

# THE PRESBYTERIAN BANNER

April, 2008

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*Devotion: "But because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them." Hebrews 7:24-25*

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**Bethesda Units - Maclean**

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## THE POWER OF WEAKNESS

*The Rev. George Ball continues his studies on "Ministry Matters," and deals with 2 Corinthians 12:1-10.*

What's your most embarrassing or humiliating experience? Perhaps it's something that happened at school in the classroom or on the sports field? Or maybe it happened at work? Perhaps it's something you wouldn't want anyone else to know it's just too embarrassing. I suspect if we were to ask the apostle Paul what his most embarrassing moment was he might confirm that it was on the night when he was let down in a basket through a window in the wall of the city of Damascus. He had approached the city with a swagger. He had all the power of the state behind him to hunt and harass and arrest Christians. Then suddenly he was confronted by a blinding light and this once self-confident Pharisee had to be led by the hand into the city. He had been conquered by the One he sought to conquer. His exit from the city was forever etched on his memory. Now the tables were turned. Now he was one of the hunted. Now they sought his arrest. Now he had to slink out of the city the cowardly way - in a basket. It was humiliating. Embarrassing. It left an indelible impression. He felt quite literally a basket case! But he says, "If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my weakness."

Paul doesn't mind sharing with us his weaknesses. Indeed he is going to share a few more personal secrets. He's going to tell us about his thorn in the flesh. But to set the scene, to provide the context, background and occasion for this thorn he has to tell us, albeit reluctantly, about some very private spiritual experiences.

### A Heavenly Vision (vs. 1-6).

"I know a man in Christ...who was caught up to the third heaven." It happened some 14 years previously (presumably before his public ministry began). He had never spoken about it until this time. He was caught up to Paradise, to the third heaven (ie. to the place of the risen Lord), and he heard things there, which were so incredible that they were inexpressible. Indeed, this was not just a "one off" but he had a number of visions (vs. 7). Now if ever a man could have been tempted to boast and brag about his spiritual experiences surely this was it. Today it would be the cause of books, seminars, videos, interviews, mugs and merchandise. But please note how Paul reports it. He describes his experience in the third person "a man" so as to be semi anonymous. He reports it briefly in just a few verses. He reports it vaguely he doesn't give much away. He reports it very reluctantly - all these years he has been silent about it. He reports it along with the weakness that accompanies it. In other words, the only reason he mentions the vision at all is because it is the necessary introduction and background to the thorn in the flesh. In this respect Paul is an example of modesty, restraint and humility which we would do well to reproduce.

### A Thorn in the Flesh (vs. 7-8).

"A thorn was given me in the flesh." Can you imagine anything more contradictory,

more opposite? It's certainly down to earth with a bump! There have been many suggestions and attempts to identify this condition of the apostle, but it is all fruitless since Paul himself never specifically identifies it. We can, however, say that it was a physical condition it was "in the flesh". In an age like ours, which worships appearance it must have been embarrassing and off-putting. It was a painful condition having a stake or splinter sticking into you is no fun. It was a God-given condition it was divinely ordained and purposed, given on the heels of his spectacular vision. It was an ongoing condition there was no let up over the years. It was a condition that Paul desperately wanted to be freed from he pleaded with the Lord three times to have it removed. As far as he was concerned it was something he needed like a hole in the head. It was a condition that Satan appeared to exploit to all appearances it was a contradiction to his ministry. Since, however, Paul never identifies the illness it has the particular benefit of making the text applicable to millions through the centuries who have been able to read this passage and identify with its pain if not with its cause. Do we not feel as though Paul is among us even today? Whether our affliction is physical or emotional can we not identify with the apostle?

### **An Unexpected Answer (vs.9).**

"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." That's not the answer that Paul wanted or expected. He wanted the thorn's removal. But God deemed the thorn necessary. It was God's will in his life. There was not going to be any removal. Such an answer drives a double decker bus through the argument that it is never God's will for you to be sick or in pain! This was the condition, which God declared to Paul, "my power is made perfect in weakness." This was the prime condition for discovering lessons about God's strength and sufficiency and one's weakness.

Currently in Australia we are experiencing one of the worst prolonged droughts on record. Water storage levels in some places are at 20% capacity or less. There is the very real fear that we will run out of water. It's good to know that God's grace is still at the level of 100%. We can draw from it and it will never run out. God is saying to Paul, "My grace is so much bigger than your thorn. You will never be able to diminish or exhaust My grace. Test Me." It's like the little boy on the sand with his bucket and spade drawing from the ocean and filling his trench with water. He has an endless supply!

How often the Lord has placed a thorn in the lives of people who have been extraordinarily fruitful. Calvin had many health problems. Whitfield was plagued with a chronic respiratory condition. Spurgeon had to preach through constant pain, depression and criticism. He had

regular attacks of gout, and occasionally was in such pain while preaching that he had to put one knee on a chair and cling to the pulpit rail. Before preaching he usually felt "terribly sick", as if he was crossing the English Channel.

John Stott recounts his own experience while conducting a mission in the University of Sydney in 1958. Before the last night of the mission he caught a bug which deprived him of speech. Shortly before the meeting some student leaders gathered around Stott and one of them read these words from 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, and they prayed that the words might be fulfilled that night. Stott says, "I could only croak my address into the microphone in a monotone unable to modulate my voice in any way. When the time came for the invitation, however, there was an immediate and eager response." He continues, "I have been back in Australia 10 times since then and everytime somebody has accosted me somewhere, asking, "Do you remember that meeting in the Great Hall of Sydney University when you lost your voice? I came to Christ that night." My power is made perfect in weakness!

***"Many people today are seeking a change in their circumstances. Some seek a "sea change", others a "tree change", but what we need most of all is a "me change". Instead of protesting to God about our circumstances or our trials, and seeking to persuade ourselves that if only things were different then we would be more effective Christians, perhaps what we need most is an attitude change.. "***

### **An Amazing Attitude (vs. 9b-10).**

"I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." What an amazing attitude; what a turn around. First he resented the thorn and wanted it removed. Now he's glad of it and actually boasts of it! He sees all the more clearly that afflictions have a God given purpose; to correct us; to perfect us and to protect us from pride. He sees that this thorn makes him lean all the more on the Lord. He sees that instead of the thorn being a problem it has become a

gracious provision opening the door to God's added grace and power, "for when I am weak then I am strong." God's ways are not like ours. He always works in ways that humble men and exalts Himself. God is not in the business of glorifying men, but in bringing glory to Himself as He works through those who are weak and foolish.

Many people today are seeking a change in their circumstances. Some seek a "sea change", others a "tree change", but what we need most of all is a "me change". Instead of protesting to God about our circumstances or our trials, and seeking to persuade ourselves that if only things were different then we would be more effective Christians, perhaps what we need most is an attitude change. Instead of resenting the things that we consider hindrances, let's see them as given by God for a purpose so that we might lean all the more on Christ and say with the apostle, "I am content with weakness, insults, hardships, persecutions and calamities for when I am weak, then I am strong".

There is power in weakness. To Him be the Glory. Amen!

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**"We can live contented that our king will never abandon us, but will supply our necessities until our warfare is ended" - John Calvin, Day by Day with John Calvin, p291**

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# BLOGGING ABOUT...

## THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

Just recently our attention was focused on the Resurrection of Jesus. While we do not hold services on "Good Friday" because we have no authority from the Bible to do so [our Lord has stipulated the way his death is to be remembered - in the Lord's Supper] we don't forget either his death on the Cross or his Resurrection from the dead. In fact the Lord's Day itself is a *weekly* reminder of this glorious event. By giving it the prominence it deserves, and the place in our lives it demands, we not only honour the commandment, but also the Resurrection of our Lord.

In a book, "The Last Days of Jesus", written some years ago by T.V. Moore and published by the Banner of Truth, in 1958, Professor Moore brings before us the significance of the Resurrection. After telling us how it fulfills the OT, grounds our Justification, provides for our regeneration, encourages holiness, and brings great comfort to us, he says this: "It will thus be seen how vitally important this great fact is in the Christian system. It lies at the very foundation of that system, and runs through all its parts. It is the great fact that assures a dying world, that there is one who has conquered death, and brought life and immortality to light in the Gospel. It is the great demonstration to a perishing race, that Christ is mighty to save, and may be trusted by every creature. It is the precious fact that has hallowed the grave, and made it but a couch of repose to the slumbering dust that shall awake on the great morning that is one day to dawn on earth; just as the body of Christ did, when the angel descended from heaven, and the earthquake shook the grave. Hence it whispers comfort to the mourner, for it tells him that the parted shall meet again, and the form that has been laid down in corruption, shall come forth in incorruption, like to Christ's glorious body. Hence, also, it disarms death of its terror to the believer, and transforms the grave into a quiet garner where the precious dust shall be safely treasured, until the trumpet shall sound, and the dead be raised incorruptible." [p. 29]

We need to think about this great truth, not just once a year, but each day, and celebrate it as we join together for worship every Lord's Day.

