

# Spiritual Blessings



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## Biblical Basics

# The Bible: Section by Section

## Part 3 - Old Testament Poetry Books

On the whole, the first 17 books of the Old Testament are historical narrative. After these come five books which are generally classified as the poetry books, because they are mainly speeches, songs or sayings, written in a poetic style. These books are: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon (variously known as Song of Songs, Canticles, or simply as Songs).

Many words from these books have become common sayings today, or have been printed on posters as inspirational verses. Indeed they are this, but once again we should remind ourselves that every verse in the Bible is part of a paragraph; every paragraph is part of a chapter; every chapter is part of a Bible book; and every Bible book fits somewhere into God's plans for mankind.

The poetry books fit into the time covered by the OT history books. Except for the first 11 chapters of Genesis, the story of the OT revolves largely around God's dealing with the nation of Israel. It should come as no surprise, then,

that Israel's special relationship with God for much of the Old Testament is going to influence what is written in the poetry books.

### In brief

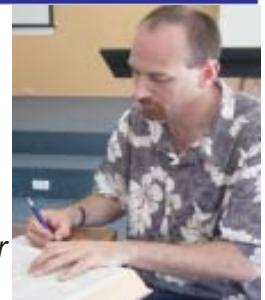
Each of the poetry books is quite different from the other, and for more details of each book see the "At a glance..." section at the end of this article. In the meantime, a short summary will suffice here.

The Book of Job is about a man dealing with crises in his life, and God's response to Job's (and his friends') attitudes. The Psalms are a collection of songs. The remaining three poetry books are all related to Solomon in one way or another - Proverbs is a collection of sayings by or for Solomon; Ecclesiastes is the musings of Solomon considering what life is about; and Song of Solomon is a love story which probably involves Solomon, although a number of varying interpretations have been offered by Bible commentators.

### Poetry vs. Prose

Simply put, the historical narrative sections of the Bible are classed as "prose", where a string of sentences are grouped together in paragraphs, the way that the article you are now reading is set out. The story is often told without embellishment, and it is a relatively simple retelling of events which have taken place. On the other

by  
David  
Tavender



hand, the "poetry" sections give us more personal reactions to events, and explore insights into what people are like and what they have experienced at a personal level. For instance, the historical narrative of 2 Chronicles 36:20 tells us simply in a few words that Nebuchadnezzar carried many Jews away from Jerusalem to be exiled in Babylon. On the other hand, the poetic equivalent, Psalm 137 ("By the rivers of Babylon...") is a song sung by one of the exiles and reveals something of the personal anguish suffered by the exiles.

The poetry sections are often expressions of people as they encounter various situations in life, or in the history of the nation of Israel. They are also often words spoken by God Himself (e.g. Job chapters 38-41) and these portions

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**Athol Walter**

# The President's Word

already worked it out.

I am very pleased that this issue contains contributions from several different writers. I particularly welcome the article on the Mid-Acts Dispensational position from Pastor Santiago Chua of the Philippines. You will see from what he says that he is well-suited to deal with this particular question. Pastor Chua is well-known to our groups here in Australia, as he and his wife, Luz, have been to our conferences. We all pray that this issue of Spiritual Blessings will help our readers to grow and progress in their spiritual lives.

Our annual conference is coming up in a few weeks, and will probably be over by the time many of you read this. Speaking of conferences, I am delighted to announce that Michael Penny of the Open Bible Trust in England, has agreed to be our Guest Speaker for the 2006 conference. He will be accompanied by his wife, Sylvia. I would like to suggest once more to our readers, both at home and overseas, that this is an excellent opportunity to come to the

conference and enjoy rich teaching and fellowship. It will be at the end of September, which is our springtime, a glorious time to visit this part of Australia.

Just as we were preparing this issue for the printer, we received news that Mrs. Joy Jarvis had fallen asleep in Christ. Joy's parents, Frank and Amplias Reynolds, were members of the Sydney group in its early days in the inter-war years, and in adult life, Joy was also a faithful member of the Sydney group. After some illness, Joy became blind, and moved interstate to be with family members. Those who knew Joy will have a lasting memory of her cheerfulness in all situations and her love for the Lord and His Word. There will be a more detailed obituary in our next edition.

I give praise and thanks to our great God and Saviour for His presence and guidance, for opportunities to serve Him and for the challenges to heart and mind that He continually lays before us.

Athol Walter.

**F**irst of all, I must apologise for an error in the Volume Number of the issue of Spiritual Blessings before the last one. It should have been Vol. 19 No. 3, but somehow was numbered as Vol. 18 No. 5. This mistake was not only missed by myself, but also by the compositor and our proof-readers! Most readers probably did not even notice it, but it caused confusion for several. The months named on the Issue are correct, and I suggest that, if any reader wants to have these things in correct order, you change the Volume numbers accordingly. We like to have our little mag. as error free as possible but this booboo has dented the confidence a bit. That is probably a good thing, as we must ever be on our guard. I think there is a moral in there somewhere, but I'm sure you have

## Letters to the Editor

From Duncan Macgregor.

Dear Editor,

Guilty as charged! I agree, I am only borrowing "the part that suits" me! But do we not all pick and choose the bits of Scripture that we like and tend to ignore the 'inconvenient' bits? If I understand your argument correctly, you choose to adopt nine of the ten commandments but reject any need to comply with the fourth because the consequences of not complying are no longer in force. Surely, by that argument, we need not obey the fifth commandment either; we need not honour our fathers and mothers because the 'consequences', or

rewards for doing so—"that thy days may be long upon the land"—are also not applicable to us.

Taking the argument further, we all choose to ignore the knowledge we have been given that the Lord Jesus was not born on 25<sup>th</sup> December nor was crucified on Good Friday because we enjoy the material traditions of Christmas Day and we believe it is good to join with other Christians in special remembrance of the Lord's death and resurrection on the Easter weekend.

