

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

*Pleading for a complete return to Christianity
as it was in the beginning*

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RIGHTEOUSNESS EXALTETH A NATION

In ancient times, some monarchs would chop off the heads of those who brought them bad news; and even today some postmen feel stigmatised in some households for much the same reason. Newspapers incur a great deal of criticism today for being the bearer of bad news, but they reply that they are merely reflecting a very sick society. "If the music is bad do we shoot the pianist or the composer?", they ask. We certainly live in a very sick society, and in this morning's newspaper alone, there are several items which illustrate the point. Actually, there are items in the paper nearly *every* morning which illustrate the point, throwing readers into a mixture of depression and anger: sometimes angry enough to write a protest. Perhaps we don't protest often enough or loud enough. Some protests certainly work. A Scottish bank recently entered into a multi-million pound contract with an American evangelist, but unfortunately the evangelist was quoted as describing Scotland (rightly) as "a dark land which tolerates homosexuality". The offended "gay" community in Edinburgh took their placards to the streets and paraded outside the bank headquarters; threatening to close their accounts. At great financial loss the bank eventually had to cancel its proposed deal with the evangelist.

British TV probably reflects the very sad state of British society *even better* than our newspapers. We have five ordinary channels (apart from Cable TV) and a common complaint is that it is increasingly difficult to find anything wholesome to watch *on any* of the channels. Much of the material ranges from the banal to the depraved. TV channels, just like the newspapers, suffer, from very fierce competition, of course, and, in a continual "ratings war", find it necessary to sink deeper and deeper into the abyss of degeneracy. The "soaps" and films continue to corrupt our youth, assuring them that casual sex and "living in sin" is not only quite normal but a refreshing break from the constraints of the Victorians. One feels sorry for the youngsters who will be regarded as "freaks" if they refuse to conform. Even the commercial advertisements on our screens, these days, for very ordinary items, find it necessary to use sexual innuendo: with not much innuendo. And from casual observation it seems that TV has more than its fair share of homosexuals running things, and increasingly they appear on our screens. Now that homosexuality has had a fair airing on the "box" over the last few years, one wonders what subject will be next to be "popularised" by the "weirdoes", and my guess would be, that soon, incestuous relationships will be encouraged. I certainly hope to be proved wrong. For years the pundits have been telling us that "there is no evidence" that TV has been corrupting society, whereas the evidence is to be seen in every direction. The great British public, even from small infants upwards, get most of their

moral instruction and ethical standards from a regular diet of "soaps", sex and violence on TV. Even "documentaries" quite often masquerade as being "educational" when, in fact, they are really in pursuit of some form of voyeurism .

But I digress. My intention was to comment (depending upon space) on three or four of the items in this morning's newspaper which reflect upon British society. The first item was about the bad language in this land.

FOUL-MOUTHED BRITAIN

In an article on "foul-mouth Britain" a quote is made from *"The New Guide To British English"* in *"The Lonely Planet"* series, which paints a sorry picture of the British attitude to their own language - a language which all the world seems keen to learn. Apparently the British are now notoriously foul-mouthed and drape their entire discourse around a certain four-lettered word. Indeed many are so dependent upon that one expletive that they are virtually dumbstruck without it. The article went on to remind us that while such language is common on the barrack square it is extremely sad to hear it from kiddies in a Primary Class. The writer of the piece was a Fellow of a Cambridge College and said that "over the years he had become wearily used to undergraduates, *of both sexes*, expensively educated and presumably the intellectual cream of our youth, swearing like navvies, and not in the least embarrassed who hears them."

And so Britain seems to have achieved another "first" amongst all its other doubtful accomplishments. The report on the foul language certainly rings true in this neck-of-the-woods and one hears it, with the four-lettered words, at every street corner, on public transport, at public gatherings, in school playgrounds, in posh offices from secretaries, and, of course on radio and TV. At one time it was a criminal offence to use such language and one could even be ejected from a 'bus for its use, but now such a charge would be laughed out-of-court. Again, there can be no doubt that our foul language has been encouraged by the now constant use of it on TV. The first time a four-letter word was used on TV was in 1965, by the critic Kenneth Tynan, to "rid the Corporation of its stuffy, middle-class image". Yes, we got rid of that image all right . . . Now we have another image - "Foul-mouthed Britain".

GRATUITOUS PROFANITY

The next small item was akin to the above, and described how that Churches across Scotland are urging the B.B.C. to eliminate blasphemous language from TV and radio programmes. Two Presbyteries have petitioned the B.B.C. to ban - or "bleep" out - the gratuitous use of sacred words, such as "Jesus", "Christ", and "God". The plea was accompanied by the first petition of around 1,300 names. A petition was also sent to the B.B.C. by the Melrose and Peebles Presbytery which declared, "In the name of religious tolerance and equitable treatment, enshrined in the B.B.C. Charter, we demand the same respect for the God whose name is held dear to millions of Christians." The B.B.C. in reply insisted that it was sensitive to people's views but pointed out that "In a gritty drama it is sometimes necessary to use gritty language."

This response from the B.B.C. is fairly typical and it wouldn't be so bad if the language complained of was confined to "gritty dramas", but it is heard, as we know, on *the whole range* of programmes: even on "chat shows" and certainly on films. The much parodied Mrs. Whitehouse tried to clean up TV many years ago, and politicians from time to time feel obligated to call for a clean-up, but any change for the better is difficult to detect.