## THE POVERTY OF NON - CHRISTIAN THINKING.

Years ago [!] one of the reasons for extending Hotel hours was to get rid of what was known then as "the six o' clock swill." For those who may not remember, in those far away days, hotels had to close at six o' clock. So, there was a desperate rush to get there after work and drink as much as one could before the barman said, "Time, Gentlemen, please." When the closing time on Hotels was introduced, it was hailed as the solution for a drinking problem. People could now become civilized in their drinking habits, and binge drinking would be a thing of the past.

It hasn't exactly worked out the way it was planned. Now, in the face of an upsurge in binge drinking the restriction of Hotel trading hours is being considered as a

solution to a serious social problem. But it has to be asked, will that prove any more effective in solving the problem than relaxing hotel hours years ago? The real problem is not in how many hours hotels stay open, but in the desire to drink excessively. And that is a problem that is almost as old as the human race itself.

What's the solution? While we don't want to minimize the difficulties involved in drunkenness, and the struggles that people have with it, surely we must confess that the real solution lies in the experience of the Gospel "the expulsive power of a new affection", as Thomas Chalmers put it. The Apostle puts it succinctly when he tells us: "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." [Ephesians 5:18-20]

## THE MAN WHO LOVED THE SOIL

In 2 Chronicles 27 Uzziah [791-740], the son of Amaziah, who ruled as a co-regent with his father for many years before he became king over Judah in his own right [767BC] is described [in verse 10] as the King "who loved the soil". Older versions say that he loved "husbandry" or agriculture but the NIV and the RAV are more literal and simply say that "he loved the soil." I find that extremely interesting. In the middle of this record about what this human dynamo is doing in God's Kingdom, we have this note: "He loved the soil." And he's not being criticized for it! It's a positive description!

And that serves to remind us that the Bible doesn't see any tension between our commitment to God, and our being close to the land and enjoying it. It's a non Christian view that depreciates the land. And perhaps this is one area where we've failed. We've pushed "otherworldliness" to such an extreme that we give the impression to people that the land and the earth are unimportant that earth is not our home and that we were really made for somewhere else!

But then there's the opposite extreme! There are those today who are so taken up with the soil that they worship the soil. The land and the earth is sacred; it must be kept in its pristine condition. We shouldn't cultivate or develop the land. We must learn to live off it. Indeed some go so far as to say that if you're close to the earth, you're somehow more "spiritual" than everybody else. You can "commune" with it and be at one with the Universe! But here we have a King who loved the soil. But he didn't worship the soil. He wasn't a slave to the soil, but king of the soil. He cultivated the soil and made it very productive! He fulfilled his destiny as a man and as a King.

But the fact that he loved the soil by itself didn't make him more spiritual than anyone else! His spirituality depended on seeking the Lord, walking reverently before the Lord, and doing what was right in the eyes of the Lord. [Verses 4-5]. And we're told that "as long as he sought the Lord, God gave him success." And so it will always be. Being on earth, and closeness to the soil will not prevent us from serving God. But by the same token, it will not by itself, make us more "spiritual" than anyone else. That depends on listening to and following the Lord Jesus.

# ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH

Dr. Rowland S. Ward, Melbourne

## **'AND IN THIS WAY ALL ISRAEL SHALL BE SAVED' – Rom 11:26**

### **Two views about Israel**

One of the much debated issues among Christians is the significance of Israel in the purposes of God.

On the one hand there are those who insist that Israel and the Church should be sharply distinguished. Old Testament passages referring to the future glory of Israel must be referred only to the nation, and similarly in the New Testament. The church is seen as a distinct provision of God, even a kind of alternative operation arising because of the unbelief of Israel in the time of Jesus. Ultimately, it is held, God will restore Israel as a people at the last minute and fulfil the ancient promises. This view is usually associated with the idea of a literal reign of Christ from Jerusalem during the millennium, and great interest in supposedly unfulfilled prophecies, and finds confirmation in the return of many Jews to Palestine in 1948.

On the other hand, there are those who accept in one form or another the majority view that the ancient promises to Israel are fulfilled in and through the church of Jesus Christ as the Israel of God. This position understands the fulfilment of the ancient promises is not a slavish, literalistic one. Rather, the distinctive institutions of Israel (sacrificial system, organization as a kingdom etc.) provide a portrayal on an earthly level of what is to be fulfilled in a greater and more wonderful way by the Messiah. The way Old Testament texts are used in the New Testament is held to confirm this approach.

The question then arises, 'Is there any place for ethnic Israel in the purposes of God in the age begun by Jesus' resurrection?'

### **Seeking understanding**

The key passage in the debate is the meaning of the expression 'and so all Israel will be saved' in Romans 11:26. Perhaps a majority say 'all Israel' is the nation although not necessarily every individual (eg. C. Hodge, J. Murray, C.E.B. Cranfield); some say it is the elect remnant from the nation (eg. R.C.H. Lenski, W. Hendriksen, H. Ridderbos), and others (eg. J. Calvin, K. Barth, N.T. Wright) say it is the church consisting of believing Jews and Gentiles. The issue is complicated by the apparent ambiguity of the words translated 'and so': they could be taken as meaning 'and in this way' or they could be taken as meaning 'and then'. Obviously we have to look at the context.

As regards the overall Biblical context, I take it as undeniable that the OT anticipates the work of Christ by utilising the events and institutions of Israel to point forward to the true fulfilment of them in Christ. For example, Jesus is greater than Moses and greater than Cyrus. On the mount of transfiguration Moses and Elijah spoke with Jesus about the coming 'departure' (Luke 9:30; lit. *exodus*) Jesus was to accomplish at Jerusalem, thus reminding us that that was at the heart of the OT. If Cyrus, the typical

Messiah (Isaiah 45:1), set the captives in Babylon free so that they might build the city and the temple in Jerusalem, Jesus, the true Messiah, delivers his people from sin's bondage that they might form a holy temple and the city of God, the New Jerusalem.

The New Testament sees the inclusion of the Gentiles in the church as the enlarging of David's fallen tent (Acts 15:14-17). The true Israel of God is the believing remnant of national Israel to which the believing Gentiles are added. It is an expansion of the true Israel, not a replacement. It is an expansion already anticipated in the OT in the Abrahamic promise, and in many prophecies.

Paul regards the fact that God has appointed the Gentiles to be heirs together with Israel, members together in one body, as the 'mystery' of Christ (Eph 3:1-6). The word 'mystery' doesn't mean a riddle we must solve, but something that is hidden from clear view until revealed by God. The mystery is that the glory of Israel promised for the last days is fulfilled in the gathering of Jew and Gentile in one body.

### **Romans**

Coming now to Romans, we need to appreciate that chapters 9-11 are not a kind of appendix to 'the gospel as the power of God for salvation' in chapters 1-8, an appendix which we can pass over as we move to the 'practical' teaching in chapters 12-16. Rather chapters 9-11 build on the teaching about salvation already given to show that the result of God's saving purposes is the building of the true Israel promised.

Jews were a very significant proportion of the population of the Roman Empire – 10% or more overall. It was only a short while before that Jews had been allowed back to Rome following their expulsion in AD 49 (Acts 18:2), and the Roman Christians didn't seem to have a sound understanding of their true position vis-a-vis the Jews. They might be tempted to think of themselves as God's favourites (11:19-21), so doing what most Jews had done. They might think that the Jews were now written out of God's purposes altogether. A better theology would need to prevail for evangelism to truly demonstrate the reconciling power of the gospel among all nations.

In Chapter 9:6 Paul distinguishes believing Israelites from unbelieving: 'not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.' He insists that physical descent from Abraham does not make one a true member of God's family. Ultimately, it is God's gracious election that is at work among sinful people. Salvation is not by human achievement, but through the instrumentality of faith in Christ. God did not reject Israel but always saved a remnant chosen by grace, and that fact remained true in Paul's day (11:1-6).

Rather, bringing salvation to Gentiles was designed to provoke Israel to seek the blessings believing Gentiles enjoyed (11:11). Paul himself hoped his Gentile ministry might arouse some Jews and save some of them. He re-

minds the Gentile believers that they were supported by the olive root of the patriarchs (cf. 9:5; 11:28). They had been grafted in as wild branches. This is a further reminder of the historic continuity between faithful Israel and the believing church.