A sceptical observer might come to the conclusion that we honour our fathers and mothers and go along with the celebrations at Christmas and Easter because these are 'nice' things to do but that we reject any obligation to make Sunday a day apart because it might cost us

something in the curtailing of our freedom to treat Sunday as any other day. I know we have the freedom to do that (Colossians 2:16) but perhaps we ought not to forget Paul's warning about not letting our liberty be an occasion to the flesh (Galatians 5:13 – although written in a previous dispensation!) remembering that whether we 'honour' the day or not, what we do we do as unto the Lord and only for His glory.

Editor's reply: Good to hear from you again, Duncan. I have to say, however, that you seem not to have understood my argument. I do not choose to adopt nine of the ten commandments and ignore the fourth. My position is that the ten commandments, as well as the rest of the Mosaic Law, never did apply to me, because Moses' Law was  
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# The Bible: Section by Section

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usually employ personal expressions of love, hate, hope, anguish, etc – very real human emotions which we can identify with.

## Inspired

In saying this, we must remember that 2 Timothy 3:16 tells us that ALL Scripture is given by the inspiration of God – including these books. They are a record of what God would have us read, even if in the course of reading these books we come across statements which are actually contrary to God's will and thoughts in other places. Such statements have been included in the Scriptural account because man has these thoughts, and their inclusion often highlights man's folly, or limited understanding, as opposed to the perfect wisdom of God.

Take, for example, Job's words, "God is not truly just, and does not understand man" (Job 10:3-7). This phrase has been included as part of an inspired and accurate record of what Job said, even though what he said was wrong. Comparing one Scripture with another, we see that Job later retracts that false statement by saying, "Surely I spoke of things I did not understand" (Job 42:3 - NIV).

It's also worth bearing in mind that when Christ spoke of "the Scriptures" (Luke 24:27,44,45), He was referring specifically to the Old Testament. This, of course, included books like Job and the Song of Solomon, the inspiration of which are often disputed by modern-day critics because of the "false" statements included in them. However, they were considered to be Scripture by Christ, and this should be our approach to such books of the Bible as well.

## Literary devices

The OT poetry books are full of

imagery, Hebraisms and eastern ways of thinking, which English readers are often not used to. In today's English we use figures of speech all the time to emphasise a point. Phrases like "as big as a house" or "once bitten twice shy" help to emphasise the point being made. Hebrew poetry also employs such figures, but there is one figure which should be carefully observed.

An important part of reading Hebrew poetry is learning to recognise rhyming thoughts, sometimes called "parallelism". Many poems in English rhyme by way of sound, where the end of one line sounds like the end of the next line. For example:

*Twinkle twinkle little star,  
How I wonder what you are.*

"Star" rhymes with "are" because the words have a similar sound; however, Hebrew poetry often rhymes by way of the thought expressed. Sometimes the second line says something similar to the first, but is expressed using different words, such as those in Psalm 59:1

*Deliver me from mine enemies, O my God,  
defend me from them that rise up against me.*

And another example from Proverbs 16:18 -

*Pride goeth before destruction,  
and an haughty spirit before a fall.*

However, sometimes the two lines will rhyme in a different way, expressing opposite thoughts (the word "but" often begins the second line). This is very commonly seen in the book of Proverbs (eg, Proverbs 13:1) -

*A wise son heareth his father's instruction:  
but a scorner heareth not rebuke.*

Another example of these opposing

thoughts is Psalm 1:6 -

*For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous:  
but the way of the ungodly shall perish.*

This is vital to our reading of poetry sections in Scripture, because one line will almost certainly shed light on another. The meaning of one line may be somewhat unclear to us when first read, but a comparison with its rhyming line (regardless of whether it is expressing a similar or different thought), will often make the meaning clearer. The value of recognising rhyming lines in Scriptural poetry should not be underestimated – there are hundreds, if not thousands, of such occurrences.

This has been a very general introduction to poetry in the Old Testament. In the next issue, we will look at the OT Prophecy books.

At a glance...

**Job:** Most likely the oldest book in the Bible, and written before Abraham's time. Contrary to popular opinion, this book is not about Job's patience, nor even his suffering really. It is more to do with acknowledging God's righteousness, and Job recognising this, despite the problems he is faced with. Much of the book is comprised of speeches by Job, his friends, a wise young man, and finally God Himself.

**Psalms:** 150 songs, probably originally accompanied on the stringed instrument called a psalter, hence the name Psalms. Written by a number of authors, with King David featuring prominently. The songs often reflect circumstances in the lives of the author.

**Proverbs:** Collections of sayings, some by Solomon, and some by others for Solomon's benefit. They may seem random at first glance, but the sayings have been grouped