POPE'S COMMENT ON HEAVEN

Another interesting little item was with regard to a recent Roman Catholic comment on heaven and hell: i.e. that heaven may not be as nice as we imagine, and hell may not

be as bad as we imagine. In a recent address by Pope John Paul II, to pilgrims outside the Vatican, the Pontiff said that ". . . heaven is 'a state of being,' after death, and not the pleasant place of fleecy clouds and angels playing harps. It is neither an abstraction nor a physical place among the clouds. It is a personal relationship with the Holy Trinity". The report also said that the traditional image of hell is also cooling down as well, and in a magazine of the Jesuits, hell is not all fire and brimstone. Instead, it "is a 'state of being' in which those who have rejected God and 'consciously decided not to do good' would be excluded from God's presence for ever."

Personal ideas about heaven may vary, but surely it is a **place**. Elijah went up in a whirlwind "into heaven": *a place*, not "a state of mind". And Jesus said, "I go to prepare a **place** for you . . ." And surely heaven and hell are both diametrically opposed: i.e. nothing will *be better* than heaven, and nothing could *be worse* than hell, human opinion notwithstanding.

A BISHOP'S VIEW

The next item in this morning's paper also came from a church leader: from The Most Reverend Richard Holloway, Bishop of Edinburgh and Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church. Readers may recall that we have had reason to mention the Bishop previously in these columns, and we have written to him without reply. The Bishop has produced a new book "*Godless Morality*" (keeping religion out of ethics) and argues that extra-marital sex may not be immoral. He urges a more tolerant attitude towards promiscuity and insists that religion should not feature in debates about ethics. He claims that just because young people have sex 'the way they have a cup of coffee or a hamburger' they are not necessarily lacking in sexual ethics. The Bishop's book promotes the legalisation of cannabis and contains colloquial sexual language, much of which is likely to anger many in the 70 million strong Anglican Church. The Chairman of the Prayer Book Society said, "He has gone too far. He would be better off in some secular occupation than taking a salary cheque from a church he is doing his best to sink". How true.

CHAMPION OF FREE SPEECH

The final item for which we have space is, perhaps, more uplifting than the others: how could it fail to be. A lady called Alison Redmond-Bate, a "Christian Fundamentalist" stood, recently, with two friends, on the steps of Wakefield Cathedral, in West Yorkshire, and started to preach. A large crowd gathered, part of which became hostile to the preaching. The police arrived, said that they feared a breach of peace, and ordered the lady to stop her preaching. Miss Redmond-Bate refused to stop and was promptly arrested and charged with obstructing a police officer in the execution of his duty. She was found guilty in the Magistrates' Court. She appealed against the conviction but the Magistrate's decision was upheld by Leeds Crown Court.

However, her subsequent appeal to the High Court was upheld, and the High Court Judge, Lord Justice Sedley, sitting in London with Mr. Justice Collins, stated that "A police officer has no right to call upon a citizen to desist from lawful conduct." The Judge also said that "if the promotion of one's opinion provoked others into breaking the law, then one could be arrested for breach of the peace. But in Miss Redmond-Bates' case there was no lawful basis for the arrest as 'nobody needed to stop and listen'. If they did stop they were, as free to express their view that the preachers should be locked-up as Miss Redmond-Bates was free to preach. At a previous trial it had been said that the preacher would not have been charged "so long as what she said was inoffensive". The High Court Judge said, "This will not do. Free Speech includes not only the inoffensive, but the irritating, the contentious, the eccentric, the heretical, the unwelcome and the provocative." He said, "Freedom to speak only inoffensively is not

worth having." This case reflects, I suggest, *inter alia*, a perceptible change in the public's attitude to the Bible and preaching. At one time the crowd would have walked on and *ignored* the preaching; now they are *aggressive* toward it.

OUR SAD STATE

These random items, taken by themselves, don't amount to very much, but taken together, from one morning's paper, they surely cast a jaundiced light upon the state of the country, and assure us that things are not improving. In the grip of *mounting crime*, our land is characterised by *violence* (murders so common and regular here that they are never reported in the newspapers), *theft, fraud* (fraudulent claims on Social Services runs into 'billions'), *drug taking* (sold in dance halls, street corners and even school playgrounds), *alcohol abuse* (even more serious than drug-taking), *'teenage' pregnancies* (Britain has highest number in Europe), *divorce* (almost two out of every three marriages end in divorce), *homosexuality* (being taught to children as a normal lifestyle, and "gays" can now adopt children). Crime levels are such that prisons bulge at the seams and new ones are erected urgently.

The cost of crime, and the payouts (on Legal Aid and Social Services), is crippling the Treasury, and really Britain now rates as a Third-World Country. Some years ago an American brother told me he was considering moving to the U.K. (or Australia) to escape the violence in the U.S.A. He changed his mind; which is just as well for it would have been a bad move. A brother in Africa recently expressed the wish that his son should come to Britain to learn how to live. This too would have been a bad move. The British used to send missionaries to Africa. The day seems not far away when missionaries might have to come from Africa to try and civilise the U.K.

The courts are so clogged up with cases that a great many are abandoned. Much more consideration is given to the criminal than the victim, and criminals have little to fear from British Law. Just yesterday a case was reported where the accused pleaded guilty to *ninety* charges of rape and one murder. The judge gave him *nine* "life sentences" to run concurrently, and recommended he be not released for 12 years! Such are our crazy laws and judges. The lady who was preaching the gospel on the cathedral steps, however, was convicted of a criminal offence both by the Magistrates Court and the Crown Court, but, thankfully, rescued by the intervention of the High Court Judge. This seems to be the way we are going in Britain.

