

THE PRESBYTERIAN BANNER

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Devotion: "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." Micah 5:2

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Geelong

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**DON'T FORGET
SUBSCRIPTIONS
FOR
2009 ARE NOW
DUE**

THE STATUS OF OLD TESTAMENT BELIEVERS

Dr. Robert Eagleson, Sydney

Dr. Robert Eagleson continues his article on the Status of Old Testament Believers. He concluded his first section with this statement: *"To argue that 'regeneration is a New Testament phenomenon' is to underestimate the absolute spiritual devastation of the fall, to ignore the pellucid teachings of Scripture if anyone is to have faith in God, to attribute to people the capacity to save themselves if they so desire, to dispute the grace of God as the sole source of our salvation, and would seem to effectively shut out any who lived in OT times from salvation – despite Genesis 15:6 – as Christ taught that regeneration was indispensable."* He now develops the argument further.

Related Repercussions

Perturbing repercussions for our understanding of Scripture surface if we deny regeneration in Old Testament times.

[1] Romans 2:28-29 recognises 2 categories of humans spiritually: the inward and the outward. Where are we to place such notable OT saints as Abraham (the friend of God), Moses (with whom God spoke face to face), and David (a man after God's heart)? Presumably Carson and others would not want to classify them as unbelievers, but nor can they include them among the regenerate. In short they fall into a kind of no man's land. Positing 2 ways of salvation to cope - 1 way with regeneration and another without - sets up an irreconcilable conflict with Scripture. Then again, is it even valid to call them "believers" if they have not been transformed by the Holy Spirit?

[2] What about the cloud of witnesses in Hebrews 11? The Epistle treats them as if they were on a par with the Christian readers, and indeed holds them up as models to be imitated. Yet if we follow Carson's position, they were unregenerate.

[3] It seems strange to be urged to 'walk in the steps of Abraham's faith' (Romans 4:12), if his conduct did not include being born again?

[4] How could membership of the commonwealth of Israel be held out to be a great blessing to the new Gentile believers?
remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel and foreigners to the covenants of promise ... but now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near.
(Ephesians 2:12-13)

[5] What would have been the advantage in joining a commonwealth in which most of the members up to that time would have been OT believers, and hence unregenerate? There could be a benefit for the unregenerate to associate with the regenerate, but the reverse process seems dubious. Ephesians 2:12-13 points to a higher status for OT believers.

These are just a small sample of the contradictions that arise with Scripture if OT be-

lievers are placed outside the ambit of regeneration and if we do not adhere rigorously to the principle of Scripture interpreting Scripture.

In what ways was the New better than the Old?

That we hold that the Holy Spirit pursued his regenerative activities in Old Testament times does not detract from the splendour of the blessings that were inaugurated in the New Testament period. Scripture provides guard against this:

These, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they should not be made perfect (Hebrews 11:39-40)

NT believers enjoy the fulfilment and not just the promise. Our Messiah is now elevated in heaven as ruler over all. The covenant is administered in a fresh way (Jeremiah 31:31). The Holy Spirit dwells with us as another advocate in the place of Christ. There was the dramatic and visible outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. And much more.

By the same token, these verses in Hebrews declare only a difference in quality between the New and the Old, not that the Old Testament believers lived in a barren state without blessings. Certainly they do not preclude the Old Testament times from sharing some blessings in common with the New, including regeneration. There may be a far greater measure of the Holy Spirit in New Testament times, but this does not signify complete absence in the Old.

Again, the riches of the New Testament period are an amplification – on the grandest of scales - of the blessings of the earlier times. In a sense the Old was like an overture to an opera: all the main themes are present but only in incomplete form. The New Testament period never countermands its predecessor. There may be replacements and substitutions, but nothing ever has to be unlearned as we move forward. The law engraved on tablets of stone, for example, is no different in character from the law written on our hearts: both express the perfections of our God. Above all the essence of our faith holds fast with God's supernatural act of recreating and renewing us at its core. But only when the Saviour came could we begin to appreciate the magnificence of God's love and wonder of his salvation. It is vital that we recognise how much better our times are so that we are spurred to love and praise our God all the more for the greater privileges he has given us, but it is also critical not to lose sight of the continuum so that we do not underestimate the sublime love and grace that have always characterised our triune God or overlook his deeds of inestimable compassion and activity in the past.

Nor was every person in the Old Testament period ignorant of the glorious days ahead:

Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to

which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow (1 Peter 1:10)

Yet, how could they do this and why would they want to if they had not been born again and their hearts predisposed by the Holy Spirit to love God and find out all they could about him.

When did the Holy Spirit come?

Nor does positing regeneration of the Old Testament believers by the Holy Spirit conflict with:

By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified (John 7:39)

A simplistic literal interpretation of this verse has led some to consider that the Holy Spirit did not begin his work of regeneration and other operations until after Pentecost. But in *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (1882, 1889) George Smeaton presents a more credible interpretation:

The apostle adds that "the Spirit was not yet" [AV] because Christ's glorification had not yet arrived. He does not mean that the Spirit did not yet exist – for all Scripture attests his eternal pre-existence – nor that his regenerating efficacy was still unknown – for countless millions had been regenerated by his power since the first promise in Eden – but that these operations of the Spirit had been but an anticipation of the atoning death of Christ rather than a GIVING. The apostle speaks comparatively, not absolutely, as is always done when the old and new economy are contrasted. (1997 reprint page 49)

"The New Testament period never countermands its predecessor. There may be replacements and substitutions, but nothing ever has to be unlearned as we move forward."

Smeaton provides considerable evidence – both theological and linguistic – from Scripture to validate his interpretation; and more could be assembled.

Silence

That the words *regeneration* and *born again* do not occur in the Old Testament does not signify the absence of the concept represented by these words. It can be expressed in a variety of ways: writers are not restricted to 1 or 2 names for it. For example, what else could these verses point to other than regeneration?

The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts (Genesis 30:6)

I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them (Ezekiel 11:19)

Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground (Psalm 143:10)

The effect or result amounts to the same.

The whole eternal plan of salvation

From Scripture we discover that Christ 'was chosen before the creation of the world' to be our Saviour. His death on Calvary was the outworking of a foreordained decision of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.



BLOGGING ABOUT...

LIGHTS, LIGHT AND LIFE

Many people put up Christmas Lights today—and some go to great lengths to decorate their homes. Some even put a subtle pressure on others to decorate their homes too, so that their streets may become famous. A few years ago, most around us in our street had the urge to decorate their homes, each vying with the other to have the best display. When we didn't put up any Christmas lights, we were made to feel like pagans! No doubt some were wondering what a strange minister of the Gospel they had as their neighbour!

But sometimes I think there's some sort of relationship between ignorance of Jesus and what He means, and the abundance of lights people put up! They light up their homes, and put up the sign for a Merry Christmas but care nothing for God, or His Worship, or his Honour, for the 364 days of the year. Each Lord's Day they go about their business—or pleasure—as usual - without a thought about the Lord Jesus, and the fact that they ought to worship Him.

Bethlehem was a small, insignificant town in Israel and the world. But it has become a household word today—all because of its connection with Jesus. And just as it was Bethlehem's connection with Christ that's made it a town of world significance, so we can say that its only our connection with Christ that will produce light, life and joy for ourselves. Without Christ, Bethlehem would be nothing – but has now become a town known throughout the world. Without Christ we're lost – and in darkness - and no amount of Christmas lights will make it any different. But through faith in him we can become the sons and daughters of God, the light of the world, and inheritors of the earth. We can have Merry Christmas everyday because

we belong to the Saviour of the World. Its the risen and ascended Lord who has made Bethlehem significant in the world today. And it's the risen and reigning Lord alone that will lighten our life and give us peace with God, security for the present, and hope for the future.

CHANGING CHURCHES?

According to a report in the British "**Daily Telegraph**" for November 8, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Nottingham, and a candidate for the position of Cardinal, the Rt Rev Malcolm McMahon, has argued for the marriage of Roman Catholic priests. He said, according to the Report, that there were "no doctrinal reason" preventing them from having wives.