# The Bible: Section by Section

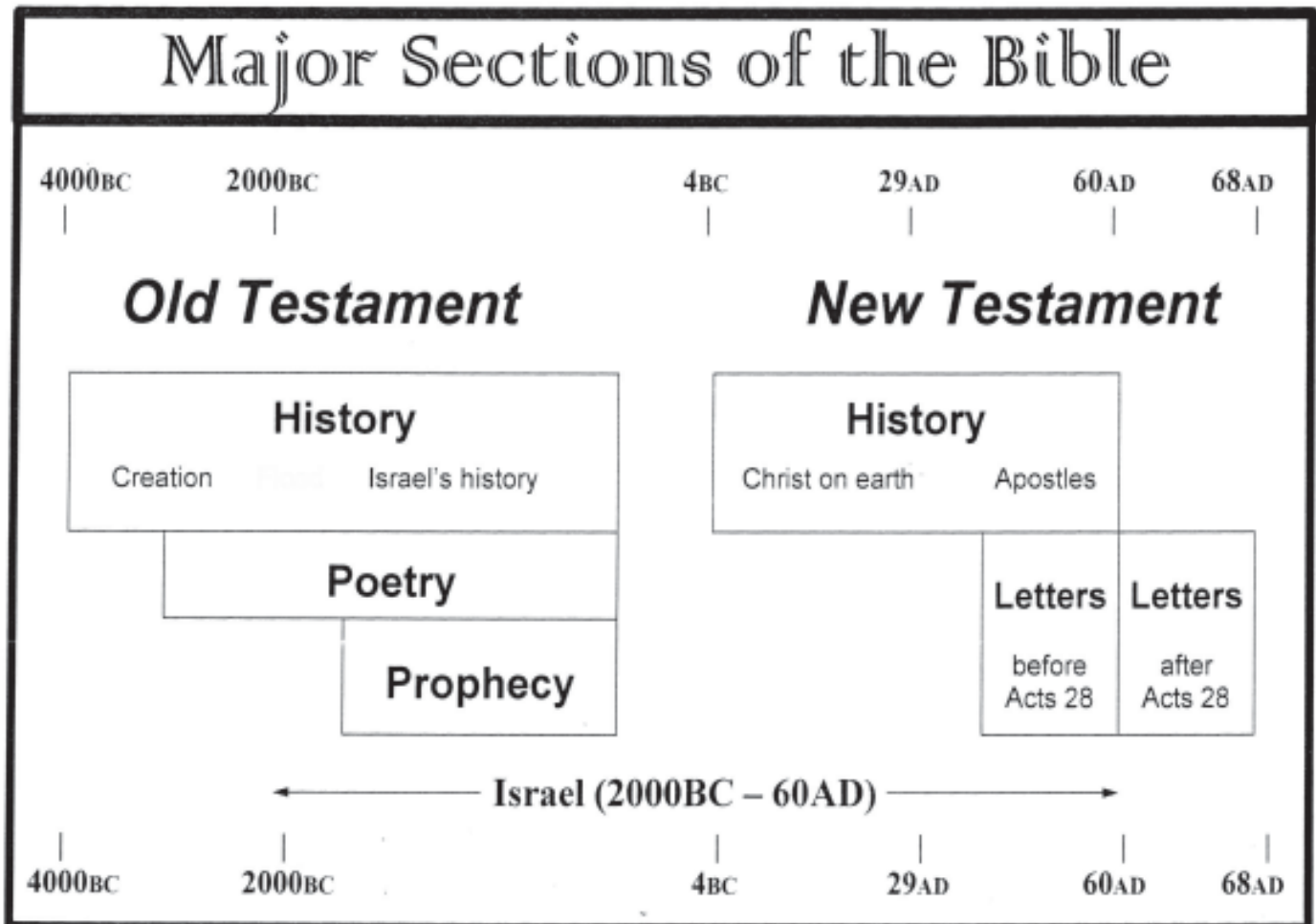
together in various ways. The Companion Bible has some helpful structures in this regard.

**Ecclesiastes:** Not to be confused with the apocryphal book "Ecclesiasticus", the word Ecclesiastes is Greek for Preacher, and the general theme is that of Solomon contemplating life – what is of value and what is not. This book is full of ancient truths and conundrums which each generation since Adam has grappled with, and still does. What it boils down to is that things which often seem important and of value, are often of no value in the context of fearing (respecting) God, and His will.

**Song of Solomon:** Sometimes called "Song of Songs", "Canticles" or "Songs". Written in

a poetic style, and either by Solomon, or written to/for Solomon, it is a love story, and is comprised of a series of dialogues between various parties. There are more divergences of opinion about this book than any other in the Old Testament, and a number of things make it difficult to understand. The labels "Shulamite", "Beloved", etc were not part of the original inspired text, and have been added in an attempt to aid the reader. The problem is that almost every translation differs from the others about which person is speaking at which point, and indeed, how many people are involved in the story. Rather than being "a guide for marriage" or about Christ's love for the Church, I prefer the approach which revolves around a young lady, referred to as the

Shulamite. She meets with a shepherd, and they fall in love. She refers to him as "my beloved" – i.e. the one she loves (1:2,7; 2:3). Her brothers are very careful to ensure no harm comes to her, so they send her to the vineyards to keep her away from the shepherd for a while (1:6). While there, a seducer comes along – the king - Solomon. (3:6,7). With flattery, he tries to win her love.(4:1, 2a). He takes her from the vineyards away to his palace (4:8a) and continues to try to win her love, amongst his harem of women. But she remains faithful to the shepherd (5:10...). Several times, Solomon tries to win her love with crude flatteries, (7:6-9), but she remains faithful to the shepherd (7:10).



The OT poetry books reflect the people and circumstances of the corresponding time in OT History.

# The Destruction of the Temple

## When & Why

by Athol Walter

It is a well-known fact – or at least, it should be – that the Christian Faith is rooted in history. The same also is true of the Jewish faith recorded in the Old Testament. Yet it seems that Christians generally are blissfully ignorant of many historical facts that underpin their faith. The main details of the Lord's death and Resurrection are generally known, although many may not know the connection the Crucifixion has with the Jewish Passover. Some even know that the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was fifty days after the crucifixion, and that Pentecost is a Jewish feast associated with the beginning of the yearly harvest. But there is much more to it than that, and while it is not essential to know all the historical connections to accept that the Lord "died for my sins", the more we know, the greater is our understanding and appreciation of what God has done for us In Christ.

The Bible itself recounts history in many of its books, and it is not without significance that its historical accuracy has been relentlessly attacked throughout the centuries. The reason for this is simple. If the Bible can be shown to be historically inaccurate, then it can be discarded as a meaningful record that has any claim on intelligent people. Believers can rest assured, however, that wherever archaeology or any other field of learning have uncovered data that bears upon the Scriptures, never once has the Bible been found wanting.