Do evil and you will get the law's full protection, and even a certain sympathy and admiration. Seek to do good and you will incur a cold disdain. Anybody suggesting decency, honesty or integrity is regarded as being from another planet.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

What can be done? Protesting to our MP is available but they, after all, are part of the problem, and in any case, have their own vested-interests, secret agendas, lobbies to please, and votes to protect. Laws and regulations obviously make little difference. The Law is certainly an ass. The teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ constitute the only real answer, and the golden rule of "**doing unto others as we would like to be done by**" would, *by itself*, transform the country overnight. However, Christ's remedy is rarely heard. The Bible is "rubbished" and "Christians" are portrayed (especially on T.V.) either as meddling "do-gooders", or having "a screw loose". Some teenagers interviewed the other day thought that Christians were "weird and sinister, and best avoided". And children are so street-wise and sophisticated nowadays, that they would be unlikely to sit in a Sunday-school class. In any case Sunday is now that day their parents take them away to the match; or the beach or the supermarkets.

The country should, of course, expect some good advice and moral guidance from the "Church": the Bishops and the clergy, but if the pronouncement of men like Bishop

Holloway are anything to go by, we can't expect too much help from our spiritual leaders.

I'm sure that there are vast numbers of ordinary men and women out there, in the U.K., who are all equally unhappy with the condition of this once great country, but who feel quite unable to do anything about it. If only the feelings of this great "silent majority" could be mobilised. If only their voice could be heard.

Certainly letters of complaint are written to editors of newspapers each day, but not much seems to be accomplished. Perhaps there are not enough of them. Perhaps such protests are not going to the right people. Clearly we are not protesting often enough or loud enough. Readers will find a letter from sister Ruth Coles on this very subject elsewhere in this magazine, and if any other reader has any suggestions on the subject, or has any experiences to share on the issue, we shall be most pleased to hear from them.

As Solomon said, "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people." (Prov. 14:34).

EDITOR.

THAT IS YOUR INTERPRETATION!

Often when we are seeking to present a point from the Word of God, someone will attempt to end the discussion with the statement: "That's just your interpretation!" How do we deal with such an objection?

It seems that first we will have to agree with the supposed objection. We have presented an interpretation which we believe to be the correct one. To "*interpret*" is to "set forth the meaning; to explain" or "to understand in a particular way." So whatever words we are dealing with, in the Bible or out of it, we certainly have a particular understanding or explanation of those words. **The real question ought to be whether we have the understanding the author intended!** An author means something by what he writes - the question is whether we have properly grasped his meaning.

When we look at a Bible statement, consider its meaning, and find that two of us come up with different understandings of that statement, then we know that one of two things has taken place (1) We have disagreed because we **both** misunderstood the passage, or (2) We have disagreed because one of us has understood the passage and the other has misunderstood it. *The Bible is intelligible* God gave it to man to be understood; otherwise it would have been useless for Him to give it to us!

NOT FOR A CLERGY CLASS

The Bible was written to common people, for the most part, rather than to a special "clergy" class. It was meant to be understood *by common people*. Take that New Testament book of Romans as an example. Paul said that he was writing "**To all God's beloved in Rome**" (1:7): in other words, to all the Christians there. And when one reads the book it becomes obvious that the letter is meant to be understood by the Christians generally, as he even greets by name a number of individuals (See chapter 16). Not only that, but Paul states in chapter fifteen, verse four, that he expected them to be able to understand and receive instruction from the Old Testament scriptures, which he says were *written for their instruction*. Because it was written for the ordinary person to understand, the book of Romans was written in the *koine* or "common" Greek - the same language the average person of the first century spoke every day and used in writing letters or making shopping lists! The same is true for the rest of the New Testament. The language of the Bible is human language, used by God so that human beings could understand His will.

WE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR UNDERSTANDING

Not only was the Bible written to the common person in the language of the common person, but it is clear that we are responsible for properly understanding it. Indeed, we will be judged by our obedience to it! How could God expect us to obey something that we could not understand?! Jesus said, "**He who rejects me and does not receive my sayings has a judge; the word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day**" (John 12:48). In other passages we are clearly told that we must keep the commandments of God (John 14:15,21,23; 1 John 5:3). God has obviously, then, given us commandments that we **can** understand, if we will apply ourselves to understand them.

WHY THE BIBLE IS OFTEN MISUNDERSTOOD

While God gave the Bible to be understood, it is true that men often misunderstand it or disagree in interpreting it. There are at least four basic reasons for this lack of understanding:

(1) **The Bible is often misunderstood because of a lack of intelligent effort at understanding it.** I was disturbed by an article which appeared in a local newspaper some time back. It has to do with reading the Bible and applying it to one's life. The writer advised people to simply open the Bible and start reading - without regard to who was speaking, to whom it was spoken, when it was spoken, or the circumstances involved. The writer advised a person to just start reading the Bible anywhere, then when a passage seemed of interest, to stop and meditate upon it, considering how to apply it to one's life. This article disturbed me because it is the type of practice which has led to much misunderstanding and even some serious wrongs, all supposedly based on the Bible.

It is no wonder we have trouble with the Bible. If we treated other books the way we treat the Bible, we would have trouble with them, too! We need to use care and common sense in Bible study. We don't turn to the middle of an ordinary book, start reading, and expect to understand what is being said there! We know that we need to know something of the circumstances, the background, the context. The same is true of the Bible.

The Bible is not even one simple, contemporary book. It is rather a collection of 66 books, written by about 40 different men, over a period of about 1500 years! The youngest parts of the Bible, the New Testament books, are now 1900 years old, and the oldest parts of the Bible are as much as 3300 years old. To appreciate what is being said we need to learn something of the backgrounds of the books and of the customs and culture of the day. In addition, the Bible does not contain one type of literature, but rather contains **law, prophecy, history, poetry, praise, and letters to individuals and to churches**. By stating this I am not trying to discourage you; rather I am trying to show that we must put forth some effort and make an intelligent approach if we would understand the Bible. Any of us **can** understand the Bible, but we must be willing to **apply** ourselves to the task.

