposes in His people.

## BEARING TESTIMONY BEFORE GOVERNORS AND PRINCES

In Acts 24, we read the account of the examination of Paul and his defence before Felix. It seems that Felix had previous knowledge of Christian truth - most certainly the Lord was extending to this man a further opportunity to receive grace. After the false accusations were stated, which consisted of half truths, highly exaggerated and out of all context, Paul made his gracious speech. Again, he appeared as master of the scene and achieved a deferral of proceedings. Perhaps one of the lessons of these chapters is simply how many times things which burned in Paul's heart concerning Rome were deferred, as he lay, apparently powerless, in the hands of others. Felix commanded that Paul be granted a degree of liberty, though this leniency was withdrawn later, and at the end of the chapter we find Paul bound by Felix, who desired to gain political sympathy from the Jews.

During this period, Felix and Drusilla, his wife, talked with Paul. There was intrigue in all this. Felix had mercenary interests at heart. Yet there was a battle going on in his soul, for Paul's words caused him to tremble. No doubt Paul perceived something of the momentous things in which he was playing a part, and he fulfilled his role with patience and grace. He spoke of righteousness and temperance and judgement to come to a man and his wife whose lives were a million miles from those things. In fact, secular history bears testimony to the fact that Felix was a slave who had been freed and risen up into government favour. It is stated that he was a most cruel and vindictive man and that he was living in open adultery with his wife, Drusilla. No wonder Felix trembled when he heard Paul's powerful applications of the truth, but it seems that procrastination was the habit of his life.

After two years of Felix subtly seeking to win Paul's submission to his corrupt ways, Paul found himself less free than ever and was handed over to the jurisdiction of a new governor named Festus. Incredible as it may seem, even after two years' delay, still the anger of the high priests and Jews against Paul surfaced within days of Festus taking up the reins of government. God again preserves His servant from harm by moving Festus not to accede to the requests of the Jews to move Paul to Jerusalem. It is thrilling to consider the care of God for His own, and the way He uses even those in high places of government to be part of His care.

The same wearing rigmarole took place and accusations without solid basis were brought before a Roman official who

had lately taken up office among a notoriously troublesome people. It is natural then that Festus should be wanting to please the Jews so as to ingratiate himself with them. Against this background, Paul was forced to appeal to Caesar's judgement seat. So it was decided '*Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? Unto Caesar shalt thou go*'. But not until further delays had accomplished their purpose and God's ambassador had borne testimony before the last of the Herods, namely Agrippa. His father had been smitten of worms and died. The destinies of his family had been linked with Jesus, and the drama was worked out here in its final act. In facing Agrippa and his wife Bernice, Paul was facing those living in incestuous sin, for Bernice was the niece of Agrippa. The representative of Jesus, the true King of the Jews and all mankind, stood before the usurper of the title 'king of the Jews'.

How graciously Paul bore his testimony! He longed that his words might turn the hearts of his hearers. It was not to be. It seemed that Agrippa's reply to Paul's crystal clear declaration was tinged with sarcasm: '*Do you think that you can persuade me to be a Christian with so few words?*'. Of course, the amazing thing about all this is that Festus, Agrippa and Bernice had to confess the fact that Paul was clear in the matters of which he was accused and should go free but, because he had appealed to Caesar, then to Caesar he had to go. So, even in this, God's purpose in His servant continues in its fulfilment. The purpose of God rolls inexorably onwards.

## THROUGH FIRE AND WATER

In Acts 27 we have the account of the voyage to Italy. It is narrated in painstaking detail by Luke. As we read it, we sense the will of various men being expressed, opinions as to how to continue the voyage. Winds blew softly, danger attended, everything seemed to hang upon so little, so that it appeared, even at this late stage, as if Paul would not see Rome. Was it the devil that inspired that fearful storm called 'Euroclydon'? The mariners knew that it was not reasonable to attempt the journey. Contrary winds, contrary voices, and at the worst moment of it, when all natural lights and hopes were gone, God spoke to Paul by an angel, assuring him that he would see Rome and bear testimony before Caesar and that all in the vessel would be saved, though all else would be lost.

After a while, the day dawned. They were near land and they utterly let go to the word of the Lord and, some swimming, others on broken boards, made it safely to the shore. None were lost, even as the Lord had said. They were received courteously by the people of Malta, yet within a short while, Paul was the centre of another drama. This time a snake, which should have killed him, fastened onto his arm, but, shaking it into the fire, he felt no harm. It seems that in most peculiar ways there was a conspiracy afoot, driven by some malign power, to prevent Paul reaching Rome! Paul passed on unscathed, bringing healing to the sick in the area. The work of the devil was turned to good and led to openness in the people, as they saw that Paul had power from God.

We are nearing the end of our narrative. After a further three month's wait, they were taken by ship to the mainland of Italy and made their journey on foot to Rome. Paul settled there, reporting first to the Jews of that place who rejected his testimony. It only freed him to speak to whosoever would hear.

He did not avail himself of his right to a lodging provided by Caesar, but hired his own house, so that he might be free of all obligation to the powers of government. So we find him exactly where the Lord had said he would be, bearing his testimony in an unrestrained way. He had come to Rome.

## THROUGH ALL THINGS TO FULFILMENT

Pondering over this story, considering why it was the Holy Spirit should have caused it to have been preserved for us, surely we can take courage from the main lesson this article is seeking to make plain. We all, each one, have some place, state and ministry for God to which He would bring us. It matters not that there is conspiracy over years to prevent us. God watches

over His word to perform it. There may be outright frontal attacks of the devil, employing every means. There may be wearying delays. Yet, through shipwreck, snake bite, crooked government officials, bigoted religious antagonisms and any other thing you might care to name, God will fulfil His purposes in us if we heed His word, move in obedience, and let His several words of encouragement and promises along the way sustain us. He is faithful to accomplish in us that which He has promised. Yes, we must, like Paul, adhere to the testimony of the Lord in our hearts, even when it is contradicted by the loving entreaties of dear friends. Paul moved meekly forward. Those same loving friends came to see that God was directing his steps. SO (through various things) shall we be brought to our 'Rome' by the Lord.