Apparently the influx of married Anglican Clergy, joining the Church because of their opposition to the ordination of women in the Anglican Church, is one reason for the comments. He believed it was unfair that they should be allowed to be married, and Roman Catholic priests themselves still required to take a vow of celibacy.

Another reason to end the tradition was an effort to deal with the shortage of priests. The Report said that around 150,000 men are estimated to have left the priesthood to marry and many want to return to the active Clergy. Changing the Law would not solve the Church's problems in getting more priests, but, he said, "clergy with a family could offer different gifts and it would enable men who did not feel called to celibacy to enter the priesthood." Marriage should not bar them from their vocation.

It's a strange mix! Men leaving a Church over the ordination of women, and joining a church that doesn't hold to evangelical truth, and a church with a long tradition of clerical celibacy accommodating them, and considering changing its position because of them! What next?

We also learn that our salvation was similarly fashioned in eternity by God:

Those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified (Romans 8:29-30)

His plan included predestining, justifying and glorifying us – and, relevantly for this discussion, calling us. But calling in this context implies more than simply issuing the invitation or command to come, and especially more than issuing an invitation to those who were incapable of hearing it because they were spiritually dead, without ears to hear. We blacken the love and sully the glory of the Father if we represent him simply as devising a plan to call but being incapable of ensuring that the plan would come to pass. Instead, the Father's call is a 'call according to his purpose' (Romans 8:28), with the full overtone that he will implement what he has decided. What God plans he accomplishes.

God is not a man, that he should lie; nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfil? (Numbers 23:19)

Equally, we slander the Holy Spirit if we represent him as standing idly by, not taking any action to ensure that those the Father wanted to be called and to be given to the Son are revived so that they could hear and respond. This denies the unity of the Godhead, the absolute congruence and cohesion of the 3 Persons in the Trinity in all that they do, and especially in devising and accomplishing our salvation. If we postulate that the Holy Spirit withheld bringing to life in the Old Testament times those whom the Father had chosen to be his children in those times, then we deny a unity of purpose and action in the Godhead and close our minds to all the teaching of Scripture. The precious reality of the oneness of the 3 Persons is captured in:

... he [the Father] saved us ... because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour (Titus 3:5-6)

Regeneration blossoms as we consider it within the ambit of the 'whole counsel of God' (Acts 20:27).

[We're grateful to Simon Manchester and Robert Eagleson for allowing this material to be published in The Presbyterian Banner.]

REFORMING STILL

Calvin's writing on reforming the Church

Sjirk Bajema

The Rev. Sjirk Bajema from the Reformed Churches of New Zealand has accepted a Call to the Narre warren Congregation, Melbourne, and will take up the work in the New Year. We bid him and his wife and family a warm welcome, and by way of introduction, reproduce an article that appeared in the October issue of Faith in Focus, the magazine of the RCNZ. [Pictured: Sjirk, Eileen, Andrew, and Betty-Ann]



One cannot help but be overwhelmed by the workload of the Reformers. From Martin Luther, Philip Melancthon, Martin Bucer, Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin, and so many others, there is an enormous amount that has been published of what they've written. Even now, over five hundred years later, there are still fresh publications of sermons and other writings which have been unavailable for much of the intervening centuries.

The writings of John Calvin, though, make him stand out even more in this area. Very few others can match the output of what he wrote. And, also, of who he wrote it to. For not only were the invariable dedications in his commentaries and dogmatic works, but he also wrote to many people personally.

The 'Selected Works' of Calvin is a seven-volume set of what you would not usually read of Calvin. These are various tracts and letters that cover the span of his ministry. One in the first volume particularly stands out. In itself it would make a small to medium sized book in our time. And then we note who it was addressed to, because in this case Calvin addressed a no less personage than the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V.

This is representative of all his work. For Calvin had very much the sense of being God's prophet for his age. In the crucial time in which Europe was at a cross-road, this Reformer put the Protestant case to the Emperor and his fellow rulers.

More significant, however, for the writing of this tract is the

occasion to which its subject matter addresses itself. For this was written in connection with the 1543 Diet of Speier and the crucial issues before it. In the insecure climate that was Europe at this time, this Diet was looked to with keen anticipation. It was an opportunity which Calvin grasped, writing a solid defence of Protestant doctrine and practice.

But let's also note the way in which he wrote. Here was preaching by letter. And it's clear already by the way he begins. For he writes: *August Emperor, You have summoned this Diet, that, in concert with the Most Illustrious Princes and other Orders of the Empire, you may at length deliberate and decide upon the means of ameliorating the present conditions of the Church, which we all see to be very miserable, and almost desperate. Now, therefore, while you are seated at this consultation, I humbly beg and implore, first of your Imperial Majesty, and at the same time of you also, Most Illustrious Princes, and distinguished Personages, that you will not decline to read, and diligently ponder, what I have to lay before you. The magnitude and weightiness of the cause may well excite in you an eagerness to hear, and I will set the matter so plainly in your view, that you will have no difficulty in determining what course to adopt."*

The Letter

We turn now to examining the tract itself. In doing that there stand out two central pillars for the foundation and maintenance of the Christian faith. These are, firstly: A knowledge of the mode (way) in which God is properly

worshipped; and, secondly: A knowledge (from Scripture alone) of the source from which salvation is obtained. Calvin regarded these two as so crucial that he says, *When these two are kept out of view, though we may glory in the name of Christian, our profession is empty and vain.*

After these two come the Sacraments and the Government of the Church. As these were instituted for the preservation of the two pillars of the faith, they cannot be used for any other purpose. Indeed, the only way of knowing whether they are administered purely, and in the right way, is to test them against the two pillars. Calvin takes this basis and applies it in three areas: (a) In describing the evils which compelled the Reformers to look for answers; (b) In showing how the solutions of the Reformers were both appropriate and beneficial; and (c) In the necessity of an immediate application of these solutions.

Proper worship

We begin with the first pillar – the proper worship of God. As Calvin says, *Let us see now what is meant by the due worship of God. It's chief foundation is to acknowledge Him to be, as He is, the only source of all virtue, justice, holiness, wisdom, truth, power, goodness, mercy, life, and salvation. In accordance with this, to ascribe and render to Him the glory of all that is good, to seek all things in Him alone, and in every want to go to Him alone. And so prayer rises up, and also praise and thanksgiving – these being evidence to the glory we give Him. This is that genuine sanctification of His name which He requires of us above all things.*

It's for this purpose that Calvin sees all of what is to happen in public worship. And he speaks of how important to this is our humbleness. The believer in meeting with God has to say “no” to himself. We're being trained to obedience and devotedness to His will, so that the deepest respect for Him lies in our hearts. That means we're really asking the constant question: “How is God being glorified in this?”

And He gives us the way to this as well. For what pleases Him is a simple, spiritual worship. There must be that faith which is truly a matter of the heart, through the simple and direct power of the Holy Spirit. Calvin quotes here John 4:23: “Yet a time is coming and now is when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth...”.

That was quite some word to a world where church services had become filled with all kinds of elaborate and extensive ceremonies! And it was all theologically justified! The Roman Catholic Church pointed to how the practice had been in the temple worship of the Old Testament, and how this had been further enhanced by what had happened up to and in the 16th century.

But Jesus, in speaking to the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4, pointed to a time beyond all kinds of ceremonies. All those intricate and involved details were pointing forward. They looked to the substance of which they were only shadows. While they had the Spirit outlined by the many figures in the Old Testament, we have Him now in the fullness of time very simply. Calvin described it vividly: *A new Judaism, as a substitute for that which God had very clearly wiped-out, has again been reared up by means of many puerile extravagancies, collected from*

different quarters; and with these have been mixed up certain impious rites, partly borrowed from the heathen, and more adapted to some theatrical show than to the dignity of our religion.

