

Contents

ChristianShepherd • Vol. 4 • No 10 • October 2000

Evangelization	255
<i>Editorial</i>	
Looking upon Jesus as He walked	258
<i>Luke 10—J.G. Bellet</i>	
The Judgement Seat of Christ	260
<i>A meditation on David's might men</i>	
The Secret of Rest	265
<i>A meditation</i>	
Feed the flock	274
<i>God's mysterious ways</i>	
Practical Reflections	276
<i>Acts 7:1—20</i>	

—Also in this Issue—

Meditations of a father—R. Thonney	267
Thoughts on the House of God	269
Thoughts on Bonds	270
Thoughts on Evangelization	271
Fragment	273
Bible Challenger answers	273
Bible Challenger	281

Editorial

Evangelization

“...do the work of an evangelist...” (2Tim. 4:5)

His first name is Adam, and from all appearances he looks to be a bright, clean cut, neatly dressed young man. He’s spending the next several months of his life as a missionary—not evangelizing in some far away land, but doing his work right here in the mid-western United States.

The following is a copy of the schedule he follows each weekday.

6:30 Arise
7:00 Personal time
8:00 Breakfast
8:30 Personal meditation
9:30 Evangelizing, visiting
12:00 Lunch
1:00 Evangelizing, visiting
5:00 Dinner
6:00 Evangelizing, visiting
9:30 Planning for next day’s work
10:30 Bedtime

Along with this busy schedule, Adam also offers to perform community service in whatever town he is working as a missionary.

It was personally very humbling to read of such zeal and dedication—even more humbling, because Adam has made a commitment to this missionary service for the next two years of his young life. However, what was most humbling and sobering of all was to find out that this young man is one of over

60,000 missionaries of a huge US based cult, who are actively and energetically propagating their wicked and false doctrines throughout the world.

In view of the vast amount of resources and energy expended by the enemy of our souls to disseminate such deceitful, unholy teaching, believers do well to ask: “What am I doing to spread the precious gospel of God to lost, needy souls?” We have the apostle’s exhortation in 2 Tim. 4:5, “*do the work of an evangelist*”. Even more, we have the words of our Lord Jesus which can certainly be applied in principle to each believer: “. . . *Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.*” (Mk. 16:15).

We are also told in Psalms 68:11, “*The Lord gave the word: great was the company of those that published it*”. We have, by the grace of God, *the scripture of truth*. (Dan. 10:21). It is His Divine, life giving, eternal Word—God’s complete and only recorded communication for man. Are we—those eternally blessed by it—faithfully doing the work of *publishing* this wonderful *truth of God* to the lost?

God’s estimation of those who spread the gospel is found in Rom. 10:14, 15. “. . . *How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!*”

As the time of our Lord’s promised return grows rapidly nearer, the world is increasingly being flooded with false religions and wicked, Christ dishonoring doctrines. Oh! that we believers might be stirred up to fresh evangelical vigor—first through earnest prayer born of love for Christ and love for lost souls. Next, through gospel activities as the Lord may

direct each one in personal evangelization.

Of course devoting the amount of time to evangelizing as our youthful disseminator of falsehood can, is not an option for most. Yet any believer who desires to *do the work of an evangelist*, will find countless ways to proclaim the truth— *good news from a far country*. For instance, consider how often the gospel can be silently preached by attaching a Bible verse to each envelope mailed. Who can tell how many souls will see that Divine message as the letter travels through the mail.

We are reminded of the four lepers in the day of Elisha (2 Ki. 6, 7) who, at the height of that horrible famine in Israel, found an abundance of food and riches in the deserted enemy's camp. While they enjoyed these wonderful and unexpected blessings, keeping the good news to themselves, the city of Samaria (the capital of Israel when Ahab reigned) suffered the agonies of starvation. (2 Ki. 6:25).

Finally, knowing the vital importance of their discovery to the starving masses, they repented saying, "*We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace*". (2Ki. 7:9). What a day of *good tidings* is the day in which we live!

A Saviour—*Christ the Lord*—has come into this world, has died, risen again, and is seated at the Father's right hand in glory. Eternal Life is now offered freely to *whosoever will*. Let us not *hold our peace*—but proclaim the news of a free and full pardon to those spiritually starving. "...*preach the word in season and out of season.*" (2 Tim. 4:2)

Ed.