(2) **A second reason for a lack of agreement on what the Bible says is that each of us comes to the Bible with certain preconceived ideas and emotional reactions.** We come from certain traditions and tend to read into a passage the thing we have previously been taught or want to believe, rather than actually dealing with the meaning of the statement. We must be aware of this tendency and fight against it, lest we find ourselves, as Peter wrote, twisting the scriptures to our own destruction (II Peter 3:16).

(3) **Carelessness in reading is another reason for problems in understanding the Bible.** As with any writing, it is essential that we read carefully lest we fail to see what is really there.

(4) Then there is a basic ignorance which may blind us to the right meaning of a passage of scripture. I am thinking about ignorance of language, of culture and custom, of history, of background and context. As we study and grow in background knowledge then we will grow in our ability to correctly interpret scripture.

God has spoken, and we need to listen. He has given us His Word, and He means for us to make an effort to understand it; to obey it. We must not seek to excuse ourselves by making God's book out to be unintelligent and obscure. We need rather to put honest effort into Bible study and come to a proper understanding of His Will.

W. HART

GOD'S APOSTATE PEOPLE

The people of God are often ungrateful and forgetful; they fail to walk in the light (1 John 1:6-10); they cease to work in the high and holy vocation to which they have been called (Eph. 4:1-3); they do not honour and serve God as He saved them to do; they love the material things of this world more than the spiritual things of the world to come (2 Tim. 4:10). In short, they forsake God - they turn back to the world rather than press on to perfection (Heb. 6:1-6).

It was this kind of apostasy that brought the following stinging indictment from God (through Isaiah) to his ancient covenant people. **"Hear, O Heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider"** (Isa. 1:2, 3). Three vital components should be noted from these verses:

God had nourished and brought up children. They were his. He loved them as a father loves his children. He was concerned with their welfare. He provided for them. Their love should have been reciprocal. John stated a divine principle when he said, **"We love him, because he first loved us"** (1 John 4:19).

What was true then is still true today. God so loved the world that He sent His only Son to provide for its redemption. Christ in turn died for the sins of the world - died that all might be able to become the sons of God (Gal. 3:26, 27; 4:4-6). The salvation of the human soul from sin is no light matter. Each one should try to see, to the extent it is possible, the problem in God saving sinful men, what it cost God to redeem man from sin. The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). And since all have sinned (Rom. 3:9; 23), all are doomed to eternal death. There was no means within man's reach whereby he could escape this sentence. But then Christ stepped in and died in man's stead. He paid the full penalty of sin - death. And so it is by the grace, mercy, and plan of God the means whereby all can be saved is provided. All who will accept the death of Christ as a substitute for their own death can be saved. God's love has purchased us (John 3:16), redeemed us (Eph. 1:7), and justified us (1 Cor. 6:11).

Just as it was in ancient times, God has today nourished and brought up children, brought them up at a terrible price, the cruel ignominious death of His only begotten Son upon the cross. Salvation did not come cheap.

God's children had rebelled against him. They had turned their back on the living God and had turned to dumb idols. The remainder of Isaiah 1 describes the condition of departed Israel. They had become a **"sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters"**; they had forsaken the Lord and had provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger; they had gone backward instead of forward.

THE SAME TODAY

With many of God's people, it is not different today. His own precious people, his purchased possession, turn from him. They forget that He saved them, purchased them, provides for them, and continues to desire their love and fellowship. They also forget that they devoted themselves to Him, and all that they were, all that they had, and all that they might become. But forgetting their own vows and all that God has done for them, they turn back to the world, back to sin, back to death. How can anyone be so thoughtless? How can they turn from the very God who made them, saved them, and gave them hope for all eternity? Is it because they are not grateful to God? Or have they forgotten His unspeakable gift?

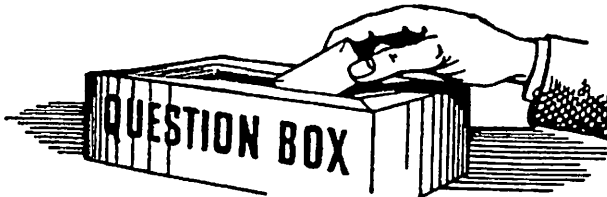
The people of God did not know, they did not consider. The ox knows his owner - he knows who feeds and cares for him. So does the ass. But Israel did not know and seemingly did not care about the providence of her God. They rebelled against Him and thus rejected the source of all their blessings.

The same is true today among those who depart from the living God, who turn back and walk with Him no more. **"He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith He was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?"** (Heb. 10:28, 29).

It is no wonder then that Peter could say of those who, in full knowledge of His will, depart from the Lord: **"For if after they have escaped the pollution of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb. The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire"** (2 Peter 2:20-22). This is just another way of saying that they have turned from all the glittering blessings of heaven back to the cesspools of iniquity. What is wrong with such people? The Lord says they do not know, they do not consider.

But God knows . . . and He cares. He longs for his departed children to return home, to come back to His love and care (cf. Luke 15:12-32).

H. WINTERS



Conducted by
Frank Worgan

"After King Saul's slaughter of the Amalekites, we are told that 'an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him' (1 Samuel 16:14). Does this mean that God sent an evil spirit to possess Saul?"