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# THE AXE IS LAID - PART TWO

GEORGE W. NORTH

## THE FRUITS OF REPENTANCE

Before reading this article, the reader should first read Matthew 4:12 to 5:16. In a former article, emphasis was laid on truth which may be regarded as negative truth. It pointed out things which must go from this life - a tree which must be cut down - things we must not do; and showed what true repentance is on the negative side. Here, the emphasis is laid on positive truth, things which must be in the life of the repentant one - the graces, the characteristics, the fruits of repentance. Here we are looking through Jesus' eyes at that which is the only living proof of the deep heart-change that has taken place in the person who professes salvation. John Baptist demanded of his listeners that they bring forth the fruits of their genuineness, but he never said what they were. Luke records that he told the people in general, and publicans and soldiers in particular, what to do, but he does not deal with the fruits of repentance in the same way, nor to the extent that Matthew does.

## JOHN ... BAPTISM IN WATER

Perfect gentleman that He was, Jesus did not develop His public ministry fully till His friend John's had ended. Kindly and considerately, Jesus waited until John was cast into prison and could not preach his gospel and practise water baptism any more. This did not mean that God wanted water baptism to pass away. He did not. On the contrary, Jesus took it up and continued it, handing it over to His disciples to administer in His name. But Jesus had something to add to the meaning of water baptism, something much, much more important; this is the reason why He superseded John. Speaking of him, Jesus said, 'He was a burning and a shining light, and ye were ready for a season to rejoice in that light'.

How true that was of the Jews! For a little while, they rejoiced in John's gospel of repentance for the remission of sins. Johns preaching, like himself, was very definite. He stood at Jordan and preached to the people, and when they believed him

and repented, he demanded that they be baptized in the river. Why did he do that? The answer could be, 'Because God told him to do so', and that answer would be correct. There was more to it than that, though. Water baptism is a picture, a kind of parable, an earthly demonstration with a heavenly meaning; John was teaching the people something. The river Jordan rose high up north in Lebanon and flowed down south in an almost straight line, emptying its contents at last into the Dead Sea. Jordan provided John with a most excellent means of teaching the people what he wanted them to know, namely that God not only forgave sins, He washed, or carried them away and buried them in the sea of death for ever.

Baptism in water represented the content of John's teaching on forgiveness. It was new and very wonderful, light to the people, and God allowed them to rejoice in it for a season. But there was more to baptism than John could reveal, so God removed him from the forefront of the ministry and replaced him with Jesus, His Son. On His mother's side, John was related to Jesus. He was an only son, but he was the son of an earthly father, as all of us are. Perhaps God is wanting to teach us something by this earthly relationship, for we can certainly trace the relationship between the baptisms they administer. Though the baptism with which Jesus baptizes is not the same as that with which John baptized, it is related to it, as the picture to the subject. John's baptism was based on his teaching. Jesus' baptism was based on Himself! He added to John's teaching His own, and then filled it with His death and resurrection. John could not do that - he was not intended to do so. It was not possible for him to do so - he was a mere man; when he was murdered his body remained dead.

## JESUS ... BAPTISM IN THE SPIRIT

Jesus made the picture of baptism a still greater picture, depicting the baptism in the Spirit - a far greater thing than baptism in water. Matthew speaks of light springing up. It certainly did! It began to spring up when John Baptist

commenced his ministry in the wilderness; it came to full power when the Lord Jesus came from the wilderness to commence His ministry. The gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ was altogether a far greater gospel than John's. Men and women were then and still are now sitting in the region of death, that is, in the sphere where death is and in which it operates; the shadow of death hung and still hangs over everyone and everything in the world. Into this region of darkness and shadow, the Light shone.

The light of John Baptist was a limited light in both intensity and scope. It shone to Jews only; Jesus shone to the Jew first and then to the world. Even to the Jews He was a greater Light than John, as they themselves realized. It shone till it reached Galilee of the Gentiles, and beyond. Simeon announced this of Him as He lay a baby in his arms - a *'Light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of Thy people Israel'*. What sprang up with John increased with Jesus, and spread and spread and spread, and is still spreading. This great enlightening message of Jesus Christ is the gospel for today; it goes far beyond anything that John preached. What he preached still holds good though: as he pointed to Christ, so Christ pointed to the Holy Ghost, so that at His coming John's prophecy about Christ might be fulfilled - *'He shall baptize you in the Holy Ghost'*.

So important is this baptism that even John, that great minister of baptism in water said to Jesus, *'I have need to be baptized of Thee'*; he knew he needed to be baptized in the Spirit. We should all listen to John saying to the Lord Christ of God, *'I need to be baptized of Thee'*, and stay with Him till He does it. John felt his need, confessed it to Christ, but that need was not met.

Perhaps John knew his request could not be granted, and accepted the position as people pressed upon him to baptize them, for he never pressed upon the Lord to baptize him. Baptism in the Spirit was not made available by God till after Christ had died and risen again and returned to His Father. Everything which took place before that time was preparatory to it, and worked toward that great end. Repeating what John had said to the nation, Jesus launched out on His public ministry. He did not stay out in the wilderness by Jordan, but moved in to the land and the people. Going down to the sea one day, He began to call His disciples - Peter, James, Andrew and John - and they followed Him, not knowing that the Lord was making His first move toward forming an apostolic band.

## **JESUS BEGAN TO TEACH THEM ...**

Following this, Jesus went about all Galilee preaching and teaching in the synagogues. Men and women came to Him in vast numbers and great need, and all sorts of wonderful things were taking place: deliverance, healing, miracles - whatever the need, the Lord met it. Naturally, He speedily became famous and His fame spread throughout all Syria. What light this was to everyone; John did nothing like this. He was very popular and the country was in the throes of great revival, yet seeing the multitudes of people, some healed, some seeking healing, all praising Him, He went up into a mountain. Great crowds followed Him everywhere, they brought the lunatic, the devil-possessed, the ill and the diseased from many countries, and He healed them all.