Paul says a number of things concerning unbelieving Israel:

<sup>11</sup>Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious.<sup>12</sup>But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring!  
<sup>13</sup>I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry <sup>14</sup>in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them.  
<sup>15</sup>For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? <sup>16</sup>If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches. (NIV)

1. Paul emphasises that the Jews are not completely written off. The firstfruits, the faithful patriarchs, mean God has in some sense set apart those descended from them for the fulfilment of his saving purposes.

2. The blessings which come through Israel's transgression are salvation for the Gentiles, riches for the world, for Gentiles. The prophets speak of the wealth/people of the Gentiles entering into Zion (eg. Isa 60:10-12; Rev 21:24-26), and there seems an allusion to this.

3. The 'fulness' (v12) refers to Jews who come to faith. It contrasts with the 'transgression' and 'loss' of the majority of Israel through unbelief, and it appears to be equivalent to 'acceptance' in v15. The word translated 'fulness' may have the idea of a full recovery or a full number. However, it is not a fullness that belongs simply to the future. It is a fullness to which Paul himself aims to contribute to now, rather than merely a last days large-scale conversion of Jews. It is a fullness that is always according to God's gracious election and in the way of faith, as Paul has explained at length from Chapter 9:1 onwards.

4. The blessings associated with Israel's 'fulness' are 'much greater riches' (v12) or 'life from the dead' (v15). It is sometimes said that the first expression implies that the fullness of Israel will result in a more extensive ingathering of Gentiles. However that is an inference not required by the context, and is seemingly contradicted by the *fulness* of the Gentiles (v25) coming in before the salvation of Israel. It is sufficient to recognise significant spiritual blessings are indicated, blessings which impact on Gentile believers as well, when Israel's fullness is in.

5. The expression 'life from the dead' might well remind us of the way in which God recovered his people from the exile, breathing life into what seemed dead by the power of his Spirit (Ezekiel 37 – the valley of dry bones). God could effect a more general conversion of ethnic Israel in the future too. But perhaps the expression really refers to the climax of God's purposes with Jew and Gentile in the resurrection and the perfection of the New Jerusalem which follows it; 'much greater riches' indeed and 'life from the dead' quite literally.

6. The Gentile believers also needed to appreciate that Israel's hardening in unbelief was not total but only partial and would continue 'until' the fulness of the Gentiles was brought in (v25). This says nothing about the proportion of Jews hardened at any particular period, only that it is not total, 'and God can graft them in again', nor does it imply they'll not be hardened after that.

7. The fulness of the Gentiles (v25) 'come in' (that is, into the olive tree of Israel cf. Jer 11:16) through conversions in the course of history, not by some last-minute mass conversion. There is no imperative reason that we should understand the fullness of the Jews any differently. If the partial hardening of Israel ends when the fulness of the Gentiles comes in so as to allow Israel's mass conversion, we are left with the strange idea of an historical period of largely Gentile accessions to God's people being succeeded by one in which it is exclusively Jews (since the fullness of the Gentiles has already come in).

8. Paul reminds the Roman believers that they are not some replacement for Israel or even a parallel separate development, but they are vitally connected to Israel and beneficiaries of the covenant God made with Abraham (cf. Rom 4). They have been grafted in to the olive tree of God's covenant people. They are part of the true Israel of faith, but they can't have mercy without ethnic Israel any more than Israel can have mercy apart from the Gentiles. All have been bound over to disobedience so that all may receive mercy (v32). Blindness in part has happened to Israel after the flesh, but in the course of history the fulness of Gentile and Jew will come in, and 'in this way all Israel will be saved' (v26).

## Conclusion

I conclude that Israel in Romans 11:26 is a name for the expanded spiritual Israel, the church as the covenant people of God, rather than the nation. The view expressed does not exclude conversion of large numbers from the Jewish people in the course of history.

Earlier, to the Galatians, Paul had written, 'If you are Christ's you are Abraham's children' (Gal 3:29) and belong to 'the Israel of God' (Gal 6:16). To the Philippians he will soon write that believers are 'the true circumcision' (Phil 3:3). There is no principial reason why Paul cannot use 'Israel' in Rom 11:36 for the glorified church, the expanded Zion, promised by the prophets. I believe that's exactly what he does.



## REACHING MUSLIMS WITH THE GOSPEL Rahmat's Story and Vision

As I stood shaking hands with those leaving morning worship I recognised a tall young girl. 'You're the daughter of Rahmat' I said to her and asked her how her father was getting on. A week later I went to visit Rahmat after the morning service which he conducted in Urdu. All who attend are from Muslim background. I met a lady who had only been coming for a few months with her five children, other ladies (wearing burqas) with their children and an older man with a long white beard. I also met two young students who attended this church, one as a member. Last time I was there I led in a service of the Lord's Sup-



per with them.

Rahmat wrote to me: *Respected Sir, Warmest greetings to you in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. I also extend our thanks from us personally and also on behalf of our congregation Murideen Urdu Christian Fellowship. Since you are well aware of how our Lord Jesus Christ has showered his great mercies even unto Ishmaelites (Muslims in North India) and how in spite of our weakness is using us for his glory and honour. I would just like to mention to you that MA'RIFAT is the social action wing of our church, and this we do for wisdom's sake since many areas we work we have to face persecutions*

### FAITH - AND FEAR .....

King Ahaz, [who was King over Judah from about 735/2 - 716 BC] was an ungodly King, the very opposite of what the Lord's Anointed was to be. When Judah was threatened by Israel and Syria, and Ahaz was thinking of getting help from Assyria, God sent his Prophet, Isaiah, to him with the following direction: "Say to him, 'Be careful, keep calm, and don't be afraid.'" [Isaiah 7:4] He met Ahaz at "the end of the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Washerman's Field" and confronted him. E.J.Young comments:

"By the upper pool stands quaking and trembling Ahaz. But the man who approaches him is not trembling. Daring

also. *In Jesus, Dr Syed Rahmat.*

A week later I went and had a meal at Rahmat's home. It was at this time that he shared his vision to start Taleem centres at a number of centres across north India. Rahmat was wonderfully and powerfully saved from the religion of Islam. He had to flee after being severely beaten by his relatives. He came into contact with a pastor who took care of him and eventually he came to the seminary. He hopes to be ordained into the Presbyterian Church soon.

Late in the night he led me to a small room under a house where he is able to hide those who are fleeing such persecution. Those who believe in Jesus take refuge in this place. Some come long distances to him; they have to come away from their homes and communities if they want to be baptised and stay alive.

Rahmat has a concern particularly for the children from his old community. Although there are over 100 million Muslims in India they are in the minority. They have the lowest literacy rate among any group in the country just 45-50% in north India, where most Muslims reside. 'Every Muslim is encouraged to send his child to a madrassa from the age of three' writes Rahmat. These religious schools are conservative and fundamentalist, and many have links with overseas terrorist groups. Rahmat wants to give these young people another option. He wants them not only to be educated but to hear the gospel.

With this aim in mind Rahmat plans to start modern English Madrassas which will also function as Taleem or discipleship centres. Many people from his home place as well as his church have encouraged him. The local Presbytery to which he belongs support him in this unique ministry. Clearly there is a need for much prayer and support.

Rahmat vision is not entirely unique. Henry Martyn had a similar vision in 1806 which led him to preach the gospel in the very places where Rahmat now wants to go. There are millions more Muslims in this place than when Martyn was there but still the call goes out, 'who will go'.

- Dennis Muldoon

to come into the very presence of kings, this man, Isaiah, cries out with the bold voice of authority. He dares in God's name to command kings, "Take heed," he enjoins, "and be quiet." These are not the words of suggestion but of command. They are to be obeyed unquestioningly. Why should Ahaz tremble? Let him rather stand in quiet confidence, his trust placed not upon Assyria but upon the Lord. He should see to it that he is calm. An agitated spirit does not comport with true faith; when one rests upon the Lord, there is no need to fear what man will do. Faith involves calmness and serenity. Absence of fear brings calmness of spirit; indeed faith and fear are contraries one of the other. Faith in God removes fear of heart."

[E.J.Young, *Commentary on Isaiah, Vol 1, p272*]

## ICRC Regional Missions Conference, Kuala Lumpur, January 21-24, 2008 - Dennis Muldoon

I was privileged to be able to attend this regional gathering of reformed mission leaders and missionaries in Malaysia last January. It was exciting to meet with old friends from India and the Netherlands, and also to meet and share with brothers and sisters from the Asian region or working in the Asian region. Delegates from ten countries attended (Netherlands-4, Korea- 4, Burma -1, Indonesia-4, PNG- 1, New Zealand – 3, India- 4, Malaysia-1, Australia -1, and USA-1). I was the only one from Australia.

