

REFORM- ATION TODAY'81



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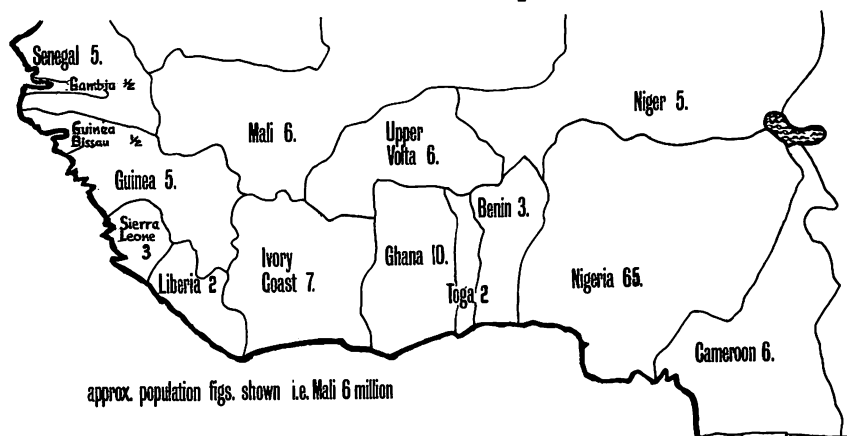
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News from the Ivory Coast



In addition to his pioneering work for Evangelical Press Bill Clark records Gospel messages in French which are broadcast to many nations including countries of Africa such as Benin, Zaire and Ivory Coast. Requests for cassette recordings of the broadcasts are received, processed and dispatched from Welwyn. Numerous letters are received. One from a young man in the Ivory Coast brings this news:

I am very happy to be able to tell you about some recent events in my life, and what Christ has done for me.

I am the son of the grand witch-doctor in my village. I was despised by my family because I had become a Christian and was different from them. Every Tuesday, Thursday and Friday evenings I went to the meetings in the church, which lasted from 6 to 8.30 p.m. When I returned home my family had left me nothing to eat. My father could not stand me and would tell me to go and eat the flesh of Christ! However, I did not stop telling them about Jesus who died on the cross to save us from our sins.

One day my father decided to throw me out of the house. I was not surprised, for the Bible in Matthew 24:9 tells us that we should expect this. I was therefore obliged to sleep in the church for three days, but I did not stop praying. The fourth day I returned to my family. My father had changed and received me home. I still did

not cease to pray, for prayer was my only strength.

My father is also the regional head-man and knows how to read and write. One night, at 4.30 a.m. (the time when I usually got up to pray) I put on one of your cassettes, not knowing that my father was listening attentively.

The next morning, very early, my father called me and told me that he had heard my Jesus speaking. I explained to him that he was not only my Jesus, and that what he had heard was a cassette which had been recorded in France. He was very surprised and asked me, 'Do the white people know Jesus too?' I explained that Jesus was known in the whole world . . .

One Sunday he took his three wives and his other children and they all went to church. . . . The evangelist read Matthew 1:21 and that very day my father decided to burn all his animal skulls and to cut down the tree which he worshipped and which he sprinkled every day with the blood of a cockerel.

From that day the people of my village began, one by one, to go to church, and I am happy to be able to tell you that today two-thirds of my village have professed to be Christians. . . . Please send me some more cassettes.

Justin Djedje.

Editorial

What constitutes a New Testament Church?

Two of our church members recently had to spend several weeks away from home. They looked everywhere within reasonable distance for a suitable evangelical church. The best they could find was a Salvation Army corps. The Gospel was faithfully declared, the fellowship was warm and welcoming, the band in fine fettle! Now if we were to argue from a purely pragmatic viewpoint and forget about theory or doctrine we could say that since that assembly was doing well without the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Table and has no elders we ourselves could well dispense with the same.

But does this follow? Surely it is our business to follow the New Testament blueprints. In attempting to do this we are not saying that we are better or in a more healthy spiritual state than other churches. But we do believe that we have to follow the instructions left us by the Head of the church and by his apostles. And *he* did ordain baptism and the Lord's supper and *they* did appoint elders.

We may, of course, very easily come to think that because we try to obey the instructions which the New Testament leaves us concerning the gathering and ordering of the church we shall necessarily be more blessed than the Salvation Army corps which has neither ordinances nor elders. But if we should do this we would be greatly mistaken. For we can follow the instructions and yet be lacking in love for each other and in zeal to preach the gospel.

Does it follow, then, that we should only be concerned to show love and to manifest zeal? By no means! Otherwise we are by implication questioning the authority of the One who instituted baptism and supper, and the Spirit's guidance of the apostles who appointed elders in every church.

Because God manifestly blesses some churches which are not as well founded or ordered as others it does not follow that the subject of David Kingdon's article is to be neglected. For as he shows with respect to baptism it was of such importance that it received considerable emphasis in our Lord's parting instructions to his disciples.

We trust that in drawing attention to the important question as to what constitutes a New Testament church we shall not be understood as claiming that we have a monopoly of truth or a premium on God's blessing. Our desire is to be faithful to the Head of the church in obeying what we see to be the whole counsel of God without in any way implying that other churches are not such because they do not view matters as we do. Like us to their own Master they stand or fall.

Sovereign grace in the New England States

With leaders such as John Cotton and Increase Mather the New England States of America were blessed with solid theological foundations which were destined to be of enormous advantage in the years which followed, years which were often to witness heaven-sent revival.

For instance the town of Northampton in Massachusetts was the scene of the ministries of Solomon Stoddard and Jonathan Edwards. Stoddard began his

Front Cover: Camping Time! August is the month when the young people from the free grace Baptist churches in the Northern counties, especially Yorkshire, go camping. Pictured above (left) is Pastor Dic Eccles of Hebden Bridge who by virtue of much experience is the fountain of knowledge and source of guidance for the campers. On his left is Malcolm McGregor, pastor at Accrington and on his right Martin Howells, headmaster of a school and elder of the church at Hebden Bridge. Martin is gifted in leading the children and especially so in teaching them how to sing and enjoy it. Next to him is Jackie Darley who is secretary of the Christian Union at Swansea University. Young people came this year from Milnrow where Victor Budgen is minister, West Houghton (Howard Crossley), Wattisham (Gordon Hawkins), Darlington (Andrew Swanson), Sowerby Bridge (Andrew Binns) and Lancaster Reformed Baptist Church where on 9th August Michael Pearce (school teacher) and Brian Ventress (policeman) were recognised and ordained to the eldership of the newly constituted church.

The campers are a tough breed. One cold water tap has to provide for the needs of all. The north west of Yorkshire (Austwick is the scene of the camp) is notoriously rainy. The hall of the local Methodist church generously loaned is a boon to the campers who readily enjoy themselves there when outdoor recreations are precluded. The drizzly conditions account for a poor photo.

ministry in Northampton in 1669 and during his 58 years of pastoring and preaching witnessed five powerful revivals. It is said that between 200 and 300 people were awakened under a sermon by Stoddard on the text, 'but you believe not, because you are not of my sheep'. Revival came to Northampton again under Edwards' ministry in 1735. Then 1740-41 proved to be the momentous time of the Great Awakening in the New England states. Edwards travelled to a number of centres to preach at that time.

Revivals were again recorded in the New England states between 1797 and 1812. Accounts of these were gathered and published by Bennett Tyler in 1846. (Republished by R. O. Roberts, U.S.A. in 1980.) The city of Boston, which today is a spiritual wilderness, was visited with revival in the years around 1840. For example 1,200 were added to 8 churches in 1842 and one church in particular reported an increase of 530 in that year.

Showers of blessing came upon the New England States during the great revival which began in 1858. In the state of Massachusetts the Baptists recorded 2,386 additions by March 1858 which was about a third of the spiritual harvest in that state. A time of revival was reported in Portland, Maine, in 1880-81.

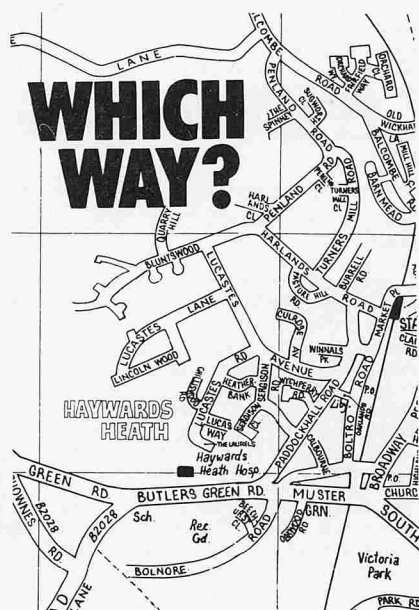


Daniel Wray

A description of the present state of affairs in these states and how decline has prevailed would be helpful. Perhaps Daniel Wray minister of the Congregational church in the village of Limington, Maine could provide us with an account some time. At his invitation it was a privilege to minister at a day conference at his church. Folk came from 25 different churches, some long distances. The subject was the role of the church in sanctification. The degree of interest shown is reflected in the fact that over 200 cassettes were ordered. An awakening of interest in the old paths and former teachings is evident. Let our prayers for reformation and revival be ceaseless and fervent.

Which Way?

Is the title of the evangelistic magazine put out by the Cuckfield Baptist Church for local use. By printing a useful map to cover front and back covers an item is provided which people are reluctant to throw away. One side of the cover is reproduced here in case other churches find the idea useful. The title lends itself to exposition on the theme of Matthew 7: 13, 14.



(continued on cover iii)

A basic subject tackled by Pastor David Kingdon of Cardigan.

What constitutes a New Testament church?

This article is a slightly revised version of a paper given at a British Evangelical Council study conference in 1979.

What constitutes a New Testament Church?

The question which heads this article raises (inevitably) other questions such as the following. Why a New Testament Church and not a biblical one? (Has the Old Testament nothing to teach us with respect to the church?) Is there one model church in the New Testament or are there several existing churches such as those at Rome, Philippi, Corinth etc. which are at varying removes from the ideal church, assuming that such a church can be found in the New Testament? Can we make a distinction, as some do, between the *esse*(being) of the church and the *bene esse*(well being) of the church? (Just as, for example, a man does not cease to be a man should he suffer the amputation of a leg, yet clearly he is no longer a 'normal' man.)

Such questions as these are not unimportant for if, for example, one cannot give a clear answer as to what constitutes a New Testament church it will be difficult to say of any particular church today that it is not in any sense a church in the sense of the church as defined in the New Testament.

Furthermore, there is the very basic issue of methodology to be considered. Thus, in framing an answer to our question, are we permitted to take into account only the direct teaching of our Lord and the apostolic writers, or is it legitimate to use the historical data given us in Acts and the Epistles? Back of this issue lies another, namely how widely we apply the authority of Scripture over the Church. In other words, is Scripture to be understood only as being intended to make us 'wise unto salvation' and to be 'profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness' (2 Tim. 3:15, 16) or is it intended to regulate the worship, mission and government of the church as well? It is well to raise these questions at the outset since the kind of answers we each give to them is bound to affect our approach to the subject before us.

For the sake of clarity let me therefore state my basic assumptions. First, just as we gather from various parts of the New Testament data which we use to systematise the doctrine of the atonement, for example, so we, I believe, must collect together the available data of the New Testament and frame it into the doctrine of the church.

Secondly, because apostolic practice as well as apostolic doctrine had a determinative role in the churches of the New Testament era, it must be included within the data to be used to construct an answer to our question. In other words, I do not feel at liberty to set aside Paul's practise of appointing elders and to argue that the form of church government is accordingly a matter of indifference or, at least, to be left to us to devise merely according to prevailing needs.