There is no doubt that this verse, 1 Sam. 16:14, is often taken to mean that God actually sent an evil spirit to take possession of King Saul; and this is an idea which is both puzzling and disturbing. But whenever we encounter difficult or strange statements in the scriptures, we must bear in mind that, although God inspired the

writers in the making of their historical records, they had to cope with the limitations of human language. This means that often they were faced with the serious problem of trying to explain divine actions in human terms.

And that could never be easy.

We also, sometimes experience a problem of a similar nature. For example, how would you describe *snow* to people who have never seen snow? Or, how would you explain to an Eskimo, who has never seen a sheep, that the Lord Jesus is '*the Lamb of God*'? Whatever explanation you offer, you will only succeed in presenting a partial picture of the truth.

Therefore, when we encounter a verse such as the one before us, we should not ask, "How does this statement look to me"? but, "What lies behind this statement? What is it meant to convey? What does God want us to understand"? The only way of determining this is by looking at the circumstances in which the problem-statement is found.

THE QUESTION MENTIONS SAUL'S DEFEAT OF THE AMALEKITES

Notice that our problem verse is connected with this event, recorded in chapter 15. King Saul had been given a plain command by God - a command which he had quite deliberately disobeyed. This was not his first act of disobedience. See ch. 13:8-14. He had already been warned!

The consequence of this later offence was that God rejected him as King of His people, and, as evidence of his rejection, the Spirit of God left him. It is at this point that we are told that '*an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him*'.

There are two questions I think we should ask.

1. What is meant by '*an evil spirit*'? and
2. In what sense was it '*from the Lord*'?

But, first, think about the event which brought this matter to a head - Saul's failure to obey God in the matter of the Amalekites - because this piece of O.T. history has long discomfited Christians and delighted unbelievers, even though, it should be noted, *this is the only time that such a command was ever issued*. In other words, God meant it to be recognized as a singular, special and serious event.

For God to have commanded the destruction of both Amalekite life and property has embarrassed even those who probably appreciate that the wickedness of the Amalekites, constituted a danger to His people and also to the purpose He planned to accomplish through them.

But, someone asks, would it not have been sufficient simply to destroy the Amalekites army? Must everything declared '*herem*' - placed under the ban - and utterly destroyed?

We must understand that this command meant that the Israelites were not ordered to engage in an ordinary conflict, but were called by God to execute an act of divine judgment.

To make this absolutely clear, contrary to what would normally have happened in time of war, they were forbidden to retain as the spoil of battle anything that belonged to the Amalekites.

In those days, a battle in which the victors did not plunder the defeated was remarkable and unusual indeed, and would certainly be recognized as a significant event. This unusual behaviour would prove to Israel's neighbours that the purpose of the action really was punitive and not the seizure of property.

However, when the rest of the Canaanite tribes learned what King Saul, had done, in disobeying God by keeping the best of the spoil, a quite different message was sent out. It appeared that Israel had committed a blatant act of aggression against the

Amalekites, merely for the purpose of self-gain, and this reflected badly not only on the Israelites themselves but also on their God.

It was after this act of disobedience which misrepresented God, that Saul was judged unworthy to remain king and God rejected him. When Samuel was sent to anoint David to succeed to the kingship. 'The Spirit of God came upon David, and 'an evil spirit' came upon Saul.

WHAT, THEN, WAS THIS 'EVIL SPIRIT'?

I think it is clear from the events which followed that, deprived of the help of the Spirit of God and abandoned by Samuel the prophet on whose support he had relied, (ch.15: vv31 and 35), something terrible happened to Saul. That expression, 'an evil spirit', refers to physical or mental illness and it is such an illness, which afflicted Saul.

He became mentally ill and began to suffer from mental depression, which rendered him unstable and caused him to suspect and distrust everyone around him. His ailment also brought attacks of panic, in which no one was safe. This was *not* 'demon-possession', as some have supposed, because the passage does *not* say that he was 'possessed by an evil spirit'.

1. We are told that an evil spirit '*troubled him*'. The word '*baath*' means 'to terrify'. In other words, Saul began to suffer from mental depression that brought on terrible panic attacks which caused him to 'rave' (ch.18.10).

2. At first these attacks were spasmodic and his condition could be soothed by David's music. Saul's attendants who suggested the music cure recognized this. Consequently, when David played, the King was '*refreshed*' and '*made well again*'. (ch.16:16 and 23).

This hardly suggests demon-possession!

3. But gradually, and no doubt influenced by his deepening sense of isolation, Saul's condition deteriorated to the point where the music of David failed to calm his troubled mind and he became increasingly unreasonable and violent (ch.18: 10-11).

Saul lost all affection for David and began to see him as an enemy (18:29).

Matters came to a head when it became obvious to David that, by attending the King, his own life was in grave danger (ch.19: 8-10), and he decided it was unsafe for him to take his usual place at the king's dinner-table (ch.20:24-27).

The psychological nature of Saul's illness is proved by the fact that, although he had three times tried to kill David, he was genuinely surprised and puzzled by the young man's absence! Yet, when Jonathan tried to offer an explanation, Saul became so angry that he tried to kill his own son.

BUT IN WHAT SENSE WAS SAUL'S CONDITION 'FROM THE LORD'?

It was not '*from the Lord*' in the sense that God deliberately afflicted Saul with insanity, but only in the sense that, when God so emphatically withdrew His endorsement and support of him, Saul became more and more depressed.

The medical word which describes his condition exactly is '*melancholia*' - which is defined as '*emotional mental disease marked by depression and ill-grounded fears*'.

This is what the scriptures reveal in the case of Saul.