We were hosted in a Reformed Baptist Church in a suburb of the bustling city of Kuala Lumpur. This church met in a house. I did not see any traditional style church buildings except in the old colonial city of Melaka. Dr Poh was the pastor of this church. He had returned from the UK some years ago to work in the University in KL. When he resigned to start full time ministry he was imprisoned for a year. This church has a field on a remote island in Indonesia.



*Delegates at the ICRC conference in KL*

Each day of the conference a paper was given. These were interesting and generated a lot of discussion. The papers given are listed below.

- “Equipping for ministry in Asia: ministers of the grace of God in the Asian context” presented by Dr Mohan Chacko

- “Engaging in ministry in Asia: Appropriate Creative Access to ‘Closed’ Places” presented by a Tentmaker Missionary in China.
- “The Nevius Plan” Rev Paul Goeng Ho Bae “Extending our Ministry in Asia: Extending Further into Asia” Dr Poh Boon Sing.

In addition to the papers all delegates shared about their particular ministry. I was aware of the work of reformed churches in India but it was good to hear the brothers share in this forum, including Rev David John from the Presbyterian Free Church. I learnt of Reformed churches in Port Moresby and a small Bible college there. Rev Steve ‘t Hart was serving there, sent by the Canadian RC and originally from the Free Reformed church of WA.

I shared with folk from the Reformed Church of New Zealand about the PCEA work in Fiji. Two men from Indonesia shared about their work in two different localities- Timor and another island near Bali. The work in Indonesia is geographically close to Australia but is still under the oversight of the Dutch Reformed Church. Rev Moses shared about the work in Burma where there are a number of Reformed Presbyterian churches and small colleges often based on tribal backgrounds.

The conference was encouraging and I pray will lead to further prayerful and practical cooperation in the task we have been given by the Lord Jesus Christ to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.



*Entrance to the Damansara church in Kuala Lumpur*

**“In spite of the many consolations known by the believer which enable him or her to endure earthly suffering, it remains the final verdict of God's Word that “if in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied”( 1 Cor. 15: 19 ). This is why the inspired biblical writers, in motivating us to persevere, would have us fix our eyes on the glories of eternity - the “age to come”. This, far from being the nebulous, disembodied existence of much modern religious thought, is substantial, solid, and all-encompassing. The gospel has at its heart (and not at its circumference!) the doctrine of the resurrection of Christ and his people, and, in a sense, “all things”. Because this is not a “throw away universe” (Philip Eveson), the entire created order will participate in the restoration that will commence with the glorification of God's people at the return of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The Scriptures see this new phase of Christian existence as dwarfing both the blessings and the woes of our life on earth, in terms of both quality and quantity.”**

- David Leyshon, *Sickness, Suffering, and Scripture* [Banner of Truth, 2008, p 72. [Review forthcoming]

# Run For Glory

## THE TEN VIRGINS - 2

**“Five of them were foolish, and five were wise.”**

**Matthew 25:1-13**

*[This is an unusual and imaginative approach to the parable of the five wise and the five foolish Virgins by James Stalker, a Scottish writer who lived in the nineteenth century. In the last issue, we were introduced to the five wise virgins. Now we meet the five foolish ones.]*

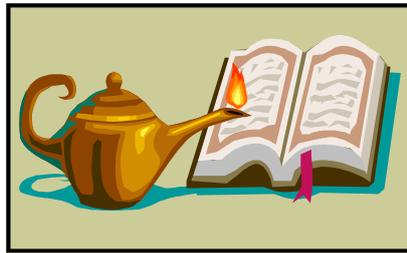
The other five bridesmaids lived in the other village. Two of them were sisters. One of the two was a pretty girl, with pink cheeks and blue eyes; but she knew it too well, and liked nothing better than to look at herself in the glass, turning herself round, and moving her head about to get different views. Her mother was sorry for this, and would not allow her to have a looking-glass in the closet where she slept. But she had an old broken one hidden there in her drawer, along with cheap ribbons and ornaments, which she used to stick all over herself in secret, and look at herself for an hour at a time. She was not a good scholar, never having patience to learn anything thoroughly. Her spelling and handwriting and arithmetic were wretched; but she could sing and play two or three pretty things, and was a good dancer, and she liked very much to show off these accomplishments. When she got the invitation to the marriage she was delighted, not because the bride and bridegroom were to be made happy she never thought of that but because she should have a new dress, and appear in so large a company, where she had no doubt she would be the admired of all admirers. And when she put on her new dress, she was so proud and pleased with herself that she actually went up to the glass, and, putting her lips to it, kissed her own reflection ! Her name was Vanity.

Her sister was not a good-looking girl. Her face was thin and sallow, and her shoulders were high. She half suspected this herself, but strove hard not to believe it, and was very angry when she thought about it. She was always criticising other girls, and speaking about their faults, and would never allow that any companion was good or beautiful. She was not glad when she saw others happy. She liked very much to hear stories about her companions, which she circulated industriously, always adding a little to them. When she heard of the marriage, she was angry with the bride for being married before her and when pretending to praise her, secretly dropped suggestions which reminded everybody of her faults. Hearing who the other bridesmaids were, she thought with anger of their beauty, and hoped they would not look well. Her name was Envy.

When starting for the place of meeting on the marriage

day, Vanity was so engrossed with the thought of her own beauty, and Envy so annoyed with her own plainness for her dress would not go on right, do what she would that they snatched up their lamps hastily, with never a thought of whether they were well supplied with oil or not.

Next door to these two lived another of the bridesmaids. She was a pretty girl, with black eyes, a dark complexion, and crisp, curly hair. But there was something unpleasant about her mouth, and a sort of threatening look on her brow, as if a cloud were resting on it. She had a bad temper, and used on the slightest provocation to burst out crying and stamping, till her little body was convulsed with rage and her face made hideous with tears and passion. Sometimes she would sulk and refuse to speak for half a day, for no apparent reason whatever. People were afraid of her, and she often made those who loved her unhappy. On the very marriage morning she burst out into a rage because something went wrong when she was putting on her dress, and cried till her face was all swollen and stained with tears. She had to begin her dressing over again, and, after all, a big tear-drop fell on her pretty white dress. All this made her too late; and, in the hurry to get off, she quite forgot to put the oil in the vessel with her lamp. Her name was Anger.



The same mischance happened to the fourth bridesmaid, though her hurry was not due to the same cause. She was a tall, soft, sprawling girl. She was always too late. She was too late in getting up in the morning, too late in arriving at school, she never had her lessons ready in time. She had no order or neatness, her hair was always wrong, and her dress untidy. She used to go to sleep on Sabbath during service, and forget messages, and loiter everywhere. She was continually being scolded, but it did her no good. And on the marriage day she was true to her character; for her companions were all at the door waiting for her long before she was ready. Her name was Indolence.

One who came in to hurry her on I have not described yet. She was a strange looking girl. When you looked at her, you saw that there was something wrong, but could not tell what it was. She had a stealthy step like a cat's, and an uneasy eye. Her lips were thin, and her brow low and narrow. She had two big jewels hanging in her ear, but if you had looked closely, you would have detected that they were sham ones, and the patch of red on her cheek was painted on. She delighted in inventing lies, and pretended to be what she was not. It was with thinking of a made up story about her father's wealth, which she intended to tell to those she met at **[Continued, page 9]**

the wedding, that she forgot the oil for her lamp. Her name was Falsehood.

These five all set out together. Their lamps were burning; they laughed and talked, but their words were full of selfishness, spite, and lies. They met the other five at a cross-road, and all went on together; but the two companies could not amalgamate, for the second five were jealous of the others, and whispered among themselves.

When they came to the waiting-place, the parties separated a little from each other, and sat down each under a tree. It was late, and they began to get sleepy, but were resolved to stay awake. The first five, remembering that it was their usual time for evening prayer, knelt down together on the grass, and, with their arms round each other, committed themselves to God. But the others, seeing it, laughed at them. It grew very late, and they looked along the road, but still the procession did not come, and at last, after many efforts to keep awake, they all slumbered and slept.

At midnight their sleep was disturbed with the cry, 'Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him'. They started to their feet, the *flam-beaux* were flaring in the distance, the music playing, and the tramp of feet coming rapidly along. They seized their lamps, and, taking out the needle attached to them for the purpose, trimmed the wick. They found that they needed oil. Those that had brought it poured it out of the vessels into their lamps, so that they burned more brightly than ever. But whenever those that had none began to stir the wicks, the lights went out. They came running in consternation to the other five, crying, 'Give us of your oil, for our lamps are going out'. With pitying looks these gazed for a moment in the terrified faces, but they could not help them, they had no more than enough for themselves. They could only tell them to hurry and buy some. The procession was upon them, those whose lamps were burning joined it, the others shrank back, terrified and ashamed, out of sight. The light, the joy, and the music passed on, and they were left in the darkness.