In our present age of innovative liturgical reform – with so many changes advocated for public worship – we too need to consider if we are beginning to do the same. It might seem and feel the right thing to do. People obviously are warming to them. But how do they help in the spiritual worship of God? We too might be able to bring in relevant quotes from the Old Testament. Yet how is the fulfillment in Christ Jesus clearly shown? John Calvin goes on: *...men pay no regard to what God has commanded, or to what He approves, in order that they may serve Him in a suitable way, but assume to themselves a licence of devising ways of worship, and afterwards showing them on God as a substitute for obedience.*

It's interesting, in this light, that the public worship of the Genevan church was very simple. There were no musical instruments, and only the singing of the Old Testament psalms and certain songs from the New Testament. And this in an age when the Lutherans sang the hymns of Luther from the high organs of the former Roman Catholic churches, and the Anabaptists already had the variety that we recognize so much in their spiritual descendants today.

The source of our salvation

Calvin next moves on to the second central pillar. He comes to the source from which salvation is obtained. And as he begins this, he explains straightaway the three parts to our salvation that we recognize from the Heidelberg Catechism and the Preparatory Forms for the Lord's Supper.

First of all, there's that sense of individual wretchedness. We are filled with the sadness as if suddenly we are aware that we are spiritually dead. The Word strikes in our hearts that sense of our total inadequacy. Secondly, there is that turning to Christ. We can't do anything else. His power alone can save. He is the only Priest who reconciles us to the Father. It's His death which is the only sacrifice by which our sin was paid. He alone made us right with God. And, thirdly, we rise to a firm and solid confidence in Christ. We're open to being taught His grace, and to live His way in all that we do.

Of all these essential parts to a true faith Calvin finds the church just before the Reformation lacking. For with the first aspect, there had been a real watering down of original sin. In fact, sin had been reduced to certain controllable outward lusts. Our whole sinful nature had become ignored – we actually believed we were quite good. You know – you can do it! Think enough of the right thoughts and you'll be alright!

In regards to the second aspect, it was believed that turning to Christ was no longer an absolute must. Aside from going through Mary, or any of the huge host of interceding saints, your own works were needed to help you as well!

No wonder that with the third part – that firm and solid confidence in Christ – there could only now be a situation of suspense and uncertainty. Purgatory demonstrated this

superstitious religion very well. As Calvin further described this: *...it is not surprising that after they had once founded their hope of salvation on the merit of works, they plunged into all this absurdity. It had to happen – that from such a precipice they should have such a fall. For what can man find in his work but materials for doubt, and finally, for despair? We see thus how error led to error.*

Perhaps this aspect of our salvation seems to have stayed intact. We certainly don't believe in purgatory. We hold dearly to the doctrines of grace – those five precious points of Calvinism. Or, do you? Could you, dear reader, just now recite those part of T.U.L.I.P. to yourself, let alone to your neighbour?

And having been refreshed as to God's grace in our lives, do we actually live in that? Our period in church history has been described as one of the most spiritually impoverished. Although the Word of God is freely available, we use it less than ever. Although personal communion with the Lord is unhindered, its practice of prayer have become at most the few rushed moments amongst the demands of modern living.

A local Lutheran minister even decried the loss of the minister's study as a place of peaceful meditation and reflection. He believes that it, too, has been taken over by telephones, computers, and fax machines. The time for genuine spiritual peace has been pushed aside. It's that kind of busyness that so easily leads to believing in ourselves, and in what we have. To be apart from God only leads to darkness, and already we cannot see it!

Because we are going through the motions things seem to be okay. All the activities of the church are being done. You go to worship, to fellowship, and drag the children here, there, and everywhere! Of course we're doing the right thing! Can't you see it?

The sacraments

Yet the form without the content is meaningless. This is shown as the tract develops to speak about the sacraments. The sacraments – two gracious provisions from the Lord for preserving the pillars of faith. And, yet, what had they become?

Actually, no longer was there two. In addition to God's stated two of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, five more had been added. The coverings of sin had become this bad! And even with the two which were biblically-based, there was no pointing anymore to what they really meant. Baptism had become a very involved ceremonial "christening".

And the Lord's Supper? Why, that was not only corrupted on the outside, it's very meaning had changed. Calvin protested: *What Christ commanded to be done, and in what order, is perfectly clear. But in contempt of His command, a theatrical exhibition was got up, and substituted for the Supper. For what resemblance is there between the Mass and the true Supper of the Lord? While the*

command of Christ tells believers to communicate with each other in the sacred symbols of His body and blood, the thing seen at Mass ought to be called excommunication. For the Priest separates himself from the rest of the body, and eats apart that which ought to have been brought forward into the middle and distributed. Then, as if he were some successor to Aaron, he pretends that he offers a sacrifice to pay for the sins of the people. But where does Christ once mention sacrifice? He bids us to take, eat, and drink. Who authorizes men to change taking into offering?

Furthermore, Calvin argued against the lack of explanation. The people were being entertained with showy ceremonies, while not a word was said about what was meant. And, what's more, it was an entertainment people were being charged to see! Yes, in many places, just to eat the so-called 'host' was costing money.

The government of the church

This brought Calvin into the whole area of church government. An area in which his greatest sadness was the abuse and neglect of the pastoral office. Scripture, as we read in the letters of Paul to Timothy and Titus, clearly



points to pastors and bishops – both names means the same, 'elders' – as being called to build up the church with sound doctrine. No man could be a true pastor of the church if he did not perform the office of teaching. Yet, at the time of the Reformation, there was scarcely one in a hundred of the bishops who ever mounted the pulpit in order to teach. No wonder! These men had become no different than secular rulers and princes, lording it over the people with privilege and property.

But added to this was the disgrace those ordained brought to their calling. Calvin writes: *At a time when the corruption of the world is at its height, there is no order more addicted to all kinds of wickedness. I wish that by their innocence they would refute what I say. How gladly would I at once retract. But their depravity stands exposed in the eyes of all – exposed is their insatiable greed and extortion – and exposed is their intolerable pride and cruelty. The noise of indecent revelry and dancing, the rage of gaming, and entertainments, abounding in all kinds of excessiveness, are in their houses only or-*

dinary occurrences, while they glory in their luxurious delicacies, as if they were distinguished virtues.

One's mind is also cast back to more modern abuses, such as air-conditioned dog houses and thirty feet statues of Jesus! There is nothing new under the sun. And, yet, what is dangerous for us all is the devil's lure of earthly power. It is such a fading pleasure and, still, it traps us so very quickly. As the saying goes: *Power corrupts – and absolute power corrupts absolutely!*

But there is still more. Calvin adds the absence of proper elections and appointments to office. It all becomes hidden. What should have been something the church took pride in had become a dark secret. And it resulted in the most cruel tyranny over the souls entrusted to their care. *Laws have been piled above laws, to be many snares to the conscience. For they have not confined these laws to matters of external order, but applied them to the interior and spiritual government of the soul. And they kept being added, until they amounted to a large multitude, which is now a labyrinth....*

No wonder the comparison was drawn to the Pharisees of Jesus' time. They too held back the people from their covenant God. The Church had so quickly changed from the loving Body of our Lord, into a terribly insatiable monster, devouring more and more souls.

Yet it was in this awful time that the ever-gracious God raised up the Reformers. In the words of Calvin: *This much, certainly, must clear alike to just and unjust, that our Reformers have done no small service to the Church, in stirring up the world as from the deepest darkness of ignorance, to read the Scriptures, to work hard to make them better understood, and in happily throwing light on certain points of doctrine of the highest practical importance.*

It seems that until they came little else was heard than old wives' fables, and stories equally frivolous. The theo-

logical colleges resounded with bawling questions, but Scripture was seldom mentioned. Those who held the government of the church made it their only concern that they did not lose any of their wealth, and accordingly, had no difficulty in allowing whatever gained for them even more money. *Even the most prejudiced, despite whatever they might say against us otherwise, admit that our people have in some degree reformed these evils.* Are we reforming still? Can we honestly say we have come a long way in sanctification since 1543? How do the unbelievers see the church? And how far have we extended the Lord's influence in this world? Oh that the Lord would raise up Reformers once more! Men and women who are Spirit-filled to declare with their mouths and lives the glory of the great God! Believers who are joined so strongly to the source of true salvation. And a people of God who love His Word!