“Looking upon Jesus as He walked”

Luke 10:25 shows another precious thing. We never touch the borders of neighborly love but in the perfect life of Jesus. *“A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.”* Leaving him half dead—there was *our* condition. He was ruined, but his life was still in him. How well for us that our life was still in us when we met Jesus!

In one aspect we see the striking impotency of the law to take up our condition; but the Lord also shows too, that the representatives of the law did not keep what they taught. I learn here, to the eternal confusion of all lawyers, priests, and Levites, that they have never kept what they set forth. Were they authorized to *pass by on the other side*: The law will never do for me a sinner, or make its abettors and assertors the thing it would have them to be.

Why is the blessed Lord of glory called a Samaritan? Because He was a stranger. A stranger from heaven has come down to show neighborly love on earth. He has come to exhibit to earth, what earth never could exhibit to itself. And how did He do it? First, *He . . . came where he was*. Who could unfold such a thought in its fullness! did not the Lord do so with you?

And when he saw him he had compassion. What is the source of all the salvation found in Him? Was there anything in *you* to draw it out or provoke it? *No!* Something in Him suggested it. The poor

waylaid man was silent from first to last. Was not the poor prodigal silent when they clothed him with the best robe, and Joshua too, when they clothed him with garments in Zechariah?

There no more blessed answer to the grace of God than the stillness of faith. Poor waylaid man! Let Him do to you as He will. The Lord acts from *Himself*—at the suggestion of His own compassion. And he poured in oil and wine. He happened to have with him the very wealth that was suited to the man that lay in the road. The Lord Jesus came with the very fullness that was fitted to you condition.

And set him on his own beast. He exchanged places with us. He was rich, and we were poor. He became poor that we might be rich.

Next, he had charged himself with the man, and he would look after him. That is the gospel, and that is neighborly love. Again I say, the blessed Lord was forced on a picture of Himself when He was asked, *Who is my neighbor?* And now, how are we to act the part of the Samaritan? We must begin by being debtors to Jesus, before we can follow Him in neighborly love. We must be the waylaid man before we can be the Samaritan. How simply He unfolds the story of our necessity and His fullness.

The chapter (10) ends with the scene in the house of Martha and Mary—the richest *table* at which we have seen Him. Here is seen as an intimate family friend. We shall have this by and by in heaven. May we ever desire it.

excerpts adapted, Notes on Luke, J. G. Bellet

Thoughts on the Judgment Seat of Christ

A Meditation on David's Mighty Men

As Christians we must get our principles from the New Testament, for truth relevant to believers in this dispensation is properly found there. But many times we find these principles and truths illustrated for us in the Old Testament, and light given as to their practical application.

Judgement Seat of Christ—Christian Truth

One of the cardinal truths given to us in the New Testament is the judgment seat of Christ for believers. We are told in 2 Cor. 5:10 that *“we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ”*. Also, in Rom. 14:10 we have very similar words—*“we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ”*. 1 Cor. 3:13 tells us that *“Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it”*. Again, in 1 Cor. 4:5, we are told to *“judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts”*. Scripture is clear. There will be a review of the believer’s life in heaven—not judicially—but rather that God may place His estimate on what we have done in our lives. What has been done for the Lord will receive a reward (1 Cor. 3:14).

David’s mighty men

In connection with this truth, I would suggest that we have an illustration of it in the account of

David's mighty men and his estimate of them. The account is given twice: in 2 Sam. 23 and 1 Chron. 11. The accounts differ somewhat, the one in Chronicles being much longer. The account in 1 Chron. is given at the beginning of David's reign, and thus perhaps brings before us those who were instrumental in setting David up as king. The account in 2 Sam. is given at the end of his reign, and no doubt gives those who were faithful throughout this time, as well as being present at the beginning.

The value of *endurance*

We know that all will be rewarded at the judgment seat of Christ (*"then shall every man have praise of God"* 1 Cor. 4:5), but some will get a greater reward than others. God places a high premium on *endurance* in the Christian life, and how many there are that start out well, only to falter as testing becomes more severe! So the apostle Paul had a burden—*"so that I finish my course"* (Acts 20:24, JND trans.), and could with confidence say in 2 Tim. 4:7, *"I have finished my course"*. May it be our earnest wish to do this too!

Adino the Ezrite

Let us consider the account in 2 Sam. 23—looking at ten different men who illustrate some truths connected with the judgment seat of Christ.