Thirdly, I am not able to make the common distinction between essential and unessential truths of revelation, between what is held to be mandatory and what is not. In this connection, I wish to quote some words written a hundred years ago which admirably express my own convictions. 'There is good reason for believing that not for a few souls are now in happiness, who in life knew little more than . . . the first principles of the oracles of God — the very alphabet of the Christian system; and if so, no other divine truths can be counted absolutely essential to salvation. But if all the other truths of revelation are unimportant, because they happen to be non-essentials, it follows that the Word of God itself is in the main unimportant; for by far the greatest portion of it is occupied with matters, the knowledge of which, in the case supposed, is not absolutely indispensable to the everlasting happiness of men. Nor does it alter the case, if we regard the number of fundamental truths to be much greater. Let a man once persuade himself that importance attaches only to what he is pleased to call essential, whatever their number, and he will, no doubt, shorten his creed and cut away the foundation of many controversies; but he will practically set aside all except a very small part of the Scriptures. If such a principle does not mutilate the Bible, it stigmatises much of it as trivial. . . . All Scripture is profitable. A fact written therein may not be essential to human salvation, and yet it may be highly conducive to some other great and gracious purpose in the economy of God — it may be necessary for our personal comfort, for our guidance in life, or for our growth in holiness, and most certainly it is essential to the completeness of the system of Divine truth.'

In view of the present controversy over this particular issue it is worth pointing out that the writer was not a Strict Baptist, but a professor in an Irish Presbyterian theological college. I refer, of course, to Thomas Witherow, from whose book *The Apostolic Church — which is it?* my quotation is taken (pp. 11-12 of 1976 reprint of the third edition, Free Presbyterian Publications, Glasgow).

With these preliminary observations behind me I must now begin my paper proper. My method of procedure will be to state a thesis and then to prove it from Scripture.

1. *The church is constituted by the saving action of the triune God*

Theologically this is surely the correct starting-point since the church has come into being only because prior to any believing response to the Gospel, which issues in the formation of a church, is the saving action of the triune God.

It is from this perspective that Paul views church at Ephesus. Her members had heard 'the word of truth' (*ἡ ῥα ῥηὶς τῆς ἀληθείας*) and 'upon believing' (taking *pisteusantes* as a coincident aorist) they had been sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise (1:13). Yet Paul sets their response in the context of the saving purpose and action of the triune God. For he speaks of the Father's electing and predestinating love (v. 3-5); of redemption through the blood of Christ (v. 7); union with him as the federal head of the new humanity (1:3 of 2:15), and the work of the Holy Spirit in sealing them as God's own possessions (cf. 1 Pet. 1:2-12).

Without this divine initiative there could be no church. Without a gracious and loving purpose formed in eternity between the three persons of the

blessed Trinity there would be no church on earth to live to the praise of the glory of God's grace.

The fact that the church is constituted by the saving action of the triune God has various profound implications for her life on earth.

In the first place, her worship is inescapably trinitarian. It is a response in doxological form to the grace of the triune God. As the Father sent the Son into the world to be 'the propitiation for our sins' (1 John 4:10), and the Father and the Son together sent the Holy Spirit to convince the world of sin, righteousness and judgement (John 16:8-11), so from the church there arises worship to the Father, through the Son, and in the power of the Holy Spirit. 'Filled with the Spirit' she gives 'thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ' (Eph. 5:18, 20). Furthermore, the church consciously confesses 'the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit' (2 Cor. 13:14), and baptises in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19).

The trinitarian nature of the church's worship marks her off from the Judaism from which she emerged and from all forms of Unitarianism. A church cannot be a church and deny the doctrine of the Trinity.

Secondly, there is an explicit *particularity* inherent in the saving action of the triune God. It is action designed to secure a people for the Father (1 Pet. 2:9, 10), a bride for the Son (Eph. 5:23, 25-27; Rev. 19:7) and a temple for the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19). The grace of the triune God is efficacious precisely because it is particularistic in intention, for he will have a people to glorify his name on earth. It is not the grace of a God who hopes for a response to his grace, but who cannot be sure that such a response will be forthcoming. It is the grace of the God 'who commanded the light to shine out of darkness' and 'hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ' (2 Cor. 4:6).

Now as the church reflects upon the particularity of saving grace she is bound to make it a matter of confession for she cannot be silent in the face of such grace. Since confession arises from reflection upon the particularity of saving grace it will be what, broadly speaking, we may call Reformed in character, i.e. of the character of the Heidelberg Catechism, the Westminster Confession, the Savoy Confession and the Particular Baptist Confession.

This is not to say, of course, that there are not other understandings of grace and other confessions which reflect these. It is to say that *rightly understood* the saving action of the triune God is particularistic, and that the confession of this is one of the marks of a New Testament church. Here one speaks of what *ought* to be, rather than of what often *is*, the case. But this is how one must speak unless one is going to start from the church as it is and try to answer our question from this starting-point.

There is, of course, a distinction to be drawn between the saving action of the triune God and the church's confession of that action. Mercifully the saving action of God is not tied to the confession of that action in theological statements otherwise who would be saved? But neither can the church escape the task of confessing the saving action of God for she must 'show

forth the praises of him who hath called (her) out of darkness into his marvelous light' (1 Pet. 2:9).

2. The church is constituted by the preaching of the gospel

When one speaks of the saving action of the triune God as constituting the church one cannot stop there and do justice to the teaching of the New Testament. For the saving action of God is tied to the preaching of the Gospel of grace. Thus for Paul the evidence of the election of the believers at Thessalonica was to be seen in the fact that 'our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance' (1 Thess. 1:4-5).

The church is formed by the preaching of the Gospel of grace. This is variously described as the preaching of Christ crucified (1 Cor. 1:23), the preaching of the cross (1 Cor. 1:18), the manifestation of the truth (2 Cor. 4:2) etc.

Of immediate concern to us is the *content* of the apostolic proclamation. What was the message preached which formed the church as men and women responded to it? The answer we give to this question will be determined very largely by which approach we choose to adopt.

We can go to a passage such as 1 Corinthians 15:3, 4 and regard it as providing us with a summary of the message Paul preached. The object of Christ's coming was to die for our sins according to the Scriptures (v. 3). He truly died ('was buried' v. 4) and on the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures.

We can regard this passage as giving us an essential definition of the Gospel and then, if we choose to do so, proceed to draw inferences from it as to what constitutes a New Testament church.

But attractive though this procedure is it is not without its problems. In the first place, was Paul intending to define the whole Gospel as such? Was it not his purpose to counteract the mistaken idea, held by some in the church at Corinth, that the bodies of believers are not raised at the last day (v. 13)? With this purpose in mind he concentrates upon the resurrection of Christ in order to demonstrate that the 'resurrection of the dead' (v. 12) flows from the resurrection of Christ (vv. 13, 15).

If this is the case it is hardly right to suppose that Paul is intending to give a full definition of the Gospel. His purpose is to deal with a denial of the resurrection of the body and therefore he concentrates upon the resurrection of Christ. It is true, of course, that he also says that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. But the death and resurrection of Christ are not the whole Gospel, nor would Paul ever have maintained that they were had you asked him. For 'Christ', as the Greek term for Messiah, does not, in and of itself, proclaim either our Lord's deity or humanity. Nor is the gospel properly defined without reference to the ascension of Christ and his high-priesthood. So, in the second place, we conclude that we do not have a full definition of the Gospel here, and that therefore it is not correct to draw inferences from it as to what constitutes a New Testament church.

It therefore seems to me that we have to follow another procedure. We have to look at the whole of the New Testament and gather from it the content of

the Gospel. And then we have to ask how the apostles preached the Gospel. Did they, for example, say anything about baptism in their gospel preaching? Or did they simply speak of faith in Christ, leaving baptism to a later stage of instruction?

Now it is not necessary for me to go through the New Testament to gather from it the content of the Gospel. I can safely take it, I trust, that we are in agreement as to its content. However, when we ask how the apostles preached the Gospel and particularly when we try to draw inferences which bear on the nature of the church we come at once into an area of controversy.

Our starting point must be Matthew 28:19-20. Here the mission of the church is defined as discipling all nations, baptising them into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe everything that the apostles have been taught by Christ. The main verb is, of course, *mathēteusate* 'make disciples'. Subordinate to making disciples are the activities of baptising and teaching. But it is not legitimate to argue that therefore baptising and teaching can be given a secondary place in the mission of the church. For if baptism is defined as a non-essential then that which is coordinate with it, namely teaching, must also be defined as a non-essential. Surely William Hendriksen is correct when he says that 'by means of being baptised and being taught a person becomes a disciple, with the understanding, of course, that this individual is ready for baptism and is willing to appropriate the teaching' (*Matthew*, p. 1000).

When we examine the apostolic preaching we find that it fits perfectly into the pattern laid down in the Great Commission. Thus on the day of Pentecost we find Peter commanding his committed hearers to repent and be baptised (Acts 2:38). Philip's proclamation of the gospel must have included teaching about baptism because the Ethiopian eunuch exclaimed 'See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptised?' (Acts 8:36). Ananias' words to Saul of Tarsus also presuppose that baptism was part of the gospel proclamation: 'Arise, and be baptised, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord' (Acts 22:16).

Now if baptism was included in the Great Commission, and if it formed part of the apostolic preaching of the gospel, then it cannot be regarded as less than mandatory or as non-essential without seriously calling into question the authority of the biblical revelation at this point (cf. John Murray: *Christian Baptism*, pp. 45-46).

Must we not therefore make an important distinction? Namely, it is one thing to recognise that there are serious differences among evangelicals with respect to their understanding of baptism. It is quite another to say that baptism is to be reckoned as a non-essential. If we say this we are playing down the significance given to baptism in the apostolic preaching of the gospel.

3. The church is constituted by the believing response of men

Thus far I have emphasised two factors in the constituting of the church. There is the saving action of the triune God. In other words, the grace of God forms the church. But the grace of God works through the instrumentality of the preached message of the gospel and this includes baptism.

Baptism therefore comes as part of the gospel — as that obligation which is laid upon men together with repentance and faith.

It is to another factor that we must now turn in order to give it careful consideration. It is this. Unless there is a *believing response* to the grace of God and the message of the Gospel there is no church. This is not to say, of course, that a believing response is secured independently of the gracious action of God. The New Testament makes it abundantly clear that those who believe do so because they are made alive in Christ (Eph. 2:1, 5). They have been enlightened at the command of God (2 Cor. 4:6). They are a 'new creation' (2 Cor. 5:17).

Now the question we have to ask is: What are the elements, according to the New Testament, which combine together in what I have described as a believing response to the Gospel? What, from the human side, constitutes the response to the grace of God and the message of the Gospel without which there would be no fellowship of believers, no church of Christ?

The first element is repentance. It was for repentance that Peter called on the day of Pentecost, for as the Lucan version of the Great Commission says, repentance must be preached in Christ's name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem (Luke 24:47). Paul is able to describe his evangelistic work at Ephesus as a 'testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ' (Acts 20:21). He could rejoice that the Thessalonian believers had 'turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God' (1 Thess 1:9).

The second element is faith. Faith is urged upon Peter's hearers: 'whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved' (Acts 2:21). It is proclaimed by Paul to the Philippian gaoler: 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house' (Acts 16:31). It is by faith that the sinner appropriates the righteousness of God (Rom. 3:22-28, especially v. 26).

The third element is baptism. Now since this is a more controversial point we must spend more time upon it.