He saw the multitudes in their deep need and deliberately withdrew Himself from them. Here is something very

important for us to notice. Everybody thought He was absolutely wonderful, there was none like Him in all the land. He was kind and compassionate and full of marvellous power, which they all needed, and the people came flocking to Him, only to find that He suddenly disappeared up a mountain. Why? Jesus had decided that it was time for Him to call a temporary halt to this great wave of popular enthusiasm and revival. He had not come to the earth to become a national idol or a popular hero. He was about His Father's business. So up the mountain He climbed, followed by His disciples, away from the people, reached the top and sat Himself down and, when His disciples had got themselves settled, He began to teach them. He had some very important things to say.

## **...THE CHARACTERISTICS OF FISHERMEN**

We normally call this section of scripture 'the Beatitudes', meaning the blessings, and so they are; but they are also much more than that. When Jesus first called His disciples, He said 'I will make you fishers of men'; now He was going to let them see something of what He meant. This was why He drew them away from the multitudes. He wanted them to know the kind of people they must be before they were qualified to be fishermen. They had heard John Baptist talking about repentance and the fruits of it in the life, but though he referred to these he had not been at all definite about them. What were they? The disciples needed to be told, so that they knew what was expected of them, and what to look for in others. It is easy to get carried away by professions of Christianity (as we would call it today), and outward ceremonies, but professions without the fruit are empty words. This was the time for them to be told plainly what He was looking for, so the Lord took His disciples apart from the crowds and began to teach them the positive characteristics which are the fruit of all those who truly repent; there are nine of them.

## **BLESSED ARE ... THE POOR IN SPIRIT**

What a gorgeous cluster of fruit forms before the spiritual eye as one by one the Lord mentions nine virtues that characterize the lives of the truly repentant, and coupled with each of the virtues the particular blessing associated with it! These men could not possibly have anticipated this. As may be expected, He commenced with the spirit of man; where else should He begin? *'Blessed are the poor in spirit'*. Repentance must be with a man's spirit. Words will not suffice. If a man's spirit doesn't change, how shall he be a changed man? Jesus begins at the beginning with repentance, which must manifest itself in a man first as poverty of spirit. When a man is presented or confronted with the riches of God's forgiveness, he becomes conscious of his spiritual poverty. Unless he realizes, this he will never be repentant, indeed he cannot be. Spiritual poverty and moral bankruptcy are twins creating longing and unless a man feels this, he will never see his need of the Kingdom of heaven. Certainly he will never be given it. God only gives the Kingdom of heaven to spiritual paupers. As Mary said, *'The rich He hath sent empty away'*. That says it all. Everything turns on a man's estimate of true wealth and of himself.

## **... THEY THAT MOURN**

The second fruit of repentance is mournfulness: *'Blessed are they that mourn'*. Mournfulness is the natural companion of

poverty of spirit - they abide together. If God's response to the poor in spirit is to give them the kingdom of heaven, then His generosity surely extends to the comfort of those that mourn. If a man so poor in spirit does not mourn his condition, there is little hope for him. Beware of those who think they can come dancing and singing and handclapping into salvation - that is not possible. Once a soul is in the Kingdom of heaven that may be so, but it is not the way in. Everyone has to come via the road of repentance - strait is the gate and narrow is the way to real salvation. *'Few there be that find it'*, says Jesus.

### ... THE MEEK

The third fruit as naturally accompanies the second as the second does the first - meekness. *'Blessed are the meek'*. A repentant man is a meek man. Aggression and self-assertion have no place in the kingdom of heaven. The conviction of sin which brings a man down onto his knees before God leaves him with one assertion about himself, namely 'I am a sinner'. Beyond that, he doesn't know anything much, save that he wants to be forgiven and saved. Jesus says that a man's fruit must remain. Meekness will be a feature of that man's life; he is therefore willing to be taught. The meek inherit the earth, not the aggressor. It is wonderful to be given the kingdom of heaven and inherit the earth.

### ... THEY WHO HUNGER AND THIRST

The fourth fruit of repentance is hunger: *'Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness'*. Hunger and thirst are normal appetites in man. They are quite lovely feelings when they can easily be satisfied, but how terrible they are if they cannot be satisfied! When drought and famine ravage a land, hunger and thirst become cravings which, remaining unsatisfied, can only mean death. To the normal, healthy person, hunger and thirst are perfectly natural - they are a sign of life. A healthy appetite for righteousness is one of the true signs of repentance. A man wrought upon by the Spirit of God wants righteousness. What a catalogue of virtues this is: poverty, sorrow, meekness, hunger and thirst. In extreme form in a person, each of these is a sign of desolation. Perhaps this is why John Baptist chose to prophesy in the wilderness and why Jesus went to him there. Repentance will bring a man to the place where, poor and mournful and meek and hungry and thirsty in spirit though he be, he will find grace to press through to the place of complete relief and supply. If the cravings be there, a man will go anywhere to have these cravings satisfied. All those who hunger and thirst for righteousness shall be filled - with righteousness in place of the fulness of sin.

### ... THE MERCIFUL

The fifth fruit is mercy: *'Blessed are the merciful'* - 'mercy in action'. The man who is poor enough in spirit to enter into the kingdom of heaven and be comforted of God, who knows he shall inherit the earth, and whose hunger for righteousness is being satisfied, is a merciful man. This man will forgive all. He will refrain from exacting justice and punishment against the person who wrongs him because he will not want to - he shall obtain mercy from the Lord to be gracious. A man obtains mercy to show mercy. Having found God to be merciful to him over his own transgressions, he will be merciful to all who trespass and transgress against him.

### ... THE PURE IN HEART

The sixth fruit is purity of heart: *'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God'*. How unfulfilling it would be to live in the Kingdom of heaven in comfort, and inherit the earth in righteousness and show mercy to others, and not see God. Surely a man is purified in heart in order to see God, isn't he? Why else? Heaven and earth without God are not worth having. What are they without Him? Not what He made, not where He dwells, but Him - that is the desire of the purified: God, the unseen, the unknown, traceable in all His works, yet a mystery to all His creatures. He is the greatest reason for living ever - to see and know Him is the goal of every pure heart. When vision has been purified from looking at this, or looking at that, when the heart has ceased from running after other things and is pure, men see and go after one thing only. When a man sees God, he quits trying to see anything else. Everything else is cut down like a tree.