The first one to be named is Adino the Ezrite, of whom it is recorded that he slew eight hundred at one time. The figure of eight hundred is one of the largest slaughters of men by one individual recorded

in the Old Testament, exceeded only perhaps by some of Samson's exploits. In 1 Chron. 11 the figure given is only three hundred, probably at an earlier time. Evidently this man's courage and faithfulness increased during David's reign, and thus he slew far more later on in his life than at the beginning. May it be our experience to walk with the Lord, and have our faith increased as time goes on, so that the Lord may work even more mightily through us!

Eleazar the Ahohite

The second one named is Eleazar the son of Dodo the Ahohite, who stood alone against the Philistines when the men of Israel were gone away. Of particular interest is the fact that "*his hand clave unto the sword*". The sword would no doubt speak of the Word of God, and how needful today to hold God's Word above all else, if we are to see a great victory! Note that it says that "*the Lord wrought a great victory*", for it is only in His strength that we can go out against impossible odds.

It is recorded that "*the people returned after him only to spoil*". He might well have resented this, having had to stand alone against the enemy when others had gone away. But there is no record that he complained. How good it is to be willing to share the fruits of a spiritual victory with others, even if they do not deserve it!

If God has given one the energy and help to have more spiritually than others, let it not be used to accredit and distinguish self. Rather that it be used for the good of all saints. Let us seek grace and ever

remember the Lord's admonition, "*Freely ye have received, freely give*".

Shammah the Hararite

The third one mentioned is Shammah the son of Agee the Hararite, who defended a field of lentiles against the Philistines. We might have thought that they were not of sufficient value to warrant his facing such odds, especially as it seems that he too was obliged to stand alone. But this was the inheritance given to them of the Lord, and he would not let even a field of lentiles fall into the enemy's hands. Perhaps this would speak to us of Christ and all the truth given to us concerning that blessed One. Many today are willing to give it up rather than stand alone, but love to Christ would exhort us that "*ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints*" (Jude, v. 3).

Serving unnoticed

But what was it that gave these three men the *first place*? To my knowledge they are not mentioned elsewhere in the Word of God. In all the accounts of David's various campaigns and battles, in all the incidents recorded in his life, they are not named. Would this not suggest that they were faithful in a quiet and unassuming way—not in the public eye? God will put His estimate on our service, taking into account things that are seen only by His eye. "*But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first*"?

Affection for David

If these three are accorded the first place only on the basis of their personal courage, it could readily be argued that others performed acts of bravery that at least approximated those recorded of these three men. I believe that there is another reason why they have the first place. In the subsequent verses, 2 Sam. 23:14-17, a very touching incident is recorded of three men who, hearing David's expressed longing for a drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, boldly broke through the host of the Philistines and brought the water to David. While they are not named as such, I believe it is clear that it was also these first three who did this. Their hearts were so devoted to David that they would risk their lives to give him that which his soul wanted. As the rightful king he should have been in control of Bethlehem and had access to the water. Though it was David's hometown, and also the future birthplace of the Messiah, it was the day of his rejection and the enemy held that place.

Perhaps this would speak to us of worship today, for it is the day of our Lord's rejection. His vindication awaits a coming day, but by faith you and I can break through the enemy who would usurp His claims, and we can give Him what is His due. Perhaps there are many who would gladly fight the Lord's battles in service, but are we willing to use our spiritual strength to give that blessed One a drink? How precious this is to His heart, as it was to David's. We may well ask why David would pour it out rather than drink it, but in type this would bring

before us the blessed truth that the Lord Jesus, while appreciating our worship in the highest degree, will not take His rightful place until we are associated with Him. If David had drunk of the water, he alone would have had it. He valued fully the cost involved in getting it, but would not drink it until all could enjoy it with him.

Thus it seems that these three men fill the first place because they were characterized by both worship and service, and both in total devotedness to David. They had courage that few could equal, but were devoted to David's person in a wonderful way. May you and I by grace seek to do the same towards our blessed Master!

Lord willing, we will look at the remainder of these ten servants of David in future articles.

B. Prost

The Secret of Rest

There was one Man whom men would not have. That Man was standing as Son of the Father, in the light with the consciousness of the Father's eye brightly beaming on Him. That Man said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." The Man Christ Jesus alone had the secret of *rest*.

There was Divine inexhaustable fullness in Him, all the Divine glory being in Him, and we have it revealed to us— "*he that hath seen me, hath seen the Father*". To whom then could He not and would He not give rest? It is not the question how much

you have to bear, but of the Lord's eye upon hindrances. When He looks on any one, even if it be a little child who does not yet feel its burden, He sees it and knows all that is connected with conflict.