Can we share Calvin's confidence? Together with him, can we say: *...let there be an examination of our whole doctrine, of our form of administering the sacraments, and our method of governing the Church; and in none of these things will it be found that we have made any change to the ancient form, without attempting to restore it to the exact standard of the Word of God.*

A response

There is a response to John Calvin's letter. The expectation which the Protestants had for the Diet of Speier, though not fully realized, yet were not altogether disappointed. The Diet decreed that, in the meantime, Protestants should continue in the possession of their rights, and a promise was given by the Emperor that no time would be lost in assembling a General Council for the final determination of religious differences. The Pope, Paul III, was horrified at these concessions. He was equally grieved and provoked at the threatened revolt of his "very dear son", the Emperor. He wrote to him a Paternal Admonition warning him against his association with these heretics and strongly hinting at excommunication.

FAMILY CAMP - Naamaroo Conference Centre,

Lane Cove National Park, SYDNEY.

5pm Monday, 5th January - 3pm Friday 9th January, 2009 [DV]

Theme: Love and Obedience: Our Response to God's Grace

Main Speaker: Rev. George Ball, Manning River Congregation.

The camp commences at 6pm Monday 5th of January (arrival after 5pm) and concludes at 3pm on Friday 9th Jan. (God willing). The costs for full time attendance, including dinner on Monday and lunch on Friday, are as follows:

- Adults \$240; Seniors \$200; Student/Unemployed \$200; Primary age children (K-6) \$175.
- Preschool children 2 -5 \$60; Children below the age of 2 free.

Family Rate (subsidised) **\$820**

If you are only planning to attend for part of the camp (this is different to a day visitor) please contact

The camp organiser on (02) 4626 8212 to check pricing.

Distance Subsidy will be paid by the Youth & Fellowship Committee. Long distance travellers are encouraged to pool vehicles to save costs. The amount of the rebate will be determined at the camp.

Hire of bed linen, blankets and towels is offered. Please indicate your requirements on the registration form.

A Limited Number of Ensuted Rooms are available, with bed linen, towel and blankets provided for an extra cost of \$30 per person for the week.

Run For Glory

BETHLEHEM - A ROYAL CITY

Over the next few weeks we'll hear a great deal about Bethlehem. Even people who don't know much about the Christian faith at least know that it's the birthplace of Jesus. But that makes it all the more important for us to think about this town that has achieved world renown—not because of its architectural beauty, or cultural achievements, but because of its association with Jesus. In every sense of the word it's a royal city.

The Birthplace of David

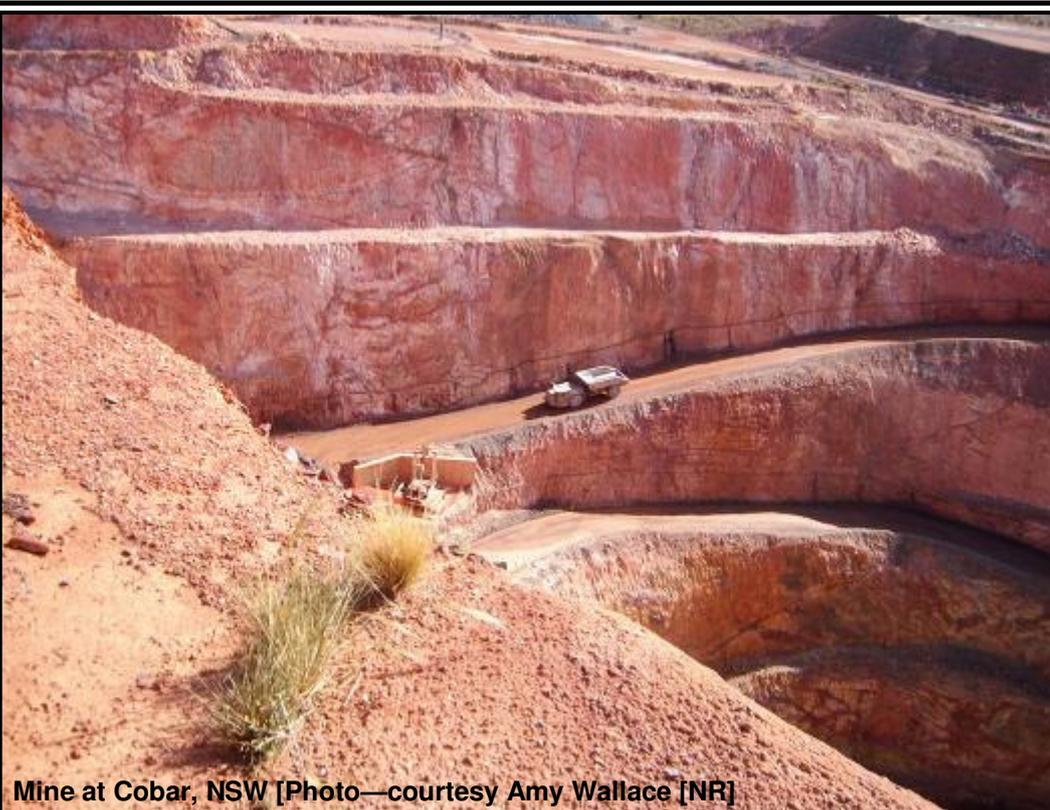
For example *It was the birthplace of King David.* The story about David's birth in Bethlehem starts in the Book of Ruth where we're introduced to Naomi and Elimelech, who belonged to the town of Bethlehem in Judah. We're told they had to leave Bethlehem because of a severe famine. They went to Moab and lived there. Elimelech and their two sons died, and Naomi decided to return home. She came back with her daughter in law, Ruth, feeling very sad. When the people said, "Can this be Naomi?" she said, "Don't call me Naomi. Call me Mara. I went away full but the Lord has brought me back empty. The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me." [Ruth 1:20-21] But little did Naomi know that the Lord had something wonderful planned for Naomi, and her Moabite daughter in law. In the course of time, she married Boaz and they had a son called Obed. And, we're told at the end of the Book of Ruth, "Obed was

the father of Jesse, and Jesse was the Father of David." David, the future King of Israel, who consolidated the nation and was a man after God's own heart – was born in Bethlehem.

The Birthplace of Jesus

But the town of Bethlehem can claim a more famous Royal Personage than that of David. *It was the Birthplace of David's son and David's Lord – the Lord Jesus.* The Lord had promised to David to establish his line forever, his throne as long as the heavens endure, [Psalm 89] and extend his rule from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth [Psalm 72]. There was glory and expansion under Solomon, but from then on it was downhill – so much so that the people of God accused God of renouncing his Covenant with his servant, and defiling his crown in the dirt. [Psalm 89:39] Almost a thousand years rolled by – and God's people still waited for their King.

And then something marvellous happened, not in Bethlehem, but in a despised town in the north of Israel – Nazareth. The Angel Gabriel appeared to a young woman named Mary, engaged to a man who was a "descendant of David." "You're going to have a baby", he said. But Nazareth was about 80 Kms from Bethlehem! How did the baby come to be born there? God saw to it that his King was: He had Caesar issue a decree for a census, and



Mine at Cobar, NSW [Photo—courtesy Amy Wallace [NR]

"There is a mine for silver and a place where gold is refined. Iron is taken from the earth, and copper is smelted from ore. Man puts an end to the darkness; he searches the farthest recesses for ore in the blackest darkness. Far from where people dwell he cuts a shaft, in places forgotten by the foot of man; far from men he dangles and sways.... But where can wisdom be found? Where does understanding dwell? Man does not comprehend its worth; it cannot be found in the land of the living.....

And God said to man, "The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding."

Job 28

everyone had to return to their ancestral home to be registered. And so they came to Bethlehem where Jesus, David's son, and yet David's Lord, was born in the stable.

The Birthplace of Our King.

But we must take this one step further. *It's the birthplace of our King.* The child that was born there grew, and suffered and died, and rose again and is now crowned Lord of all. He's been given the highest place in the Universe and a Name that's above every Name *"that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow."* Whether we like or not, Jesus is now Lord and King. He's our King – and should be recognised as such. And if we've been living and not recognising the Kingship of that child who was born in Bethlehem, we need to think again.