### ... THE PEACEMAKERS

The seventh fruit of repentance is peace: *'Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God'*. Peace because of a peacemaker? Everybody who knows God knows He is a peacemaker. Before peace can be enjoyed it has to be made. Because of sin, the whole earth is filled with warfare and to be able to live in peace in a world of conflict and make peace for others as well is a sign that heaven is in the heart. Repentance destroys warfare. To cease from conflict with God is to cease from conflict with men. It is not possible to have peace with God and warfare with men. A man whose heart is pure enough to see God must become a peacemaker. Like his Maker he must make peace.

### ... THE PERSECUTED ... THE VILIFIED

The eighth and ninth fruits of repentance, though separately stated, set forth one virtue - endurance. It is not easy to endure persecution, yet nothing so strengthens a man's moral fibre as this. Persecution is a blessing - when endured for righteousness' sake. With persecution comes temptation to do wrong, as well as pressure to give in. This is specially hard when one is all alone and no-one else is standing with you. Endurance to the end is a great virtue and brings great blessing. On the other hand, moral weakness brings no commendation from God - it is contemptible in His sight. When persecution is accompanied by vilification, it becomes doubly hard to endure. The injustice of it is hard to bear, and the fact that it is so undeserved is so upsetting to the mind, but to Christ, that is the blessing of it. Vilification, to be such a blessing, must be false. So long as it is false vilification, so long as it is all lies and the opposite is true, great is the blessing it brings, for it is all for Christ's sake. When persecution arises because you live and do and speak righteousness - when you are reviled falsely and your good is called evil for His sake - rejoice and be exceedingly glad. We must not let our good be evil spoken of because of our own foolishness - but we must not shrink from doing it because of false accusations or because our motives are questioned. There is no joy like the joy of living persecuted or being vilified for His sake. *'Great is your reward in heaven'*, says the Lord, *'for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you'*. Hallelujah!

## **"BY THEIR FRUITS"**

Unless a man is living in the inheritance of the saints, namely, the Kingdom of heaven, there is little fear that he may be persecuted. Living in the Kingdom of heaven in meekness and purity of heart, seeing God and being comforted by Him, it is not so very hard to endure persecution, or stand vilification. When hunger and thirst for righteousness inspires a man's search, and peacemaking is his aim among men, when his inheritance on earth is not health or wealth or longevity, and everything is held in this perspective, when he lives for nothing else than the blessings of God, he counts all things other than these to be dung, and lives with joy, and his reward is great beyond calculation. He belongs to a select company; he may not be one of the prophets but he is fit to stand with them, for he is as one of them. The greatest thing about prophets is not the prophecies they make but the persons they are, the lives they live, in other words what manner of men they are, for in God's sight this is the more important thing. God is looking for fruit when a man says he is a believer - the fruit of repentance. The nine heart-states or characteristics with these evidential results are that fruit of repentance for which God is looking in a man's life. Apart from these there has not been true repentance. They must be there to some degree in every life that claims to have been repentant unto true faith, and they must also increase in measure as the life develops. Increase in measure will bring increase of blessings; God cannot and does not withhold blessings from such a life, indeed that this life abounds in God's blessings is manifest to all.

When this is so evident to man it is certain that the old tree has been cut down. God's work is most devastating and very comprehensive indeed. The trouble with so many people is that they are content if they can find one little thing which they consider is evidence of this change of which they make profession. But nature itself teaches us that a tree produces only one kind of fruit; men graft new varieties on old stocks with great success, but God says 'cut down' and that is that. Isn't it precisely because the tree hasn't been cut down that so many people are like chameleons? They change colour so successfully that they are indistinguishable from their immediate background. Sometimes they seem to be all right, but at others - oh dear, oh dear. These do not shed their coat like serpents, they change it to suit their surroundings or company. These are not Christians, and neither are those who preach sermons justifying or apologising for that condition. Every preacher of the gospel must employ the method of John and Jesus. Before he ever started introducing the gospel and the great gospel preacher Jesus, John said, *'The axe is laid to the root of the tree'*, for Jesus to come and apply it. Amen. Bless

God there are hearts that recognize truth when they hear it, who see the plain common sense of what God says, and acknowledge that it is all according to laws of nature. A serpent can shed its skin, a chameleon can change its colour, wolves can wear sheep's clothing, but men do not gather grapes of thorns, nor figs from thistles. *'By their fruits'*, said Jesus later, *'ye shall know them'*. Not by their looks, or their colours, or their skins or their coats or by their prophecies, but by their fruits. From the moment it is cut off at the roots, a tree will cease to bear even leaves, let alone fruit. Do not try pruning or grafting - cut it down. There must be a new planting. Burn up all the old, every bit of it - stock, stem, branch, twig, leaf, fruit, the whole lot of it. Bless the Lord for this approach to the gospel! When we hear it, we know where we stand. If we would only read the Bible as it is written and accept its plain statements, we would not be forever hunting for scriptures which might afford us a way of escape, or to make excuses for ourselves. We would come under conviction of sin and would see what God has provided, and say 'that's it Lord, that's it'!

## **EXPECT WHAT GOD EXPECTS!**

John Baptist's gospel was fire, and so was Christ's - John Baptist said so. He said that Christ was mightier than he was, and His fire was mightier than John's, burning up the trees of the field and the chaff of the threshing floor. His baptism is both destructive and refining. It separates - the chaff goes into the fire and the wheat goes into the barn. The blessed seed of God remains. That seed is going to be sown in a new earth, a new heaven on earth will be introduced, created by God, and that seed is going to grow to His eternal glory. Everything will bring forth a hundredfold then, because the conditions will be ideal.

John demanded that we bring forth fruit meet for repentance; Jesus tells us what it is and adds His blessings upon it. John never had much chance to see that fruit, for he soon lost his head, but the Lord sees it, the Lord knows. No longer now are we in ignorance, a man cannot now say he does not know what to expect. Expect what God expects. Christian life is not a mixture of fruit, it is not 'sort of', it is not patchy, it is new altogether. When we stop looking at others, and cease trying to find a fig leaf to cover up or to clothe ourselves with, and stop searching for a tree to hide behind, when we come right out into the open and say 'I need cutting right down, Lord', He will do it. Every man must recognize his own poverty, mourn his own wretchedness, his own warlikeness, his own hunger, whatever it is, and seek the Lord's own baptism. A man must know himself by the Lord's own definition, and let the Lord do His great work in his life.