What was to be done? They ran for a little in the direction of the nearest town. But soon their courage failed, they saw they would not be in time to make up with the procession. Anger burst into a fit of tears and rage, Indolence flung herself on the ground and wept, Envy gnashed her teeth at the joy which had passed her by. But Vanity cried, "I am sure they must let me in", and Falsehood cried, "I will tell a story which will induce them to let me in".

So up they all started and ran after the procession. But it was very dark, and they stumbled and hurt themselves. Still they ran on,

April, 2008

## SEARCH WORK - MARCH

SENIOR 12+ yrs; INTERMEDIATE 10-11 yrs; JUNIOR 9 and under.

APRIL 2008

### SENIOR and INTERMEDIATE

Intermediate omit questions 2 and 8

#### 2 SAMUEL Chapter 9

1. Why did David tell Mephibosheth not to be afraid?

#### Chapter 10

2. (x) In the battle with the Syrians and Ammonites, what plan did Joab make with his brother Abashai? (2 verses)

#### Chapter 11:14—27

3. What did David write in the letter to Joab that he sent by the hand of Uriah?

4. When the mourning for Uriah was past, what did David do? Had David's actions pleased the Lord?

#### Chapter 12

5. What was David's reaction as soon as Nathan had finished his parable of the little ewe lamb? (2 verses)

6. What was Nathan's answer when David said, "I have sinned against the Lord"? (2 verses)

7. What reason did David give his servants for his behaviour after his child was dead? (2 verses)

8. (x) What are the meanings of the two names, Solomon and Jedidiah, which David gave his son?

### JUNIOR

#### GENESIS Chapter 29

1. What did Jacob do when he saw Rachel? (2 verses)

2. How many years did Jacob serve for Rachel?

3. What were the names of Leah's first four sons, and what do the names mean?

#### Chapter 30:25—36

4. What did Laban say he had learnt by experience the Lord had done for Jacob's sake?

SEARCH WORK TO: MRS I. STEEL, PO Box 942, EPPING 1710.

E-mail: iesteel@gmail.com

sad and weeping. At last they came in sight of the procession again. They saw the banqueting house shining afar off, they could hear the music and the din of happy voices. They saw the door thrown wide, and there came rushing out a burst of welcome and song. The procession passed in. They cried, and shouted, and ran, but the hinges turned heavily, and with a crash the door was shut.

You know the meaning of this story. That banquet is in heaven. We are invited to it, every one of us. We should all like to sit down at that eternal marriage feast. But the vain and arrogant, the selfish and envious, the false and the bad tempered, cannot enter there. It is only for those possessed of faith, and love, and hope, and for the humble and pure. Are you not ready yet? Can you recognise your own portrait among those of the "foolish" virgins? Do you feel that faith, love, and hope, humility and purity, are not in your soul yet? Then call on God to make you ready.

## GOOD WORK! GOOD WORK! GOOD WORK!

The following children completed the search work questions for 2007.

Junior Section: Jessie Carswell, Hannah Southwell.

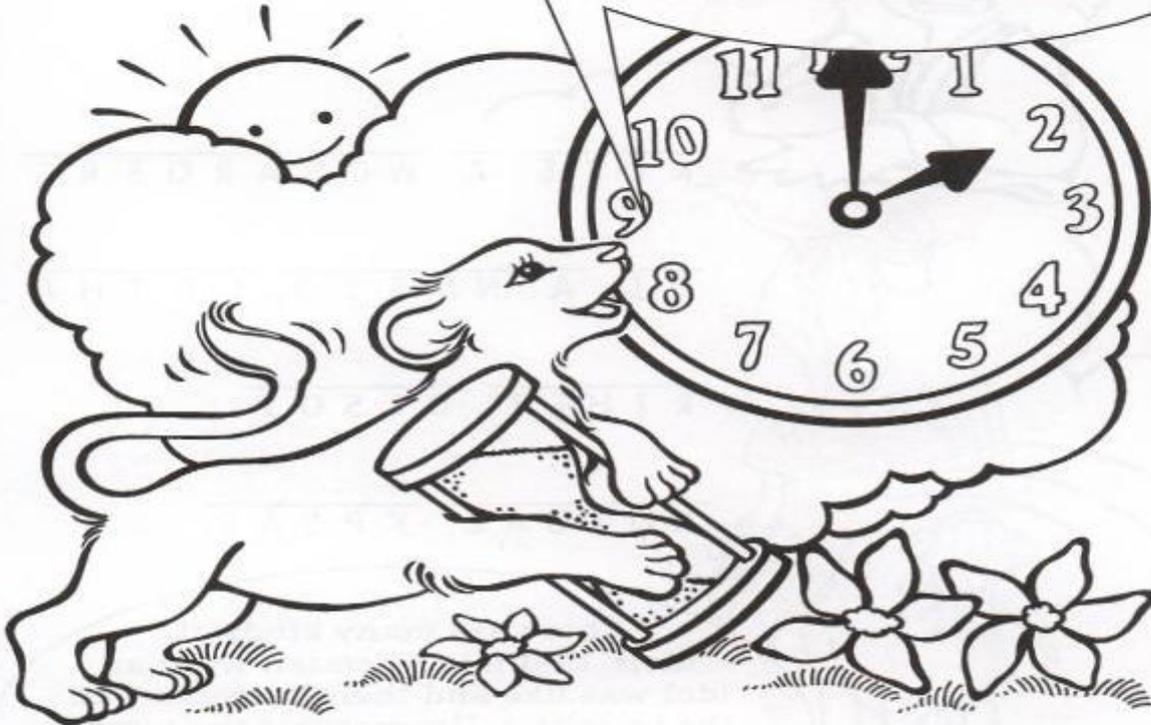
Intermediate Section: Andrew Hamilton, Alexander King

Senior Section: Cameron Hamilton, Chris Hamilton, Esther Hamilton, Mark Hamilton, Adelaide King, Amelia King, Sarah King.

# ACTIVITY PAGE.....

## 21. Matching Time

Ecclesiastes 3 says there is a time for everything. Match the event or action in the first column with the correct event or action from the second column. The answers are found in Ecclesiastes 3:2-8.



- | A time to             | and | a time to        |
|-----------------------|-----|------------------|
| ___ 1. be born        |     | a. speak         |
| ___ 2. plant          |     | b. throw away    |
| ___ 3. kill           |     | c. gather stones |
| ___ 4. tear down      |     | d. laugh         |
| ___ 5. weep           |     | e. heal          |
| ___ 6. mourn          |     | f. die           |
| ___ 7. scatter stones |     | g. make peace    |
| ___ 8. search         |     | h. uproot        |
| ___ 9. keep           |     | i. hate          |
| ___ 10. tear          |     | j. build         |
| ___ 11. be silent     |     | k. mend          |
| ___ 12. love          |     | l. dance         |
| ___ 13. make war      |     | m. give up       |

*From: Search and Solve: Bible Activity Sheets by Betty De Vries [Illustrated by Donna Greenlee] Baker Books, 1998.*



## PEGGING AWAY DOES IT!

"A little Spanish boy who found it very hard work at school, ran away. He sat down by a well, and there he saw on the stone side of that well a furrow [groove] a long mark worn in the stone, it had been worn there by the slipping of the rope. That was all. And this boy said to himself, 'What! can that soft rope wear away that hard stone? And I thought that I could not do my work because it was hard. If I try I can learn anything.' And that boy went straight back and he became a great and famous Spaniard named San Isidore. Pegging away does it." - Bernard J. Snell [San Isidore of Seville lived about 560 - 636 A.D. From his early years he showed great interest in learning, and later, through his books he became "the schoolmaster of the Middle Ages."]

## Bible Timelines

While reading the article on Amaziah in last month's Banner, I wanted to have a look at a timeline for where Amaziah fitted into the various kings of Israel. So jumping onto Google a search for 'old testament timeline' returned a number of sites. The ones which stood out as particularly informative were:

[www.biblestudy.org/beginner/timelineot.html](http://www.biblestudy.org/beginner/timelineot.html)

With links to a variety of material (from models of Noah's Ark, Maps of the Division of the Promised Land, Models of the Second Temple, Detailed listing of the minor prophets and the prophecies God gave to them and much more) this site (or rather subsection of the main [www.biblestudy.org](http://www.biblestudy.org)) was a great find. However, some caution must be taken with the "parent" site. Denial of a literal hell but rather the annihilation of the soul, being one that I found quite quickly, there might be more. So, as with any site, care must be taken. I could not find any statement of beliefs.