He sees the burden within each heart; sees everything that is against us. I may be like a ship wrecked between two seas. He says, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest." How can you get away from that word? Is anything beyond His power? It is just there that we get the very essence of the gospel. He goes on: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me and ye shall find rest unto your souls." How was it that Christ found such perfect rest in the midst of all that was against Him? Ever quiet and at home, in the midst of it all, He says, "Learn of me."

If we could put down self in every way and entirely, we should find rest in all circumstances of life. If we walked as Christ did, we should see God and our Father in everything. Privations, temptations, difficulties—God and our Father in it all.

Subjection to His Word in everything—saying, "It is written"—makes the bitterest thing sweet. Our Lord Jesus Christ has pledged Himself that I shall have rest. He reveals the Father to me—the blessing He has shut me up to. All blessing comes from Christ teaching me every day to find rest by seeing God and my Father in everything.

excerpts adapted, G.V.Wigram

Nature is of God. Its corruption is not.

Fragment

Meditations of a father

“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.” (Psa. 51:17)

It hurts to be broken and yet it is necessary. Why? Because naturally we all have our own thoughts and ideas. But they are not as great and far reaching as God’s thoughts. What He has for us is far more exceeding and eternal. When we pursue our own thoughts, often persuading ourselves that it is what is the Lord’s will is for us, necessarily there has to be breaking. When there is brokenness—real brokenness—with a willingness to sit quietly in His presence until He shows us His way, then He will not despise. Then there is blessing.

“Preserve me, O God: for in thee do I put my trust.” (Psa. 16:1)

This Psalm is prophetic of the Lord Jesus. God has all power and all authority. Man is made to be dependent and obedient—dependent because God has all power and obedient because God has all authority. The Lord Jesus here as a perfect Man cries for preservation. We, as born into God’s family and as such, partakers of the divine nature, can also properly cry to God with those same words. We live in a world system where man is encouraged to be independent and rebellious. But there is a blessedness in simply realizing our need and crying to One who is greater than all.

R. Thonney

“The Lord carries His point, and often makes His conquest, by keeping His saints in a helpless condition in various ways, so as to make them live by faith, and depend on God alone. Men of great faith are never allowed to get beyond having their faith tried. God's plan is, there shall be none of self, and all of Christ. The very people who are doing most for God are often those who are working on short supplies of strength, money, talents, and advantages. They are kept in a position of living by faith and taking from God, day by day, both physical and spiritual supplies. This is the way God [completes His work].

Our [victory] is to form a secret alliance with God, and take His side. We succeed by agreeing to be what other people [may] call a miserable failure. Yet God always come out ahead and on top. He [may seem] to be doing nothing, yet all the while, like the majesty of chemistry, He is working miracles.”

excerpt quoted in a personal letter

When the Samaritans turned the Lord away because His face was to go to Jerusalem, John wanted to call fire down from heaven on them. The Lord told him that he did not know what spirit he was of. (Luke 9:53).

When Philip preached in Samaria and many were saved, (Acts 8:5) they did not receive the Holy Spirit until two came from Jerusalem to them. Who were those two? One was John who, instead of calling fire down from heaven, was the means of their receiving the Holy Spirit.

T. Roach

Thoughts on the House of God

God has a temple, or house, today. Notice what Paul says in writing in 1 Tim. 3:15: *“But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.”* The house of God today is the church [assembly] of the living God. Timothy was told that he must know how to behave himself in that house.

It is very important, dear young friends, to be concerned about our behavior in the house of God. In 1 Peter 2:4,5, we are told how this house is built. *“To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, Ye also, as lively (living) stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.”* The house of God today, instead of being built with great costly stones (1 Kng. 5:17) that were quarried from the bowels of the earth, is being built with living stones—believers in the Lord Jesus. Are you saved, dear young friends? Are you boys and girls trusting Christ as your Saviour?

It is not a matter of age or maturity nor because a brother has a distinct gift that he is a stone in that house. Peter tells us that those who come to Christ are the living stones in that spiritual house.

So the house of God in this world today is composed of every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. And the house of God is built for a very definite and special purpose. In that house there is a holy priesthood. Thank God that everyone who is trusting

in Christ is not only a *living stone*, but he is also a *holy priest* to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ!

