

Scripture Truth



Inside:

Fathers!
Demoralisation
A wake-up call
Alpha People: Lydia

The pearl of great price
Jehoshaphat and the little ones
How should we respond
to God's revelation?

SCRIPTURE TRUTH

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Contents

Jehoshaphat and the little ones	29	How should we respond to God's revelation?	45
A wake-up call	30	The pearl of great price	50
Fathers!	34	Alpha People: Lydia	55
Demoralisation	40	Paul's exchange (poem)	Back cover

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Jehoshaphat and the little ones

Jehoshaphat and the entire kingdom of Judah were in dire trouble, and it was partly Jehoshaphat's own fault for having allied with king Ahab of Israel (2 Chronicles 18; 20:1-2). But then he had listened to the voice of the prophet and evidently repented (unlike his father, who had put a reprimanding prophet in chains – ch. 19; cp. 16:10). However the divine protection (see 17:10) was withdrawn, and Judah was menaced by an enormous coalition of Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites (all of them Israel's relatives), who had advanced round the end of the Dead Sea into the land of Judah (20:1-2).

Jehoshaphat's response would not commend itself to modern military strategists. He proclaimed a fast, called the entire people of Judah to an assembly in the forecourt of the temple, and prayed.

They were all called, including the little ones. One can imagine how troubled they, too, felt at this solemn gathering. They heard Jehoshaphat's prayer. They heard him plead God's promises, God's past instructions that had forbidden Israel to attack these nations, and they heard his confession, "We have no might against this great company... but our eyes are upon thee" (v.12).

Then a prophet named Jahaziel gave God's directions (vv.14-17). They were to advance towards the enemy but then to "stand still and see the salvation of the LORD" (v.17). What God has done once, He can do again (cp. Exodus 14:13). This time, however, they praised God *before* the deliverance (2 Chronicles 20:19-22; contrast Exodus 15). And when they began to praise, the downfall of the enemy also began (2 Chronicles 20:22ff). And once the rout was complete and the enemy despoiled, they gave thanks in the valley of blessing and in Jerusalem (v.26ff). "And the fear of the LORD came upon all kingdoms (v.29).

We might consider ourselves in an emergency too, no doubt partly of our own making. Are the dynamics of obedience, prayer, praise, and dependence weakening? Are we concerned about the little ones? Learn from Jehoshaphat!

THEO BALDERSTON

A wake-up call

Donald Hill

I was brought up in a mining community where an alarm clock was an essential item in every miner's home. If you were late arriving for work you had to turn round and head for home – coal was being wound up the shaft and empty coal tubs sent down!

How often we need a WAKE-UP CALL in our Christian lives! How easy it is to carve out for ourselves a comfortable lifestyle and neglect the things of God. We sing, but soon forget, the words of the hymn:

“Lord we are thine, bought by thy blood,
Once the poor guilty slaves of sin...”¹

We often consider the wonderful truths communicated by Paul to believers at Ephesus: our spiritual blessings in the heavenlies; our being chosen, predestinated, redeemed, and sealed by the Holy Spirit, and raised and seated in the heavenly places in Christ; and the fact that we are a habitation of God through the Spirit.

But even the *Ephesians* needed a WAKE-UP CALL. “Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light” (5:14, KJV).

In an earlier day Elijah was elated when God gave him victory over the Baal-worshippers on mount Carmel. But when his life was threatened by the wicked queen Jezebel he fled many miles south to Beersheba, and then on to mount Horeb on the Sinai peninsula. God's question to him was, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” (cp. 1 Kings 19:9) What about the many who had witnessed the event on mount Carmel and publicly recognised that Elijah's God was the true God? (18:39) Weren't *they* in need of encouragement and support from the prophet who had run away?

How often do I – do we – escape from our privileges and responsibilities?

Jonah is a further example of someone who ran away. Instead of travelling east to Nineveh with a warning message from God, he turned westwards; and we find him taking four downward steps. First of all he went *down* to the seaport, Joppa. Then, having paid his fare, he went *down* into the ship sailing to

How often we need a WAKE-UP CALL! How easy it is to carve out for ourselves a comfortable lifestyle

¹ James George Deck, 1808-1884.

*Remember! Downward steps
take us away from our responsibilities*

Tarshish (1:3). Then he went *down* again to a lower deck where he fell asleep (1:5) – only to be awakened by the heathen crew when the fierce storm arose. And as the storm continued to rage, he was thrown overboard and went “down” into the sea (1:15), where he was swallowed by the great fish. The God who had prepared the fish also heard the prayer of Jonah (who no doubt prayed as never before!), and delivered him. Jonah, once spat out on dry land, was recommissioned, and went to warn Nineveh, a city of 120,000 inhabitants, of impending judgment (2:10; 3:2ff; 4:11). The king and citizens repented, and the city was spared (3:5-10).

Remember! There are downward steps which take us away from our responsibilities. Do we need a WAKE-UP CALL in relation to our gospel responsibilities? God “commandeth all men everywhere to repent because he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness” (Acts 17:30-31).

Timothy needed wake-up calls; we find them in both of Paul’s epistles to him. “Neglect not the gift that is in thee” (1 Timothy 4:14); and, “Stir up the gift” (2 Timothy 1:6). Here was a young man who needed to take up his responsibilities. Paul was shortly to depart this life, and Timothy was needed to fill up the ranks. Similarly, Joshua followed Moses and God promised to be with him (Joshua 1:5); and Elisha was raised up to take the place of Elijah (1 Kings 19:19). And this is true in our day. God will always have those who take up His service in the place of those who are departing.

Many were the unheeded WAKE-UP CALLS issued by God through the prophets to both the kingdoms of Israel. The ten tribes were taken captive by the Assyrians and scattered amongst the nations as God’s punishment for turning to idols; golden calves had been set up in Bethel and Dan (1 Kings 12:28f; 2 Kings 17:6-14; Hosea 11:1ff). Similarly with Judah; its failure to heed the many wake-up calls ultimately led to the Babylonian captivity.

And the apostle John has a rather similar WAKE-UP CALL for us too. “Keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21). In our case an idol is not necessarily sinful but may be some interest which displaces the things of God in our lives. Who or what comes first? My family interest? A hobby? Some other interest?