The first point to be made about baptism is that it is 'into the name of Jesus' (Acts 2:38) cf. Acts 8:16; 10:48; 19:5. The basic meaning of the Hebrew-Aramaic original *leshem* is 'with respect to'. It can denote both the basis and purpose of that which is named. Thus, in Matthew 10:41 to receive a prophet 'in the name of a prophet' (*eis onoma prophētou*) is to welcome him *because* he is a prophet. Those who meet 'in my name' (Mark 18:20) do so in the interests of the cause of Jesus.

Strack-Billerbeck cite three examples from Rabbinical literature to illustrate the meaning of *eis to onoma* in Matthew 28:19.

(i) When heathen slaves entered a Jewish household they were compelled to receive a baptism 'in the name of slavery' i.e. to become slaves, standing in a relationship of slavery to their master. Similarly when they were set free they were to be immersed 'in the name of freedom'. In this example baptism sets a man in relationship to either slavery or freedom. In this analogy baptism in the name of Jesus (in the case of the Acts passages) sets the

baptised in a definite relation to Jesus. Or in the case of Matthew 28:19 it sets the baptised in a definite relation to Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

(ii) An offering is slaughtered in the name of six things: 'in the name of the offering, in the name of God, in the name of the altar fires, in the name of the sweet savour, and in the name of the good pleasure (before God). . . . From this point of view baptism in the name of the Father etc. takes place for the sake of God, to make the baptised over to God' (G. R. Beasley-Murray: *Baptism in the New Testament*, p. 9).

(iii) An Israelite can circumcise the Samaritan, but a Samaritan is not permitted to circumcise an Israelite because the Samaritans circumcise 'in the name of Mount Gerizim' i.e. with the obligation of venerating the God of the Samaritans who is worshipped there. So when a person is baptised in the name of Jesus it is with the obligation to venerate him, to live in covenant allegiance to him.

The New Testament writers do not, of course, think of baptism apart from faith, so they do not raise the kind of questions which so readily occur to us. For them baptism is the vehicle used by faith to respond to the gospel. 'In the New Testament faith *comes* to baptism; the idea of baptism creating faith is not on the horizon' (ibid., p. 274). On the other hand, since baptism is into the name of Jesus, placing the believer in a definite relationship to him as Lord, the New Testament does not disjoin faith and baptism.

The second point to be made about baptism is that it is an act of incorporation into Christ. Again it must be stressed that we do not speak of baptism apart from faith, but of baptism in faith. Baptism is according to Paul *eis Christon Jēsun* (Rom. 6:3) – 'into Christ Jesus'. If to be baptised 'into Moses' (1 Cor. 10:2) is to be baptised into the discipleship of Moses, and to be baptised 'into the name of Paul' (2 Cor. 1:13) is to be baptised into the discipleship of Paul, an idea which Paul decisively rejects, then baptism 'into Christ Jesus' means baptism into union with Christ. 'Baptism into Christ signifies union with him and participation of all the privileges which he as Christ Jesus embodies,' wrote the late John Murray (*Romans* I, p. 214). In particular, in the context of Romans 6:1-6 baptism means union with Christ in his death, for Paul is concerned to vindicate the proposition that believers have died to sin. Therefore it follows that 'if baptism means union with Christ Jesus in his death, then believers died with Christ in his death' (op. cit. p. 215). Professor Murray rightly adds that 'we are not to impute to the apostle a sacerdotalist view of the efficacy of baptism. It is sufficient that in an appeal of this kind he should have elicited from the import of baptism as sign and seal the significance which pointed to the vindication and elucidation of his thesis that believers died to sin. This holds true as truly on an evangelical view of the efficacy of baptism as on the sacerdotalist . . .' (ibid., p. 215).

A third point follows. If baptism is into Christ then it is at one and the same time baptism into his body, for Christ cannot now be thought of apart from the church which is his body. Thus when Paul writes to the church at Corinth he argues thus: 'For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ' (1 Cor. 12:12). That is, so close is the relationship between Christ and his

body, the church, that Paul can write 'so also is Christ' where we might have expected him to have written 'so also is the church'. This closeness of identity does not amount to an identity of the head with the members for Paul has just stated (12:3) that Jesus is the Lord in any confession prompted by the Holy Spirit. In this sense he is distinct from the church. Yet just as he is the vine (John 15:1) so here 'He is the whole Body, as being that which unites the members and makes them an organic whole' (Robertson and Plummer, *1 Corinthians*, p. 271).

That baptism is into Christ and at the same time into his body is made clear in Galatians 3:36ff. Baptism received in faith is both a putting on of Christ (v. 27) and an incorporation into his body, in which there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus (v. 28). What is noteworthy is how Paul links justification by faith, our status as children of God, the putting on of Christ in baptism, and incorporation into his body in one complex of ideas. This surely warns us against either exalting baptism at the expense of faith or faith at the expense of baptism (see Beasley-Murray, *op. cit.*, p. 151). It is baptism in faith that incorporates us into Christ's body. In other words, according to the teaching of the New Testament baptism marks the point of demarcation between the church and the world. By it he who repents of his sins and believes in Jesus Christ is 'added' to the church (Acts 2:41).

It might seem from what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:10-17 that baptism does not have for him the importance which other passages we have already noticed would suggest. Certainly this passage is frequently used in current evangelical debate over church unity. So, for example, Edwin King writes in a recent issue of *Fellowship* (Nov./Dec. 1978): 'Paul reproves division over water-baptism, declares his indifference and says, "Christ sent me not to baptise, but to preach the Gospel" (1 Cor. 1:10-17)' (p. 6, 7).

Now apart from the fact that if in 1 Corinthians 1:10-17 Paul is declaring his indifference to baptism he is contradicting what he has elsewhere taught to be the very great significance of baptism, we must question this kind of use of the passage on a number of grounds.

First of all, the situation to which Paul was addressing himself is to be noted. There were divisions (*schismata*, v. 10) and quarrels (*erides*, v. 11) in the church. These found expression in parties which looked to various leaders (v. 12), and used their names as a badge of faction.

Paul asks three questions. Is Christ divided? That is, has Christ been shared out? (cf. 7:17, 2 Cor. 10:13, Rom. 13:3). The answer is no. 'There is only one undivided Christ, and if you have him, and belong to him, it is trivial whether you attach yourself to Paul, Apollos or Cephas' (C. K. Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, p. 46). Was Paul crucified for you? An unthinkable supposition which should shame those who used his name as a badge of party. Were you baptised in the name of Paul? No, for they were baptised into the name of Christ, placed under his authority and appropriated by him.

The fact that Paul asks this third question indicates that far from depreciating baptism he wishes to rescue it from misunderstanding. Some seemingly were making much of the fact that they had been baptised by Paul. So Paul

thanks God that he baptised only a few of the believers at Corinth (v. 14, 16), 'so that none of you can say that you were baptised into my name' (v. 15). Such language hardly suggests that Paul viewed baptism as unessential or a matter of indifference.

But what of verse 17? Does this not suggest a depreciation of baptism? No, not when it is understood in context and as an Hebraism. Certainly Paul subordinates the administration of baptism to the proclamation of the gospel. Others could baptise; Paul was called to preach. Moreover baptism follows the proclamation of Christ crucified (v. 23) and draws its meaning from the gospel. 'Baptism is secondary to the proclamation, in that it depends upon it and embodies it; but as it is the God-ordained mode of faith's appropriation of the gospel and of God's appropriation of the believer, it can never be said to be of second-rate importance' (G. R. Beasley-Murray, *op. cit.*, p. 180).

Furthermore, it is likely that we have an Hebraism in verse 17. When the Hebrews wished to say that something was more important than something else instead of using a comparative they used a negative — 'not this . . . but that' (cf. Amos 52:25; Ps. 51:16-17). Hence Paul may well be saying that Christ sent him to preach the gospel rather than to baptise.

In the light of all this it would seem hazardous in the extreme to interpret 1 Corinthians 1:10-17 as teaching a low view of baptism and then to proceed to argue that baptism can be regarded as being an unessential matter so far as the expressing of church unity is concerned.

Obviously there is much more that could be said in answer to the question 'What constitutes a New Testament church?' I have left out of consideration such matters as church government and church discipline, not because I consider them unimportant but because I have tried to focus on three areas of theology which are of crucial importance for the contemporary debate among evangelicals.

There is, first of all, the grace of God as expressed in the saving action of the Trinity. Could a New Testament church have compromised its understanding of the electing grace of the Father, the redeeming grace of the Son, and the quickening grace of the Spirit? Could it have done so and remained faithful to the apostolic revelation?

Secondly, can baptism be exercised from the apostolic proclamation as having no rightful place in the *kerugma*? Can it be regarded as a secondary issue in view of its place in the Great Commission without calling into question the authority of him who instituted two ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper, but gave us no hint that one is greater importance than the other?

Thirdly, if baptism is into the name of Christ can *faith* substitute for it if baptism in faith is the appointed vehicle of response to the Gospel and the ordinance in which the believer is bound to Christ and appropriated by him? And can baptism be seen as secondary if, when received in faith, it is the means of incorporation into the body of Christ? (cf. *A Faith to Confess* (1969), p. 61, chap. 29:1).

If we are to enter into more light out of the present heat it is, I suggest, with these and related questions that we shall have to wrestle more carefully and more prayerfully than we have done in the past. □□□

The Whitefield Fraternal

The gist of the subjects for 14th September may interest some of our readers. Cassette can be purchased or hired. Address: Mr. S. D. Hogwood, 13 Lancaster Avenue, HAYWARDS HEATH, Sussex.

Apologetics and our Evangelistic Preaching

What kind of people are we seeking to reach with the gospel of Jesus Christ? What are their thoughts about God and this world? What do they know? What is our point of contact with the unregenerate man who cannot discern the things of the Spirit of God? The answers to these and many other questions will determine not only the content of the message we preach but also our whole practice of evangelism.

A survey of Western civilisation shows that the natural man is largely ignorant of the Scriptures. Secularism has flooded every area of his behaviour and thinking – religion, education, leisure, art, literature, politics and economics. Theology and the message of the Christian gospel has been relegated as irrelevant. 20th century men and women look to scientists, psychiatrists, sociologists, their local G.P., the agony-columnists, TV cult-figures for their answers. It is largely a world cut off from God. These are the kind of people we are trying to reach. How do we go about that task?

A true Biblical apologetic must concern itself with the assumptions (presuppositions) that underlie a person's arguments and actions. Popular Christian apologetics and evangelism has not always done this. Rather it has attempted a number of short cuts which have tended to distort the message of the gospel.

Apologetics has often been dismissed as only relevant for intellectuals and can therefore be dispensed with when speaking to the 'man in the street'. All we need to do is proclaim the gospel. 10 minutes conversation with a reasonably intelligent but ignorant unbeliever will have convinced you that it is not as simple as that!

Evangelicals have not always taken seriously enough the plain statements of Romans 1 and worked out the implications for evangelism. The natural man is a rebel, exercising unlawful autonomy over against God. On Monday, 14th September our task will be to examine some aspects of popular apologetics, to point out some weaknesses and provide a structure for a true Biblical

apologetic and God-honouring evangelism. That task then will be a practical one – how to bring the content of the gospel to bear on 20th century man, and call him to faith and repentance. Austin Walker.

Preparationism and our evangelistic preaching

Does God prepare sinners before he regenerates them? If this is the case how can a hard-core sinner who is at enmity to God be prepared for the new birth? Surely the Bible gives consistent testimony to the fact that a sinner is blind. He cannot see (Jn. 3:3); he cannot understand (1Cor. 2:14); he cannot do anything spiritual (Rom. 8:8) or anything pleasing to God. For these reasons there are some who reject the whole idea of preparation for regeneration. It poses no problem for others because they believe that sinners have the ability to prepare themselves. They hold that unregenerate people can repent and can believe by their own power. If not why would God command them to do so? True they may need some help or assistance but then this would be titled *divine assistance* for sinners, not *preparation*.