The historical details I want to examine are those connected with God's dealings with Israel and Jerusalem after the Crucifixion. It is difficult, sometimes even

impossible, to assign firm dates to many events recorded in Acts because sufficient information is not given. It is interesting that right from Adam in Genesis to the end of the Gospel period, the Bible gives us definite chronological information. In case you hadn't noticed, in Genesis, the ages of various men at the birth of their first sons is given, but only for those who are in the line of descent to the Messiah. For example, we have ages given for Seth and his descendants but not for Cain and his line. It is possible to build a complete chronological table from Adam to the Lord Jesus. For example, see Appendix 50 in the Companion Bible.

When we move past the records of the earthly ministry of the Lord, however, this chronological detail ceases, and apart from the beginning of Acts, the death of Herod in Acts 12, and then, moving outside the pages of Scripture, the destruction of the Temple and much of Jerusalem in AD 70, it is difficult to give exact or even approximate dates for the events recorded. There are clues, of course, and many scholars have done painstaking work to arrive at dates that may be taken as reasonable guides, although there certainly is no unanimity among them.

Even the date of the Crucifixion is contested. Some say, with great conviction, that the Lord died in AD 29. Others say, with equal conviction, that the Crucifixion was either AD 30, 31 or even 32. In this study, I will go with AD 30, remembering that it is not set in concrete.

The question I want to consider is this. If the destruction of Jerusalem, and particularly the Temple, was to be part of the

punishment for Israel's rejection of her Messiah, and if God set Israel aside as His chosen people just after the Crucifixion, why was not Jerusalem and the Temple destroyed then, say, within ten years, instead of forty years later in AD 70? It really is a simple question, and in my experience, most believers have not faced it, let alone answered it.

First, let us establish that the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple and the city itself was a punishment from God for Israel's rejection and murder of their Messiah. Let me remind you of the points from the several parables we discussed in the previous two issues.

Matt. 21:41. "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end", they replied, "and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants ..."

Matt. 22:7. "The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city."

Matt. 23:37, 38. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left unto you desolate."

Matt. 24:1, 2. "Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. 'Do you see all these things?' he asked. 'I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; everyone will be thrown down.'"

Our knowledge of the secular history of the period is based largely on Josephus' account in his book "The Jewish Wars". I do not have a copy, but the Encyclopedia

# The Destruction of the Temple

Britannica gives the bare bones of the story.

In the fifties and sixties, under several governors, of whom Festus was one, Judea was in a state of unrest. There were a number of rebellions led by various zealous patriots. Matters came to a head in AD 66, when the Jews expelled the Romans from Jerusalem and much of the country. Nero was the emperor at the time, and he sent Vespasian with an army to subdue the country and teach them a lesson.

Nero was killed about this time, and there were several emperors in quick succession, but in AD 69, Vespasian went to Rome and became emperor. He sent his eldest son, Titus, to lead the army in Judea, and in AD 70, they overran Jerusalem. In the ensuing carnage, the Temple was set alight. The gold that lined the inside of parts of the Temple melted in the heat and ran into the cracks between the stones, and the soldiers tore the building apart stone by stone to get the gold, thus fulfilling the Lord's prediction.

It is historical fact that since that time, right to the present day, there has not been a Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, and the Jewish people have not been able to conduct their sacrifices and Temple worship. In the lifetimes of those of us who are older, we have seen the name Israel appear in our atlases again after nearly two thousand years. No Temple there yet, but it will come.

Back to the first century AD. It took the Romans about four years to overcome Jerusalem, during which time terrible sufferings were endured by its inhabitants. Obviously, God used the Romans to carry out His sentence on the people of Israel, as He had used

the Assyrians and Babylonians in earlier times. Now, if we take the four years as a reasonable time table, or even round it out to five, and come back to the Crucifixion, and if the majority view is correct, i.e. that God finished with Israel immediately after they crucified the Lord, we should have seen Jerusalem destroyed, say, by about AD 35. But it was not destroyed then, as we well know. Why not?

The answer is plainly writ on the pages of Scripture for all to see, if they will but look. We read in Luke 23:34 these words, "Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing'". Leave aside for the moment the matter of how the Jews could be ignorant of who the Lord really was. The point is that the Lord said they (i.e. the people of Israel) did not know that they were crucifying their Messiah. Peter re-affirmed this in Acts 3:17 and promised the people that the times of refreshing depended on their repentance. He also told the Sanhedrin in Acts 4:12 that healing (or salvation – it is the same word in Greek) could only be had by the nation in and through the name of Jesus, the despised Nazarene.

The point is that the Lord prayed that His Father would forgive that generation of Israel who did not know the hour of their visitation. Was His prayer answered? If it wasn't, then it is the only prayer of the Lord recorded in the Gospels that was not. Of course it was answered, and the years covered by the Book of Acts is when God answered that prayer and gave that generation of Israel their second chance to accept the lowly Jesus as their Messiah.

Because of this, the threatened destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple was postponed until the Jews of both the Homeland and the Dispersion had the chance to

respond to the preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom. However, as history shows us, and as the parables we considered in the last two instalments also show, they refused the second time, and the King sent His armies and destroyed their city.

Acts 28:25-28 is the cut-off point, not Acts 2. This is where Israel went into her present LO-AMMI condition. (LO-AMMI is Hebrew for 'not my people'. Read Hosea's prophecy.) And it is after this that Paul was commissioned to reveal the truth of a new dispensation, the Dispensation of the Mystery (or Secret) that has nothing to do with Abraham, covenants, Moses' Law or Israel, but is based on a promise of eternal life made by God before time began (Titus 1:1, 2), and in accordance with an election made by God before the foundation of the world.

Brethren, rightly divide the Word of Truth (2 Tim. 2:15), or as Phil. 1:9, 10 says, "abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the Day of Christ."