In the ways of God, Judah’s captivity in Babylon lasted for seventy years, after which time He raised up Cyrus, king of Persia, to facilitate the return of Jews from Babylon for the rebuilding of the temple. Cyrus also ordered the release

of the looted temple furniture and furnishings (see Ezra 1:2f, 7-11). More than forty thousand Jews packed their bags in Babylon and returned to Jerusalem as a result of the decree of Cyrus (Ezra 2:64f).

But even they needed a WAKE-UP CALL! They were more concerned about their own interests than those of God. The prophet Haggai was raised up by God to administer this call. His recorded prophesies consist of two chapters containing only thirty-eight verses. But what powerful and stirring messages from God they are!

“Thus saith the Lord of hosts, CONSIDER YOUR WAYS” (Haggai 1:5). Five times in the book we have the word, “consider” (1:5,7; 2:15,18). They had built houses for themselves and embellished them with panels! But they had neglected the re-building of the temple (1:4); and about sixteen years had elapsed since their return (compare Ezra 1:1 with Haggai 1:1).

“Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house,” was the LORD’s command (1:8). It is noteworthy that the sons of the governor and high priest were addressed (1:1). Is the Lord appealing to younger men and women with energy? Remember: there weren’t any power-tools, powered transport, or cranes – it was all hard work. But both Zerubbabel and Joshua, sons of the governor and high priest respectively, responded to the call along with the rest of the remnant who had returned. The building work began. The temple was rebuilt and furnished (Ezra 6:14f). It was not as majestic as that built by king Solomon, but once more there was a place for the people to respond to the true God.

After the call of Zacchaeus, there were those in the company of the Lord Jesus who thought that since He was on his way to Jerusalem He was about to establish His earthly kingdom (Luke 19:11). Not so! The cross was a divine necessity. The Lord Jesus was here in this world as God’s Lamb to deal with the question of sin. He was about to be lifted up on a cross of shame. His resurrection would follow, together with His ascension. And once the Holy Spirit had been given at Pentecost, the church age would commence and the followers of the Lord Jesus would be actively engaged in His service in this world.

And so the Lord instructed them about this in the parable of the minas (verses 12ff). This concerns a nobleman leaving for a far county where in due course

More than forty thousand Jews returned to Jerusalem but even they needed a WAKE-UP CALL!

he would receive a kingdom and then return. Ten servants are each given ten minas with instructions to trade for their absent master until his return.

Salespeople who trade in kitchens, windows, cars, etc., are no doubt rewarded if they prove to be good at their work. And *we* are left here as believers empowered by the Holy Spirit to trade for our absent Lord. “Ten” in Scripture speaks of responsibility.

On returning, the nobleman required his servants to give an account of their service during His absence, rewarding those who had been faithful and served Him well (verses 15ff). Unfaithfulness was condemned. The day will dawn when all our lives as believers will be reviewed, and our faithfulness or otherwise will determine our place in that kingdom-day when the rightful King, the Lord Jesus, will reign. The parable is a WAKE-UP CALL to *us*!

Lessons for us in 2016

- 1 The Lord Jesus has left every believer on His Name in this world to serve Him during His absence. He is the living, ascended Head of His church. We are all members of His body, intended to act for Him and as directed by Him (Romans 12:4-8). Just as the human body is made up of different members and performs different services, so, too, we are not all given the same service to do (1 Corinthians 12:14-18). The question raised by Saul of Tarsus in Acts 9:6 (KJV) is, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” Do I need a WAKE -UP CALL?
- 2 The rebuilding programme in Jerusalem required physical energy on the part of those who returned from Babylon. Going to the mountain to fell trees, cut them into planks and transport these to the building site was hard work! Today, amongst other things, we need spiritual energy to enable us to
 - *worship* in the Spirit (Philippians 3:3),
 - *witness* in the power of the Spirit (Acts 4:8),
 - *walk* in the power of the Spirit (Galatians 5:25), and
 - conduct our *warfare* in the power of the Spirit (Zechariah 4:6).
- 3 In Romans 16 we have the names of men and women who served the Lord in their day. Some laboured; and some laboured *much*!

To be for Thee where thou hast been,
until we reach Thee in that scene
where Thou wilt own us Thine.²

² T. Porter.

Fathers!

David Anderson

This truly instructive article should be read by all parents and grandparents! It is a précis of a Truth for Today talk on Premier Radio (www.truthfortoday.org),

Introduction

“Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4, NKJV).

This text occurs in the practical section of this Letter, that begins at 4:17 with the words, “This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind.” Paul was urging the Ephesians to be different in lifestyle from the rest of society, a call which also addresses us in twenty-first-century, post-Christian Britain, with all its secular ideas, norms, and practices.

Not to do so is inconsistent with our profession of Christ as Saviour and Lord. “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called” (4:1). Throughout chapters 4-6 Paul explains how to live up to our heavenly calling in all spheres of life: in the world of mankind, in church, in our families, and in the workplace. In other words, belief governs behaviour. But in addition, and more than ever before, Christian families nowadays have a unique opportunity to demonstrate that Christianity works!

Christian family relationships

The immediate context of Ephesians 6:4 is relationships within families. It starts with husbands and wives in 5:22-33. It concludes with children and parents in 6:1-4. Even though he quotes from the Old-Testament Law in verses 3-4, Paul’s emphasis is on what is freely offered to others by, and not on what is demanded from, each family member. We are under grace, not law.

The NIV [2011] gives “parents” as a marginal translation for Ephesians 6:4; and since there is no separate exhortation to mothers the exhortation would seem to apply equally to them! Also, unless children can see a proper husband/wife relationship being displayed in their parents, they are unlikely to see that there is any good reason why they should obey them. Specifically for me as a father, if my children do not see that I love my wife, then can I truly expect them to reverence me? Likewise, if they don’t see my wife submitting to me as is fitting in the Lord, the likelihood is that they will not submit either.

In Genesis 1:26-27, God made man in His image and after His likeness: “male and female He created them.” A man is joined to his wife by marriage to become one flesh (2:24). They complement each other in order to reflect God’s image and likeness – both are needed for the reflection to “work”. With Adam and Eve, God went on to establish the family unit. He commanded them to “be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:28).