The question of preparation is essential and practical. We see it to be so with our own children. They grow up under the full instruction of the Gospel and yet remain unregenerate. What are we to do? Do we place any hope in the preaching to which they are subject? Does that preaching prepare them for regeneration? If so then how does the content and character of that preaching affect preparation for regeneration?

This subject enables us to understand the weaknesses and dangers of modern decisionists evangelism.

Preparation of a soul can be seen under three heads: 1. Illumination, 2. Conviction, 3. Reformation. These call for exposition. How do we exhort our unregenerate hearers to seek and pray? There are many texts and passages along that line. Yet procrastination is dangerous. Dangers beset this subject and they must be avoided. How can I be a preacher of power with a thoroughly awakening ministry which does justice to the nuances we have considered? In short how can we be like the prophets and apostles in being used to make the dry bones live? E.H.

Evolution opposed on radio BBC

A report by Austin Walker

July 1981 will, without doubt, go down in British history as the month of the royal wedding and riots in some of our cities. 14th July will not be remembered by many. That evening for the first time members of the Biblical Creation Society were given the opportunity to express their convictions on a national radio programme. Mr. Nigel Cameron, Dr. David Gower and Professor Edgar Andrews were among scientists and theologians of various standpoints who participated in a 40 minute programme on BBC Radio 4.

I shall not review the whole programme but refer to salient matters which hopefully will provoke further comment. The programme presented a wide spectrum of views. I counted eleven contributors. The presenter, Robert Foxcroft, gave us the impression that creationists still believe the world was created in 4004 B.C., which we do not. He was, I think, oversimplifying the issue when he said that creationists say evolution is wrong because evolution turns people away from God and from believing in their creator. As one would expect, the traditional critical approach to Genesis 1 and 2 – that these chapters are myth or allegory – was presented. In reply Professor Andrews made it quite clear that it is possible to be 'wholly scientific' and to accept Genesis 1 and 2 as 'sober history'. Various contributors were critical of the creationist's viewpoint. It was too precise said one, requiring obedience to authority. It was too exclusive and sect-like because such an approach does not gear in to other methods of understanding, said another. Or again, it was too immature because it asks too few questions. The conclusion to the programme charged the creationist position with being 'paradoxically scientific', because it tries to take over the authority that science has acquired and use it for its own purposes. The contribution made by Professor Andrews was particularly helpful. He was asked together with Rev. Dr. Charles Headley to sum up the various points made. He clarified the creationist's position without in any way

being arrogant. Sometimes it is easy to ruin our conversation by a wrong attitude. A gentle and gracious firmness marked all he said. Among the points he made were: that science has its limitations and cannot account for the origins of the world, that evolution is one interpretation of the facts, and to present it as the only view leads to brainwashing, that Christian maturity is that which stands firmly on the revealed will of God.

It is not my intention to discuss scientific details in this article. Instead I want to investigate some points that arise from the debate as a whole. These are important for those who believe that Genesis is 'sober history'. He stated that there is an ongoing contradiction between evolutionist and Biblical philosophy. This contradiction was apparent throughout the programme and the question of authority was raised on more than one occasion. Every Christian is called upon to defend the faith. But just how do you go about persuading someone that evolution is not true. Some Christians would retort 'Impossible!' Others feel hopelessly inadequate or unsure when confronted with 'science-disproves-the-Bible'-type objections.

Professor Andrews showed that his belief in creation rested on his faith in Scripture as God's word so acknowledging his dependence upon God for interpreting the world around him. It is this commitment with all that it entails that makes the crucial difference between being a Biblical creationist and an evolutionist. The Christian looks at the world through a certain set of spectacles, with a heart and mind enlightened by the Holy Spirit and dependent upon God's infallible word. Those who do not share that commitment say in effect 'we are interpreting the world without reference to God because we do not believe in God or we are not sure whether there is a God'. Through their set of spectacles the world looks a different

place, the facts are interpreted in a very different way. Scripture says that the mind without God is in darkness and does not and cannot know God.

Understanding this commitment is important in seeking to persuade someone that evolution is not true. Before Darwin's ideas gained popular approval, and Genesis 1 and 2 were jettisoned as unscientific and unhistorical, most Christians were prepared to accept that the Bible was true because of certain 'proofs' for God's existence. One of the best known was the argument from design. Simply put it argued in this way. All things in this world happen with a given purpose, there is plenty of evidence of plan and design, day and night, the seasons and so on. Behind all this there must be a person of superior intellect who maintains the whole world order. That person is God himself. Prior to Darwin, people on the whole were persuaded that scientific discoveries backed up what the Bible actually said. Darwin's theories, however, portrayed the evidence in quite another way and presented a mechanistic view of natural selection. Men's faith in the Bible began to crumble. Christians today are still using this argument along with others to 'prove' that Christianity is true.

However, such a defence of Christianity is not consistent with Scripture. It asks the unbeliever to sift the evidence and judge for himself whether the evidence is true or not. Is it the place of human reason and human logic to sit in judgment of the truth of Scripture? Can human logic be the common ground between the unbeliever and the believer? Are we then able to build a case for the credibility of Scripture based on this common ground? My answer is a firm negative. We cannot speak of the evidence, or if you prefer the facts, without being affected by our basic commitment. The facts are understood and interpreted either by a Christian or a non-Christian.

The Christian then should not be seeking to present a credible case for Christianity based on appeals to human logic. The usual arguments collect the evidence together and say that any intelligent,

honest and logical person will see that Christianity is true. That assumes that fallen man is capable of such an unbiased judgment. That is the very point — he does not, cannot and will not reach such a judgment. His whole commitment is to independent thinking. This was Eve's basic sin. She rebelled against God and threw off her dependence upon God. She was going to be the final judge of right and wrong. She rejected God's revelation as the only way of truly knowing God and understanding this world. How do we then try to persuade the evolutionist of the truth? By seeking to show that his whole framework is based on his commitment to be independent of God. This is sin. Our task is, gently but firmly, to bring that person to see his sinfulness, to expose the inconsistencies in this whole approach, to call him to repentance and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, thus renouncing his independence. Such, of course, is impossible apart from the enlightening and regenerating power of the Holy Spirit.

Because of these factors I found myself unhappy with Mr. Cameron's opening remarks. He said, 'that God had made the world somewhat ambiguous and that all Christians must believe that to some extent'. No-one is compelled, he continued, to believe in God, so it is possible for a man to believe that things just got there or that God made everything. He sought to justify the creationist position by saying that there are better reasons why we should believe in God as Creator rather than in evolution. His point was picked up towards the end of the programme and it was suggested that such an argument allows for the possibility of another scientific explanation (evolution). I am inclined to agree. By such statements Mr. Cameron is surely conceding too much to the unbeliever and giving him space to excuse himself, space that Scripture does not give him.

Scripture does not say that God has made the world somewhat ambiguous. Rather, according to Romans 1:18-32 God's eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made. Every fact in creation speaks of God's existence but men deny

(continued on page 15)

Books for Brazil

by
Ron Edmonds

Richard and Pearl Denham



My wife, being Brazilian, was in dire need of a visit to her home after many years away. I was enabled to accompany her on the trip, together with our (then) six-year-old daughter. It has since served to be a nagging concern for the spiritual needs of Brasil. Last year, in April 1980 I was sent back by my church to see what could be done by our own assembly, and any others who might be interested. Let me recount some of the observations, and then describe the need in question!

Among my first impressions was the presence of white candles burning at various times and in various places such as on the beach, by the side of the road, on the steps of Roman churches. A closer look revealed plates of food and bottles of water. These turned out to be offerings to the spirits who were being placated to fulfil some need, or as thank-offerings for needs already met. Upon enquiry I was informed that this form of 'spiritism' was quite effective. It was also made clear that the black side of spiritism was also effective in sinister ways, in bringing calamity upon rivals in business and romance, as well as for personal gain.

Added to this common-place experience was the startling knowledge that spiritism was being tolerated in Pentecostal churches,

seemingly for want of directive biblical doctrine. Another alarming factor was the knowledge that spiritism is practically a national religion, practiced by intelligencia and politicians in the capital city of Brasilia, as well as among the poor people of the North, farmers in the Interior, and the cosmopolitan and sophisticated of the South.

As I travelled this country of more than 115 million people, I visited Brazilian pastors and a Bible School-Seminary and the most pitiful sight was the conspicuous absence of good literature in the Portuguese language. (The one theological work of any significance that I observed, was Berkhof's *Systematic Theology in Spanish!*) My dear fellow pastor, your library would be regarded with awe by any Brazilian pastor. They have virtually nothing to help them in their study and preaching of Scripture. One pastor showed me his little library (mostly paperbacks) and he had but a handful of assorted helps. I will enclose two copies of letters from Brazilians to illustrate further my point.

I now come to appeal to you for help in this desperately needy country. Several years ago I became aware of (and later acquainted with) a fellow American pastor who had gone down to labour among the

Evolution opposed on Radio B.B.C. (continued from page 14)

the revelation of God both in creation and in Scripture. Men suppress the truth by their wickedness. Evolutionary theory is but one manifestation of men suppressing the truth, of men asserting their sinful rebellion against God. Men are without any excuse, says Paul, because of this clear revelation of God.

These comments are intended to be constructive criticism. Hopefully it will set

people thinking about how they defend the faith and how they seek to win men and women to Christ. As Christians we must challenge the rebellious spirit in fallen man. He has a false framework of reasoning and is unable to submit to God unless he is regenerated by the Holy Spirit. The gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. I believe that with all my heart and so I am sure does Mr. Cameron. □□□

unevangelised in Amazonas about 28 years ago. In due course he was exposed to Banner of Truth books and espoused sovereign grace doctrine. Some years later he moved south to São Paulo and began translating books and booklets into Portuguese. He is a retiring man, and not one to frequently ask for money. In fact he has hardly asked at all! He made money by buying and selling land, and doing some construction work. Profit was put into his publishing work. As money became available he would print and publish small works, in order to distribute diverse subjects of free grace emphasis.

These are some of the titles that he has produced: Pink's *Sovereignty, Profiting from the Word*; *Today's Gospel* by Walt Chantry; *Right With God* by John Blanchard; *The Gospel in Genesis* by Henry Law; *Christian Living in the Home* by Jay Adams; A digest of *Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan; a two-volume children's work, *God With Us* by Marianne Radius and a number of other books representing a broad range of Christian material. More recently translations of Al Martin's *Implications of Calvinism*; and Ernest Reisinger's *Carnal Christian* were sent to pastors all over the country. At present, work is going on to publish the *Englishman's Greek Concordance* (in Portuguese), and John Murray's commentary on *Romans* is ready to be typeset.

The need for which I appeal to you, is that of an up-to-date computerised typesetting machine that will radically speed the process of publishing. *This need amounts to \$15,000.* Our own small assembly has been helping as we have been enabled, and we would like to provide funds for one of two volumes of Dr. Lloyd-Jones' *Sermon on the Mount*.

The missionary, whose name is Richard Denham, recently wrote to me and in the course of his letter he said: 'I am no longer able to do what I could ten years ago' (referring to secular work, to help with costs). 'This is the first year that we have not been able to add personal support to the ministry.' In view of this little-known need, would you kindly make this a matter of prayer, bring it before your Deacons? It is conceivable that the course of the history of the Church in Brasil could be changed by the printing and distribution of solid, Reformed material that will help pastors in their study of the Word, as well as edifying church members. We need to promote the planting of churches with reliable doctrinal foundations. I know of only one or two!