<http://www.bible-history.com/>

The second site covers a huge amount of information. There are a few ways to find information on the site. On the homepage this is a circular set of menus while on the left is a more "table of contents" type of layout. Across the top are some more links with two useful ones being Home and Site Map as well as a search feature. Some of the information is on the site while others is linked to from other sites. As the author states, it is not always possible to control the information to the resources on other sites, so care should be taken. I didn't find it always user-friendly navigating my way around, nor did the yellow text on a black background help but the information contained and linked was really great at least those pages I have so far read. The timeline is available at [www.bible-history.com/rome/RomeTimeline Biblical History.htm](http://www.bible-history.com/rome/RomeTimeline%20Biblical%20History.htm) which I liked as it included events in secular history.

[www.sundayschoolresources.com/timeline.htm](http://www.sundayschoolresources.com/timeline.htm)

And finally I was able to find a visual timeline from Creation to the New Testament, with a Google search of 'kings of Israel timeline' which was what I was really looking for or even better than I had hoped to find. I have only one complaint anything prior to 1000BS is labelled as "Early Ages Dates Uncertain". However by combining the dates found in other sites, such as [www.matthewmcgee.org/ottimlin.html](http://www.matthewmcgee.org/ottimlin.html) then it is possible to construct a "better" timeline.

## Two Foundational Truths.....

[1] There is a God [the true God];

[2] And you are not Him.

[*Sherwood Cliffs - Newsletter, March,2001*]

## LOVE RULES: The Ten Commandments for the Twenty – First Century [Banner of Truth, 2007]

This excellent little paper-back of only fifteen chapters and 118 pages belies the weightiness, timeliness and necessity of its message. It was published by The Banner of Truth trust in 2007. However it was first published by The Church and Nation Committee of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria in 2004. It was in response to the relativism of the times and 'widespread ignorance of the ten commandments'. It is maintained that less than 1% of Church members can list the ten commandments. The intention of the exercise was to help Christians and non Christians alike see the importance of The Law of God for all of Life and the mutual dependence between The Law and The Gospel. It is the responsibility of the Church to proclaim both and it is rightly and strongly maintained that "it is impossible to preach the genuine Gospel without the Law".

Eleven ministers and lecturers from The Presbyterian Church of Victorian and NSW collaborated in its production and they have done so competently, succinctly, with great clarity and from a thoroughly Reformed position. From the Introduction and throughout the neglect of preaching and teaching the ten commandments in the evangelical Church is lamented. The ten commandments are seen as 'the schoolmaster' to lead us to Christ, which they are, for without the Law there is no knowledge of sin and without the knowledge of sin mankind will have no need of Jesus Christ as Saviour. The Church and the World need to rediscover the necessity of the Moral Law and to understand that the Law and the Gospel have as their Source the Love of God, and therefore there can be no conflict between them as there is no conflict between The NT and the OT. This Love was consummated in Jesus Christ fulfilling the Law in His active and Passive obedience as our representative and substitute.

Each of the ten commandments is dealt with separately, though not exhaustively, yet so thoroughly and with such lucidity "that he who runs may read" and be profitably instructed. Each chapter concludes with a very useful summary of the teaching of each commandment under the caption "The Bottom Line". The final Chapter is devoted to "The Moral Law and the Teaching of Jesus" which is followed by a list of OT and NT references. The book is completed with an excellent Study guide on all ten commandments which is eminently suitable for individuals or group bible studies.

The Presbyterian Church of Victoria has done the Church in Australia a valuable service In producing this treatise as has The Banner of Truth in publishing it in Its present attractive format. If the whole of the Church In Australia spoke with this one Voice, with the blessing and by the grace of God we could expect changes for the better in the Church and Society.  
- KM.

## A PLACE FOR THE AGED IN THE PLAN OF GOD - 2

When the Saviour was born, God had a place for the aged in the revelation of his Son. Simeon and Anna were waiting, watching and working for the Kingdom of God. And being the sort of people they were [See our previous article] we're not surprised to see that their lives revolved around the Temple, and that both should be there that day when Mary and Joseph brought their baby in to present him to the Lord to redeem the redeemer.

### They were There

And the first thing we ought to notice is that they were there! And that, in itself, reminds us of danger of not being devout and keen about the worship and service of God. What if Anna had said, I won't bother going to the Temple today! And what if Jesus turned up at one of our services and asked for us by name? Simeon and Anna weren't like that. They didn't miss out when baby Jesus was brought in. And if you say, "But Simeon was 'moved by the Spirit'," I would simply ask: What spirit is it moves a person to stay away from the worship of God, when the Holy Spirit obviously moves others to be here? Let's be like these two old people! Make every effort to be where you might see and meet God.

### They Saw a Baby

What did they both see that day in the temple? They saw a Baby! A real live baby! They didn't see an angel; they didn't see something that looked like a baby; they saw a baby. In fact Simeon took him up in his arms. What a surprise Mary and Joseph must have got when this old man came in and took the baby up in his arms! And we should reflect on that. Jesus has come, and still is, "in the flesh". In the Incarnation he took our nature into permanent union with himself. And if we deny that we deny the faith. John says, anyone who denies that the Christ has come in the flesh, denies him! Let us not retreat from that one iota. He was, and is, as real as anyone of us and that day Simeon proved it! He took him up in his arms.

### They Saw Salvation

But they also saw the significance of the baby! They realised that Salvation redemption was bound up in him. Salvation is not a matter of believing a system of ideas or following a moral code. It's a matter of personal trust in a real living Person who came into the world as a little baby, lived among us, died on the Cross for our sin, and rose triumphant from the dead. Simeon and Anna may not have known all the "ins and outs" of it. But from their words on this occasion they probably knew far more than we give them credit for! At the very least, they knew this baby was the Child of promise and the King of Israel who would accomplish the salvation of God's People. Simeon tells us as much. He says: "For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." And as far as Anna was concerned, here was the one who would provide that "plenteous redemption" for the people of God spoken about in Psalm 130. In this child, all the hope and expectation of the OT was going to be fulfilled.

### They were taught by the Holy Spirit

How did they "see" all this? It's made very clear in the case of Simeon. It was through the Holy Spirit. The same Spirit who said that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Christ, also revealed to him and to Anna the true significance of Jesus. This is the uniform teaching of Jesus. No one can know who he is apart from the revealing work of the Father through the Holy Spirit. And if we can see Jesus today as the Lord's Christ who has come into the world for our consolation and redemption, then we do so because the Holy Spirit has taught us. And if that's so what privileged people we are. We have seen his Salvation!

### They Believed

And this leads to the final thing, *what they did*. And first and foremost they believed in Jesus. They saw in that baby the fulfilment of all that was promised in the OT. But more than that: They saw he was the Redeemer. Have you and I believed in Jesus? That's the crux of the matter isn't it? It really doesn't matter if we read about him when he's a month, or a year, or thirty three years old. It's what we think about this child that makes all the difference! To be sure, he grew up; he died on the Cross; he rose from the dead. But all this was already bound up in this child as Simeon's prophetic words to Mary demonstrate. We don't separate this child from the man, or the man from what He is today. He was the King of Israel and the Saviour of the world when he was born, when he died, and when he rose and he will always be so! And when we look at this child at the Temple we should see him as our Saviour and believe in him.

### They Praised God

And believing, these two old people praise God. We're not told what Anna said, except that she gave thanks to God, but the case is different with Simeon. What noble words come from Simeon on this occasion! "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." [Luke 2:29-31] [1] He praises God for the public nature of his salvation. His salvation, "which you have prepared in the sight of all people." There's nothing secret about the Salvation God Provides! He'd spoken about it for thousands of years very publicly. Its Publication began at Genesis and continued through in the history of Israel. Israel was living proof of its "preparation in the sight of all nations." And he continues to make it public. And if it's Public Knowledge we have no excuse for not believing in it! [2] And then he praises God for the far reaching significance of the birth of Jesus "a light for revelation to the Gentiles." Gentiles will benefit from this salvation! [3] And he praises God for it's implication for Israel "for glory to your people Israel." If only Israel realised where their true glory lay not in Judaism, not in the power of arms, not in the restoration of their land, but in Christ their King and Saviour.

### They Bore Witness to Jesus

And then they bore witness to Jesus. In a sense Simeon's prayer of thanksgiving is itself a witness. But he and Anna had more to say that day! [1] Simeon spoke about the critical importance of Christ in the destiny of men; he spoke about opposition to Jesus [Continued on page 13]

# THE CHURCH ...

## Manning River News

Despite not having a settled minister the Manning congregation continues to function normally with the assistance of Rev. Jim Cromarty (our Interim moderator) Rev. John Cromarty and Mr. Neil Robinson who leads five regular Bible studies each week. There have been visitors conducting some services including Rev. Trevor Leggott on 2/3/08. This service was followed by a fellowship luncheon after which Trevor gave an update of the work of A.I.M.