Saul began showing such great promise. He had so much ability and was blessed with so many advantages, having the help of the Spirit of God and the fatherly guidance of Samuel the prophet. The highest possibilities were within his reach.

But his life ended in depression and despair, because he failed to appreciate that God looks for obedience in His people. *That* is the tragedy of King Saul.

Even today, "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams"

(Questions to: Frank Worgan, 5 Gryfebank Way, Houston,

Renfrewshire, Scotland, PA6 7NZ. E-mail: fworgan@freeserve.co.uk)

A NEW PEOPLE WITH A NEW NAME AND A NEW DAY

Out of all the people on earth, God of old had chosen Israel as His loved and treasured people - Deut. 7:6-9. In their faithfulness and as a holy nation, He referred to them as His wife - Isaiah 54:5-7, Jer. 3:14. **One of the most beautiful things in marriage is that a wife wears the name of her husband** - Gen. 5:2. God knowing this said "So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them." - Numb. 6:27. The God of Israel revealed His name to them as "Jehovah" - Exo. 6:3. It was no wonder that the **Israelites** were called "**Jehovah's Witnesses**" - Isaiah 43:10-12, Dan. 9:19. This is the name God promised to change - Isaiah 62:2,65:15. He had also given to them the Sabbath which is the 7th day to keep - Deut. 5:3,12-15. A day that was to cease - Hosea 2:11 and was fulfilled in Col. 2:14-17. In the process of time, Jehovah promised a New Covenant - Jer. 31:31. A new marriage which will embrace all people will be transacted. **Those who were not God's people could say to God you are my God** - Hosea 2:19-23. This is fulfilled in 1 Peter 2:9-10, Rom. 9:24-26. When the time of fulfilment drew nigh, Israel was told: "Rejoice greatly, O' Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your King comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey . . . Zech. 9:9, Matt. 21:1-10. It was of this King of Zion that the Angel said ". . . you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; His kingdom will never end."

A NEW NAME

Jesus in the will of God, took away the first covenant to establish the second - Heb. 10:9. Before Jesus left the earth, he promised establishing **His Church** which He also called the **Kingdom** - Matt. 16:18-19, Col. 1:13, Rev. 1:9. The Church of Christ is a kingdom because Christ is the head - Col. 1:18 and King of Kings and Lord of Lords - 1 Tim. 6:15, Eph. 1:20-23, Dan. 7:13-14. **Christ is the Bridegroom** - John. 3:28-30. **The new Husband** - 2 Cor. 11:1-2, Eph. 5:22-32. **The Church is the Bride** - Matt. 22:1-14, Rev. 19:6-8,21:9. **The baptized are those who have put on Christ** - Gal. 3:27. **They are a new people, Jews and Gentiles together who praise God through Christ** - Rom. 15:8-12, Eph. 2:11-22. Christians form the spiritual house of God - Heb. 3:4-6, 1 Pet. 2:5. God has purchased them with His own blood - Acts 20:28. **They wear their husband's name** - Christian(s) 1 Pet. 4:16, (Acts 11:26) in the **Church(es) of Christ** - Rom. 16:16 all **after Christ** - Acts 4:12.

A NEW DAY

David wrote of a new day for these new people in Psalm 118:22-24. In Matt. 21:42-43. Jesus applied this Psalm to himself. Therefore He is the Stone the builders (Jews) refused. **The day the Lord has made for us to rejoice and be glad in it is the day He became the Capstone; the marvellous resurrection day.** This is the **1st day of the week (Sunday)** - Mk. 16:9, the **Lord's day** - Rev. 1:10. **It was the day that the Church began** - Lev. 23:15-16, Acts 2:1-47 and the **early Church met for worship** - Acts 20:7, 1 Cor. 16:1-2.

About 150 A.D. Barnabas wrote "Wherefore, also we keep the eighth day (Sunday) with joyfulness; the day also on which Jesus arose again from the dead." (Chapter 15).

A new and living way is opened for all men; come to Jesus now and be washed - Heb. 10:20-22, Acts 22:16.

FRED T. TAMATEY,
Ghana.

SUGGESTION FROM RUTH COLES

Dear Brethren,

I am sure that many of you, like me, are disgusted by the increase in sex and violence shown on our television screens. Sex and nudity is even creeping into some of the adverts and this is deplorable. I wrote to the Broadcasting Standard Commission recently and complained about the above. Many of the adverts are seen by children as they are shown throughout the day. I made reference to the advert for the Citroen Xzara car which shows a young woman descending the stairs removing her clothing until the last item is dropped out of the window of the car. This is degrading to women as well as being offensive.

I received a reply thanking me for my complaint and this is what was said *"Research show that audiences in Britain have generally become more liberal in the portrayal of sex, but broadcasters cannot assume a universal climate of tolerance towards sexually explicit material. Offence may be given by making public and explicit what many people regard as private and exclusive."* The writer then went on to say that only eleven people from the whole of the United Kingdom complained about the advert for the Citroen Xzara car.

I know that many of you object to what you see on your television screens but like me put off complaining about it. You may have seen an advertisement recently for a bank where two elderly people are on a beach where they remove all of their clothes and run hand in hand into the sea. It is disgusting and nothing at all to do with banking.

I have a suggestion to make. If each congregation has one member who feels strongly about this matter, he or she could write a letter to the Broadcasting Commission and every other member sign it, I believe that the Church could make a big impact on what is shown on our screens.

Brethren I feel that we need to act now before the forces of evil can do more damage to the minds of the younger generation.

The address to write to is:- Broadcasting Standards Commission, 7, The Sanctuary, London SW1P 3JS.

There are other addresses which you can write to but if you write a letter of complaint they will send you all the information you will need.