He also made these family relationships for our mutual benefit: husband and wife; parents and children; father and children; mother and children. However, soon after creation Adam and Eve sinned. Sadly, the entrance of sin into the world also marred family relationships. A sobering experience of parenthood is that the principle of sin soon manifests itself in every baby! Yes, it has been well said that, because of sin within us, each of us now has the tendency to move away from God’s ideals for family life. This is what makes these exhortations in Ephesians 5:22 - 6:4 (and again in Colossians 3:18-21) so necessary. A man can neglect to love his wife. A wife may think that she does not need to submit to her husband. A father can so easily provoke his children by lording his authority over them. And children do not always obey their parents.

On the positive side, believers possess a new nature which wants to obey God – and Paul urges us to “put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind” (Ephesians 4:22-23). We have been made new in the attitude of our minds in order to *act* – not only to put off the old self, but to put on the new self. We have learned of Christ’s sinless life and we have been taught by Him. This is practical



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*A man is joined
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“work”*



godliness, called here “the truth as it is in Jesus” (see verses 20-21).

The God-given role of the father in family relationships

Through Jesus Christ, God’s Son, the true and essential nature of God has been revealed: “God is love” (1 John 4:8). Love permeates the “family life” of God from eternity. And the Son came from heaven to make the Father’s name and love known to believers (John 17:6 & 26). Now the name “Father” introduces us to the Person in the Godhead who originated everything. “There is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist” (1 Corinthians 8:6, ESV).

Ephesians 3:15 states that the real meaning of fatherhood is derived from God the Father, “of whom every family in the heavens and on earth is named” (Darby Trans.). And therefore the real meaning of family life is derived from God the Father. When (in 2:10) Malachi challenged his people with the question, “Have we not all one Father?”, he was stating that fathers and families reflect God’s image and likeness – because he adds, “Has not one God created [every one of] us?” (NKJV) Yes, God is the father of every person in the world, in the sense that He created each – whether they are believers, or agnostics, or atheists. “We are God’s offspring” (Acts 17:28, NIV). Family life is the basic social structure in the world wherein love is manifested and experienced.

The Amplified Bible expands Ephesians 3:15. “That Father from Whom all fatherhood¹ takes its title and derives its name.” That is, fatherhood and family have no meaning to mankind other than that bestowed by the Creator upon them. In other words,

¹ The word for “family” in this verse is closely akin to the word for “father”.



The real meaning of fatherhood is derived from God the Father



Family life is the basic social structure in the world wherein love is manifested and experienced



a father is the progenitor of his family and his children are his offspring. A family takes its character from its father and he is its figurehead. “Father” sets the standards by which he wants his family to live, and he sets the tone for how family life operates. Without a father in a family – or the active involvement of a father in a family – family life inevitably suffers. It does not function in the way God intended. Sadly, there are many situations nowadays where fathers are either unknown, or absent themselves from participation in family life. In a one-parent family where there is godliness, the promise can be claimed, “In You the fatherless finds mercy” (Hosea 14:3). But where there is the view that father is unnecessary and that mum can well manage the family without him, the result is dysfunctional families.

All Christian fathers should be like God the Father. They should manifest His nature and His character. They should love as He loves, forgive as He forgives, be pitiful as He is pitiful, be compassionate as He is compassionate, care for their children as He cares for His children, and be merciful as He is merciful. But they should also abhor sin as He abhors sin, in whatever shape or size it manifests itself in their children. They should give wise guidance, and should do good to their children in the same way that God does with *His* children (Ephesians 5:1). Luke 15:11-32 presents Him as the loving Father, who yearns to bless His children, who has provided the best position (i.e., sonship) in His home, and the best out of His treasury store for them.

Ephesians 6:4 requires a father to be diligent in all his responsibilities as head of his family. Again, the expanded meaning of the verse given in the Amplified Bible is helpful. “Fathers, do not irritate and provoke your children to anger [do not exasperate them to resentment], but rear them [tenderly] in the training and discipline and the counsel and admonition of the Lord.” The parallel passage on family-life issues in Colossians 3 ends similarly, “Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged” (v.21, NKJV). The reason why provocation of children by fathers is out of place in Christian families is to prevent them becoming discouraged, or turned-off from the Christian way of life. If a father copies his heavenly Father in all of his dealings with his children, they will be encouraged, for they will experience a father’s love in all its reality.

What fathers should *not* do

Fathers should not provoke their children to anger. To provoke is to antagonise. It is to set out deliberately to arouse anger or cause unnecessary distress. If the provocation becomes habitual, either of these may lead eventually to embitterment and resentment. Rather, fathers should want the best for their

children, and temper their interactions with their children accordingly. Therefore, fathers should be neither commanding their children like bullying sergeant majors, nor over-demanding of them so as to discourage them.

Above all, fathers need to ensure that their behaviour towards their children is not hypocritical. Children readily perceive father's inconsistencies: between pious professions in public and/or church life and very different attitudes at home with his family! This is most likely if father doesn't play an active role in family life. Fathers should also avoid a legalistic approach to the practice of Christian family life, where lifestyle issues become merely, "we don't do this or that because we believe in Jesus". Where godly reasons can be, and are, given, the children will usually respect them. But they will most likely be turned off from the Faith (and even begin to resent the Lord) where restrictive, meaningless legalism dominates family life. Such legalistic attitudes invariably back-fire upon parents. As children grow up, they generally find themselves unable to keep up these kinds of restrictive lifestyles.

What fathers *should* do

Fathers should bring their children up in the training and admonition of the Lord. Paul is not implying that discipline is unnecessary. The final part of the verse makes clear how necessary discipline is in family life. All of us were children once. We all know that childhood, with its inherent immaturity and eagerness to throw off restraint, needs parental, especially fatherly, restraint and constraint. Children are full of natural life. Their Adamic nature is ready to mischievously assert itself. Youths have many ill-conceived ideas which subsequently lead to wrong actions, and can eventually lead to ungodly lifestyles.