## **Think on This.**

"It is my deep conviction that the continuous systematic unfolding of the Holy Scriptures, in which their true connection and interdependence, and their literal sense, and historical concrete basis are shown before any figurative or practical application of them is made, is the great need in the teaching and preaching of the present day, and that it is chiefly to the almost exclusively fragmentary, vague, disjointed, *textual* manner in which the Bible is being dealt with that the lamentable lack of depth and backbone in the Christianity of the present day is due."

David Baron: "Types, Psalms and Prophecies." In the Introduction. This book was published in 1906. I am relieved the author was spared a view of the present state of Christianity.

# The Shield of Faith

by Anne Ward

In Ephesians 6: 11-17 Paul instructs us to put on the whole armour of God...."that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil". To quote verse 16:

"Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked".

The word *shield* is the Greek word *thureos*, which means a large door- shaped shield. Since this is the only occurrence of the word in the New Testament, we must go to the Old Testament to gain a deeper understanding of its meaning and how it is being applied in this passage. From this study there emerge a number of themes that provide much depth and richness to our understanding of this verse.

In the OT there are two primary Hebrew words for shield – *magen* and *zinnah*, both used as defensive armour. *Magen* refers to a small shield, often circular in shape. *Zinnah* refers to a large shield, oblong shaped, which covered the whole body. The latter was used by Goliath and was worn by his shield bearer who went before Goliath as he challenged the Israelites (1 Sam 17:7). Paul's instruction in Ephesians to use the large shield appears to indicate the need for such protection (i.e. total covering) against as powerful an enemy as Satan.

The first occurrence of the word *magen* is in Gen 15:1, where God says to Abram...."Fear not Abram, I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward". David uses the word extensively to describe the nature of God's protection and salvation. Following his delivery from Saul, David prays as follows:

"The Lord is my rock....in Him will I trust: He is my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower and my refuge, my saviour;

Thou savest me from violence." (2 Sam, 22: 2-3).

Ps 3:3 - But thou, O Lord, art a shield for me, my glory and the lifter up of mine head.

Ps 84:9 - Behold, our God our shield, and look upon the face of Thine Anointed.

The use of the title "Thine Anointed" provides an obvious linkage to Christ that is confirmed by Zacharias in Luke 1:69 when he uses the phrase "horn of salvation" to prophesy concerning Christ. Thus, we have here another poignant illustration of how the Jehovah of the Old Testament, who saved and preserved His people, is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom we place our trust.

The shield (*magen*) is also linked to trust in His Word as seen in the following verses:

Ps 119:114 - Thou art my hiding place and my shield, I hope in Thy word.

Pr 30:5 Every word of God is pure: He is a shield unto them that put their trust in Him.

The word *zinnah* occurs in a number of passages where we see the development of more themes that provide a rich context for understanding what is being conveyed by the use of the word shield:

Ps 5:11-12 Let all those that put their trust in Thee rejoice....For Thou wilt bless the righteous; with favour wilt Thou compass him as with a shield.

Ps 30:5 For His anger endureth but a moment. In His favour is life.

Ps 91:1-4 He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of The Almighty. I will say unto the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress: My God, in Him will I trust"... He

shall cover thee with His feathers, and under His wings shalt thou trust: His truth shall be thy shield and buckler.

If we look more closely at the word favour and the phrase the secret place of the Most High, we find some very striking parallels to passages in the prison epistles, from which we draw direct teaching.

The word "favour" in the verses quoted above means to be pleased with, conveying delight and acceptance. A similar idea is conveyed in Luke 1:28 when the angel appeared to Mary saying..."Hail, thou that art highly favoured (Greek: *charitoo*), the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women". The same Greek word *charitoo* is found in Ephesians 1:6. Reading from verse 5, we have:

"Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself according to the good pleasure of His will....To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved".

The word accepted is the Greek word *charitoo*. It is from the root *charis*, which means grace, acceptance, favour, pleasure and used, in this case, to convey endowment with special honour.

Just as Jehovah was a shield and protected those who put their trust in Him from their enemies, we have the same protection through the Lord Jesus Christ and this is something that the Lord delights in.

Turning now to the theme of the secret place of the Most High quoted above from Psalm 91, we find the word "secret" is from the Hebrew word *cathar*, which means to hide, by covering. Colossians 3:2-3 reads: Set your affection on things above, not on

# Shield of Faith .....cont from Pg. 7

things on the earth ...For ye are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God."

The word hid is from the Greek *krupto*, which means to conceal by covering; to hide; to keep secret. Reading this in light of what is conveyed in Psalm 91 affords an even richer understanding of these verses, and, comparing scripture with scripture, one can't help notice the similarities between the two passages.

Note once again from Psalm 91 the words..."he that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.....".

So, what can we take from this?

From my experience of my own walk, and in observing others, one of the challenges that we have as believers, is getting our minds around the notion that our calling is a spiritual one. Paul says in Ephesians 6:12 that we wrestle, not with flesh and blood (i.e. earthly enemies), but against principalities and powers, against spiritual wickedness in the heavenly places. To emphasise the point even more, Paul says in Colossians, as quoted above, that we are to set our affection on things above, not on earthly things. Our earthly existence and experience is of flesh and blood, but our calling is to things that are not tangible and beyond our sensory capabilities. Christ alludes to the challenge inherent in this when he said to Thomas in John 20:29...."Thomas, because thou hast seen Me thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed".