Central Presbytery met recently and the induction of Rev. George Ball to the congregation has been set for Friday 9th May (D.V) We look forward to having George and Rhoda with us.

The "Friendship Group" (Mrs. Paul Dyson's idea) is proving very popular. In February approximately thirty people from the Manning district visited "Timbertown" Wauchope. What a joy it was to be joined by a smaller group of members from the Hastings and two from Armidale. Neil Robinson capably led the devotions. The next outing is to Manning Point on 20/3/08 and future events have been planned for the third Thursday of each month. .

The Taree Kids' Club and Tinnonee Lighthouse Club combined for a social evening on Friday 29th February at Mondrook hall when over forty chil-

dren were present. The meetings are held regularly on Friday afternoons after school hours.

The congregation has been saddened by the passing of Fay Barlin (wife of Keith - a deacon ). The funeral service at Taree church was conducted by Jim Cromarty with John Cromarty leading the singing. The church and hall were packed to capacity for the funeral service and Jim's message on "Paradise" was greatly appreciated. Fay had been in poor health for some time and the cancer finally got the better of her. However, we believe she is now with the Lord she loved.

The Ladies' Missionary Society are to hold their 4th garage sale on 19/4/08. This time the proceeds are to go to "Street Reach" which is organised by a Christian couple from Wingham who pick up young people off the streets on Friday and Saturday nights. Any saleable items may be left with Mrs Betty Stewart (ph. 65521873) at whose home the goods are sold.



[a sign to be spoken against]; and he spoke about the sufferings of Mary. Having paid the redemption money for her little boy, perhaps Joseph and Mary thought they could now enjoy their firstborn son and perhaps possess him for many years to come. But it would not be. "A sword will pierce your own soul too," Simeon tells Mary. [2] And though Anna's testimony is shorter, it is equally profound, summed up in one glorious word: Redemption.

### Our Witness

What an important witness they had to bear. And Isn't it wonderful that God chose these two elderly and godly people to bring out the significance of his own Son. And if we've been taught by the Holy Spirit about the true significance of Jesus, we ought to be able to bear the same testimony. What a blessing it is for children to hear from parents and grandparents even great grandparents what the Lord Jesus means to them, and encouraging their children and grandchildren to thank him today and every day for coming into the world to save us and bring us so much joy and blessing to it.

### They Anticipated Death

But they could add something else to their testimony if

they wanted to. They could say, with aged Simeon: "You know, I'm not afraid to die, because I have seen and come to know Jesus as my Saviour. And I want you to trust in him too. And if you trust in him, then when he returns we'll have new bodies, and we'll all be reunited again in a fresh new world with God and Jesus." But even if they didn't want to say that, they can at least say with Simeon, "Sovereign Lord, now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people." [Luke 2:29-30] My watch is over! The future and their future can be safely left in the hands to whom it belongs this child of promise this baby that was cradled in Mary's arms! And if our eyes have seen the salvation of God, we're ready to depart in peace too. We know that death will not have the victory that our redemption is sure and certain.

What a memorable day that was at the Temple for Simeon and Anna! They saw the salvation of God. And if we do, it will be memorable for us and we can depart this world "in peace." We'll know that the sting has been taken out of death, and we're more that conquerors through him who loved us.

## The Third Commandment

Dr. W.J.W. Hanna, Brisbane, continues a study on the Ten Commandments. He deals now with the second Commandment: Exodus 20: 7 “*You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.*”

### Introduction

As we have studied the Commandments so far we have seen that the first commandment tells us *Whom* we should worship and that the second commandment tells us *how* we should worship Him. The third commandment tells us about the *attitude* required in true worship. Indeed, it tells us about the attitude required in *all* true service of God. Just as it is wrong to worship any other God than the true God, or to worship the true God in the wrong manner, so it is also wrong to worship the true God even if we do it in the right way if we do not do it sincerely. This is what the third commandment teaches us.

### God's Name

As we commence to study this in detail, it would perhaps be best to spend a little time on what is meant by “the name of the LORD your God.” Basically, we must understand that the “name” of God is not an empty title or label without meaning. In fact, it may not even *be* a title or label at all! We think of names as simply labels to distinguish one object or person from another. The word itself does not even have to have any significance. We all have come across parents who invent names for their children, apparently simply choosing a word which, they think, sounds nice.



But it was not always like that. There was a time when names were expected to furnish some sort of description of the owner of the name and this is the situation in the Bible, particularly in the earlier sections. So when the Bible speaks of the “name” of God, it is referring to the *character* or the *reputation* of God. When the Psalmist, in Psalm 8: 1, says, “O LORD, our Lord, how excellent *is* Your name in all the earth, who have set Your glory above the heavens!”, he is saying that God has revealed the excellency of His character in the earth and the heavens that He has made. All the universe is a revelation of the character of God! Just as we can see something of the character of a great painter by looking at the works that he or she has produced, so we can see something of the character of God in “all the earth.”

Now, it must also be clear to us that we cannot know anything about the character of God except in so far as He has chosen to reveal it to us. Clearly, He has revealed something of His character in His creation, but He has also revealed Himself in other ways. He has revealed Himself in the Scriptures, and in His relationships with men and women down through the ages, especially as we find these recorded for us in the Scriptures which He has given us. But He has revealed Himself most clearly of all

in the person of His Son Jesus Christ. This is what Jesus meant when He said, “I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world.” We can see, then, that “the name” of God does not mean simply titles like Lord, Jehovah, or even descriptive words or phrases like Almighty, God Most High and so on. It means the entire character of God, especially those aspects of that character which God has chosen to reveal to us. In other words the words of the Shorter Catechism, to be exact the “name” of God consists of “anything whereby God makes Himself known.”

### Taking God's Name in Vain

Now all this is of considerable help to us as we come to consider what is meant by taking God's name in vain. Many people think that “to take God's name in vain” means to use it as a swear or curse word as a profanity. Now, certainly, this *is* a way of breaking this commandment but not the only way. When people do this, they often will excuse themselves by saying that they did not mean anything by using God's name in that manner. They will even say that they do it without thinking. But this is precisely one of the things that the third commandment forbids! The words “in vain” mean “in emptiness” or “meaninglessly” that is, without really meaning it! All the names of God are far too important words and of too great significance to be used in a loose and flippant manner!

Now, while this is an important teaching and one which applies to all people, it has an even greater significance for those who claim to be Christians. They, above all, should not use the name of the One who has done so much for them in a light or thoughtless way. And this brings us to examine further what is meant by the expression “to take” as applied to the name of God. Scripture could have said “You shall not *use* the name of the LORD your God in vain,” but it did not. So why have we got the word “take?”

The actual Hebrew word used here means “to lift up” or “to bear.” The Commandment is referring to “lifting up” or “bearing” the name of the LORD. It is a clear reference to claiming to have a special relationship with Him. We can think of this in terms of a very simple example the example of human marriage. It is an appropriate example because Scripture itself often uses human marriage as a picture of the relationship between God and the individual Christian, or between God and His church. Now, certainly in our society, when a woman marries she usually “takes” the name of her husband and we can note that we use exactly the same expression as the commandment does to “take the name of”. The fact that she has taken his name is a claim before all the world that they now enjoy this special close relationship. What would anyone think if she now, having done this, went on living her life as if this bond did not exist if we found that she had taken this name “in vain” without really meaning it? We would think that she had done the one unforgivable thing in a marriage she had clearly broken her marriage vows! We can

then take this one step further to the situation in which these commandments were given in Exodus. The Israelites had been saved from slavery in Egypt, they had been brought out from that land and a special covenant relationship had been re-established with them the same covenant relationship which God had already established with their ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Individually and collectively they had claimed to accept that relationship – they had certainly accepted its benefits. What now was the situation if they did not do so sincerely? What was the situation if they bore the name of the LORD, but did so without meaning it? They would be covenant-breakers and would be punished accordingly! There *were* undoubtedly such people among those who left Egypt! It would be unlikely that, having seen the great things that the Lord did for the Israelites in Egypt, there would not be those who would attach themselves to them for what they could get out of it. We do not have to guess about this; Exodus 12:38 tells us clearly that “A mixed multitude went up with them also.” We can also see from Numbers 11: 4 that these same people who had “taken the name of the LORD in vain” were at least partly responsible for some of the problems in the camp of Israel as they travelled.