How wonderful it is that you, dear young brothers and sisters, are just as much priests as the older brothers who take the public lead in the meetings. You can be present, gathered in the Lord's Name, and be just as much a holy priest, just as much offering up a spiritual sacrifice, as the brother who may eloquently express his praise to the Lord. If your heart is full of Christ and you are enjoying that blessed One in your soul, you are sending up what is most acceptable to the heart of God the Father, and that is worship. You are a worshipper!

A. M. Barry

Thoughts on bonds

"... and when they had bound him, they led him away, and delivered him to Pontius Pilate the governor." (Mat. 27:1,2)

Chains mean nothing to a submissive man; he needs no restraint and is not daunted by obstacles. The bonds of the Lord Jesus could have been torn apart as those of Samson (Judg. 15:14), reduced to ashes as those of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (Dan. 3:25), or just have fallen off as those of Peter or of Paul, Silas and their fellow prisoners (Acts 12,16). The will of his Father were the *bonds* of Him who said: *"My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work."* (Jn. 4:34)

The apostle Paul in prison exhibited the spirit of

Christ when he says: “I can do all things . . . ,” in spite of the chains that bound him (Php. 4:13). If one of the Roman guards had heard him so speak, he might well have mockingly retorted: “*Then why don't you just throw off these prison chains and walk away?*” Can we not hear Paul responding, “*God hasn't told me to do that*”.

Paul well knew that his bonds were no hindrance to God. He could think of the earthquake that night in the prison in Philippi when “*the bands of all were loosed*.” He and Silas had sat there quietly, free yet submissive. In what perfect wisdom does He who “*careth for us*” order all our circumstances.

Happy, peaceful path! Following the precious Savior in submissive confidence. May He give it to be our portion by grace, each in the *chains* His love has provided. W.M. Warr

Thoughts on Evangelization

I should be greatly grieved if brethren *ceased to be an evangelizing set of Christians*. Indeed, they would fade in their own spiritual standing, and get probably sectarian—not in theory, but in practice—because the enlarging principle of love would not be there.

I confess I feel a sort of envy of those whom God has called to evangelize. My want of courage keeps me humble. At the beginning brethren were engaged, and pretty much alone, in the roughest evangelizing—fairs, markets, races, regattas, and everywhere in the open air. Gatherings grew up, and

the care of them became needful, though evangelizing went on, and was blessed in many places. At *all times* in a general way we have to do it, as Paul says to Timothy. (“... *do the work of an evangelist...*” 2 Tim. 4:5)

As to [the evangelist], while evangelizing ever, let him look after these small gatherings and visit them elsewhere. But evangelizing in Christendom is different from doing it in heathenism. A full salvation gives a basis for [Christian] growth, but in Christendom it is necessarily *separative*. Hence the need of wisdom in such work. But I should indeed be sorry if [evangelization] was given up.

I see joy and gladness in conversions, even in heaven. (Luke 15:7, 10). But *making a fuss about them* and *writing [about] the people [those saved] I dread*. The feebleness of such work is felt afterwards. It requires both distinct gift and being *very near* Christ in consecration of heart to carry on [evangelizing] and [shepherding].

excerpts adapted from a letter, J. N. Darby, 1875

Faith can walk on rough water as easily as on smooth. Nature cannot walk on either. It is not a question of the state of the water, but of the state of the heart.

When trouble comes don't pray, "Lord get me out of this". Pray "Lord, what do you want me to get out of this?"

Spiritual Gems for the Path of Faith

Answers to September 2000 Bible Challenger

Gentleness	2 Sam. 22:36
Ready to be revealed	1 Peter 1:5
Ashamed	Rom. 1:16
Contend for the faith	Jude 3
Earth	1 Chron. 16:23
Of the day	1 Thess. 5:8
Fear ye not, stand still	Ex. 14:13
Garment	Isa. 51:6
Obey him	Heb. 5:9
Daily	Psa. 68:19

“For the **Grace of God** that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men.” (Titus 2:11) *R. Erisman*

Conformity to His death, to Paul was martyrdom. Reasoning on it, he says, “*Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus.*” (2 Cor. 4:10). We cannot be trusted to put ourselves to death. “*Delivered unto death*” is *God’s* doing it. (2 Cor. 4:11). He has done it. (Gal. 2:20). Paul was to be martyred—he was branded as Christ’s, ready to die. How far is it so with us? How far are we *ready*? We may not be called to physical death as was Paul, but are we practically bearing about in our body *the dying of the Lord Jesus*? Let each answer for themselves. *fragment*

Feed the Flock

At a Special Olympics track meet, a young girl had just won the 50 yard dash. Excitedly jumping up and down she yelled out to her parents, “Look, Mom and Dad, I won!”