Our church will be glad to channel gifts to Brother Denham's work, or, you can contact our brother directly in Brasil, address as follows:

Rev. Richard Denham
Caixa Postal 210
Atibaia, S.P. 12940
Brasil

Gifts may be sent directly through:
Christian Literature Advance,
1022 E. Saga
Glendora, CA 91740

Perhaps you might like to consider paying for a particular book that your church would like to sponsor! There is also the possibility of establishing libraries in various areas for the use of local pastors and students. We have provided several Reformed pastors with books, who were able to read English (all can read Spanish).

Ron Edmonds
(for address see back cover)

Notes on Armageddon article

- 1 *Ezekiel*. John B. Taylor. Tyndale O.T. commentary. I.V.P.
- 2: Compare the living creatures of Ezekiel 1 and Revelation 1. Also the story of the God-man central to the visions of Ezekiel and John at Patmos. The eating of the scroll: Ezekiel 3:1, 2; Revelation 10:9, 10. Prophecies to the nations: Ezekiel 25:2; Revelation 10:11. The marking of the foreheads of the godly; Ezekiel 9:4; Revelation 7:3, 22:4. The doctrine of adoption: Ezekiel 11:20, 36:28; Revelation 21:3. The fall of mighty world powers: Ezekiel 28:18, 19; Revelation 18:9.

Recommended commentaries. Most helpful are Patrick Fairbairn and E. W. Hengstenberg together with John B. Taylor mentioned above. From a practical and devotional point of view William Greenhill's massive work is excellent. Walthar Eichrodt, the liberal, is worth consulting. Ralph Alexander (Moody Press, 160pp., paperback) argues as cogently as it is possible to argue for the dispensational and literal interpretation of Ezekiel 38-48.

Gog and Magog are massive armies which bear down on 'The Camp of God'. Is this a reference to military forces being amassed today? Is Armageddon the third world war, the last conflagration? The following was given at Cuckfield on 4th February, 1981, being one of a mid-week series on the book of Ezekiel.

Armageddon !

When we come to Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39 which describe Gog and Magog there are two extremely important factors to observe.

The first one has to do with the construction of the book as a whole and is derived from an historical knowledge of those times. Chapters 38 and 39 are not to be viewed chronologically as following on from chapter 36 (the promise of the new covenant). Chapter 37 (the restoration and reunification of the Jews in their homeland). Scholars give us good reason to believe that chapters 38, 39 formed a separate composition which was added to 1-37 as a kind of postscript and 40-48 was a later appendix.¹ When his writings were gathered the obvious construction was to place the three independent sections in the order we now have: 1-37, 38 and 39, and 40 and 48. We should observe that there is a connection between chapters 40-48 and 8:1-11:25. The glory of the Lord which is described by Ezekiel in 8:1-11:25 is declared as returning when the Temple is rebuilt (43:1-5).

The second factor which will help us tremendously is the simple observation that Ezekiel is unique in the Bible. He is unique because of the wide diversity of ways in which God's revelation came through him. This fact will help us see the importance of knowing when Ezekiel is speaking literally and when he is speaking symbolically. Also he was able to move with lightning speed from one place to another and from one period of history to another. The very diversity of his methods will caution us to be careful in our interpretation. Let us think for a few moments of this prophet's versatility and uniqueness.

We should not lose sight of the fact that Ezekiel was a deep theologian and teacher of doctrine (chs. 3, 18, 33, 36). Like other major prophets, Isaiah and Jeremiah, he experienced a special call. In his calling he was given a vision of fantastic and gigantic wheels moving at lightning speed. A radiant Christ is in control of these wheels of providence (1:27). If the vision of the wheels is unique then so are the following features of Ezekiel's revelations.

Ezekiel was an elaborate model-maker (4:1-3). Ezekiel was an actor who used his body, his daily life and his house as object lessons (4:4-17 and 5:1-12). Ezekiel shaved off all his hair and burned a third of it (5:1-12).

Ezekiel is the John Bunyan of the Bible in the sense that he is supreme in the variety and usage of metaphor and allegory. Strong nations are eagles and a weak nation is a vine (17:1-11). Jerusalem is an abandoned infant, a beautiful woman, a vile prostitute, a restored wife (ch. 16). The whole house of Israel is a valley of dead bones (ch. 37).

We observe then that versatility and swift movement characterises Ezekiel. He is with his fellow captives one moment but in the next he is surveying the abominations of the temple in Jerusalem (10:18). He knows the surrounding nations well: Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre and Egypt. By the Holy Spirit he moves into the future with the same dexterity as he moves among the nations. Equally with his contemporary Jeremiah he is the denouncer of false prophets (13:1-16) and equally the herald of the new covenant of the future (11:19ff, 16:60, 36:26ff).

It is here we find some common ground between chapters 36 and 37, and 40-48. These sections look forward to the future to a new age. The spiritual unity described in 37:15-28 is only realised in Christ and the new covenant (37:22, 27; Eph. 2:11-22). The closing verse of the section, chapters 38 and 39 is future by way of blessing in perpetuity – *I will no longer hide my face from them*, and in the prophetic perfect tense to denote absolute finality, *I have poured out my spirit upon the house of Israel*. That surely is referring to this age of the Holy Spirit (47:1-12).

The Armageddon of Ezekiel 38 and 39

Ezekiel then is the prophet of doctrine and of illustration, of symbol and allegory, of present and future. That he is speaking in chapters 38 and 39 of something future nobody contests. That he is really using the language of symbol few doubt. After outlining the two chapters we will see the difficulty of holding to a literal interpretation.

An outline for chapters 38 and 39 is easy to follow for each of the seven sections begins with the words: *This is what the Sovereign Lord says*. We are not dealing with possibilities and speculations that may interest specialists. We are confronted with a living, unchanging, eternal God and His Word to us. The seven sections are as follows:

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|---|----------|
| 1 <i>A vast hostile army, by the name of Gog</i> | 38:3-9 |
| 2 <i>The purpose of Gog is evil</i> | 38:10-13 |
| 3 <i>This horde will be mobile and will advance against God's people</i> | 38:14-16 |
| 4 <i>God's fiery wrath will descend upon Gog</i> | 38:17-23 |
| 5 <i>The destruction will be so great that the weapons will be used for fuel for seven years and seven years taken to bury the bodies</i> | 39:1-16 |
| 6 <i>This judgment will be a tremendous vindication of God's glory</i> | 39:17-24 |
| 7 <i>God will pour out his Spirit on his people and comfort them</i> | 39:25-29 |

A foremost principle of interpretation is to ask what this prophecy would mean to the captives of Ezekiel's time? Imagine their fears. Having suffered so much would they not again soon sink under attack? The answer was that

they were not to fear. It did not matter how many enemies gathered against them from the North. In the day of their restoration the Lord would intervene on their behalf and destroy all armed hordes that might bear down on them.

Yet we have to ponder the fact that nothing even resembling this prophecy of Ezekiel ever took place following the restoration. There is nothing in subsequent history that remotely resembles the propositions and details of God and Magog. The vision is essentially apocalyptic. It is a vision of the future. For its symbolic form it runs in the same style as the concluding chapters of Daniel and is like the book of Revelation. The symbolic number 'seven' reminds us of this, *seven* years of fuel burning and seven years of burials. The prospect of a literal, physical fulfilment of a battle like this diminishes as time goes on because no army today takes the field with horses and shields or would be so foolish to go to war with swords. While the armies of today are more formidable than ever before, we find it incredible to believe that they would all bear down together on Israel with swords. A further observation is that western nations are now concentrating on small professional armies trained to handle the most lethal and devastating equipment on the basis that a war now would be won or lost in a few hours. The major question is to discover the time of the fulfilment of this vision and thereby come to understand its meaning. The number of similarities between Ezekiel and the Revelation point us to finding the answers in Revelation. There we see successive descriptions of human history terminating in final judgments. These descriptions increase in intensity and detail and match the colour and power of Ezekiel's Armageddon.

Revelation divides into seven parts (1-3; 4-7; 8-11; 12-14; 15-16; 17-19; 20-22). The last three particularly end in climax and finality. Note the following three similarities:

- | | | |
|-----|--|------------------------|
| (i) | <i>I will pour down hailstones
huge hailstones fell upon men</i> | Ez. 38:22
Rev. 16:2 |
|-----|--|------------------------|

What does this mean? The answer is Judgment. Hailstones hurtling down will destroy whitewashed structures of error erected by false teachers (13:11). Likewise Jesus warns that all those who neglect his sayings will have their hopes destroyed in a great storm (Mt. 7:27). He truly emphasises the greatness of the calamity of those not prepared for the final judgment which he likens in vivid terms to a storm (Lk. 6:49).

- | | | |
|------|--|-----------------------------|
| (ii) | <i>You will eat the flesh of princes and eat your
fill of horses and riders
You may eat the flesh of kings, of
horses and their riders</i> | Ez. 39:18

Rev. 19:18 |
|------|--|-----------------------------|

Cannibalism is abhorrent and totally condemned by the moral law. We see then that these visions are essentially symbolic. That does not mean we can diminish their force. On the contrary what is expressed is the overwhelming nature of the final judgment. The enemy in every form whether 'free or

slave', 'small or great', will be eaten, this is become utterly powerless, be utterly exposed, be utterly vanquished and put to shame.

(iii) *Gog, I will put hooks in your jaws and bring you out with your whole army – the many nations with you*

Ez. 38:3-6

When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations – God and Magog – together, to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand of the seashore

Rev. 20:7-8

The parallel with Ezekiel is very close for we read in the verses immediately following that just as the multitudes surrounds 'the camp of God's people' fire comes down to devour them. Judgment of both leaders and hostile army answers (Rev. 20:9-10).

In Revelation 20:7-10 together with the parallel of Revelation 16:16-21 and 19:17-21 we see true fulfilment of the visions of Ezekiel's chapters 38 and 39. The reality of the final judgment is more terrible than the physical destruction of any war on earth.

What are the main lessons? I will outline three.

1. Observe the awful nature of enmity to God (Rom. 8:7). The fall has allied mankind with Satan. Aversion to the Creator and his holy character is the dreadful disease of the race. Too readily they rise and gather to express hostility to 'The camp of God's people' (Rev. 20:9). Too readily do the kings gather to the place called Armageddon (Rev. 16:16). It is the sovereign purpose of Jehovah to have all the forces of evil marshalled together at the end of the age that he might expose the true nature of their hatred for him and his people. The expression 'I will put hooks in your jaws' (Ez. 38:3) indicates the sovereign purpose and power of God to expose to full view the full hatred of the ungodly. When that hatred is exhibited his justice will also be vindicated (Jude 14-16).

2. Note the protection afforded 'The camp of God's people'. Armageddon is the final gathering of all the opposition – Rev. 16:16, 19:19, 20:8 for the consummation of the age. In the meantime we are locked in a deadly conflict of spiritual warfare which sometimes threatens to overwhelm us (Eph. 6:10-18). But as we are afforded protection and preservation in that great day when our house (our lives) will stand (Matt. 7:25) so now we are protected and preserved. God causes the earth to help the Church and he will not allow her to be engulfed or destroyed (Rev. 12:16). The gates of hell will not prevail against her (Matt. 16:18).

3. Contemplate the promise that the Holy Spirit will be poured out in revival. 'I will no longer hide my face from them, for I will pour out my spirit on the house of Israel,' declares the Sovereign Lord (Ez. 39:29). That concluding promise is most heartening for us. The cause of God will not be defeated.