If we don't recognise his kingship and submit ourselves to it, it doesn't mean it doesn't exist or that we can escape from it. It means we'll get a terrible shock one day when he returns – and we have to kneel before him, not in reverence and joy but in fear and dread because we've lived a life ignoring Him and his Word, and His Laws, and His mercy. Bethlehem is not only a Royal city of the OT and the NT. Its a Royal City for us too – because it's the Birthplace of *our* King.

When Jesus was born in a stable in Bethlehem, there were many famous and powerful people alive then, like Caesar Augustus and King Herod. But we won't be shown pictures of Caesar's Palace, or of Herod's – the big and famous names in the first century A.D. They were somebodys then – and Jesus was nobody. Indeed he was less than a nobody. He was cast out of the city and crucified – and life went on as usual. But who has triumphed in the end? They've passed into history – and hardly anyone knows them. But its a different story with Jesus. Most people know something about what happened in Bethlehem!

Why? Because the Good News about this Saviour, in obedience to His command, has been taken out into the world. People have been touched, inspired, and transformed by this baby in Bethlehem – and what he did. Its led them to witness for Him, to die for Him, to treasure His words and preserve them, to obey his teaching, and write more books about him than any other person! And not only that: He's led them to value life, be humble and honest, build Hospitals, Schools and Universities, and raise civilizations based on His Word. Today socially and economically we owe a tremendous debt to Him. And it all began there in a stable in the town of Bethlehem! Isn't that beautiful. What Mary said in her praise to God also applies to the place Jesus was born: *"He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble."* [Luke 1:52] God brings low those who are proud and exalts the lowly.

SEARCH WORK - December

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

December, 2008

SENIOR and INTERMEDIATE

Intermediate omit questions 3 and 4

2 CHRONICLES 14

1. What did king Asa do that was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God? (3 verses)
2. What was Asa's prayer before the battle with the Ethiopians? (2 verses)

Chapter 15

3. (x) What did the prophet Azariah the son of Oded tell Asa would happen if he sought the Lord?
4. (x) What were the terms of the covenant that the people made?

Chapter 16

5. What did the prophet Hanani tell Asa had happened because he had not relied on the Lord?
6. What was Asa's reaction to Hanani's words?

Chapter 17

7. Why was the Lord with Jehoshaphat? (3 verses)
8. Why did all the kingdoms around Judah not make war on Jehoshaphat.

JUNIOR

GENESIS 46:1- 7

1. What did God say to Jacob at Beersheba on his journey to Egypt? (2 verses)

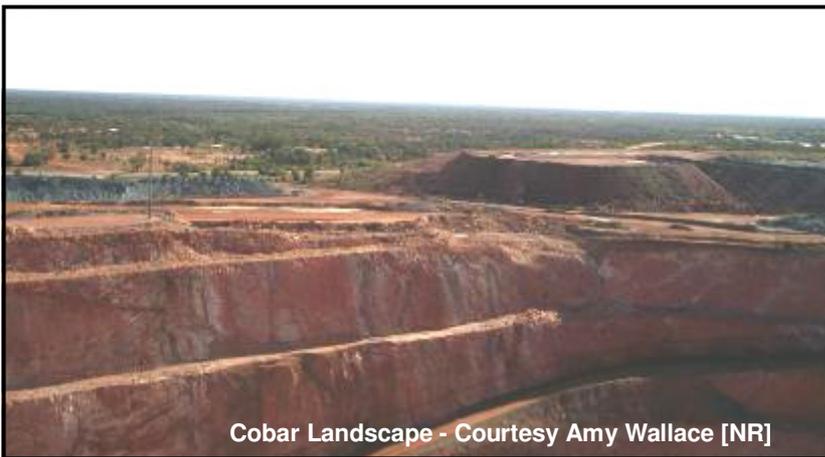
Chapter 46:28—34

2. What did Joseph say when he met his father in Goshen, and what did Israel say to Joseph? (2 verses)

Chapter 50

3. Where was the cave in which Jacob's sons buried him?
4. What did Joseph say when his brothers fell down before his face? (3 verses)

SEARCH WORK TO: MRS I. STEEL, PO Box 942, EPPING 1710.
E-mail: iesteel@gmail.com



Cobar Landscape - Courtesy Amy Wallace [NR]

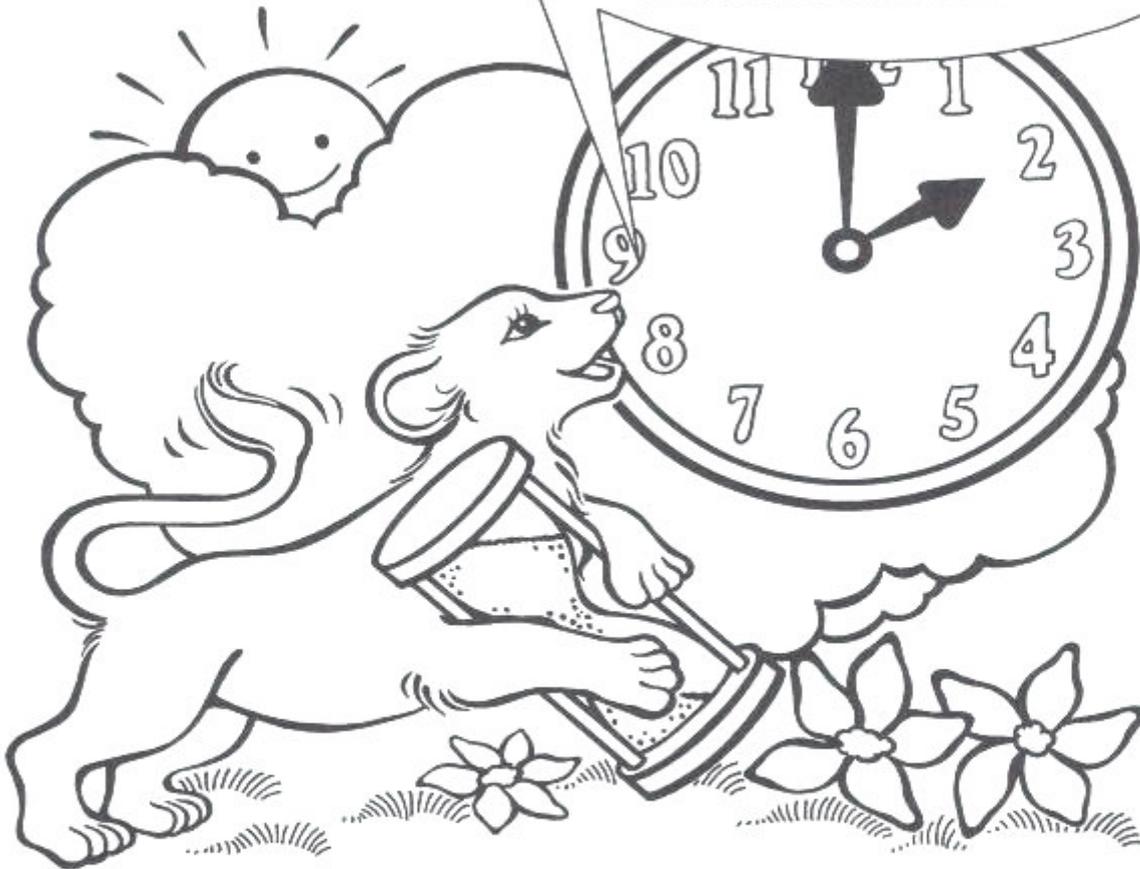
PERSONAL HOLINESS

"When we behold Christ bearing our sins, we have before us the greatest of all motives to personal holiness. He "died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him." When temptation comes in like a tide, cast your eyes to the Cross. Nothing has "such virtue against our corruptions."
- J.W. Alexander

ACTIVITY PAGE.....

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.