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**Muslim countries today are rarely out of the news - terrorism, oil, Islamic revolutions...**

**Muslims are sickened by Western decadence - Islam is on the move again.**

**Muslim fanatics in Iran have set up an Islamic republic and in Pakistan the government is trying to reinforce the power of Islamic law.**

**1.5 million Muslims from many nations now live in Britain, and over 300 Mosques have sprung up in our cities.**

**Who are these people, what do they believe, how do Christians relate to them?**

**"The Muslims" Supertract No. 49 by CPO.**

**J = JOY****Gr. = Chara**

Is found frequently in Matthew and Luke, and especially in John, once in Mark (4:16) - gladness: it is absent from 1 Cor. (though the verb is used three times), but it is frequent in 2 Cor., where the noun is used 5 times and the verb 8 times, suggestive of the Apostle's relief in the change in the condition of the Corinthian Church after his first letter. In Phil 1:16 those who read his letter were called the Apostle's joy, so in 1 Thess. 2:19-20 and Heb. 12:2 the Christian's presence at Christ's Second Coming and the place and the future heaven had in Jesus' ministry. The Epistle of James links the trial of faith with joy (Jas. 1:2). Joy is associated with life in 1 Thess. 3:8-9 where experiences of difficulty and sorrow prepare and increase our

capacity to contain joy (John 16:20, 2 Cor. 7:4; 8:2, Heb. 10:3-4).

Throughout the OT and NT joy and gladness are specifically and consistently related to the life of God's people. Joy is a part of God's gift, proceeding from Himself - the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, etc. (Gal. 5:22, Rom. 15:17, 15:13).

This source of joy in the life of God, that gives an effect now in this present life, but also contains an element of anticipation of a final state. 'In thy presence is fulness of joy' - the shorter catechism states in response to the question, 'What is the chief aim of man?', that it is to know God and enjoy Him for ever.

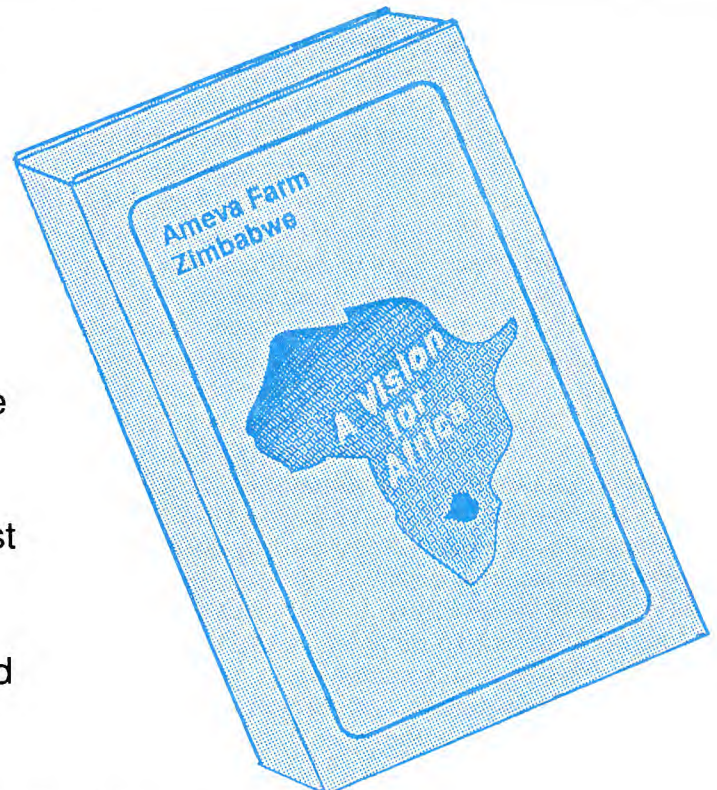
To sum up, joy in the Bible appears consistently as an eschatological reality which has its outworking in some measure in the Christian life now, as we experience the kingdom of God within our hearts. **Editor**

## The Ameva Farm Video

During a visit in February various aspects of the work in the Bible School and on the Farm were recorded and included in a 40 minute video.

The video can be purchased at a cost of £5.00 from the address below.

If requiring copies by post please add £1.00 for postage and packing.



**Please support this work**

Although we are not planning to collect goods this year, due to the high cost of a container, we would still like you to support the work. Our priority is to build up a fund here in the UK to supply the continuing needs, particularly the repair and maintenance of vehicles and equipment. Please forward any contributions to:

**Terry Watson,  
World Mission Project,  
4 Eltham Green,  
London  
SE9 5JZ**

# FAMILY QUESTIONS

GEORGE W. NORTH

**Question:** *'Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety. (1 Tim. 2:15) What does this verse mean?*

**Answer:** This question is obviously connected with the former one and arises from Paul's instruction to Timothy. 'She' (that is the woman) 'shall be saved in childbearing'. 'What does that mean?', asks the questioner. We must keep it in context - 'If they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety', Paul continues. Notice that 'if'. You may have a marginal note in your Bible linking the statement back to Genesis where we read 'Unto the woman, He (that is God) said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception, in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; thy desire shall be to thy husband, he shall rule over thee'. Paul's statement to Timothy is made in connection with this. He is not referring to the salvation of the soul but to the salvation of the body of the mother from death during childbirth! This is not a guaranty that if a woman bears children she will be saved thereby and go to heaven at last just because she has become a mother. It means that she will be saved therein from sickness, or illness, but it does not mean that she will be spared the birth-pangs or the pains of contraction. The suffering involved in childbirth stem from the pronouncement of God in Eden, they will continue unaltered to the end. Women should not only be loved by men, they should be admired also. Some women seem to be able to endure unlimited agonies, bearing child upon child, year after year. It would have killed men to have borne even one! That is contrary to nature of course, and quite impossible also, but it is worth reflecting upon.