RUTH COLES

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Oct. 3	Psalm 41	Luke 22:39-53
Oct. 10	Exodus 20:1-17	Luke 22:54-71
Oct. 17	Isaiah 50	Luke 23:1-25
Oct. 24	Hosea 10	Luke 23:26-43
Oct. 31	Psalm 16	Luke 23:44 to 24:12

CHRIST'S PRAYER

We read of the Master kneeling and praying at a time of personal agony

(22:41,44). His prayer could not have been more earnest. We read also of blood-like sweat (44). The "cup" (of suffering) (42) was not removed by the Father, but the Son was given sufficient strength to see him through the ordeal of the arrest, trial and crucifixion. I recall the lines of the hymn:

*Ask the Saviour to help you,
Comfort, strengthen, and keep you;
He is willing to aid you,
He will carry you through.*

What the Father did for the Son, the

Son can now do for us. Of course, we shall never endure betrayal, false arrest, a mock trial, beatings, mockery and crucifixion. But whatever suffering we bear for the Master, we have the knowledge that He is with us to help us overcome it.

I like verse 43, especially in the light of what Brother Worgan recently wrote in Question Box: "**And there appeared an angel unto Him from heaven, strengthening Him**". James M. Boice has written: "Angels are ministering spirits sent to assist and defend God's people. Thus we read, first in reference to Christ but then also to ourselves as His people, 'For He will give His angels charge of you to guard you in all His ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone' (Psalm 91:11-12). And, 'The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and delivers them' (Psalm 34:7). From a practical standpoint, if Christian people thought more often of this angelic protection, they would be less fearful of circumstances and enemies".

JESUS' ARREST

Jesus was the perfect embodiment of goodness, mercy and love and, yet, many were out to destroy Him. I think about this a lot. I think about the evil in the world and the personality behind it - Satan. He did everything to prevent the Messiah entering the world, but, failing in this task, he then set about to have Jesus removed from the earth at all costs.

Satan uses people as his instruments. He used Judas to have Jesus destroyed. He played on the man's weaknesses, and it worked. But we must not overlook the fact that Judas was a willing participant in the whole affair. He himself was totally responsible for his actions. He later knew he was guilty. The guilt, of

course, led to his suicide. Judas is one of the most tragic figures in the history of the world.

Satan also worked on Peter's weaknesses, which led to the denial of his Master three times. Jesus, of course, had predicted this (Luke 22:34). Peter must have been terribly afraid at this time, especially of crucifixion. He, of course, was to experience such a death later on in his life, by which time he had become totally committed to the service of his Master. Jesus predicted his death too (John 21:18-19).

JESUS BEFORE PILATE AND HEROD

I see there is a new book out on Pilate. I must read it when the opportunity arises. Pontius Pilate continues to fascinate historians and general public alike. He will always be remembered for his encounter with Jesus and for the fact that he was the one who sentenced the Son of God to death, washing his hands in the process (Matthew 27:24).

"Pilate was procurator of Judea from A.D. 26 to 36. He was not a governor in the full Roman sense of the office, although he was fully responsible for the administration of Judea . . . There can be no doubt that Pilate must have already shown himself a competent military commander and an efficient administrator or he would never have been chosen to administer and control so notoriously difficult an area as Judea" (William Barclay). Pilate did everything he could to release Jesus, but the Jewish leaders would have none of it. Luke later recorded Peter's words thus: "**The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His Son Jesus; whom you delivered up and denied Him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go**" (Acts 3:13). Nevertheless, he too was responsible for

his actions; and one day he will stand before the judgment throne of Jesus, just as Jesus had once stood before his judgment seat. The tables will be turned and it will be a quite a different encounter to the first. True justice will be administered by the Lord. There will be no pardon for the guilty and no condemnation of the guiltless.

We read: "And as soon as he (Pilate) knew that He (Jesus) belonged to unto Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who himself also was at Jerusalem at that time" (23:7). This Herod was Herod Antipas, who was Herod the Great's younger son by Malthace and who had inherited the Galilean and Peraean portions of his father's kingdom. He was the one who imprisoned and executed John the Baptist. Jesus once described him as "that fox" (Luke 13:31f.) He had married the daughter of the Nabataean king, Aretas IV, but had divorced her to marry Herodias, the wife of his half-brother Herod Philip. It was this marriage that John condemned (Luke 3:19-20). Herod treated Jesus shamefully, but decided to send Him back to Pilate for further examination. It resulted in a friendlier relationship between the two political heavy-weights.

JESUS' CRUCIFIXION, DEATH AND BURIAL

I read a book recently on Sir William Wallace of Scotland. The account of his torture and death was truly horrifying. The account of Jesus' suffering and death is equally horrifying. That the perfect Son of God ended up on a cross is often hard to take in, yet, it is a fact beyond dispute.

Jesus was placed between two malefactors, just like a common criminal. Satan was out to utterly discredit Him. The wonderful thing is that, in the end, one of these malefactors was won over

to Jesus. "Today you shall be with me in paradise" (23:43) were the Master's words to Him. "What about the thief on the cross?" is the often-asked question. "He was saved" is the simple reply. On death, his soul descended to *sheol* or *hades* and, in particular, to paradise or Abraham's bosom. The experience of Lazarus immediately springs to mind (Luke 16:19-31).

Jesus was buried "in a sepulchre that was hewn in stone, wherein never man before was laid" (23:53). He was to remain in this tomb for three days and three nights, which was the sign of the prophet Jonah (Matthew 12:39-41). I am convinced that this puts paid to Good Friday. I do not believe that one of the nights was covered by the three hours of darkness, which descended over all the earth at the time of the crucifixion (23:44).