CHURCH NEWS

NEWS FROM KNOX - MELBOURNE

Our minister was approached on 17th November by Rev Eddie Smith, one of the trustees of Bethel Baptist Church at 91 Tiverton Drive, Mulgrave to see if we would be interested in purchasing the Bethel property. He knew of our work among Sudanese and our search for a suitable home for the congregation and for general outreach. Bethel is an independent church formed about 1970 and of latter years stressing the doctrines of grace. Mr Smith, who has cared for it for the last 10 years, was minister of Ulverstone Baptist Church back in 1975 when Mr Ward was ministering to our congregation there. However, Bethel numbers had declined and it was thought appropriate to wind up the work.

While the property is not prominently located, abuts the Monash freeway and has a substantial easement for power lines, it is centrally located for many Sudanese and is about 16 kms from each of the other Melbourne centres – Glen Huntly, Narre Warren and Knox. The area is residential and there is opportunity for outreach in the local area.

The building is similar to our Knox and Narre Warren buildings, and was rearranged internally and renovated in 1997. It is about 273m² in area and, as currently configured, would seat about 120-140 in the main worship area.

There are about 30 asphalted car parks, mostly on the easement, and room for many more on the site of some 2800m². While the building has a small hall it lacks Sunday school classrooms and an extension of 100m² will be needed before the existing Sudanese congregation could use it. There is sufficient room outside the easement to do this. Fencing and work on the grounds would also be appropriate so expense of say \$100,000 could be envisaged. Our office-bearers were all in favour of purchase if the price was right, and Presbyterian members were also positive.

At first Bethel had thought to merge with a Brethren-type group and transfer the property, but decided against this. Their trust requires that, upon winding up, assets are transferred to a church or churches with substantially similar beliefs and/or mission bodies. At a meeting on 22nd November the congregation unanimously decided to offer it to Knox PCEA, but they did require immediate decision. As we had done our homework we were ready to act, and we signed contracts the same day, quite moved by the generosity of our brothers and sisters in fixing the price at only \$150,000.

We have occupancy rights now and will settle the purchase on 13th February. We want to record our heartfelt thanks to the Bethel people for this generous action on their part, and to the Lord who brought us together in great harmony and did beyond what we even asked or thought. [RSW]



CHURCH BUILDING IN MULGRAVE, MELBOURNE

SPIRITUAL RENEWAL

“There is not much glamour in reading the Bible and praying, and many in the church have moved on impatiently to other things. But in doing so they have left God behind, because he has not moved on at all! He still delights in his Word and in our prayer, and we must delight in them as well.

The measure of our faith is not to be found in excitement, ecstasies and emotional experiences, but rather in the degree to which we delight in Bible study and communion with God.

The church of today sorely needs true spiritual renewal. But let us not be in doubt about what a genuine revival will do. It will sweep away a thousand things that churches are now doing and will place on centre stage the Bible and prayer. May God hasten the day!”

Roger Ellsworth, “The Delights of Faith”, Evangelical Times, September 2008.

A LETTER FROM KENYA - Mick Alley

Cheusa was just four years old when his mother burnt to death in a Manyatta fire. The cooking fire near the entrance of the small Samburu hut has been the cause of deaths of children and adults for as long as the Samburu remember. It was night, she had fallen asleep, a blanket got kicked into the fire, she didn't realise. Smoke billowed into the air but the Samburu think of smoke as a companion to their lives. She woke before it was too late, but the flames engulfed the entrance. Her shrieks of terror struck the night air. She was trapped in a furnace. That night, Cheusa's Mama perished in the flames. He was so young, but he remembers that night, the night that pain crept into his heart, the night that God took his mama away.

Sometime after Cheusa's Mama had died, Cheusa recalls sitting, legs crossed on the ground with other children his age, listening to a white missionary woman telling them about a man named Jesus. Cheusa's young mind struggled to remember the detail of those stories, but detail or none, as he grew, his heart wanted to know this man, the son of God, and Cheusa looked for Jesus. Perhaps his heart yearned for the love he lost when his mama left him. So, at a young age still, with just the little he had understood, Cheusa came to trust and love Jesus as his own.

Years passed and Cheusa continued to learn in primary school about God, his little heart soaking up everything he was taught. But seven years after his Mama had passed, Cheusa's father died. He was very old and had become ill. "I became really angry with God," Cheusa recounted to me. "I felt all alone, and my people think it's shameful to have no family. I felt rejected, why would God do this to me – It felt like God had hated me when I had tried to love him". And so Cheusa went to live with his only sibling, his elder sister who had been married off at the customary nine or ten years of age. She was known in the community as stark raving mad. She would walk through the village mumbling to herself, shouting at the air, pointing at people. Living at her home was a very hard time in Cheusa's life.

The time came and passed that Cheusa should have undergone circumcision to become a man. He felt the shame of his state, but with no one to help him undergo the initiation into manhood, he was left to misery. A man in the

community noticed and decided to help, and Cheusa has been living with him ever since. Cheusa realised that that man's mercy upon him was like what he had learnt about Jesus' love for Him. The man didn't have to love Cheusa, but he just did anyway – it was then he realised that he not only knew the love God had for him, but he felt it enter into the deepest recesses of his being.

Cheusa was twenty years old when I met him, he was in my Year 10 English class and later came to meet with me to read the bible and pray once a week. A constant point of concern and prayer for him was that his secondary school fees were in debt and some of the Government grants given randomly to schools for orphans had stopped arriving. Cheusa was soon to be chased from school, not to return. We prayed, and I just knew that the gospel I preached would be nothing if my life also didn't tell the story. "Cheusa, you are a special boy" I told him as I took his hand "and I can see you love the Lord with all your heart. I will pay your fees so you can stay in school. God is doing this for you, not me. He has taken you this far, and now He is just using me to take you the next part. God loves you Cheusa, God loves you, never forget that." His eyes were moist when I finished, and so were mine.

Jesus said "Whatever you did for one of the least of these, you did for me" Matthew 25:40. In Australia I searched to know who they were. In all the world we are surrounded by people, but who do we know that is hungry? Who do we know that needs clothes? I searched for these people when I visited developing nations, I searched for them when I did ministry in prisons. I found need and the need is great. It is bigger than you or me, but I have seen and tasted the joy in serving Jesus the way he chose to serve on earth – He came to seek and save the lost, those that were in need. If you want to help them, a theology degree doesn't qualify you, neither the surety you have in the knowledge of the scriptures. These should be sought for, our zeal must be based on knowledge, but without love, 1 Corinthians 13 tells us, you will be making too much noise achieving absolutely nothing. The power of God's love is our motivation for serving, it's the reason we give. Love is our greatest ministry. It's about loving till it hurts. It's about sacrificing yourself to God. It's about loving in a way that will transform lives into new beginnings with Jesus.

There are people that are hungry. Will we give them something to eat? There are those that need clothes. Will we share some with them? The bible is clear, we should help them. But the greatest need, the one you find in every community around the globe – people are lost in their sin. This is the greatest gift of love, the one that surpasses all the others. It is the message of the Gospel, it is the truth, Jesus died for us, offering forgiveness of sin. People desperately need to know.

The week after I sent my last newsletter "A witchdoctors Decree" I returned to the satellite internet at a mission station to discover countless recipients received blank emails. But it seemed it was also about the same number that replied indicating they had received my newsletter. A strange occurrence, but not matched by the brutal fever,



diarrhoea, stomach pain, and dehydration that threw my body into shutdown in the days that followed. I had not felt so sick since arriving in Africa. I laid for days in a semi delirious sleep, but as I recovered, my dreams became sinister in nature, and I woke regularly during the night in a sweat. The depression of darkness clouding my mind began to disturb me. In sickness I had wanted to escape my body, but in thought I felt desperate to escape an oppressive mind.

In the past few weeks a number of friends in Australia told me they felt compelled to pray for me, one friend saying she woke in the middle of the night knowing she should pray for me then and there. I haven't presumed to label these occurrences coincidence, spiritual attacks, or an over active imagination, but I have held tight to the power



and presence of my Living God, and I believe the Lord answered peoples prayers in helping me through this time. I thank God for you, faithfully praying for me. Please pray for me as the school year finishes, that departing this valley which after a year and four months has become my home, will be a time of trusting God's purpose in moving

me on despite my desire to stay. Please pray for my Dec/Jan assignment leading a team of ten Australians in two different ministry locations, that the Lord would use us all in proclaiming Him.