'The camp of God's people in the end will not be a pathetic, miserably small remnant.' Revivals are the outpouring of God's Holy Spirit and such is the number of converts that they accumulate to a point beyond computation — 'a great multitude that no-one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language' (Rev. 7:9). It is through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that this increase comes (Ez. 39:29).

We have observed the parallel between Ezekiel and the Revelation concerning Armageddon. Where is the parallel between Ezekiel and John's revelation concerning the outpouring of the Holy Spirit? It is found in Revelation 20:3 where we read of Satan being bound for a long period of time so that the nations should not be deceived.

Today all nations are deceived — the West by secular, humanistic materialism; the East by atheistic communism; the Jews by legalism; the Muslims by their opposition to the Trinity; the Hindus and Buddhists by their idolatry; the Mormons by their additions to the Scripture testimony. The binding of Satan and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit can soon bring deliverance to the nations.

Surely we should be pleading the promises for an outpouring of the Spirit so that the nations may be delivered from deception. Isaiah said that the Lord 'was appalled that there was no-one to intercede' (Is. 59:16).

Our business is to pray and work that our fellow beings may believe in Christ and no longer be deceived. Our business is to live in consideration of the impending judgment when every person will be subjected to the climactic and colossal test of the Armageddon — the great judgment. At that time there will be no middle ground. Either we will be in the 'the camp of God's people' or we will be in Satan's army.

Now is the time to make the test. Are you at this moment part of the body of Christ? Are your sins forgiven? Are you reconciled to the Father? Are you a citizen of 'the city he loves'? (Rev. 20:9). If not I implore you to come out from the ranks of the army of Gog and of the Devil. Openly denounce that miserable and doomed cause of evil which will be devoured by eternal fires. You will have nothing to fear and nothing to be ashamed of under the banner of our King Emmanuel. Christ is our hero who, by dying on the Cross has borne away our sin and guilt. In him is full salvation. In him is guarantee of victory in the great day of final judgment to which this fallen world is hurtling with ever increasing and dramatic momentum. In the camp of Christ is absolute security when Armageddon comes.

We began by referring to the enormous arsenals of military power being amassed by the nations today. Does this mean Armageddon will be a nuclear war? No! While we cannot rule out the use of nuclear weapons the Scripture teaches that Armageddon is a spiritual conflict — the final spiritual cataclysm of the age. By their sheer destructive possibilities the armaments of today may cancel themselves. The real issues are not temporal but eternal.

For footnotes see page 16

This is the third article which concludes Jim van Zyl's analysis of various forms of secular thought. American readers are possibly more subject to the bombardment of the advertising described here as nearly all their channels are interrupted with constant frequency so baneful that it can have the happy effect of destroying any desire to watch TV. Jim van Zyl is correct when he maintains that children are conditioned by it – the adults having succumbed long ago. Many Christians likewise seem to offer no resistance which is an indication of the usefulness and importance of this contribution. In Britain most areas are served with two channels wholly free of advertising while the third (ITV) has advertising about every fifteen minutes which is often excessive and which is accurately described in the article with an increase of the type 3 described (emotional bombs). Jim van Zyl has experience as a pastor and as a professional in radio broadcasting.

The ethics of advertising

E. S. Turner, in his book *The Shocking History of Advertising* (Penguin Books, 1968 ed.), describes advertising as, 'the whip which hustles humanity up the road to the better mousetrap'.

A mousetrap is diabolically clever. It is built around the following facts: (1) The desire of the mouse for the bait. (2) The virtually irresistible *bait* itself. (3) One *fatally trapped* mouse.

To change Turner's metaphor slightly, I want to suggest that advertising is not only a whip, but more accurately the bait, cunningly disguised to trap the unwary.

The bait used in advertising (ie, the actually finished advertisement) is constructed with virtually one dominant object in mind – will it cause the viewing public *to purchase* the article advertised? Its purpose, quite understandably, is purely economic. This purpose is, however, bedevilled when non-Christian men begin to argue that *the end justifies the means*. This argument results in the use of questionable methods and means, as long as the end (economic purpose) is achieved. And because you can seldom advertise without conveying some kind of message, the message emerges from the minds of non-Christian men who are thoroughly materialistic in their view of life. Thus advertising has virtually ceased to produce any form of neutral advertising. It has become a constant round of propaganda presenting a philosophy of life which is secular, this-worldly, materialistic and non-Christian.

Such secular and materialistic advertising is flung at our children in magazines, newspapers, billboards and from television. Unless, as Christian parents, pastors and teachers we make a serious effort to open their eyes to the dangers of modern advertising, they will simply accept it as part of their culture and consequently also accept modern advertising's secular message and view of life.

There are two main methods used in advertising. The first is the 'cool' method. The term 'cool' was originally coined by the Canadian communications expert, Marshall McLuhan. It refers to advertising that *by-passes the use of the mind*. It is basically emotionalistic. It plays heavily upon feelings, emotions, experiences and desires. While highly sophisticated, it does not basically concern itself with facts, figures and information. In the hands of the great secular advertising firms which cross international boundaries such 'cool' methods have an influence and power that can hardly be comprehended. Influence and power in the lives of nations, cultures, cities, homes, parents and children!

The following are some examples of 'cool' advertising:

1. *Famous personality method.* Advertising of the latest model of Rover car is based (on TV at least) entirely upon the recommendation of John Steed, of New Avenger fame. Because *he* makes the recommendation it carries enormous weight and authority. His 'punchline' sells the car. The impressionable viewer is emotionally overwhelmed by the personality of Steed, the pretty girl, the explosive piece of machinery scenario, the screaming tyres as the car roars off. No objective facts or statistics are given. There is no information upon which a prospective buyer can base a carefully calculated decision. The viewer's reason and mind are by-passed and he is emotionally knocked-out. It may be argued that any prospective buyer will request further information from his nearest Rover dealer, on the other hand, it is a well-known, psychologically proven fact that in a very large number of cases we purchase articles we have *already determined* to buy (due to advertising and other influences) and that the request for additional information is only *a rationalisation of a step already taken* in the subconscious mind!

2. *Image and prestige method.* Play upon such materialistic motives as success, superiority, status and accomplishment (and not forgetting sex-appeal!) comes powerfully to the fore in adverts figuring cars, cigarettes, wine, deodorants, cosmetics, travel and fashion, to name but a few areas. Colours are rich reds, browns, orange. The atmosphere is sensual, nostalgic or downright sentimental (surprisingly many people react positively to sentiment!) The backdrop is invariably a famous hotel, an historic monument, heavily laden vineyards, the dramatic take-off of a Jumbo, opulent furniture, the latest in fine fashions or a pair of Afghan hounds. Once more little (if any) information is given. The advert is, however, so constructed that *you are subtly invited to identify* with the people (always classy!), homes, cars, objets d'art, wealth and sheer materialism shown in the advert. Such identification will then signify your success, your arrival, your acceptance amongst the secular elite! Thus the spirit of the world (Romans 12:2).

3. *Emotional Bombs.* It includes the use of vivid colours, camera zooming into or onto an object, jet-set scenes, music with a distinct bass beat, a deep and throaty announcer, rapid camera shots moving swiftly from one scene to another (a current TV-advert has approximately 45 such shots in about 20

seconds), female mystique or explosive sounds (a boxer connecting explosively with his opponent). This emotional bomb style is highly characteristic of television-advertising.

The second method of advertising is the 'hot' method. This method *does not by-pass* the mind. It is based upon genuine content, information and educational principles, by which the public or viewers *are informed* by means of facts, figures, statistics, scientific evidence and practical proof. These facts are then largely allowed to speak for themselves. The viewer is allowed the dignity of making up his own mind, not having it made up for him! This method is largely used only by Banks, Building Societies and certain forms of Medication.

How are we to face up to this challenge of advertising? Christian parents can help themselves, as well as their children, in the following manner:

1. They must make themselves thoroughly aware of the basic methods of advertising. Only when they can discern and analyse advertisements will they be able to help their children to do the same.
2. They should take the time to point out to their children what constitutes the worldly, materialistic and secular elements of an advert. Those ingredients which run completely counter to the Christian concepts of success, morality and integrity.
3. They should encourage their children to consistently use their minds and reason, and refuse to allow themselves to be emotionally swamped. The New Testament places great emphasis upon the crucial use of the mind by the Christian. See for example Paul's prayers and statements in Ephesians 1:17-19 and 3:14-19; Philippians 1:9-11; Colossians 1:9-10.
4. They should take time to expound Philippians 4:8-9 (whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable — think about such things). In this way they can help their children compare such Biblical truths and concepts as beauty, excellence, justice etc. to the worldly ones portrayed in adverts.
5. They should encourage their children to realistically test the content of an advert. What is it really saying? What is its basic message? Can it be confirmed or proved? What evidence is marshalled? Or is it just another emotional bomb? A statement pushing a secular philosophy of worldly success?
6. They should encourage their children, particularly as they grow in the faith and begin to take a more active part in the life of the church, to deliberately stand in antithesis *to the use of any secular or worldly advertising methods* in the propagation of the Gospel. This is not the same as not using advertising! But it is saying that we must not use the principles and values *of the world* in order to propagate the supernatural Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.



Have you found yourself using the psalms as prayers? Last time (R.T. 62) John Waite, principal of the Barry Bible College, South Wales, explained that the psalms are greatly enhanced in their meaning when proper attention is given to their captions and historical settings. He reminded us of the various poetic forms employed and also how the psalms are employed as prayers or as songs. In this concluding article three important subjects are opened up before the problematic issue of the imprecatory psalms is explained.

The theology of the psalms

In the first article I pointed out that the Psalms are unique among Old Testament writings because they seem to be as immediately useful and valuable to believers under the New Covenant as they evidently were to believers under the Old Testament economy. Now this at once raises the whole question of progressive revelation, as some would call it. It is, I believe, more helpful and more accurate to speak of cumulative revelation. The point really is this. The writer to the Hebrews represents the revelation given under the Old Covenant as fragmentary and partial. The full and final revelation of God has come through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. 'This revelation stands both in fulfilment of and in contrast to the old order of things.'¹ Lacking the full and final revelation, it was inevitable that Old Testament saints, Psalm writers included, would have inadequate conceptions concerning certain areas of doctrine such as life beyond death. We will consider that and then two areas of revelation which were clear.

1. *Life beyond death*

Is it not acknowledged that with respect to life after death, Old Testament believers were at a great disadvantage compared with us? We know, for example, that Hezekiah dreaded dying and was greatly comforted when God promised him through the prophet Isaiah a fifteen-year extension of his life (cf. Isa. 38:18, 19). Does this mean that Hezekiah had no hope beyond death? Did he fear annihilation after death? We must bear in mind that Hezekiah's illness which threatened premature death was due to his sins. The threat of death brought him to deep repentance. This in turn secured his reprieve from death.

E. J. Young comments, 'He knows that his sins are the cause of his death, and he looks upon this death as a punishment for them. To go to such a death would mean an eternal separation from God whom he wants to praise; if such a death overcomes him, then indeed he will no longer be able to praise God.'²

Some of the psalms are very reminiscent of Hezekiah's prayer. In Psalm 6:5 for example: 'For in death there is no remembrance of thee; in the grave who shall give thee thanks?' Psalm 88:10-12 is even more gloomy 'Wilt thou show wonders to the dead? Shall the dead arise and praise thee. Shall thy lovingkindness be declared in the grave? or thy faithfulness in destruction?