Discipline is the constituent part of fatherhood for counteracting all of these kinds of things. On the one side there is "nurture", or training – positive instruction in correct ways of living. Positive, because there's great potential with children. "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6). Training means showing what is right by practical demonstration. Sometimes a father achieves this by things which are absent from his life, when he is compared with men of the world. It is usually what he does not do or say, and where he does not go. For example, children will readily notice that father does not swear, etc.

Our children are our precious possession committed to us for only a few short years. And nurture and training primarily means instructing them in the Scriptures, so that they might come to a living, personal knowledge of the God of the Scriptures and the Christ of the Scriptures. Children should receive this instruction in the Scriptures and in personal praying in a variety of ways

(though especially through *systematic* ways: children thrive on routines); but they should hear their father, daily if possible, reading the Scriptures in a way in which they can understand them, and praying for his family. Compare Deuteronomy 6:6f.

“Nurture” is one side. On the other side the verse includes “admonition” – reproof where there is any wrong, even chastening, where that is required; warning of the consequences of such action); and following this by urging his children along right paths in life (see Hebrews 12:5-11). However the final phrase of Ephesians 6:4, “...of the Lord”, is all-important. Everything a father does should reflect the fact that he himself, as a disciple, is trained by the Lord. What he requires his children to do, he must always do himself. He must practise what he preaches. Any discipline or admonition of his children should be in accordance with the godly principle, “Whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality” (Colossians 3:23-25). By following this principle fathers will exercise discipline that’s both measured and appropriate for their children.

What about us fathers today?

All of us will have had real-life family experiences in which fathers have indeed provoked their children to wrath. So, yes, it still happens, and fathers must seek grace from God to ensure that it is not an on-going feature of family life. Then, if slip ups do occur, there will be no permanent damage to these precious relationships.

Overall, Christian fathers should model themselves on God the Father and demonstrate His kind of love in their behaviour towards their children.



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*Children should
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Demoralisation

The case of David

Theo Balderston

“And David said in his heart, I shall surely now perish one day by the hand of Saul” (1 Samuel 27:1, RV). This was demoralisation. He said it “in his heart.” This means (a) that he didn’t tell anyone else; but (b) that there was something deliberate about this inward thought. The heart in the OT is the seat of the will (e.g. Genesis 27:41; Psalm 14:1; Jeremiah 17:9). Of course David didn’t apostatise from his saving faith in God and His covenant (as we will see). But he seems to have taken the decision not to rely on God any longer as his protection, to live the life of faith no longer. Instead he would do the humanly prudent thing, and seek refuge with Saul’s enemies, the Philistines, on the calculation that they wouldn’t be intending to do Saul a good turn by handing him over. But what he “said in his heart” involved a practical denial that God would fulfil the divine promise inherent in his anointing – that he would be king (1 Samuel 13:14; 16:13).

David’s decision to defect to Gath (27:2) might astound the armchair Christian. Just in the previous chapter God had given him a resounding moral victory over Saul, such as no human stratagem could have contrived. The Ziphites had betrayed David’s whereabouts to Saul; but David, in order to prove (for a second time – see 24:4ff!) that he was no threat whatsoever to Saul, had sneaked into his military encampment, stolen his spear and water jug, and then retreated to a safe distance to prove to Saul that he (David) had just passed up the perfect opportunity to murder him. God had enabled this exploit, by casting Saul and his host into an unnaturally deep sleep (26:12). Previously God had delivered David out of Saul’s hand many times, sometimes by what could seem like mere human adroitness (e.g. 18:11; 19:10), or human subterfuge (19:12ff); or human kindness (19:4ff; 20:12f). But David had also sought the guidance of God regarding his own safety – and received it (23:10-13).

How, then, could David’s practical faith have collapsed in so spectacular a fashion? “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall!” (1 Corinthians 10:12) We have only to think of the strain of being hunted to death by a partly insane and unpredictable king whose professions of goodwill could never be trusted (1 Samuel 24:17,22); of being constantly on the move, never knowing whether he was going to be betrayed (23:12; 26:1); of being haunted by the knowledge that he had caused the deaths of an entire city of

priests (22:18f), and oppressed by the sense of being responsible for the lives of six hundred men and their families (27:2). David evidently decided that he could take no more.

And when he cracked, total demoralisation set in. Having turned away from the faith for each day by which up till now he had remained a fugitive, he acted on natural wisdom and fled to Gath. The lesson for us is in relation to persecution. David was persecuted for being the LORD's anointed; the persecution of Christians today is for faithfulness to God's rejected, though glorified, Anointed. And there is enough persecution today, even in western lands, and even if low grade and indirect, to wear down the people of God. It may be no more than the relentless bombardment with ideas and information all couched in stridently secular and godless terms, and the wearing-down effect of needing constantly to participate in conversations framed in such terms. These are acids eating away our purpose of heart to live by God's word (Matthew 4:4) and publicly confess Jesus as Lord (Romans 10:9). Why not just keep our heads down, and settle for a satisfying career and for a no-challenges family life – not renouncing God, but living by worldly maxims?

David went to Gath, the home town of Goliath, of all places! He did what his enemies at Saul's court had intended – abandon the inheritance of the LORD (cp. 1 Samuel 26:19). Even more amazing, he had been in Gath as a fugitive before, seeking asylum in Goliath's city - whilst carrying Goliath's sword! (21:8f) What an abject spectacle! That first time, God had graciously and quickly made it prudent for David to flee from Gath again. David's self-esteem had no doubt suffered in the process, but not much else. But when, a second time, David made the same God-dishonouring move, God did not so easily extricate him. David had a deep lesson to learn.



*How could
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*“Let him that
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His second move to Gath certainly paid off in the short term: Saul stopped trying to hunt him down (27:4). He even achieved prosperity when Achish assigned him and his men the city of Ziklag (27:6). It was a long time since they had owned houses! Moreover, living out in Ziklag spared them the irritation of Philistine idolatry. How David could have congratulated himself about this!

But David couldn't stop at that: he was reliant on the world, so he needed constantly to keep up his credit with the world. So he instituted raiding expeditions against the Amalekites and others, saving none of them alive, so that he could pretend to Achish that he had been raiding the land of Israel and making himself odious with Saul (24:7-12). What he did contravened the Law (Deuteronomy 20:13f). However, his lie succeeded: the devil saw to that (1 Samuel 27:12). But how miserable his lying must have made him underneath! Yet we should note that, however badly he did it, he would not attack the *people of God*. However low he had sunk, he still believed in God and His covenant.