Praise God for the rain. Five weeks ago as I wrote how the Lord brought rain on the land in the face of the witch-doctors decree, in all the time of living here, I have never seen so much water in this valley, and the rain still continues to fall. Praise God for the twelve Samburu that were Baptised at our little church last Sunday. Please pray for a sponsorship program I want to establish for some of the desperately needy students in our school. Their future education is so uncertain as money here is so meagre. If you would like to contribute in some way please let me know. And lastly, please pray for Cheusa, that as he matures and moves into his future life, pray that he would also tell people about a man that loved him when nobody else would, a man that was named Jesus.

Your brother, Mick Alley

P.S. I have had some friends ask when I am returning to Australia. December to January I am leading a team of ten Australians in a remote area within the Rendille Tribe of North Kenya doing ministry with Young Adults and then involved running Youth programs in Kenya's largest slum of 1.5 Million people living within a 1 mile radius. February to May I will be visiting ministries in other parts of Africa before I return home to Australia, looking to support and to see for myself if Africa is where I should be spending my long term future. In a way I feel I have seen enough, but will follow through with the original plan. I am expecting to be back in Australia by June/July 2009.

Pictures:

- [1] A Group of boys from a Bible Study;**
- [2] At a Family Home.**

[Continued from page 15] Eg: - Psalm 42, 'as the deer pants for water, so my soul pants for you O God.' Ps. 63, 'My soul thirsts for you.' Ps. 73, 'Whom Have I in heaven but You, and earth has nothing I desire besides you.' Such aspirations are not exceeded even in the New Covenant.

Alexander Whyte has written, 'Let him who is feeble in faith, and in repentance, and holiness and in communion with God, be much in the Psalms. Let the psalms dwell richly in the feeblest among us, and the feeblest among us will yet be a man of more spiritual strength than David. Sing a heart-strengthening psalm every morning, and a heart cleansing and heart quieting psalm every night. Seven times every remaining day of your remaining pilgrimage sing a psalm. Let no place, and no conversation and no occupation delude you out of your heart-refreshing psalm. Fill the house of your pilgrimage with the sound of psalms. Let the prisoners hear you. Let the angels hear you. Let God hear you. Let Him bow down His ear and hear you.'

Whyte is in the Puritan tradition. According to the puritan view, life was a continuous act of worship, pursued under an unremitting and lively sense of God's providential purposes and constantly refreshed by religious activity, personal, domestic and public. Oh, that we might recover such an understanding and practice in our day. That we might see the day when family worship is restored in

every home, the Word is read and the psalms are sung

The Psalms Give us Songs Worthy of the Church.

These psalms are not our psalms. They're not Presbyterian psalms. They're not even Scottish psalms. They're not denominational psalms. They're not sectarian psalms. They are songs for all the people of God in every age. A truly ecumenical song book. Songs which should unite believers everywhere in their common faith. No matter what our view of baptism or of the Second Coming or of church government these songs are suitable.

The Holy Spirit did not give the New Testament Church a new songbook, or even make additions or amendments to the old one. Surely if the old songbook had been considered inadequate or incomplete it would have been a task given to Paul or John to produce something? None has been given.

It's a general rule that the songs of the church reflect its theology – what it believes. The psalms help to preserve the doctrines that the church is to hold through the ages. Just as there is, 'One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all' – so is there one Psalter! The continued use of the Psalter should (under the grace of God) steer the church away from modernism, liberalism, and error.

Let us then ensure that we value, appreciate and use the psalms. Let us endeavour to give to God only that which is best.

PRESBYTERIAN AGENDA

THE USEFULNESS OF THE PSALMS.

Rev. George Ball, Manning Congregation

I want us to say a word about the usefulness and value of the psalms. It's the hymnbook that God has given to His church. It's a book therefore to be valued and used. I know a hobby of some is to visit the garage sale. What's on sale? Things which are valuable? Things which are precious? I think not! Rather, things which are no longer needed, things that might even be defective, things that will never be missed. Things which are no longer useful or appreciated. We don't throw out useful things or valuable things. Yet I fear this is what has happened in many churches – even Reformed and evangelical churches – the psalms have been thrown out, the psalms are for sale. They are no longer appreciated.

The Book of Psalms has been valued and appreciated and used far more in the past than they are today. These psalms have been used in the church for thousands of years. These psalms have been the effective songbook of the church universally until as recently as the 1800's. But today – even in the most conservative Presbyterian and evangelical Churches - while lip service may be paid to the psalms – they are not sung, and as a result not known. I had the recent experience at a funeral (in another church!) when the organist recognised 'Psalm 23' but said of the words of Psalm 121, 'I haven't seen that one before!' (And she played it as much too!)

By contrast, Dr. Robert Godfrey tells of the funeral of one of the matriarchs in his church. "Two of the granddaughters spoke at the funeral and talked about their grandmother. They said, 'We used to play a game with Grandma growing up. We would open the Psalter and read a verse out of a psalm. And Grandma could always tell us what psalm it was from. And sometimes we would try and trick her. We would read half a verse from one psalm and half a verse from another, and she could always tell us which two psalms it was from.' This was a woman who knew the psalms. She had hidden them in her heart. What a blessing." Then Godfrey wryly asks, 'Would she not have been better off just singing 'Alleluia' eleven times! I think you'll agree that the Psalms don't compare with the mindless, repetitive, shallow, trite choruses now sung in many churches.

The Psalms Give us Songs Worthy of God.

How can we be sure that the words we sing please God? Because we like them? Because others like them? Or because God likes them? How should I choose a gift for my wife? What's the prerequisite? Is it something that I like or something I think she would like? Would she like an electric drill (which would be really useful), or a box of Milk Tray? Would she prefer a set of exercise weights or a bunch of flowers? I think you know the answer!

When we bring our gift of worship to God this must be the consideration as well. What is it that pleases Him? Surely that which is best. His own inspired Word. The psalms are God's description of Himself. 'No one knows the thoughts

of God except the Spirit of God.' (1 Cor. 2:11). This is why the psalms are so valuable. They are an accurate description of God without fault or inaccuracy or error. They perfectly describe God. They magnify and exalt Him as the Sovereign Creator, and Ruler and Saviour. How can we worship God unless we know what kind of God He is? 'The Psalms have a strength in their conception of God which is peculiar to themselves, and which makes them especially helpful as a medium of devotion.' (W. I. Wishart.)

In the Psalms we find described: - His independence and self-existence 'Our God is in heaven; He does whatever pleases Him' Ps. 115:2. His omniscience: 'Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely O Lord' Ps. 139:4. His omnipotence: 'The Lord is in His holy Temple; the Lord is on His holy throne. He observes the sons of men; His eyes examine them' Ps. 11:4. His faithfulness: 'All the ways of the Lord are loving and faithful' Ps. 25:10. His goodness: 'The Lord is good to all; He has compassion on all He has made' Ps. 145:9. His Mercy: 'For His mercy endures forever' Ps. 136:2. And we could go on to mention His wisdom, mercy, providence, etc.

Let me mention two aspects of God's character, which are muted nowadays in evangelical worship.

God is a Holy God.

God is Holy. His holiness is overwhelming, awesome, intimidating, and complete. 'Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.' (Heb 12:28-29). 'Exalt the Lord our God, and worship at His footstool, He is holy.' (Ps. 99:5). 'Let all the earth fear the Lord, let all the people of the world revere Him' (Ps. 33:8). 'God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be held in reverence by all those around Him.' (Ps. 89:7).

The psalmist often speaks in the presence of God. Accordingly it is not surprising that he expresses awe toward Him. 'But I, by your great mercy, will come into your house; in reverence will I bow down toward your holy temple.' (Ps. 5:7).