Shall thy wonders be known in the dark? And thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?" (cf. also verse 5). Two other passages may be mentioned — Psalm 30:9 and Psalm 115:17. Do these statements imply a complete lack of hope and expectation of life beyond death? David who gives expression to the statement of Psalm 6:5 also wrote Psalms 16 and 17 in which he gives the clearest possible evidence of his anticipation of life in the world to come. In the former as a prophet, he spoke of the bodily resurrection of 'the Holy One' of God. As H. C. Leupold very rightly affirms, 'But it can be demonstrated that that hope (the blessedness of the hereafter) had always been a part of godly faith, dimmer indeed in patriarchal days and still much in need of clarification in the early days of the monarchy. Both Psalm 16 and Psalm 17 offer clear-cut testimony as to how faith practically postulates such a solution, and how saints grew in experience to see that on the premises of true trust in God, hope of complete fruition of his presence is a logical necessity.'³

There are other robust statements of confident hope of life beyond death. For example, Psalm 49:14.15 'But God will redeem my life (soul) from the power of the grave: for he shall receive me.' See this in sharp contrast with the previous verse. Consider also Psalm 73:23-26. Asaph speaks with no vestige of uncertainty here. He has no doubt of what lies before him, 'When this passing world is done.' H. C. Leupold wisely remarks, 'Whether all of Israel in the Old Testament always lived on this highest level of hope is quite another question. But, for that matter, does the New Testament Christian always hold the faith in its fullest implications?' (p. 27).

We are by no means obliged to put the most pessimistic construction upon these apparently less hopeful statements in the Psalms. The expectation of life beyond death was more prevalent in Old Testament times than is generally acknowledged even by those who would like themselves to be regarded as evangelical scholars and theologians.

2. *Emphasis upon the Covenant*

The importance of the covenant relation between God and his people is deeply embedded in the Psalms. There is a distinctive Hebrew term, too rich in its implications to be adequately expressed by any one English word or even phrase. The A.V. predominantly uses the word 'mercy', frequently 'lovingkindness', occasionally 'kindness' sometimes 'merciful kindness' and 'goodness'. The N.I.V. renders 'unfailing love' and sometimes (e.g. Ps. 107) simply 'love'. The N.A.S.B. has uniformly 'lovingkindness'. The R.S.V. has 'steadfast love' uniformly. This word occurs 127 times in the Psalms. It cannot be divorced from covenant implications. When David cries to God in his great penitential prayer in Psalm 51:1, the ground he urges is this *hesed*. 'Have mercy upon me O God, according to thy lovingkindness. . . . ' Because this lovingkindness of God flows from his covenant with his people and is guaranteed by that covenant, the Psalms constantly affirm, 'His mercy endures for ever.' Psalm 136 reiterates this vital truth no less than 26 times. Apart

from its covenant implications how could such language as David uses in Psalm 143:12 be understood? 'and in thy mercy (*hesed*) cut off my enemies and destroy all them that afflict my soul: for I am thy servant'. David is able to affirm in Psalm 103:17 'But the *hesed* of the LORD is from everlasting, to everlasting upon them that fear him. . . .'

Linked with this great covenant term is another important word the meaning of which must be rightly understood if the Psalms are to be correctly interpreted. The word *hasid* rendered mostly 'saints' in A.V. but occasionally 'godly'. The N.I.V. is the same. This word can be considered in an objective or subjective sense, much in the way we can employ the term 'saint'. It is quite evident that its meaning is to be construed in an objective way in many of the Psalms. Its objective meaning is 'he whom God favours'. So J. A. Alexander, 'The predominant idea seems to be the passive one, so that the words are not so much descriptive of religious character as of divine choice.' This is his comment on Psalm 4:3: 'But know that the LORD hath set apart him that is *godly* for himself.' J. A. Alexander considers that both ideas — one who is the object of divine mercy and one who is activated by a love towards God — are included. So that this term also has no exact equivalent in English. It denotes those who are merciful because they have obtained mercy. When David cries 'Preserve my soul (my life) for I am *holy*' (*hasid*) in Psalm 86:2, the dual idea is probably present — 'a merciful object of God's mercy'. This word is found 25 times in the Psalms.

'Righteousness' also is prominent in the Psalms as a covenant term. Two words in Hebrew *sedeq* and *š'daqah* are virtual synonyms. The idea expressed often in the Psalms is that God is righteous to deliver his people and to pardon his people. 'Deliver me in thy righteousness . . . my mouth shall show forth thy righteousness and thy Salvation' (Ps. 71:2,15). 'Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my mouth shall sing aloud of thy righteousness' (Ps. 51:14). David knows that for God to clear him of guilt will be an evidence of God's righteousness — i.e. acting in the light of his covenant with David. This comes out especially well in Psalm 143:1,2 and 11: 'Hear my prayer, O LORD, give ear to my supplications: in thy faithfulness answer me and in thy righteousness. And enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified. . . . For thy righteousness' sake bring my soul out of trouble.'

3. *God's design of mercy for the Gentile world*

This is one of the most prominent emphases in the Psalms. There is no narrow exclusivism. Repeatedly we find mentioned and stressed that the Gentile nations are going to share to the full in Israel's covenant privileges. This truth is often found side by side with a declaration of God's universal sovereignty or his Creatorhood. Psalm 96 for example, is addressed to 'all the earth' — 'Declare his glory among the nations (A.V. heathen), and his wonders among all peoples. . . . Say among the nations that the LORD reigneth . . .

He shall judge the world with righteousness and the people with his truth.' In Psalm 86 David makes the confident statement, 'All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee O Lord; and shall glorify thy name.' Not only do we find such statements as these right through the Book of Psalms, but we are enabled to glimpse God's purpose to make Gentiles one with Israel as God's people. Gentiles too shall be enrolled among the citizens of Zion. From this point of view Psalm 87 is truly remarkable. H. C. Leupold gives it the title: 'The Glorification of Zion by the Adoption of the Gentiles.' How will these Gentiles enter Zion as citizens? — Gentiles once so bitterly opposed to Israel! The answer is: by the new birth! Notice three times over in this Psalm, 'this man was born there. . . . This and that man was born in her . . . this man was born there'. In other words Zion is to become the spiritual birthplace of the nations. Was Paul recalling this when he wrote to Ephesians: 'Now therefore you are no more strangers and foreigners but *fellowcitizens* with the saints, and of the household of God' (Eph. 2:19). On the strength of this Psalm alone Christians are justified in taking up all the Psalms and applying all that was Israel's under the Old Covenant to the Church. Nicodemus ought to have understood the doctrine of the new birth — this Psalm proclaims it both loudly and clearly.

The Problem of the Imprecatory Psalms

One of the greatest problems of interpretation concerns those Psalms in which the psalmist prays that God will visit evil men with the judgment which they deserve. There are more than 20 Psalms in which such prayers are to be found. The very term 'imprecatory' really begs the question. By using this term it is not my intention to pre-judge the issue.

The most striking example of all is undoubtedly Psalm 109. Here we meet the problem in its most acute form. The entire section from vv. 6-20 is a prayer to God to punish malignant and slanderous enemies and one individual in particular appears to be in mind. None can deny that the language is very strong indeed. Note especially vv. 6, 7; v. 12; v. 14; v. 18. This is a prayer which David prayed! The caption indicates that the entire Psalm was sung in the Temple services. What are we to make of this? It is part of Scripture. David was inspired by the Spirit of God to pray after this fashion. The very prayer is a prophecy that relates to Judas Iscariot for thus Peter quotes it in Acts 1:20.

C. H. Spurgeon in his preface in Volume V of *Treasury of David* makes the following comment: '. . . we have lingered for months over a Psalm, feeling quite unfit to enter upon it. Especially was this the case over the 109th Psalm which we sometimes think we never should have been able to handle at all if it had not been for the Bulgarian massacres, which threw us into such a state of righteous indignation that while we were musing the fire burned, and we melted the sentences, and wished that we could throw them boiling hot upon the monsters. Later tidings make us feel that the other side might well be favoured with similar visitations.'

Some commentators like Bishop George Home have side-stepped the difficulty altogether by suggesting that all the verbs in this and similar passages can quite as well be rendered as simple futures. Instead of 'let him be condemned: and let his prayer become sin', we could render 'he will be condemned: and his prayer will become sin'. The good bishop was entirely satisfied by this solution. '... by the future rendering of the verbs, every possible objection is precluded at once. This method has therefore been adopted in the ensuing commentary' (p. 23). This procedure, however, is inadmissible. It is the verdict of all reliable Hebraists that these verbs *must* be translated as optatives, that is language of definite wish. These are the expressions of prayer.

A number of considerations must be borne in mind in endeavouring to grapple with the problem posed by these so-called Imprecatory Psalms.

1. The Old Testament teaching was as opposed to a vengeful spirit as the New Testament

In Deuteronomy 32:35 Moses records the Lord's words, 'Vengeance is mine' -- or strictly, 'To me belongeth vengeance and recompense.' Solomon in Proverbs 25:21f. puts into words an attitude with respect to one's enemies that is not one whit behind the New Testament teaching: 'If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he be thirsty give him water to drink: For thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head, and the LORD shall reward thee.' The Old Testament standard for the treatment of one's enemies was as high as that of the New Testament.

Further, David himself from whose pen most of these imprecatory prayers have come was exemplary in showing a spirit of forgiveness to those who had wronged him and persecuted him. Examine the record of 1 Samuel 24 and 26 and read his moving lament written when the news of Saul's death in battle reached him. It is a model of magnanimity and genuine grief. In vv. 4, 5 of this very psalm David speaks of the love that he has exhibited towards these enemies against whom he prays.

There can be no question that he prays in the right spirit. He is entirely free from personal malice and vindictiveness. We have all the evidence that we could ask for that David was a man of eminent piety and godliness. We need to bear in mind that David's prayer here is not that of a private individual. He prays as Israel's king, as the anointed of the Lord. By the special covenant of 2 Samuel 7, he stood closer to the Lord than any other Israelite. He was a type of him who was to come who declared, 'I am the root and offspring of David.' David's enemies were very truly the enemies of God. In opposing and plotting against him, they were opposing God and plotting against him. In Psalm 139 he says, 'Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee? and am I not grieved with those that rise up against thee. I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies' (vv. 21, 22).

Though we are bound to admit that this psalm in particular causes difficulty for our understanding, as do portions of other psalms in similar vein yet

there are situations described in the New Testament that are by no means dissimilar. Consider Peter's words against Simon the sorcerer in Acts 8:20, 'Thy money perish with thee because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. . . .' This is certainly no benediction! It is true that Peter urges him to repent and seek God's forgiveness. Paul's words concerning Alexander the coppersmith are not dissimilar to David's utterances, 'the Lord reward him according to his works' (2 Tim. 4:14). His sharp rebuke to Ananias the high priest ought not to be overlooked, 'God shall smite thee, thou whited wall . . .' (Acts 23:3). Note also the strong language he employs with respect to the Judaizers in Galatians 1:8,9.

C. H. Spurgeon comments, 'Truly this is one of the hard places of Scripture, a passage which the soul trembles to read, yet as it is a psalm unto God, and given by inspiration, it is not ours to sit in judgment upon it, but to bow our ear to what God the Lord would speak to us therein.' 'We would all pray for the conversion of our worst enemy, and David would have done the same, but viewing the adversaries of the Lord and doers of iniquity, *As Such, And As Incorrigible*, we cannot wish them well; on the contrary, we desire their overthrow and destruction.'

C. H. Spurgeon is right to stress the incorrigibility of those adversaries of the LORD upon whom such maledictions are called. It is noteworthy that in Psalm 83 Asaph prays earnestly for God to overthrow his enemies. 'They that hate thee have lifted up the head.' His language is almost as strong as David's. But he does not regard these particular enemies as incorrigible and so we find in v. 16, 'Fill their faces with shame, that they may seek thy name O LORD.'