Something wonderful is happening in these days; men are being encouraged to go and see their children being born. What a change from the past! Here is a word of advice to all men: the next time you go to witness this, dear husband, place yourself in your precious wife's position, if you can. Be that as it may, there is no need for any believing woman to suffer unduly in childbirth now, nor should she die if she is the Lord's. She shall be saved from this, says God. There is no need for anything to go gravely wrong; every true Christian family, living in the fullness of the Holy Ghost, can expect God to fulfil this promise unto them.

**Question:** *Is infant baptism a sign of salvation?*

Acts 16:11

**Answer:** In a certain way this next question is connected with babies also, though not directly. Paul and Silas were in conversation with the Philippian gaoler who was in process of being restrained from suicide. 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ', they said, 'and thou shalt be saved, and thy house'. Now

this question and the answer has what may be called political overtones in Christian circles; the question turns around the words 'thy house'. There is at least one sect that, because of false emphasis on this, practises infant baptism by immersion. To their credit, they do not believe in or practise the man-made counterfeit of baptism used by so many others. They do not sprinkle their babies with water or make the sign of the cross on the forehead: they abjure all the mystique of priest-craft, but soon after the baby is born they place a bath on their table, and dip the child in it. These dear people do this because they think they are fulfilling God's will as revealed in this verse: they believe in salvation by households; they are mistaken, it is a mistaken interpretation.

The idea of making the sign of the cross, whether it be on babes or adults, or in process of blessing people, so called, or in pronouncing benediction is heathenish. This is not the place to argue doctrine or theology, but we can hardly avoid touching on doctrines at this point. The practise of infant sprinkling has arisen from the teaching of St. Augustine, as he is called. It was he who first introduced into the church the doctrine that we are all born sinners. (Not many believers would argue with him about that, nor is that our point). Naturally this teaching, if accepted, gives rise to this question, 'What is our child dies at birth or a few days or weeks after it is born, will it be lost, can it not be saved?'. This concern is real and the question valid. A seemingly satisfactory answer was soon found, namely infant sprinkling. From then on infants were sprinkled with water in the well-known manner. This was done despite the fact that nowhere in scripture is the practise to be found or even mentioned. The practise itself, heathenish as it is, would not be so tragic if the lie that accompanies it was not so profoundly disturbing and terribly damaging. People who practise this actually believe, or at least say, that thereby the child becomes a child of God and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven. Could anything be more wildly wrong and so terribly damaging? There is another group that ought perhaps to find mention at this point: these people do not believe that anyone born into this world is born in sin. They believe that everyone is born fallen, but not born in sin. This to them is an important distinction, but in the end it amounts to the same thing, for being fallen, sooner or later all men go straight into sin. Nevertheless, they like to make the definition, but except doctrinally, it doesn't matter much.

Whatever the matter may be, it is important to understand this, that whether you're baptized in a tub when a few days old, or signed with a watery cross, or dipped as an adult in a baptistry, or baptized in the sea, makes no difference whatsoever to salvation. Both baptism and salvation are faith transactions, and the latter is far more important than the former. The gaoler said, 'What must I do to be saved?'. Paul answered 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved'. To suggest that Paul would demand that in order to be saved the man must

believe and then virtually contradict the necessity by saying no other person in his family need do so, is beyond belief and reason. The man was not told he should believe for his house or that his belief would cover his household. The doctrine founded upon what the verse does not say must be pure fabrication. A correct approach to reading often greatly assists understanding. By changing the inflection of the voice, the verse makes sense and reveals the unstated truth, without adding any more words or fanciful ideas. 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved' - now pause slightly and raise the voice - 'and, thy house' - meaning that if all thy household wish to be saved they must do the same. Of course, that is exactly what Paul did mean. What else would he say?

**Question:** *Can a Christian couple expect their children to be saved?*

**Answer:** Perhaps behind this question there lies an unasked question, namely this: if a married couple born of God live in love and grace together, and eventually bring children into the world, and train them, or are determined to train them up in the grace of Christ, may they not expect them to be saved? The general answer to that must be 'Yes'. But it is not guaranteed: nobody becomes a Christian automatically. Because a mother and father are Christians it does not follow that the children are saved. The household or family is not saved because a parent or both parents are saved, but a child born to Christian parents and brought up in a Christian family in the true Church of God has a head and shoulders start over children born in a non-Christian home. Blessed indeed are the children of Christian parents who train them up in the ways of eternal life.

A personal testimony may not come amiss here. I remember being introduced to public service when I was only about three years of age. My parents used to take part in Christian social work down in the East End of London. On

Sunday nights we never went into respectable churches for nice comfortable services, but into the steaming, stinking lodging houses of the East End of London. I see it all now - cockroaches crawling up the walls, fleas jumping from man to man and woman to woman, poor unfortunates cooking bacon or sausages or kippers, and spitting on the fire in the communal kitchen. Many are the stories that could be told about that. Every Wednesday afternoon, my mother used to take me to a service held in a centre just a little way down from the corner of a dingy street bearing a lovely name - Flower and Dean Street; the corner boasted a pub called the Frying Pan! Those who came to the meetings were rewarded with mugs of steaming cocoa and about half a loaf of bread. Having secured this they would find a bench and sit eating and drinking as the meeting got under way, as most interested in the food as they were in the gospel. My mother was the musician, she played the harmonium and led the singing, such as it was. One day she stood me on the top of the harmonium to face that congregation of derelicts and outcasts, and while she played I sang my first solo. I could repeat the words now and I cannot say what joy that brings me.

What will your son be able to say about you, mother and father? What? What have you taught them to do? Sit in front of the television late into the night, while you have smoked cigarettes, and drank wine, or more potent alcohol? I wonder. There are no rewards in heaven for that, precious friends. None, only sorrow and regrets both here and there. Quite likely you've ruined yourself and your children too. What if they should curse the day they were born? At three, I sang solos about Jesus - that was over 70 years ago, it's in my bones, my parents instilled it in me. Do you parents see, do you know what opportunity you have? You cannot manufacture stinking dungeon-like lodging houses now, that is not what it's about, it's about training up children in the way they should go. Oh beloved, when a man has passed into reality, having been started on the right way by his parents, he rises up and calls his parents blessed.