His lie only landed him in an even worse predicament. The devil had inveigled David into seeking Philistine protection just at a time when the lords of the Philistines were again planning a concerted campaign against Israel. Achish was so pleased with David's false show of loyalty that he assured him that his band could join in the campaign. David's answer could be justly termed "evasive": "Therefore thou shalt know what thy servant will do" (28:2). He must have felt relieved and dismayed in equal measures when Achish interpreted it favourably – relieved not to have been "rumbled"; dismayed at having no option but to fight God's covenant people after all. We could say, that even if Achish had not "rumbled" him, God was showing him the dire implications of his defection. One is either for God and His people, or against them: there is no neutrality. Yet God was going to deliver David, albeit painfully, from himself.

The other lords of the Philistines protested vehemently against David's presence (29:3ff), and, in some embarrassment, Achish had to send David and his men back to Ziklag. What a deliverance, in spite of himself! But God, if we may say so reverently, could do no other. David was the man after His own heart whom He had anointed through Samuel (13:14; 16:12). How could He permit it that this future king should previously have fought with God's enemies against God's people? "If we are faithless, he abideth faithful, for he cannot deny himself" (2 Timothy 2:13).

But David's deliverance from himself was exceedingly painful, and so too may *our* deliverances from ourselves be. So anxious had David been to display his

loyalty to Achish that he had not left a man behind to defend Ziklag. The Philistine forces were far in the north. So the Amalekites, whom David and his men had harried mercilessly, took advantage of Ziklag's defencelessness to wreak reprisal (though, in the providence of God, not a reprisal as merciless as David's original action against *them*). They burned Ziklag to the ground, but took captive all the women and children (1 Samuel 30:1-4). (Perhaps they thought thereby to humiliate David the more).

When David's men returned, they were *distraught*. No doubt David had promised them and their families greater security by their move to Gath; instead it had brought them complete calamity. As a result, "the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters" (30:6).

His own men had turned against him, who had stood by him these years in the wilderness: the debtors, the distressed, and the discontented who had gathered themselves to him at the cave of Adullam. How did the three in that cave, who had broken through the Philistine lines to fetch the water for him from the well at Bethlehem (2 Samuel 23:13ff), feel about him now? How bitter this moment must have been for David! Everything had seemed to go so well, not least in his amazing extrication from the Philistines' campaign against Saul. And now this! He was confronted with the utter bankruptcy of all his natural, faithless strategies for saving his own skin and that of those with him.

But it caused him to do something of which there had been no trace since he had decided to defect to Gath. "David strengthened himself in the LORD His God" (1 Samuel 30:6). As long as the "Gath strategy" had governed him, he had been his own strength. Now he had learned again what he had known long ago (17:37,



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45f), that God alone was his strength. “I love thee, O LORD, my strength. The LORD is my rock, and my fortress...” (Psalm 18:1).

“...and my deliverer.” David now resumed another habit laid aside in going to Gath. There is no mention of his having sought the Lord’s mind about that decision! But now he summons Abiathar to bring the ephod, and inquires of the LORD, “If I pursue after this troop, shall I overtake them?” This brings to mind another of David’s psalms:

“Hear my prayer, O LORD; give ear to my supplication, and in thy faithfulness answer me and in thy righteousness. And enter not into judgment with thy servant; for in thy sight shall no man living be justified. Quicken me, O LORD, for thy name’s sake: in thy righteousness bring my soul out of trouble. And in thy lovingkindness cut off mine enemies, and destroy all them that afflict my soul, for I am thy servant” (Psalm 143:1f, 11f).

What an answer of grace he received! “Thou shalt surely overtake them and without fail recover all” (1 Samuel 30:8). And so it happened (vv.18f). However the “righteousness” that procured his deliverance was something that David would never properly know in this life:

“Christ Jesus, whom God set forth to be a propitiation, through faith, by his blood, to show his righteousness, because of the passing over of the sins done aforetime in the forbearance of God... that he might himself be just, and the justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus” (Romans 3:24-26).

Hallelujah! In the lovingkindness of the God who justifies the ungodly (Romans 4:5) David was spared the stain of collaboration with the Philistines at Gilboa when the Lord’s anointed died. Then the stolen families were rescued in their entirety (1 Samuel 30:19f). Truly David recovered all.

The warning of this unhappy episode to us is, to guard against the demoralisation that results in our collapsing into the world’s way of thinking, speaking, and acting, and abandoning the path of faith. That is demoralisation. As the western world grows ever colder towards Christ, God’s Beloved, and wishes His Name to perish, the warning becomes ever more urgent. Our safeguard is, to be

“looking stedfastly on Jesus, the leader and completer of faith; who, in view of the joy lying before him, endured [the] cross, having despised [the] shame, and is set down at the right-hand of the throne of God. For consider well him who endured so great contradiction from sinners against himself, that ye be not weary, fainting in your mind” (Hebrews, 12:2f, Darby Trans.).

How should we respond to God's revelation?

Yannick Ford

By not reading God's Word? By not testing everything else by it? This article gives some punchy answers.

In my previous two articles¹ we considered why we needed a revelation from God, and how we could know that the Bible was that revelation. A study of Ecclesiastes showed us how far we could go with unaided human wisdom. We could discern that there was a Creator, and that we were accountable to Him. We may even have been able to discern that there would be a day of accountability (Ecclesiastes 12:13f), much like a harvest that is of greater intensity than that which was sown; but we could not go much further. The Bible truths that we know and love about God's own love, His grace, and His plan of redemption, have all been *revealed* to us.

How can we be sure of such a revelation? In my last article we considered various sets of evidence for the trustworthiness of the Bible. A key point was that the Bible introduces us to the Lord Jesus, and when we come to know Him, we find that He is indeed exactly like what we read of Him. Thus, the Bible is an accurate portrayal of a real Person! Like the queen of Sheba, we can say that "It was a true report which I heard" (2 Chronicles 9:5, NKJV).


And so: since the Bible is a revelation from God to us, how should we treat it? This is a big question, so I can only mention a few aspects, but hopefully they will give us some general pointers. Let's consider the following six topics.