Upon hearing this exclamation, her parents immediately burst into tears. Later, at the awards ceremony the young girl stood proudly as a ribbon with a large gold colored medal was placed around her neck. After receiving her award she excitedly ran to her parents who were sobbing even more then before. Even as the three of them hugged each other, the parents kept sobbing and weeping.

One of the officials, noticing the whole scene, became quite concerned with their increasing weeping. He finally went over to them and gently said, “Excuse me folks, but I’ve been watching you and I wondered if there is something wrong?”

Through her tears the mother smiled at him. “Oh no, nothing’s wrong. Everything’s right—everything is wonderful!”

Seeing the official’s confused look the girl’s father added, “We just heard our daughter speak for the first time in her life!”

Christian parents can easily identify with the feelings of this dear couple. Longing for the first signs of real life—eternal life—in their child, how diligently they listen for those words and watch for those actions, which express the reality of personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We read in Romans 10:9, “*If thou shalt confess*

with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." What joy and comfort to a parent's heart to hear a beloved child clearly and simply confess the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour for the first time.

It must have been a tremendous joy and comfort to dear Elisha, as he knelt in the room of the Shunemite's dead son, to hear that young man *sneeze* seven times. (2 Ki. 4:32-36). He had felt the lad's flesh grow warm—a *sign* of life. Now the man of God heard the *sound* of life and he was able to deliver the *living* child back to his mother.

In Luke 17:11-18 we read of the the *eternal Son of the Father* raising to life the *dead son of the mother*. What Divine, glorious power was expressed in the blessed Lord's words: "*young man I say unto thee, arise*".

Death must ever flee the presence and power of this glorious Eternal Life. What joy that dear widowed mother must have felt when *he that was dead sat up and began to speak!* Let us praise God for His infinite power and goodness, and trust Him for the salvation of our beloved children. *Ed.*

The Psalms are the expression of the Spirit of Christ, either in the Jewish remnant (or in that of all Israel), or in His own Person as suffering for them, in view of the counsels of God with respect to His elect earthly people.

excerpted "Exposition of the Psalms", J. N. Darby

Practical Reflections

Acts 7:48-8:3

vv 48-50 “*Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? Hath not my hand made all these things?*”

The spiritually blinded Jews were proud of their temple which had taken 46 years to build, (see John 2:20) thinking this insured the presence of Jehovah. But He could not find rest in a building which had become, through wicked unbelief, a defiled *house of merchandise*. (John 2:16). The longsuffering presence of God among His earthly people, was due to His grace and patience, not because of the temple.

v 51 “*Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.*”

What good did the outward ritual of circumcision do, when they would not *hear* or *act on* God’s Word given them by the Holy Spirit? Of what eternal value is the outward name of Christian—bestowed through baptism—if there has been no *real work* of faith by the power of the Spirit in the soul? Such empty profession produces the grossest kind of conduct by those who call themselves *Christians*.

v 52 “*Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and*

murderers: Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.”

What an indictment! Their fathers and they themselves would not have these channels of God’s mind, even as they did not *honor* the *Son*, (Matt. 21:38). The *law*, divinely received (*by the disposition of angels*) that they might be blessed, served only to condemn them. How exceedingly solemn today for any who have had free access to the Divine Word of God, and yet have rejected its truth.

v 54 *“When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth.”*

The word given by Stephen, through the power of the Spirit of God was living and *“powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword”*. It cut to the wicked *“thoughts and intents of the heart.”* (Heb 4:12). But rather than allowing a work of repentance which would cause them to smite their breasts and cry *God be merciful to me a sinner*, (Lk. 18:13) they react in the same horrible way in which those in a lost eternity will react—they *gnash* (Lk. 13:28) with their teeth on the one who has told them the truth.

v 55 *“But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God,”*

What a view filled Stephen’s gaze—in the midst of the very worst imaginable circumstances. He saw the *glory of God* and *Jesus*. And more, he saw the power (*Jesus standing at God’s right hand*) of that coming kingdom. (Psa. 63:2, Matt. 6:13, 24:30).