Many take promises and blessings given to Israel and try to apply them today. However, we can see from the passages studied above, that

God makes bountiful provision for those who believe and trust in Him, according to the working out of His purpose. His concern and provision for those who put their trust in Him, transcends dispensational boundaries, although the means of provision may vary between dispensations. It is up to us to understand the nature of the provision and apply it in our walk. David's enemies were on the earth, thus the protection given to him and others who put their trust in the Lord was very much in the physical dimension. This is not to say that God does not give us physical protection today. However, the shield of faith, as spoken of in Ephesians, is set in the context of protection against enemies in a spiritual battle, which takes place in the spiritual realm and has a spiritual inheritance. It is in this context that God is emphasizing our need and His provision. We should therefore take heed.

In summary, from the passages studied above, we can identify four themes associated with the Shield of Faith: protection, trust in God's Word, favour and a secret dwelling place. These themes cross dispensational boundaries, although their specific application is within the context of each dispensational calling. Applying this to our dispensation, the Shield of Faith is the Word of God, which became flesh in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Concerning our spiritual armour, we are told in Ephesians – above all – to take the shield of faith as an appropriate defense against our (unseen) spiritual enemies. God provides us with additional spiritual protection by hiding our lives in a secret dwelling place, which we know is with Christ, at the right hand of God. Whilst I don't fully comprehend the meaning of this latter assurance, I am left with no doubt concerning the importance that God places on His Word, not

only as a source of instruction, but as a means of protection.

## Letters to the Editor

.....cont from Pg. 2

for Israel. I also think that your comments about the seventh commandment prove my point. If the reward for obeying it no longer applies, perhaps we need to ask why that is so. Surely it is because the commandments do not apply to us now.

I have enjoyed our discussion, Duncan, but perhaps we have reached a stopping point. We are starting to repeat ourselves.

Yours in Him, Athol.

From Martin Walter.

Dear Editor/Dad,

I am writing in response to your article 'Is God Just?' as it raised a number of questions.

I would like to acknowledge the many years of 'training in righteousness' that I have had from you.

You state that Paul's quote of Psalm 51:4 is different to the OT. But this depends on the translation you use. In fact, the NIV says of God "that you will prevail when you judge". (Rom. 3:4) My commentary says that the Greek word is ambiguous and can have either meaning, depending on whether you think it is in the passive or middle voice. I would prefer to accept the translation that was faithful to the original OT, as that is a valid translation of Paul's quote. Can you give reasons why you choose a reading different to the OT that Paul was quoting from?

Based on your translation, you raise the idea that we can judge God's righteousness. If this is correct, then I think that it is important to understand how we are allowed to judge God and what

.....cont Pg. 11

# When did the Church for today begin?

By Pastor Santiago Chua, Manila, The Philippines. (Pastor Chua is President of the Open Bible Fellowship of The Philippines)

The greatest question for a serious student of the Scriptures is to determine from among the many prevailing views, the historical beginning of the Church for us today. There are those who hold that the Church for today began historically at Pentecost (Acts 2), while some, called Mid-Acts Dispensationalists, believe that the Church began when the Apostle Paul was called. They also believe that the teachings for the Church are to be found in all 14 of Paul's epistles. In other words, all one has to do to know about God's instructions for the Church today is to carefully study all the epistles of Paul. These are Galatians, Hebrews, I & II Thessalonians, I & II Corinthians, Romans, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, Titus and I & II Timothy.

Those who hold the view that the Church historically began at Pentecost, say that the Book of Acts is the story book of early Christianity, and God has given us the Book of Acts as the PATTERN of Christian testimony, missionary effort etc., a pattern which we do well to follow. So what message then shall we preach? Shall we call men "to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins" and offer them Messiah's return and the establishment of the Kingdom, as Peter did (Acts 2:8; 3:19-21)? Or shall we proclaim the economic program presented in Acts 2 and 4 and have all things common? Again, if we should use Acts as a pattern, can we faithfully carry it out as to miracles and healings, and could we expect Divine intervention like the Apostles did? All of those who believe that Pentecost is the beginning of the Church, should claim to possess the signs and gifts, yet the evidence is not very convincing.

Coming to the Mid-Acts Dispensationalists, we must distinguish between two groups. One group believes that the Church for today historically began at Acts 9 when the Apostle Paul was converted, while the other group believes that the Church began at Acts 13, when Paul was sent on his first missionary journey. Before we can thoroughly refute all their claims, let us first consider some of the givens regarding the position of the Mid-Acts groups.

Both groups agree that the hope of the Church is the so-called Rapture (1 Thess. 4); that all believers shall be in Heaven; that the Church is different from Israel, for Israel's hope is an earthly Kingdom to be established during the second coming of the Lord; that Israel was set aside at either Acts 9 or 13; and that all the epistles of Paul are the true instructions for today. They also agree that Paul's epistles are divided into the pre-prison epistles, viz. Galatians, Hebrews, I & II Thessalonians, I & II Corinthians and Romans; and the prison epistles, viz. Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, Titus and I & II Timothy.

If we carefully consider the relationship of the letters of Paul to the history of Acts, we can see that the pre-prison epistles were written during the Acts period, while the prison epistles were written after the close of the Book of Acts.

Let us now look at the validity of the claims of the Mid-Acts brethren. Firstly, the hope of the Church which is the so-called rapture. (1 Thess. 4:13-18) They claim that when this particular event happens, members of the Church for today would then be taken to Heaven by the Lord.

However, a key word occurs in v. 17. This word in the Greek is "apantesis" and is translated "to meet", and it is used only four times in the whole Bible. These occurrences are:- Matt. 25:1 and 6; Acts 28:15; I Thess. 4:17. In the three references apart from I Thess. 4, a clear direction is shown. The people who came out to meet someone are seen returning to wherever they came from. Applying this rule to I Thess. 4:17, we only have to ask ourselves "who meets whom", and we will be able to determine where these people went after the meeting in the air.