1. We should accept that all of it is needed.

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

It is very likely that some of God's revelation will go against our norms – our flesh may even not like some of it! However, if we think about it, we would not expect a surprising and gracious revelation from God to consist of something banal and entirely in the spirit of the age. We would not need any revelation for that. The Scripture is what God is telling us, and consequently we need all of it.

¹ In *Scripture Truth*, October 2015, pp.310ff, and January 2016 pp. 12ff.


*The Bible
is not an
esoteric
book – it
was
written for
all to be
able to read
and
understand*


*It is
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understand
how all its
parts fit
together*



We may not be so familiar with parts of God's revelation, such as the minor prophets. A little while ago I came across some very helpful advice when considering an individual book of the Bible. All 66 books contribute to the overall grand message of God's revelation. Therefore, good questions to ask are, "What does this book contribute to the overall theme of God's Word? What would we have missed, or not known, if we did not have this particular book?"² Questions such as these really help to open up a passage for study, and to keep in mind that it is all part of the message that God wants us to understand.

2. We should seek to understand it properly

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

The Bible is not an esoteric book – it was written for all to be able to read and understand.

However, it is important that we understand how all its parts fit together. There are fundamental differences such as the dispensations of law and of grace (John 1:17), or the distinctions between Israel, gentiles, and the church of God (1 Corinthians 10:32). If we mix these up we will end up with a muddled understanding of some of God's ways. Consequently, thoughtful and careful reading is important, just as the apostle Paul said to Timothy: "Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things" (2 Timothy 3:7). We can ask our Father for the Holy Spirit's help. He is the Author of Scripture, and we cannot understand it apart from His enlightening:

"For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God" (1 Corinthians 2:11f).

² This is adapted from comments by David Jackman in *Preach the Word*, edited by Leland Ryken and Todd Wilson, (Wheaton, IL. 2007), chapter 1.

And what the Holy Spirit does is to show what all the Scriptures tell us regarding Christ, and His sufferings and glory (Luke 24:27; John 5:39). They also, rather graphically, show us what man is; and how God is resolving, to His own glory and the glory of Christ, the terrible contradiction between what He is and what man is. An interpretation that does not bear on this great matter is not of the Holy Spirit.

3. We should trust it and put it into practice!

Psalm 1 is a very good example:

“Blessed is the man
Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,
Nor stands in the path of sinners,
Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;
But his delight is in the law of the Lord,
And in His law he meditates day and night.
He shall be like a tree
Planted by the rivers of water,
That brings forth its fruit in its season,
Whose leaf also shall not wither;
And whatever he does shall prosper.”

Psalm 1:1-3

The result of meditating in Scripture, according to Psalm 1, is that we will be fruitful and our lives will count for God. Knowledge of Scriptural principles, and understanding how to apply them, will mean that we can use them in life's circumstances. Even as I write this, I realise what a challenge this is to me! But we can be encouraged by the godly example of Psalm 1.

Joshua was given very similar advice: “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success” (Joshua 1:8).

4. We should pray according to the Bible

Daniel 9 is a wonderful example of praying according to the Bible.



*“Consider
what I say,
and may the
Lord give you
understanding
in all things”*



*The result of
meditating in
Scripture is
that our lives
will count for
God*



Prayer means that we enter into fellowship with our Father in His affairs

“In the first year of [Darius’s] reign I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years specified by the word of the LORD through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes” (Daniel 9:2-3).

Daniel was evidently familiar with the Scriptures that existed in his day, and he had read Jeremiah’s prophecy. He understood that God had revealed that Jerusalem would be desolate for 70 years (Jeremiah 25:1; 29:10), and so he prayed according to this, that God would fulfil His Word for restoring Jerusalem. If we read further on in Daniel 9, we will see that he was rewarded by receiving further revelation; and he also received the tremendous encouragement of being told that he was “greatly beloved” (verse 23). Imagine what an effect such a message would have had!

We may ask, if God has said that something is going to happen, why then should we pray for it? But prayer according to the Scriptures means that we enter into fellowship with our Father in *His* affairs – it shows that what concerns Him concerns us. In addition, we can be confident of having prayers heard, if we know that we are praying in accord with Scriptural principles – even if (unlike Daniel) the actual thing that we are praying for is not specified in Scripture. “Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him” (1 John 5:14-15).

5. We should read all of it

This is similar to my first point, which was that we should *accept* that all of Scripture is needed. Then we should *read* all of it too! Some Scriptures are easier to read than others. Let me give you a personal example. Some years ago, I decided that I would read through the Bible in one year, which means reading about four chapters a day. I have more or less done this each year since, although more recently I have slowed down and instead read about two chapters a day, with occasional breaks. I have found this to be really helpful in gaining a good overview of the whole of Scripture. I have often struggled with reading certain passages. For example Numbers 7, where the same set of gifts is described twelve times *in identical words* (!), once for each of the tribes of Israel. A cursory reading might lead us to ask, “Why was this not summarised

in one verse?" But, in thinking it through, some encouraging thoughts came to me, such as these:

- God treats us all as individuals and He values what we do for Him – He never just lumps us together with others. Whatever we do He will take note of, just as if it had been the only thing given to Him.
- God also values the collective work that we do, which is why the twelve identical sets of gifts are then totted up and detailed as a whole in verses 84-88. God valued the individual contributions, and He valued the collective result from all of the tribes. So too in our work as assemblies, God values the overall effort.
- These verses give us an indication of what pleases God. He delights to linger over a record of what His people gave to Him.

So some passages might seem like tough reading, but they will yield some blessing if we persevere!

6. We should test things according to it

“These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Acts 17:11).

The Bible is what we *know* is a revelation from God. Therefore we should test other things against it. Remember the old prophet of Bethel in 1 Kings 13! This chapter is a telling warning on this point. If we read it, we will see that the man of God from Judah had been told by the LORD not to eat or drink in Bethel, nor to go back the same way that he came (verse 9). But the old prophet of Bethel lied to the man of God in alleging God's authority for inviting him to his home (verse 18); and it led to disaster for the man of God. He should have realised that someone else did not have the authority to directly contradict a plain statement given to him by God. This is an encouragement and a warning to test things according to Scripture.