However, we need to take this commandment with reference to *our* situation as a Christian Church, as a group of people who have taken the name of the Lord Jesus Christ upon them. By doing so we have made public profession that we belong to *Him* and we must not do this if we do not really mean it! We must not do it “in vain”! It is easy to attach oneself to a Church for one reason or another and yet not to have any real commitment to the relationship claimed. We should be very careful, before we claim the name of Christ, that we really have come to have that living faith in Him which is the only way in which the true relationship can be established. We must be trusting that He has saved us from slavery to sin, and that He has taken us into union with Himself a union much closer than the marriage bond.

Now, I am conscious that I might put some people off, who might be contemplating making confession of their faith and this is something that I would not wish to do unnecessarily. Therefore, let me say immediately that there is no one who is completely *free* of the sin of taking the name of the LORD in vain, just as there is no one who keeps the first or the second commandments perfectly. If we who claim to be Christians were keep this commandment perfectly it would mean that we would never say or even hear the name of any of the Persons of the Trinity without a sense of deep awe and reverence. We would never think of any of the attributes of God which go to make up His character without a sense of awe and reverence which would be beyond our human capabilities. It would mean that our attitude during worship would always be equally perfect our minds would *never* wander as we pray and we would *never* think of anything else during the reading or the preaching of the Word and, believe me, not

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even the minister manages to do that! So please do not be put off making a public profession of faith by joining the membership of the Church because you feel that you cannot keep this commandment perfectly. No one can! No one can keep *any* of the commandments perfectly. If they could, there would *be* no “Christian” Church to join, for there would be no need that Christ should die for sins. We do not need to be perfect but we should be aware of our imperfections, and we should be trying to do something about them!

### The Unseen Sin

I want to move on to some other aspects of the third commandment. And here I would like, firstly, to note that the breaking of this commandment is, by and large, an unseen sin unseen, that is, by other human beings, for nothing is unseen by God. We *may* be able to tell if someone is not worshipping the true God (though not always), and we *should* be able to tell if people are not worshipping Him as He has commanded but we cannot tell if the person who claims to be worshipping the true God and who is doing so in a reasonably correct way, is really doing it *sincerely*. This is something that only the person himself or herself can know apart from God, that is. This is why those Christians who wrote the Catechism warn us that “however the breakers of this commandment may escape punishment from men, yet the Lord our God will not suffer them to escape His righteous judgement.” It is why, more importantly, God Himself warns us that “the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.”

### Held Guiltless

And this brings me to the last aspect of the commandment which I wish to discuss in this article. Let us think about what it means to be “held guiltless.” God’s word tells us that not one of us starts *off* that way; it tells us that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God ...” (Romans 3: 23) It is therefore of vital importance to each one of us that we learn how we may be “held” guiltless. I do not mean to say that we may actually *be* guiltless, but that we may be “held” guiltless *considered* guiltless, even though we are not. This is, as I have said, of vital importance for, when the final judgement comes, there will be two classes of people those who *are* guilty and are counted so and those who are “held guiltless.” It is essential, therefore, that we should know to which of these two classes we belong and that we should know that God has provided a way for men and women to be brought into the group which will be “held guiltless.”

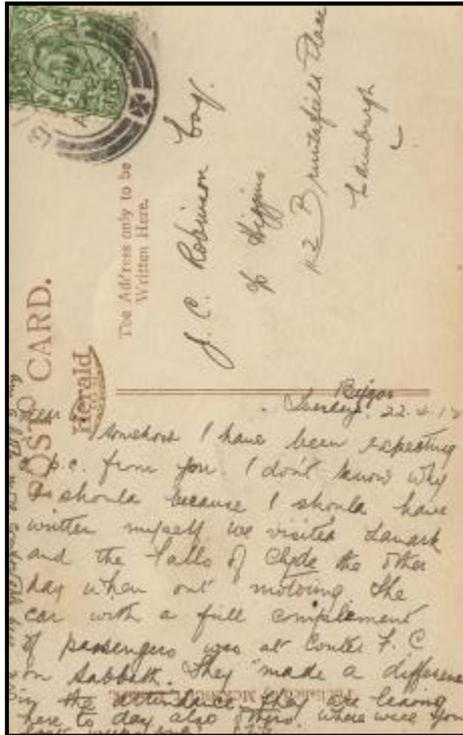
That Way is Jesus Christ! The Bible tells us that, “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them ...” (2 Corinthians 5: 19) A few verses later the same reference also tells us how this was brought about – “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” (2 Corinthians 5: 21) Jesus Christ is the God appointed Sin-Bearer; He is **[Continued page 16]**

# BETWEEN YOU AND ME .....

I'm a hoarder! I act on the principle that if you throw something out today, you'll need it tomorrow. When we were having some renovations done on the manse, the builder used to call me a "scavenger" and other uncomplimentary titles. However, the tables were turned when he came back a few months later to do some more work. On a number of occasions I saw him making his way across to my "pile" of off cuts to get a piece of wood that suited him.

If you're a hoarder, you never know what you'll find! The other day, I opened a Commentary on Isaiah - and what should fall out but the record of the first Session Meeting I had to conduct many years ago. It must have been a short meeting. There wasn't much information on it!

Others are hoarders too - perhaps unknowingly - and it's to our benefit! Not long ago a lady in our Congregation passed on to me some books she had no further use of. As I looked through them, what should fall out of one of them but a Postcard written by the Rev. I.L.Graham

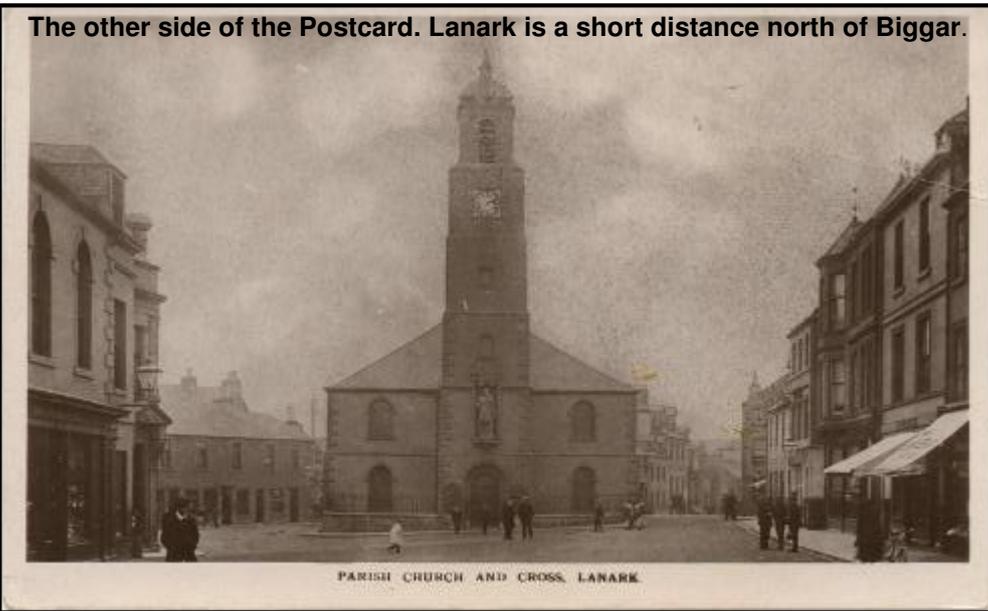


[featured last month in a sermon from the Archives] to the Rev. J.Campbell Robinson, our minister in Melbourne for many years, and the writer of our first history book. The Postcard bears the address, Biggar, and is dated 22nd April, 1912.

It reads: "Dear C, Somehow I have been expecting a p.c. from you. I don't know why I should because I should have written myself. We visited Lanark and the Falls of Clyde the other day when out motoring. The car with a full complement of passengers was at Coulter F.C on Sabbath. They made a difference in the attendance. They are leaving here today also others. Where were you last week-end? Am a little more comfortable here. Have a room and fire to myself. ILG."

I.L. Graham, and J.C. Robinson were both students for the ministry studying in Edinburgh. The question, "Where were you last week-end" was a common one among students at the College! Each week most went out to vacant Congregations to supply, and each was interested where the others had been.

The other side of the Postcard. Lanark is a short distance north of Biggar.



the only Way to be "held guiltless" before God! It is His name that we must take upon us if we are to stand in the Judgement but we must take it sincerely. That Name is no protection for hypocrites! Those who refuse to take the Name of Christ upon them will be guilty but those who claim that Name without any sincerity will also perish "the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain."

Let me close by pleading with each one who reads this, if you have not taken the name of Jesus Christ, and taken it sincerely and without hypocrisy, take it now. It is the only Way to be held guiltless in the Day of Judgement! Amen.

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**Editor:**

Rev. Ray Murray,  
33 Tallowood Street,  
South Grafton,  
NSW, 2460.  
Tel/Fax 02 6643 4272.  
Email: raymurray @ aapt.net.au.

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