Do we reverence God in our worship, as we should? We need to prepare ourselves for public worship – physically, mentally and spiritually. Preparation should begin on Saturday! We must approach with reverence and thoughtfulness. Sometimes before a service it seems that the atmosphere can be more like a football match or a concert. Yes we should greet one another. But remember we are coming to worship. 'Then public worship being begun, the people are to wholly attend upon it, forbearing to read anything, except what the minister is then reading or citing, and abstaining from all private whisperings.. as also from all gazing, sleeping and other indecent behaviour, which may disturb the minister or people, or hinder themselves or others in the service of God.' (Directory for Public Worship).

God is a Just Judge

God is a Just Judge. In some churches today it seems

that only happy, joyful songs are sung. While joy is a legitimate emotion (eg. Ps. 122), yet there are also some very solemn words in the Psalter.. 'God is a righteous Judge, a God who expresses his wrath every day.' (Ps. 7:11). 'He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples with equity.' (Ps. 98:9). 'Judge, judged, judgements' appear about 66 times in the psalms.' It's an important theme.

How do we react? With embarrassment? Do we silently wish they weren't there? Are they like having a black sheep in the family? Perhaps we avoid them? Or we may think they are unloving and unchristian? Who says? Paul tells us to 'consider the goodness and the severity of God.'

God is to be praised for all that He does. Like the angel in Rev. 16 pouring out the bowl of God's wrath on the earth, proclaims; 'You are just in these judgements, You who are and who were, the Holy One, because You have so judged, for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets and You have given them blood to drink as they deserve.' (Rev. 16:5-6).

Friends, if you are embarrassed with these words – you are embarrassed with God! Let God be God. Let God be praised for all that He does. Who are we to redefine God? Who are we to modify God? The idea is preposterous. Instead of getting down on our knees and letting the Lord be our judge, we stand with pride and judge the Lord. God forgive us!

The Psalms Give us Songs Worthy of Christ.

Not only is the Psalter criticised for what it contains; it is also criticised for what it supposedly omits. One of the objections to the psalter is it doesn't mention the name of Jesus. Such a belief is to misunderstand the Old Testament. Isaiah 53 doesn't mention the name Jesus – yet we have no difficulty seeing him in it! Remember Jesus lesson to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus? Jesus found Himself in the Psalms. He gave those two forlorn disciples a Bible lesson explaining that 'All things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses, and the Prophets, and the Psalms concerning Me.' (Luke 24:25-27, 44). All Scripture is about the Lord Jesus Christ and His redeeming work and that includes the Psalms. Further, the Psalms are described as the words of Christ, 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.' (Col. 3:16). We are to sing these psalms now with a New Testament understanding. The psalms are now much more comprehensible and useful than before. These songs therefore are eminently suitable for new covenant worship.

As (the late) Rev. S. P. Stewart notes, 'There is no other book of the OT so often quoted in the NT as the Book of Psalms. On turning to Hebrews chapter one, we find the writer quotes from at least seven of the psalms. The quotations are made to exhibit the superiority of Christ over the Angels – to exhibit indeed His Divinity. ...The writer

found Christ.... Christ in the psalms! Yes, verily He is there. He is there in His offices of Prophet, Priest and King. He is there in His Divinity and in His humanity. He is there in His power and in His love – in His humiliation and exaltation.'

In the Psalms we see: - Christ's Divinity (Ps. 45:6; 110:1). Incarnation (8:5, 40:7-9). His mediatorial offices as Prophet (40:9-10), Priest (110:4), King (2:7-12; 22:28; 45:6; 72; 110:1). His betrayal (41:9). His sufferings and crucifixion (22). His burial and resurrection (16:9-11). His ascension (24:7-10, 47:5, 68:18). His Second Coming and judgement (50:3-4, 98:6-9).

The Psalms Give us Songs Worthy of the Believer.

John Calvin states, 'I have been wont to call this book not inappropriately, an anatomy of all parts of the soul; for there is not an emotion of which any one can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror. The Holy Spirit has here drawn to the life all the griefs, sorrows, fears, doubts, hopes, cares, perplexities, in short, all the distracting emotions with which the minds of men are wont to be agitated.'

“When we bring our gift of worship to God this must be the consideration as well. What is it that pleases Him? Surely that which is best. His own inspired Word. The psalms are God’s description of Himself. ‘No one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.’ (1 Cor. 2:11). This is why the psalms are so valuable. They are an accurate description of God without fault or inaccuracy

There is a psalm for every season; the whole gamut of human experience is here expressed in the Psalter. The Psalms contain a complete psychology; they appeal to the whole person; 'they leave no soul state dumb' (S.P.Stewart). 'The reason why Christian people are drawn to the psalms is that they speak the universal language of the human soul...Whatever our spiritual mood may be, there is sure to be a psalm which reflects it – whether triumph or defeat, excitement or depression, joy or sorrow, praise or penitence, wonder or anger'. (Stott)

The psalms arouse our emotions eg: -
Feeling sad? Ps. 6, 13.
Feeling confused and ashamed? Ps. 44
Feeling afraid? Ps. 34, 46, 56.
Feeling depressed and lonely? Ps. 23, 42, 43.
Feeling guilty Ps. 51.
Feeling angry, envious, doubt? Ps. 73.

What strikes us is that the psalmist is a real, breathing, bleeding, sweating, and hurting human being, a man of like passions with us. The psalms put us in touch with our deepest emotions. We can feel ourselves understood and explained by them. They are not however a sinful expression of emotion, because the negative always leads to the positive. Doubt leads to trust; anger toward God turns to love, sadness to joy.

The psalms not only speak to our emotions – they also direct our wills. They instruct us, teach us, exhort us, and examine us eg: - Psalm 1; 15; 24; 119, etc. We are instructed to obey God's law, to thank God, to trust God, to witness to God's salvation, and to worship God.

The Psalms also stretch us and motivate us to greater godliness. They set the bar high. **[Continued, page 13]**

BETWEEN YOU AND ME

They say all good things come to those who wait! And I was especially pleased the other day to get the following letter. It reads:

Dear Ray,

I haven't quite finished the Nov Banner, but have enjoyed what I read so far (except the page on computers - My old brain just can't handle it).

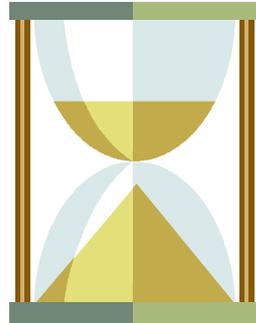
We especially enjoyed the 1953 sermon re Queen Elizabeth. We're only slightly behind her in her age grouping, so a lot of it brought back memories of that period. Helen Ramsay's article also was first class. I also liked the quick outline of George's camp talks re the Four Roads, and Denis Muldoon's RATSACK experience. All providing gripping reading.

I found the first article by Dr Robert Eagleson very enlightening and thought provoking. I forwarded it on to my ministerial son-in-law, who also appreciated it. The article caused me to do my own little study on the subject, and I have forwarded that on to you to do with as you wish. I trust that it won't steal Dr Eagleson's thunder for the remainder of the article, yet to be published.

*Encouragingly yours,
Bruce Dunne.*

Thank you, Bruce for your letter, and your contribution to

the discussion on the status of OT believers. We'll publish it later on. I'm also sure those who contributed the articles for the magazine must find great encouragement too. Believe it or not, there are some out there who appreciate your work, and the time and effort you make in sending the material in.



This will be the last issue of the magazine until February—there is no issue in January. Currently we are producing and distributing about 100 copies. We're always hopeful that more will access it on the web, and it's good to see that more each year are taking up this free option. This reflects how the computer is being used more and more to access information, even by the "older" generation. Meanwhile, we are happy to provide the printed copy to those who prefer it that way. Be assured it is no trouble, and the production and distribution process is now quite streamlined!

May I take the opportunity to thank you for your support and prayers during the year, wish you all a very enjoyable holiday period, and may God's rich blessing be yours in the New Year. We do not know what the future holds for anyone of us. But we do know that if we, in body and soul, belong to the Lord, He will make all things work together for our good.

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