I hope that these six simple points will help us as we consider how we should respond to the revelation from God that we have in Scripture. We can – and should – thank God that we have been privileged to have His Word easily available to us in our language, and we can give thanks for wonderful servants of God in the past, such as William Tyndale, who worked so hard and sometimes dangerously that we could have the Bible in English.

*All of Scripture is needed.
Then we should read all of it too!*

The pearl of great price

Iain Martin

“... *Christ also loved the church and gave himself for her*” (Ephesians 5:25).

“And one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them, ‘You know nothing at all, nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish.’ Now this he did not say on his own authority; but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for that nation only, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who are scattered abroad” (John 11:49-52, NKJV).

In this prophecy Caiaphas spoke of Christ’s death for two groups of people: *not only* for the nation of Israel, *but also* for the gathering in of God’s children who are scattered abroad. Similarly, in Romans 1:16 we are given two distinct peoples, the Jews and the Greeks: whilst in 1 Corinthians 10:32 we are given three groups of people – Jews, Gentiles, and church of God.

The fifth and sixth parables of Matthew 13 show us what the Lord is doing on the earth in relation to these groups.

In the first four parables the Lord had given His listeners – and us – some graphic reality-checks concerning the progress of the gospel. In the parable of the Sower only one type of ground out of four was productive. In the parable of the wheat and the tares, an enemy spoiled the field by sowing some rather hard-to-distinguish weeds in among the good seed. In the parable of the mustard seed something good was planted, yet was permitted to become something that wasn’t quite what it seemed. In the parable of the leaven someone else introduced a corrupting agent into the good flour, just as “an enemy” sowed the tares that spoiled the wheat field.¹

These four parables had been spoken in the hearing of the multitudes, even though the multitudes were unable to understand them (13:13ff). But in verse 36 the Lord “sent the multitudes away and went into the house.” He was going to teach His disciples about what *God* was doing, rather than, as in the first four parables, about the enemy’s spoiling work.

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it” (Matthew 13:44-46).

¹ Articles on the latter three of these parables appeared in *Scripture Truth* in January, July, and October 2015.

In interpreting these two parables it is important to recognise the distinction between them, and not be tempted to dismiss the second as merely a restating of the first. In 2 Timothy 2:15 we are instructed to study the Word, and rightly divide it. That means recognising differences as well as similarities when we encounter them, and applying parables and prophecies to those to whom they apply rather than claiming that the whole testimony of Scripture is about us.

In the parable of the hid treasure, the treasure is Israel, and not the church.² Israel is a treasure which was briefly uncovered through the Lord's earthly ministry. But when Israel, as a nation, rejected its Messiah (Matthew 21:43; 27:25), it became "hidden" again – as regards the current outworking of the purposes of God. To see how Jesus is dealing with us, who have believed during this great gospel epoch we need to read on into the next parable: "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it."

Some mistakenly approach the parable by saying that

- The merchant is the man or woman seeking salvation.
- The pearl is the salvation being sought, and
- The price paid for the pearl is the sinner paying everything they can in order to get their soul saved.

But that would be "works salvation", and entirely contrary to the essence of the gospel:

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Ephesians 2:8,9).

² On this see the writer's article in *Scripture Truth*, January 2016.



*In the
parable of
the hid
treasure,
the treasure
is Israel*



*To see how
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read on
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next
parable*



So this commonplace interpretation of the parable cannot be correct. In the parables of Matthew 13 those who hear the gospel are always persons *acted upon*, never the *initiators* of the action. So too in this parable. Who is the only One who sold all that He had? The Lord Jesus Himself. He “did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, taking on him the form of a bondservant [and] became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:6-8).

In terms of Caiaphas’s prophecy, this parable shows us the effect of Christ’s death in gathering in the scattered children of God. John 1:11-12 tells us who these “children” are, namely, “as many as received him,” in contrast to “His own” [people] who “did not receive him.” “As many as” implies, out of every nation, background, etc.

A pearl is formed when an oyster gets something trapped in the soft flesh, called the mantle, within its shell. This piece of sand irritates the tender oyster and it responds by coating the grain of sand with layer upon layer of a substance called nacre, which is basically saliva and calcium. It is the same substance that coats the inside of the oyster’s shell. The oyster begins with something worthless, and covers it with something wonderful, the entire action being the product of pain.

Similarly the church is formed from people who are, in themselves, nothing, until they are washed in His blood and clothed with the righteousness of Christ; and it is the product of His agonising death on the cross.

“And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others” (Ephesians 2:1-3).

A pearl can take up to three years to be formed. It grows hidden inside the oyster, which is under the water, where no one can see what is happening.

And Christ has been “growing” His true church for some two thousand years now. Sometimes the Lord adds to it: “...and the Lord added to their number daily.” At other times, He multiplies it: “Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem”! (Acts 2:47; 6:7) But at all times it is He who gives any genuine increase (1 Corinthians 3:7).

In the days before pearls could be cultured in oyster farms, real pearls were worth a fortune. A Roman historian tells how Cleopatra, in order to convince Rome that Egypt possessed a heritage and wealth that put it above conquest,

wagered Mark Antony that she could give the most expensive dinner in history. The Roman reclined as the queen sat with an empty plate and a goblet of wine. She crushed one large pearl of a pair of earrings, dissolved it in the liquid, then drank it down. Astonished, Antony declined his dinner – the matching pearl – and admitted she had won.

The worth of the church to Christ is immeasurable – He paid for us with His own life. “...You were not redeemed with corruptible things like silver or gold from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ” (1 Peter 1:18-19). The church is “the pearl of great price” and it is Christ who was willing to pay the ultimate price at Calvary to purchase it, and save lost people from a certain death in hell. “Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it” (Ephesians 5:23). He was rich, and became poor for our sake, so that we might be made rich in Him (2 Corinthians 8:9).

The pearl is the only gem known to man that cannot be cut. Large diamonds are cut and made into smaller, more evenly shaped, and more lustrous and valuable stones: but the pearl cannot be divided. To cut a pearl utterly destroys its worth. And so the merchant in the parable found *one* pearl of great price. And there is one true church (Ephesians 4:4), for whose unity Christ prayed (John 17:21), that will forever stand together. But we have to work at this: “Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel” (Philippians 1:27).