What H. Schultz has written concerning the whole of the Old Testament is pre-eminently true of the psalms. 'Christ and his apostles do not regard the Old Testament religion as a mere outward historical preparation for Christianity, but as a form of piety which could and would continue to be the foundation even of Christian piety. An Old Testament saint did not require to change his religion in order to become a Christian.'⁴

The psalms thus have this perennial freshness, and permanent relevance for the child of God. 'All the psalms' says Leupold, 'were prayed on the steps of the throne of mercy.'

¹Hebrews, P. E. Hughes, p. 36. ²Isaiah, vol 2, p. 526. ³Psalms, p. 160ff. ⁴Old Testament Theology, vol. 1, p. 51ff. □□□

Brass Tacks (continued from page 32)

Thirdly, the claim to miraculous powers is not shared by other evangelical Christians who do believe in the miraculous. Most of us who are ministers can produce cases from our pastoral experience of healing that is truly remarkable and very encouraging and which we attribute to the kindness of God but we do not by any stretch of the imagination put that in the category of apostolic miracles. The Charismatic movement, as represented on your programme,

claim that they are bringing back apostolic Christianity with all the miraculous gifts and that this will herald a world-wide victory for the Gospel. We believe that such triumph will ultimately come but the movement you depicted is a dangerous delusion and when the balloon pops evangelical religion as a whole will be discredited. Yours sincerely, Erroll Hulse.

P.S. Part of this letter was screened on the follow up television programme broadcast nationwide on 7th September.

One of the qualifications required for eldership is that the children of elders believe. Does this mean that a man cannot be elder unless all his children are converted? The matter came up in the article by Keith Davies 'Reformation for elders and deacons'. Mr. J. E. Hoad of Stockport, Cheshire wrote to enquire into this subject. Here is pastor Davies' reply which of necessity is technical and illustrates the care and detail required to establish the precise meaning intended by Scripture. In this case everything hinges on the word 'believing' (pistos).

A man whose children 'believe'?

Dear Mr. Hoad,

The matter you raise in your letter concerning the meaning of *pistos* in Titus 1:6 is very important, not least because of the practical implications for churches appointing elders.

Undoubtedly, your gathering of authorities on both sides of the argument is valuable. But we do not arrive at a true understanding of the meaning of particular passages of Scripture by taking a vote of scholarly opinion. You correctly indicate that the adjective 'pistos' can be taken in two ways: either 'believing', 'one who trusts' (active), or 'faithful', 'one who can be trusted' (passive). But how do we arrive at a conclusion as to the meaning of the word in Titus 1:6?

In determining the meaning of unclear passages of Scripture we should rely heavily on those passages which are clear. So, we can turn to other places where 'pistos' is used. The English versions translate the word in various ways, sometimes in the active sense, sometimes in the passive sense. In some places the context or the noun being qualified by the adjective 'pistos' determines how it is to be translated. In other places it seemingly can be either active or passive.

In Matthew 24:45; 25:21, 23, the noun is 'servant'. The important quality required of servants is 'faithfulness' (the passive use of the word). Whether or not the servants 'have faith' is not the issue.

Similarly, in Luke 12:42 the noun is 'steward'. Once again the quality of 'faithfulness' (passive) is what is required. In Acts 13:34 the noun 'mercies' in the phrase 'the mercies of David' is clearly to be qualified by the adjective meaning 'sure' or 'reliable' (the passive use). Mercies do not exercise faith! In 1 Timothy 1:15 the position is similar again. The 'saying' does not exercise faith (active), so the meaning must be the passive use of the adjective - 'reliable', 'trustworthy'. Then, in Revelation 1:15 the Lord Jesus Christ is described as a 'witness'. He does not exercise faith in that office, but his testimony is most certainly 'reliable', 'faithful' - the passive use again.

These uses of the adjective, then, are clear. When we turn to other verses - John 20:27; Acts 10:45; 16:1, 15; 1 Corinthians 7:25; 2 Corinthians 6:15; Galatians 3:9; 2 Timothy 2:2; Revelation 2:13 - we find that the meaning is not always so clear. We are, in fact, confronted, in a number of instances, by nouns (eg, people) who can and do exercise faith (active). But not all the verses necessarily require an active meaning. In fact, it is possible to translate them all by the passive 'faithful' without the result being nonsense, although Acts 10:45 for instance, makes very good sense with an active meaning.

So, where does that leave us with Titus 1:6? Either active or passive meaning makes perfectly good sense. But due to the influence of the passages of Scripture where the translation is clear, and they are

passive in meaning, the passive meaning of Titus 1:6 seems more likely. The more doubtful passages cannot be translated with an exclusively active meaning. Titus 1:6 is one such passage, and cannot be translated definitely with an active meaning. It seems therefore, that the passive meaning is more likely.

Where else can we get help within the pages of the Bible? In such a question as this, where the matter of interpretation is unclear, we can see what Paul says elsewhere when he is writing on the same or a similar topic, and that will give us an indication as to what he is likely to have meant in the passage under consideration. In 1 Timothy 3:4, the bishop (overseer) is to rule his own house well and to have his children in subjection with gravity. In 1 Timothy 3:12, deacons are to rule their children and their houses well. In the verse under consideration (Titus 1:6),

the children are not to be capable of being accused of riot and are not to be unruly.

All these requirements concerning the children – in subjection, under the father's rule, not open to accusation – are much more consistent with the passive use of 'pistos' ('faithful', 'trustworthy', 'reliable'), than with the active use ('believing'), which seems to introduce an element out of keeping with Paul's emphasis on behavioural qualities.

For these reasons it seems to me that the A.V. translation 'faithful' is much to be preferred.

Thank you very much for your letter, I do hope that my reply is of some help.

Yours sincerely in the Saviour,

J. K. Davies.

□□□

Brass Tacks BBC2

A letter in response to the Television programme Brass Tacks presented by Eric Robson and presented on 31st August, 9.35 p.m.-10.15 p.m. on B.B.C.2. The programme invites and encourages criticisms.

1st September, 1981

Brass Tacks, P.O. Box 27, Oxford Road,
MANCHESTER

Dear Mr. Robson,

Brass Tacks: The New Evangelicals

Thank you for your well-produced and enjoyable edition of Brass Tacks and a special vote of thanks to those responsible for some superb photography in catching facial expressions at the right moment.

It was refreshing for evangelical Christians to have an opportunity to speak for themselves but unfortunate that the most emotional, non-intellectual and non-doctrinal section of evangelical religion was pitted against top liberal scholars. The doubts expressed by them concerning small breakaway housegroups or large-scale gatherings when all the groups are brought together and emotion seems to predominate over reason are shared by evangelicals.

My first criticism, therefore, would be the simplistic polarisation between Charismatic

evangelicals and liberals. We were not shown the 'mainstream' evangelicals who take an uncompromising view of Biblical authority and who emphasise doctrine and practice as well as experience.

Secondly, the assumption that Britain is experiencing an evangelical revival should not go unchallenged. The unchanged pathetic smallness of the evangelical constituency was briefly asserted at the beginning of the programme, but then the impressions that followed gave the impression of revival. The meetings at Harrogate and York are by no means typical and to a large extent represent musical chairs, that is a change of alignment by many who are sick and tired of boring religion, evangelical or otherwise. The number of new converts makes up a very small proportion of the whole. The movement bears no relationship to the evangelical awakenings of the past such as the Wesleyan revival with its sturdy emphasis on repentance, brokenness and tears. True religion is not all ecstasy and joy. Gethsemane comes in too! It is true that we can do with some fervour but for whom is the applause of handclapping – ourselves or God? The movement with its neglect of conviction about sin and its concentration on the ecstatic including singing in tongues which has no precedent in the Bible makes it more like Hari Krishna or the Zionist sects of Africa than the evangelical revivals of the past.

(continued on page 30)

Editorial (continued from page 2)

Gospel broadcasts in French

News from the Ivory Coast is reported on the front inside cover. Bill Clark who pioneers the work of Evangelical Press purchases time on E.L.W.A. and F.E.B.A. The broadcasts reach a large number of countries and letters are received from as wide a field as Thailand and Haiti, Mauritius and Canada. French speaking people seem to be everywhere on the African continent. Correspondence arrives from about 20 nations including Senegal, Mali, Upper Volta, Togo, Nigeria, Benin and Ghana. Especially encouraging is the volume of correspondence coming from Madagascar and Zaire. The costs for this ministry of radio comes to about £7,200 per annum. There is a shortage of finance and it would be a great pity if this ministry was to suffer for lack of support. The Welwyn Evangelical Church has an outstanding record for generous support of missionary endeavour. A substantial part of the expenses for the radio work is being met by them. It is hoped that other churches may help as a result of this information.

When we think of these encouragements and opportunities it is difficult to describe our feelings. The following rendering of Psalm 67 by David Preston expresses the matter admirably. It can be sung to the tune *All Saints*.

Psalm 67

God in mercy grant us blessing,
Lift on us his radiant face;
May all earth, your ways confessing,
Know the power of saving grace.
Let the peoples' voices raise,
Lord, to you their hymns of praise.

Let them sing with jubilation
Of your greatness and your worth:
Justly will you judge each nation,
Justly govern all the earth.
Let the peoples' voices raise,
Let, to you their hymns of praise.

See the blessing God has granted
On our labours in the field!
May his word in hearts implanted
World-wide harvests richly yield.
So shall all the nations raise
To our God their hymns of praise.

Forthcoming Conferences

We were glad to hear from South Africa that the recent annual Evangelical and Reformed conference at Skoegheim, Natal, was encouraging. Pastor J. W. Baker of Oxford, Mississippi (see back cover) was the principal speaker. Among the contributors was Murdo Gordon, principal of the Bible Institute at Kalk Bay, John Newby of the Church of England in S.A., Deon Thom of the Dutch Reformed Church, Jim van Zyl and Pastors Martin Holdt and Fred Arnot.

The B.E.C.—1981 Annual Conference Westminster Chapel

Tuesday, Wednesday, 10th, 11th November
Our controversy with Rome — Herbert Carson; Our unshakable foundation — Francis Schaeffer. Ministry of the Word at 10.30 a.m. on both days by Graham Harrison. Secretary: David Lucke, 96 March Lane, Stanmore, Middlesex HA7 4HP. Tel. 01-954 2183.

The Westminster Conference 1981

Theme: Puritan Holiness. Tuesday 15th December beginning 10.30 a.m.

1. The Puritans — a holy people, Maurice

Roberts; 2. The Gospel Mystery, Walter and John Marshall; 3. Sanctification of the inner life, Daniel Webber.

Wednesday, 16th December

1. Sanctification of the outward life, Peter Beale; 2. The Puritan Sabbath, Erroll Hulse; 3. John Welsh, Peter Lewis.

Secretary: Brian Freer, 12 Pasture Road, Stapleford, Nottingham NG9 8GG. Tel. 0602 393722.

The Carey Conference for ministers

Swanwick, Derbyshire, 12th-14th January 1982

Preacher — Donald MacLeod. Harry Kilbride on mobilising the church for evangelism followed by discussion. Leith Samuel on crisis points in the ministry and how to deal with them followed by discussion. Other subjects and speakers to be announced.

The Carey Family Conference 1982

14th-21st August — Capel, Surrey

Visiting speaker: Tom Lutz of Indiana, USA. Secretary for Carey Conferences: John Rubens, P.O. Box 65, Bedford.

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