JESUS' RESURRECTION

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the greatest fact in history. "He arose! Hallelujah! Christ arose!" Dying on the cross proved Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of man; rising from the dead proved he was the Son of God (Romans 1:3-4). The evidences for the resurrection are clear. "The body had disappeared. The graveclothes remained undisturbed. The Lord was seen. And the disciples were changed. There is no adequate explanation of these phenomena other than the great Christian affirmation 'the Lord is risen indeed' " (John R.W. Stott).

IAN S. DAVIDSON,
Motherwell.

TEST YOUR BIBLICAL KNOWLEDGE

1. To whom was Joseph sold in Egypt?
2. Who was the daughter of Bethuel?
3. While in disguise, whom did Saul

consult at night?

4. Who saw a valley of dry bones?
5. Which famous prophet had a son called Shear-Jashub?
6. David received this city from king Achish of Gath.
7. This was a model Church for believers in Macedonia and Achaia.
8. Jesus resurrected the daughter of this synagogue official.
9. In which city did Cornelius live?
10. Who saw a large sheet full of animals coming from heaven?

OBITUARY

Argyle Street, Wigan: It is with great sadness that the Church in Argyle Street announce the death on 16th July of our beloved sister May Fairhurst. Sister May was 78 years of age and had been a faithful servant of the Lord for a great number of years.

May had not enjoyed the best of health during her last years but she attended the meetings whenever she could. She loved the Lord immensely and she loved to be amongst her brethren and always put others before herself.

May always had a smile on her face even when we knew that she was suffering. That smile will not be there to see anymore but we will always have the sunshine of her smile in our hearts.

We thank the Lord for giving us such a sister as May and we rejoice that she has gone to be with Him.

The funeral took place on 26th July with Bro. John Morgan conducting the service.

C. HILTON, (Sec.).

JOIN US IF YOU CAN

Two sisters, Jenny Murray and Helen Draye, meet together for worship on Lord's Day in Kelso. At one time we were blessed by visits from Dr. Brian Hawley, who, when he came to Scotland

to work for short periods, joined us for worship. However, as readers may know, our dear brother was tragically killed recently in an air crash in U.S.A. and so once again there are just the two of us. Anyone in the area wishing to join us for worship will be most welcome.

Please contact:-

Mrs. Jenny Kirk
41A Horsemarket,
Kelso, Borders. TD5 78E.
Tel: 01573 225368

COMING EVENTS

PETERHEAD

ANNUAL SOCIAL WEEK-END

OCTOBER 2nd & 3rd
SATURDAY at 3.00pm

*Speakers: Frank Worgan
Bob Eckman*

Sunday meetings as usual.

SPECIAL WEEK-END MEETINGS

OCTOBER 30th & 31st
SATURDAY at 7.00pm

Speaker: Mitch Vick

Sunday meetings as usual.

SPECIAL WEEK-END MEETINGS

NOVEMBER 13th & 14th
SATURDAY at 7.00pm

Speaker: Ian Starrs

Sunday meetings as usual

SPECIAL WEEK-END MEETINGS

DECEMBER 4th & 5th
SATURDAY at 7.00pm

Speaker: Adam Barr

Sunday meetings as usual

ANNUAL SOCIAL NEWTONGRANGE

SATURDAY, 9th OCTOBER, 1999
at 4.00pm

*Speakers: John Kneller, Tranent
Graeme Scobbie, Dennyloanhead*

A warm welcome is extended to all.

GHANA APPEAL

Again we sincerely thank those who have contributed to the encouragement and financial aid given to the Lord's Kingdom in Ghana which has been highly beneficial to the work. The results have been extremely encouraging and the number of congregations continues to grow. Between 28th July and 8th August another two churches have been planted in the Elmina area (South West Ghana). The new church at Wassa Akutuase began with 13 souls and will be led by Daniel Opoku. The other new church at Agona-Abrem began with 9 souls under the guidance of Joshua Ewusi. Please remember both churches and their leaders, in your prayers. Our Ghanaian brethren have an outstanding zeal and enthusiasm to spread the word, bring others to Christ and extend God's Kingdom. Brethren, so much has been achieved in this joint effort and on behalf of our Ghanaian Brethren we thank you for your love and concern for this work. Those wishing to help in this work, please make cheques payable to "Graeme Pearson (Ghana Appeal)" and send to Graeme Pearson, 13 Fairways, Dunfermline, Fife KY12 0DU. Tel: (01383) 728624.

CONSCIENCE

Conscience is like a sundial. During

the hours of daylight, and so long as the sun is shining, the dial will have a correct recording of the time; but when the sun is not shining, or when the light comes upon it from a lantern or from the moon at night, its record may be completely inaccurate. So it is with conscience. So long as the light of God's Word shines upon us and directs our decisions the voice of conscience is both correct and helpful; but when it is illuminated by the light of our own imagination, or by the opinions of others, it will not only fail to give the true direction, but it will make the error all the greater because it claims to speak with authority. A fallible guide, who may lead us astray through wrong information, is worse than no guide at all.

10. Peter (Acts 10:11-12).
9. Caesarea (Acts 10:1).
8. Jairus (Luke 8:41).
- (1) The Thessalonians 1:7.
7. The church at Thessalonica 2:7:6).
6. Ziklag (1 Samuel 27:6).
5. Isaiah (Isaiah 7:3).
4. Ezekiel (Ezekiel 37:1).
3. The witch of Endor (1 Samuel 28:8).
2. Rebekah (Genesis 22:23).
1. Pothphar (Genesis 37:36).

ANSWERS

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