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## BIBLE STUDY

ROGER SHUTTLEWORTH

THE SONG OF SOLOMON

### INTRODUCTION

This short book, the last of the 'Sacred Writings' gathered together by Ezra the Scribe, has been misinterpreted by many through the years, or dismissed as irrelevant, irreverent or incomprehensible. Yet by many it has been regarded and treasured as the centre of the writings, perhaps the loveliest part of the Old Testament. In the words of Rabbi Akiba, 'All the Writings are holy; and the Song of Solomon is the Holy of Holies'.

Here we have a love-song written by Solomon, the King of Peace, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, that points us to the love-relationship between Christ and the Bride (representing not just the church, but each individual soul that sets out on the road of deepening love for its Lord). Just as there are degrees

of human relationship, so in this book the Spirit takes us through the varying degrees of relationship between the Christian and Christ, beginning in the early days of Christian experience and culminating in the 'face to face' knowledge that He wants for all of us.

The book should be read as a conversation, to which there are three parties: the maiden, referred to by her Lover in the term 'my love'; the Lover, whom she refers to as 'my beloved'; and the 'daughters of Jerusalem', who may be regarded as interested spectators. Though many editions of the Bible use no quotation marks, it is easy to see from the context where each person's speech begins and ends. In this series of studies we shall be referring to passages from all over the Bible, showing how the great themes of Scripture are taken up in the Song, all directing us to the Lord Jesus.

## 1. THE TITLE - CH.1:1

Solomon is credited with many songs (1 Kings 4:29-34); this one is the best of all. Compare the title with 'vanity of vanities' of Ecclesiastes (also written by Solomon). There he is seeking; here he has found. There he wanders; here he rests. Having drawn his conclusion in Ecc1.12:13, he knows that fulfilment is in God alone; here he goes on into the various levels of relationship with the Lord. It is Solomon, not David, who writes the Song. So we have to do with the risen Christ, seated on the throne, not with the Man of Blood - see 1 Chron. 22:5-10. And it is not the wandering sinner who is in view here, but the person who is already 'in Christ'.

## 2. DESIRES OF THE HEART - CH.1:2-7

Desire is fundamental, for we get from God what we truly want (Psalm 106:15). The Song is written not for the complacent, but for those who want to love Him more.

v.2 The first awareness is that it must begin with Him - see 1 John 4:19. Many wonderful promises are conditional upon loving Him, e.g. John 14:15,16,21,23; 16:27. Yet first we realize that it is all of grace; we need Him to come and love us first. Many of us try to love Him more without first allowing Him to come and kiss us.

v.3 There are spiritual senses just as there are physical senses - see Heb.5:14. The maiden 'smells the odour of His Name', as Wesley puts it, just as Isaac smelled the odour of his son Esau (actually Jacob in disguise), Gen.27:27. So we are led on by the indefinable sense of the sweetness of Jesus. References to smell abound in this book, e.g. vv.12:14; 4:10-16; 5:5; 6:2; 7:13. And it is not only He who is fragrant, but the bride too. It seems that spiritual communion is closely paralleled by the sense of smell particularly. His Name, poured forth, speaks of the Name Jesus, who as 'the Lord our Salvador' was poured out unto death for us - Isa. 53:12.

The maid is not alone in her quest; there are others too, referred to as virgins, who are keeping themselves only for Him. Thus the temptation to spiritual pride is avoided, as brought out in the next verse and chp.2:1.

v.4 Grace is emphasized again - we have to be drawn. See John 6:44; 12:32; Ezekiel 47:1-6. And if I am drawn, there will be others too who will come.

The chambers signify the most intimate fellowship. This is not like David bringing Bathsheba, the action of lust, but the expression of purest love. It is not realm to trample into; one has to be brought. The chamber is the place of union, and the result of union is fruit unto God (Rom.7:4). This fellowship has an effect upon her - she realizes that here all things are opened unto the eyes of Him with whom she has to do (Heb. 4:13). She realizes that all hypocrisy must go; any attempt at prevarication will spoil it.

v.5 Deeper fellowship with Jesus leads to a deeper appreciation of ourselves. See Job 42:5,6. Black - but nevertheless comely to Him. He does not, of course, deceive Himself, telling Himself that she is really all right. But there is a sense in which the repentant soul, however black with sin or self, is irresistibly attractive to Him; He knows what He can do with such a soul.

Kedar was one of the sons of Ishmael, the fruit of the flesh (Gen.25:13; Gal.4:23). See Psalm 120:5. For Mesech, see Ezek.38:2,3. So she speaks of her fleshliness, and is not ashamed to confess it in the presence of others who are of the household of God, the 'daughters of Jerusalem'. It is interesting that the scriptural emphasis with regard to confession is that it is done in the presence of others. Perhaps in wanting to avoid the misuse of these things, we have missed something of the truth.

Yet her confession is not altogether negative. Black, it may be, as the tents of Kedar, but also comely as the curtains of Solomon. These are inner graces that the Lord hangs around the soul, 'all glorious within' (Psalm 45:13).

v.6 She refuses the admiring glances of other believers, knowing that she is hardened by the spirit of the world. She knows too that her own heart, the vineyard that the Lord gave her in the beginning, has not been kept as it should have been. Others criticise her for this; many of the Lord's people have had to endure the rejection of those who should have been a source of encouragement - see chp. 5:7,9; Isa.66:5. David experienced the same, 1 Sam. 17:28-30.

v.7 Jesus leads His flock into rest and full provision. Psalm 23. 'Ah, show me that happiest place, the place of thy people's abode'. To know this, the soul has to go through the disciplines of the Lord. Yet she has an earnest desire to come here; why settle for anything less? There are other flocks and other shepherds - preachers, leaders, ministers. A true shepherd will have the unconscious effect of leading the soul to the Great Shepherd and not to himself - see Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 5:1-4. Many people know where the food is, but how many are prepared to go there?

## 3. INTENTIONS OF GRACE - CH.1:8-11

It is significant that the Lord speaks second, i.e. He responds to the love of her heart. He responds to her specific question, instructing her in the way that she should take.

v.8 She is the 'fairest among women' because of her desires - see Luke 1:28.