Mid-Acts people claim that after the meeting in the air, the Lord will take the believers who were raised, and those who remained, to Heaven. This can only be true if the one who meets the believers is the Lord. But by carefully reading the verse, we will see that it says "then we ... shall be caught up ... to meet the Lord" in the air. In other words, it is the believers who will meet the Lord, and after the meeting, shall accompany the Lord to the earth, where He will establish the promised Kingdom here on earth at His second coming, also called the "the Day of the Lord". Because the believers who meet the Lord came from the earth, their hope therefore is an earthly one, not heavenly. This is also the idea of Gal. 3:7, 9, 29; 4:24-26. It is very clear that believers of Galatia, saved during the Acts period, were promised "that they will be blessed WITH FAITHFUL ABRAHAM (Gal. 3:9) and are heirs according to the promise (v. 29). These references are all saying that where Abraham will be, they will be there also, and will be heirs also of the same promise given to Abraham. We know that Abraham

# **When did the Church for today begin?**

will not be in Heaven, but in the earthly Kingdom, thus the Galatian believers will be there with him, not in Heaven as claimed by the Mid-Acts brethren.

The covenants, both old and new, are for the people of Judah and Israel. (Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 8:8-12) During the Acts period, the New Covenant, or Testament, is the program that is being implemented by God through the apostles, including Paul (II Cor. 3:6), showing to us that the early ministry of Paul and the pre-prison epistles that he wrote, are related to the administration of the New Covenant made solely with the House of Judah and the House of Israel. This is not for the Church for today.

All the contents of the Book of Hebrews are definitely related to Israel, particularly to the Aaronic and Melchizedek priesthood, the Law of Moses and the New Covenant, the animal sacrifices – which are contrasted to the One Sacrifice of Christ and the ministries of angels. All these things are saying that the Book of Hebrews is truly Jewish in purpose and teaching.

Romans is the last book written by Paul during the Acts period. The ministry presented here is Jew first, then the Greeks, which means that if the message presented to the Jewish synagogues was rejected, then Paul would go to the Gentiles. The reason for turning to the Gentiles was only to provoke Israel to jealousy (Rom. 1:16; 11:11, 14). This shows that during the Acts period, the Jewish nation had not yet been set aside, for the very reason that they are still being “provoked to jealousy”. You cannot provoke someone to jealousy, if that someone is already absent.

Consistently during the Acts period, the people of Israel, its

miraculous endowments (Acts 2:1-4; 9:36-41; 19:11-12; 28:3-9), and its hope (Acts 1:6; 26:6, 7; 28:20) were all still the object of the ministry of the twelve Apostles, and also that of the Apostle Paul. This is proof that during the whole period of Acts, from the opening of the book right up to the end, the hope of Israel is still there until finally God sets them aside at Acts 28:28. From that point on, the salvation of God is sent to the Gentiles apart from Israel.

It was then, after the pronouncement of Acts 28:28, that God saw fit to give unto the Apostle Paul a new set of revelations regarding “the Mystery” (Eph. 3:3, 9), which was kept secret since the beginning of the world. The Hope of this secret is in “heavenly places (Eph. 1:3), and its citizenship is in Heaven (Phil. 3:20). It must also be noted that this revelation was given ONLY to the Apostle Paul (Eph. 3:1-9).

If we truly desire to know God’s instructions for the Church which is His Body, then we have to take and study diligently the prison epistles written by Paul, the epistles written after the close of the Book of Acts. Indeed, to be approved of God today, we must take heed of what II Tim. 2:15 is saying - “rightly divide the Word of Truth” - in order that we may distinguish the things that differ and see clearly God’s Dispensation of the Mystery revealed to and through the Apostle Paul alone.

If we rightly divide the pre-prison epistles of Paul from his prison epistles, then and only then, can we truly appreciate the joy of understanding His gracious will for today. I know, because I was once a member of the Mid-Acts groups, not only as a believer, but as a pastor for 11 years. Throughout all those years, I thought our position was indeed the right one, until I was bothered by Gal. 3:7-9, where it is

clearly stated that “they which be of faith, shall be blessed WITH FAITHFUL ABRAHAM”. Once again, if we only open our eyes, we shall see that this is saying that where Abraham will be, those believers of that time will be there with him. We know also that in Gen. 12, God promised Abraham a piece of land, commonly called “the Promised Land” in theology. This is where the Kingdom promised to them, and also during David’s lifetime, is going to be established. (II Sam. 7)

Indeed, if we can only forget all that we have been taught, and consider what the rightly divided Word teaches about the contents of the pre-prison epistle of Paul as they relate to God’s program for His chosen nation, the people of Israel, then we will see the removal of seeming contradictions in the Scriptures, and allow the real purpose and teaching of God for today in Paul’s prison epistles to show through. It is in these epistles that we find the REAL PATTERN for the ministry of the Church which is His Body (Eph. 1:22, 23), whose sphere of blessing is in the Heavens (Eph. 1:3), to the praise and glory of His grace.

The hope of Israel is now in abeyance, and it will stay that way until the end of the Dispensation of the Mystery, which end is the appearing or manifestation in glory of the members of the Body of Christ, the Church for today (Col. 3:4).

This article is written with the prayer that those who are at present in the same condition as I was before, may be enlightened to see the beauty of the new revelation as given to the Apostle Paul and contained in the seven prison epistles. My prayers for you are like those of Paul in Eph. 1:17-19, and also that you will continue on to rejoice in the riches of His grace now and in the ages to come (Eph. 2:7 & 1:7).

# A Pilgrim's Progress in Russia

## Vladimir Loria's Story.

I learned the Good News of Christ in the end of 1979. You may know that adult sheep are very short-sighted, which explains why they crowd together in a flock. But young lambs see well, therefore they can escape from the flock, but in doing so, they expose themselves to the teeth of the predator. So, to limit the activity of the young lambs and save their lives, the shepherds had to break one of the lamb's legs, thus stopping them from escaping from the flock. Later, as the sheep became short-sighted, the broken leg was restored. The temporary breaking of a leg which limited the activity of the lamb, resulted in the ultimate saving of its life.