A good pearl has a most beautiful lustre. Surely this is what above all attracted the merchant to it. But Christ saw, not what we were, but what we would be through His saving, cleansing, and sanctifying work. “... that He might present it to Himself a glorious church.” We could also refer to a pearl being round – which speaks of the eternal nature of the church.

So Christ died for us, the children of God who were scattered abroad. But, according to Caiaphas’s prophecy He died for that nation too (John 11:51f). God is not finished with the nation of Israel. One day He will reclaim His treasure. According to Jeremiah’s famous passage on the new covenant,

“Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah – not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their



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beautiful lustre*



*But Christ
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through His
saving work*



minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people...

“Thus says the LORD, who gives the sun for a light by day, the ordinances of the moon and the stars for a light by night..., If those ordinances depart from before Me, says the LORD, then the seed of Israel shall also cease from being a nation before Me forever. Thus says the LORD: If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, says the LORD. Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, that the city shall be built for the LORD from the Tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate... It shall not be plucked up or thrown down anymore forever” (Jeremiah 31:31 - 40, abridged).

The parable of the hidden treasure teaches us that God has not finished with Israel, but is faithful in keeping His promises. He is not a man, that He should lie or repent (Numbers 23:19). He never fails, even if man is disobedient. Israel is still God’s chosen people. He bought them when He bought the entire field (the world). There is only one way of salvation, whoever receives it and whenever – by faith in the immeasurably costly death of the Lord Jesus (see Zechariah 12:10). The treasure is presently hidden. But Christ will fulfil His great purpose for Israel in the future, and Israel will once more be a great blessing to the world. The future of Israel is what prompted the apostle Paul to write Romans 9, 10 and 11.

The parable of the pearl of great price tells us that the same God who will one day uncover his treasure Israel, is now saving all types of men, both Jews and Gentiles, and making them part of the church. Jesus Christ has paid the price, once and for all, for our sins; each of us who now repents and believes is part of the pearl that Jesus Christ has bought. Each and every person who believes the gospel is so valuable to Him that He died not only for everyone else, but also for you and for me.

Alpha People

Lydia

George Stevens

“And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us” (Acts 16:14, KJV).

When we first encounter Lydia in Acts we meet an able and busy woman, a well-to-do merchant, selling purple cloth. This expensive commodity was associated with high birth and royalty, as is confirmed by the soldiers putting a purple robe on the Lord Jesus before twisting a crown of thorns, setting it on His head, and mocking Him with the salute, “Hail, king of the Jews!” (Mark 15:17) Lydia managed a substantial household, presumably consisting of slaves and perhaps some relatives (v.15). Because she invited Paul into what she calls “my house”, we may assume that she was either single, or a widow.

She had moved to Philippi from Thyatira, perhaps in *her* mind for business reasons, but in the purposes of *God* in order that there she, along with the jailor, might be a key person in the establishment and development of the church in Philippi.

Paul and his companions were specifically led by the Holy Spirit to come to Philippi (Acts 16:6-12). He directed them to this woman who was found in the right place, at the right time, with the right heart, and with the right attitude. God can do amazing things through men and women who are prepared to trust and obey Him. We are often limited by the smallness of our personal vision; but the vision that comes from God is without limit! Lydia responded to the gospel and, through her, the door was opened for the gospel in that region. Being in the way, the Lord led her (cp. Genesis 24:27, KJV). This happened because:

- Lydia trusted in the LORD (Yahweh) and prayed regularly. The phrase “where prayer was wont to be made” (Acts 16:13) implies that that fewer than ten male heads of households in the city were observant Jews, so that a synagogue could not be formed. How is our attendance at Christian church services, especially at those poorly-attended prayer meetings?
- Lydia’s heart was opened by the Lord. She listened to Paul and his companions because she was eager to learn. She would have heard the

gospel of God's Son. They would doubtless have spoken of Him as the long-awaited Messiah who had been crucified to take away their sins, who was raised on the third day for their justification, who had appeared to the disciples for their assurance, and who had ascended into heaven and sent the Holy Spirit to empower them. But it was *the Lord* who opened her heart to believe: salvation is the work of God! Generally, the heart is symbolic of a person's love and his/her will. Lydia came to love the Lord, and submit her will to Him.

- Lydia was a worshipper of God in the rabbinical manner (v.14). The little gathering would have recited prayers and read from the Old Testament Scriptures. These they would then discuss (17:11). But after her heart was opened, she could now worship the Father in spirit and in truth! (John 4:23)
- Lydia was obedient to baptism (v.15). This must have been included in the preaching of the gospel. How often do we hear it preached today? It is the acknowledgement of receiving Christ as your Lord and Saviour and of the truth of the gospel itself. It is symbolic of our old selves being crucified with Christ and buried for ever. It reveals that our new, Christian selves will live for Him in newness of life (Romans 6:3f).
- Lydia opened not only her heart but also her home. Firstly, she showed hospitality to the apostle and his companions. In this way, she was supporting the gospel effort. Secondly, she gave over her home as a meeting place for the Christians at Philippi (v.40). It was the start of the church in that city. Shortly after the wealthy Lydia was saved God delivered a slave girl from demons through Paul, and then saved the Philippian jailer through an earthquake. However the change in Lydia's life (and in that of her household) would also have been a real witness to their neighbours and the merchants who came to trade with her. The word of the Lord was confirmed by miracles; but the miracle of a changed life is just as convincing. It proves that God is at work and His word is true.

*Lydia was found in the right place,
at the right time, with the right heart,
and with the right attitude.
God can do amazing things through men and women
who are prepared to trust and obey Him*

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Paul's exchange

Philippians 3:7ff

Whatsoever things were gain to me,
these I counted, these I counted,
—all the things I fain would be—
these I counted loss

for the all-eclipsing worth of knowing
Christ my Lord, Christ my gain!
for the privilege of going
in His power and pain;

for another righteousness receiving
—none of mine! none of mine!
righteousness through sheer believing;
righteousness divine;

for the eager hope of Christ from heaven
us to His raised likeness changing.
I press on, past prides estranging,
t'ward God's upward call.