We are exhorted to *be filled with the Spirit* (Eph. 5:18). In the measure that is true in a believer, there will be a corresponding view and enjoyment of the Lord Jesus *crowned with glory and honor*. (Heb. 2:9).

v 56 “*And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.*”

These wicked rulers had heard the Lord in an earlier day say to them: “*But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins. . .*”. (Mt 9:6). Still ready to come back in grace and blessing to the guilty nation of Israel, the blessed and rejected Son of Man is seen *standing* (not yet *seated*) at God’s right hand. May we believers be ever ready, in like spirit, to show the patient, long-suffering grace of God to a world so often guilty of mistreating and persecuting the children of God.

vv 57, 58 “*Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man’s feet, whose name was Saul.*”

What a difference in their *loud* cry and the *loud* cry of Stephen (v. 60)! Their’s, a cry of hatred at Stephen’s Divine vision of Jesus standing in glory. His, a cry of love and forgiveness. Such a horrible reaction is all the worse for the place of Divine favor they had been brought into by Jehovah. Yet the this place of blessing only brings greater responsibility and condemnation in view of their wicked rejection.

But in the midst of all this darkness, God’s divine purposes and counsels shine so brightly. They can

never be overruled or defeated by man's failure or the enemy's efforts. At this dark moment we are, for the first time, brought in contact with the *zealous* and *overbearing* Saul—later to become Paul the Apostle of the risen Christ, the vessel of the mysteries of Christ and His bride, the church. What grace!

v 59 “*And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.*”

In every extremity, the believer has instant and effectual recourse to God through and because of His well beloved Son, Jesus our Lord.

v 60 “*And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.*”

Stephen had *looked up* in faith (v 55). Now he *kneels down* in dependence, submission, and love. Every day of our Christian pathway, we need to do the same—*look up* and *kneel down*.

With words of love and forgiveness fitting to a child of God, Stephen enters the glory and bliss he had seen by faith—he *fell asleep*. “*We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,*” (1Co 15:51).

Acts 8:1 “*And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.*”

How dark the circumstances seemed—how glorious the victory that God was working! The death of Stephen and the persecution of believers, seemed to be a victory for Satan, yet his attempts to destroy the assembly were thwarted in two ways.

First, the gospel was carried to many other parts by those who escaped the persecution at Jerusalem. Those in *Judaea* and *Samaria* who might not have heard that wonderful message had the assembly in Jerusalem remained in peace, now were able to also hear of the *wonderful works of God*.

Secondly, about 40 years after this event, the Roman army under Titus swept into Jerusalem and destroyed it, massacring most, if not all the Jews who remained there. This present persecution was used by God to send many believers to places of safety before this awful event took place.

v 2 “*And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.*”

It is appropriate to mourn the loss of a saint of God. Though knowing that *joy comes in the morning*, we weep in this present *night* when temporary separation through death takes a loved one home.

v 3 “*As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.*”

Many homes in Jerusalem were privileged to host believers who gathered *in assembly* around the Lord Jesus Christ in the midst. Saul's hatred of Christianity however, even set aside Moses' teaching as to the sanctity of the home in the matter of pledges. “*thou shalt not go into his house to fetch his pledge.*” (Deut. 24:10). In faith, the Christians' had pledged their souls to Christ. The insolent, overbearing zealot was busily *dragging* (JND) that pledge back, either to Judaism, or off to prison and death.

Ed.

Bible Challenger

The first letter of the following responses will form the word defining how a certain triad will not be quickly rendered useless. The number in brackets indicates the number of words in each answer.

1. Something a debtor was told to take, while sitting down quickly, resulting in a large debt reduction. (1)
2. A dire fore warning to Israel, that should they fail to honor the Lord in their promised land, something from the heavens would surely cease, and they would quickly perish. (2)
3. What was the anticipated result for a certain king seeking foreign invaders, if the advice (given under false pretenses) from a lofty inhabitant, to pursue quickly was heeded?
4. Who were the mountain dwellers that were gathered together against some servants of Israel, that prompted an urgent plea to come quickly and help in their time of need. (4)
5. The name of the stone where a coded message was to be delivered to an anointed king who went there quickly after a set waiting period. (1)
6. The alternative that Philadelphians were to consider in holding fast their spiritual heritage, upon hearing the promise "Behold I come quickly". (5)

Answers to these questions will be found, Lord willing, in the next issue of the *Christian Shepherd*.

R. Erisman