Something similar occurred with me. As a student, I was very active. But my leg was broken and I had to stay home. I was limited in my movement. I had never liked the Soviet totalitarian system, so to while away the time while I was stuck at home, I listened to different western radio stations. Quite accidentally, I came across a Christian radio station. I started to listen to it on a regular basis and so believed in Christ.

At that time in the Soviet Union, the Bible was under an interdiction, so before Perestroyka, the only way I could get Bible teaching was to listen to these broadcasts, and I

learned many things. I did find the Baptist Church in Moscow, but I had no desire to go there, as it was supervised by the KGB. Once the Soviet time passed, we then had choices about where to worship, and it seemed to me at that time that the Plymouth Brothers meeting most corresponded with the Bible truth. I studied the works of Darby, Scofield and Macintosh. I regularly visited this assembly and it was a good school

Then a new person came to the assembly who received many various Christian publications from different countries. Among these publications were some Berean editions, and he started to understand a little what they were teaching. He talked to me about these things. I was the oldest brother in the assembly and did not want to say anything to the others until I understood it better myself.

I started to look deeply into what he was saying, and in the end, I understood that rightly dividing the Word is the true thing. I accepted this principle and then started to tell the other members about it. As a result of this, there was a split in the meeting, part of the group accepting the Mystery, while the rest of the group did not. Those of us who had accepted the Mystery truth, separated from the others and formed our own fellowship. This occurred on March 7<sup>th</sup> 1995.



Now there are in Moscow six persons who clearly understand and accept the Mystery. Also we have 5-6 persons who know about The Mystery but do not have clear vision, understanding and corresponding practice. We do not have any organized group or regular common meetings. We communicate on a personal level visiting each other, or by phone, or by e-mail. Usually, on our meetings we exchange opinions about any problems or articles. Also each of us research those or other questions, dispatch their conclusions to other members, and after that we place the results of researches and discussions on our website ([www.mgoll.narod.ru](http://www.mgoll.narod.ru) which is in Russian).

Please give our greetings and love to your group. In His Grace and Love with all of you,

Vladimir.

(Some of Vladimir's personal details were in the last edition of Spiritual Blessings.)

## Letters to the Editor

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standards we are entitled to use when judging Him.

- Are we allowed to question whether He is righteous, or should we only question the nature of His righteousness?
- What standards are we entitled to use when questioning God's righteousness?

When referring to Romans 3:20-22 you state that: "Notice that in the above verses, before we ever

get to the righteousness which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all etc, we have "But now the righteousness (or justification) of God without the law is manifested ..." It is plainly and gloriously true that Romans 3 states that the believer is justified (or made righteous) by faith and not by works, but it is just as clearly stated that the Gospel justifies God first."

While I agree that Paul is concerned to demonstrate that God is just, I think that the 'righteousness of God' that Paul is talking about in v. 20 is that righteousness that we receive from God by faith in Jesus Christ, as he goes on to explain in v. 21.

Martin Walter.

Editor's note: It is obvious that Martin is my son. I want to assure .....cont Back Pg.

# Letters to the Editor .....cont from Pg. 11

readers, however, that his letter is not a setup in anyway. Martin has written on his own initiative, and the issues he raises are his genuine concerns.

Editor's response: Thank you for your letter, Martin. In answer to your question, I must say that I haven't deliberately chosen a reading of Rom. 3:4 that is different from Psalm 51:4. The translations I usually use translate the verse as I quoted. I checked the NIV and found that it too translates the quote in Rom. 3:4 differently to how it translates Psalm 51:4. The Psalm says, "so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge."

The last part of the verse in the Romans quote is, as you say in your letter, "... that you will prevail when you judge." The Greek of the Textus Receptus and Nestlè's text are identical, so that part of it comes down to a choice of the different voices you mentioned. I confess I must rely on translators for that.

I concede that the righteousness of God in Rom. 3:20 is referring to the righteousness imputed to the believer, but I believe there is still sufficient evidence in the passage that Paul also refers to the righteousness that is God's, referring particularly to the fact that in providing justification by faith, He has acted justly and has not impugned His absolute holiness in any way. V. 25 states the connection between the provision of Christ as the atoning and redeeming sacrifice and the passing over by God of sins committed by earlier generations. It is also apparent from reading the whole chapter that the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus allows God to act justly in condemning any who refuse to accept the offered salvation.

It seems to me that vv. 25 and 26 in the NIV state my case rather well: "God presented him (Christ) as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. HE DID THIS TO DEMONSTRATE HIS JUSTICE, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished - HE DID IT TO DEMONSTRATE HIS JUSTICE AT THE PRESENT TIME, SO AS TO BE JUST and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus."

Why does God demonstrate that in His method of providing salvation He has acted justly? Obviously, it must be important to Him that in this area, if not in any other, it is clear to all involved, that nothing has been done in an

underhanded or unjust way. I think that God is clearly saying to us all, and particularly to the heavenly hosts, "Look carefully. Examine what I have done. Nothing has been swept under the carpet. Every satisfaction for sin that My Holiness demands has been fully met by the death of My beloved Son. No one who is finally condemned will be judged unjustly."

And I believe the most important point of all is that God will be able to say to Satan, "You have been justly condemned, because My Son, the Word who became flesh, and was on a lower plane than you, was faithful and obedient. You need not have sinned."



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Alternate Sundays 10:00am  
Redbank Plains High School.  
(07) 3297 1981

### Sydney:

3rd Sunday of each month.  
Lunch 12:30pm.  
Study 1:30pm.

Community Hall  
104 Galston Rd  
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(02) 4996 4455

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Every Monday.  
7:30pm  
34 Aroona St  
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