His first recommendation to her is very instructive. It draws her away from independence and encouraged that humility which is essential. She is to follow the flock with others, not to 'do her own thing'. And the Lord credits her with the spiritual discernment to be able to detect the footsteps of the true flock. She is also to listen to the counsels of the shepherds. How wonderfully the Lord blends together the inward anointing (1 John 2:27) and the ministry of spiritual men (Eph.4:11). Her first step is thus one not of separation but of involvement, and in doing this she herself becomes an example to her own little flock.

vv.9,10 Now that she has committed herself to following Him, the Lord tells her how He sees her. How many of us need to see with His eyes! Horses were one of Solomon's passions, 1 Kings 4:26; 10:28. God's comparisons are always favourable. The horse denotes strength and swiftness, but these things are often merely natural, and so there comes the change of emphasis of the next verse. The cheekbones seem to determine beauty in a face; the neck is a symbol of stubbornness, Deut. 31:27; Neh. 9:29,

etc. Her cheeks and neck are adorned with natural beauty, but it is not the beauty of the Lord, and so the Lord makes it clear to her that He will replace it with His own.

v.11 'We' denotes the Trinity. Gold denotes the nature of God Himself (think of all the furnishings in the Tabernacle). Silver symbolises redemption - see Hosea 3:2; Zech.11:12; Matt.26:15. The borders or braids of gold that the Lord will make for her will be of His own nature, and they will be held in place by the power of redemption. It has to be painstakingly made by Him, Eph.2:10. Our redemption was worked out and accomplished by all the Persons of the Godhead - the Son in His death, the Father in resurrection, and the Spirit in sanctification.

#### 4. WORDS OF LOVE - VV.12-17

vv12,13 One of the women whom we associate with Jesus as He walked on the earth is Mary the sister of Lazarus. She obviously gained insight into His death, as we see her in John 12:1-8 anointing Him with spikenard (see also Mark 14:3) while He sat at table. In these verses we see how the maiden has an appreciation of His suffering; myrrh too has its association with death, Matt.2:11; Mark 15:23; John 19:39; Psalm 45:8. The contemplation of His suffering and death for us is one sure way of seeing our love for Him grow. How often these things become trite! We need to take time to 'survey the wondrous cross, on which the Prince of Glory died'. So she cherishes Him, holding Him to herself in the grateful, sorrowing love that feels its own unworthiness.

v.14 Camphire, or henna, bears fragrant yellow blossoms. It was in Engedi that David hid from Saul, 1 Sam.23:29. It was a rare place of fertility near to the Dead Sea, a source of food, shelter and water in an otherwise dry and barren land.

v.15 Again the Beloved replies to her in words that echo her own. The repetition lends emphasis, 'thou ART fair'. See Isa.62:5. There is a beauty in holiness, Psalm 29:2. We wonder that the Lord Jesus should ever find anything attractive in us, yet he does. The eye is the window of the soul (see Matt.6:22) and here He expresses the thing that characterises her inward state as dove-like, beautiful and peaceful.

v.16 - chp.2:1 The maiden replies, 'THOU art fair'. She finds pleasure in Him too, and does not need the pleasures of the world. The scene is of a summer-house, a place of repose. Cedar was used in the construction of the temple, 1 Kings chps.6,7; it denotes permanence and strength. Fir too (properly translated 'cypress') was used in the temple; its wood is known for its resistance to decay. So our 'building' is upheld by the power and unchangeableness of the love of God.

#### 5. FULL OF JOY - CH.2:1-4

v.1 Though we often sing of Christ as the Rose of Sharon, the verse is really spoken by the maid about herself. The Plain of Sharon towards the west coast of Israel was sometimes covered

with roses, and so she is aware that she is only one among many, though she does not argue with the Lord when He says that He finds her beautiful. True humility can hear praise of itself without protest or pride, but it is well to remember that we are each one among many. The rose speaks of beauty, the lily of purity. See Psalm 45 title.

v. 2 The Lord confirms what she says; compare Romans 8:16, the dual witness of our spirit and His. We know, and He confirms. He tells her that she is not only a lily, but rare too. The 'daughters; figure several times in the book, e.g. chp.1:5; 2:7, etc.; they are those who in some sense have a relationship with Him, but it is that of onlookers. For thorns, see Gen.3:18; Isa.55:13, Numbers 33:55; Mark 4:7,18.

v.3 She replies in praise. The citron-tree is meant, which is related to the orange and is known for its fragrance, its fruit and its shade. The Lord Jesus is often likened to a tree - See Isa.11:1; Jer.23:5; 33:15; Zech.3:8; 6:12. This is the meaning of 'Nazarene' in Matt.2:23.

Communion with the Lord must include times of 'sitting down under His shade' (Psalm 91:1; Ruth 3:18). He is greater than we, for the lesser is always shaded by the greater.

v.4 'He brought me' - see chp.1:4. The banqueting house is literally the House of Wine, the place of extreme joy and gladness, Psalm 104:15. We think of the Lord's first sign in John chp.2, and His words in Matt.26:29.

'Oh, I am my Beloved's, and my Belov'd is mine;  
He brings a poor, vile sinner into His House of Wine!'

Above the whole scene flies the banner of Love. The Israelites in the wilderness pitched their tents beneath their tribal banner; the Levites pitched theirs beneath the pillar of fire, Numbers 1:52,53.

#### 6. SICK WITH LOVE - VV.5-7

vv.5,6 She is not sick OF love, but sick WITH love. She appeals for support to those around her, but immediately finds that it is He who comes to her aid.

v. 7 Many souls who are not familiar with the kind of communion here depicted will try to arouse the enraptured soul to activity; after all, they say, we are here to serve God. The maid has to speak sternly to them, charging them not to interrupt this communion - a charge that recurs several times in the book. There are times with the Lord when it seems inappropriate even to breathe. Like the roes and the hinds, these times are so easily disturbed.

So this blessed woman comes into the first experiences of love with her Lord. It is a time of joy, gladness, revelation and rest. But she has yet many things to learn, not least about herself.

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